They Hold Our Doctrine:
Women in Cultic Leadership from the time of Christ to the First Council of Nicaea

Deborah Suddard

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Abstract

This paper explores the history of named women in cultic leadership across Hebraic, early Christian and pagan worship traditions, from the first century of the Common Era to the First Council of Nicaea, showing that women in cultic leadership were not uncommon. It will review the terminology familiar to modern Christian liturgical leadership, tracing how those terms were first used and how they developed from descriptions of leadership roles into titles. It will also look at how women in cultic leadership were restricted as early as the end of the first century, coinciding with the development of ecclesiastical structure and the formalizing of cultic leadership. Evidence will be found in grave markings, statuary, artwork, canonical and extra-canonical letters, and the early attempts to standardize Christian liturgical offices.

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Chapter 1

Framing the Question

Christianity did not start two thousand years ago in a vacuum. It started with people already disenchanted with their own belief systems, searching for something new to believe. It started within a geographical context where Hebraic, Greek and Roman cultures met on the shores of the Mediterranean. It started in a world of political upheaval where some wanted the status quo maintained while others fought their entire lives to change that status quo. It started with the theologies and philosophies prevalent throughout the Roman Empire.

Distinguishing between the actual historical development of the early Christian church and the 'traditional' assumptions of that historical development has become an ongoing challenge. The sparsity of evidence makes it tempting to read backwards through history, treating conjecture as fact in an attempt to fill the gaps. Nowhere does this practice of reconstructed history seem more evident than in discussions around the leadership of women in the first centuries.

The question of women in recognized liturgical leadership in the early centuries of the Christian church has been studied at length for more than forty years. An ever increasing body of evidence in the fields of anthropology and archeology has added to the theological discussion around the role of women in the earliest churches. When combined with the acceptance of the discipleship of women as shown by Jesus; the thanks given to his helpers by Paul; the epitaphs and inscriptions found on buildings, tombs and sculptures throughout the Mediterranean; and the already existing liturgical leadership offered by women in Hebraic and pagan cultures during the Roman Empire, an appreciable picture of the roles of women begins to emerge.

However, tradition tells otherwise. “Tradition" states that while the message of Christianity was inclusion for all, women were still excluded from any ritual or cultic leadership. Having internalized ancient philosophical thought about women, and justified it through theological arguments, tradition claims that the earliest Christian communities were only run by men and managed by men, with women given sideline responsibilities for the care of children and widows, and occasionally providing education and ritual assistance for other women. Tradition tells us women were not welcome in worship leadership in the early church.

Is this understanding of “tradition” historically accurate?

Challenges

While the information available for research has increased considerably in the last decades, we are still faced with a number of challenges. The first of those is the type and amount of evidence. We do not have the volume of documentation for the time

of the Roman Empire that we do for later historic periods. One reason is the material used to write letters and documents. It was costly to write and send letters, and writing was the domain of the elite. While many were taught to read, including slaves and freedmen and women, fewer were taught to write. Those who could were usually scribes employed or enslaved to write for their master or mistress, not themselves. As a result most of the letters and documents from the first centuries were written by men, and set firmly with a male point of view.[1]

To fill in the gaps left by lack of written evidence we turn to archeological evidence. Dorothy Irwin has catalogued numerous artifacts and murals demonstrating women in liturgical leadership in the first thousand years of Christianity, many in the years before the Council of Nicaea. Inscriptions can be found naming women who were acknowledged as priests, deacons and respected leaders in their church. Bernadette Brooten and Ute Eisen both looked at statuary, grave markers and frescos to chart not only women in liturgical leadership within Christianity, but in Brooten's work women within the Hebraic culture of the day. Brooten shows us that the synagogue tradition in the Roman Empire had many women in liturgical and organizational leadership. Further evidence can be found through the work of Ross Shepherd Kraemer who collected

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[1] Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009) 242-244; While women were writers, philosophers and artists, their education was limited and at the discretion of the male family member who had authority over their lives. Some saw education for women as a doorway to sexual impropriety. Others saw it as necessary for well- raised children. See the conversation in Chapter 2 about Teachers.

documents and letters by and about women in the first centuries, looking at those from the Hebraic, Christian and pagan traditions.[2] All of these writers will be explored in turn.

The second challenge is social class. Letters, statuary, legal documents, bills of sale, frescos and grave markings point to women who were possibly upper class, and independently wealthy, or at least enjoyed a great deal of freedom to make their own decisions. Women in the lower classes did not experience the same degree of economic privilege and would not have been able to leave behind a legacy of benevolence that would be etched in stone by her family or local community. In *Contra Celsum*, Origen gives us an historic snapshot of the typical Christian as seen by the pagan elites of the day, through Celsus' condemning words:

> '…But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly.' By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their [Christian] God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonourable and stupid, and only slaves, women and little children.[3]

This describes people who might not have been able to afford a monument after death.

However there is a caution in this assumption, which is that many freedwomen ran businesses, and might in fact have had more economic independence than upper class women, who were still stuck in a social structure that restricted their economic

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[2] Dorothy Irvin, *Calendars: The Archeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church: 2003-2007* (St Paul, Minnesota: Privately published); Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders In Early Christianity* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000); Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1992); Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, (Chico, California: Scholar's Press,1982)

[3] Henry Chadwick (translator). *Origen Contra Celsum, Book III.44,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) 158

independence. It is a fallacy to assume that financial independence reflected higher social status. While the two are related, there is no direct correlation.[4]

Our third challenge comes from the breadth of Christian worship practices in the nascent church. There was not one early church, and using the term in a singular sense is misleading. It is more accurate to refer to the 'early churches' in a plural form, to recognize the multiplicity of Christian beliefs and practices in the first three hundred years. Some were in communication with each other through teachers and leaders such as Priscilla and Paul, but for the most part early Christian communities were independent, choosing their own scriptures and calling their own people to liturgical leadership. Until the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, there had been no real effort to unite the Christian churches.[5] It is impossible to discern the number of different worshipping traditions that existed in the first centuries. Our only window is through the few apologists who spoke on behalf of their own Christian communities.

A fourth challenge is that of gender bias. There is a tendency to read the silences in the literature of the early churches as being filled by men, and the further removed the reader is from the historic culture in question, the more likely it is that that culture will be analyzed simplistically and compared to modern assumptions that include male dominance. To look at the question from the opposite perspective, there is little evidence of men named to the cultic leadership in the early churches. What scarce reference we

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[4] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of its First Century*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1999), 376

[5] Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Group, 1967) 129-131; Although the council was called for the less lofty reason of settling a theological argument between Bishop Alexander of Alexandria and his priest Arius before it destroyed the eastern Christian community, the outcome of this first ecumenical council gave a sense of universality when all but two bishops signed their agreement to the creed, the date for Easter, and the general rules of order that were to define the Christian church.

have to men in charge comes from the early writers about their own forms of ministry. Outside of these firsthand acknowledgements of authority, all other men named are in subordinate positions and identified as helpers, and are further restricted by location of the author and receiver of the letters. The First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians and the letters of Ignatius do list a few men by name, but none of them are referenced with cultic leadership, the exception being those letters of Ignatius written specifically to Polycarp. Paul had a limited number of men named. Barnabas was identified as an apostle, while Apollos and Timothy were acknowledged as deacons and missionaries. His most extensive listing of named male associates in the first generation of the early church was from Romans 16, which also included the most extensive listing of named female associates in the first generation of that early church, and that list was within the assumed expectation that the people named were those most familiar and most advantageous to Paul when he did eventually visit Rome.[6]

Unless it is clearly stated that those in cultic leadership and missionary ministries were men, there would be no reason to assume women were not amongst their ranks, as they had been since the earliest followers of Jesus.

The final challenge is the desire to find a correlation between the titles and roles used in the early churches and those used in the modern world.[7] This causes difficulty both for those arguing that women definitely held recognized, possibly ordained liturgical

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[6] Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 209

[7] In his book *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Gary Macy begins with a discussion of how the understanding of ordination changed substantially around the 12th century. While that topic is outside the scope of this paper, it does underscore the argument that liturgical leadership in the early church must be studied within its own context and not through the presumptions of modernity.

church offices and for those who argue against women in those positions. While the first century Biblical and extra-canonical writers used terms familiar to modernity as adjectives to identify those in leadership roles, it was not until the second century that those titles began to gain a solid noun-like definition of responsibility and a location within the hierarchy. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110 CE) in his letter to Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna is the first to give a defined reading of the three levels of clergy - bishop, priest and deacon,[8] and the primacy of the bishop in the community particularly when celebrating Eucharist.[9] These roles and job clarifications would not become standardized for the Christian community throughout the Roman Empire until the first Council of Nicaea, in 325 CE.[10]

Methodology

Using the principles of Historical Contextual analysis, this paper has used letters and archeological evidence as the primary sources of historic information. The letters of Paul found in the Christian Scriptures[11] were written within the first decades of the origins of the Christian church and were intended to address questions and concerns about the orthodoxy of the first Christian communities. The Gospels were written later

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[8] Kenneth J. Howell (translator), *Ignatius of Antioch & Polycarp of Smyrna* (Zanesville, Ohio: CHResources, 2009) 143

[9] Howell, 134

[10] Leo Donald Davis. *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787),* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 67

[11] For the purposes of this paper, the letters referenced as being part of the New Testament canon are those considered by the majority of scholars to come from Paul himself: Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1st Thessalonians, and Philemon. Colossians is also included for the passage 4:15, which speaks to Nympha supporting a church in her own home. While other epistles are occasionally referenced, they are not viewed as representations of Paul's ministerial relationships.

and were narrative in nature, and while they show us the person of Jesus and stories of his ministry, they are not reliably reflective of the lives and communities of faith of the first generations after Christ's resurrection.[12] The two qualifiable exceptions to this are The Book of Acts and the person of Mary Magdalene. While Acts is also narrative in nature and written decades after the Resurrection, there is a limited amount of cross-referencing with the letters of Paul and the people he encountered during his trips around the Mediterranean, which demands that it be included as a questionable source of historical accuracy. The Book of Acts is a better reflection of the attitudes at the end of the first century of Christian development, than a completely accurate account of the mid-first century.

Likewise the character of Mary Magdalene is cross-referenced through all four Gospels, appearing in a similar manner throughout. This frequency lends credence to the historicity of her story. While the story of Mary Magdalene still demands a 'hermeneutic of suspicion', the frequency with which her name appears in both canonical and non-canonical literature from the first centuries does suggest that a woman of wealth and status held a place of leadership with the followers of Jesus, and the post-resurrection church, and that Mary from Magdala is acknowledged to be that person.

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[12] It is important to acknowledge that theology and history do not always ask or answer the same questions. This paper is an attempt to highlight verifiable history only, not theological principle. Therefore part of the methodology used in this paper demands that resources written decades after the events they claim to have witnessed are challenged for their historical accuracy.

With the conditioned inclusion of Mary Magdalene, as outlined above, each of the examples given in this paper, of women in worship leadership for Gentile, Hebraic[13] and Christian communities, are women who have been recorded in history by name. Although it is changing, the discussion of women in the early Christian leadership has often kept women nameless and thus easily theoretical. Naming the women identified in this paper provides an added layer of historical authenticity.[14] The women named in this paper lived in the first four centuries of the Common Era, and in each case some personal information has been preserved, even if that information is only the title they held within their communities.

Restricting this paper to named women from the first decades of the Christian church up to the First Council of Nicaea (c. 30-325 CE), along with their leadership descriptions or titles, limits the amount and types of evidence presented. This is a deliberate choice and strengthens the argument that real women held real positions in, and contributed to, the development of Christianity. It is the position of this paper that there is a firm dividing line between the nature of the early churches before the First Council of Nicaea and the church that emerged following this First Council.

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[13] Risa Levitte Kohn and Rebecca Moore, *A Portable God* (Lanham, Maryland: The Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 57-63. Throughout this paper I purposely use the terms “Hebraic”, “Hebraic tradition” and “Hebraic culture” as opposed to ‘Jewish’ because I am convinced by the argument proposed in *A Portable God*, that Judaism and Christianity are sister faiths who emerged together from a shared Hebraic heritage. Once of age, they developed independently; however, their connection should not be seen as supercessionism. The authors continue to argue that Judean is a far better translation of “*Ioudais*”, as even the concept of religions that would be used to distinguish Judaism from other religious practices of the day does not emerge in Western thought until the third or fourth centuries of the Common Era.

[14] For a longer discussion about the significance of names, naming and forced anonymity see Falk, A. “Identity and Name Changes” *in Psychoanalytic Review, 62*(Winter 1975), 647; and Michal Rom & Orly Benjamin, *Feminism, family, and identity in Israel: women’s marital names* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

The only exception to the date restriction is the priest Marin of Tell el-Yahudiyyeh, who died in 28 BCE, included to lend support to the argument that women were actively involved in Hebraic worship leadership a century before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, and continued their positions of leadership into the resulting diaspora.[15]

There is considerably more evidence of named women and the positions they held in the centuries following the first ecumenical councils, as well as uncredited pictorial evidence supporting the worship leadership of women in the first centuries of the Christian church. Paul includes additional women in his letters, as did the writer of The Book of Acts, however these women are not given identifiable roles within their wider Christian community. Liturgists, archeologists, biblical scholars and historians like Bernadette Brooten, Dorothy Irvin, Mary Shaefer, Teresa Berger, Carolyn Osiek and Ross Shepherd Kraemer, have worked to identify women in Christian leadership throughout the history of the church, and this paper will explore their research in turn. Women in ministry after the first Council of Nicaea is beyond the scope of this paper.

