

## ***The Jesus Movement Part VII: The Third Century***

*“We appeared only yesterday, but now we fill your cities, your homes, your squares, your municipalities, the councils, the tribunes, the decuries (senatorial electorates), the palace, the Senate, and the Forum. We have left you nothing but your temples. Should we secede from you, you would be terrified by your own loneliness.” - Tertullian (160-220 CE), Apology 37.*

*In this article some of the key elements in the history of the Jesus Movement in the third century will be examined. They include the success of its early mission to the Gentiles, its infiltration of the Greco-Roman host culture; its largely unobtrusive inculturation and gradual consolidation as an increasingly respected member of society as its collective wealth and influence grew to such an extent that the Jesus Movement was in a position to provide spiritual and social outreach to people regardless of race, social position or gender. A number of other elements specific to the history of Christianity in the third century will be covered briefly, notably the effects of Roman persecution on the Jesus Movement and the development of its internal community life and worship.*

### ***Changing the Eschatological Clock***

***It takes only a very short time before a good idea attracts a board of directors and a book of rules*** – With apologies to Jesus Christ (6 BCE – 33 CE) on what seemed like a good idea at the time.

Within a few decades of the first Christian Pentecost, the followers of the Jesus Movement were forced to do a radical reappraisal of themselves, their mission and their collective future. In its early years Christianity was gripped by a mood of intense expectation that its first generation would witness the return of the Lord. (1) As time went by and Christ had not reappeared, it became clearer that the Jesus Movement had to maintain its commitment to the mandate of Christ just prior to the Ascension to “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations ....” (Mt 28: 19-20)

The new discernment of Christ’s final commission caused his followers to change dramatically from seeing themselves as transients travelling light to being settlers who needed to look ahead and to plan for the future. Certainly by 200 CE, Christians had come to realise that the time of the expected short sojourn had been extended into the era of the long stay. This dawning realisation is strongly reflected notably in the narratives of Luke/Acts:

“Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you." (Luke 17:20-21)” And.....

"So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:6-8)

It was the single-minded use of time itself and of its opportunities that led to the ascendancy and consolidation of the Movement in the Greco-Roman world. The earliest teachers within Christianity went to considerable lengths to instruct their sisters and brothers in outward-looking benevolence, good neighbourliness, responsible social behaviours, unobtrusive and simple life-styles, honest work and ethical business practices (1Thess 4: 11-12; Titus 3: 1-2).

### ***The Movement becomes urbanised and blends in.***

If there is any wider historical and geographical value in the Acts 2: 5-13 (a list of Jews from many places: Parthians, Medes, Elamites etc) than simply the stylised account of Peter preaching to the Jewish crowds in Jerusalem at Pentecost, it would indicate the extent to which the Gospel had already been preached and taken root between 33 and around 85 CE. The list and its implied achievements are very impressive to say the least.

Christians in the Greco-Roman world were active at all levels of society right from early in the Gentile mission. An example of this success is Erastus who was the treasurer (οἰκονόμος, oikonomos) of Corinth and possibly a convert of Paul. (Rom 16: 23) Early in the twentieth century archaeologists discovered the name Erastus carved into a paved area on northeast side of the theatre of Corinth. It has been dated to the mid-first century and reads: "Erastus in return for his aedileship (public office), laid the pavement at his own expense." (*ERASTVS. PRO. AED. S. P. STRAVIT*) The fact that such a high ranking city official is mentioned in relation to both Corinth and Rome has significant implications for determining the social mix of Paul's communities. Among the new converts Paul and Silas made at Thessalonica there were "not a few of the prominent women" (Acts 17: 4)

Biblical and Church historians have demonstrated convincing evidence to show that Christians continued to occupy positions of responsibility at all levels in Roman society including those in the government, the military and civil service. They were also well represented in the professions especially trades and small business. American biblical historian Wayne Meeks writes: "(This, too, would fit) the picture of fairly well-off artisans and tradespeople as the typical Christians." (2)

By the middle of the third century, the Church had developed such a high public profile in many places that communities were given the privilege of free association, to frequent openly their places of worship and to participate in the civil administration. These freedoms were often achieved with the patronage of influential court and government officials many of whom may have become Christians themselves.

