The Missionary Strategy of the Didache

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Abstract
The Didache is a short text, which was likely intended to be committed to memory, offering training in ‘The Way’ of the Lord, the practices of the churches, and in the community’s hope for the future. Dating from the first century, and quite plausible from before 70 AD, it offers us a unique vantage point into the concerns, attitudes, and praxis of the communities who would have heard our gospels from the lips of the evangelists. The purpose of this paper is to bring it to light in the hope that this can be further studied in relations to the gospels and mission.

Keywords
community, didache, discipleship, mission

Discovered in the library of a monastery in Constantinople in 1875, the Didache is one of the under-appreciated resources from the earliest decades of the churches. It is a short text, which in all likelihood was intended to be committed to memory, offering training in ‘The Way’ of the Lord, the practices of the churches, and in the community’s hope for the future. It was not intended for use by a specialist group, but for use by all the members of the churches; nor was it intended to be ‘a high-level document’ explaining faith or preaching ‘the gospel,’ but rather it provided information on Christian praxis so that an individual might live as a disciple within a community, know how the group conducts its common affairs, and possess that information in such a way that s/he could initiate new members into the group. Dating from the first century, and quite plausible from before 70 AD, it offers us a unique vantage point into the concerns, attitudes, and praxis of the communities who would have heard our gospels from the lips of the evangelists.

It is customary to spend the first section of any paper on the Didache explaining its value as a contextualizing source for the documents in the canonical collection, justifying the manner by which it is dated, and explaining how its praxis developed in the churches over subsequent generations thereby leaving the extant form of the Didache to disappear as out-dated; and sometimes, incidentally, by way of the same process to explain why it was never read in the liturgy and, therefore, did not become part of the canonical collection. Then, this lengthy preamble over, the remaining time is spent on the particular theme of the paper. I, however, wish to get straight to the
Training in Discipleship

We customarily translate *he didache* as ‘the teaching.’ ‘Teaching’ is a word that focuses our minds on the content of what is taught; or in a theological context on the content of ‘doctrine.’ Moreover, it tacitly focuses our attention on the teacher who is the originator of the teaching, and it assumes a relationship between teacher and taught whereby, given the document’s content, a document like the *Didache* is seen as the equivalent of a first-level information-imparting course: ‘Christianity 101.’ Inherent in this approach is the notion that the teacher is radically distinct from the taught, the information giver from the recipients, the knowledge possessor from those who are still in ignorance. Likewise, there is the assumption that the information has an ontological status as a ‘body of information’ prior to it being ‘acquired’ by the students. These binary models are inherent, rightly or wrongly, in many studies of the canonical collection where we think of a teacher with his disciples, an apostle in relation to those to whom he is sent, or an evangelist with his audience, and, indeed, such a relationship can be seen within the content of the *Didache* when it refers to apostles and prophets (e.g., at 11:3 or 13:2) in relationship to the community.

Reading the *Didache* with this model of teaching, then, often includes the further assumption that the ideal hearers either know very little about the subject (in which case the act of teaching is intended both to impart basic information and establish the formal structures of Christian knowledge) or that this information is somehow disputed (and so they need clarification and regulation) and the act of teaching is that of ‘laying down the law.’ However, even a cursory reading of the content of the *Didache* with these models in mind, throws up a range of problems. Why, for instance, is it so remarkably free of obvious doctrine. It seems to take a knowledge of the content of ‘the gospel’ for granted.

While it gives ‘instructions’ on the practicalities/liturgy of Baptism and the Eucharist, it also assumes that its audience are already themselves baptised – it is not a training for its audience’s Baptism nor an encouragement to them to be baptised – and that they are already regularly taking part in the Christian meal and offering Jesus’ blessing to the Father, and it is not an encouragement for them to begin or to continue this practice. Moreover, what such students are actually ‘taught’ in the part of the text that is most easily seen as ‘teaching’ (Did 1–5) seems little more than a checklist of moral ‘do’s and don’ts’ – which has had the effect of ‘turning off’ more than one modern reader of this little text – to which have been ‘added’ a heap of liturgical and administrative details rounded off with a little sermon that is reminiscent of the Synoptic Apocalypse. Hence, many have seen it as even less than a teaching document and described it in legal terms as a ‘church order’ or ‘manual of discipline,’ the sort of document you might consult, but not value for itself. So, some have argued, is it any wonder it disappeared! But before we dismiss it, it is worth noting two counter-indicators. First, Christianity spread remarkably widely, setting down very deep roots, in the first decades of its existence; and this is the period in which this document was in use. Second, virtually every detail regarding Christian living found in the *Didache* became the widespread standard practice of the churches, and so to think of it being ‘abandoned’ is wide of the mark. While the actual document ceased to be used, its content was absorbed into later documents and practice. Perhaps, therefore, we should question our working assumptions before looking further at the text.
If we translate *he didache* by equally applicable words such as ‘the training’ or ‘the instruction,’ a very different image of this text comes before us – albeit one that is less familiar to the academics’ study environment of many who examine early Christian documents. Words such as ‘instruction’ focus our attention on the process of how disciples were made, the apprenticeship that discipleship supposes, and the priority of learning *how* to be a follower within a community, and so a member of that community, over the acquisition of information seen as a distinct activity. In the craftsman–apprentice model of teaching, the craftsman must possess the teaching, it must be part of him, and not only must he possess it in every act of his craft (e.g., the skill to use a handsaw or a wood plane must be there every time one cuts a piece of wood or planes it), but it must be possessed in such a way that the skill can be communicated to the apprentice, and passed on to the next generation within the society. This is knowledge that takes external expression as a hundred easily remembered ‘rules of thumb,’ mnemonics and phrases that become the in-house language of the groups who are bound together by that skill-set: you and I might struggle to describe how to cut a corner of a piece of wood, but one craftsman can tell another to ‘chamfer’ it, and both will know what is wanted. The knowledge becomes the identity of the craftsman, and the bond between him and his apprentice: when both have achieved the skills of the trade, they both stand together in their common identity. So could the notion of *didaskalos–mathétés* if understood as ‘master–apprentice,’ serve us better than that of ‘teacher–student’?

