

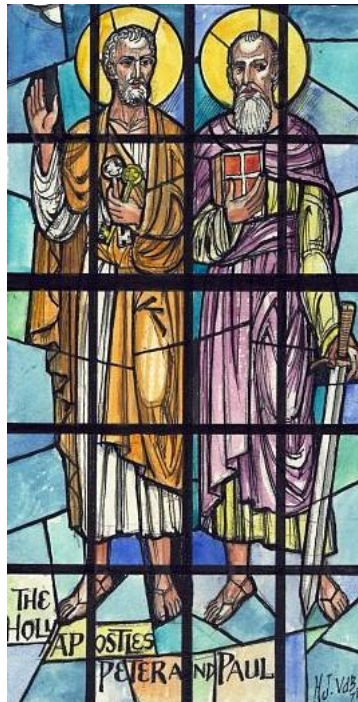
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# Worship and Cultural Patterns in the Early Church



Written by Robert Jones  
Acworth, Georgia

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# Christian Theology and History Adult Sunday School Courses

Robert Jones

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I've always been a strong believer in adult Sunday School classes and Bible studies in our churches. And many churches have quality, Biblically-based adult-focused programs. Unfortunately, just as many churches tend to downplay adult education, focusing on children's education (not a bad thing in itself), or focusing on the needs of the "unchurched", where topics such as church history and theology are often purposely ignored.

Yet there is a strong need for adult education focused on both the Bible and the basic tenets and history of the Faith. Among the reasons:

- Not all adults come from a strong childhood background in the church – adult Sunday School classes/Bible studies may be their first serious introduction to what Christianity is all about
- Christianity (and especially Evangelical Christianity) is under constant attack from the media and popular culture (movies, music, etc.). We need to give fellow Christians the tools to defend the Faith against attack (or to provide a "ready defense" as Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15)
- Even adult Christians that have a strong Biblical background often know little about the origins and history of their Faith

To better meet the needs of adult Christians (both those mature in their Faith, and those just starting out in the "School of Christ"), I've written a series of courses that focus on the history of the Christian Church (including the Jewish roots), as well as the development of doctrine in the Church. The topics represented in these courses are intended to both further the participant's walk in the Faith, as well as serve as a starting point for Christian apologetics.

While the primary purpose of these courses is for use in churches, they also may be useful for High School and College projects, especially the courses focused primarily on historical aspects.

One note: these courses are primarily written from an Evangelical Protestant viewpoint (I come from a Reformed Church background), but I hope I've given ample time to other points of view throughout the various courses.

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## Introduction

This course will examine the worship and cultural patterns of the early Christian Church, from its establishment in Acts, to roughly the time of the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.) How Christians worshipped in the early church is an enduring topic of interest in the modern church – many churches today continue to want to model themselves after the style of the ancients. Among the topics covered in this course:

- Where early Christians worshipped
- How they worshipped
- Baptism & the Eucharist
- Church leadership and hierarchy

Somewhat surprisingly, given the antiquity of the sources, we actually have quite a bit of information about how Christians worshipped in the first three centuries. Among the more prominent ancient sources referenced in this work are:

- The New Testament, especially *Acts of the Apostles* and Paul's letters
- *The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, an early second century guide for new converts (*catechumens*). This work was referred to by Eusebius (325 A.D.) and Athanasius (367 A.D.), but was lost until its rediscovery in Turkey in 1873.
- Justyn Martyr's *First Apology* (c. 150 A.D.), which describes an early worship service, as well as the Eucharist
- The 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century *Apostolic Constitutions* (which includes much of the *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*), which is a detailed guide for church form and practice

### ***Worship and cultural patterns in the early church quiz***

1. T/F The communal worship pattern (sharing all possessions, etc.) described in Acts 2 and 4 became the pattern for the later Gentile Christian church
2. T/F In the early church, the fellowship meal (agape) was often combined with the sacrament of the Eucharist
3. T/F When Paul preached in the cities of the Gentiles, he avoided going into the Jewish synagogues in those cities
4. T/F It was common in the early church to have worship services in people's homes
5. T/F There is no concept of a bishop in the New Testament
6. T/F Catechumens (candidates for conversion) had to receive 2-3 weeks of instruction before being baptized in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century church
7. T/F Paul of Tarsus was the first deacon in the history of the Christian Church
8. T/F One of the reasons that early Christians worshipped on Sundays instead of Saturdays is because it was the first day of God's creation
9. T/F According to the New Testament, Peter started the first Christian church in Rome
10. T/F Being baptized allowed one to participate in the sacrament of the Eucharist in the early church

### **Worship patterns of the Early Church – First Century**

Our primary source for information on how Christians worshipped in the first century is the *Acts of the Apostles* and Paul's letters, in the New Testament. Parts of the *Teachings of the Apostles* may have been written in the latter part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, and therefore may also be useful.

## Where they worshipped

Reflecting the Jewish roots of Christianity, the earliest worship practices in the Christian Church centered around the Temple in Jerusalem. For example, in Acts 2:46 (see also Acts 2:46, 4:1, 5:12, 5:17-21, 5:42):

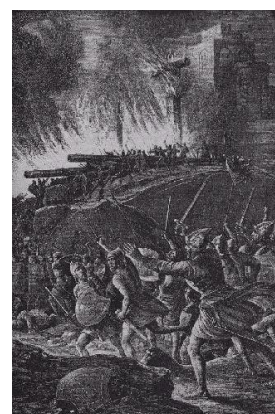
<sup>46</sup>“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.” (NIV, Acts 2:46-47)



In time, Temple worship became less important, as Paul spread his ministry throughout the Roman Empire, preaching primarily to the Gentiles. However, in the early part of Paul’s ministry, he would often preach first in a Jewish synagogue as he entered a new city. Some of those references are listed below.

| Who             | Where        | Reference  |
|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| Paul            | Damascus     | Acts 9:20  |
| Paul & Barnabas | Salamis      | Acts 13:5  |
| Paul & Barnabas | Iconium      | Acts 14:1  |
| Paul & Silas    | Thessalonica | Acts 17:2  |
| Paul & Silas    | Berea        | Acts 17:10 |
| Paul            | Athens       | Acts 17:17 |
| Paul            | Corinth      | Acts 18:4  |
| Paul            | Ephesus      | Acts 18:19 |
| Paul            | Ephesus      | Acts 19:8  |

Temple worship, of course, was completely wiped out in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. (Photo from *The Life And Works Of Flavius Josephus*, by William Whiston, Translator - depicting the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.)