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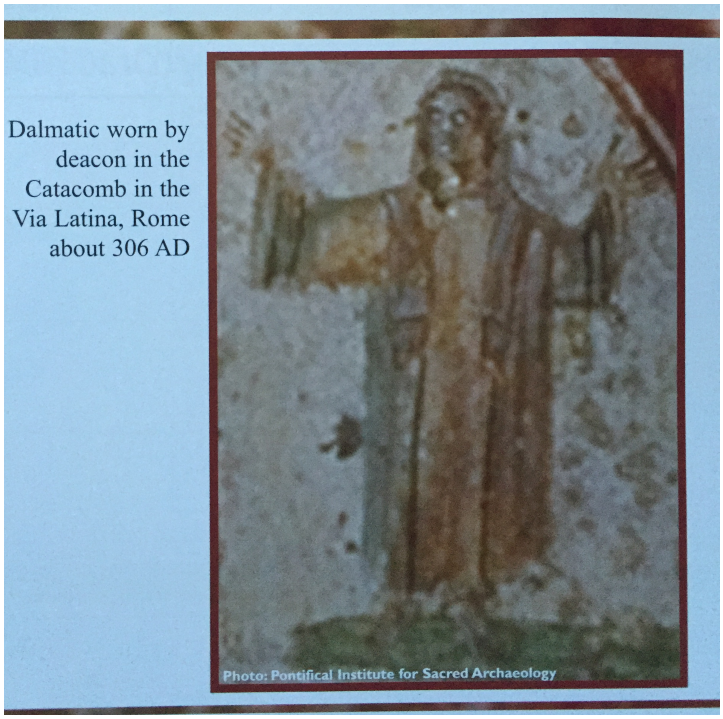
[15] For a longer discussion on the continuation of women in leadership in the synagogues past the destruction of the Second Temple, see Carrie Duncan, (2012). Inscribing Authority: Female Title Bearers in Jewish Inscriptions. *Religions, 3*(1), 37-49



An example of pictorial evidence of unidentified women in the first centuries of Christian leadership, showing a woman with her arms outstretched in the Orans position. This was a common stance and motif representing priestly actions.[16]

[16] Dorothy Irvin, *Calendars: The Archeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church: 2003-2007*

Chapter 2

Recognized Ministries in the Nascent Church

Before investigating examples of named women filling the roles of leadership and authority in the earliest centuries of the Christian church, a more thorough examination of the various recognized ministries and their practical application is necessary. The earliest communities in the Christian scriptures named a number of offices, and many of the terms are still in use in the 21st century. However, it would be erroneous to assume the use of these terms today represents the way they were used in the first centuries. Each of these terms has been adapted over time, some rising to prominence due to location or community need, others waning in their importance. Cultural interpretation and denominational structure have also influenced how these terms are used in modern times.

Even today, terms such as ‘priest’ and ‘minister’, as well as ‘deacon’ and ‘elder’, are often used interchangeably in some Christian denominations, while other denominations have defined nuances for these terms of office and see them as having

very distinct responsibilities and authority within the wider Christian world. Acknowledging these significant, while often subtle, differences in modern usage of terms of Christian office helps create a framework for investigating what these terms meant in their original use.

In the first centuries, the terms bishop; deacon; apostle; teacher; minister; priest; and prophet were fluid terms describing the job required not the title held: adjectives as opposed to nouns. Some were borrowed from the wider Roman or Greek cultures of the day, some from the Hebraic religions tradition that was the primary liturgical influence of the earliest Christian communities, and some terms have origins so clouded in mystery that they could very well have been the invention of the first Christians who saw a need and decided to define it themselves.

The first Christians organized themselves into two distinct yet overlapping types of ministries: those who stayed within a community and those who traveled to evangelize. Those who stayed in one location eventually developed the roles of bishops and deacons, both roles having multiple people in a local congregation fulfilling the responsibilities. Deacons were primarily focused on the money and logistics of the community, while bishops held the responsibility of hospitality and directing the spiritual lives of the followers.

While those fulfilling localized offices focused on their own communities with passing interests in other centres of worship, apostles were primarily focused on traveling ministries and evangelism. These were the church planters, sometimes known

as teachers and prophets, rather than apostles, a term that quickly faded from use as the first generations of believers died.[17]

It is important to note that while these jobs were generally assumed to be either transient or localized, they were not strictly one or the other. The deacon Phoebe, travelled, while the teacher Prisca stayed for extended periods of time within three different churches that she helped establish.

It is also important to note that in the first generations of the Christian church, the most significant job for leaders was that of evangelism. Whether that role was identified as bishop, apostle or teacher, the church was focused foremost on spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, not on the role of presider of the rituals. This can be observed by the number of spiritual gifts recognized for educating, proclaiming and correcting the understanding and faith of believers and inquirers, compared with the references to rituals and worship gifts. While the initiation ritual of baptism and the communal meal of the breaking bread[18] were part of Christian worship from the beginning, their theology

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[17] Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2002), 336-339. Sandt and Flusser continue to suggest that bishops and deacons took greater roles around worship leadership and education as the itinerant ministries began to dwindle, arguing the rise of localized ministries was directly as a result of travelling ministries fading, rather than two ministries occupying the same place in church history. Thus the qualities of bishops and deacons were highlighted in *The Didache*. The two groups of bishops and deacons continued with multiple members in each designation, until the churches matured and one singular bishop retained that title, while their peers, the "council of elders/presbyters" became a mid-tier ministry, between teaching bishops and administrative deacons. These terms and the process of moving from a church of itinerant preachers to one of high levels of structure will be the topic of survey for chapter 2.

[18] The first historical appearance of the term "baptize/baptism" is found in 1 Corinthians 12:13. However the term "eucharist" does not appear until the beginning of the second century, and is taken from the Greek word '*eucharistia*', which means 'Thanksgiving'. Paul F. Bradshaw, "Eucharist", in J. G. Davies ed. *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 227.

and restriction were not highly developed until the 4th century.[19] Evangelism was the primary focus of the nascent church.

Apostles

The Greek term 'apostle' comes from the verb *apostello*, meaning "to be sent",[20] or "emissary".[21] Outside of early Christian literature, the term has most often been translated as 'envoy', or one sent with a specific message to deliver or information to collect. The term has been translated as apostle and messenger within the Christian scriptures, depending on translation.

John Bertron, in his essay on Apostles in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, traces the origin of the word 'apostle' from that of an adjective based on the Greek verb, "to send forth", or a descriptive for those being sent with a message by either the divine or someone significant. Later the word became a noun used in a limited manner for ships and freighters being sent with cargo, or navy fleets sent for military purposes. Eventually the term became identified with people who were recognized as messengers.[22]

There is also a potential connection with the Hebrew word for temple worker, the one sent out from Jerusalem to collect the temple payments, among other foreign

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[19] "*First Apology*, chapter 65", Denis Minns and Paul Parvis, (translators) *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 253-255; In the First Apology of Justin Martyr, the reference to 'sacraments' is in connection to the bread and blood alone. While baptism is acknowledged, that was not considered a sacrament in his writings.

[20] Hans Dieter Betz, "Apostle" in David Noel Freedman, editor, *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol 1*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992,) 309

[21] Kraemer and D'Angelo, 209

[22] John A. Bertron, "Apostle", in George Thomas Kurian, editor, *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, Volume I, (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 95

missions. There are metaphorical connections to the position of one being sent out to gather and bring back that which is due to Christ as the temple, but a linguistic link is weak.[23]

The New Revised Standard Version translates the action of apostle as follows:

2 Corinthians 8:23: “As for Titus, he is my partner and co-worker in your service; as for our brothers, they are *messengers* of the churches, in the glory of Christ.”

Philippians 2:25: “Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus - my brother and coworker and fellow soldier, your *messenger* and minister to my need.”

The Greek Orthodox New Testament[24] uses the following translation:

2 Corinthians 8:23: “Whether it be necessary to say anything on behalf of Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker in regards to you, or whether ye wish to hear anything regarding our brethren, they are *apostles* of the churches, Christ’s glory.”

Philippians 2:25: “And I deemed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditos, the brother and my fellow worker and fellow soldier, but your *apostle*, and minister of my need.”

There is not one unified vision of how an ‘apostle’ is identified within the Christian canon. The first three gospels identify the term ‘apostle' with the original twelve named male followers of Jesus, and in all three synoptics, it is a passing reference that they were also to be known as apostles, and commissioned to preach and heal (Matthew 10:2, Mark 3:14, and Luke 6:13). This reference to twelve is a nod to the tradition of the

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[23] Edward Russell Bernard, “Apostles”, in William Smith and J. M Fuller, editors, *A Dictionary of the Bible: Antiquities, Biography, Geography and Natural History*, Volume I, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2017), 199

[24] Praxapostolos, (translator), *The Orthodox New Testament, Volume 2*, (Buena Vista, Colorado: Holy Apostles Convent, 2000)

Twelve Tribes, and kept the practice of nascent Christianity within the confines of the Hebraic tradition, potentially limiting the mission to the Gentiles.[25]

The Gospel of John does not use the term 'apostle' for any of those sent out to spread the message, but instead identifies Jesus as the real envoy or 'apostle'.[26] John 13:16 uses a word that can be translated 'messengers', but it is not associated with anyone specifically.

In the passages found in the synoptics, these twelve named men were instructed to go in pairs, and spread the teachings of Jesus. They were given strict limitations on what to take with them and how to deal with those they encountered. As the narrative moves into The Book of Acts, these named apostles have to deal with the loss of Judas and finding a replacement. Election becomes the precedent in Acts 1:26, suggesting the originally named apostles moved into the practice of replacing their number through vote. There is no reference to how the pool of potential candidates was determined or narrowed to two individuals.

Historians have to tread very lightly in reading any absolutes into the practices of these named apostles, especially considering the texts of the gospels were written decades after the original followers of Jesus lived. There cannot be an assumption that women were definitely included any more than it can be assumed that women were

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[25] Bernard, "Apostle", 200

[26] Betz, "Apostle", 311

definitely excluded.[27] To get a clearer picture of the practices of the first generations, the earliest documentation needs to be prioritized.

In the communities where Paul lived and spoke, he identified himself as an 'apostle'. There is no mention in his letters or in The Book of Acts, which spends an extensive period of time recalling the ministry of Paul, that there was ever a period of election to replace a deceased original apostle with Paul. The narrative given in Acts 22:14-21 and again in Acts 26:16-18 tells of a man who was called to conversion, baptized, and then commissioned to speak specifically to the Gentiles. Galatians 1:1 references Paul telling the church that he was not chosen through the actions of other men, but directly chosen by Jesus Christ and God. In Galatians 1:15, he goes further to say God chose him even before he was born to be part of this mission.

Most of the disputed letters of Paul also have an introduction that claims apostleship for Paul. Ephesians 3:5 seems to suggest that the calling of Paul was interpreted as being part of a larger vision that extended the message of Christ beyond the confines of the Hebraic initiators into the wider Gentile world, thus changing the process of how apostles were identified, chosen and sent forth. Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 8:23, Paul references Titus as an "apostle of the churches", suggesting that it was the churches themselves who decided who they would identify as apostles, and send out on missions.[28]

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[27] Ute E. Eisen, 54; A further discussion on the cultural ramifications of women travelling for three years with men who were not their husbands, can be found in Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 59. Payne suggests that women would not have been named as Jesus' closest disciples due to cultural expectation and stigma, rather than an assumption of exclusion.

[28] Terry L. Wilder, "Apostle", in Daniel Patte, editor, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 63

This can only be conjecture, as the evidence to support this as an argument cannot be substantiated; however, there are enough uses of the term in both the authenticated and disputed letters of Paul to suggest the meaning of the word ‘apostle’ was a topic of conversation for the second and third generations of Christians.[29] In 1 Corinthians 9:2, Paul suggests that apostles are not necessarily always recognized as apostles of Christ, but rather apostles to a specific group. This corresponds with Origen who maintained that “everyone who is sent by someone is an apostle of the one who sent him”[30], meaning the community could recognize someone as an apostle, and they did not necessarily have to claim connection to Christ’s call, or trace themselves to the original named twelve. Already by the time of Paul, the definition of who was an apostle had been broadened. Revelation 18:20 shows a song of praise that references the “saints and apostles and prophets”, without limiting any groups to identifiable individuals.

Paul continues to state that apostles are the primary ministry, listing them first in 1 Corinthians 12:28, a sentiment that was picked up in Ephesians 4:11. For the first time, being an apostle was separated from healing and performing miracles, the specific tasks of an apostle identified in the synoptic gospels. Additionally, the gift of apostleship is identified with God and not Jesus Christ.

Throughout his letters, Paul names specific individuals as apostles. One is a woman, the remainder are men. They were traveling ministries with limited oversight. By the time of his second letter to the Corinthians, there is already a concern about false apostles (2 Corinthians 11:13) traveling around claiming authenticity. In Revelation 2:2,

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[29] See chart in Appendix I, Named roles in Christian Scripture, identifying the scriptural references to the various orders of ministry in the earliest Christian communities.

[30] Betz, “Apostle”, 309

written to the third generation of the early church in Ephesus, there is a warning about false apostles claiming authority.