**Becoming a Community of Disciples**

The community of the *Didache* saw itself as having chosen the Way of Live and rejected the Way of Death, and, as such, it was the community of the covenant established by Moses and described in Dt 30:14–8. Here, in the covenant, was the origin of their identity. Not only were they the inheritors of the blessings promised in Deuteronomy to those who walk in the Lord’s ways, but now they blessed the Father for a new gift of Jesus through whom they had life:

> We give thanks to you, our Father, for the holy vine of David, your servant, which you have made known to us. Through Jesus, your servant, to you be glory forever (Did 9:2);

and

> We give thanks to you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us. Through Jesus, your servant, to you be glory forever (Did 9:3).

The *Didache* re-affirmed this identity of belonging to a graced community, which had been prepared by the Spirit (Did 4:10), and was thankful to the Father for all the gifts it had received through Jesus (Did 9:1). Jesus was, as the new covenant, the immediate source of their community, their identity, and their common knowledge. Having a grasp of this, *this didache*, was the evidence for the members of the community themselves that they knew who they were, what they were about, the marks of their membership, and expressing it – having it ‘at their fingertips’ in memory – was a reaffirmation of the Way they had chosen.
Training such as this is not primarily that which one has for transmission to another-who-is-without-it (as would be the case if one possessed a set of teacher’s notes or introductory manual), but is self-referential: I am trained, I possess the training in myself, I know what I know; now, being such, I may also be able to communicate it to you. We should, therefore, abandon notions of a set of teachers’ notes, or a manual of instructions as analogies for the Didache, and rather seek analogies in declarations of identity such as formal professions of discipleship. So just as later credal statements were primarily liturgical professions of faith for use at a baptism – an as such public acts of self-identification with a people – and only as a derivative of that function can they be seen as either summaries of doctrine or ‘teaching tools,’ so possessing the didache is primarily a statement of self-identification. Indeed, we have a confirmation of this approach in the Didache’s opening remark about Baptism:

With regard to baptism, here is the teaching:

You are to baptise in this way.

Once you have gone back over all that is in the Two Ways, you baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living water (Did 7:1).

In other words, the step preliminary to baptism is that of reviewing the Two Ways: an action which functions as a personal re-affirmation by the one-to-be-baptised of the Way on which she/he is about to embark.

Viewed in this way, the act of committing this text to memory is neither an act of downloading a catechism of practice (i.e., some things you must know in order to show you have ‘learned’ a teacher’s content – and parts of the Didache, such as regulations on hospitality, have been viewed as technical details that could be ‘learned’ as regulations) nor the accumulation of useful details needed to carry out tasks (by analogy committing formulae to memory to obviate the need to refer to notes – and parts of the Didache such as the formula for baptising or the formula of thanksgiving at the community’s meal have been viewed in this way). Rather, having this text in the memory serves to assert the self-identity of the one who knows it, and to assure the one who knows it that she/he is fully part of the community. The trained disciple, a being who is distinct from one who is the recipient of teaching, is someone who knows what she/he is about, what has brought him/her there together with the other members of the covenantal community, knowing how they behave and knowing the behaviour they expect, and sharing in values – such as hospitality, vision – such as their sense that they belong to a larger community that is linked by prayer and travelling, and hopes about the future – the Lord is coming (Did 16:1), maranatha (Did 10:6).

The Didache and a curious comment about discipleship in Luke’s gospel may throw light on one another on this aspect of discipleship. In Lk 6:40 we read: ‘a disciple is not above his teacher, but every one when he is fully taught will be like his teacher’ (RSV). What does ‘fully taught’ mean here, and is there an implication that such a disciple is equal to his teacher? By contrast, in the parallel statement in Mt 10:24–5, the matter can be read in a simpler way: disciples can become like their teachers and servants like their masters, but an inferiority of students / servants to teachers / masters can be preserved: ‘A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master.’ But for Luke, while it is clear that the disciple is not above his teacher, it seems that any fully trained disciple (katértismenos de pas) is, at least, on a level with his teacher: ‘like’ (hós) in this case implies equivalence. The passive perfect participle, katértismenos, can be understood to mean ‘fully taught’
(RSV) ‘fully qualified’ (NRSV) but it also means ‘fully formed,’ ‘properly trained,’ ‘practiced’ or ‘completely linked in with the group’ – a sense found in 1 Cor 1:10. In our context it can be understood to be someone, a follower of the Way, a disciple, who has absorbed the Didache, he/she lives as a member of the community, knows what s/he is about, and has internalised the training: knowing it by heart and in his/her heart. It is often noted that Lk 6:40 ‘undoubtedly refers to instruction in the Christian community,’ but if we link it with this way of viewing the Didache, then to be ‘complete’ as a disciple was a recognisable quality in a member of the church. In the process, the action of internalising the Didache makes religious sense: completing the apprenticeship makes the apprentice like the didaskalos, that is, like Jesus himself.

Welcoming into the Community

However, although this is not stated explicitly in the Didache in the manner of Mt 28:19, this community desired to communicate its identity to others and share its Way with others. The decision for the Way of Life, now identified with the way of Jesus, forms the opening of the document. To everyone who encounters this community, the opening public statement is that a decision between two ways confronts the individual, who must then choose between them. The first step on the path to entering the community is to adopt the Way of Life, and reject the Way of Death. That step taken, and prepared by the Spirit (Did 4:10), then the person can be baptised. We are then given details of what the baptizer is to do and what to say, the role of the community in fasting at the time of this event, but not a word about, that great desire of modernity, what baptism ‘means.’ However, looking at how rituals function within human societies, it is clear that for these churches, baptism forms the boundary of the community. The new community of the covenant first promised by Moses is the community of the baptised: these have accepted the Way of Life, have acknowledged the Father’s gift of Jesus (e.g., Did 9:2), and are those who pray together to their father (Did 8:2).

