

Developing the Catholic Consciousness in the Second Century: From Clement to Polycarp

τῆς ἁγίας καὶ καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας

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INTRODUCTION

The apostle Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).¹ In response to this confession, Jesus declared, “Upon this rock I will build My church” (Matthew 16:18). The term *church* is translated from the Greek *ἐκκλησία* and is a common term for a political, social, or religious *assembly* of people. But in a Jewish context it was commonly used in the Septuagint to indicate the nation of Israel in covenant with God (cf. Acts 7:38).² In the apostolic writings of the New Testament, *ἐκκλησία* refers to those who have acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord, who have been baptized for the remission of sin, and are gathered as disciples of Jesus Christ – the people of God. The most common designation in the apostolic writings is “Church

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the *New American Standard Bible 2020* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995, 2020).

² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 623.

of God” (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:13; 1 Timothy 3:5).

Jesus declared “My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations.” (Mark 11:17). Jesus insisted that his gospel was to be preached “in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations” (Matthew 24:14; cf. 28:19; Mark 13:10; 16:14; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:16). The term *nations* is translated from the Greek *ἔθνος* and refers to all the ethnicities of the inhabited world.³ John identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29; cf. John 3:16); and as the light of world (John 1:9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46). Jesus is the “Savior of the world” (John 4:42; cf. 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 2:2; 4:9, 14). The mission of Christ to “all nations” is grounded in God’s promise to Abraham: “And in you *all the families of the earth* will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3, emphasis added; cf. Acts 3:25; Romans 4:18; Galatians 3:8, 16). The church of Jesus is to be comprised of all peoples of the world – the Jews, the Greeks, the uncultured, the wise, and the foolish (cf. Romans 1:14-16). Peter addressed his readers as “those who reside as strangers, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Peter 1:1-2). Peter continues the notion of scattered strangers who are chosen: “You are a chosen people. . . you were once not a people, but now you are the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9-10). The followers of Jesus are *γένος ἐκλεκτόν* (“elect race”). This suggests that the Christian community is a group with “shared common customs that were derived from the holy God whom they served [and] underlines the unity of the Christian community despite the diverse ethnic backgrounds from which they came.”⁴

The church began as a movement within first-century Judaism and was largely comprised of ethnic Jews. With the missionary journeys of Paul, and the work of other apostles and evangelists, the Christian movement spread throughout the Mediterranean world, transcending its Jewish roots. In the first decade of the second century, the church of Jesus would come to identify itself as *the catholic church*. This paper will seek

³ Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 201.

⁴ Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 165.

to discern the catholic consciousness – common beliefs and practices – that began to be developed in the apostolic fathers.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Ignatius wrote, “Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is *the catholic church*” (Greek - καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία).⁵ In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (circa 156 CE), the church is identified as τῆς ἁγίας καὶ καθολικῆς ἐκκλησίας (the holy and catholic church).⁶ In classical Greek, the term *catholic* had the meaning of “universal, total, general.” The term was appropriated by second generation Christians to indicate “their consciousness of Christianity’s originality, its overcoming of ethnic limitations, and its offer of salvation to all without distinction.”⁷ The term *catholic* was appropriated as a theological term to identify the Christian movement as a “loose federation,”⁸ that is, an extended network (universal) of house churches (local), united by common beliefs and practices, led by local bishops, and organized around Roman transportation routes throughout “the whole world as a testimony to all the nations” (Matthew 24:14). The catholic church is “the first church, the spiritual one, which was created before the sun and moon” (cf. Ephesians 1:4-5). To be catholic is to belong to the “church of life” which is alive because it is the body of Christ, through which “we may be saved.”⁹ The catholic church a spiritual temple – the building of God – constructed of living stones (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:9; 1 Peter 2:5). Just as the Jerusalem Temple was the habitation God, so the catholic church is “God-bearer” and “Christ-bearer.”¹⁰ The “faithful in love bear the stamp of God” in contrast to

⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8.2 in Michael W. Holmes, editor, *The Apostolic Fathers, 3rd Edition: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 255-257. All citations from the Apostolic Fathers are from Holmes.

