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The Didache

Radically Biblical, Apostolic, Christianity



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THE DIDACHE

Towards the end of 1883, Philotheos Bryenniois, then Metropolitan of Nicomedia, astonished the world of learning by publishing a text of *The Didache* which he had discovered ten years earlier in a small eleventh-century codex of 120 pages in the library in Constantinople belonging to the Patriarch of Jerusalem (it has since been transferred to Jerusalem) a manuscript we have already encountered as it contains also the only complete Greek texts we know of the epistles of Clement and Barnabas. Interest in the text were sold within a few months; by 1891 only eight years after its appearance, more than 300 translations, studies and articles on *The Didache*, not to mention editions of the original text, had been published. The discovery of *The Didache* caused in Victorian Europe and America something of the stir aroused by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Judaeian Desert in the years following the Second World War. That there had been such a book had always been known: a book referred to as “The Teaching (*Didache*) of the Apostles” is mentioned by Eusebius, by Athanasius and by others as a work which, though not of canonical status, is worth the attention of Christians. But the text had sunk into complete oblivion. No other Greek text has come to light since Bryennios’s discovery, except for two fragments of papyrus from Oxrhynchus which provide a text of parts of the first three chapters. Almost immediately after Bryennios’s publication, the German scholar Gebhardt realized that a Latin manuscript from the Abbey of Melk in Austria preserved what appeared to be a translation of most of the first part of *The Didache*, though it is now believed that this is an independent witness to the Two Ways tradition used as a source by *The Didache*. Coptic and Ethiopic translations have since been discovered, and *The Didache* itself seems to have been used as the basis for sections of later church manuals like the *Ecclesiastical Canons of the Holy Apostles* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (both belonging to the fourth century).

The Didache falls into two parts. The first (chs. 1-6) is a version of the treatise on the Two Ways such as we find at the end of the *Epistle of Barnabas*; it is more thoroughly Christianized and, in particular, most of (ch. 1) is additional material drawn from the (oral)

tradition of Jesus' teaching. The second is concerned with the worship and discipline of an early Christian community. It falls into three: the first section (chs. 7-10) gives directions about the administration of baptism, the institution of fasting, daily prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist; the second (chs. 11-15) is a disciplinary section concerned with the ministry (an itinerant ministry of apostles and prophets: (chs. 11-13; a local ministry of bishops and deacons: (ch. 15) and Sunday worship (ch. 14): the third section (ch. 16), which is incomplete) is an exhortation to be ready for the impending end of the world and coming of the Lord. In all this several curious features are noticeable.

The eucharistic prayers (chs. 9 and 10) are very closely modeled on Jewish forms of grace at table and give a vivid picture of the Church meeting to break bread and bless wine as an anticipation of the messianic banquet of the coming Kingdom of God. There is no mention of the Last Supper or the Cross of Christ, which has led some scholars to distinguish two different primitive types of the Eucharist: one is a "breaking of bread," a fellowship meal in which the disciples continued the meals they had had with Jesus in anticipation of His return (witness *Acts* and *The Didache*), and the other is a recalling of the Last Supper and the death of Jesus, the bread and wine representing the body and blood of Christ (witness Paul, John and the accounts of the Last Supper in the Synoptic Gospels, seen as "institution" narratives). The two different types quickly converged, making it difficult to see whether this is any more than a prematurely conceived "theory." In *The Didache* too the form of the Eucharist seems to have been an actual meal: the cup and the bread are blessed and then, when the meal finished, there are prayers of thanksgiving. Very quickly in the history of the Church (perhaps soon after the date of *1 Corinthians*) the Eucharist ceased to be a meal at which one might satisfy one's appetite: such a fellowship meal was called *agape*, a love-feast, in distinction from the Eucharist (though we know all too little about this). *The Didache* seems to reflect a period before this separation.

The picture of the ministry also seems primitive. Chs. 11-13 envisage an itinerant ministry of "apostles" (not just the "Twelve") and "prophets" (inspired teachers; *1 Corinthians* xiv); teachers are also mentioned (*Acts* xiii, 1-3, where Paul and Barnabas

are commissioned as apostles by the “prophets and teachers” of Antioch). But (ch. 15) envisages a local ministry of “bishops and deacons,” possibly as an innovation to replace the ministry of “prophets and teachers,” as they are called here (maybe they were dying or had simply moved further afield).