In this process of the spreading awareness of The Way there are some surprising assumptions and omissions. The most interesting omission is that the process of training and baptizing new members of the community is not assigned to any specially selected members of the community. While the presence of apostles, prophets, and teachers is assumed in the community, their functions are understood to relate to the whole baptised community, and there is no indication that they have any special role in extending The Way to others outside the church. This missionary dimension is assumed to belong to all the members of the community. Likewise, while the whole group is exorted to engage in a preparatory fast for the baptism of a new member of the group (we should compare Luke’s account of the 3 days between the revelation on the Damascus road and his baptism when Paul neither ate nor drank Acts 9:9–18); the actual baptising is done by the member of the church who had trained the newcomer in the Way – for there is no reference here to any of those with ‘leadership functions.’ The assumption is that of the master-apprentice relationship: a member of the community trains an apprentice member, and that process complete and reviewed, admits their apprentice by baptising him/her.

If the working assumption is that every existing disciple – and it makes no distinction between men and women – can act as a guide, a mentor to an apprentice Christian, each can lead an apprentice through the process of learning The Way, then make sure the apprentice has mastered it (Did 7:1), and then baptise the person, then why has the community a special category of Christian referred to as a didaskalos (Did 13:2)? This individual is, like the apostles and prophets, to be given welcome and respect, provided that that person is a true teacher (Did 6:1). Clearly, the communities are not self-sufficient: there is a travelling ministry who bear witness to Jesus, who instruct the community, and who are recognised as having special gifts to impart to communities. Indeed, the
community of the *Didache* seems to know the first three kinds of ‘gifted’ person mentioned in 1 Cor 12:28–9, and they seem to function in the way similar to that envisaged of a roughly similar group of ‘gifted’ people in Eph 4:11. So how does this *didaskalos* relate to the *didache* as expressed in the document? This teacher’s work is focused on the on-going teaching of the whole community, not on its communication of its basic identity within itself nor the communication of that identity to a neophyte. The basic knowledge, skill, teaching exists within the community, and just as it does not need to call on a specific person to baptise or to eucharistise (note the verb, *eucharistéaste*, at Did 9:1), so it does not need it for sharing its basic identity. We have here *didache* within a community without a *didaskalos*. Yet at the same time, a community who has visits from a *didaskalos*, but the content of whose teaching we can only surmise: was it something like a history of salvation such as we find in Peter’s speech in Acts 2 or perhaps a performance of the story of Jesus such as the text we know as the Gospel of Mark? However, one thing should be clear: the *Didache* belongs to a model of communication that is more akin to the workshop, the forum, or the hearth, than to the classroom, the library, or the pulpit.

**The Community’s Self-identification**

So what face does this community show to itself and anyone who is enquiring about it? First, it is more than a collection of like-minded individuals, a faction, or a dining-club: all of which were familiar groupings in the Greco-Roman world. The community is formed by its history in Jesus and in the covenant, it is also unified in that it possesses a single initiation ritual, baptism, and this is encountered through apprenticeship to an existing member of the community: it is a person to person encounter, and the structure of the *Didache* seems to assume this, rather than an encounter with a set of ideas which might make one want to opt for closer association. There is a sharing of knowledge, of ethics, and of a common vision in this community but the community is not the result of those commonalities, rather those commonalities are a result of the work of the Spirit forming the people who enter the community that calls on God as Father and thus become the new Israel, the new vine (Did 9:2). So being one people, it is not surprising that these individuals were expected to have committed the *Didache* to memory and so know, as individuals, the Two Ways, how to instruct and baptise a new sister/brother, to pray, to thank the Father in the breaking of the loaf and the sharing of the cup, and to give expression to their hopes.

A second aspect of the community is its openness: it assumes that that new people will be entering the community or else giving instructions on baptism with the sole condition that that people have accepted the way of life and have reviewed their decision prior to taking the step of formal identification. That step taken, they are welcomed to the community’s table and participate in it according to its distinctive life style and discipline. Moreover, this openness is not simply an approach of ‘we take all comers’ but a deliberate decision for the Way of Life is the decision of a path that leads towards God (Did 6:1). This deliberate openness is seen in the attitude to the demands of the Mosaic Law that it assumes is widespread among the communities. We are familiar with this issue as the great debate in Pauline churches over circumcision, but in the *Didache* – in a community in which Jewish-Christians probably predominated – we find a far more relaxed approach to the whole question that would make the process of entering this community far less problematic:

Now if you are able to bear the whole of the Lord’s yoke, you will be complete. However, if you are not able [to bear that yoke], then do what can.
And concerning food regulations, bear what you are able. However, you must keep strictly away from meat that has been sacrificed to idols for involvement with it involves worship of dead gods (6:2–3).