⁶ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Salutation.

⁷ *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* s.v. “Catholic”

⁸ Alistair C. Stewart, *The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 15.

⁹ 2 *Clement* 14:2.

¹⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 9.1-2. Cf. *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 3:3.

unbelievers who bear the stamp of this world.”¹¹ The *stamp* refers to the striking of coinage which impresses an image onto the planchet and may be borrowed from Paul’s use of *seal* and would indicate being sealed by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30).¹²

According to some estimates, by 150 CE there may have been just over 40,000 Christians throughout the Roman Empire. Allowing for the “normal processes of conversion,” the Christian population is estimated to have been about 225,000 by 200 CE.¹³ Catholic Christians are a new race of people – the race of the righteous – citizens of a heavenly kingdom who are “sojourning in every place.”¹⁴ Christians are “foreigners and strangers” in this present age (1 Peter 2:11), citizens of God’s household (Ephesians 2:12), “transient residents in this world,”¹⁵ “servants of God are living in a foreign country.”¹⁶ This is a well established eschatological motif that demonstrates that the church is rooted in history but anticipates the New Jerusalem (Hebrews 11:9-16; 12:22; 13:14; Revelation 21:12.)¹⁷ The catholic consciousness offered a common identity among the geographical, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the ancient Christian house churches. To be *catholic* is to be organically united and by its very nature resistant to division.¹⁸ Schism in the Church of God is to be “detestable and unholy. . . alien and

¹¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 5:2.

¹² William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*. Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia PA: Fortress, 1985), 110.

¹³ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.

¹⁴ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Salutation, 3:2; 14:1; 17:1; *Epistle to Diognetus* 1.

¹⁵ *2 Clement* 5:1.

¹⁶ *Shepherd of Hermas* 50:1.

¹⁷ Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia PA: Fortress, 1999), 158.

¹⁸ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 244.

strange to those chosen by God.”¹⁹ The church is one,²⁰ holy,²¹ apostolic,²² and catholic.²³

The catholic churches were not isolated, but existed in communion. Communion meant communication. The unity of the catholic consciousness was maintained through the circulation of apostolic letters and the four gospels. The gospels were being circulated widely by the early second century. The letters of Paul, John, and Peter were read widely. There was great interest in preserving the testimony of eyewitnesses to Jesus for future generations. The apostolic testimony was “a living and abiding voice.”²⁴ Likewise, the writings of the apostolic fathers were widely circulated. Though scattered, many Christians lived within a few days travel, via Roman roads and waterways, of major Christian centers. Itinerant teachers, prophets, and leaders traveled from church to church bearing news, letters, and money.²⁵

GOD

To be catholic required holding to continuity with apostolic teaching – the rule of faith. As one reads through these writings, the influence of Paul, Peter, and the other apostles is easily discerned. The God of the apostolic fathers is revealed ἐν υἱῷ καὶ πατρὶ καὶ ἐν πνεύματι (in the Son and the Father and in the Spirit).²⁶ This language about the one God²⁷ was inherited from the apostles (cf. Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2-3; et al) and is essential in understanding catholic doctrine. Human redemption is accomplished by the will of the Father, through the cross of Jesus Christ,

¹⁹ 1 Clement 1:1.

²⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 7:2; *To the Smyrnaeans* 1:2.

²¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians*, Salutation; *Shepherd of Hermas* 1:6. *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Salutation.

²² Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 11:2; *To the Magnesians* 13:1; *To the Trallians* 7:1.

²³ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:2; *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Salutation.

²⁴ *Fragments of Papias* 3:3.

²⁵ Ivor J. Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine – AD 30-312* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 156.

²⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 13:1-2. Cf. *To the Ephesians* 9:1; 1 Clement 46:6.