Around the end of the first century, *The Didache*[31] addressed a concern for false apostles, associating them with false prophets, and giving an extensive test for how to adjudicate whether the apostles who had arrived in those communities were legitimately representing Christ, or were in it for their own personal reasons.[32] (*The Didache* 11:3-12:5). This opens up an interesting series of questions for the earliest churches: While *The Didache* is ascribed to the named Twelve Apostles, the text itself points to the fact that others called themselves 'apostles'. Clearly the term did not have a firm definition.[33]

Outlined in chronological order, it would seem that the term 'apostle' was a secular term adopted by the early Christian church and rarely seen outside of canonical references[34], shared freely amongst the first generations of the early churches that were

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[31] There is great discussion about the dating of *The Didache*. While Aaron Milvec (2003) dates *The Didache* within the period of Paul's writings to the early churches in Hellenistic areas along with Rome. David M. Scholer in an essay for the *Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, Volume I, argues that the topics covered, including church structure, false prophets and eucharistic practices, would most likely place it around the end of the first century, and contemporaneous with Luke-Acts. p. 99; In his entry on *The Didache* in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, Huub van de Sandt agrees with Scholer's dating, and expands the context of *The Didache* to be from western Syria, and an attempt to find union between the Hellenistic early churches and the Hebraic early churches, while defining them against the Hebraic tradition of the day. The authorship was assigned to the Apostles in order to give the document authority. 324. Alistair Stewart-Sykes in his book *On the Apostolic Tradition*, outlines that some of the concern about false prophets, was actually about false teaching. The Hebraic tradition included many independent teachers, but as the early churches tried to standardize their theology, it becomes necessary to restrict their teaching within the house church system. Thus 'false prophets' would have to be vetted to see if they maintained the emerging orthodox theology, or if they were teaching the emerging heresies that were seen as a threat to the wider Christian church. 38-42

[32] "*The Didache*, chapters 11-12", Milavec (translator), 27-31

[33] Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser (translators) *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2002), 343

[34] Betz, "Apostle", 309

represented by the letters of Paul and others. It spoke to the missionary model used to spread the faith throughout the Mediterranean, and the establishment of new localized communities. However, by the first century of the early churches, they were already seeing the term misused and cautioning believers against mistaking false apostles for authentic apostles, presumably, as *The Didache* alludes, to prevent community resources from being squandered. This was contemporaneous with the writing of the synoptic Gospels and Acts, where a tightening of the definition of 'apostle' had occurred, limiting it to the twelve named male apostles and those elected to replace them, although having the term associated with Paul continued.

The greatest use of the term 'apostle' occurs in just two books: Luke and Acts. Over 75% of the use of this term occurred with this one author, which could represent regional importance of the term within the Hellenistic community where the texts originated. Bertron suggests this could indicate that the community of Luke/Acts was the church that used the term 'apostle' most frequently in reference to the named twelve. This practice was not in regular use by the writers of Mark and Matthew, he continued.[35] This could explain the different uses of the term between the time Paul was writing and when the Gospels were composed.

The writings of the Apostolic Fathers showed a limited understanding of those identified as 'apostles'. Ignatius, writing to the Ephesians at the beginning of the second century, identified "Jesus Christ, Paul, John and Timothy" as apostles,[36] and writes to the Philadelphians in another letter that there were "Paul and [the] rest of the apostles",

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[35] John A. Bertron, "Apostle", in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, 96

[36] "Ignatius to Ephesians, chapter 11", Howell (translator), 83-84. A long form version of this letter can be found on www.earlychristianwritings.com (accessed April 17, 2018).

suggesting the act of being an apostle had within one century become the title of being an Apostle.[37] Clement, writing his letter to Corinth, recognized that apostles were from Christ, but he only gave Paul that term 'apostle' as an identifier of his ministry.[38] The community surrounding the writers of the Gospel of John chose not to use the title at all.[39]

There are references to a limited number of individuals being the 'apostle' to a specific location, such as Ansgar as the Apostle to the North and Simon Kimbangu as the Apostle to the Africans, but that seems more in keeping with the use of the term within Christian tradition to identify someone who has in hindsight been an incredible influence on those locations, rather than a title given as one specifically called by Christ.[40]

It is safe to conclude that the term 'apostle' as used to reference the workers and missionaries of the first generations is not to be understood in the same vein as the title 'Apostle' that was used in association with the twelve named male disciples of the synoptic Gospels and Acts. However, this distinction should not be used to lessen the value of those named as the original apostles, but rather to demonstrate the evolution of the term as used and needed in the first century of the Christian churches, an evolution that can be seen happening only within the confines of those communities with written

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[37] Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (translators) "Ignatius to Philadelphians ch 9:1" (long version), www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/ignatius-philadelphians-longer.html (accessed April 17, 2018)

[38] Clark, W. K. Lowther, (translator), The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, 47:1, (London: SPCK, 1937), 75

[39] Betz, "Apostle", 311

[40] Terry L. Wilder, "Apostle", in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, 63-64

record. There is no possibility of ascertaining the significance, or even use, of the term 'apostle' in undocumented early churches.

Bishops and Deacons

While apostles were traveling missionaries in the early church, those communities that were localized congregations developed their own system of leadership, based loosely on the system of organization found in the synagogues of the first centuries.[41]

In Philippians 1:1, Paul recognized both the bishops and deacons of that church, showing that by mid-first century, those in Philippi had developed this level of organizational sophistication. Outside of a references to a deacon in Romans 16:1, no other authenticated Pauline letter reference either bishops or deacons.

By the third generation of the early churches, 1 Timothy 3 outlines the expectations for lifestyle and seriousness of both bishops and deacons, while Titus 1 includes instructions about what to look for in bishops for Crete. 1 Timothy adds that women deacons[42] must also be proper managers of both their children and their household.

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[41] Peter Hinchliff, "Bishop", in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 92

[42] Frequently Phoebe is identified as a 'deaconess' instead of the proper translation 'deacon', because she was a woman. However there was no term 'deaconess' in Greek at the time of Paul's writing. Derek & Dianne Tidball, *The Message of Women*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 204; The word itself can be read as *deacon*, *minister*, *helper* or *leader*. "This noun denotes one who serves as a deacon, with responsibility to care for the needs of believers." David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of Romans 9-16* (Dallas, Texas: SIL International, 2009), 363. The term 'deaconess' does not appear until the Apostolic Constitutions in the fourth century CE, and after Council of Chalcedon, in the eastern part of the early Christian church. Any translation of term as 'deaconess' before this time is inaccurate. Edward Hayes Plumptre and Edgar Charles Sumner Gibson, "Bishop", in *A Dictionary of the Bible: Antiquities, Biography, Geography and Natural History*, Volume I, 740-741; Peter Hinchliff, "Deaconess", *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 209

Into the first century of the early churches, *The Didache* dedicates only two verses (15:1,2) to picking their leaders wisely. Apostolic Fathers, Clement and Ignatius, spoke to the importance of bishops and deacons, and the respect due to both offices. In his letter to the Corinthians, Clement wrote that the apostles chose the bishops and deacons, then quoted a non-canonical verse that he considered scripture, which read "I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and deacons in faith".[43] Ignatius, writing to Polycarp, stressed the importance of camaraderie and agreement for those in leadership positions within the church.[44]

Even though all of those chosen to be bishops and deacons worked together in their congregations, the job division fell along spiritual and practical lines. Bishops were responsible for teaching and spiritual oversight of the congregation, and were expected to provide hospitality to travellers,[45] a job description that mimicked the way the word was used in its secular context.

In their contributions to the essay on the topic of "Bishop" for *A Dictionary of the Bible: Antiquities, Biography, Geography and Natural History, Volume I*, Edward Hayes Plumptre and Edgar Charles Sumner Gibson outlined how the term was used in ancient cultures prior to the advent of Christianity and well into the first centuries of the Common Era. The Greek term '*episcopos*' (meaning "overseer")[46] was originally used within the

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[43] Clark, *First Clement letter to the Corinthians, 42:4, 5*, 72

[44] "Ignatius' letter to Polycarp, chapter 6", Kenneth J. Howell (translator), 143

[45] Edward Hayes Plumptre and Edgar Charles Sumner Gibson, "Bishop", in *A Dictionary of the Bible: Antiquities, Biography, Geography and Natural History, Volume I*, 438

[46] Patte, "Bishop", 130

Greek and Roman governments, appearing in documents from Athens, Sparta, Rome and Ephesus.[47] These were civil servants who were given the rights of oversight and interference in local governing bodies. While the Christian canon translated this Greek term into ‘bishop’ with an emphasis on church order, the Hebrew canon translated the same term into ‘magistrate' or ‘overseer'. The term is used in several places in the Hebrew Scriptures, including Job 20:29, Judges 9:28 and Numbers 4:16, in reference to government officials.

In the Christian Scriptures, the term is only used five times: twice connected to Ephesus (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:2), once for Philippi (Philippians 1:1), once to describe the leader needed in Crete (Titus 1:7), and once to reference Jesus as the “guardian/bishop of their soul” (1 Peter 2:25).[48]

There is some suggestion that the word ‘*episcopos’* was a word used first within the Hellenistic early churches, before it became normative throughout the Mediterranean. Scholars suggest this might be due to the secular origin of the word being uniquely used within the early Christian context, thus drawing a distinction between these first congregations and the other religious cults of the time period. It also gave a sense of authority and recognizable structure to those in the emerging Christian communities outside of Jerusalem. [49] Conversely, this term was not used within the original Hebraic communities, possibly because it had such close connection to the secular government. Instead the early churches in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas

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[47] Plumptre and Gibson, “Bishop”, 436

[48] Plumptre and Gibson, “Bishop”, 436

[49] Plumptre and Gibson, “Bishop”, 436-437

used the terminology from the synagogues. Terms like ‘elder’ and ‘presbyter’ were used interchangeably with *episcopos* for the first generations.[50]

The central role for bishops in a maturing congregation was that of hospitality and supporting the faith development of their communities.

> The Bishop-elder’s house was to be the house of the Christian who arrived in a strange city, and found himself without a friend (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8). Of the part taken by them in the liturgical meetings of the church, we have no distinct evidence. Reasoning from the language of 1 Cor 10-12, and the practices of the post-apostolic age, we may believe that they would preside at such meetings, and that it would belong to them to bless and to give thanks when the church met to break bread.[51]

As the structure evolved, congregations for whom records remain, can be seen to transition from a group of many bishops to one central bishop, having a higher level of responsibility for congregational oversight than their elder peers.[52] Ignatius, in his correspondence with the church in Rome, c. 110 CE, is the first mention of one person being in the role of bishop, and could signalling that role of ‘bishop’ was beginning its transition towards becoming a recognized title, as early as the beginning of the second century.[53] Unfortunately there is not enough evidence to piece together an hypothesis on whether Ignatius was being self-aggrandizing or whether he was representative of a transition that had already taken place in some Hellenistic congregations.

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[50] Plumptre and Gibson, “Bishop”, 436-437; Peter Hinchliff, “Bishop”, in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 92; “Bishop” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, 130; Samson Adetunji Fatokun, “Episcopacy”, in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, 841

[51] Plumptre and Gibson,“Bishop”, 438

[52] Plumptre and Gibson, “Bishop”, 438; Samson Adetunji Fatokun, “Episcopacy”, in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, 841; Peter Hinchliff “Bishop”, in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 92

[53] Plumptre and Gibson,“Bishop”, 436-7; In chapter 2 of his letter to the Romans, Ignatius identifies himself as the singular bishop of Syria. “Ignatius to Polycarp, chapter 2”, Howell (translator) 141

Ignatius can however shed light on another issue: the age of those elected as bishops. In his letter to the Magnesians, he addresses their treatment of their newly elected bishop, and tells them his youth should not influence the level of respect they offer.[54] This suggests that those elected bishop were primarily older members of the congregation, which would be in keeping with the term 'elder' that was used interchangeably in the first generations.

Regardless of who held the role, Ignatius had a firm grasp on how the lines of power should proceed. In his letter to Polycarp, Ignatius made certain those lines of ascendency moved upwards from deacons, to presbyters, to bishop, and finally to Christ.[55] With the era of the apostles waning, bishops took over the highest degree of importance within the early churches.[56]

In his essay entitled "Bishop" for *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, Peter Hinchliff maintains that

> It has been widely assumed that the early Christian communities were governed by colleges of elders, as Jewish synagogues were, and that in the course of time a monarchial episcopate developed… It is possible that the need to have a liturgical president (like the rule of the synagogue) may have contributed to the process.[57]

Hinchliff goes on to suggest that the growth of the congregations was most likely responsible for the elevation of one elder/priest to liturgical responsibility, because they could no longer contain everyone within a single worship space. By the middle of the third century, and out of logistical necessity, those named as bishops became the

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[54] "Ignatius to Magnesians, chapter 3", Howell (translator), 93

[55] "Ignatius to Polycarp, chapter. 4", Howell (translator), 142

[56] Plumptre and Gibson, "Bishop", 439

[57] Hinchliff "Bishop", 92

overseer of the multiple communities, further separating them from the direct work that had originally been done as a ministry team with many bishops and deacons, and eventually priests, working together, and placed them in an administrative role.[58]

Plumptre and Gibons continue the argument of logistical necessity by suggesting that the increasing government and cultural hostility towards the growing early churches necessitated a single leader who would engage those in the secular community.[59] It is not a mistake of history that the majority of early church writings come from people who identified themselves with the authority of 'Bishop'.