We are familiar with the opponents of Paul who were becoming experts in making the practicalities of becoming a disciple so onerous as to tend towards either impossibility or a very unattractive one; and Paul then has to argue for a more practical approach by appealing to the power of grace in opposition to the need for the Law. The Didache takes a far simpler approach to the problem, and may reflect the background position in the churches against which we have to locate the disputes we see in Paul as reaction and counter-reaction. For the Didache the choice of the Way of Life as the fundamental decision of one’s life – a decision with is not equated with accepting the details of the Law but that of entering the community of the Covenant – is primary. This is then expressed in terms of Jesus’ presentation of ‘the core of the Law’ (cp. Mt 22:35–40) which is found in Did 1:2–6 – often described in terms of source analysis as the Christian ‘insertion’ into an older ‘Two Ways’ text – which established the framework for the lifestyle of the disciples who possess in themselves the didache. This then takes on a more detailed moral form in terms of the commandments, and, finally, observances of the community. But the focus is on the centrality of accepting the invitation to enter the Covenant and the distinctive way of Jesus. In comparison with this, gentiles should do what they are able to do. Likewise, with regard to food laws, where the one limit is that they avoid what had been used in sacrifices. This coheres with what we find in 1 Cor 10:14–33 and Acts 15:29 and 21:25; and in the case of Paul and the Didache this concern relates to an underlying assumption about dedicating food before it is eaten which inherently involves communion with the name to which it has been dedicated. When Paul says ‘Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved’ (1 Cor 10:32–3), he is, in effect, acknowledging that the position we see in the Didache is the ‘standard’ one and he will, pragmatically, accept it. However, the important point to note here is that while eating meat already offered to idols / demons forms a limit case in the Didache, nineteen apart, its desire to be open to new disciples produces its general pragmatism on the observance of the demands of the Law: ‘do what you can!’

Third, the apprentice learns what it is to be part of the community of Jesus by being absorbed into its time structures that the Didache lays out for the day and week. Each day they recite either together, or virtually together, the Lord Prayer on three occasions which seems to equate with the notion for these communities of the service of the Temple. Each week they fast on two specific days as a community – and it is expressly stated that sharing times is understood as sharing destinies - and on the Lord’s Day they gather for the community eucharistic meal. Sharing a common time is a fundamental way that human beings express their solidarities; and if that is linked with structures of remembering – as the was the Jewish liturgical year at the time of Jesus – then it becomes the means by which people not only express their present solidarity but absorb the history of the community. In an apprenticeship model of mission, the emphasis of the Didache on shared time not only makes sense in terms of explanation of the structures of practice, but may indicate an awareness that it was only by living with the community and sharing its time and times that the neophyte could learn what it was to be part of the church. This notion of leaning by ‘living with’ which of its nature involves time shared both in duration (time as chronos) and shared events (time as kairos) fits with the notion of didache as apprenticeship. However, if we approach the Didache from the perspective of a learner as someone in the process of knowledge acquisition, then its detailing of what the community does at fixed times seem little more than
almost irrelevant details (and have been treated in that manner by many contemporary scholars) which are, at best, only of interest as historical curiosities. However, if the larger argument of this paper is accepted, then they are indicators of its overarching approach to its key mission of making disciples.

Fourth, the community not only shares times and activities, it eats together regularly, and it seeks to work together and provide for its guests – slackers are not to be indulged even if they claim to be prophets (Did 11–12), and all of this framed by a vision of a common origin (having been gathered by the Shepherd of Israel: Did 9:4) and a destiny (awaiting his return on the clouds of heaven: Did 16:8). So discipleship is about this shared life, and mission is about helping others to learn how to share this life.

It is proverbial wisdom that one only gets to know someone’s character after one has lived and worked with them over time – this is their identity beneath the level of formal religious allegiance, ideology, and public face. The Didache adopts this wisdom in that it assumes that the neophyte will only really know discipleship from the inside, living it, and so it describes the structures of how the community lives; and that the training needed by the neophyte for the inner journey of becoming a disciple is knowledge of how the community lives in whose living that growth in discipleship takes place. So awareness of the identity and structures of the community is essential to its mission as a ‘place’ where new disciples can be formed.

The Didache and the Portrayal of an Ideal Community

As ‘the common knowledge’ of the community, that which must be absorbed by those who seek to enter into this communion, it is not surprising that the structures we see in the Didache are set out in ideal forms either positively or negatively. We see such a form set out positively in the case of the description of the Eucharist: there is no hint of the problems of class and stratification that were breaking up meals into factions in Corinth nor of the drunkenness that seems to have disrupted the community’s meals elsewhere. It sets out the ideal negatively in its care that prophets should not be ‘men on the make’ or that the community not become prey to idlers abusing its hospitality. The actual practice was in all likelihood far more varied: in some places meals did get out of hand, but elsewhere were probably quite sober; there were ‘Christmongers’ (Did 12:5) – possibly Simon the Magician in Acts 8 fits the description – but presumably many communities were never so afflicted: thought Paul seems to want to play it safe and earn his keep.

It is important to keep this fact that the Didache projects an ideal community in mind lest we imagine that it reflects some perfect historical moment in the past which is then looked back upon with nostalgia and regret. The Didache represents the ambitions and general conditions of the churches in which it was used: if it is to be judged for its effectiveness then that follows from the fact that those early communities, in increasingly adverse political conditions, continued to attract new members and to form those new members in The Way of Jesus. As Aaron Milavec has pointed out:

Any community that cannot artfully and effectively pass on its cherished way of life as a program [sic] for divine wisdom and graced existence cannot long endure. Any way of life that cannot be clearly specified, exhibited, and differentiated from the alternative modes operative within the surrounding culture is doomed to growing insignificance and to gradual assimilation. Faced with these harsh realities, the Didache unfolds the training program calculated to irreversibly alter the habits of perception and standards of judgement of novices coming out of a pagan life style.
Is there a Value in Studying the Didache for Today?

The Didache is probably our earliest instance of that approach to mission which is expressed in the adage: faith is caught not taught! On closer reflection it is, probably, also our earliest formal expression of the theological position that ‘mission’ and ‘identity’ are interchangeable terms in Christian discourse: to be Christian is to be missionary, or in the Didache’s terms: to be skilled disciple is to have the skill to engage in the mission of leading others on to The Way. However, the Didache can also serve as a reminder of certain more specific aspects of mission that we are all too apt to forget.