²⁷ 1 Clement 46:6; Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 8:2; *Epistle to Diognetus* 3:2.

and the power of the Holy Spirit.²⁸ The represents a proto-trinitarian theological construction.²⁹

God the Father is majesty Most High,³⁰ the Almighty and merciful.³¹ The Father is “the bishop of all” (τῷ πάντων ἐπισκόπῳ)³² which might signify the monarchy of the Father, the ruler over all creation. The Father is the source of the Son³³ and the Spirit.³⁴ God the Father has willed and predestined the church “before the ages.”³⁵ The Father acknowledges those who are “members of His Son.”³⁶ The Father raised Jesus from the dead and will likewise raise all who have died in Christ.³⁷

Jesus Christ who is “the Savior of our souls and Helmsman of our bodies and Shepherd of the catholic church throughout the world.”³⁸ Jesus Christ is the Son of God³⁹ who has come forth from one Father⁴⁰ and was with the Father before the ages.⁴¹ Jesus is “our God,”⁴² “the mind of the Father,”⁴³ “the door of the Father”⁴⁴ “the majestic

²⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 9:1.

²⁹ *1 Clement* 58:2; *Didache* 7:1, 3

³⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Romans*, Salutation.

³¹ *1 Clement* 2:3.

³² Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 3:1. Here it is difficult to discern whether the Father or the Son is the “bishop of all.” Ignatius wrote, “but to the Father of Jesus Christ, the bishop of all.”

³³ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 7:2.

³⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians* 7:1.

³⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians*, Salutation.

³⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 4:2.

³⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians* 9:1-2.

³⁸ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 19:2.

³⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 20:2; *To the Magnesians* 3:1; 8:2; *To the Trallians* 9:2; *To the Romans*, Salutation; *To the Smyrnaeans* 1:1.

⁴⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 7:2.

⁴¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 6:1.

⁴² *2 Clement* 1:1; Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians*, Salutation; *To the Romans*, Salutation; 3:3; *To the Smyrnaeans* 1:1; *To Polycarp* 8:3.

⁴³ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 3:2.

⁴⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians* 9:1.

scepter of God”⁴⁵ “the Savior and Founder of immortality”⁴⁶ and imitator of the Father.⁴⁷ God is revealed through Jesus Christ who is the Word of the Father.⁴⁸ The Word is “the Designer and Creator of the universe,”⁴⁹ “the Eternal One . . . through whom the church is enriched and grace is unfolded and multiplied among the saints.”⁵⁰ Jesus Christ is one *with* and *in* the Father in harmonious unity.⁵¹ The union of relationships among the Father, Son, and Spirit are a model of church unity.⁵²

Ignatius of Antioch offers an ancient creedal statement regarding Jesus Christ:⁵³ “There is only one physician, who is both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering and then beyond it, Jesus Christ our Lord.”⁵⁴ For Ignatius to declare that Jesus Christ is the “one physician” is to infer the divinity of Christ. The Old Testament vision of salvation is that YAHWEH is the creator of life who sustains the health and well-being (*shalom*) of humanity, and of all creation.⁵⁵ YAHWEH God is Israel’s *healer*, that is, doctor or physician.⁵⁶ The psalmist declared that God has “sent His word and healed them” (Psalm 107:20). Throughout the gospels, Jesus is the enfleshed Word, the Son of God, who is the healer of humanity (1 Peter 2:24). The image of Jesus as physician was a

⁴⁵ 1 Clement 16:2.

⁴⁶ 2 Clement 20:5.

⁴⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians* 7:2.

⁴⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 8:2; *To the Romans* 8:2.

⁴⁹ *Epistle to Diognetus* 7:2.

⁵⁰ *Epistle to Diognetus* 11:5.

⁵¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 5:1; *To the Magnesians* 7:2; *To the Smyrnaeans* 12:1; *To the Romans* 3:3.

⁵² William W. Weber, *Dying to Reach God: A New Translation and Commentary on the Writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp of Smyrna, Second-Century Christian Martyrs* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2024).

