



**COPTIC ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE
SAINT MARY'S COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH**

388 Ottawa St. S. Kitchener, ON Canada N2M 3P4

www.stmaryscopticorthodox.ca E-mail: athanas@sympatico.ca
Father Athanasius Iskander (519) 740-7627 Fax (519) 621-1444

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THE CHURCH OF THE APOSTLES AND THE FATHERS

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. (Jer 6:16)

Innovation is the mark of this age. Old things are discarded and new ones are adhered to. Even morals and religious practices are being updated to keep up with an ever changing society. The Lord admonishes us to “ask for the old paths, where is the good way and walk therein” In this article, we will try to study the old paths of the early Church, the Church of the Apostles and of the Fathers, using Biblical references as well as Patristic references. So, what was the Early Church like? Let us start answering that question:

1. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD AN ALTAR:

a. The Lord Himself told us that!

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the **altar**, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the **altar**, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (MAT 5:23)

Here we have a reference to an altar on which gifts (the bread and wine) are brought, and we are told that unless we are reconciled, we cannot offer our gifts. This is the reason we do not approach communion if we have a grudge against someone.

b. The Old Testament tells us so:

In that day shall there be an **altar** to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the Lord. And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it. (ISA 19:19,21)

Here is an Old Testament reference to a Christian altar! It could not be otherwise, for the Jews were not permitted to offer sacrifice and oblation except in one altar: that in Jerusalem. Of course that prophesy was fulfilled when the Egyptians embraced Christianity.

c. Saint Paul tells us so:

We have an **altar**, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. (HEB 13:10)

Saint Paul is telling us here, that we, the Christians have an altar! And that those who serve the tabernacle (the Jewish priests) have no right to eat from it (unless they believe and become Christians!).

d. The Fathers tell us so:

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS¹ TO THE EPHESIANS (107 ad.)
Ante Nicene Fathers (ANF) VOL I page 51

Let no man deceive himself: if any one be not within the **altar**, he is deprived of the bread of God.

Saint Ignatius not only mentions the **altar**, but also refers to the

¹Ignatius became bishop of Antioch in 69 ad. he wrote these epistles in 107 ad. on the way to Rome where he was martyred.

Eucharist as the **bread of God**.

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE PHILADELPHIANS (107 a.d.)

ANF VOL I page 81

Take ye heed, then, to have but one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to show forth the unity of His blood; one **altar**; as there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants: that so, whatsoever ye do, ye may do it according to the will of God.

Not only does this great saint and martyr assert the presence of the altar in the early Church, but he also asserts the presence of the three tiered ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishop, presbyters (priests) and deacons. He also reminds the Christians of Philadelphia that if they follow these directives, they will be doing the will of God.

IRENAEUS AGAINST HERESIES -- BOOK IV (circa 180 a.d.)

ANF VOL I page 484

The oblation of the Church, therefore, which the Lord gave instructions to be offered throughout all the world, is accounted with God a pure sacrifice, and is acceptable to Him; not that He stands in need of a sacrifice from us, but that he who offers is himself glorified in what he does offer, if his gift be accepted. For by the gift both honour and affection are shown forth towards the King; and the Lord, wishing us to offer it in all simplicity and innocence, did express Himself thus: "Therefore, when thou offerest thy gift upon the **altar**, and shalt remember that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then return and offer thy gift."

The great Irenaeus here tells us in very clear terms that the Lord's words quoted above are to be understood of the Christian oblation and the Christian altar. The great saint tells us that the Lord Himself gave instructions that this oblation is to be offered throughout all the world. He also tells us that the oblation of the Church is accounted with God a *pure sacrifice*.

2. THE EARLY CHURCH USED INCENSE:

a. The Old Testament tells us so:

For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts. (MAL 1:11)

The prophesy of Malachi specifically tells us that the gentiles and not the Jews are the ones that will offer incense unto the Lord. Here is how the Fathers understood this prophesy:

SAINT HIPPOLYTUS: A DISCOURSE ON THE END OF THE WORLD, AND ON ANTICHRIST, ANF VOL V page 250

And the churches, too, will wail with a mighty lamentation, because neither "oblation nor incense" is attended to, nor a service acceptable to God.

In this discourse, Saint Hippolytus describes the church under Antichrist, during the Great Tribulation. He declares to us that "*no oblation nor incense is attended to*", which means that during his life time (second century) there was oblation and incense exactly as Malachi had prophesied hundreds of years earlier.

FRAGMENTS FROM THE LOST WRITINGS OF IRENAEUS

Ante Nicene Fathers (ANF) Vol I page 574

Those who have become acquainted with the secondary (i.e., under Christ) constitutions of the apostles, are aware that the Lord instituted a new oblation in the new covenant, according to [the declaration of] Malachi the prophet. For, "from the rising of the sun even to the setting my name has been glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice."