Mission in the Didache is not the preserve of a special group of professionals, nor can those ‘professionals’ it acknowledges be seen as somehow being the primary agents in forming and admitting new members of The Way: all such ‘experts’ are functions of, and servants to, the community. Even in churches where there is not a great deal of emphasis on a formally appointed ministry, much less a hierarchy, there is a human tendency to allow specialisation, and with it the binary distinction of teachers / taught, with the subsequent concentration of all teaching, all forming, and all mission with the former, while the latter become the ‘base support’ of the professionals in the field. This is precisely what happened in the ancient churches when, with the emergence of the clergy / laity divide, mission became the domain of the former and maintenance the domain of the latter. The Didache is an apposite warning that this was not the original way, nor the way most Christians affirm when they reflect on the matter, but vigilance against creeping specialisation, and its accompanying reduction of the nature of mission, is always needed.

Likewise, the Didache reminds us that mission should not be confused with the activity of winning converts to an ideology. It highlights the tacit dimension of Christian faith: people learn how to live a way of life, to gradually appreciate that they have been adopted as sons and daughters of the covenant, and so brought into a relationship with the Father and with a community – and all the while the Spirit preparing those who will seek out the Way (Did 4:10). This community is aware of its own didache, its identity, and is one that seeks to live, work, eat and pray together. This didache is its set of common skills, shared training, and everyday awareness of how it lives as a community. But it is also an open community: it welcomes new members, and absorbs them: training them while knowing that they may find some of its ways strange and, therefore, assuring them that it is sufficient that they do what they can (Did 6:2).

Finally, in all our discourses on mission we look back to the documents which contain the kerugma of Christian faith, such as the gospels and the early epistles, and to the great preachers Paul, the evangelists, and others, but the Didache reminds us that this headline missionary activity by the apostles, prophets and teachers was build upon, presupposed, and was facilitated by the more diffused and less obvious activity of didache: imparting a training in discipleship within the everyday life of the community.

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The Teaching of the Lord given to the Gentiles by the Twelve Apostles

In most translations, there are notes inserted into the text or placed in footnotes pointing to sources or overlaps with other ancient texts. Such apparatus belongs to the world of reading, and would not have been heard when the Didache was being used; rather the text would have ‘rung bells’ in the memories of the audience as they listened without being distracted as we tend to be by notes. So as to let the text simply ring bells in the memory, this translation is without notes.
1.1 There are two ways: one is the Way of Life, the other is the Way of Death; and there is a mighty
difference between these two ways.
1.2 The way of life is this: first, you shall love God who created you; second, your neighbour as
yourself; all those things which you do not want to be done to you, you should not do to others.
1.3 The training about these words is this:
Bless those who curse you;
Pray for those who are your enemies;
Do fasts for those who persecute you.
What benefit is it if you love those who love you? Do not even the Gentiles do that? Rather, you
must love those who hate you, and so you are not to treat the other person as your enemy.
1.4 Abstain from carnal desires.
If someone strikes your left cheek, then turn the right cheek towards him also, and you will be
perfect.
If someone makes you go one mile, then go the extra mile with him.
If someone takes your coat, then let him have your jacket.
If someone takes your property, then you are not allowed to ask for it back.
1.5 Give to everyone who asks help from you, and do not seek a return because the Father wants his
generosity to be shared with everyone.
Blessed is anyone that gives according to this command, that person goes without punishment. But, watch
out for them who received these things: if they receive things from need, then there is no
punishment, but if they receive these things without need then they shall have to explain why they
acted in that way and they shall be questioned about it when in prison and they will not be released
until the last penny is repaid.
1.6 But remember it has also been said that 'you should let your gift sweat in your hands until you know
to whom to give it.'
2.1 Now, the second part of the training is this:
2.2 You shall not murder.
You shall not commit adultery.
You shall not corrupt boys.
You shall not be promiscuous.
You shall not steal.
You shall not practice divination.
You shall not practice with magic potions.
You shall not kill a child in the womb nor expose infants.
You shall not try to take your neighbours’ goods.
2.3 You shall not perjure yourself.
You shall not act as a false witness.
You shall not speak evil of others.
You shall not hold grudges.
Do not be fickle or deceitful because the deceitful tongue is the snare of death.
Your discourse must neither be full of deceits nor empty, but rather it should be supported by your
actions.
You should not be avaricious, nor greedy, nor hypocritical, nor spiteful, nor disdainful.
You should not be plotting against your neighbour.
You shall not hate anyone, rather you should correct some people, you should pray for other people,
and yet others you should love more than your own life.
My child, run away from every kind of evil, and even from everything that looks like it.
Do not let yourself become angry: it may start in anger, but end in murder.
And do not be jealous, nor argumentative, nor someone with a hot temper: these can also end in
murder.
My child, do not lust after sex, for such lust leads on to fornication.
You should not be someone of obscene speech nor someone with a roaming eye, for these too lead on to fornication.

My child, you must not become someone who works at telling the future by divination, for such doing lead on to idolatry. Nor should you be involved in casting magic spells, nor an astrologer, nor one who purges curses, nor should you allow yourself to become curious about these things, for they all lead on to idolatry.

My child, do not be one who tells lies, for lying leads on to thieving. And do not be greedy or vain, for these also lead on to thieving.

My child, do not be someone who grumbles, for it leads on to blasphemy. And do not be arrogant or bad-minded, for these too lead on to blasphemy.

Rather, you should act with humility for the humble shall inherit the earth.

You should be patient and merciful and without guile and quiet and good and you should treasure, with respect, these commandments you have received.

Do not be haughty, nor let your heart draw you off into false pride. You should not associate with the mighty, but live with the people who are righteous and humble.

Accept as blessings whatever happens to you, being aware that nothing happens without God.

My child, remember always, day and night, the one who speaks to you the discourse of God, and honour that person as you would the Lord: for wherever the things of the Lord are spoken about, there the Lord is present.

Furthermore, every day you should seek out the company of the saints so that you can be helped by their conversation.