Deacons were directly connected to the bishops, and were part of the two-fold ministry observed in 1 Timothy 3:1-12. The term, literally meaning "to serve", was often translated as 'minister' or 'servant' when it was used as a title or identifier for an occupation within the early churches,[60] and they were a support to the bishops. They eventually became the third order of formally recognized ministry as the early churches developed, and bishops were separated from presbyter.[61]

The tasks assigned to the deacons in the first generations included assisting at the breaking of bread during worship, managing the financial accounts for their congregations, distributing alms, and ministering to the congregants outside of

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[58] Hinchliff, "Bishop", 92

[59] Plumptre and Gibson, "Bishop", 439

[60] Kenan B. Osborne, "Deacon, Diaconate", in Daniel Patte, ed, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, 306

[61] Hinchliff, "Deacon", in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship,* 208

worship.[62] While there is definitely a correlation between the tasks expected of the deacon in the first generations of the newly formed Christian churches, and the *chazzen* who carried scrolls, cleaned the synagogues, collected and redistributed the alms, within the Hebraic worshipping communities at the time, Plumptre and Gibson, in the essay they contributed on the subject of "Deacon" in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, conclude that that role within the synagogue was in keeping with an administrator, not a liturgical assistant.[63] There is little evidence to outline what level of assistance was offered by the deacons in the first generations of churches during eucharist,[64] and no evidence to clarify whether that was the only domain of the deacons while teaching was reserved for the bishops. "Under Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch the church continued to use the title 'deacon' in a general way but later limited it to the designation of the official responsible for the provision of the poor, and to assistants at the Eucharist."[65]

By the time of Justin Martyr the deacons with which he was familiar, were given the responsibility of taking the eucharist after Sunday worship to those who had not been present.[66] There is no quantifiable evidence to identify whether or not the bishops were responsible for the service of the table in the first generations of the churches, it is

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[62] Plumptre and Gibson, "Deacon", in *A Dictionary of the Bible: Antiquities, Biography, Geography and Natural History*, Volume I, 740

[63] Plumptre and Gibson, "Deacon", 739

[64] The term Eucharist was not adopted until well into the second century of the early churches. Most scholars agree that the first experiences of what would become the eucharistic celebration were community meals, in a format that was familiar to the Hebraic tradition. Once this practice moved outside of the Hebraic context into Hellenistic communities, the prayer element was often replaced by a celebratory tone, and eventually the act of eucharist was removed from the meal and made its own liturgical celebration. Paul F. Bradshaw, "Eucharist", in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 227-228

[65] Thomas Schirrmacher "Diaconate", in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization*, 670

[66] "First Apology, chapter 65", Minns and Parvis, (translators) 253-255

only assumed that they were the ones the deacons were assisting, since the two offices were closely linked. Interestingly, Justin Martyr does not reference a bishop in any of his known writings. He refers to the person presiding at worship as the 'president', much like synagogue worship.[67]

A tradition arose after the second century CE, that the seven men in Acts 6:1-7 chosen to help the widows in local Hellenistic communities were deacons, and thus centuries of practice in Rome restricted the office of deacon to seven members.[68] However, those men named in Acts 6:5 were never identified as 'deacons', a term that was in use by the writing of The Book of Acts. Irenaeus of Lyon was the first known to mistakenly make this connection, in his third book of *Against Heresies*.[69]

By the middle of the third century, a new book dedicated to church order emerged in Rome. Often associated with Hippolytus of Rome, The Apostolic Tradition[70] provided the first services of ordination for the tri-fold ministry, and outlined that deacons were ordained by the bishop, and "for this reason that he is not ordained to priesthood, but to serve the bishop, that he might do those things which are commanded by him."[71]

The Apostolic Tradition gives an extensive list of the jobs that are the responsibility of those deacons in Rome: Bringing the cup and plate to the bishop

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[67] "First Apology, chapters 65-66" ibid, 253-257

[68] Plumptre and Gibson "Deacon", 740; Peter Hinchliff, "Deacon", 208

[69] Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* Book 3, 12:10, www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-book3.html (accessed April 19, 2018)

[70] Although Hippolytus has been credited as the author of The Apostolic Tradition, that authorship has come into question. Scholars are now more comfortable suggesting it was written by an unknown author from the school of Hippolytus in Rome, rather than Hippolytus himself. For an expanded discussion on the authorship of The Apostolic Tradition, see Stewart-Sykes, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, chapter 5

[71] Alistar Stewart-Sykes (translator), *On The Apostolic Tradition*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 86

(chapter 4); and helping to distribute the bread (chapter 22); obedient to the bishop, but not the presbyters (chapter 8); they have their own group of sub-deacons, eventually known as “acolytes” (chapter 13)[72]; assist with the baptism, bringing oils to the presbyters, escorting the person being baptized to the bishop, dunk themselves along with the person being baptized, then once the newly baptized are ready for the bread and cup, the deacon brings those items to the bishop, and once consecrated, the deacon may help serve the elements, if there are not enough presbyters (chapter 21); in the absence of a presbyter, can anoint the sick (chapter 24); brings in the light for the evening agape meal, and is the first to recite a Psalm after the cup and bread are offered (chapter 25); visiting the sick, with permission of the bishop (chapter 34)[73]

The financial element that was part of the responsibilities in the first generations in the early church seemed no longer to be expected of the deacons in Rome by the time the The Apostolic Tradition was in circulation. Instead, the requirements of the deacon were all liturgically based.

Presbyters and Elders, Servants and Ministers

The language around *presbyteros*, elders, servants and ministers is complicated. Unlike bishops, deacons, and apostles, whose roles were acknowledged and had early definition in those nascent church communities that were recorded in the letters of Paul and the additional epistles, ‘*presbyteros’*, ‘elders’, ‘servants’, and ‘ministers’ were used

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[72] Stewart-Sykes, *On The Apostolic Tradition*, 94; Stewart-Sykes cites the conclusions of Burton Scott Easton, that the sub-deacons were included as a response to limiting the number of deacons to seven, which was in keeping with the belief that Acts 6 placed that limit for the office of Deacon.

[73] Stewart-Sykes, *On The Apostolic Tradition*, 53-174

interchangeably to such an extent that they are impossible to separate from each other in the first generations. Eventually *presbyteros* and elders would become associated with the bishops, while 'servant' and 'minister' were used as alternative translations for deacons, particularly when women were involved.[74]

Throughout the Gospels and well into the first few generations, the terms priest, servant, elder and minister were used for anyone who demonstrated they were part of the discipleship of Jesus. Christians were expected to *minister* to and *serve* Jesus, as well as each other (Matthew 27:55; Luke 17:8; Acts 19:22). Followers of Christ were the *priesthood* of all believers. (2 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 5:10). 'Elders' were both the older members of the congregations (1 Timothy 5:2), as well as a recognized group within the community, who were eventually appointed with certain responsibilities (Acts 14:23; 20:17)

Towards the end of the first century of the nascent church, the two-fold ministry had become a three-fold ministry, in many locations. 'Priests and elders' that had been a recognized Hebraic leadership group associated with the temple, in the stories of Jesus and the named twelve disciples in Jerusalem (Mark 15:1; Acts 4:5),[75] gave way to the priesthood of all believers and as such removed specific intercessors while they awaited *parousia.* However, as each generation of Christ followers gave way to the next, logistical concerns necessitated another group of recognized leaders within the growing

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[74] Arthur Frederick Ide, Woman as Priest, Bishop & Laity, in the Early Catholic church to 440 AD, (Mesquite, Texas: Ide House, Inc, 1984), 27; Pliny the younger, when he wrote to Trajan about the two slave women admitting to Christian leadership, has been translated as both 'deacon' and 'minister', probably owing more to gender bias than translation of terminology; Kraemer and D'Angelo, 224; See footnote 42 on the translation of 'deacon' for women

[75] William Latham Bevan, "Elder", in *A Dictionary of the Bible: Antiquities, Biography, Geography and Natural History*, Volume I, 896

early churches. While bishops and deacons had been enough to cover the first generations, growing complexity in worship and growing populations required increased leadership.

The term '*presbyteros*' in Greek and '*presbyter*' in Latin means 'elder',[76] and while it seems logical that the references to 'elders' in The Book of Acts is an indication of priests from the very beginning of the earliest Christian communities, there is a definite distinction between the use of the term as a form of identifiable leadership in the Hebraic context, and that which emerges by the end of the first century within the developing churches.

> For Christians, in the New Testament, the priesthood of the Old Testament was abolished. In its place believers had a high priest in Jesus Christ whose one-time sacrifice ended with his crucifixion. All those who put their faith in him could also be seen as serving not only as priests, but also as prophets, evangelists, miracle workers, or servants.[77]

Kunian maintains that the 'holy priesthood' as it was understood by the first generations was not the priesthood that they had inherited from the Hebraic community, nor that of Hellenistic worship which surrounded them. The priesthood was not separate from the community, he continues, but through the regular acts of worship with the communal bread and cup, and a life lived as a sacrifice to God, believers were liberated from their need of an intercessor.[78] "Thus baptism is not merely a consecration, it is an ordination to priesthood."[79]

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[76] Hinchliff "Presbyter", in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, 446; Patte "Presbyter", in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, 1006

[77] Kurian, "Priesthood of Believers" in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization, Volume III*, 1887

[78] Kurian, "Priesthood of Believers", 1887

[79] Kurian, "Priesthood of Believers", 1887

Taking a different approach to the historic priesthood, in his contribution of "Presbyters" in the *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity, Volume Three*, Angelo Di Berardino argues that the term had not changed that much from the Hebraic meaning, where elders were recognized as having wisdom due to age, and were given local judiciary authority. In Jerusalem the elders joined the high priests to make up the Sanhedrin. After the fall of the Second Temple, the diaspora had colleges of elders of various sizes, depending on the membership of their congregations.[80] Berardino uses texts from The Book of Acts to support his conclusion: Acts 15:2-6; 22-23; 20:17.

As with the historic use of the term 'apostle' above, a chronology of letters and books are needed to assess the timeline of term usage. The references to identifiable elders in The Book of Acts come after the writing of the epistles, suggesting that while those at the end of the first century and beginning of the second century were comfortable reading elders as having a continuous line of leadership, the second generation (accepted Pauline epistles) and the third generation (disputed Pauline epistles) did not recognize an identifiable group known as 'elders' in this same manner.

The Book of Acts and the later epistles are more likely to have reflected the development of leadership that was observed by Clement and Ignatius of Antioch, and surrounded their own authorship, where priests/elders were beginning to become disassociated with bishops and become their own ministerial group.

By the time Polycarp was writing his letter to the Philippians in the early second century, presbyters were a recognizable tier of ministry in that city, and he called upon

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[80] "Presbyters", in Angelo Di Berardino, *Enclyclopedia of Ancient Christianity, Volume Three*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 297

them, as he had the orders of widow and deacons, to live in a particular manner which was respectful of their position.

> Let the presbyters be compassionate, merciful to all, converting those who are deceived, carefully watching over the weak, not neglecting the widow or orphans, or the poor. Rather plan ahead for what is beautiful in the sight of God and man, abstaining from all anger, discrimination against persons, unjust judgements, remaining far above the love of money. Do not believe something against anyone too quickly; don't be severe in judgement because you know that we are all subject to sin.[81]

While *The Didache* has one reference to 'priest', in conjunction with travelling prophets,[82] by the writing of The Apostolic Tradition, priests in Rome were firmly established as an authority above deacon and below bishop, and were responsible for their own congregations in larger centres. Presbyters were ordained through laying on of hands and given teaching responsibility equal to that of bishop (ch. 7, 39); and were involved in the ordination of bishops, although they did not lay on hands for the ritual of bishop ordination (ch. 2); they could not choose or ordain deacons, as that authority resided with the bishop (ch. 8); they anointed with oil during baptism, and possibly presided over baptism (ch.21); they distributed the bread during the eucharistic celebration (ch. 22); and hosted the faithful at the fellowship meal, when the bishop was not present (ch. 28).[83]

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[81] "Polycarp to the Philippians, chapter 6.1", Howell (translator), 152-153

[82] "*The Didache*, chapter 13.3", Milavec (translator), 33

[83] Stewart-Sykes, *On the Apostolic Tradition*, 53-174

Teachers

Itinerant teachers were common within the early church tradition. Paul considered teaching one of the spiritual gifts (Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:28), as did a pseudo-Pauline writer (Ephesians 4:11). In Acts 18:26, Priscilla and Aquila[84] were the teachers of Apollos, clarifying some of his theological mistakes.

Education had long been a significant part of the Hebraic culture. Initial education was done in the household, with both boys and girls being educated on the basics of their faith, their responsibilities to the laws, and the learning of a trade. While boys might have been taught the trade of their fathers, girls were taught to run both their own household and a trade that would provide for their future families, such as midwifery.[85] One of the unique aspects of the Hebraic culture was that it considered the economic health of the family to be a shared responsibility with women, while men were given the expectation to spend more time in the privacy of home, studying the Hebrew scriptures. Therefore, it was just as important to educate daughters as it was sons.[86] Upper class women in Jerusalem probably had their own education systems, and held power over many of their personal legal and economic decisions. Seals have been found, which suggest they could sign legal documents, and could most likely read and write.[87]

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[84] The significance of name order, having Prisca/Priscialla ahead of Aquila four out of six times in the Christian Scriptures, will be discussed further in chapter three.

[85] Freedman, “Education (Israel)” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol 2*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992,) 305-311

[86] Martin Goodman, ed, *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 775

[87] Freedman, “Education (Israel)”, 311

Greco-Roman cultures valued education for boys and girls as well, although their inclusion of nude physical education received negative attention from the Hebraic culture of the day.[88]

> Primary education, however, was widespread and not limited to freeborn males. Girls frequently attended school along with their brothers; and in the case of slaves, many of them also necessarily received at least some education in order to perform tasks commonly assigned to them. In the Greco-Roman world of the NT, even the poor felt the need for reading skills.[89]

As Hebraic children began to interact with Greco-Roman culture, they were educated in philosophy, reading and writing. There is also evidence that girls were taught the Torah in the first centuries of the Common Era,[90] which would speak to their preparation as participants in faith dialogues and communal worship of the emerging early churches.

