



The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church

Paul McKechnie

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The first three centuries of the early church were a period of struggle, transition and growth. Recent attempts by historians and social scientists to understand this era have produced various and conflicting accounts. Indeed, some have sought to overturn the former consensus regarding which texts provide reliable evidence and how they should be interpreted. In *The First Christian Centuries*, Paul McKechnie, a classical scholar, examines some key issues in the current debate.

- Which ancient sources are reliable?
- What was the social makeup of the early Christian movement?
- What can we determine about the growth rate and persecution of first-century Christians?
- What do we know about the second generation of Christians?
- How should we assess the reliability of our various sources from the second and third centuries?
- What were the nature and extent of persecutions in the second and third centuries?
- What were the long-term consequences of Paul's making converts within the household of Caesar?
- Can we gain historical perspective on the diversity that traveled under the name Christian in the early centuries?
- How were women regarded and what roles did they play?
- And how was it that a Roman emperor, Constantine, was converted--and what were the implications for the Christian movement?

The value of McKechnie's study lies not in providing a comprehensive narrative of the origins and growth of the early church. Rather, it lies in critically examining key historical issues in sustained conversation with contemporary scholarship and the ancient sources. McKechnie will be valued by both students and scholars of early Christianity as an intelligent and informed companion who offers repeated and valuable insights into this critical era of Christian beginnings.

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