Do not be someone who creates factions, rather work for reconciliation between parties. You should adjudicate with justice and so not show partiality when correcting transgressions.

You should not be someone who sits on the fence in these matters.

You should not be someone who opens his hands when it comes to receiving, but then keeps them shut when it comes to giving.

When you have earned your keep by the work of your hands, you should offer something for the expiation of your sins.

You must not be slow to be generous with alms, and do not grumble when you do give them, eventually you shall come to know who is the One who is the Good Paymaster who rewards all.

You must not turn away from anyone in need but share everything with your brother holding back nothing as just your individual property. Remember: if you are sharers in what is imperishable, how much more must you become sharers in what is perishable!

4.9 You should not keep back your hand from your son or daughter, but, from their youth, train them in the fear of the Lord.

4.10 You shall not give orders to your man-slave or woman-slave when you are angry – remember they hope in the same God as you – because this might cause them to stop respecting God who is over both of you; and remember that he comes to call, without thought of status, those whom the Spirit has prepared.

4.11 And slaves, you should be submissive to your masters with respect and fear as to an image of God.

4.12 You should hate all sham, and all that is not pleasing to the Lord.

4.13 You should not abandon the Lord’s commands, but hold fast to what has been handed on to you without addition or subtraction.

4.14 You should acknowledge your transgressions in the church; and you should not set out on your prayers when you have a bad conscience.

This is the Way of Life.

Now, by contrast, here is the Way of Death.

First, it is full of wickedness and is cursed: it is full of murders, adulteries, lusts, acts of fornication, robberies, acts of idolatry, magic and sorcery, thefts, false accusations, sham, double dealing, fraud, arrogance, malicious intentions, stubbornness, covetousness, obscene language, jealousy, haughtiness, pride and pomposity.
This is the way of all those who persecute good people; of those who hate the truth and who love lies; of those who do not know the reward of righteousness, who are not devoted to what is good, and who do not give just judgements because they are not looking out for what is good but for what is evil. These people do not know gentleness, they lack patience, they love worthless things and pursue money. These people are without mercy for the poor, and do nothing on behalf of the oppressed. These people do not know who was their Maker. They are murderers of children, they are corrupters of God’s image, they turn away from those in need, oppress the afflicted, are advocates of the wealthy, treat the poor unjustly. All told, they are full of sin!

Children, may you be kept safe from all this.

6.1 Take care that no one leads you astray from this Way of the Teaching, because any other teaching takes you away from God.

6.2 Now if you are able to bear the whole of the Lord’s yoke, you will be complete. However, if you are not able [to bear that yoke], then do what can.

6.3 And concerning food regulations, bear what you are able. However, you must keep strictly away from meat that has been sacrificed to idols for involvement with it involves worship of dead gods.

7.1 With regard to baptism, here is the teaching:
You are to baptise in this way. Once you have gone back over all that is in the Two Ways, you baptise in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living water.

7.2 However, if you do not have access to living water, then baptise in some other water; and if you do not have any cold water, then you can use warm water.

7.3 And if you cannot get access to either [running or still water], then pour water three times on the head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

7.4 Moreover, before the baptism takes place, let both the person baptising and the person who is going to be baptised fast – along with as many others as are able to do so. Indeed, you must instruct the person who is going to be baptised to fast for one or two days before the baptism.

8.1 You must not let your days of fasting be at the same time as those of the hypocrites. They fast on the second day of the Sabbath and on the fifth day of the Sabbath, so you should hold your fasts on the fourth day of the Sabbath and on the Day of Preparation.

8.2 Nor should you offer prayers as the hypocrites do.
Rather, you should pray like this, just as the Lord commanded in his gospel:
Our Father, who is in the heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtors
And do not lead us in the trial
But deliver us from evil
For yours is the power and glory forever.

8.3 Say this prayer three times each day.

9.1 Now this is how you should engage in giving thanks, bless God in this way.

9.2 First, at the cup, say:
We give thanks to you, our Father,
for the holy vine of David, your servant, which you have made known to us.
Through Jesus, your servant, to you be glory forever.

9.3 Then when it comes to the broken loaf say:
We give thanks to you, our Father,
for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us.
Through Jesus, your servant, to you be glory forever.
9.4 For as the broken loaf was one scattered over the mountains and then was gathered in and became one, so may your church be gathered together into your kingdom from the very ends of the earth.
Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.

9.5 Only let those who have been baptised in the name of the Lord eat and drink at your eucharists. And remember what the Lord has said about this: do not give to dogs what is holy.

10.1 After you all have had enough to eat, give thanks in this way:

10.2 We give you thanks, holy Father, for your holy name which you have made to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge and faith and immortality which you have made known to us. Through Jesus, your servant, to you be glory forever.

10.3 You are the mighty ruler of all who has created all for your name’s sake, and you have given food and drink to human beings for their enjoyment so that they might give thanks to you. But to us, from your generosity, you have given spiritual food and drink, and life eternal, through your servant.

10.4 Above all things we give thanks to you because you are mighty: to you be glory forever.

10.5 Remember, Lord, your church, deliver her from evil, make her complete in your love, and gather her from the four winds into your kingdom you have prepared for her, for yours is the power and the glory forever.

10.6 May grace come and may this world pass away.
Hosanna to the God of David.
If anyone is holy, let him advance; if anyone is not, let him be converted.
Maranatha. Amen.