Here Saint Irenaeus tells us clearly that the prophesy of Malachi is about the offerings of the New Covenant. But the most amazing thing

is that he speaks about *those who have become acquainted with ... the constitutions of the apostles!*. That means that the early church, in the time of Irenaeus (second century) had a document called “*the constitutions of the apostles*”, This document exists! And anyone can read it in Vol VII of the Ante Nicene Fathers.

3. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD A LITURGY:

a. The Bible tells us so:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. (ACT 13:2-3)

The Greek word *λειτουργούν* (*leitourgeo*) that was translated into “ministered” in the English versions of the Bible, really means “to perform a ritual service” (the Liturgy) So, the proper translation of this verse should have been: “As they were performing the Liturgy of the Lord, while fasting”, which not only tells us that the early church had a Liturgy, but also that they used to fast in order to attend the Liturgy. This becomes very obvious when we examine verse 3: *And when they had fasted and prayed.* ... The fasting in Verse 2 refers to fasting before the Liturgy, while fasting in Verse 3 refers to fasting before the ceremony of ordination (laying on of the hands), a tradition that our church still keeps.

That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. (ROM 15:16)

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul describes himself as a priest of Jesus Christ *λειτουργῶν* (*leitourgōs*) . This word which is wrongly translated into “minister” actually means a person who performs a ritual liturgical service or simply a liturgist.

Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF) Volume VII has a section for the early liturgies of the Church including the Liturgy of St. Mark’s and that of Saint James on pages 529-572.

4. **THE EARLY CHURCH HAD SET OBLIGATORY FASTS:**

a. The Bible tells us so:

Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them ... (ACT 27:9)

The Book of Acts tells us that “*sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past*” This “fast” that the Book of Acts simply refers to as “*the fast*” is none other than holy Lent which was observed in the church at the time of the Apostle Paul’s journey by sea to Rome.

b. The Fathers tell us so:

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE PHILIPPIANS ANF Vol I page 119

Despise not the period of forty days, for it comprises an imitation of the conduct of the Lord. ... do not neglect to fast on the fourth and sixth days, distributing at the same time of thine abundance to the poor. If any one fasts on the Lord's Day or on the Sabbath, except on the paschal Sabbath only, he is a murderer of Christ.

Saint Ignatius, the bishop and martyr writes to the Philippians on his way to be thrown to the beasts in Rome, not only about Lent, but also about the fast of Wednesday and Friday. Fasting was not permitted on Saturday or Sunday, except on Great Saturday.

THE CANONS OF THE BLESSED PETER, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA, AND MARTYR Nicene/Post Nicene, series II, Volume XIV page 601 CANON XV.

Wednesday is to be **fasted**, because then the Jews conspired to betray Jesus; Friday, because he then suffered for us. We keep the Lord's Day as a day of joy, because then our Lord rose. Our tradition is, not to kneel on that day.

Wednesday and Friday fasts were often referred to as the “Stations”, as we see here:

Similarly, too, touching the days of **Stations**, most think that they must not be present at the sacrificial prayers, on the ground that the **Station** must be dissolved by reception of the Lord's Body. Does, then, the Eucharist cancel a service devoted to God, or bind it more to God? Will not your **Station** be more solemn if you have withal stood at God's altar? When the Lord's Body has been received and reserved.

In this treatise on repentance, Tertullian answers some objections by some people, who thought that if you are fasting (on Wednesday or Friday) and then attend a Liturgy and have communion, you can break your fast. Note how he speaks about "God's altar" and receiving "the Lord's Body". Tertullian continues further by saying: (page 689)

We, however (just as we have received), only on the day of the Lord's Resurrection ought to guard not only against kneeling, but every posture and office of solicitude; deferring even our businesses lest we give any place to the devil. Similarly, too, in the period of Pentecost; which period we distinguish by the same solemnity of exultation. But who would hesitate every day to prostrate himself before God, at least in the first prayer with which we enter on the daylight? At **fasts**, moreover, and **Stations**, no prayer should be made without kneeling.

Tertullian is explaining another custom of the church in his time: that of not kneeling at prayer on Sundays and the fifty days of Pentecost. He then adds that at "fasts" and "Stations" no prayer should be made without kneeling. Note that he says "fasts" in the plural, denoting that the church had more than one fast besides Wednesday and Friday.

Besides abstaining from food till the ninth hour (3 pm) the early Christians ate a vegetarian diet. This abstention from certain foods during a fast is referred to as **Xerophagy**. Some early Christians, called "Psychics", raised some opposition saying that this is an innovation, not sanctioned by the Lord, and not needed for our spiritual struggle. To them, Tertullian wrote:

[The Jews] whom, by their regretful hankering after flesh, and their recollection of their Egyptian plenties, they were ever exacerbating: "Who shall feed us with flesh? there have come into our mind the fish which in Egypt we were wont to eat freely, and the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic. But now our soul is arid nought save manna do our eyes see!" Thus used they, too, (like the Psychics), to find the angelic bread of xerophagy displeasing: they preferred the fragrance of garlic and onion to that of heaven. And therefore from men so ungrateful all that was more pleasing and appetizing was withdrawn, for the sake at once of punishing gluttony and exercising continence, that the former might be condemned, the latter practically learned.