⁵³ Clayton N. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: A Student’s Introduction, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 55. For other creedal statements from Ignatius, see: *To the Ephesians* 18:2; *To the Magnesians* 11:1; *To the Trallians* 9:1-2.

⁵⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 7:2.

⁵⁵ Ilona Rashkow, “I Am the Lord Who Heals You (Exodus 15:26).” *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 51.3 (July 2023), 157.

⁵⁶ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 244.

major salvific motif in the patristic age. Justin Martyr spoke of the work of “our physician Christ, [who is] God” as the sanctifier who has “rescued us.”⁵⁷ Theophilus of Antioch wrote that humans suffered from the blindness of soul and hardness of heart. He pleaded “Entrust yourself to the Physician . . . God, who heals and makes alive.”⁵⁸ In an ancient liturgy, worshipers prayed, “But do Thou, O Lord, the physician of our souls and bodies, the guardian of all flesh, look down, and by Thy saving power heal all the diseases of soul and body.”⁵⁹

Jesus Christ is really God and *a real human being*. Jesus is “both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God.”⁶⁰ He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, baptized by John, crucified under Pontius Pilate, and raised from the dead.⁶¹ The resurrection of Christ was both physical and spiritual.⁶² Jesus is “the new man”⁶³ through whom the faithful receive “true life.”⁶⁴ Ignatius is resisting those who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh – the Docetists (cf. 1 John 4:2-3). Jesus Christ is “our savior,”⁶⁵ the divine-human physician⁶⁶ whose blood grants “new life” to those who believe.⁶⁷

⁵⁷ Justin Martyr, “Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection,” in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds. *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 299.

⁵⁸ Theophilus of Antioch, “*Theophilus to Autolytus*,” in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, editors. *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 91.

⁵⁹ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 555.

⁶⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 7:2.

⁶¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 18:2; 19:1; *To the Smyrnaeans* 1:1.

⁶² Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans* 12:2.

⁶³ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 20:1.

⁶⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 11:1; *To the Trallians* 9:2; *To the Smyrnaeans* 4:1.

⁶⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 1:1; *To the Magnesians*, Salutation; *To the Philadelphians* 9:2.

⁶⁶ 2 *Clement* 9:7; Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 7:2.

⁶⁷ 1 *Clement* 7:4; 21:6; 49:6; Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 1:1; *To the Trallians* 8:1; *To the Philadelphians*, Salutation; *To the Smyrnaeans* 1:1; *Epistle of Barnabas* 5:1.

The Holy Spirit is with the Father and the Son.⁶⁸ The Holy Spirit is the pre-existent creator of all things.⁶⁹ This is the same spirit who dwelt in the incarnate Christ and worked as a partner with Christ. This reflects a monotheistic theology in which the Son and Spirit are in union.⁷⁰ Clement speaks to “an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit” at Corinth⁷¹ which suggest a post-apostolic move of the Spirit similar to the Jerusalem Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff). It is through the Holy Spirit that Christ calls believers,⁷² and it is the Holy Spirit who provokes repentance.⁷³ Ignatius speaks of the Holy Spirit using the imagery of a hoisting rope, suggesting that the Spirit lifts believers into the presence of God.⁷⁴ The Spirit inspired the prophets in their proclamation of the coming Christ.⁷⁵ The Son of God becomes incarnate in the womb of Mary by the presence of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ The Spirit is the “gracious gift that the Lord as truly sent.”⁷⁷ The Spirit establishes the church and the church is the bearer of the Spirit. Ignatius introduces himself as Θεοφόρος – God-bearer. Likewise, the church is θεοφόροι καὶ ναοφόροι, χριστοφόροι, ἅγιοφόροι⁷⁸ - God-bearer, temple-bearer, Christ-bearer, and bearer of holy things. Ignatius is employing the imagery of a religious pilgrimage of the people of God sojourning through this present age. The word ἅγιοφόροι (holy things) may signify the sacraments and/or gifts of the Spirit. Likewise, πεπληρωμένη ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ (filled with faith and love) may be a reference to the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians

⁶⁸ *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 14:1; 19:2; 22:3; 23:3.