With the rapid increasing in the number of Christians there was a proportionate increase in the number of bishops, deacons and presbyters. A diocesan system of Church government developed and expanded along with population increases and demographic shifts. Bishops in time became property holders, especially of land, buildings and even cemeteries. Social services, hostels and many other kinds of philanthropic endeavours sprang up as extensions of the Christian community's evangelical mission.

Deacons in particular became key figures in Church life particularly in their roles as guardians of Church assets. The deacon Lawrence was the Administrator or chief financial officer of the Roman Church. For his refusal to hand over the wealth of the diocese, Lawrence was martyred under Valerian in 258 CE. He has long become an iconic figure in Christian history but probably for the wrong reason. Peter Brown, Irish-American historian of late Antiquity, notes the Church's determination to position itself in the mainstream of Roman society by developing areas of influence at all levels:

"...the Christian Church stood squarely in the middle of Roman society. It occupied the extensive middle ground between the very rich and the very poor. 'Middling' persons formed its principal constituency. The church tended to recruit its clergy from among the more prosperous artisans and from the fringes of the class of town councillors." (3)

By the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century the Jesus Movement had become ubiquitous and so deeply embedded in Roman society that it had assumed an indispensable role within the host culture. It was, in fact, in a position to compete fairly credibly with the Roman State on the level of both human and economic capital. Its leaders, furthermore, had become so well educated and sophisticated across all areas of learning that they were able to outmatch and outsmart the Greco-Roman rhetoricians in the arts of philosophical discourse and apologetics. From a religious perspective too, Christianity had begun to pose a challenge to State polytheism along with the public institutions and ideology which supported it:

"When Tertullian spoke of Christianity as "filling the world," he meant the Roman world. There were Christian communities in all the major centers of his native North Africa, and Christians were common in the legions stationed there. The Christians had become "a vast invisible empire," writes the historian W. H. C. Frend." (4)

### ***A State within the State***

The author of the *Letter to Titus* exhorted Christians to be loyal and responsible members of the host society (3: 1-8). But that advice was ambivalent. The early Christians, while being always open and welcoming of outsiders and acceptance of the stranger, were also conscious of the need to maintain a certain distance from the pagan culture and its influences. Christianity's clear, distinct moral and social difference constituted a major element in its attractiveness as an alternative society. (1Thess 4: 10-12; Col 4: 5-6) This culture of shapely defined difference also led from time to time to problems with jealous and resentful neighbours (1 Pt 3: 15-16).

The major spiritual weakness of the Roman Empire was its *Pantheon* (the national and local gods). Although people worshipped the deities common to the Greco-Roman religious tradition, the *Pantheon* overwhelmingly reflected the many local protector and nature deities which attracted specific geographical and ethnic loyalties. On the other hand, the strength and attractiveness of both Judaism and Christianity lay in their monotheism. Their universal appeal was the unambiguous *One God and Creator of all*. Christianity enjoyed the added advantage of having at its centre the humanity of Jesus, a tangible meeting point between human beings and the transcendent God. This provided Christianity with its foundational genius that offered a radical vision of who God is and what authentic humanity is defined in the being of Jesus Christ. It was precisely this that ultimately empowered and gave meaning to the Jesus Movement as well as providing the key to its evangelical success.

Christianity inherited from Judaism a strong core conviction that a good, virtuous and stable community was founded on the principles of justice and fairness. The earliest Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles was characterised by the value it placed on the practice of collective ownership of property and goods. Members of the community benefited from the regular distribution on the basis of need not of want (Acts 2: 44-47).

Christianity publicly presented itself as a religion of universal respect for human dignity and this was clearly validated in his active ministry of care and compassion for all and without conditions. House Churches played a vital role this outreach as they quickly became centres of hospice care for the sick and of regular food distribution to the hungry:

"What needs to be stressed is that the Christian poorhouse-cum-hospital was a novel institution in the ancient world. Temples, of course, had always contained large sleeping quarters for those in search of healing, as at the incubatory shrine of Asclepius at Epidaurus (in Greece). But the new *xenodocheia* (stranger-friendly places of welcome) were not necessarily connected with healing shrines. Only soldiers and slaves--that is, persons who had no family to look after them--had *valetudinaria*, hospital quarters in their camps and slave barracks. To extend this facility to the poor in general and to associate it with any human settlement was a new departure." (5)

This regard for the human dignity of outsiders shown by early Christians was a natural extension of the spirit of mutual love, respect and deference they had for one another. This finds a powerful expression in the third century CE Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum* (*The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*):

"The deacon stands next to you as a symbol of Christ; therefore you should love him. The deaconess should be honored by you as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Presbyters should be looked upon by you as symbols of the apostles. You should consider widows and orphans as symbols of the altar." – II, 26. 5-8.