Tertullian notes that Saint Paul tells us of the many fasts he had:

I think, moreover, that the apostle too, in the Second of Corinthians, among his labours, and perils, and hardships, after "hunger and thirst," enumerates "fasts" also "very many".

Then, returning to Xerophagy or avoiding rich foods during fasts, he adds: (page 107)

Daniel and his brethren, preferring as they did a diet of vegetables and the beverage of water to the royal dishes and decanters, and being found as they were therefore "more handsome" (lest any be apprehensive on the score of his paltry body, to boot!), sides being spiritually cultured into the bargain.

Tertullian goes back to another instance of fasting recorded for us in the Book of Daniel: (page 107)

"In those days," he says, "I Daniel was mourning during three weeks: pleasant bread I ate not; flesh and wine entered not into my mouth; with oil I was not anointed; until three weeks were consummated:" which being elapsed, an angel was sent out (from

God), addressing him on this wise: "Daniel, thou art a man pitiable; fear not: since, from the first day on which thou gavest thy soul to recogitation and to humiliation before God, thy word hath been heard, and I am entered at thy word." Thus the "pitiable" spectacle and the humiliation of xerophagies expel fear, and attract the ears of God, and make men masters of secrets.

Commenting on these writings of Tertullian, the editor of ANF writes:

In our age of an entire relaxation of discipline, the enthusiast (Tertullian) may nevertheless awaken us, perhaps, to honest self-examination as to our manner of life, in view of the example of Christ and His apostles, and their holy precepts. (Page 114)

Note that the editor considers this way of fasting which is preserved in our church as the practice and "holy precepts" of the apostles. The editor then adds this: (page 115)

Think of our Master's fast among the wild beasts! Let us condescend to go back to Clement, to Origen, and to Tertullian to learn the practical laws of the Gospel against avarice, luxury, and "the deceitfulness of sin." I am emboldened to say this by some remarkable words which I find, to my surprise, thrown out in a scientific work proceeding from Harvard University. It is with exceeding gratitude that I quote as follows: "It is well to go away at times, that we may see another aspect of human life which still survives in the East, and to feel that influence which led even the Christ into the wilderness to prepare for the struggle with the animal nature of man. We need something of the experience of the Anchorites of Egypt, to impress us with the great truth that the distinction between the spiritual and the material remains broad and clear, even if with the scalpel of our modern philosophy we cannot completely dissect the two; and this experience will give us courage to cherish our aspirations, keep bright our hopes, and hold fast our Christian faith until the consummation comes."

5. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD SET FEASTS:

a. The Bible tells us so:

But [Paul] bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this **feast** that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. (ACT 18:21)

The feast St. Paul refers to here must be Easter, the feast of the resurrection of the Lord, which dates to the time of the apostles.

For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. (ACT 20:16)

But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. (1CO 16:8)

These two verses tell us that the church even at the time of the writing of First Corinthians (around the middle of the first century) celebrated Pentecost.

b. The Fathers tell us so:

THE EPISTLE OF IGNATIUS TO THE PHILIPPIANS ANF Vol I page 119

Do not lightly esteem the festivals.

Even around the year 107 (when this Epistle was written), the church had set festivals that the faithful were exhorted to regard highly.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: THE INSTRUCTOR (end of 2nd century)
ANF Vol II page 243

Those who are already advanced in life may partake more cheerfully of the draught, to warm by the harmless medicine of the vine the chill of age, which the decay of time has produced. For old men's passions are not, for the most part, stirred to such agitation as to drive them to the shipwreck of drunkenness. For being moored by reason and time, as by anchors, they stand with

greater ease the storm of passions which rushes down from intemperance. They also may be permitted to indulge in pleasantries at **feasts**. But to them also let the limit of their potations be the point up to which they keep their reason unwavering, their memory active, and their body unmoved and unshaken by wine.

Clement's book "The Instructor" is the first book to be written about Christian ethics. In this section about drinking wine, he gives permission to older people to drink it judiciously, especially at feasts.