Tutors for Greco-Roman education, independent Hebrew teachers and self-declared philosophers were common in the first centuries, all establishing their own disciples and schools of thought, so it was only a matter of time until independent Christian teachers saw this as a way to establish their own income. This caused concern, however, as a growing need to establish consistent teaching was at odds with independent interpretation of the gospel. Along with the warning in *The Didache* to protect against false teachers, the Shepherd of Hermes included a warning in two verses in the ninth parable, about "hypocrites and teachers of wickedness."[91]

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[88] Freedman, "Education, Greco-Roman Period", 313

[89] Freedman, "Education, Greco-Roman Period", 313

[90] Freedman, "Education (Greco-Roman Period)", 316. One of the controversies in the first century CE was between Ben Azzai who argued parents were obligated to teach their daughters Torah, and R Eliezer, who argued teaching girls Torah was tantamount to teaching them immorality.

[91] Stewart-Sykes, *The Apostolic Tradition*, 38-39; *Shepherd of Hermes, Parable 9* 19:2-3 www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/shepherd-lightfoot.html (accessed April 12, 2018)

With the firmer establishment of Christian communities throughout the second and third centuries, and the attempts to systematize worship practices, administrative roles and theological principles, the travelling teacher became less common, and education was handled by first bishops then presbyters.[92] Eventually some of the centres with larger Christian populations would develop their own theological schools, setting the stage for the theological debates that began in Jerusalem (c. 50 CE; Acts 15) with Paul and Peter discussing how much of the Hebraic tradition the earliest Christians had to follow, and eventually beginning in 325 CE, becoming the multi-church Councils to establish theology, worship and ministry standards.[93]

While education in general was recognized as an important part of developing the earliest Christian communities, with time an issue arose based on gender, and the increasing cultural clash of women within the early churches teaching men about the faith. In his vindication of women as teachers, Tatian is reported to have said,

> Therefore I have been desirous to prove from the things which are esteemed honourable among you, that our institutions are marked by sobermindedness, but that yours are in close affinity with madness. You who say that we talk nonsense among women and boys, among maidens and old women, and scoff at us for not being with you, hear what silliness prevails among the Greeks… My object in referring to these women is, that you may not regard as something strange what you find among us, and that, comparing the statues which are before your eyes, you may not treat the women with scorn who among us pursue philosophy. This Sappho is a lewd, love-sick female, and sings her own wantonness; but all our women are chaste, and the maidens at their distaffs sing of divine things more nobly than that damsel of yours. Wherefore be ashamed, you who are professed disciples of women yet scoff at those of the sex who hold our

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[92] See discussion on bishops and presbyters above.

[93] Patte, “Educational Practices and Institutions”, in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, 356; David Leinweber “Education and Training”, in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization, Volume II*, 796

doctrine, as well as at the solemn assemblies they frequent… But, forsooth, you will not believe that among us there are wise women![94]

[94] Tatian “Address to the Greeks, ch. 33, Vindication of Christian Women”, www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tatian-address.html (accessed April 14, 2018); For a fuller conversation on the topic of women teaching men, see chapter four “Women be Silent”. Tatian was a student of Justin Martyr. He had disagreements with Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus and Origen. “Tatian”, in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 1341

Chapter 3

Women in the Greco-Roman and Hebraic world

To get a fuller picture of women in worship and spiritual leadership in the early Christian churches, it is important to see what women were doing in other parts of society. It is erroneous to assume the message of inclusion given by Jesus somehow changed the various points of view about women in leadership in the Christian communities within the milieu of the wider Greco-Roman and Hebraic worlds to the point where women were suddenly able to claim and be recognized in positions of authority. While poets, philosophers and historians such as Juvenal[95] and Philo[96] gave long speeches about their perception and expectation of the perfect woman in Greco-Roman and Hebraic societies, claiming they stayed at home, took care of their households, obeyed their male relatives at all times and showed their value through weaving and

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[95] Ross Shepard Kraemer, 60-61; "Juvenal" translated by Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1988) 39-42

[96] Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics*, 15

submission, the reality for women as demonstrated by court documents, business agreements, letters, statuary and epitaphs shows something quite different.[97]

> Women in the early Roman empire in practice were more prominent than some ancient texts would indicate. Wealth and social position made some women patrons and gave them considerable power and influence apart from the social theory of the time. Many others as well acted with great independence. Women frequently held civic offices. Especially in religion where women were prominent, often serving as priestesses and doing so not only in cults of female deities. Women, moreover, were found in a wide variety of occupations. In addition to expected roles - wives, mothers, prostitutes, midwives, wet nurses - they are found as physicians, musicians, artists, winners of athletic events, selling groceries, and in all sorts of manufacturing and commercial activities.[98]

Roman women frequently had a great deal of autonomy, especially when it came to running their household. It must be noted that class played a significant part in this, and that power came with money and class status. Lower class women had much more autonomy then upper class women, simply because they were not expected to set the standard of behaviour or be a symbol of the Roman matron. Women in the upper class had the freedom of money, power and influence over their household and wider community while women in lower classes had the freedom that came with fewer social expectations. Slaves and servants were still restricted due to their low social standing. In all cases, when women had family economies to run, such as a small business or farm, they were the ones ensuring that the needs of that business were met, that materials for

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[97] Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics*, 90-92; Examples include an agreement about a house sale between two women, Egypt, 45 CE, and a tax report for a Jewish woman, Egypt 73 CE.

[98] Everett Ferguson. *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003) 79

production were ordered, that workers or slaves were supervised, and that profits were recorded.[99]

Sexual propriety of women was a significant concern throughout the cultures that made up the Roman Empire. Women were held to the highest and strictest sexual and moral standards. While men were allowed to have sexual relations with others outside their marriage, women had to remain faithful to their husbands or their chastity.[100] Accusations of sexual impropriety were the primary condemnation used against women in every spiritual tradition covered below. The rebuttal was often quick and fierce, and the result was renewed efforts to keep women within religious cults morally untouchable, by being chaste or faithful in their marriages.[101]

Spiritual Leadership of Women in Pagan Cults

Roman society, like those in the rest of the ancient world, did not separate spirituality and ritual from daily or political life.

> Romans conflated religion and patriotism in civic ritual, law and duty. Law, ritual, family, and the City were sacred. Sacrificial ritual was understood by Romans necessary for maintaining harmonious relationships with the gods. The efficacy of Roman civic religion, particularly sacrifice, relied on precise adherence to ritual formulae and juridical norms governing cult practice. Roman civic religion was governed by a priestly class of individuals who meticulously

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[99] Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 144-145

[100] Osiek and MacDonald, 148

[101] Osiek and MacDonald, 9; Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995) 222; Karen Jo Torjesen. *When Women Were Priests*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 144-145

> observed Roman ritual laws and modelled the ideal form of Roman marriage and family structure.[102]

Every household had their cult where the *paterfamilias* was responsible for overseeing rituals and the adherence of his household. Little is known about the private household cultic practices in Ancient Rome, aside from the inclusion or exclusion of the mothers and daughters as members of the household.[103]

Roman legal structure had many forms of recognized marriage. If a woman was married '*cum manus*', that meant she left the household of her father and joined the household of her husband, complete with leaving the cult of her father and joining that of her husband. If a woman was married without '*manus*', she was not officially part of the household of her husband, and was expected to adhere to the cult of her father. By the first centuries of the Common Era, fewer women were marrying *cum manus*.[104] Another category of marriage reflects modern understandings of Common Law marriages, as those of lower classes were not given access to the system of legal marriage reserved for the upper classes.[105]

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[102] Lindsay J. Thompson, *The Role of the Vestal Virgin in Roman Civic Religion* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) 87

[103] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 52-55; An exception to this is the mystery cult *Bona Dea*, which was a woman's only celebration. Unfortunately what we know about ancient rituals comes through men, who were technically excluded from the *Bona Dea* celebrations. Most of what is written is quite negative, such as Juvenal's claim that the women used *Bona Dea* rituals for sexually inappropriate behaviour, a common accusation where women were involved.

[104] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 50-51; Historians theorize that the deciding factor of whether a woman married with or without a *manus* was wealth. If a woman married without a *manus*, in a divorce she took her money away from the marriage and often kept it, all while under the legal protection of a male member of her extended family. With *manus* meant that a woman returned without her dowry or any independence financially. Over time fewer marriages included the *manus*, and women gained more control over their own finances.

[105] Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves,* 193

The joining or not joining of the household cult based on manus was the expectation in the private lives of Roman households, and there is not enough documentation to show whether this was merely the ideal or if this was lived reality for the majority of Roman citizens. Publicly, rituals were performed by both women and men. In her book, *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons*, Sarolta A. Takács gives an extensive monthly breakdown of how rituals were celebrated in public, noting that there was a sense of gender parity between those performed by women and those by men, with women having more ritual responsibilities during the planting and harvesting season between February and July than the rest of the year.[106]

i. Cornelia, Vestal Virgin

Vestal Virgins were integral to the myths of Roman origin and ultimate survival. According to legend, Mars raped the very first Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia, and impregnated her with twins who would eventually be Romulus and Remus. Rhea Silvia was held responsible for her rape and breaking her Vestal vows, and was sentenced to the traditional death for Vestals: being buried alive. Her cousin intervened and Rhea Silvia was saved from death only to be forced into a life in isolation from society and from her children. When the twins were born they were placed in a basket and sent down the river. Discovered first by a female wolf who nursed the babies, then the shepherd who would ultimately raise them, Romulus and Remus survived to adulthood and founded their own cities. A petty squabble led to Romulus killing Remus, and thus

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[106] Sarolta A. Takács. *Vestal Virgins, Sibyls, and Matrons* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2008) 25-59

becoming the first king of Rome.[107] Takács points out putting the blame for her rape on Rhea Silvia and punishing her for the rape was the ultimate act of human 'scapegoating'.[108] Yet Rhea Silvia, not Mars, was acknowledged through developed myth as being the parent of Rome[109], and Vestal Virgins were the spiritual connection to the continuation of Roman success and power.

At any time in Roman history, six women from elite families fulfilled the role of Vestal Virgins. Their jobs included keeping the sacred fire burning, making the sacred salt (*mola salsa*) that was used in all public sacrifice rituals, and guarding the "sacred Paladium, a religious object that secured the safety of Rome itself."[110] The Vestals were chosen as children, while they were between the ages of six and ten, and were immediately given independence from their fathers, which was significant for inheritance and self-determination, but also for removing the influence of their natal families.[111] Vestal Virgins were expected to serve for thirty years before being given the opportunity to marry or retire.[112] Their virginity was believed to be a symbol and guarantee for the continued power of Rome, so when a Vestal Virgin was judged to be unchaste, as Rhea Silvia had been, it was not seen as a personal act of choice, but risking the continued

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[107] Takács, 7

[108] Takács, 8

[109] Allen M. Ward et al, *A History of the Roman People* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003) 54; Mars was celebrated in the Roman Empire because he was the god of war and defender of Rome, not because he was the father of Romulus and Remus.

[110] Lynn H. Cohick, *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009) 162

[111] Andrew B. Gallia, "Vestal Virgins and Their Families"; in *Classical Antiquity (Volume 34, Issue 1*) 75-76

[112] Takács, 81; Cohick ,162

existence of Rome itself. The only punishment was to be buried alive and a new Vestal would then be chosen to take her place.[113]

The Vestal Cornelia served from roughly 50-91 CE. Aside from her dates of service, the only thing known about her is the reason and means of her death. Emperor Domitian decided that she had broken the rules around chastity and after a second hearing where she was absent, she was declared guilty and was put to death by being buried alive.[114] Pliny the Younger is the source of this information and was aware of her situation. He wrote to his friend Cornelius Minicianus on the matter (letter 4:11), suggesting the death of Cornelia was a matter of politics, even though he was not entirely convinced of her innocence.[115]

ii. Alexandria and Cantria Longina, priestesses in the Cult of Isis

The Cult of Isis was a mystery cult[116] originated in Egypt, and was found throughout the Roman Empire by the first centuries in the Common Era. The goddess Isis was a mother and wife, who understood sorrows and found joy despite her continued hardships, making her the ideal goddess for women to worship. Unlike the Vestal Virgins, Isis was not state controlled nor did worship of Isis have any influence on the political dealings of the government. For the first time Rome experienced a religious

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[113] Inge Kroppenberg, in *Law, Religion, and Constitution of the Vestal Virgins* (Law & Literature, Volume 22. Number 3) 428-429

[114] Kroppenberg, 429

[115] “Pliny the Younger, letter 4:11”, Walsh, P. G. (translator), *Pliny the Younger Complete Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 90-92

[116] Ward, 363-364; Mystery Cults were religions that insisted on membership rituals before the full cult was revealed. The Cult of Isis was a mystery cult, as were the religions that would eventually be known as Judaism and Christianity.

movement that was open to all people regardless of socio-economic status and family devotion; encouraged sexual conservatism, virginity and chastity in its adherents; and provided women an opportunity to be spiritual leaders for one year or a lifetime.[117] Isis brought with her resurrection, the promise of salvation, a focus on the faithful community, renewal of life in those dedicated to her, and the initiation into the cult through an act reminiscent of baptism.[118]

Women involved in the Cult of Isis were frequently involved with more than one cult. Alexandria was a woman from Rome in the second or third century of the Common Era, who had engravings on her sarcophagus stating that she was a priestess of both Bacchus and Isis.[119] Towards the end of the first century an altar inscription for Cantria Longina said she was “a priestess of Diva Julia, the daughter of Titus, and of Cybele was also a priestess of Isis”.[120] In the first few centuries of the Common Era until the ultimate demise of the Isis cult in the fourth century, sixteen women were identified as priestesses of Isis.[121]

In her survey of those drawn to the Cult of Isis, McCabe suggests that they were a very similar population to that drawn towards Christianity, as there was much in

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[117] Witherington, 24; Donalson, 56-57; Ross Shepherd Kraemer, *H*er *Share of the Blessings*, 78-79

[118] Elizabeth A. McCabe, *An Examination of the Isis Cult with Preliminary Exploration into New Testament Studies* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2008), 82-87. McCabe provides an extensive set of charts outlining the commonality between spirituality and theology of the Isis cult and Pauline letters, and Christianity in general.