In addition to public worship in the synagogues and in the Temple Court, more private worship services containing only believers were conducted in private homes, often located on the upper levels of small shops. These services typically accommodated 10-20 people. One example of a reference to a house church can be found in 1 Corinthians 16:

<sup>19</sup>“The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.” (NIV, 1 Cor 16:19)

Other examples of New Testament references to house churches can be found in the table below:

| House owner               | Reference    |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| Mary, Mother of John Mark | (Acts 12:12) |
| Titius Justus             | (Acts 18:7)  |
| Nympha                    | (Col 4:15)   |

Over time, as the worship communities grew, houses were converted to places of worship, often by removing walls to enlarge common areas for worship and meals. (In Rome, these were sometimes re-

ferred to as "title churches", after the name of the original donor). The earliest (c. 232 A.D.) extant known church is located in Dura-Europos in modern day Iraq.

One other location of worship was common in the early church - cemeteries. Commemorative feasts were sometimes held at graves to worship "in the company of martyrs". Worship services were often held in the catacombs of Rome, to avoid the detection of the authorities.

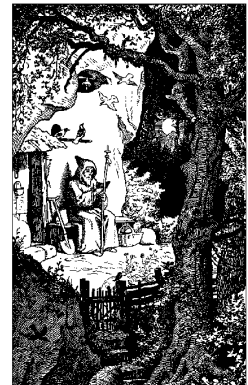
## ***How they worshiped***

So what was a first century Christian worship service like? *Acts* tells us that the early primitive Jerusalem church practiced a form of communal worship that included shared ownership of property:

<sup>32</sup>All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup>There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup>and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. <sup>36</sup>Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), <sup>37</sup>sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet." (NIV, Acts 4:32-37)

<sup>44</sup>All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup>Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (NIV, Acts 2:44-47)

This communal worship pattern existed only in the primitive Jerusalem church. There is no evidence that it ever appeared in the Gentile church, probably because the Gentile church realized that if they sold off all of their possessions and means for generating wealth, they wouldn't have any money for the church to survive on in the future. (The early Jerusalem church believed that Christ's return was imminent; thus, they probably weren't focused on a long term "business plan" for the church!) However, this communal form of worship was a model followed by early monastics such as St. Antony and St. Benedict.



The early 2<sup>nd</sup> century guide for catechumens, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, gives a brief description of a Gentile church "Christian Assembly on the Lord's Day":

"But every Lord's day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, saith the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations." (*Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, Chapter 14)

Various sources indicate that in the early church, a fellowship meal (*agape*, the "love feast") was followed by the Eucharist ("thanksgiving"). Early Christians gave thanks during the meal and prayers were said over wine and broken bread (Acts 2:42, 2:46, 20:7, 20:11).

We discover in 1 Cor 11:20-29 that there were some difficulties in combining the fellowship meal with the Eucharist:

<sup>20</sup>When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup>for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup>Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not! <sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup>and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup>In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup>For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. <sup>27</sup>Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. <sup>29</sup>For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." (NIV, 1 Cor 11:20-29)

In time, the practice of combining the fellowship meal with the Eucharist faded.

## Baptism

The New Testament gives fascinating clues as to how the Early Church practiced baptism. However, there is no "Handbook on Baptism" in the New Testament. We can only surmise the proper form and meaning of baptism based on various verses that mention the sacrament. Some of those verses are referenced in the table below.

| Reference  | Comments   |
|--|--|
| Pentecost  |  |
| Acts 1:4 - 1:5   | "...in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." – are water baptism and baptism by the Holy Spirit two separate things? Does one follow the other? |
| Acts 2:1 - 2:41  | "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit..."  |
| Acts 2:38 – 2:39   | "The promise is for you and your children..." - sometimes used to justify infant baptism   |
| Baptism and the Apostles                                 |  |
| Acts 8:6 - 8:25  | Baptism of Simon Magus; Acts 8:14/16 seems to indicate that baptism by the Holy Spirit can follow water baptism  |
| Acts 8:26 - 8:40   | Philip baptizes the eunuch   |
| Acts 9:17 - 9:19   | Saul receives the Holy Spirit from the laying on of hands by Ananias, and is then baptized   |
| Acts 10:44 - 10:48                                       | Gentiles receive Holy Spirit <i>before</i> water baptism   |
| Acts 16:14 - 16:15;<br>Acts 16:33; Acts 18:8, 1 Cor 1:16 | Household baptisms – sometimes used to establish a scriptural basis for infant baptism   |
| Acts 18:23 - Acts 18:28                                  | Apollo – "...he knew only the baptism of John"   |
| Acts 19:1 - 19:7   | Paul baptizes followers of John the Baptist – "When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them..."  |
| 1 Cor 1:13 - 1:17  | Paul came not to baptize but to preach   |



| Reference          | Comments   |
|--------------------|--|
| Meaning of Baptism |  |
| Rom 6:3 - 6:4      | "...all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death..."                                 |
| 1 Cor 12:13        | "...we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body..."   |
| Eph 4:4 - 4:6      | "...one Lord, one faith, one baptism..."   |
| Col 2:11-12        | Paul seems to equate circumcision with baptism – sometimes used to establish a scriptural basis for infant baptism |
| Gal 3:26 - 3:28    | "...all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ"                                  |
| Titus 3:5 - 3:6    | "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit..."                                     |
| 1 Pet 3:18 - 3:22  | Noah and family saved by water – "This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also..."                        |