Early eastern Christianity preserves a tradition of what appears to be a Christian version of district nursing and home care. In Syriac-speaking churches the "widow" became almost synonymous with the "deaconess." According to the *Didascalia*, the deaconess "is required to go into the houses of the heathen where there are believing women, and to visit those who are

sick, and to minister to them that are in need, and to bathe those who have begun to recover from sickness.” (6)

By the beginning of the third century, the Christian Church was rapidly becoming an alternative society in both economic and professional human capital. This was not lost on the Romans. With Emperor Decius (249-251), State policy towards Christians shifted from simply ‘striking at the head’ (bishops and deacons in particular) to wholesale persecution of the entire community. This was doomed to failure from the outset not only in Decius’ punitive action but also in the final major attempt at mass elimination of Christian influence during the Diocletian age (270-305 CE). Not only were there far too many Christians and far too valuable to be eradicated. The more prudent of Roman policy makers realised that the Empire would have come perilously close to collapse without them. (7)

### ***Deterioration of the Empire: within and without***

The Roman Empire, especially during the years 235-284 CE experienced acute political instability, economic stagnation and other stress factors such as food shortages and plagues. It came to be known as *The Crisis of the Third Century* and the circumstances were compounded, among other things, by increasing military threats to the security of Imperial Roman. The Germanic tribes in the north plus the Parthians, the Palmyrenes and Semitic nomads in the East were stretching Roman power and authority to their limits. Roman diplomacy, provincial government and economic stability were severely disrupted.

Shrinking borders created problems all the way through the Roman social and economic system such as disruptions to internal and external trade, loss of access to foreign markets and consequent threats to food security. Unrest in the provinces meant that the acquisition of precious metals became more risky. The shortages of silver and gold resulted in currency debasement and a resultant loss of commercial and political confidence. All of this, plus resultant hyper-inflation had catastrophic impacts on the Imperial taxation system:

“The central argument ... is the idea that perhaps one of the most important causes of Rome’s decline was structural economic weakness inherent within the empire long before the third century AD. These weaknesses include things like the inherent problems of a slave-economy, decentralisation of industry/agriculture, and the long-term non-sustainability and ‘top-heaviness’ of the Empire. However, this is not to suggest that there were not other important factors at play other than economic ones. Things like the increasing ‘barbarization’ of the military and the political classes, intellectual and ‘spiritual’ decline and the increasing pressure on Rome’s borders could also be cited as important. The decline of Rome should be seen as part of a complex process without a single, concise explanation. The decline of Rome was the result of a complex process of interwoven weaknesses, defects and contingencies.” (8)

Among the most serious casualties of internal and external volatility were political social cohesion, a sense of certainty and long term stability within the Empire. During the course of the third century the Praetorian Guard made a fortune in bribes out of the over forty Roman emperors and pretenders who sought power. Very few of them died peacefully in their beds.

While a combination of introspection, forlornness, melancholy and a general loss of control took hold of the Roman psyche, the opposite was true of Christianity. The Jesus Movement in the third century projected a well founded spirit of collective confidence, optimism and self-possession. This enabled the Community to respond substantively and quickly to the challenges of a rapidly decaying Empire and the resulting chaos. Christianity had already established a proven record in its culture of community building, humanitarianism and social outreach. Furthermore, they had the resources and wide public support to sustain it all. (9)

### ***The Lapsi, the Traditores and the Schism of the Rigorists***

Apostasy was not a new or surprising phenomenon in the Jesus Movement. Very early on it had witnessed spectacular precedents in Peter's three time denial of Christ and the cowardly flight of the Twelve chosen ones. The memory of these denials and betrayals at the very top of its leadership later stood the Movement in good stead. Beginning with the brief and savage persecution of Nero in 64 CE, Christians were subject to similar sporadic bouts of repression, usually on the local level and during all of them there was a great deal of betrayal and denial.