10.7 However, permit the prophets to give thanks in whatever manner they wish.

11.1 Now, whoever comes to you and teaches all these things which have just been set out here, you are to welcome him.

11.2 However, if a teacher has himself wandered from the right path and has begun to teach a teaching that is at odds with what is set out here, you should not listen to him. On the other hand, if his teaching promotes holiness and knowledge of the Lord, then you should welcome him as you would the Lord.
Now, turning to apostles and prophets you must treat them according to the rule of the gospel.
Every apostle who arrives among you is to be welcomed as if he were the Lord.
But normally he must not stay with you for more than one day, but he may stay a second day if this is necessary. However, if he stays a third day, then he is a false prophet!
When he leaves you, an apostle must receive nothing except enough food to sustain him until the next night’s lodgings. However, if he asks for money, then he is a false prophet!
Now if any prophet speaks in the Spirit he is not to be tested: for every sin can be forgiven but this sin cannot be forgiven.
However, not everyone who speaks in the Spirit is a prophet: only those who show that they follow the Way of the Lord. It is by the way that he lives that the true prophet can be separated from the false one.
Now if a prophet speaking in the Spirit orders a banquet, then that man should not partake in it; if he does eat the meal, then he is a false prophet!
And any prophet who teaches the truth, but does not live according to his teaching is to be considered a false prophet.

Any prophet, who has been proven to be a true prophet, who acts out in his life the earthly mystery of the church (provided that he does not teach everyone to do as he does) is not to be judged by you: leave his judgement with God. After all, the prophets in olden times also acted in that way.
Now if anyone should say in the Spirit ‘Give me money’ – or anything like that – you should not listen to that man; however, if he tells you to give something to other people who are in need, then he is not to be condemned.
Now anyone coming in the Lord’s name should be made welcome; then you can test him, using your own insight into human nature to see if he is genuine or a fraud.
If the visitor is someone who is passing through, help him as much as you can. However, he is not to stay for more than two days – or three out of necessity.
If the visitor wishes to settle in your community, then if he is a craftsman, he should work for his living.
But if he does not have a trade, then use your own judgment to decide how he is to live among you as a Christian: but he is not to live in idleness.
If he is unhappy with this arrangement, then he is a christmoner. Be on the watch for such people.
Any true prophet who wishes to settle down among you is worthy of his food. In the same way, any true teacher is like a labourer who is worthy of his food.
So take the first fruits of the vine and the harvest, of cattle and sheep, and present these first fruits to the prophets because they are to you, the high priests.
But if you have no prophet settled in your community, then give the first fruits to the poor.
When you bake a batch of bread, take the first loaf and present it as it says in the commandment.
Do likewise when you open a fresh flask of wine or oil, take the first portion from it and present to the prophets.
So also with money and cloth and other commodities, set aside the first fruits, and give it – as much as seems right to you – according to the commandment.
On the day which is the Day of the Lord gather together for the breaking of the loaf and giving thanks. However, you should first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be a pure one; and do not let anyone who is having a dispute with a neighbor join until they are reconciled so that your sacrifice may not be impure.
For this is the sacrifice about which the Lord has said: ‘In every place and time let a pure sacrifice be offered to me, for I am the great king, says the Lord, and my name is feared among the nations.’ Select for yourselves bishops and deacons: men who are worthy of the Lord, humble, not greedy for money, honest, and well tested because these too carry out for you the service of the prophets and teachers.
Therefore, you should not despise them but treat them as your honored men like the prophets and teachers.
Now when you come to correct one another, this is to be done in a composed way, and not in anger, just as you find in the gospel.
And when someone does wrong against his neighbour, let no one speak to him, indeed he is not to hear anything from you, until he repents.
Now with regard to your prayers and almsgiving, indeed all your actions, do them all in the way that you find them prescribed in our Lord’s gospel.
Watch over your lives. You must not let your lamps go out, nor should you let your loins be ungirded, rather you should be ready because you do not know the hour at which our Lord is coming.
Gather together frequently and seek those things that are good for your souls. Otherwise what use will having faith over all the time of your life be to you, if at the end of time you are not made perfect.
For in the last days there are going to be many false prophets and those who would corrupt you, then the sheep will turn into wolves, and love will turn into hate.
Then when lawlessness is increasing, people will hate and persecute and be treacherous with one another. Then, indeed, the Deceiver of this world will appear as if a son of God and he will do signs and wonders and the earth will be delivered into his hands and he will commit lawless acts such as have never been seen since the world began.
Then all people will be brought through the trial of fire.
Then many will fall away and will perish; but those whose stand firm in their faith will be saved by the Cursed One himself.

16.6 And then, the signs of the truth will appear:
The first sign will be the heavens opening;
Then [second,] the sound of the trumpet;
And, third, the resurrection of the dead –

16.7 but not of everyone, but as it has been said: ‘the Lord will come and all his saints with him.’

16.8 Then the world will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven.
Notes
1 For the background to the Didache and its discovery, see T. O’Loughlin, *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (London, 2010), ch. 1.

2 That it was intended to be committed to memory was first suggested by I. H. Henderson, ‘Didache and Orality in Synoptic Comparison,’ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992), 283–306 – which article is fundamental to the approach being taken in this paper – and has been developed by A. Milavec, ‘Distinguishing True and False Prophets: The Protective Wisdom of the Didache,’ *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994), 117–36.

3 I have explored this distinction between ‘high-level’ and ‘low-level’ documents in ‘The Didache as a Source for Picturing the Earliest Christian Communities: The Case of the Practice of Fasting’ in K. O’Mahony (ed.), *Christian Origins: Worship, Belief and Society* (Sheffield, 2003), 83–112.

4 For an account of gospel formation that would accord with my presentation of the Didache, see G. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge, 2004).

5 I am not suggesting that there is an overlap between the Didache and any of the modern definitions of approaches to ‘mission’; but rather that the notion of mission in its broadest meaning – a response to Mt 28:19 – does bring before us a fundamental aspect of Christianity and we can observe how the Didache relates to this aspect of Christianity.

6 On the orality, and so also the aurality, of the Didache, see Henderson, 1992 and Milavec, 1994; and these studies should be set in the wider context as set out by P. J. Achtemeier, ‘*Omne verbum sonat*: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity,’ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990), 3–27.