The late 1<sup>st</sup>-century/early-2<sup>nd</sup> century *Epistle of Barnabas* (possibly written by the Apostle) contains the following description of Christian baptism:

"...we indeed descend into the water full of sins and defilement, but come up, bearing fruit in our heart, having the fear [of God] and trust in Jesus in our spirit..." (*Epistle of Barnabas*, Chapter 11)

The *Shepherd of Hermas*, an early 2<sup>nd</sup>-century work, describes the meaning of baptism as follows:

"...before a man bears the name of the Son of God he is dead; but when he receives the seal he lays aside his deadness, and obtains life. The seal, then, is the water: they descend into the water dead, and they arise alive." (*Shepherd of Hermas* - Similitude IX, Chapter 16)

*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* describes the baptism ceremony as follows. Notice the requirement for fasting prior to the ceremony:

"And concerning baptism, thus baptize ye: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if thou have not living water, baptize into other water; and if thou canst not in cold, in warm. But if thou have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whatever others can; but thou shalt order the baptized to fast one or two days before." (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, Chapter 7)

## Celebrating the Eucharist

We get an ancient description of the celebration of the Eucharist from *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*:

"Now concerning the Thanksgiving (Eucharist), thus give thanks. First, concerning the cup: We thank thee, our Father, for the holy vine of David Thy servant, which Thou madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. And concerning the broken bread: We thank Thee, our Father, for the life and knowledge which Thou madest known to us through Jesus Thy Servant; to Thee be the glory for ever. Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom; for Thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever. But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving (Eucharist),

but they who have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this also the Lord hath said, Give not that which is holy to the dogs." (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, Chapter 9)

Note that the Eucharist (as opposed to the fellowship meal) was reserved for baptized believers.

## **Charismatic worship**

1 Corinthians 14 discusses a variation on the worship service as we have so far described it – what we today might refer to as “charismatic worship”:

“Everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation.” (NIV, 1 Cor 14:26)

Paul didn't discourage this sort of service, but he cautioned that interpretation (prophecy) was more important than simply speaking in tongues:

“<sup>1</sup>Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. <sup>2</sup>For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he utters mysteries with his spirit. <sup>3</sup>But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. <sup>4</sup>He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. <sup>5</sup>I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.” (NIV, 1 Cor 14:1-5)

An extreme form of charismatic worship grew up in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century. Around c. 156 A.D., a self-styled prophet named Montanus started to attract followers in Phrygia, Asia Minor (early church father Tertullian was among their ranks for a period of time). Montanus fostered a very charismatic environment, and believed that the Holy Spirit spoke directly through him, and his followers. Montanists believed that they were receiving Divine Revelation, like the Old Testament prophets.

Some of the bishops of the time (such as Serapion, bishop of Antioch) were concerned that such prophesizing might be viewed on the same level as Holy Scripture – and could interfere with people's understanding of the core message of the Scriptures.

Around c. 190 A.D., Montanus was excommunicated, but his movement forced the established church to examine the role of the Holy Spirit in the contemporary church. In time, the response of the church was that revelation ended with the Apostolic Age. Those with the gift of prophecy after the Apostolic Age were simply explaining the already existing Word of God – not adding to it.

## **Music in the Early Church**

There are few extant references to singing in the early church – the New Testament only mentions the practice twice (Col 3:16, Eph 5:19) and then somewhat obliquely. The most striking reference of the two is in Ephesians:

“...be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup>speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” (NIV Eph 5:18-20)

Church Father Clement suggests that hymns should be “austere”.

## Leadership in the Early Church

The early church was extremely egalitarian in nature. Every baptized member was seen to have a gift (see Rom 12:4-8, 1 Pet 4:10-11, 1 Cor 12:1-31, 1 Cor 14:26, Eph 4:11-13). But in time, some formal positions of church leadership evolved, probably because of the ever-increasing size of the congregations. Congregations are exhorted several times in the New Testament to obey and submit to their leaders:

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account." (NIV, Heb 13:17; see also 1 Thess 5:12-13 and 1 Tim 5:17)

The late-first century *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* (probably written by Clement, Bishop of Rome) discusses a line of succession in the churches that was established by the apostles themselves:

"The Apostles have preached to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ from God...And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first fruits of their conversion to be bishops and ministers over such as should afterwards believe, having first proved them by the Spirit...So likewise our Apostles knew by our Lord Jesus Christ, that there should contentions arise, upon account of the ministry. And therefore having a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed persons, as we have before said, and then gave direction, how, when they should die, other chosen and approved men should succeed in their ministry." (*First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, Chapter 42)

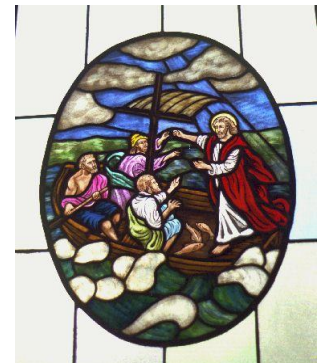
We discuss the different "church officials" that appeared in the first century church below.