[119] Donalson, 56; Sharon Kelly Heyob, *The Cult of Isis Among Women in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill. 1975) 89

[120] Heyob, 90

[121] Heyob, 90

common between the two religious practices.[122] Further connections have been drawn between Isis and Mary, through identities such as Theotokos, “bringer of grace... [and] mother of a god who achieves victory over darkness and death.”[123] Malcolm Drew Donalson alludes to the possibility that the Cult of Isis did not really disappear when Christianity became the state religion, but instead Christianity adopted those parts of the Cult of Isis that would lend themselves to the veneration of Mary.[124]

Temple of Isis, Mainz, Germany.[125]

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[122] McCabe, 92; A further discussion about the similarities of the Cult of Isis, other mystery cults in the first centuries and Christianity can be found in Jaime Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods*. (Boston: Brill, 2008), 383-409. He argues that rather than Christianity being the more fulfilling choice compared to the other mystery cults of the day, as has been argued by apologists since the dawn of Christianity, in fact the mystery cults like Isis and Mithras shared language and symbolism with the early Christian communities, and that much of their spiritual writing was done after that of Christianity. Teresa Berger also notes that the celebration of Eucharist in the early churches in Egypt, North Africa and Rome had ritual elements in common with the Cult of Isis, namely the giving of milk and honey to the newly initiated as nursing the young. Teresa Berger, *Women’s Ways of Worship*, 38. A further connection between Isis and Judaism was made by Shelly Matthews, who alluded to the expulsion in 19 CE of both the Isis and Hebraic cults, arguing that they were both seen as religions brought by foreigners and thus both were viewed with suspicion. Shelly Matthews, *First Converts* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2001) 22

[123] Donalson, 11

[124] Donalson, 11

[125] Photo Credit D. Suddard. Excavated temple in Mainz, Germany dating to the reign of Vespasian, contemporaneous with the first Christian communities around the Mediterranean.

Spiritual Leadership of Women in the Hebraic Culture

The traditional view of women in the Hebraic tradition holds that women were free of all but three *mitzvahs* or commandments, and they were not expected to fulfill the rest of the laws of Moses. The required mitzvahs were lighting the Shabbat candles, making the challah for the Sabbath ceremony, and making sure to keep themselves from their husbands while they were 'ritually unclean', i.e. menstruating. Outside of that they were to be wives and mothers, creating the environment for their husbands and sons to fulfill their cultic obligations,[126] and little more.

As with the real lives of women throughout Rome, the oversimplified traditional assumptions around the behaviour of all Hebraic women and the reality as shown through literary and archeological evidence prove to be quite different. Far from docile characters who were spectators in their own lives, Hebraic scriptures showed women leading during sacred rituals and worship:[127] Zipporah cutting off her son's foreskin (Exodus 4:25); Miriam leading public worship (Exodus 15:20); Deborah and Barak singing praise (Judges 5); Jepthah's daughter leading rituals of celebration and lament (Judges 11: 34, 37-40); Esther detailing the celebration of Purim (Esther 32); and found in the Septuagint, Judith leading her people in songs of praise (Judith 15:14).

Praise and worship in the Hebraic culture at the time was not the Rabbinic Judaism familiar in the modern age. Daily sacrifices by the priests in the temple were normative, but public worship was spontaneous as the examples of Miriam and Judith

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[126] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 95-96; There is further explanation that the Laws of Moses were divided into two forms: positive and negative commands. While all members of the Hebraic community were expected to observe the negative commands that included restrictions such as abstaining from certain foods, the positive commandments, aside from the three mentioned above, were for free men only.

[127] Markus McDowell offers a deeper discussion around women leading prayer in the Hebrew Scriptures, in *Prayers of Jewish Women*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006)

demonstrate.[128] There was not a disconnect between daily life and worshipping God, nor was there a regulated set of prayers required to be spoken. Although liturgical prayer as communal worship was emerging around this period, prayers were still given from a master to students, or offered as an extemporaneous expression of praise.[129] The weekly celebration of Shabbat included two of the three *mizvot* demanded of women: making and burning a piece of the challah, and presiding over the candles. Women had no requirement to participate in the public yearly rituals around harvest, but they were expected to prepare and lead Shabbat within their own homes.[130]

Studying the Law and Prophets was a large part of the religious life for the Hebraic people during the early days of the Roman Empire and well into the diaspora, and synagogues played a large role in the education of the community. While the origin of the synagogue is unknown, the best assumption is that they emerged during the Babylonian exile,[131] as a place for the Israeli tribes to gather and maintain their cultural heritage.

The term '*synagogue*' comes from the Greek word meaning 'assembly', and over the years has come to mean the place of communal worship for the Jewish people. The earliest synagogues were places of prayer, schools, places of business, community halls and courtrooms in smaller communities[132]. Synagogue leaders were community leaders, judges, educators and business leaders. In a book entitled *The Source of the*

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[128] Stephen M. Wylen, *The Jews in the time of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) 86

[129] Wylan, 85-86; Matthew 6:9-13 demonstrates Jesus tells his disciples to pray in a particular fashion

[130] Kraemer. *Her Share of the Blessings*, 97

[131] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968), 343

[132] Ferguson, 575

Christian Tradition: A Critical History of Ancient Judaism, published in 1911, Eduard Dujardin described synagogues as

> houses of prayer, preaching, and patriotic gatherings; even in Jerusalem where were, round the temple, pious shelters for the pilgrims of various nationalities and these were called synagogues. No cult was practised in the synagogue; no sacrifices were offered in them; they were meeting-places. There one listened to the reading of the Law and, later, of the prophets… and the exhortations of those who speak.[133]

In her doctoral dissertation, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, Bernadette Brooten makes an extensive study of references to Jewish women in leadership in ancient synagogues. Using evidence like grave markings and mosaics on synagogue floors, she shows prominent women in various roles of leadership. Interestingly, this is not a recent conversation. Previous writers have done work on the involvement of women in the Hebraic cults in earlier centuries. In an essay written for the Journal of Biblical Literature in 1898, Rev. Dr. Ismar Peritz (Syracuse University, Head of Religious Studies, 1895-1933), wrote:

> The conclusion to which the facts thus treated have led me... is that the Semites in general, and the Hebrews in particular, and the latter especially in the earlier periods of their history, exhibit no tendency to discriminate between man and woman so far as regards participation in religious practices, but that woman participates in all the essentials of the cult, both as worshipper and official; and that only in later time, with the progress in the development of the cult itself, a tendency appears, not so much, however, to exclude woman from the cult, as rather to make man prominent in it.[134]

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[133] Eduard Dujardin, *The Source of the Christian Tradition: A Critical History of Ancient Judaism*, (London: Watts & Co, 1911), 208

[134] Peritz, Ismar. 1898. "Woman in the ancient Hebrew cult." In *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 17, no. 2: 111-148. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, Web: (accessed November 10, 2014) 114

Brooten's work spans the century Before the Common Era to the period after the Fall of Rome, showing women in many roles of cultic leadership in the Hebraic tradition.

i. Rufina, Archisynagogue

Following the language pattern of the day, the *Archisynagogue* would literally mean "head of the synagogue" and is a title found in the Christian scriptures referencing the importance of Jarius (Mark 5:22) as well as others who confronted Jesus (Luke 13:14). The NRSV translates *archisynagogue* as 'leaders of the synagogue,' and the Lucan reference identifies them as people who tried to ensure that the laws around religious observations were kept.[135] Heads of the Synagogue were not readers of the Torah necessarily, but if there was no one available to read, they would assume that role. They were responsible for financial oversight, building and restoring the synagogue itself, "supervised local Hebraic community affairs",[136] and were generally perceived as being from wealthy families, a social role that often came with the expectation of financial and moral leadership. There is also evidence to suggest these leaders represented the synagogues to the wider society in civic matters.[137] There is a connection between *Archisynagogos* and *Mater Synagogae*, which might suggest they were the same position within the synagogues of the Talmudic Era (70 CE - 640 CE,

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[135] Tassa Rajak and David Noy. "Archisynagogoi: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue." In *The Journal of Roman Studies,* Volume 83 (1993), 79

[136] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, "Archisynagogs", in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 25

[137] Bernadette J. Brooten, 28-29

date in dispute depending on source cited), although the latter is assumed to be more honorary than functional.[138]

Rufina from Smyrna (2nd century) was identified in this position of authority, thus demonstrating that both women and men could be named as Head of the Synagogue. She built a tomb for her slaves, outlining the parameters of usage and punishment for those who went against her wishes. Brooten makes the following translation from the Greek:

> *Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her house. No one else has the right to bury anyone (here). If someone should dare to do, he or she will pay 1500 denars to the sacred treasury and 1000 denars to the Jewish people. A copy of this inscription has been placed in the (public) archives.* [139]

Much can be learned about Rufina from this inscription. She was a woman of power and influence, one probably used to being obeyed. She was responsible for her own money and was significantly wealthy.[140] Women developed their wealth through inheritance, marriage and business, and while we do not have enough information to know how Rufina gained her wealth, we do know she saw herself responsible for the care of her servants and slaves past their deaths. The promise of legal retribution if the instructions on the tomb were not followed was a frequent addition to burial sites. Other tombs in this era had notices that they were registered with the archives, and those who violated the wishes of the person who owned the tomb had to pay a significant amount

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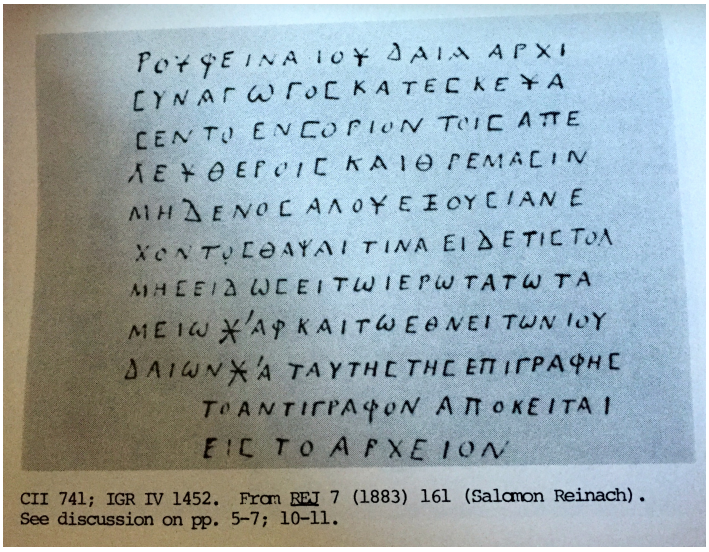
[138] “Archisynagogos”, Geoffrey Wigoder, ed, *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, (New York: MacMililan Publishing Company, 1989), 73; See further discussion on *Mater Synagogae* below.

[139] Brooten, 5; A similar translation of this tomb marker can be found in Ross Shepherd Kraemer. *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics*, 218

[140] Dorothy Irvin, in "The Ministry Of Women In The Early Church: The Archaeological Evidence." *Touchstone* 4.1 (1986), 26

to the owner or the person identified by the owner. Some went so far as giving a warning that those who did not follow the expectations outlined on the instructions for the tomb would have to deal with the wrath of God.[141]



CII 741; IGR IV 1452. From REJ 7 (1883) 161 (Salomon Reinach).
See discussion on pp. 5-7; 10-11.

Inscription on the tomb built by Rufina. [142]

ii. Sara Ura, *Presbytera* (Elder)

Another category of leaders within the synagogue were *Presbyteros* or Elders. Elders were scholars and the ones responsible for the synagogue finances and enforcing the religious laws.[143] This is consistent with the reference to the Hebraic elders in the Christian scriptures, where Acts 11:29-30 shows the elders were responsible for redistributing funds; in Luke 7:3-5 they try to convince Jesus that the centurion was worthy of his attention. Matthew 16:21 shows that elders had the primary

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[141] Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics,* 110-111

[142] Photo credit to Bernadette J. Brooten. *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, Plate I

[143] Brooten, 50-51

power to pass judgement over the life of Jesus, as they were named first in the prediction narrative of his death, and 1 Timothy 5:17 shows they were responsible for teaching.