All this, together with the renewed eschatological emphasis of (ch. 16), points to a very early date for *The Didache* (not that all the elements need be of the same date, but all seem early and some even earlier than others) and many scholars now would assign *The Didache* to a point somewhere in the latter half of the first century, earlier, that is, than much of the New Testament itself - unless all this “primitiveness” is contrived, a theory that has been popular with English and American scholars from the very beginning. They would assign it to the end of the second century (or later) and see it as perhaps intended to vindicate the Montanist “prophets” against the by then well-established ministry of bishops, priests and deacons. But *The Didache* does not look contrived and in particular its use of the Gospel tradition seems a guarantee of its authentic primitiveness, for *The Didache* seems to know the Gospel tradition in an unsettled, oral form prior to its being fixed by the influence of the canonical Gospels.

Where was *The Didache* written and for whom? Egypt or Syria have both been claimed as places of origin: Egypt is put forward because Clement of Alexandria is an early witness to it (indeed, as Scripture), because *The Didache* was clearly popular in Egypt in the fourth century, as Athanasius’ reference to it shows, and because the versions are in Coptic and Ethiopia; Syria is put forward because of links (such as ministry (see above), and the reminiscence of the apostolic decree of Acts xv, 23-9, said to be characteristic of early Syrian Christianity, in (ch. 6) with Antioch and Syria. *The Didache* seems to have envisaged a largely rural community (ch. 13),. Perhaps in hilly country (ch. 9-4), which would point to Syria rather than Egypt.

The Didache is a small and tantalizing piece of evidence from a period of enormous importance for the history of early Christianity of which we are almost ignorant and driven to conjecture and hypothesis. But apart from the evidence it gives us for answering the

kind of questions we want to ask, it provides - more importantly - a picture of the Church standing on the brink of the world to come, eager for the coming of its Saviour, to whom it looks with joy, and aware of the momentous decision we make in the face of that coming, a decision between light and darkness, life and death.

The Didache

Part 1. The Two Ways

The Way of Life

1. There are two Ways: a Way of Life and a Way of Death, and the difference between these Ways is great.

The Way of Life is this: *Thou shalt love first the Lord thy Creator, and secondly thy neighbor as thyself; and thou shalt do nothing to any man that thou wouldst not wish to be done to thyself.*

What you may learn from these words is to bless them that curse you, to pray for your enemies, and to fast for your persecutors. For where is the merit in loving only those who return your love? Even the heathens do as much as that. But if you love those who hate you, you will have nobody to be your enemy.

Beware of the carnal appetites of the body. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other one to him as well, and perfection will be yours. Should anyone compel you to go a mile, go another one with him. If someone takes away your coat, let him have your shirt too. If someone seizes anything that belongs to you, do not ask for it back again (you could not get it anyway). Give to everyone that asks, without looking for any repayment, for it is the Father's pleasure that we should share His gracious bounty with all men. A giver who gives freely, as the commandment directs, is blessed; no fault can be found in him. But woe to the taker; for though he cannot be blamed for taking if he

was in need, yet if he was not, an account will be required of him as to why he took it, and for what purpose, and he will be taken into custody and examined about his action, and he will not get out until he has paid the last penny. The old saying is in point here: "Let your alms grow damp with sweat in your hand, until you know who it is you are giving them to."

2. The second commandment in the Teaching means: Commit no murder, adultery, sodomy, fornication, or theft. Practice no magic, sorcery, abortion, or infanticide. See that you do not covet anything your neighbor possess, and never be guilty of perjury, false witness, slander, or malice. Do not equivocate in thought or speech, for a double tongue is a deadly snare; the words you speak should not be false or empty phrases, but fraught with purposeful action. You are not to be avaricious or extortionate, and you must resist any temptation to hypocrisy, spitefulness, or superiority. You are to have no malicious designs on a neighbor. You are to cherish no feelings of hatred for anybody; some you are to reprove, some to pray for, and some again to love more than your own life.

3. Keep away from every bad man, my son, and from all his kind. Never give way to anger, for anger leads to homicide.

Beware of lust, my son, for lust leads to fornication. Likewise refrain from unclean talk and the roving eye, for these too can breed adultery.

Do not be always looking for omens, my son, for this leads to idolatry. Likewise have nothing to do with witchcraft, astrology, or magic; do not even consent to be a witness of such practices, for they too can breed idolatry.