However, the Movement did enjoy nearly forty years of peace and practically no persecution from 211 to 249 CE. This period of respite was interrupted briefly during the savage reign of Maximian the Thracian (235-238 CE) after which, there was an hiatus of ten years before the repression began again with periods of fierce and systematic persecution under Decius (249-251) and Valerian (257CE).

The *Lapsi* ('the fallen away') were those Christians who had renounced or betrayed the Faith under threats of torture or death. Within the Jesus Movement, they were classified into different categories depending on the nature of their apostasy. There were some who had lost their nerve, succumbed to fear and subsequently offered sacrifices or incense to idols. Some had bribed officials to issue certificates or affidavits to prove that they had offered pagan sacrifice while others perjured themselves in court to avoid punishment. Among the most serious sins of apostasy was that of the *Traditores*, those who delivered the sacred books into the hands of the Roman authorities. These texts included the Hebrew Scriptures, copies of the Gospels, the letters of the Apostles and other revered writings. Other things which were betrayed were the identities of leaders, secrets involving Christian rituals and the location of nocturnal gatherings which were illegal.

In the spirit of the Twelve who abandoned Jesus when he was arrested, Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage fled in the face of persecution and was later forced to rationalise it all. He appealed to the precedents of Jesus and the Twelve, 'withdrawing' to a place apart when the atmosphere became dangerous. He also argued that his people needed a live bishop not a dead one. On a local level, Cyprian was never fully trusted by either the people or presbyterate of Carthage.

On a broader scale, the entire Jesus Movement was nearly torn apart as a result of the defections of many of its members and the consequent heated debates over what kinds of

internal disciplines should be applied to those who wished to return to the faith community. Christians, in fact, became so bitterly and fundamentally conflicted over the issue that a major Schism was triggered. On one side the Roman faction, led by usurper bishop Novatian and his followers, insisted on a rigorist approach to the issue. They refused to accept the possibility of the *Lapsi* being restored to Christian life and practice. They were to be shut out of the community forever without the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. (10)

While the North Africans, led by Cyprian, were initially inclined to deal quite harshly with the *Lapsi* and *Traditores*, it was Cyprian's presbyters who independently arrived at a solution based not on punitive law but on compassion and leniency. Their controversial initiative actually circumvented the ordinary authority of the bishop by offering their own absolution, often without penance. Interestingly, the Africans had endured a far more brutal persecution under Decius than the Roman Christians had. Greater mercy, apparently, was the fruit born of greater suffering. The same tension, ironically, still exists in the Catholic Church seventeen hundred years later.

### ***Eucharist in the third century***

As noted in an earlier article in this series, the synagogal model of ecclesial leadership and liturgical structure, described in the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, was still in place centuries later. For example, Henry Chadwick's study on the way the Scriptures were read during the Eucharist in some churches into the fourth century showed: "that some churches had preserved the old synagogue practice of having the Old Testament read in Hebrew even if its hearers did not understand it." (11)

Hippolytus of Rome (170-235 CE), Bishop and martyr, provides a detailed description of the leadership structure of the Roman Church, its principal rituals and even the actual prayers used in these different rites. In *The Apostolic Tradition*, Hippolytus also confirms Justin Martyr's second century description of the Eucharist. (12) Noteworthy too is the fact that the early third century *Anaphora* (Eucharistic Prayer) of Hippolytus bears striking similarities to Eucharistic Prayer II in the Missal of Paul VI. (See this *Anaphora* appended to Endnote 12).

Hippolytus and others witness to the practice for the *Anaphora* (Eucharistic Prayer) to be recited extemporaneously. This was very possibly the normal way the Memorial of the Lord (*Anamnesis*) was observed in House Church gatherings. It would be reasonable to assume also that more formal texts for the *Anaphora* were used when the Bishop presided, surrounded by his people, deacons and presbyters. A powerful example of the wide diversity in Eucharistic theologies from east to west is that the earliest existing Eucharistic Prayer is the early third century Chaldean-Assyrian *Anaphora of Addai and Mari*. While it has a lengthy *Epiklesis*, there are actually no words of institution (consecration) in it. (13)

It is noteworthy too that Christians had a rich repertoire of liturgical song. Long before the letters of Paul and other authors were recognised as canonical Scripture, many of their texts were used as liturgical hymns. The most commonly recognised ones from the New Testament

are: Phil 2: 5-11; Col 1: 15-20; 1 Tim 3: 16; Heb 1: 1-3; 1 Pr 2: 21-25. The Hebrew Psalms were also regularly used as either simple reflective prayers or sung as hymns.