## Apostles

The first custodians of the early church were the apostles – and more specifically, the "The Twelve" chosen by Jesus. The word "apostle" comes from the Greek word *apostolos* that means:

"a *delegate*; specifically an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a *commissioner* of Christ ("apostle"), (with miraculous powers):—apostle, messenger, he that is sent. (*Strongs Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*)

There are four different lists of "The Twelve" mentioned in the New Testament, with slight variations between them:



| Matt 10:2                   | Mark 3:16                              | Luke 6:14                   | Acts 1:13             |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Andrew                      | Andrew                                 | Andrew                      | Andrew                |
| Bartholomew                 | Bartholomew                            | Bartholomew                 | Bartholomew           |
| James son of Alphaeus       | James son of Alphaeus                  | James son of Alphaeus       | James son of Alphaeus |
| James son of Zebedee        | James son of Zebedee                   | James                       | James                 |
| John                        | John                                   | John                        | John                  |
| Judas Iscariot              | Judas Iscariot                         | Judas Iscariot              |                       |
| Matthew                     | Matthew                                | Matthew                     | Matthew               |
| Philip                      | Philip                                 | Philip                      | Philip                |
| Simon (who is called Peter) | Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter) | Simon (whom he named Peter) | Peter                 |

| Matt 10:2        | Mark 3:16        | Luke 6:14                       | Acts 1:13          |
|------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Simon the Zealot | Simon the Zealot | Simon who was called the Zealot | Simon the Zealot   |
| Thaddaeus        | Thaddaeus        | Judas son of James              | Judas son of James |
| Thomas           | Thomas           | Thomas                          | Thomas             |

Immediately before his ascension, Christ instructs his remaining 11 apostles to carry on his ministry:

<sup>8</sup>"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (NIV, Acts 1:8)

After the ascension, the 11 remaining apostles wished to replace Judas Iscariot, and decided that a prime qualification for the replacement apostle was to have participated in Jesus' earthly ministry from the start:

<sup>21</sup>"Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, <sup>22</sup>beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection." (NIV, Acts 1:21-22)

Matthias (never to be heard from again in the New Testament) is chosen as the Judas-replacement.

However, the original twelve plus Matthias are not the only apostles referred to in the New Testament. Paul & Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Andronicus and Junias (Rom 16:7) and, possibly, James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19) also receive the appellation. However, no one after the first century used the title.

The reference to Junias as an apostle in Romans 16:7 is interesting because Junias is the feminine form of a Greek name (see below). Depending on how one interprets the passage (is it saying that Andronicus and Junias are well known to the apostles, or that they are outstanding apostles?), we may have grounds to identify a female apostle.

<sup>7</sup>"Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was."

Junias (*Iounias*) is clearly of the feminine form, as Thayer's Greek Definitions states:

"1) a Christian woman at Rome, mentioned by Paul as one of his kinsfolk and fellow prisoners  
Part of Speech: noun proper feminine"

## **Bishop (or overseer)**

Next in importance to the apostles were the bishops (or overseers) and the elders. The term bishop comes from the Greek word *episkopos*:

"a superintendent, that is, Christian officer in general charge of a (or the) church (literally or figuratively):—bishop, overseer." (*Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*)

In the New Testament, bishops are instructed to be "shepherds of the church of God"

<sup>28</sup>“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” (NIV, Acts 20:28)

The qualifications to be a bishop are steep:

<sup>1</sup>“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup>Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup>He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. <sup>5</sup>(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup>He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap”. (NIV, 1 Tim 3:1-7)

See also Phillipians 1:1 and 1 Titus 1:5-9.

By the 2nd century, the role of the bishop was more formalized, with a bishop presiding over a diocese or see. Bishops of churches founded by the apostles were said to be in succession to the apostles (for example – John-Polycarp-Irenaeus).

## Elder (or presbyter)

The term “elder” comes from the Greek word *presbuteros*. Both “presbyter” and “priest” are derived from this word. According to Strong’s:

“Comparative of *presbus* (*elderly*); *older*; as noun, a *senior*; specifically an Israelite *Sanhedrist* (also figuratively, member of the celestial council) or Christian “presbyter”:—elder (-est), old.” (*Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*)

The term is used in two different ways in the New Testament, depending upon whether it is used in reference to the Jerusalem Church or the Gentile church. In the former, the concept of elder was modeled after the Old Testament pattern, with elders acting as a decision making council in the Jerusalem church (see Acts 15, Acts 21:17-26). The term as we use it today comes from the Gentile church, and is often used to denote the highest official in a particular church or area:

<sup>23</sup>“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” (Acts 14:23)

The qualifications for elders are similar to the aforementioned ones for bishop. In fact, one could read Titus 1:5-9 as indicating that there was no distinction between bishops (overseers) and elders in the 1<sup>st</sup> century church:

<sup>5</sup>“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. <sup>6</sup>An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. <sup>7</sup>Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. <sup>8</sup>Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. <sup>9</sup>He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.” (Titus 1:5-9)

See also James 5:14-15, 1 Tim 4:14, and 1 Peter 5:1-4 for other references to elders.

Adding further confusion to the hierarchy of the first century church (were bishops and elders on the same level?), the apostles sometimes referred to themselves as elders - John refers to himself simply as "the elder" in 2 John 1:1 and 3 John 1:1.

## Deacons

Finally, we have the deacons, which comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, often translated as "servant":

*"an attendant, that is, (generally) a waiter (at table or in other menial duties); specifically a Christian teacher and pastor (technically a deacon or deaconess):—deacon, minister, servant." (Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries)*

Traditionally, the first deacons were seven Hellenistic Jewish Christians chosen by the apostles to assist in the "daily distribution of food" to the poor:

"They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism." (NIV, Acts 6:5)

Stephen has the distinction of being the first martyr in the history of the church (his murder being aided and abetted by one Saul of Tarsus).

The qualifications to be a deacon are similar to those of being a bishop or elder – with the distinction that there is no requirement to have the gift of teaching:

<sup>8</sup>Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup>They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. <sup>11</sup>In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. <sup>12</sup>A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. <sup>13</sup>Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus." (NIV, 1 Tim 3:8-13)

By the end of the first century, deacons assisted church leaders, managed the church treasury, and served the needs of the poor. In time, they also assisted (but not administered) in sacraments such as baptism.