METHODIUS: ORATION ON THE PALMS: ANF Vol VI page 394

Come then, beloved, and let us, too, with prepared hearts, and with ears intent, listen to what the Lord our God shall say unto us out of the prophets and Gospels concerning this most sacred **feast**. ... Let us all come together cheerfully; let us all receive Him gladly, and hold our **feast**¹ with all honesty. Instead of our garments, let us strew our hearts before Him. In psalms and hymns, let us raise to Him our shouts of thanksgiving; and, without ceasing, let us exclaim, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

CONSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY APOSTLES. BOOK III-V ANF Vol VII page 443

Brethren, observe the **festival days**; and first of all the **birthday** which you are to celebrate on the twenty-fifth of the ninth month; after which let the **Epiphany** be to you the most honoured, in which the Lord made to you a display of His own Godhead, and let it take place on the sixth of the tenth month.

Here is mention of Christmas and Epiphany in a document from the first century.

¹Saint Methodius lived in the third century. He wrote this sermon on the occasion of Palm Sunday, which he calls a "most sacred feast"

All who worthily observe the festival of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, acquire as their meet recompense the fuller interest in the message, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured!" It is our duty, therefore, to keep this **feast**, seeing that it has filled the whole world with joy and gladness. And let us keep it with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.

Feasts of the martyrs:

The Early Church paid a lot of attention to the relics of the martyrs and from the earliest times, the faithful held annual memorial for them. The Book of Acts tells us that after Stephen was martyred, "And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him." (Ac 8:2)

THE MARTYRDOM OF IGNATIUS (AD 107) ANF Vol I page 131

He was thus cast to the wild beasts close, beside the temple, that so by them the desire of the holy martyr Ignatius should be fulfilled, according to that which is written, "The desire of the righteous is acceptable [to God]," to the effect that he might not be troublesome to any of the brethren by the gathering of his remains, even as he had in his Epistle expressed a wish beforehand that so his end might be. For only the harder portions of his holy remains were left, which were conveyed to Antioch and wrapped in linen, as an inestimable treasure left to the holy Church by the grace which was in the martyr. ... and now we have made known to you both the day and the time [when these things happened], that, assembling ourselves together according to the time of his martyrdom, we may have fellowship with the champion and noble martyr of Christ, who trode under foot the devil, and perfected the course which, out of love to Christ, he had desired.

This noble bishop of Antioch was martyred in the year 107 AD. The story of his martyrdom was written by eyewitnesses. Note that even

though a few of his remains were left, they were esteemed by the faithful as a treasure. The writers of the account tell the rest of the Christians why they wrote the story including the day and time of his martyrdom, “*that, assembling ourselves together according to the time of his martyrdom, we may have fellowship with the champion and noble martyr of Christ.*” This is the earliest record of having an annual commemoration for a martyr.

The clearest indication of this ancient custom of the Church comes from the writings of the North African bishop Cyprian, who himself died as a martyr in the year 258 AD.

CYPRIAN¹: EPISTLE XXXIII ANF Vol V page 313

Laurentius and Egnatius, who themselves also were once warring in the camps of the world, but were true and spiritual soldiers of God, casting down the devil by the confession of Christ, merited palms and crowns from the Lord by their illustrious passion. We always offer sacrifices for them, as you remember, as often as we celebrate the passions and days of the martyrs in the **annual commemoration.**²

6. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD SET TIMES FOR PRAYER

a. The Bible tells us so:

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. (ACT 3:1)

On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. (ACT 10:9)

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. (ACT 16:25)

¹St. Cyprian became bishop of Carthage in North Africa in 248

²Instance of “offering sacrifices” (Eucharist) and annual commemoration of the saints circa A.D. 250

b. The Fathers tell us so:

TERTULLIAN: ON PRAYER ANF Vol III page 689

Touching the time, however, the extrinsic observance of certain hours will not be unprofitable--those common hours, I mean, which mark the intervals of the day--the third, the sixth, the ninth--which we may find in the Scriptures to have been more solemn than the rest. The first infusion of the Holy Spirit into the congregated disciples took place at "the third hour." Peter, on the day on which he experienced the vision of Universal Community, (exhibited) in that small vessel, had ascended into the more lofty parts of the house, for prayer's sake "at the sixth hour." The same (apostle) was going into the temple, with John, at the ninth hour," when he restored the paralytic to his health. Albeit these practices stand simply without any precept for their observance, still it may be granted a good thing to establish some definite presumption, which may both add stringency to the admonition to, pray, and may, as it were by a law, tear us out from our businesses unto such a duty; so that--what we read to have been observed by Daniel also, in accordance (of course) with Israel's discipline--we pray at least not less than thrice in the day, debtors as we are to Three--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: of course, in addition to our regular prayers which are due, without any admonition, on the entrance of light and of night. But, withal, it becomes believers not to take food, and not to go to the bath, before interposing a prayer; for the refreshments and nourishments of the spirit are to be held prior to those of the flesh, and things heavenly prior to things earthly.

Tertullian here recognizes the third, sixth and ninth hours, in addition to the morning and evening prayers. He also admonishes us to pray before eating, and even before we go to the bathroom!