⁶⁹ *Shepherd of Hermas*, 59:5.

⁷⁰ Carolyn Osiek, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, 180-181.

⁷¹ *1 Clement* 2:2.

⁷² *1 Clement* 22:1.

⁷³ *1 Clement* 8:1.

⁷⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 9:1.

⁷⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 9:2.

⁷⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 18:2. *Shepherd of Hermas* 59:5-7.

⁷⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 17:2.

⁷⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 9:2.

5:22f).⁷⁹ The believer's heart is a "dwelling place . . . a holy temple dedicated to the Lord."⁸⁰

MARY

A fully developed sense of the catholic consciousness requires that one must consider the role of Mary in the Incarnation of the Word and the redemption of humanity. Although Ignatius is the only apostolic father to mention Mary, it is likely that his references to her are informed by wider oral and written tradition.⁸¹ Jesus is "both from Mary and from God." Ignatius declared, "For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary according to God's plan, both from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit."⁸² For Ignatius, the mystery⁸³ of the virginal conception/ birth was necessary in order "safeguard the actuality of the incarnation against the Docetists" and he was the earliest to link the virginal conception with God's redemptive purpose.⁸⁴ Ignatius clearly links the virgin birth of Christ to his death on the cross.⁸⁵ As catholic theologians reflected further on the role of Mary, she became more significant in popular devotion. Irenaeus suggested that Mary was a counterpart to Eve. Just as Jesus was the second Adam, Mary was the second Eve. He wrote, "And thus also it was that the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. For what the virgin Eve had bound fast through unbelief, this did the virgin Mary set free through faith."⁸⁶ Because Mary was the mother of the fully divine-fully human Christ, Mary is the Mother of God.

⁷⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans*, Salutation.

⁸⁰ *Epistle of Barnabas* 6:15.

⁸¹ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 84.

⁸² Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 18:2. Cf. *To the Trallians* 9:9;

⁸³ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 19:1.

⁸⁴ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines, Revised Edition* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2003), 492.

⁸⁵ Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch*, 90.

⁸⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* in Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, editors, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 455.

WORSHIP

Catholic Christians “are participants together in a shared worship . . . bearers of holy things.”⁸⁷ The imagery here is that of an ancient liturgical procession in which worshipers are arrayed in festal garments.⁸⁸ Christians gathered for worship on the Lord’s day – Sunday – which was the day of the Lord’s resurrection, ascension, and new creation.⁸⁹ The Lord’s day signifies “newness of hope . . . the day on which our life also arose through him.”⁹⁰ As mentioned above, the “holy things” which were carried in the liturgical process might be a reference to the sacraments of water baptism and the Eucharist. Water baptism and the Eucharist were ritual practices established in the apostolic church (regarding baptism: Matthew 29:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12 et al; regarding Eucharist: Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20; Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). The ritual observance of Water Baptism and the Eucharist are sacramental symbols filled with meaning - the highest sacred practices in the catholic community.⁹¹ By the middle of the second century these rituals developed into new forms of religious devotion that shaped the catholic theological imagination. These symbolic rituals are expressions of the Faith, convey grace, and signify transformation.

Water baptism was the sacrament of initiation that signified the forgiveness of sins.⁹² Jesus was “baptized in order that by his suffering he might cleanse the water”⁹³ which suggests that, through his suffering on the cross,⁹⁴ the divine-human Christ is healer of creation, and the waters of baptism effect the cleansing and healing of humanity. In his letter to Polycarp, Ignatius wrote, “Let your baptism serve as a shield,

⁸⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 9.2.

⁸⁸ Weber, *Dying to Reach God*.

⁸⁹ *Epistle of Barnabas* 15:8-9.

⁹⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 9:1; *Didache* 14:1.

⁹¹ Shawn J. Wilhite, *The Didache: A Commentary*, ed. Paul A. Hartog and Shawn J. Wilhite, vol. 1, *Apostolic Fathers Commentary Series* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 212.