Tell no lies, my son, for lying leads to theft. Likewise do not be over-anxious to be rich or to be admired, for these too can breed thievishness.

Do not be a grumbler, my son, for this leads to blasphemy. Likewise, do not be too opinionated, and do not harbor thoughts of wickedness, for these too can breed

blasphemy.

Learn to be meek, for the meek are to inherit the earth. School yourself to forbearance, compassion, guilelessness, calmness, and goodness, and never forget to respect the teaching you have had.

Do not parade your own merits, or allow yourself to behave presumptuously, and do not make a point of associating with persons of eminence, but choose the companionship of honest and humble folk.

Accept as good whatever experiences comes your way, in the knowledge that nothing can happen without God.

4. By day and by night, my son, remember him who speaks the word of God to you. Give him the honor you would give the Lord; for wherever the Lord's attributes are the subject of discourse, there the Lord is present. Frequent the company of the saints daily, so as to be edified by their conversation. Never encourage dissensions, but try to make peace between those who are at variance. Judge with justice, reprove without fear or favor, and never be in two minds about your decisions.

Do not be like those who reach out to take, but draw back when the time comes for giving. If the labor of your hands has been productive, your giving will be a ransom for sins. Give without hesitating and without grumbling, and you will see whose generosity will requite you. Never turn away the needy; share all your possessions with your brother, and do not claim that anything is your own. If you and he are joint participators in things immoral, how much more so in things that are moral?

You are not to withhold your hand from your son or daughter, but to bring them up in the fear of God from their childhood.

Never speak sharply when giving orders to male or female domestics whose trust is in

the same God as yours; otherwise that may cease to fear Him who is over you both. He has not come to call men according to their rank, but those for whom He has prepared the Spirit. And you, servants, obey your masters with respectfulness and fear, as the representatives of God. Hate all impiety and everything that does not please the Lord. See that you do not neglect the commandments of the Lord, but keep them just as you received them, without any additions or subtractions of your own.

In church, make confession of your faults, and do not come to your prayers with a bad conscience.

That is the Way of Life.

The Way of Death

5. The Way of Death is this. To begin with, it is evil, and in every way fraught with damnation. In it are murderers, adulteries, lusts, fornications, thefts, idolatries, witchcraft, sorceries, robberies, perjuries, hypocrisies, duplicities, deceit, malice, self-will, avarice, foul language, jealousy, insolence, arrogance, and boastfulness. Here are those who persecute good men, hold truth in abhorrence, and love falsehood; who do not know of the rewards of righteousness, nor adhere to what is good, nor to just judgment; who lie awake planning wickedness rather than well-doing. Gentleness and patience are beyond their conception; they care for nothing good or useful, and are bent only on their advantage, without pity for the poor or feeling for the distressed. Knowledge of their Creator is not in them; they make away with their infants and deface God's image; they turn away the needy and oppress the afflicted; they aid and abet the rich but arbitrarily condemn the poor; they are utterly and altogether sunk in iniquity. Flee, my children, from all this!

Conclusion

6. Take care that nobody tempts you away from the path of this Teaching, for such a man's tuition can have nothing to do with God. If you can shoulder the Lord's yoke in its entirety, then you will be perfect; but if that is too much for you, do as much as you can.

As regards diet, keep the rules so far as you are able; only be careful to refuse anything that has been offered to an idol, for that is the worship of dead gods.

Part 2. A Church Manual

Of Baptism

7. The procedure for baptizing is as follows. After repeating all that has been said, immerse in running water “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible; otherwise warm. If neither is practical, then pour water three times on the head “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Both baptizer and baptized ought to fast before baptism, as well as any others who can do so; but the candidate should be told to keep a fast for a day or two beforehand.

Of Fast-Days and Prayer

8. Do not keep the same fast-days as the hypocrites. Mondays and Thursdays are their days of fasting, so yours should be on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Your prayers too, should be different from theirs. Pray as the Lord enjoined in His Gospel, thus “Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, As in heaven, so on earth; Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors, And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from the Evil One, For thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever.”

Say this prayer three times every day.

Of the Eucharist

9. At the Eucharist, offer the eucharistic prayer in this way. Begin with the chalice: “We give liveness to thee, our Father, for the holy Vine of thy servant David, which thou hast made known to us through thy servant Jesus.”

“Glory be to thee, world without end.”