CYPRIAN: TREATISE IV : ON THE LORD'S PRAYER ANF Vol V page 457

For upon the disciples at the third hour the Holy Spirit descended, who fulfilled the grace of the Lord's promise.

Moreover, at the sixth hour, Peter, going up unto the house-top, was instructed as well by the sign as by the word of God admonishing him to receive all to the grace of salvation, whereas he was previously doubtful of the receiving of the Gentiles to baptism. And from the sixth hour to the ninth, the Lord, being crucified, washed away our sins by His blood; and that He might redeem and quicken us, He then accomplished His victory by His passion. ... we must also pray in the morning, that the Lord's resurrection may be celebrated by morning prayer. ... Let not us, then, who are in Christ--that is, always in the lights cease from praying even during night. Thus the widow Anna, without intermission praying and watching, persevered in deserving well of God, as it is written in the Gospel: "She departed not," it says, "from the temple, serving with fastings and prayers night and day."

7. THE EARLY CHURCH PRACTISED THE SIGN OF THE CROSS:

Although the Bible does not mention the sign of the Cross specifically, yet many passages allude to it, as in the morning Psalm of Tut 17 (the feast of the exaltation of the Cross): "Thou hast given a sign to them that fear thee, that they may flee from the face of the bow: That thy beloved ones may be delivered." (Translated from Coptic)

The Fathers, however, preserve for us the antiquity of this custom in the Church, which they simply refer to as "the sign":

TERTULLIAN: THE CHAPLET ANF Vol III page 94

At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign.

Saint Hippolytus¹ says the same, almost word for word: (page 103)

¹Saint Hippolytus was a disciple of Clement of Alexandria, together with Origen. His Feast day is February 12 (Meshir 5)

In all the ordinary occasions of life we furrow our foreheads with the sign of the Cross, in which we glory none the less because it is regarded as our shame by the heathen in presence of whom it is a profession of our faith.

8. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD MYSTERIES (SACRAMENTS):

The word Sacrament is taken from the Latin *sacramentum*, which is a translation of the Greek *mysterion* or mystery. The Bible speaks of mysteries as we shall see from these quotations:

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 1 Co 4:1

Here Saint Paul tells us that people should think of him and his fellow apostles not only as ministers or servants of God but as stewards (persons entrusted with administering) the mysteries or sacraments of God.

This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Eph 5:32

Here Saint Paul describes marriage as a “great mystery” but he tells us that the greatness of this mystery or sacrament lies in the fact that it is actually a mirror image to the relationship of Christ and the Church.

The Fathers of the church from beginning, spoke freely of the sacraments of the Church as we shall see from the following examples:

The early church writers had lots to say about sacraments:

Tertullian: On Baptism ANF Vol III page 669

HAPPY is our **sacrament of water**, in that, by washing away the sins of our early blindness, we are set free and admitted into eternal life!

Tertullian describes Baptism as “the sacrament of water” as a means for washing away the sins and admittance to eternal life.

Let us beware of such dangerous temptations of pride, and let us rather consider the fact that the Apostle Paul himself, although stricken down and admonished by the voice of God from heaven, was yet sent to a man to receive the **sacraments** and be admitted into the Church; and that Cornelius the centurion, although an angel announced to him that his prayers were heard and his alms had in remembrance, was yet handed over to Peter for instruction, and not only received the **sacraments** from the apostle's hands, but was also instructed by him as to the proper objects of faith, hope, and love. And without doubt it was possible to have done everything through the instrumentality of angels, but the condition of our race would have been much more degraded if God had not chosen to make use of men as the ministers of His word to their fellow-men.

That God has in His infinite wisdom decreed that the sacraments are to be administered by the “stewards of His sacraments” is made evident to us by Saint Augustin, with strong Biblical proofs. For though Saint Paul was called by Christ Who appeared to him personally, he had to receive the sacraments from a fellow servant Ananias (Act 9:10-18). The same happened to Cornelius to whom an angel spoke.

ST. CYRIL OF JERUSALEM: CATECHETICAL LECTURES

LECTURE XXI. :ON CHRISM.

NICENE/POSTNICENE FATHERS SERIES II VOL VII page 150

For as the Bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Ghost, is mere bread no longer, but the Body of Christ, so also this holy ointment is no more simple ointment, nor (so to say) common, after invocation, but it is Christ's gift of grace, and, by the advent of the Holy Ghost, is made fit to impart His Divine Nature. Which ointment is symbolically applied to thy forehead and thy other senses; and while thy body is anointed with the visible ointment, thy soul is sanctified by the Holy and life-giving Spirit.

Here Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (one of the 318 assembled at Nicea) instructs catechumens in the sacrament of Chrismation.

TERTULLIAN: THE CHAPLET ANF VOL III page 94

We take also, in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the **sacrament of the Eucharist**, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike.