While the house church (*domus ecclesia*), usually hosted by a wealthy Christian individual or family, continued to be a normal gathering place of weekly Christian worship, by the third century there was a noticeable change in the larger population areas. Larger meeting rooms were used to accommodate the growing numbers of the baptized and catechumens. One of the most immediate and dramatic effects of this arrangement was the loss of intimacy which typified the celebration of the Memorial of the Lord within a House Church communal meal the *Agape*.

German liturgist J.A. Jungmann, SJ, explains that “the growing communities became too large for these domestic table-gatherings ... [so] ... the tables disappeared from the room, except for the one at which the presiding official pronounced the eucharist(ic Blessing) over the bread and wine. The room was broadened into a large hall capable of holding the whole congregation. Only in isolated instances was the connection with a meal continued into the following centuries.” (14) These large meeting halls were gradually developed into neighbourhood community clusters and the one presided over by the Bishop or his delegate became his *See* (Chair/ Cathedra) hence Cathedral.

With this gradual and dramatic development Christians lost the more intimate experiences of the Eucharistic celebration within the *Agape* communal meal. Another related loss was some of the more important theologies which were generated and developed within the House Church experiences over nearly three centuries.

One of them involved the focus being shifted away from the community doing the remembering to an intermediary performing it on their behalf. Another was a the richness of the community together retrieving in sacred Memory the complete story of Christ’s whole sacrificial existence, his life, death and resurrection and not simply a compartmentalised memorial of his death on the Cross. This almost exclusive focus on the physicality of Calvary and the cross was intensified theologically under the influence of North African Christian theology of the Eucharist.

Many of the convert members of the Carthaginian Community preserved deep-seated memories of the ancient practice of human sacrifice. Those memories had a powerful impact on the way the theology of the North African Eucharist developed especially in the third century. The Carthaginian Christians, probably quite unconsciously, syncretised the symbolism of pagan human sacrifice with the crucifixion of Jesus on Calvary. Their recent memory of their own martyrs became concentrated in the emphasis they placed on the bloody judicial murder of Jesus and the sense of meaning and perspective it provided for their own suffering. As Cyprian taught the power of, “...drinking the blood of Christ in order to be able to shed blood for him.” (*Letter LXIII. 14* and *Letters XIII, LVIII.1*)

This particular regional understanding gradually worked its way into, shaped then dominated the Eucharistic tradition and the sacramental theology of priesthood in the Latin West up to and including the present time. W.H.C Frend comments:

“In North Africa, ... , a new element was being introduced. The strongly sacrificial nature of the Church there, with its glorification of confession (of Faith) and martyrdom, was affecting the interpretation of the Eucharist. Cyprian defined the act of the priest as an imitation of the sacrifice of Christ in which he offered a full and true sacrifice in the church to God the Father. This change is very important. In the medieval Latin church greater stress would be laid on the sacrificial rather than the purely spiritual and recalling element in the Eucharist.” (15)

### ***A Conclusion***

By the beginning of the third century CE, the Jesus Movement had successfully navigated its way through the dilemmas and tensions of the “already” and the “not-quite-yet” of its Eschatological expectations. Once the second and third generations of Christians had adjusted to the idea that second coming of the Lord and the end of human history would be delayed, they set about redeeming the time. They did this by redefining themselves and their mission in terms of themselves as permanent residents instead of holders of temporary visas. They began to inculturate, re-imagine and embed themselves and the Gospel into the host society. They accomplished this difficult task with great genius, imagination and skill. While the Jesus Movement preserved the clear distinctiveness of its own doctrine, moral code and common lifestyle, it did so in such a way that it transformed those differences into attractions and so avoided the alienation of its neighbours.

Christians were accused of being subversives and promoters of foreign superstitions. They were from time to time publicly accused, prosecuted and condemned for these crimes and suffered the prescribed punishments. Despite this, the Movement never collapsed into self-serving introspection or despair; it continued to expand, to grow and to flourish.

When the Empire came under enormous stresses in the third century and came close to collapse, the Jesus Movement demonstrated that it had the human, spiritual and material resources to act effectively as viable alternative society to the Roman state. The ability of Christians to project spiritual and social power gained them enormous credibility and moral authority. The *Crisis of the Third Century* made it abundantly clear that the Christians had become indispensable to the Roman State and Roman society. Constantine understood this perhaps more than most.