⁹² *Epistle of Barnabas* 11:1.

⁹³ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 18:2.

⁹⁴ *Epistle of Barnabas* 11:8.

faith as a helmet, love as a spear, endurance as armor”⁹⁵ suggesting that one’s baptism corresponds to the apostle Paul’s “full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:10-17). To be baptized is to be inducted as a soldier of Christ. Converts are to be baptized by three-fold immersion in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁹⁶ It has been suggested that Matthew and the *Didache* have borrowed the Trinitarian formula from an older liturgical source.⁹⁷ The baptized are to follow a common “way of life,” a social ethic that reflects the people of God.⁹⁸ Clement encouraged his readers to live holy lives and endeavor to keep their baptism “pure and undefiled.”⁹⁹ This suggest that post-baptismal sin was a grave offense.

Christians are encouraged to come together frequently to receive the Eucharist, giving glory to God (εις εὐχαριστίαν θεοῦ καὶ εἰς δόξαν).¹⁰⁰ The Eucharist is a rite of thanksgiving. Only baptized believers who lived faithfully could partake of the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 11:27).¹⁰¹ The celebration of the Eucharist is an invitation and a warning: “If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not, let him repent.”¹⁰² The *Didache* presents a liturgical prayer to be used in the celebration of the Eucharist, which suggest the development of a formal rite.¹⁰³ Prophets are presiding over the Eucharist, along with other ecclesial leaders. The prophets are allowed to pray over the Eucharist “however they wish”¹⁰⁴ which suggests that spontaneous prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were offered by freewheeling charismatic prophets, and were normative.¹⁰⁵ The Eucharistic liturgies in the *Didache* contain theological reflection on nascent

⁹⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *To Polycarp* 6:2.

⁹⁶ *Didache* 7:1-4.

⁹⁷ Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia PA: Fortress, 1988), 127.

⁹⁸ *Didache* 1:2-3:10.

⁹⁹ *1 Clement* 6:9.

¹⁰⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 13:1; *Didache* 14:1.

¹⁰¹ *Didache* 9:5.

¹⁰² *Didache* 10:6.

¹⁰³ *Didache* 9:1-4.

¹⁰⁴ *Didache* 10:7.

¹⁰⁵ Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 164.

trinitarianism, “Davidic and servant motifs, epistemological categories, eschatological-ecclesial gathering, temple and dwelling motifs, and the idea of God as creator.”¹⁰⁶

Ignatius insisted that water baptism and the Eucharist must be observed under the authority of the bishop, or one whom he designates.¹⁰⁷ The flesh of Jesus is the “bread of God.”¹⁰⁸ The blood of Jesus signifies the “love of God.”¹⁰⁹ The flesh and blood of Jesus Christ are presented in the *εὐχαριστία*,¹¹⁰ “which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ (ὃ ἐστὶν φάρμακον ἀθανασίας, ἀντίδοτος τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν ἀλλὰ ζῆν ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ διὰ παντός).”¹¹¹ To speak of the Eucharist in terms of *medicine* and *antidote* reflects a widespread convention of using medical terms as metaphors in pagan and Jewish sources.¹¹² Even so, to use metaphorical language is not to deny the theological reality. Ignatius insists that to deny the presence of Christ in the bread and blood of the Eucharist is to hold to a “heretical opinion.”¹¹³

LEADERSHIP

The development of a catholic consciousness was expressed in the ecclesial organization of the postapostolic church – bishops, presbyters, and deacons – which was to be an expression of unity. Clement is concerned about proper order and authority in the Church. God has established order in creation and in the Church. Priests are bound by priestly rules, laymen are bound by the laymen’s rules, and no one should overstep “the designated rule of his ministry.”¹¹⁴ Clement implies an early form of

¹⁰⁶ Shawn J. Wilhite, *The Didache*, 177.

¹⁰⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:1-2.

¹⁰⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Romans* 7:3

¹⁰⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians* 8:1; *To the Romans* 7:3; *To the Smyrnaeans* 1:1.