Here Tertullian refers to the sacrament of the Eucharist which the early Christians partook of and which he describes as commanded by the Lord. He tells us that the Eucharist is to be taken from the hands of “*none but the presidents*” (the clergy presiding at the Liturgy of the Eucharist)

SAINT AUGUSTIN: THE SEVEN BOOKS AGAINST THE DONATISTS, BOOK V
NICENE/POST NICENE FATHERS SERIES I Vol IV page 474

Wherefore God gives the **sacrament of grace** even through the hands of wicked men, but the grace itself only by Himself or through His saints. And therefore He gives remission of sins either of Himself, or through the members of that dove to whom He says, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

Saint Augustin refers to the Sacrament of confession as the “sacrament of grace” and further teaches that forgiveness of sins can be given even at the hands of a wicked man, since the grace comes from God.

SAINT AMBROSE: ON REPENTANCE

NICENE/POST NICENE FATHERS SERIES II Vol X page 331

You who make a distinction between sins, some of which you consider that you can loose, and others which you consider to be without remedy. But God does not make a distinction, Who has promised His mercy to all, and granted to His priests the power of loosing without any exception.

Writing to the Novatians who taught that there were some sins that could not be forgiven by the priests, Saint Ambrose corrects them by saying that God granted the priests the power to forgive all sins.

JOHN CASSIAN AGAINST NESTORIUS, BOOK VI CHAPTER XVIII.

N/PNF SERIES II VOL XI page 600

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION IS NECESSARY FOR THE LAPSED FOR THEIR SALVATION.

Acknowledge the sacraments of your salvation, by which you were initiated and regenerated. They are of no less use to you now than they were then; for they can now regenerate you by penance, as they then gave you birth through the Font.

In his argument with Nestorius the heretic, John Cassian speaks of the Sacrament of Confession as the “sacrament of reconciliation”. He compares the Sacrament of Baptism as the one that gives us new birth “through the font” and the Sacrament of Confession that “regenerates us through penance”. He considers both as “sacraments of our salvation” or sacraments necessary for salvation. These are the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, Confession and Communion. The other three sacraments of anointing of the sick, marriage and holy orders are not considered necessary for salvation. For one can be saved without being married, being sick or being ordained!

SAINT AUGUSTIN :ON VIRGINITY

N/PNF SERIES I Vol III page 420

Let marriages possess their own good, not that they beget sons, but that honestly, that lawfully, that modestly, that in a spirit of fellowship they beget them, and educate them, after they have been begotten, with cooperation, with wholesome teaching, and earnest purpose: in that they keep the faith of the couch one with another; in that they violate not the **sacrament of wedlock**.

SAINT AUGUSTIN: On Marriage Chapter 11: THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE

N/PNF SERIES I Vol V page 268

It is certainly not fecundity only, the fruit of which consists of offspring, nor chastity only, whose bond is fidelity, but also a

certain **sacramental bond** in marriage which is recommended to believers in wedlock. Accordingly it is en-joined by the apostle: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church.”

In these two excerpts from Saint Augustin’s writings, he defends marriage as a sacrament in its own right and not only as a means of fecundity or having children. He argues for a sacramental bond in marriage in which the love between husband and wife is an image of the love between Christ and the Church.

JOHN CASSIAN: THE FIRST CONFERENCE OF ABBOT THEONAS CHAPTER IX
N/PNF SERIES II VOL XI page 507

For I acknowledge and honour my helpmeet assigned to me by the word of the Lord, and I do not refuse to be joined to her in an unbroken tie of love in Christ, nor do I separate from me what the Lord joined to me by the law of the original condition, if only you yourself will be what your Maker meant you to be. But if you will not be a helpmeet, but prefer to make yourself a deceiver and an assistance not to me but to the adversary, and fancy that the **sacrament of matrimony** was granted to you for this reason that you may deprive yourself of this salvation which is offered to you, and also hold me back from following the Saviour as a disciple, then I will resolutely lay hold on the words which were uttered by the lips of Abbot John, or rather of Christ Himself, so that no carnal affection may be able to tear me away from spiritual blessings, for He says: “He that hateth not father and mother and children and brothers and sisters and wife and lands, yea and his own soul also, cannot be My disciple.”

Here, John Cassian, quoting one of the Fathers of the Egyptian desert in his famous book “The Conferences”, gives us a rare glimpse into the Coptic Church’s belief about matrimony in the latter part of the fifth century. The marital union is described as an “unbroken tie of love in Christ” It is declared as the “Sacrament of Matrimony” without any hint of ambiguity. The passage however confirms that if marriage becomes a hindrance to one’s own salvation, then one has to prefer the love of God to any human love.

SAINT AUGUSTIN: ON THE GOOD OF MARRIAGE

N/PNF SERIES I VOL III page 408

Forsooth in the marriage of one woman the sanctity of the **Sacrament** is of more avail than the fruitfulness of the womb.