This de facto status would become official Imperial Roman State policy less than half way into the fourth century. That, plus the great theological debates about the dual natures of Christ which led to the Creeds of Nicaea (325 CE) and Constantinople (381 CE), will be the subject of the next article in this series.

## *Endnotes*

- 1) An entire branch of theology in Church thinking has developed over time. It is known as Eschatology (Gk *Eschata*: the final things at the end of human history) and it is based on a number of textual references which echo and illustrated its basis. See for example: Paul: 1 Thess 4: 13-5: 1-24; 1 Cor 15: 51-58; 16: 22; 2 Cor 5: 2, 4; 2 Pt 3: 1-10, 16; 1 Jn 2: 20; Rev 21: 1; Mk 12: 37; Lk 19: 11. The possibly liturgical invocation *Maranatha/Come Lord* appears in 1 Cor 16: 22 and in the *Didache* 10.4 while that of a realized but an implicitly forward-looking Eschatology is: תא מרנא: *maranâ thâ'*, "Our Lord has come" (1 Cor 16: 22); A statement of imminent Eschatology: אַתָּא מָרְן: *maran 'athâ'* "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely *I am coming soon.*' Come Lord Jesus." (Rev 22: 20)
- 2) *The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul.* (Newhaven, CT, Yale UP, 2003) 65
- 3) Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH, Brandeis, 2002) 48.
- 4) "The leaven in the bread: steady, silent, relentless" *Christian History Project*, # 10 The Early Church, an online series (Linked [HERE](#))
- 5) Peter Brown, *Ibid.*, 34; See also Vincent Faherty :

"Recognizing that Christians were not unique in their insistence on charity for the less fortunate, Jones (1964) proposes, however, that they did set a new, higher standard than their Greek, Roman and Jewish counterparts by contributing substantially more resources. Brown (1989) offers further examples of the uniqueness of Christian benevolence: At a time of inflation, the Christians invested large sums of liquid capital in people; at a time of increased brutality, the courage of Christian martyrs was impressive; during public emergencies such as plague or rioting, the Christian clergy were shown to be the only united group in the town, able to look after the burial of the dead and to organize food supplies." in "Social Welfare before the Elizabethan Poor Laws: The Early Christian Tradition, AD 33 to 313," *The Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 22, 2 (2006) 112. (Linked [HERE](#)) And see Rodney Stark:

"Christian values of love and charity had, from the beginning, been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity. When disaster struck, the Christians were better able to cope, and this resulted in substantially higher rates of survival." *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton NJ: PUP, 1996) 72.

- 6) *Didascalia Apostolorum* on the many roles of deaconesses in ecclesiology, in liturgical and social service: *Didascalia Apostolorum* III, 12, 1-4; see also III, 13, 1-2; II, 26, 5-8 (Linked [HERE](#)); See also, Sr Vincent Emmanuel Hannon S.U.S.C., "The Order of Deaconesses in the Early Church", in *The Question of Women and the*

*Priesthood* (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1967) 71-96 and republished on this website and with the necessary permissions. (Linked [HERE](#))

- 7) "When the Roman state did perceive political threats, its repressive measures were not only brutal but unrelenting and extremely thorough-Masada comes immediately to mind. Yet even the most brutal persecutions of Christians were haphazard and limited, and the state ignored thousands of persons who openly professed the new religion. If we postulate a Christianity of the privileged, on the other hand, this behavior by the state seems consistent. If, as is now believed, the Christians were not a mass of degraded outsiders but from early days had members, friends, and relatives in high places-often within the imperial family--this would have greatly mitigated repression and persecution. Hence the many instances when Christians were pardoned." Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ, PUP, 1996) 46.