¹¹⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians* 4:1; *To the Smyrnaeans* 6:2; 8:1.

¹¹¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 20:2.

¹¹² Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*, 97-98.

¹¹³ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans* 6.2.

¹¹⁴ 1 *Clement* 40:1-41:1.

apostolic succession¹¹⁵ in which God sends Christ, Christ sends the apostles, and the apostles appointed bishops and deacons “with the consent of the whole church.”¹¹⁶ Clement insists this is not a novelty, but received tradition.¹¹⁷ Clement insists that his letter has been written “through the Holy Spirit,”¹¹⁸ therefore his ecclesial polity is inspired and has divine sanction. Clement views himself, and his fellow presbyters, to be speaking by the Spirit. He is comfortable using the language of charismatic gifts.

In Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians, the term *bishop* is not used. Polycarp referred to himself as one among the *presbyters*. Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians is roughly contemporaneous with the episcopal letters of Ignatius in which Polycarp is called the “bishop of the church of the Smyrnaeans.”¹¹⁹ This might suggest that the terms *bishop* and *presbyter* were somewhat equivalent and that ecclesial structure was in flux. Even so, the leaders of the house churches were a symbol of ecclesial unity. God the Father is a model for the office and function of the bishop.¹²⁰ The presbyters were responsible for pastoral care.¹²¹ The faithful are to “be obedient to the presbyters and deacons.”¹²² Polycarp was known as “an apostolic and prophetic teacher”¹²³ which suggests that the catholic consciousness embraced apostolic tradition and apostolic charisms.¹²⁴

The Spirit guarantees the incorruptibility of the church¹²⁵ and establishes and secures the leadership of the church - Τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ προσέχετε καὶ τῷ πρεσβυτερίῳ καὶ

¹¹⁵ 1 Clement 42:1-5.

¹¹⁶ 1 Clement 44:3.

¹¹⁷ 1 Clement 42:5.

¹¹⁸ 1 Clement 63:2.

¹¹⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To Polycarp*, Salutation; *Fragments of Papias* 2.

¹²⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians* 3:1.

¹²¹ Polycarp, *To the Ephesians* 6:1.

¹²² Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 5:3.

¹²³ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 16:2.

¹²⁴ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 5:2; 7:3; 12:1.

¹²⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 17:1.

διανόνοις (give attention to the bishops, presbyters, and deacons).¹²⁶ The leaders of the church are authorized through prophetic utterance and are essential to the structure and mission of the church.¹²⁷ In the Greco-Roman world, ἐπίσκοπος refers to “one who has a definite function or fixed office of guardianship and related activity within a group.”¹²⁸ Writing to Titus, Paul insisted that the bishops must be “able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it” (Titus 1:7-9; cf. 1 Timothy 3:2). In the apostolic church, the bishop was one who served as overseer, or steward, of a local house church, with special interests in guarding the apostolic tradition and managing the resources¹²⁹ of the community. In the letters of Ignatius, the bishop is the primary leader of the church. Speaking prophetically by the Spirit, Ignatius cried out, “Do nothing without the bishop.”¹³⁰ The bishop is to lead the worship and prayers of the congregation,¹³¹ and supervise water baptism,¹³² the Eucharist,¹³³ and marriage.¹³⁴ Ignatius exhorted repeatedly, “be careful not to oppose the bishop, in order that we may be obedient to God.”¹³⁵ He declared, “the bishops appointed throughout the world are in the mind of Christ.”¹³⁶ The presbyters functioned as a council of church elders, or a council of bishops,¹³⁷ and the deacons served as attendants, or aids, to the bishop and

¹²⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians*, Salutation; 7:1-2.

¹²⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians* 3:1.

¹²⁸ *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition s.v. ἐπίσκοπος

¹²⁹ Alistair C. Stewart refers to the bishop as an “economic functionary.” *The Original Bishops*, 77.

¹³⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians* 7:2; *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:1; *To Polycarp* 4:1.