7 It refers to the ‘gospel’ at 8:2, 11:3, 15:2 and 15:4, but intends this to be the gospel as an event, rather than one of our texts; see Stanton, 2004, pp. 9–62 (however, note that on p. 55 where he refers to the Didache he assumes that it is dependent on Matthew – which I do not – and justified this with the aside ‘since few scholars doubt that the Didache is dependent on Matthew … ’, whereas many scholars doubt precisely this, see A. Milavec, *The Didache: Faith, Hope, and Life of the Earliest Christian Communities*, 50–70 C.E. (New York, NY, 2003), 693–739, and A. J. P. Garrow, *The Gospel of Matthew’s Dependence on the Didache* (London, 2004).

8 There is no statement about who Jesus is, what he did, or any confession of faith in him: knowledge is simply assumed and he is referred to as ‘Lord’ at 4:1 and 15:4. The only time the Didache mentions the name ‘Jesus’ is in liturgical formulae: 9:2, 9:3, 9:4 and 10:2.

9 The notion of the Didache as a ‘manual’ of regulations or a ‘church order’ invokes 19th-century categories (e.g., the first study of the text, in English, which formed a foundation for much later work and which still contains important information about the discovery of the text was by Philip Schaff and entitled: *The Oldest Church Manual called The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (New York, NY, 1886)) whose general use has disappeared from scholarship with the exception of this document where the description has survived and is used casually without asking whether it obscures or illumines the text itself. That this is a genuine problem can be seen from this example: A. Yarbro-Collins, ‘Apocalypses and Apocalypticism (Early Christian)’ in D. N. Freedman ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY, 1992), 1, 291 begins by noting that ‘Although the Didache is a church order in terms of genre, it expresses apocalyptic eschatology’ which seems to her somewhat incongruous; but that classification of the Didache is not a secure foundation for an argument. One of the major problems in Didache research is that we do not have a comparable text, and so it is, in the strict sense, *sui generis*.

10 The distinction I employ here is one derived from common sense: there are books/tools which we keep near at hand in our work (a ready reckoner/calculator, a grammar, a manual of academic regulations, a staff-book, some timetables) because they are most valuable and ‘we would not be without them,’ but this is a value derived from use; then there are books we value as we enjoy or endorse their content as wisdom or literature. The latter category, because it is seen as more than of passing value, tends to survive in the blind sieve of time – and when we look at the paucity of Christian texts from the first two Christian centuries we should always recall that we have but a fraction of what we can infer was once in existence.

11 I owe the inspiration to thinking in this way about the Didache to reading the work of Aaron Milavec. He sketched it out in a paper given to the to the Society of Biblical Literature Seminar in 2002: ‘Apprenticeship
in the Way of Wisdom Within the Apocalyptic-Orientated Didache Communities 50–70 C.E.’ which has not subsequently been published (personal communication from Dr Milavec, March 2010); and also in the introduction to his The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary (Collegeville, MN, 2003).

12 ‘If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you are entering to take possession of it’: Dt 30:16 – it is not frequently noted, but without assuming this verse as basic to understanding all Two Ways documents, including the Didache, one sees the documents as simply ethical or legal, without appreciating that they treat of a way of life in communion with God: they are covenant texts, and so our Didache has to be seen as an expression of the ‘new testament’/‘new covenant.’

13 All translations from the Didache are taken from O’Loughlin, 2010.
14 J. A. Fitzmyer, The Gospel according to Luke, I - IX (New York, NY, 1981), p. 642.
15 See O’Loughlin, 2003, for a study of this aspect of the text.
16 On the origins of our quest for ‘meaning’ as distinct from the encounter with the ritual symbol, see J. Z. Smith, To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual (Chicago, IL, 1987), 96–117.
17 This fasting, distinct from fasting as penitence, could be described as ‘psyching-ourselves-up’ for the significant moment of baptism. When Jews in Jesus’ time recalled Moses receiving the law on Sinai they remembered he had to prepare for this meeting by fasting for forty days (Ex 38:28). Likewise, Daniel fasted while he awaited his revelation (Dn 10:3). The communities of the Jesus movement also thought of him fasting as a preparation for the start of his public ministry (Mk 1:3/Mt 4:2/Lk 4:2). So by fasting the candidate was being finally prepared for formally setting out on the Way – but this was a path she or he would follow in company, and so the whole community by fasting was helping the candidate with her/his preparation for this moment of change in her/his life. Note that Luke points out that they prayed and fasted when Barnabas and Saul were set apart at Antioch (Acts 13:1–2); and when Paul is about to entrust the care of a church to elders he did so with prayer and fasting (Acts 14:23). See O’Loughlin, 2010, ch. 4.
18 The Didache employs the image of the vine for the community formed around Jesus’ table – and as such invokes the imagery we find in such texts as Ps 80.
19 The rationale for this opposition to meat dedicated to pagan gods is not hard to find in the case of the Didache. The community’s central religious act was to share food, a cup and a loaf, which had been dedicated in the act of blessing the Father for his gifts, and then eating them as a group united them as participants with one another and with God; by the same ritual logic, meat already dedicated to a supposed god was an act of religious declaration and identification, and so they had to steer clear of it because eating such already-dedicated food could be seen to either undermine their own ritual rationale for eating together or else compromise their monotheism.
20 See O’Loughlin, 2003.
21 See O’Loughlin, 2010, chs 4 and 5.
22 See G. Theissen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity (Edinburgh, 1982), especially, 145–75.
23 For example, the conditions which generated the comment in Jude 12 – on the similarity of all these meals, see M. Daly-Denton, ‘Looking Beyond the Upper Room: Eucharistic Origins in Contemporary Research,’ Search 31 (2008), 3–15.
24 See J. Murphy-O’Connor, Paul: A Critical Life (Oxford, 1996), 85–9.
25 This is taken from his un-published paper of 2002, p. 1.

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