Scholarly research has shown convincingly that Jewish Christianity in Palestine remained alive and active even after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and was instrumental in bringing Christianity to Mesopotamia and further East, thus laying the foundations of Semitic, Aramaic speaking, Syrian Christianity.

Some scholars go even further: they think that even the Dead Sea Scrolls should be brought into the picture and consider the possibility of a direct line from Qumran to Edessa.¹

Even if this last view deserves a critical reassessment, there is no doubt that Palestine and Mesopotamia are conceived of in our day as a special unit, independent of and of equal importance with Latin and Greek Christianity. Rome, Ephesus and Edessa are held to be the three main centres of the Early Church.²

This is the new image of the history of the Early Church, and it is important that our students should be made familiar with this idea, because it may be relevant to their present situation. In the first place it shows them that the Christian religion is not to be identified with the western world. As a matter of fact Aramaic speaking Christianity remained throughout the Middle Ages one of the main religions of Asia, and the patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon ruled over a territory from Cairo to Peking and from Siberia to Ceylon.³ In the second place our students ought to know that Christianity has been interpreted in several ways, according to the genius of the peoples to whom it was entrusted: if Rome stressed the legal aspects of the new religion, and the Greeks developed an ontological interpretation of God and Christ, the Syrians were not very interested in dogmatic strife, at least until Ephrem Syrus in the fourth

³ Peter Kawerau, Geschichte der Alten Kirche (Marburg, 1967) p. 27.
century, and conceived their faith rather as a Way, a way of life.⁴ All this might or might not be relevant, but this is the image of early Christianity which our generation has produced, and we sometimes wonder how it was possible for earlier generations not to perceive what we do now see so clearly. But then we find that this view is not so recent after all, that the insights were there long before the great discoveries of manuscripts in our time. But these ideas disappeared only a few decades ago, in the period between the two world wars, owing to a temporary eclipse of common sense in German scholarship.

When we consult the authoritative textbook of Hans Lietzmann, *The History of the Early Church*, we find there that the Pseudo-Clementine writings, until then considered as the main source of Jewish Christianity, are nothing but a novel, a fiction without historical value.⁵ And again that Christianity in Edessa, in so far as it was not gnostic, came from Antioch and was of Gentile Christian origin. Thus the possibility that there existed in these oriental countries a non-Pauline Christianity of Palestinian background is dismissed out of hand.⁶ And this view is defended even in our day, because so many people begin their study of the Early Church with Lietzmann.

Long before Lietzmann, as long ago as 1818, the learned August Neander had shown that the Clementine writings must preserve certain views of Jewish, anti-Pauline Christians.⁷ And in the course of the nineteenth century the Jewish Christian source (or sources) of these writings had been traced with some amount of certainty.

In 1932 Eduard Schwartz declared that all this was nonsense: whatever Jewish-Christian elements there seemed to be in the Clementines – hostility against Saint Paul, the primacy of James and so on – are said to have nothing to do with Jewish Christianity but to have sprung from the mind of audacious, bold novelists of the fourth century, who wished to legitimatize pro-Jewish tendencies within the then existing Christian con-

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⁵ German edition, I (Berlin, 1937) p. 197: "ein frei erfundener Roman, der für die Erforschung der christlichen und der judaistischen Frühzeit schlechterdings gar keine Bedeutung hat und auch mit Elxai und seiner Gemeinde nicht zusammenhängt."
⁶ German edition, II (Berlin, 1936) p. 274: "Aber das Christentum ist nicht durch Jerusalem oder das ausgewanderte Judenchristentum vermittelt worden, sondern hat von Anfang an antiochenische Prägung getragen."