Then over the broken bread: “We give thanks to thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge thou hast made known to us through thy servant Jesus.”

“Glory be to thee, world without end.”

“As this broken bread, once dispersed over the hills, was brought together and became one loaf, so may the Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom.”

“Thine is the glory and the power, through Jesus Christ, for ever and ever.”

No one is to eat or drink of your Eucharist but those who have been baptized in the Name of the Lord; for the Lord’s own saying applies here, “Give not that which is holy unto dogs.”

10. When all have partaken sufficiently, give thanks in these words:

“Thanks be to thee, holy Father, for thy sacred Name which thou has caused to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith in immortality which thou hast revealed to us through thy servant Jesus.”

“Glory be to thee for ever and ever.”

“Thou, O Almighty Lord, hast created all things for thine own Name’s sake; to all men thou hast given meat and drink to enjoy, that they may give thanks to thee, but to us thou hast graciously given spiritual meat and drink, together with life eternal, through thy Servant. Especially, and above all, do we give thanks to thee for the mightiness of thy power.”

“Glory be to thee for ever and ever.”

“Be mindful of thy Church, O Lord; deliver it from all evil, perfect it in thy love, sanctify it, and gather it from the four winds into the kingdom which thou hast prepared for it.”

“Thine is the power and the glory for ever and ever.”

“Let Grace come, and this present world pass away.”

“Hosanna to the God of David.”

“Whosoever is holy, let him approach, whoso is not, let him repent.”

“Maranatha, Amen.”

(Prophets, however, should be free to give thanks as they please).

Of Apostles and Prophets

11. If anyone comes and instructs you on the foregoing lines, make him welcome. But should the instructor himself then turn around and introduce teaching of a different and subversive nature, pay no attention to him. It aims at promoting righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, though, welcome his as you would the Lord.

As regards apostles and prophets, according to the Gospel directions this is how you are to act. Every apostle who comes to you should be welcomed as the Lord, but he is not to stay more than one day, or two days if it is really necessary. If he stays for three days, he is a false prophet. And an apostle at his departure should accept nothing but as much provisions as will last him to his next night's lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

While a prophet is uttering words in the spirit, you are on no account to subject him to any tests or verifications; *every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven.* Nevertheless, not all who speak in the spirit are prophets, unless they also exhibit the manners and conduct of the Lord. It is by their behavior that you can tell the imposter from the true. Thus, if a prophet should happen to call out for something to eat while he

is in the spirit, he will not actually eat of it; if he does, he is a fraud. Also, even supposing a prophet is sound enough in his teaching, yet if his deeds do not correspond with his words, he is an imposter. Or again, a prophet, thoroughly accredited and genuine, living the mystery of the Church in the world, may yet fail to teach others to copy his example. In that case, you are not to judge the man yourselves; his judgment lies with God. The prophets of old used to do things of a similar kind.

If any prophet, speaking in the spirit, says, "Give me money (or anything else), do not listen to him. On the other hand, if he bids you to give it to someone else who is in need, nobody should criticize him.

12. Everyone who comes in the Name of the Lord is to be made welcome, though later on you must test him and find out about him. You will be able to distinguish the true from the false. If the newcomer is only passing through, give him all the help you can - though he is not to stay more than a couple of days with you, or three if it is unavoidable. But if he wants to settle down among you, and is a skilled worker, let him find employment and earn his bread. If he knows no trade, use your discretion to make sure that he does not live in idleness simply on the strength of being a Christian. Unless he agrees to this, he is only trying to exploit Christ. You must be on your guard against men of that sort.

13. A genuine prophet, however, who wishes to make his home with you has a right to a livelihood. (Similarly, a genuine teacher is as much entitled to his keep as a manual laborer). You are therefore to take the first products of your winepress, your threshing-floor, your oxen and your sheep, and give them as first-fruits to the prophets, for nowadays it is they who are your "High Priests." If there is no prophet among you, give them to the poor. And when you bake a batch of loaves, take the first of them and give it away, as the commandment directs. Similarly, when you broach a jar of wine or oil, take the first portion to give to the prophets. So, too, with your money, and your clothing, and all your possessions; take a tithe of them in whatever way you think best, and make a gift of it, as the commandment bids you.