The understanding of 'elder/presbytera' within the Hebraic context requires the historic lens of the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jewish Revolt and the Diaspora. The role of elders changed dramatically with the beginning of the Talmudic Era. While the elders served as judges and official representatives to the Roman government prior to the destruction of the temple,[144] afterwards their role was muted. Eventually it became associated with scholarship.[145]

Sara Ura's tomb in Rome identified her with this title: "*Here lies Sara Ura, presbytera*".[146] Unlike Rufina, whose inscription was able to tell us a great deal about her status within her community, we know nothing about Sara other than her name, her position and presumed title, and that she lived in Rome somewhere between the first and third centuries. This inscription does not include the name of a husband or other males. She is the one who held the authority.

iii. Maria, Mother of Synagogue

Though a recognized title of importance, little can be determined from either the inscription or the title itself in this roughly second century sarcophagus fragment. "*Here lies (Maria? Julia?) Marcella, mother of the synagogue of the Augustesians. May [...] be*

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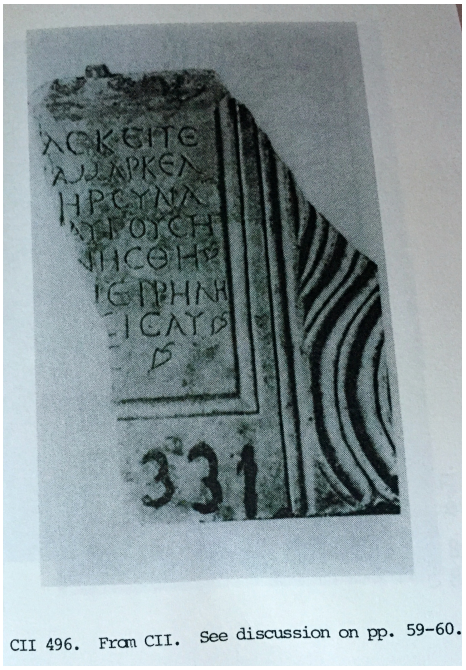
[144] Cohn-Sherbok, "Elder", in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica*, 132

[145] Wigoder, "Elders", in *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 221

[146] Brooten, p. 45; A similar translation of this tomb marker can be found in Ross Shepherd Kraemer. *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics*, 219

remembered. In peace her sleep."[147] M. H. Williams argues that she was most likely a patron of the synagogue and honoured for her generosity.[148] Kraemer carries this further by noting that local public officials sometimes carried the title of 'Pateressa' or 'Mother' of the city, in the same way there were "Fathers of the Synagogue" and "Fathers of the City", and suggests that it is reasonable to assume there would be shared titles between public and cultic practices given how religion was not separated from the wider culture of the day. While no clear correlation of these terms can be traced, it is reasonable to assume there was a sharing of the language from one realm into the other.[149]



Sarcophagus fragment from the burial of Maria, Mother of the Synagogue.[150]

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[147] Brooten, 59

[148] Williams, Margaret H. "The Structure of Roman Jewry Re-Considered: Were the Synagogues of Ancient Rome Entirely Homogeneous?" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 104 (1994) 134

[149] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 121

[150] Photo credit to Bernadette J. Brooten. *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*, Plate VII

iv. Marin and Gaudentia, *Hiereia* (Priest)

The word used in the epitaphs for both Marin and Gaudentia is '*Hiereia*', which was a Greek version of the word Kohen, or worship leader.[151] The word *hiereia* "literally translated [as] 'those who are in charge of' or 'those who take care of holy things'. These 'holy things' can include ritual objects, sacred rites and liturgies, and even religious festivals as a whole."[152] The Hebraic tradition held that all priests were descended from the line of Levi, and positions were inherited, unlike the priesthoods within other religious traditions at that time. Prior to the destruction of the Second Temple, priests were primarily concerned with sacrifices in Jerusalem. After the fall and the Diaspera, those involved in the priesthood primarily gave the blessing and had the privilege of being the first to read from the scrolls.[153] Marin of Tell el-Yahudiyyeh (d. June 7, 28 BCE) and Gaudentia in Rome (3rd - 4th century) were both identified as priests at their burials:

> *O Marin, priest, good and a friend to all, causing pain to no one and friendly to your neighbours, farewell! [She died at the age of] approximately fifty years, in the third year of Caesar [Augustus], on the thirteenth day of Payni (= June 7, 28 BCE)*
>
> *Here lies Gaudentia, priest, [aged] 24 years. In peace be her sleep!*[154]

The epitaph of Marin of Tell el-Yahudiyyeh is of particular interest considering it shows women carried the title of priest within the Hebraic worship tradition decades

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[151] Brooten, 78

[152] Joan Bretton Connelly, *Portraits of a Priestess* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007) 8

[153] Wigoder, "Priests", in *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 569-570; Cohn-Sherbok, "Priest", in The Blackwell Dictionary of Judaica, 434-435

[154] Brooten, 73-75; Kraemer, *Maenads, Martyrs, Matrons, Monastics*, 220

before the life and ministry of Jesus. Brooten concludes that if these women were following the priestly tradition as described in the Hebrew scriptures, then it is not a stretch to believe women held the scrolls and read from them during worship or study.[155]

Spiritual Leadership of Women in the Early Christian Church

Women in the first centuries of the early church community were already firmly established in either the Hebraic or Greco-Roman worlds, since the teachings they followed and shared were meant as correctives to the current Hebraic practices, and were not yet defined as their own emerging religious culture. Unlike either the pagan or Hebraic traditions which had hundreds of years to develop and permeate the numerous social classes of the wider Greco-Roman world, early followers of Jesus were geographically isolated and socially restricted.

The first Christian documents, those considered the authentic letters of Paul, thanked both women and men for their tireless efforts spreading the new faith and giving leadership in their communities. Nothing written in the first decades after the death of Jesus suggested women had one role while men had another. Instead the letters of Paul were concerned with women and men being part of authentic communities that supported each other, with a particular emphasis on caring for widows and orphans, and maintaining strict standards of behaviour.

Outside of the following limited references to specific men and women having identifiable roles within the letters of Paul, history is all but silent about the first seventy

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[155] Brooten, 98

years of the early church, how they worshipped, how they structured their local church organization, and which scriptures they understood to be authentic teachings.[156]

i. Phoebe, Maria, Agalliasis and Agrippiane, Deacon

Phoebe was the only woman in the Christian scriptures to be given this title.[157] This is significant because while Paul referenced himself as a 'deacon' along with select others, he in no way subordinated Phoebe to the male deacons.[158] Pliny the Younger acknowledged having tortured two women identified as deacons for information while he was the magistrate in Bithynia: "So I thought it all the more necessary to ascertain the truth from two maidservants, who were called [deacons], even by employing torture. I found nothing other than a debased and boundless superstition."[159]

The role of the deacon in the early church was not well defined for either women and men.[160] On a burial inscription from Cappadocia, the deacon Maria was said to have "raised children, sheltered guests, washed the feet of the saints, and shared her bread with the needy."[161] In his letter to the Trallians, Ignatius comments that deacons are 'ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ' and not those who take care of 'meat and

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[156] See footnote 31 for a discussion on the dating of *The Didache*.

[157] Mary M. Schaefer, *Women in Pastoral Office* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 135

[158] Florence M. Gillman, *Women Who Knew Paul* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 62

[159] "Pliny the Younger, letter 10:96", Walsh, (translator), 278-279

[160] Schaefer, 135

[161] Ute. E. Eisen, 165. There are many more epigraphical and literary examples of women in named and unnamed leadership positions within Christian church well into the Middle Ages, outlined in *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity,* and through the work of Dorothy Irvin. However they were not examined because this paper was only interested in named women prior to the First Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.

bread'.[162] Clearly this was a reference to the involvement of deacons in the rituals of eucharist and baptism, but not necessarily the agape feast in the evening when the worshipping community of the early church came together for evening prayers. Justin Martyr also states deacons had responsibility for distributing the Eucharist.[163]

Romans 16:1-2[164] introduces Phoebe, a Gentile convert named as deacon and *prostatis*, a benefactor or protector of the Christian community in Corinth. Another woman, Julia Theodora, from the same region and era is described as a *prostatis*, and was praised for being a supporter of exiles from Lycia. Julia Theodora used her personal and political influence on behalf of the exiles and others in her community, offering hospitality as well as economic and political connections. Seeing how Julia Theodora was viewed by her community in Corinth gives us a clearer picture of what Phoebe might have provided for the early church. Both women were part of the upper economic and political class, and made it easier for those under their protection to enjoy their hospitality and support.[165]

Paul spoke of Phoebe with the same titular references as he gave himself and other missionaries and leaders in the communities he visited,[166] then continued with the

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[162] Howell, 104

[163] "First Apology, chapter 65.5", Minns and Parvis, (translators), 255

[164] There has been some discussion as to whether Romans 16 was part of the original letter to the Romans, however most scholars have come to the conclusion that chapter 16 was definitely part of the original letter that Phoebe carried to the Roman churches. Craig S. Keener. *Paul, Women & Wives*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992. p. 237; For further discussion see Karl Paul Donfried, "A Short Note on Romans 16," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 89 (1970), 449; Klaus Haacker, *The Theology of Paul's Letters to the Romans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12; Harry Gamble, *The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans (*Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1977) 127

[165] Cohick, 301-303; Osiek and MacDonald, 216

[166] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1994) 45-46, 170-171

usual Roman practice of homage paid to a patron, speaking well of her and encouraging the community of Rome to welcome her as a 'sister'. Although some modern historians suggest the Christian community was above the Roman practice of paying homage to their patrons,[167] it seems apparent that Romans 16:2 included an open acknowledgement of praise and appreciation from Paul to Phoebe. In short, Paul was fulfilling his social obligation as a Roman citizen speaking to Romans, by recognizing her generosity as a leader in her community.[168] However, Paul also acts as patron to Phoebe by writing his letter of introduction, suggesting that while the act of paying homage was adhered to by both Phoebe and Paul, the relationship between the two was not strictly one sided.[169]

Phoebe was due great respect according to Paul, and within two verses we learn how powerful she was in the community of Cenchreae, and perhaps in Rome as well. Being chosen as the letter carrier included the expectation that she could explain the letter to the community in Rome.[170] Therefore Phoebe was deacon in Cenchraea, a wealthy and politically connected benefactor, a patron of Paul and her church community, and a missionary to those addressed in the Letter to the Romans.[171] While creating his commentary on Romans, Origen wrote about the role of Phoebe: "This

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[167] Derek & Dianne Tidball, *The Message of Women* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012) 204

[168] Cohick 306-307; Kraemer and D'Angelo, 208-209; A further discussion of patronage within the early Christian church can be found below.

[169] J. Paul Sampley, ed, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2003) 499

[170] Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds, *Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2012) 700; Keener, 238

[171] Schüssler Fiorenza, 169-172; Newsom and Ringe. *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 320

passage teaches with apostolic authority that women are likewise appointed to the ministry (diaconate) of the Church."[172]

Most funeral references found for women deacons date from the late 4th century CE into the 7th century CE. One from the early 4th century found in Milos, Greece, reads:

> The presbyters, worthy in every memory, Asclepis and Elpizon and Asclepiodotos and the deacon Agalliasis and the virgin Eutychia and the virgin Claudiane and Eutychia, their mother, rest here. And because this tomb is full I adjure you by the angel who sits before it that no one should dare to bury another in this place. Jesus Christ be the aid of the writer and his whole household.[173]

The grave of this clergy family has no mention of a father or husband, nor is their mother ordained or consecrated in any way. However all the sons (Asclepis and Elpizon and Asclepiodotos) were identified as priests, while two daughters were consecrated virgins (Eutychia and Claudiane) and the third daughter was a deacon (Agalliasis).[174] We do not have enough evidence to confirm whether the father buried his entire family or if that responsibility fell to another male member of the household. However, we can assume this family provided significant leadership in their community as all or most of the siblings were recognized in their ministry, much like another prominent Christian family, that of Basil the Great, who along with his brothers Gregory of Nyssa, Peter of Sabeste and Naucratius, and their sister Macrina, influenced the community around them in their day.

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[172] Origen translated by Thomas P. Scheck, ed, *The Fathers of the Church: Origen Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans Books 6-10* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002) 290

[173] Eisen, 175

[174] Eisen, 175

Another type of decorative feature which identified people and their roles within their early Christian communities was votives in mosaics, publicly acknowledging a vow or promise. A mosaic from Patras in Achaia, in Greece, states: “The best beloved of God, the deacon Agrippiane, has laid this mosaic in order to fulfill her vow.”[175]

According to Ute Eisen in *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity*, Origen spoke to these votives as a form of bargaining with God, that the person behind the votive would fulfill their promise once God had delivered what they requested. The above inscription and votive dates from an undetermined point in the early Christian church, which means it could fit within the time prior to the Council of Nicaea, or shortly afterwards, as votives increased in popularity moving into the early years of the Byzantine period.[176] The phrase “best beloved of God” was a term used during this time period to underscore the significance of the person as a church official.[177]

ii. Prisca and Kyria, Teacher

The most recognized woman in the early Christian church according to Acts and the Pauline epistles was ‘Priscilla’ or Prisca[178], named in Acts 18:1-3, 18-19, 24-28;

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[175] Eisen, 175-176

[176] Eisen, 176

[177] Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, editors. *Ordained Women in the Early Church* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 70

[178] Levine, Amy-Jill, with Marianne Blickenstaff, ed. *A Feminist Companion to Luke* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004) 189; There is some suggestion that the writer of Luke intentionally uses the diminutive “Priscilla” rather than the name Paul uses, “Prisca”, as a way to undermine her significance in the early church.