¹³¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 5:1-2;

¹³² Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:2.

¹³³ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Philadelphians* 4:1; *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:1.

¹³⁴ Ignatius of Antioch, *To Polycarp* 5:2.

¹³⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 5:2-3; cf. 20:2; *To the Magnesians* 13:1-2; *To the Trallians* 2:1-2; *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:1; *To Polycarp* 6:1.

¹³⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 3:2; *To the Magnesians* 6:1.

¹³⁷ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 2:2; 4:1; 20:2; *To the Magnesians* 2:1; 6:1; 13:1; *To the Trallians* 2:2; 3:1; 7:2; 13:2; *To the Philadelphians* 4:1; 5:1; 7:1; *To the Smyrnaeans* 8:1; 12:2. See: Alistair C. Stewart, *The Original Bishops*, 15-17.

servants of the congregation.¹³⁸ Just as Jesus is both physical and spiritual,¹³⁹ the church is physical and spiritual¹⁴⁰ – led by the Spirit and by Spirit-anointed leaders, both institutional and charismatic. The church is in union with Christ and the leaders of the church are to represent the unity of the Faith.¹⁴¹ Just as the Father, Son, and Spirit exist in unity, so too must the bishops, presbyters, deacons and the congregation dwell in unity.¹⁴²

MARTYRDOM

Catholic Christians are to “hold steadfastly and unceasingly to . . . Christ Jesus, who bore our sins in his own body upon the tree” and they are to “become imitators” of Christ, even suffering “for the sake of his name.”¹⁴³ To be martyred is to be conformed to the passion of Jesus Christ. To be a faithful Christian was to confess that “Jesus is Lord” and refuse to “swear by the genius of Caesar.”¹⁴⁴ This led to persecution and martyrdom and was understood to be spiritual warfare. Those who suffer persecution are to “exercise unlimited endurance” as exemplified by Ignatius, Zosimus, and Rufus.¹⁴⁵ Ignatius declared, “It is better for me to die for Jesus Christ than to rule over the ends of the earth.”¹⁴⁶ Martyrs receive a crown of victory and a crown of immortality because that have “wrestled with the devil and conquered him.”¹⁴⁷ Those who suffer “a martyrdom that is in accord with the Gospel” are “blessed and noble,” imitators of the Lord Jesus¹⁴⁸

¹³⁸ *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition s.v. δῆκονος. Cf. Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Trallians* 2:3; *To the Magnesians* 6:1.

¹³⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans* 12:2.

¹⁴⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 10:3; *To the Magnesians* 13:1-2; *To the Trallians* 12:1; *To Polycarp* 1:2.

¹⁴¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Magnesians* 1:1-2.

¹⁴² Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Ephesians* 4:1-2; 5:1; *To the Philadelphians*, Salutation; 3:2-3; 4:1; 7:2; *To the Magnesians* 13:2.

¹⁴³ Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 8:1-2.

¹⁴⁴ *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 10:1.

¹⁴⁵ Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 9:1

¹⁴⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Romans* 6:1.

¹⁴⁷ *Shepherd of Hermas*, 8.3.6; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17:1; 19:2.

¹⁴⁸ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 1:1; 2:1.

who was a faithful witness - ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός (Revelation 1:5). Martyrs were exceptionally brave and died without uttering a cry or groan during their hour of torture and death because Jesus was standing with them offering words of consolation and encouragement.¹⁴⁹ Martyrdom was believed to be the ultimate form of Christian sanctity and dedication. Martyrs were venerated and their bodies and possessions became holy relics, “more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold.”¹⁵⁰ The day of martyrdom was considered a birthday to be celebrated throughout the catholic church.¹⁵¹ Ignatius and Polycarp, both bishops of the era of the apostolic fathers, continue to be revered for their faithful examples of martyrdom. Polycarp’s confession of faith continues to ring out through the ages: “For eighty-six years I have been his servant, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 2.2.

¹⁵⁰ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18:2.

¹⁵¹ *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18:3.

¹⁵² *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 9:3.

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