See also: "Consequently, the early church was a mass movement in the fullest sense and not simply the creation of an elite. Ramsay MacMullen recognized that the failure of Roman authorities to understand this fact accounts for the strange aspect of the persecutions: that only leaders were seized, while crowds of obvious Christians went unpunished. That is, when the Romans decided to destroy Christianity, "they did so from the top down, evidently taking it for granted that only the Church's leaders counted." This mistaken judgment was, according to MacMullen, based on the fact that paganism was utterly dependent on the elite and could easily have been destroyed from the top." *Ibid.*,208

- 8) Julian Fenner, "To what extent were economic factors to blame for the deterioration of the Roman Empire in the Third Century A.D?" *The Roman Empire*, online site. (Linked [HERE](#))
- 9) Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 74; see also W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 504.
- 10) "Novatian and Novatianism." *Early Church History.org.uk* (Linked [HERE](#))
- 11) Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, (Oxford: OUP, 1966) 70.
- 12) Hippolytus of Rome, *The Apostolic Tradition*. (Linked [HERE](#))

## **The Anaphora of Hippolytus of Rome (Early Third Century CE)**

### **The Preface**

*The Bishop begins:*  
The Lord be with you.  
*And all reply:*  
And with your spirit.  
*The Bishop continues:*  
Lift up your hearts.

*Congregation:*  
We lift them up unto the Lord,  
*Bishop:*  
Let us give thanks to the Lord.  
*Congregation:*  
It is meet and right.

### **Thanksgiving – statement of motive**

*The Bishop continues:*  
We give thanks to you God,  
through your beloved son Jesus Christ,  
whom you sent to us in former times  
as Saviour, Redeemer, and Messenger of your Will,  
who is your inseparable Word,  
through whom you made all,  
and in whom you were well-pleased,  
whom you sent from heaven into the womb of a virgin,  
who, being conceived within her, was made flesh,  
and appeared as your Son,  
born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin.  
It is he who, fulfilling your will  
and acquiring for you a holy people,  
extended his hands in suffering,  
in order to liberate from sufferings  
those who believe in you.

### **Words of Institution**

Who, when he was delivered to voluntary suffering,  
in order to dissolve death,  
and break the chains of the devil,  
and tread down hell,  
and bring the just to the light,  
and set the limit,  
and manifest the resurrection,  
taking the bread, and giving thanks to you, said,  
"Take, eat, for this is my body which is broken for you."  
Likewise the cup, saying,  
This is my blood which is shed for you.  
Whenever you do this, do this [in] memory of me.

### **Anamnesis and Oblation**

Therefore, remembering his death and resurrection,  
we offer to you the bread and the chalice,  
giving thanks to you, who has made us worthy  
to stand before you and to serve as your priests.

### **Epiklesis** (Invocation of the Holy Spirit)

And we pray that you would send your Holy Spirit  
to the oblation of your Holy Church.

In their gathering together,  
give to all those who partake of your holy mysteries the fullness of the Holy Spirit,  
toward the strengthening of the faith in truth that,

### **Doxology**

we may praise you and glorify you,  
through your son Jesus Christ,  
through whom to you be glory and honour,  
Father and Son,  
with the Holy Spirit,  
in your Holy Church,  
now and always, [Amen]

See also “An Ancient Jewish Christian Eucharistic Prayer” *Association of Hebrew Catholics* (Linked [HERE](#))

- 13) Daniel J. Castellano, “Consecration in the Anaphora of Addai and Mari,” 2007. (Linked [HERE](#)).
- 14) “The Mass of the Roman Rite. Its Origins and Development (Missarum Sollemnia)” (New York: Benziger Bros., 1959) 10.
- 15) *The Rise of Christianity*, 408.

### **For further pondering:**

- Paula Fredriksen “Christians in the Roman Empire in the First Three Centuries CE,” in David S Potter, *A Companion to the Roman Empire*, (Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing 2006) (Linked [HERE](#))
- “Why did Christians Succeed,” *From Jesus to Christ*, PBS Frontline, (Linked [HERE](#))
- Wayne Meeks: *The spread of Christianity - an Urban Story*, christianthinktank .com, (Linked [HERE](#)) This site provides a sound study resource which features authoritative references and useful citations from leading biblical scholars, ancient historians and sociologists.
- Philip Esler (Ed), *The Early Christian World. Vols I-II* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000)
- “Crisis in the Third Century,” online resource by *Chrystalinks* (Linked [HERE](#))
- Joseph R Peden, “Inflation and the Fall of the Roman Empire,” *Mises Institute. Austrian Economics, Freedom and Peace*, September 7, 2009. (Linked [HERE](#))
- For very informative citations on the role of female deacons in the Assyrian/Chaldean Churches, see Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, *The Didascalia – 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. Women can be priests* (Linked [HERE](#))

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