Of Sunday Worship

14. Assemble on the Lord's Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist, but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with this fellow is not to take part with you until they have been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice. For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, *Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations.*

Of Local Officials

15. You must choose for yourselves bishops and deacons who are worthy of the Lord: men who are humble and not eager for money, but sincere and approved; for they are carrying out the ministry of the prophets and the teachers for you. Do not esteem them lightly, for they take an honorable rank among you along with the prophets and teachers.

Reprove one another, but peacefully and not in hot blood, as you are told in the Gospel. But have no converse with anyone who has done his neighbor an injury; let that man not hear a single word from you until he repents.

In your prayers, your almsgiving, and everything you do, be guided by what you read in the Gospel of our Lord.

Eschatology

16. Be watchful over your life; never let your lamps go out of your loins be ungirt, but keep yourselves always in readiness, for you can never be sure of the hour when our Lord may be coming. Come often together for spiritual improvement; because all the past years of your faith will be no good to you at the end, unless you have made yourselves perfect. In the last days of the world false prophets and deceivers will abound, sheep will be perverted and turn into wolves, and love will change to hate, for with the growth of lawlessness men will begin to hate their fellows and persecute them and betray them. Then the Deceiver of the World will show himself, pretending to be the Son of God and doing signs and wonders, and the earth will be deceived into his hands, and he will work such wickedness as there has never been since the beginning. After that, all mankind

will come up for their fiery trial; multitudes of them will stumble and perish, but such as remain steadfast in the faith will be saved by the Curse. And then the signs of the truth will appear; for the sign of the opening heavens, next the sign of the trumpet's voice, and thirdly the rising of the dead - not of all the dead, but, as it says, *the Lord will come, and with him all his holy ones*. And then the whole world will see the Lord as He comes riding on the clouds of heaven...

Encyclopedia Britannica

11th Edition

1910 A.D.

The Didache was previously known by name from lists of canonical and extra-canonical books compiled by Eusebius and other writers. Moreover, it had come to be suspected by several scholars that a lost book, variously entitled The Two Ways or The Judgment of Peter had been freely used in a number of works.

In 1882 a critical re-construction of this book was made by Adam Krawotsky with marvelous accuracy as was shown when in the next year the Greek bishop Philotheus Bryennius published "The Teaching of The Twelve Apostles" from the same manuscript from which he had previously published the complete form of the Epistle of Clement.

The MS was found in the library of the Jerusalem monastery of the most Holy Sepulcher, in Phanar, the Greek quarter of Constantinople. It is a small octavo Volume of 120 parchment leaves, written throughout by Leo "notary and sinner" who finished his task on the 11th of June in 1156 A.D. Besides the Didache and the Epistles of Clement it contains several spurious Ignatian epistles.

The word "Twelve" had no place in the original title and was inserted when the original Didache or Teaching was combined with the church manual which mentions apostles

outside of the twelve. It is noted that the division of the Didache into chapters is due to Bryennius, that into verses to A. Harnack.

The author of the complete work as we now have it, has modified the original Two Ways.

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11th Edition
1910 A.D.

The apostles of the second part are not the 12 apostles, and the prophets seem in some instances to have proved unworthy of their high position.

It is wise not to place the complete work much earlier than 120 A.D. and there are passages which may well be later.

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The Didache composed either at the end of the 1st century or the second, is not the product of an apostolic father, but reflects the liturgy and order of a church possibly in Egypt but more probably in Syria.

The basic problem with the Didache is whether it describes a real situation of the 1st century, or, consciously or unconsciously archaizes its picture from the standpoint of some later time.

Discussion of the Didache

By

D.R. Vestal, Ph.D.

It is obvious by reading the Didache that it in no way reflects the teachings and actions of the early Apostolic Church of Acts.

It is noted that the questionable work was found years after the apostolic age in a library at Constantinople. Constantinople was founded by Constantine and it was the Eastern part of the Roman Empire. The capital of Italy was moved from Rome to Constantinople, however, the doctrines of Rome remained in the West. It is from this area of Constantinople that many modern churches of today claim their Eastern Orthodox faith.

The baptism as listed on Part 2, A Church Manual, sheds light that this work was not truly apostolic. The apostles never baptized “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” They baptized converts in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostles also never poured water on their converts three times on their head and repeated “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.”

The Didache was certainly never mentioned by St. Paul who lived about 54 A.D., or by St. John who lived about 98 A.D. It seems to have been a work after the apostolic age made by someone of early Catholicism.