

A Week in the Life of Ephesus, David A. DeSilva

Pages 118-119

THE VARIETIES OF CHRISTIANITY IN EPHEBUS

By the end of the first century, it is likely that Christianity in Ephesus was highly diverse. This diversity would have resulted largely from the physical limitations on Christians' ability to gather with one another, namely, the realities of house churches. The spacious townhouse of a wealthy Christian might afford room for a regular gathering of thirty or so Christians in its "public" areas, such as a large courtyard at the core of the house's layout. We cannot assume, however, that all house churches met in affluent homes. An artisan family opening up its workshop and living space to a Christian group might be able to accommodate ten or a dozen Christians. We have no numbers for the Christian population in any city of the Roman world at the close of the first century, but if we were to assume that the movement had by then very modest success, capturing just 0.5 percent of the population of Ephesus, we would be looking at about one thousand to twelve hundred Christians. Assuming an average size of twenty-five for a house church, that would yield between forty and forty-eight groups, each meeting more or less consistently together with its house-church circle. There is no evidence of a rotation and no

evidence of larger convocations that might give a sense of unity and begin to develop homogeneity.

In a landmark study of Christianity in Ephesus, Paul Trebilco suggests that by the end of the first century, we might find house churches in Ephesus connected with the Pauline mission and its theology, house churches nurtured by the teachers *opposed* in the Pastoral Epistles, house churches that form the circle of groups addressed by 1 John and nurtured by the traditions of the Gospel of John, house churches made up of the Christians who left the Johannine churches to form their own house churches (those whom the author of 1 John censures), and house churches that might fall even outside these descriptors, whose existence but not location is known from other sources.^a It was the remarkable achievement of the second century that from this diversity came a greater unity and cohesion that led to the formation of an orthodox Christian identity—a process no doubt (and ironically) helped by the success of a number of heterodox expressions of Christianity against which the others could crystallize.

^aPaul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).