Here Saint Augustin argues against those who advocate re-marriage if the wife is barren by saying the sanctity of the Sacrament is more important than having children.

SAINT AUGUSTIN: ON THE GOOD OF MARRIAGE

N/PNF SERIES I VOL III page 412

In like manner as if there take place an ordination of clergy in order to form a congregation of people, although the congregation of people follow not, yet there remains in the ordained persons the **Sacrament of Ordination**; and if, for any fault, any be removed from his office, he will not be without the Sacrament of the Lord once for all set upon him, albeit continuing unto condemnation.

In this important reference to the Sacrament of Holy Orders (ordination), Saint Augustin reminds us that the gifts of God are “once and for all” An ordained person can be defrocked but he does not lose the sacrament given to him by God, even if he perishes in his sin.

SAINT AUGUSTIN: THE CITY OF GOD BOOK XXII CHAPTER 8

N/PNF SERIES I-VOL II page 485

For even now miracles are wrought in the name of Christ, whether by His **sacraments** or by the prayers or relics of His saints.

Saint Augustin tells us that in his time miracles (of cures) were wrought in the name of Christ. These cures were done either through the Sacraments (a reference to the Sacrament of the anointing of the sick) or through the intercessions of the saints or through their relics.

The reference to miracles wrought through the intercession of the saints and their relics is very interesting. This is proof that the early church esteemed the intercession of the saints as well as their relics.

9. THE EARLY CHURCH HAD APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION:

The Apostles went on to preach the Gospel, and wherever they went, they ordained **Bishops, Priests, and Deacons**. They did this by **laying their hands** on them. The Bible has many examples of this ordination by the laying-on of hands of the Apostles:

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and **laid their hands on them**, they sent them away. (ACT 13:2-3).

Paul and Barnabas were **ordained by the laying-on of the hands** after they were **called** by the Holy Spirit to the ministry. Later on, Paul and Barnabas would do the same, ordaining **Priests** (called Elders in KJV) by **laying on their hands on them**.

And when they had **ordained** them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. (ACT 14:23).

St. Paul ordained two of his disciples as **Bishops**, these are Timothy and Titus. He reminds Timothy of this saying: “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the **putting on of my hands**.” (2TI 1:6)

He admonishes Timothy to do the same by choosing persons that are suitable for ordination:

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.(2TI 2:2)

He warns him however not to ordain any person hastily, since he will be responsible for the actions of those on whom he lays his hands: “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.” (1TI 5:22).

He writes to Titus, his disciple, and now Bishop of the Mediterranean Island of Crete:

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee. (TIT 1:5)

The same happened with the other Apostles, they ordained Bishops and Priests and gave the Bishops authority to ordain other Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In a very short time, this three tiered system of the clergy was established in every Apostolic church through the tradition of **Apostolic Succession**. This is obvious in many passages in the Bible:

Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. (PHI 1:1)

The ancient writers of the Church considered this Apostolic succession as the only proof of orthodoxy:

TERTULLIAN: THE PRESCRIPTION AGAINST HERETICS

ANF VOL III page 252

Since the Lord Jesus Christ sent the apostles to preach, (our rule is) that no others ought to be received as preachers than those whom Christ appointed; for “no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.” Nor does the Son seem to have revealed Him to any other than the apostles, whom He sent forth to preach--that, of course, which He revealed to them. Now, what that was which they preached--in other words, what it was which Christ revealed to them--can, as I must here likewise prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles founded in person, by declaring the gospel to them directly themselves, both by mouth, and subsequently by their epistles. If, then, these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that all doctrine which agrees with the **apostolic churches**--those moulds and original sources of the faith must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly containing that which the (said) churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God.

Tertullian continues his argument that only the churches that have this valid apostolic succession have the truth, by challenging the heretics to produce the records that proof their apostolic succession: (page 258)

But if there be any (heresies) which are bold enough to plant themselves in the midst Of the apostolic age, that they may thereby seem to have been handed down by the apostles, because they existed in the time of the apostles, we can say: Let them produce the original records of their churches; let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner that [that first bishop of theirs] shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men,--a man, moreover, who continued steadfast with the apostles. For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers.

Apostolic churches kept a register of all of their bishops showing that their first bishop was ordained by an apostle. Our church has such a register that starts with Saint Anianus our first bishop, who was ordained by Saint Marc the apostle.