Both women and men served as deacons in the early church, as can be seen by the Phoebe mentioned by Paul in Romans 16:1-2. The NIV translates it as follows:

<sup>1</sup>I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. <sup>2</sup>I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me." (Romans 16:1-2, NIV)

The word that the NIV (and KJV) translates as "servant" is actually from the Greek word *diakonos*, defined above (the NIV has a note which gives an alternative translation of *diakonos* as "deaconess").

## Women in leadership positions

There is ample evidence that Christianity was an egalitarian religion at its inception – both men and women were welcome in leadership positions. We've already mentioned Phoebe the Deacon, and (possibly) Junias the Apostle. The table below summarizes some of the church leadership positions of women in the New Testament.

| Woman                    | Reference               | Comment  |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Phoebe                   | Romans 16:1-2           | "a deaconess of the church"  |
| Priscilla (or Prisca)    | Rom 16:3-5, 1 Cor 16:19 | Founded at least two home churches with her husband Aquila             |
| Junias                   | Rom 16:7                | "outstanding among the apostles"                                       |
| Nympha                   | Col 4:15                | Started church in her house  |
| Mary, Mother of Jesus    | Acts 1:14               | Present at first meetings of church                                    |
| Euodia, Syntyche         | Phil 4:2-3              | "these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel" |
| Four daughters of Philip | Acts 21:8/9             | Prophetesses   |

## How Christians were to treat each other

The New Testament contains a number of passages that describe how Christians were to treat each. As can be seen from the table below, key attributes were love, forgiveness, charity and hospitality. Christians are exhorted to not take their disputes with each other to courts not run by believers.

| Reference      | Key Attribute            |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| Col 3:12-14    | forgiveness, love        |
| Eph 5:1-2      | love                     |
| 1 John 3:11-20 | love, charity            |
| Eph 4:25-32    | compassion               |
| 1 Cor 6:1-6    | no lawsuits              |
| 2 Cor 2:5-11   | forgiveness              |
| James 2:1-9    | tolerance, no favoritism |
| Rom 12:10,13   | devotion, hospitality    |
| Rom 12:16      | harmony, humility        |
| 1 Pet 4:8-9    | love, hospitality        |
| Rom 14:1-21    | acceptance               |
| Rom 15:1-7     | acceptance               |
| Hebrews 13:1-3 | love, hospitality        |
| James 5:16     | communal confession      |

There were, however, limits on the relationships between Christians. Unruly believers who did not follow "the tradition received from us" were to be shunned (see also Titus 3: 10-11). Visiting Christians were not to be burdens on their hosts.

<sup>6</sup>"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. <sup>7</sup>For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; <sup>8</sup>nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, <sup>9</sup>not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. <sup>10</sup>For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. <sup>11</sup>For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. <sup>12</sup>Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." (NIV, 2 Thess 3:6-12)

In later centuries, both St. Benedict and St. Augustine, when drawing up the rules and regulations for monastic houses, stressed the importance of manual labor, drawing on 2 Thess 3:6-12 as their guide.

By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, the protocol for visiting Christians had become more formalized, as this passage from the *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles* shows. One wonders as one reads such passages whether traveling "believers" mooching off of various Christian communities as they went from town to town was a major problem in the early church!

"But let every one that cometh in the name of the Lord be received, and afterward ye shall prove and know him; for ye shall have understanding right and left. If he who cometh is a wayfarer, assist him as far as ye are able; but **he shall not remain with you, except for two or three days**, if need be. But if he willeth to abide with you, being an artisan, **let him work and eat**; but if he hath no trade, according to your understanding see to it that, as a Christian, **he shall not live with you idle**. But if he willeth not to do, he is a Christ-monger. Watch that ye keep aloof from such." (*Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, Chapter 12, emphasis added)

However, the protocols for treating other *believers* did not necessarily extend to how to treat *unbelievers*, who were to be avoided:

<sup>14</sup>"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (NIV, Titus 3:10-11)

## Charity

As already mentioned, one of the primary charters for deacons in the early church was to provide for the needs of the poor. The importance of giving is stressed in many verses in the New Testament, including Rom 12:8, Rom 12:13, 2 Cor 9:6-11, Gal 6:10, James 1:27, James 2:15-16, 1 John 3:17-18. Examples of giving to the poor can be found at Acts 9:36, Acts 10:2-4, Acts 11:29, Rom 15:26, 2 Cor 8:1-12. One especially interesting example is that of Tabitha, a woman "full of good works and charitable deeds" (Acts 9:36). Seemingly as a reward for her charitable acts, she is raised from the dead by Peter.

However, there was practical limits on Christian charity - those who were able were expected to fend for themselves:

"But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family..." (NIV, 1 Tim 5:4)

"If any woman who is a believer has a widow in the family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so the church can help those widows who are really in need" (NIV, 1 Tim 5:16)



## Worship patterns of the Early Church – second and third centuries

In this section, we'll examine some marvelous sources from the period that describe the mechanics of the worship service, of the Eucharist, and of baptism. We'll also examine the increasing formality of the church leadership hierarchy.

### How they worshipped

After the aforementioned *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, one of the earliest descriptions we have of an early church service comes from Justyn Martyr in his *First Apology*, c. 150 A.D. Justyn Martyr affirms that the Christian practice of celebrating the Sabbath on Sunday rather than the Jewish custom of Saturday has a long pedigree. Justyn also tells us the reason for the switch – Sunday is the first day of God's creation, and also the day that Jesus rose from the dead.



