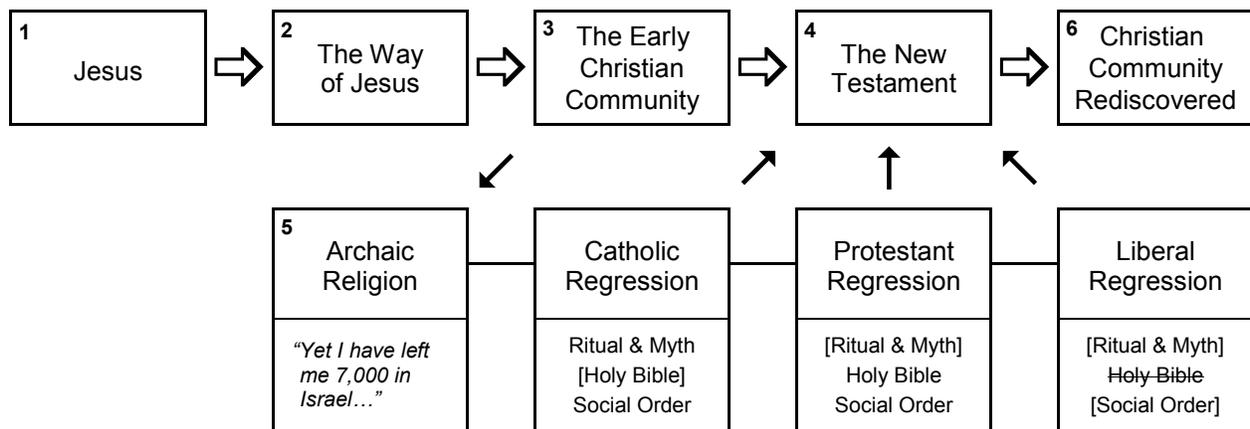


# From Christ to Christian Community



- 1. Jesus.** Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ. A Judean teacher of righteousness, charged with sedition and executed under Roman law in Jerusalem around AD 30. The story of Jesus is told in the New Testament, in the four Gospels, in which factual information is blended with poetry and parable and elements of docudrama. Two key events presented throughout the New Testament as factual: Jesus raised by God from the dead and Jesus vested by God with full divine authority.
- 2. The Way of Jesus.** According to the New Testament: total surrender to the God of life and love, whose Spirit nurtures compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, generosity, and truth-telling, extending even to outsiders, even to the enemy, even in the face of violent opposition.
- 3. The Early Christian Community.** Began with Jesus and his first disciples. Continued beyond the slaying of Jesus. Essentially Jewish until AD 135, with significant non-Jewish participation as early as AD 50. "Christian" means belonging to Christ. "Christ" is a Jewish designation for God's chosen one (from *ho christos*, Greek, a translation of *ha-mashiach*, Hebrew, "the Messiah," the [Lord's] anointed).
- 4. The New Testament.** 27 documents that promote the Way of Jesus from a First-Century Judean-Diaspora context. Composed from around AD 50 to around AD 100, they were copied, circulated, and collected by the early Christian community. The set presumes an understanding of Judean history, religion, and literature that is preserved in the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Old Testament.
- 5. Archaic Religion.** The default collective human response to social disintegration. Social cohesion is maintained by sacred violence (reenacted in ritual, veiled in myth), which induces groupthink and protective stupidity. Regressive tendencies are countered throughout the New Testament, but (by the early Second Century) are evident in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch and in the *Didache*.
 

**Catholic Regression.** Among those who claim apostolic succession, the Way of Jesus is eclipsed by ritual and myth and a social order based on patronage. Together, the New Testament and Old Testament are treated as a single, homogenous book (or bible), deemed holy (mysterious, magical, sacrosanct), and filtered by theologians and priests in the service of the patronage system.

**Protestant Regression.** The old patronage system gives way to democratic structures. Ritual and myth are minimized, but not eliminated. The Holy Bible, now available to the laity in print in vernacular translations, is still filtered by clergy, though now in the service of the new social order.

**Liberal Regression.** Among the affluent (Protestant *and* Catholic), a concern for social order gives way to a demand for personal liberty. Social cohesion is still maintained by groupthink and protective stupidity. The Bible, no longer deemed holy, is still filtered, now by secular-minded scholars, who treat the New Testament as an embarrassment ("foolishness to the Greeks"). Myth and ritual are accepted as valid expressions of spirituality ("having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof").
- 6. Christian Community Rediscovered.** Life together with God, as among the early Franciscans, Moravians, Mennonites, Methodists, and Restorationists. Occurs whenever the New Testament is differentiated from the Old Testament and the Way of Jesus is recognized and embraced.