10. THE EARLY CHURCH BELIEVED IN HOLY TRADITION:

The church started through the preaching of the Apostles. The Apostles not only deposited into the churches they established the faith in the Trinity and the salvation through the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord, but also gave them traditions and ordinances. These traditions and ordinances were not all written, but some were given as oral traditions: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the **traditions** which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” (II Th 2:15) These traditions were not invented by St. Paul, but he had received them from the Lord, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.” (1 Cor 11:23)

St. Paul praised the Corinthians for keeping the ordinances he delivered to them, “Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” (1 Cor 11:2) He tells them that those who rebel against these traditions are going against the “custom of the churches of God,” “But if any man

seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” (1 Cor 11:16) He even commands the faithful to avoid those who despise the tradition he delivered to them:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the **tradition** which he received of us. (II Th 3:6)

The early writers of the church defended the traditions they received from the Apostles, and which the Apostles received from the Lord. Here are some samples:

IRENÆUS¹ AGAINST HERESIES -- BOOK III (circa 180 a.d.)
APOSTOLIC CHURCHES POSSESS THE TRUTH, THEY DO NOT NEED
OPINIONS OF OTHERS ANF VOL I page 416

Since the apostles, like a rich man depositing his money in a bank, lodged in the church's hands most copiously all things pertaining to the truth: so that every man, whosoever will, can draw from her the water of life. For she is the entrance to life; all others are thieves and robbers. On this account are we bound to avoid them, but to make choice of the thing pertaining to the Church with the utmost diligence, **and to lay hold of the tradition of the truth.** ... Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, in that case, to **follow the course of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the Churches?**

¹Irenaeus was a disciple of Polycarp, born 130 a.d. became bishop of Lyons 177 a.d. Polycarp was a disciple of John, he is the “Angel of the church of Smyrna” (Rev 2:8) What Irenaeus writes here, he received from Polycarp, who received from John, who was “the disciple whom Jesus loved”

If no passage of Scripture has prescribed it, assuredly custom, which without doubt flowed from tradition, has confirmed it. For how can anything come into use, if it has not first been handed down? Even in pleading tradition, written authority, you say, must be demanded. Let us inquire, therefore, whether tradition, unless it be written, should not be admitted. Certainly we shall say that it ought not to be admitted, if no cases of other practices which, without any written instrument, we maintain on the ground of tradition alone, and the countenance thereafter of custom, affords us any precedent.

When we are going to enter the water(to be baptized), but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the Gospel.

We take also (communion), in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the Eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at meal-times, and enjoined to be taken by all alike. As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honours¹.

We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord's day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to Whitsunday. We feel pained should any wine or bread, even though our own, be cast upon the ground.

At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign(of the cross).

If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held

¹Here is mention of the custom of making offering (of the Eucharist) on the anniversary of the death of loved ones

forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer.

THE CANONICAL EPISTLE OF PETER, ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA (Saint Peter Seal of the Martyrs) ANF Volume VI page 278

No one shall find fault with us for observing the fourth day of the week, (Wednesday) and the preparation, (Friday) on which it is reasonably enjoined us to fast **according to the tradition**. On the fourth day, indeed, because on it the Jews took counsel for the betrayal of the Lord; and on the sixth, because on it He himself suffered for us. But the Lord's day we celebrate as a day of joy, because on it He rose again, on which day we have received it for a custom not even to bow the knee.

FRAGMENTS FROM THE WRITINGS OF PETER ARCHBISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA ANTE NICENE FATHERS VOLUME VI page 282

And not as some who, carried along by ignorance, confidently affirm that after He had eaten the Passover, He was betrayed; which we neither learn from the holy evangelists, **nor has any of the blessed apostles handed it down to us**.

In these two passages, Saint Peter, Pope and seal of the martyrs, here tells us that fasting on Wednesday and Friday, as well as not bending the knees on Sunday are old customs in the church **according to the tradition**. Neither of these were mentioned in the Bible but were universally accepted in the Church on the authority of **received unwritten tradition**.

He also argues another point of interpretation of the gospel by the fact that “we neither learn from the holy evangelists, nor has any of the blessed apostles handed it down to us.”

SAINT ATHANASIUS THE APOSTOLIC: FESTAL LETTER XXXIX
(NICENE/POST NICENE, SERIES II, VOLUME XIV page 603)

As the heretics are quoting apocryphal writings, an evil which was rife even as early as when St. Luke wrote his gospel, therefore I have thought good to set forth clearly what books have been

received by us through tradition as belonging to the Canon, and which we believe to be divine. (*Here Saint Athanasius gives a list of the Books of the Old and New Testament that are canonical*)

Saint Athanasius here tells us that even the canon of the Bible (the list that tells us which books are canonical) was **“received by us through tradition”**

COMMENTARY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, Homily XLV (Acts 20) Nicene/Post Nicene, series I Vol XI page 274

For, “remember,” he says, “the words of the Lord which he spake: It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And where said He this? **Perhaps the Apostles delivered it by unwritten tradition.**

In St. Paul’s speech to the elders of the Church of Ephesus recorded to us in Acts 20: 18-35, he exhorts them to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Ac 20:35). No where in the Gospels do we find this saying. St. John Chrysostom argues that this could have been delivered by the apostles as an **unwritten tradition.**

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