#### "WEEKLY WORSHIP OF THE CHRISTIANS

And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost. **And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read,** as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, **the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray,** and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, **bread and wine and water are brought,** and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; **and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given,** and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. **And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit;** and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But **Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.** For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration." (*First Apology*, Justyn Martyr, c. 150 A.D., emphasis added)

As one reads through the description above, one is struck by how similar the basic church service of 150 A.D. is with the church service today, as the table below indicates.

| Modern church service          | 150 A.D. church service   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Old and New Testament readings | "...the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read..."  |
| Sermon                         | "...the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things..."   |
| Prayers of the people          | "Then we all rise together and pray..."   |
| Communion                      | "...bread and wine and water are brought...there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given..." |

|          |  |
|----------|--|
|          | [Note: this could also be describing the agape meal]                     |
| Offering | "And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit..." |

Another Early Church Father, Hippolytus, described how Christians should worship when they are *not* at church:

- "Let each one be diligent in coming to the church, the place where the Holy Spirit flourishes. If there is a day when there is no instruction, let each one, when he is at home, take up a holy book and read in it..." (*Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus, c. 215 A.D.)
- Christians should pray seven times a day. Later, Christian monasticism would adopt this idea in the singing of the "offices" throughout the day.

Finally, the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century *Apostolic Constitutions* has a long section entitled "On Assembling In The Church". It is much more specific than the Justyn Martyr account on issues such as:

- Where different groups in the church are supposed to sit (men and women, young and old are separated)
- The layout of the church itself. The description given is similar to later monastic churches.
- The roles of various church officials during the service – bishops, priests, deacons and deaconesses, porters and presbyters are mentioned, all with distinct roles

Other elements have been added to the service since the 150 A.D. description:

- The "Lord's kiss" (passing of the peace, in modern times)
- People stand during the reading of the Gospels
- "...catechumens and penitents" are ushered out prior to the Eucharist
- The wonderful blessing "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and give thee peace."
- Responsive readings

Also, given the emphasis assigned to the role of deacons and porters in keeping people attentive and awake during the service, one might postulate that services in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century were a bit longer than they are today!

"When thou [the bishop] callest an assembly of the Church as one that is the commander of a great ship, appoint the assemblies to be made with all possible skill, charging the deacons as mariners to prepare places for the brethren as for passengers, with all due care and decency.

And first, let the building be long, with its head to the east, with its vestries on both sides at the east end, and so it will be like a ship. In the middle let the bishop's throne be placed, and on each side of him let the presbytery sit down; and let the deacons stand near at hand, in close and small girt garments, for they are like the mariners and managers of the ship: with regard to these, let the laity sit on the other side, with all quietness and good order.

**And let the women sit by themselves, they also keeping silence.** In the middle, let the reader stand upon some high place: let him read the books of Moses, of Joshua the son of Nun, of the Judges, and of the Kings and of the Chronicles, and those written after the return from the captivity; and besides these, the

books of Job and of Solomon, and of the sixteen prophets. But when there have been two lessons severally read, let some other person sing the hymns of David, and let the people join at the conclusions of the verses.

Afterwards let our Acts be read, and the Epistles of Paul our fellow-worker, which he sent to the churches under the conduct of the Holy Spirit; and afterwards let a deacon or a presbyter read the Gospels, both those which I Matthew and John have delivered to you, and those which the fellow-workers of Paul received and left to you, Luke and Mark. **And while the Gospel is read, let all the presbyters and deacons, and all the people, stand up in great silence...**"

In the next place, let the presbyters one by one, not all together, exhort the people, and the bishop in the last place, as being the commander. Let the porters stand at the entries of the men, and observe them. Let the deaconesses also stand at those of the women, like shipmen. For the same description and pattern was both in the tabernacle of the testimony and in the temple of God. **But if any one be found sitting out of his place, let him be rebuked by the deacon**, as a manager of the foreship, and be removed into the place proper for him...

Let the young persons sit by themselves, if there be a place for them; if not, let them stand upright. But let those that are already stricken in years sit in order. For the children which stand, let their fathers and mothers take them to them...

**In like manner, let the deacon oversee the people, that nobody may whisper, nor slumber, nor laugh, nor nod**; for all ought in the church to stand wisely, and soberly, and attentively, having their attention fixed upon the word of the Lord. **After this, let all rise up with one consent, and looking towards the east, after the catechumens and penitents are gone out**, pray to God eastward, who ascended up to the heaven of heavens to the east; remembering also the ancient situation of paradise in the east...

As to the deacons, after the prayer is over, let some of them attend upon the oblation of the Eucharist, ministering to the Lord's body with fear. Let others of them watch the multitude, and keep them silent. But let that deacon who is at the high priest's hand say to the people, Let no one have any quarrel against another; let no one come in hypocrisy.

**Then let the men give the men, and the women give the women, the Lord's kiss.** But let no one do it with deceit, as Judas betrayed the Lord with a kiss. After this let the deacon pray for the whole Church, for the whole world...After this let the high priest pray for peace upon the people, and bless them, as Moses commanded the priests to bless the people, in these words: **"The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face to shine upon thee, and give thee peace."**

Let the bishop pray for the people...After this let the sacrifice follow, the people standing, and praying silently; and when the oblation has been made, **let every rank by itself partake of the Lord's body and precious blood in order, and approach with reverence and holy fear**, as to the body of their king. Let the women approach with their heads covered, as is becoming the order of women; **but let the door be watched, lest any unbeliever, or one not yet initiated, come in."** (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 2, Section 7, emphasis added)

## Eucharist



In the prior section, we have already seen a 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century description of the Eucharist ceremony, which includes elements such as:

- The congregation “partake[s] of the Lord’s body and precious blood in order”
- Women “approach with their heads covered”
- Only believers can be present during the Eucharist – “let the door be watched, lest any unbeliever, or one not yet initiated, come in”

Justyn Martyr in his *First Apology* (c. 150 A.D.) gives an earlier description of the Eucharist, again stressing that the ceremony is for believers only, and seems to foreshadow the Roman Catholic doctrine of transmutation.

### “OF THE EUCHARIST

And this food is called among us *Eujcariatia* [the Eucharist], of which **no one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things which we teach are true**, and who has been washed with the washing that is for has enjoined. For not as common bread and common drink do we receive these; but in like manner as Jesus Christ our Savior, having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have **we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh**. For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, “This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;” and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, “This is My blood;” and gave it to them alone...” (*First Apology*, Chapter 66, Justyn Martyr, c. 150 A.D.)

Hippolytus in his c. 215 A.D. *Apostolic Tradition* adds these thoughts:

- The Eucharist should be received before any other food
- Great care should be taken that nothing is spilled
- Sacred bread should not be left where an unbaptized person (or even a mouse) could eat it
- "And when he breaks the bread, in distributing fragments to each, he shall say: The bread of heaven in Christ Jesus."

## Baptism

Through a number of Early Church sources, we have detailed accounts both of the form of baptisms in the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, as well as the meaning and liturgy of baptism.

### Meaning of baptism

Justin Martyr, in his c. 150 work *First Apology*, describes baptism as follows:

"And for this [rite] we have learned from the apostles this reason. Since at our birth we were born without our own knowledge or choice, by our parents coming together, and were brought up in bad habits and wicked training; in order that we may not remain the children of necessity and of ignorance, **but may become the children of choice and knowledge, and may obtain in the water the remission of sins formerly committed, there is pronounced over him who chooses to be born again, and has repented of his sins,** the name of God the Father and Lord of the universe; he who leads to the laver the person that is to be washed calling him by this name alone." (*First Apology*, Justin Martyr, p 339)

The c. 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century *Apostolic Constitutions* discusses the seriousness of baptism and the potential consequences if a Christian continues to sin after being initiated into the faith through baptism:

"Beloved, be it known to you that those who are baptized into the death of our Lord Jesus are obliged to go on no longer in sin...Now he who sins after his baptism, unless he repent and forsake his sins, shall be condemned to hell-fire." (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 2, Section 3)

By the early fourth century, many people (including, possibly, the Emperor Constantine) put off getting baptized until they were near death, so that they could continue to live a sinful life!

## The form of baptism

Events prior to a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century baptism typically included a two to three year period of instruction into the Christian faith, and a period of fasting prior to the baptism. Catechumens were expected to lead lives of purity, and to renounce Satan:

"But let him that is to be baptized be free from all iniquity; one that has left off to work sin, the friend of God, the enemy of the devil, the heir of God the Father, the fellow-heir of His Son; one that has renounced Satan, and the demons, and Satan's deceits; chaste, pure, holy, beloved of God..." (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 3, Section 18)



Baptisms were generally performed by church officials (bishops, presbyters, etc.), often in the period preceding Easter. The baptism itself included both an anointing with oil and/or ointment, as well as the dipping or immersion in water:

"Thou therefore, O bishop, according to that type, shalt anoint the head of those that are to be baptized, whether they be men or women, with the holy oil, for a type of the spiritual baptism. After that, either thou, O bishop, or a presbyter that is under thee, shall in the solemn form name over them the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit, and shall dip them in the water; and let a deacon receive the man, and a deaconess the woman, that so the conferring of this inviolable seal may take place with a becoming decency. And after that, let the bishop anoint those that are baptized with ointment." (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 3, Section 16/17)

The meaning of the tri-part baptism (oil, water, ointment) is discussed:

"But thou shalt beforehand anoint the person with the holy oil, and afterward baptize him with the water, and in the conclusion shall seal him with the ointment; that the anointing with oil may be the participation of the Holy Spirit, and the water the symbol of the death of Christ, and the ointment the seal of the covenants." (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 7, Chapter 22)

The *Constitutions* describe the meaning of the immersion and rising up out of the water:

"This baptism, therefore, is given into the death of Jesus: the water is instead of the burial...the descent into the water the dying together with Christ; the ascent out of the water the rising again with Him."  
(*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 3, Section 16/17)

In a passage from Hippolytus (c. 215 A.D.), it appears that whole families might have been baptized together, including their children. Hippolytus also seems to infer that full immersion is not a requirement for baptism:

"Where there is no scarcity of water the stream shall flow through the baptismal font or pour into it from above; but if water is scarce, whether on a constant condition or on occasion, then use whatever water is available. Let them remove their clothing. Baptize first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them." (Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 21:15).

## The liturgy of baptism

Hippolytus also preserves an early baptismal creed in his writings. Similarities to the Apostles Creed are to be expected, as the Apostles Creed probably started out as a baptismal creed:

"When the person being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say: 'Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?' And the person being baptized shall say: 'I believe.' Then holding his hand on his head, he shall baptize him once. And then he shall say: 'Do you believe in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?' And when he says: 'I believe,' he is baptized again. And again he shall say: 'Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and the resurrection of the body?' The person being baptized shall say: 'I believe,' and then he is baptized a third time." (*Creeds Of The Church*, Ages Software, P. 7)

## Church officials

Church leadership and hierarchies became much more formal and hierarchical in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D. than they were in the 1<sup>st</sup>. Bishops of major cities (Rome, Antioch, Carthage, etc.) were powerful and important figures in their congregations. In fact, the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century *Apostolic Constitutions* tells the congregation that the bishop is "next after God, your earthly God, who has a right to be honored by you".

"The bishop, he is the minister of the word, the keeper of knowledge, the mediator between God [and] in the several parts of your divine worship. He is the teacher of piety; and, next after God, he is your father, who has begotten you again to the adoption of sons by water and the Spirit. **He is your ruler and governor; he is your king and potentate; he is, next after God, your earthly God, who has a right to be honored by you.**" (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book One, Section Four, emphasis added)

This view of the bishop as the "earthly God" would later be echoed in monasticism, in the person of the abbot - "In the monastery, he is considered to represent the person of Christ." (*Rule of Benedict* Chapter II).

The *Apostolic Constitutions* commented on the high standards required for one to become a bishop – and explicitly stated that they could be married:

#### “WHAT OUGHT TO BE THE CHARACTERS OF A BISHOP AND OF THE REST? OF THE CLERGY

Let him therefore be sober, prudent, decent, firm, stable, not given to wine; no striker, but gentle; not a brawler, not covetous; “not a novice, test, being puffed up with pride, be fall into condemnation, and the snare of the devil: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abused.” Such a one a bishop ought to be, who has been the “husband of one wife,” who also has herself had no other husband, “ruling well his own house.” In this manner let examination be made when he is to receive ordination, and to be placed in his bishopric, whether he be grave, faithful, decent; whether he hath a grave and faithful-wife, or has formerly had such a one; whether he hath educated his children piously, and has “brought them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;” whether his domestics do fear and reverence him, and are all obedient to him: for if those who are immediately about him for worldly concerns are seditious and disobedient, how will others not of his family, when they are under his management, become obedient to him?” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 1, Section 1)

Deacons were to be the right-hand men of the bishop:

“But the weighty matters let the bishop judge; but let the deacon be the bishop’s ear, and eye, and mouth, and heart, and soul, that the bishop may not be distracted with many cares, but with such only as are more considerable, as Jethro did appoint for Moses, and his counsel was received.” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 1, Section 6)

Both men and women could be deacons – with deaconesses “diligent in the taking care of the women”. Both deacons and deaconesses “minister to the infirm”, and carry messages, travel about, minister, and serve:

“Let the deacons be in all things unspotted, as the bishop himself is to be, only more active; in number according to the largeness of the Church, that they may **minister to the infirm** as workmen that are not ashamed. And **let the deaconess be diligent in taking care of the women**; but both of them ready to **carry messages, to travel about, to minister, and to serve...**” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book 3, Section 2, emphasis added)

### Ascendancy of Rome

It is hard to pinpoint exactly how and why the Bishop of Rome began to be viewed as the “bishop of bishops”. The New Testament is clear that Paul preached in Rome (and probably founded the church there). The New Testament however doesn’t say anything about Peter preaching in Rome, although early church tradition identifies that he did so. Early Church Father Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.) records that Peter and Paul founded the Church in Rome in his book *Against Heresies*:

“Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while **Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church.**” (*Against Heresies*, Irenaeus, Book 3, Chapter 1, emphasis added)

Rome’s importance as the crossroads of the Roman Empire may have increased the prestige of the Bishop of Rome in Christian circles, especially after the original “home base” of the Apostles, Jerusalem, was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. Some people suggest that the fact that the late-1<sup>st</sup> century Bishop of Rome Clement responded to a request for advice from the church in Corinth is an early indication of Roman supremacy:

“Owing, dear brethren, to the sudden and successive calamitous events which have happened to ourselves, we feel that we have been somewhat tardy in turning our attention to the points respecting which you consulted us...” (*First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, Clement of Rome, late 1<sup>st</sup>-century)

However, Clement of Roman was hardly unique as a bishop or presbyter in the ancient world in his willingness to give other Christian congregations advice! (Cyprian and Origen come to mind).

The first Bishop of Rome that invoked the “rock” and “keys” argument to back Roman supremacy was Bishop (254-56 A.D.) Stephen of Rome. The argument ran that 1) Peter was the first Bishop of Rome and 2) Peter was the “rock” upon which Jesus would build his Church, and Jesus assigned him the “keys to the kingdom”. Thus, the line of succession from the first Bishop of Rome (Peter) assumed the “rock” and “keys” mantle. The passages in question are below:

“<sup>18</sup>And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. <sup>19</sup>I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (NIV, Mat 16:18-19)



Of course, these passages can also be interpreted to indicate that the *faith* of Peter is the “rock upon which I will build my church”, and that *faith* is the “keys to the kingdom.”

It also appears that the aforementioned Bishop Stephen had the final word on the Novatian schism, noting that baptism belongs to Christ, not the church, and the standing of the baptizer is not a relevant issue. This could indicate that the Bishop of Rome had some adjudication responsibility for disputes, although Novatian had tried to become Bishop of Rome in 251 A.D. Thus, Stephen’s involvement could have been partially local in nature.

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## Notes

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Robert C. Jones grew up in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area. He made his living as a hotel lounge band leader/musician from 1974-1981. In 1981, he moved to the Atlanta, Georgia area, where he received a B.S. in Computer Science at DeVry Institute of Technology. From 1984-2009, Robert worked for Hewlett-Packard as a computer consultant.

Robert is an ordained elder in the Presbyterian Church. He has written and taught numerous adult Sunday School courses (see front inside cover). He has also been active in choir ministries over the years, and has taught the *Disciples* Bible Study five times.



Robert is also President of the Kennesaw Historical Society, for whom he has written several books, including "The Law Heard 'Round the World - An Examination of the Kennesaw Gun Law and Its Effects on the Community", "Re-tracing the Route of the General - Following in the Footsteps of the Andrews Raid", and "Kennesaw (Big Shanty) in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century". A new book, "Images of America: Kennesaw", was published by Arcadia in 2006.

Robert has also written several books on ghost towns in the Southwest, including in Death Valley, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Mojave National Preserve.

In 2005, Robert co-authored a business-oriented book entitled "Working Virtually: The Challenges of Virtual Teams". His co-authors were Lise Pace and Rob Oyung.

His interests include the Civil War, Medieval Monasteries, American railroads, ghost towns, hiking in Death Valley and the Mojave, and Biblical Archaeology.

Robert is available as a guest speaker on Christian history and theology topics in the Atlanta Metro area, and North Georgia. See <http://www.sundayschoolcourses.com/speaker.htm> for more information.

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