Romans 16:3-5a; 1 Corinthians 16:19; and 2 Timothy 4:19. Unlike Phoebe, who was a prominent and wealthy Gentile firmly established in Cenchrea, Prisca was a displaced Hebrew or Hellenistic 'Jew', who had been kicked out of Rome when Emperor Claudius expelled all the peoples associated with the Hebraic cult from Rome c. 49 CE.[179] Prisca was a businesswoman and craftsperson in the art of tent making or leatherwork.[180] Paul considered her to be one of the 'hard workers' for the faith, a compliment he gave to a number of other women and men.[181] Like many others Paul commended as teachers and leaders, they were most likely Christian before they met Paul in Corinth, considering that Paul does not talk about converting them but does acknowledge that both Prisca and Aquila built up the Christian community by having church meetings in their home.[182]

The Book of Acts records her as correcting mistakes in the theology of Apollos from Ephesus, quite possibly in his understanding of a baptism in Jesus, because Apollos 'knew only the baptism of John' (Acts 18:25-26). That would indicate that Prisca taught about the sacrament of baptism to a man, and he accepted her as his teacher, and that the writer of Acts thought this was important information to share.[183] John

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[179] A. R. C. Leaney, *The Jewish & Christian World 200 BC to AD 200* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 75

[180] Ivoni Richter Reimer, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Liberation Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 200-202; There is disagreement about what 'tent maker' meant, and some suggest Prisca, Aquila and Paul were in reality leather workers, making tents and saddles and following the Roman military. This would help explain why they were well known in three different cities.

[181] Tucker, 73; Gillman, 43

[182] Gillman, 51-52; It is important to note Paul refers to the house church being in "their" home, not Aquila's home, signifying that they were indeed a team ministry in the early Christian church. Further discussion about whether Prisca and Aquila were married, information only presented in Acts 18:2, or simple co-workers can be found in Margaret Y. MacDonald's essay in Ross Shepherd Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo, *Women & Christian Origins,* 202

[183] Witherington, Ben, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992) 220; Cohick, 130, 217; Schottroff and Wacker, 694; Eisen, 100

Chrysostom acknowledged the role Prisca played as a teacher stating in his Homily 40 on the Acts of the Apostles, “But [Priscilla and Aquila] he left in Ephesus. With good reason, namely, that *they* should teach.”[184] (Emphasis added)

Of the six times she is mentioned, four of those have Prisca listed before her husband, possibly suggesting she was more recognized or held a more prominent position of leadership in the early Christian community and gave authenticity to the ministry of Paul.[185] Regardless of which of the pair was more significant, they were seen as a ministry team, one not being devalued for the other, which was significant given they lived within a broader Greco-Roman world that was definitely hierarchical and patriarchal.[186]

Kyria was a teacher in Egypt in the early part of the fourth century, when teaching had yet to be centralized in schools or under the bishop. At the time teachers in Egypt were on par with other liturgical leaders.[187]

> ... newly in Alexandria... my lord brother Julianus... and if you wish (only?)... what we have in the way of good things: the... the teacher Kyria: the... who also wrote me the letter... the lady Xenike, the lady Arsinoe, and... the honourable freemen... Philoxenos and your own people: the lord... the good Phoibammon and the whole household greet you: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all
> Left margin: Kyria the teacher

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[184] John Chrysostom Homily 40 on Acts of the Apostles, as translated by Web: www.newadvent.org/fathers/210140.htm (accessed April 12, 2018)

[185] Witherington, 219; Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, ed, *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1992) 359; Gillman, 50; Cohick suggests the use of Prisca’s name first could be related to her having more personal wealth than Aquila. 130

[186] Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, 311; Keener, 241

[187] Eisen, 91

Address: To the best of all teachers Philoxenos...[188]

Nothing more is known about Kyria apart from being a teacher, but she was likely part of a larger group of women who would eventually become recognized as the Desert Mothers, ascetics who had their own followers and had many of their teachings recorded.[189] Other women who were teachers established and supported monasteries in the towns and cities throughout the Roman Empire.[190]

iii. Mary, Lydia and Nymphas, Patrons/House Church Leaders

Although they were co-workers and met together over extended periods of time, Paul, Phoebe, Prisca and Aquila demonstrated very different styles of ministry. While Paul travelled, seeing himself as the creator of Christian communities, it was people like Phoebe, Prisca and Aquila who stayed for long periods in specific cities, nurturing and teaching the new Christians and holding worship in their homes or places of business.[191]

House churches were one of the earliest forms of worshipping communities in the nascent church, but the term 'house church' did not mean that all early churches were only in the house nor that the house meant living quarters alone. There is ample evidence that communities gathered in apartments, rooming houses, workshops, hotels,

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[188] Eisen, 90; It must be acknowledged that "Kyria" is Latin for "Lady", and perhaps in this instance we are not talking about a woman named "Kyria" but a woman with the title "Lady". However both interpretations support the point that a woman was identified as a teacher in the Christian community.

[189] Eisen, 99-100; For further discussion about the Desert Mothers and their teachings, see Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers* (New York: The Paulist Press, 2001)

[190] Kraemer and D'Angelo, 335; One of the most famous women to found a monastery and teach was Macrina (c. 327-379), sister of Basil the Great and Gregory and Nyssa. It was her brother Gregory who praised her as "father, teacher, paedagogue, mother and counsellor".

[191] Gillman, 55

inns and outside near burial sites.[192] The Book of Acts 20:9 references a third story room where Paul addressed a crowd. Peter preached from Solomon's Portico in Acts 3:11, while in other references Paul preached in synagogues.

The primary style of house in the Greco-Roman era was a building with a series of rooms around a courtyard, all open to the public throughout the day. People from the streets could enter for business or visiting, or out of curiosity. It was in this type of free-for-all setting that the earliest worshipping communities held their services. They were not closed off from non-believers during times of communal fellowship and teaching, as they were during the rites of initiation and Eucharist. In essence the house-church itself was a quite likely a form of evangelization, and the head of the household was the host or patron.[193]

By the middle of the first century, the earliest Christian worshippers were no longer welcome in the synagogues, as they were considered heretics, making the House Church the only place of worship for the early congregations. Many of the worship practices that had begun as copies of the Hebraic synagogue style worship were adapted as the nascent church developed their own rituals, leaders and writers.[194]

In her work *Phoebe: Patron and Emissary*, Joan C. Campbell goes into greater length outlining the term 'patron' and what it meant in the Greco-Roman context of the first century CE. Patrons filled a specific role, one that was inherited across generations, wherein those with resources were expected to support those with less. The relationship

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[192] For a fuller analysis of early Christian gathering spots see Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016)

[193] Sampley, 258-266

[194] Kurian, The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization, Robert F. Lay, "The Church", 522-523

was not one of charity, but one of reciprocity. While the patron provided financial support, the recipient of the patronage was expected to honour the patron publicly.[195] In socially progressive Rome, women of power and wealth had a great deal of influence over the business, political standing and social advancement of those who benefited from their generosity. Statues were erected and epitaphs were hung recognizing the great influence women had in the lives of Roman people,[196] and it seemed as long as money was involved, men did not mind women having influence in the public arena.[197]

Being host did not necessarily mean that the patron of a worship community was automatically their liturgical leader. Neither men nor women were automatically given that power based solely on their financial status. However, as Osiek and MacDonald argue in *A Woman's Place*, "The assumption can be made that [house church patronages] were conducted in the same way as any other patronage situations, with deference, respect, and submission owed to the patronal figure who expected to be the centre of attention and of honour, except at those times when founding apostles were present".[198] Whether we follow the argument of Tidball[199] who suggests the early Christian community did not recognize patrons in the same way as did the wider Greco-Roman world, or that of Osiek and MacDonald who give an image of the respect that

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[195] Joan Cecelia Campbell, *Phoebe: Patron and Emissary* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2009) 83; A further discussion about Phoebe as Patron can be found above.

[196] Osiek and MacDonald, 194-213

[197] Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 107

[198] Osiek and MacDonald, 214

[199] For a fuller explanation of Tidball's position on homage to patrons in the early churches, see the material referenced by footnote 167.

would eventually be shown to bishops, there can be no argument that these relationships were of utmost importance in the spread of the early church.

Worship in the earliest Christian communities, as Peter Lampe comments in his essay “Paul, Patrons and Clients” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*, was a communal event with many members contributing. Without the stricter worshipping practices that the Hebraic and pagan communities employed, worship had the potential to be chaotic In 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 Paul acknowledges that a number of forms of worship were offered, listing them in order of importance: apostles, prophets, teacher, deeds of power, healing, assisting others, leadership and finally speaking in tongues. All were encouraged to lead based on their spiritual gifts, not their financial contribution or their gender.[200] If a house church patron had a spiritual gift, they would have had the opportunity to lead in worship as well.

Frequently when houses as places of gathering and worship are mentioned in The Book of Acts or the letters of Paul, they are the homes of women recognized as patrons.[201] References to women as heads of house churches include the house of Mary, mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12); Lydia (Acts 16:40); Nymphas (Colossians 4:15); Priscilla, who was noted to have house churches in Rome, Corinth and Ephesus (Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, 1 Timothy 4:19); and most likely Phoebe in Cenchreae (Romans 16:1).

In light of the insult Celsus gave that claimed Christians were primarily women and slaves,[202] teaching Christianity in their households as they worked, and building on

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[200] Sampley, 497

[201] Newsom and Ringe, 311; Keener, 243

[202] See footnote 3 above, for an expansion on Celsus’ critique of early Christian identity.

the fact that converts from the Hebraic cult would already be practiced at presiding over family worship on the Sabbath as outlined above, it can be argued that the reason so many women were named as house church leaders was because they were in fact the teachers and worship leaders of the community gathered around their household. As mentioned above by Osiek and MacDonald, while patrons were not automatically the main worship leaders, they did have the respect of their community and were probably regarded as people who shared their faith with others through teaching and praise. "When women were widowed or divorced and remained in charge of their own house, it was not unnatural for them to be initiators and central figures of hospitality. In a Christian context, accordingly, it was no less natural for them to be hostess and thus presiders at the common meal."[203] There is also the strong possibility that their wealth and status meant they were the most literate in their community, therefore they might have been the ones called upon to read letters and scripture.

Little is said of Mary (Acts 12:12-17) apart from her being the mother of John Mark, who became an assistant to Barnabas when Paul refused to include the young man in his ministry (Acts 15:37-39). Her house was a place for gathering and a worship community, and those who were part of the early Christian community were not necessarily restricted to a traditional Roman hierarchical structure of interaction. This was made evident by the exchange between Mary and Rhonda, a slave girl who did not appear to be owned by Mary, and who challenged Mary when she did not accept

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[203] Osiek and MacDonald, 248

Rhonda announcing the arrival of Peter, who had just walked out of jail.[204] There was no indication that Mary chastised Rhonda by reminding her of her place in the social hierarchy.

Another example of a patron and house church leader was Lydia (Acts 16:11-15,40), who began her Christian journey already having been a leader in the Hebrew community in Philippi. According to Ivoni Richter Reimer, in her essay "Acts of the Apostles" in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Schottroff and Wacker, the words used to describe what Lydia and her friends were doing that morning by the waterfront translated into 'speaking together in the synagogue'.[205] It is quite possible that Lydia was a *heireia*,[206] if the translation by Reimer is correct, and she with her friends were a *minyan*, the group of seven members of the synagogue needed to hold a worship service.[207] Once converted and baptized, the new group of Christians moved from the synagogue to a home church, and presumably retained the patronage Lydia provided from the Hebraic community to the newly formed Christian community.

iv. Artemidora, Epikto and Ammion, Priest

The term 'priest' was frequently used in the Greco-Roman culture to identify people with specific roles within their worshipping community, but it was not a term

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[204] Schottroff and Wacker, 690

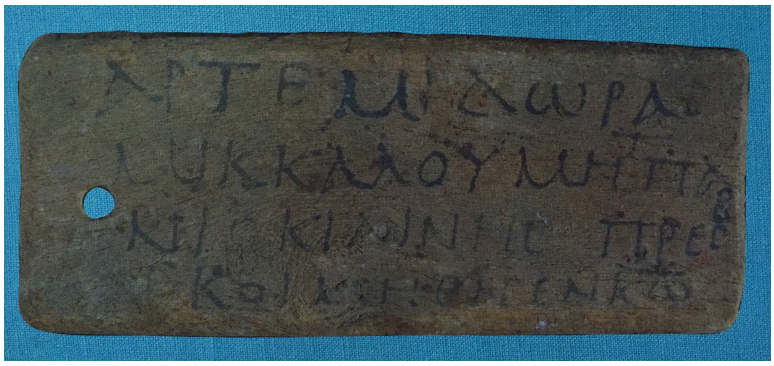
[205] Schottroff and Wacker, 691; "Proseuchē" means synagogue building, while "Synerchesthai" means to gather, to sit down and to speak, in a worship style much like Jesus did in Luke 4:14-21

[206] Brooten, 90-91; see section on Marin and Gaudentia, *Hiereia* (Priest) above.

[207] Schottroff and Wacker, 691; Brooten, 94-95

employed by Paul in his letters nor was it a term used in The Book of Acts to refer to those in Christian leadership.[208] It was not until well into the second century that Christian priests started to appear and were named in the three tiers of Christian ministry, between Deacon and Bishop,[209] due to the growth in the Christian communities and the inability of the bishops to participate in weekly worship in every church under their jurisdiction.[210]

Artemidora was a priest in Egypt, somewhere between the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries. The wooden toe tag from her mummy is all that remains. In addition to her name and title "*Presb*" or priest, the names of her parents are listed.[211]



Toe tag from the mummy of Artemidora.[212]

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[208] References to specific priests in the Christian scriptures were either those from the Hebraic tradition or a lone reference in Acts 14:13 to a priest from the temple of Jupiter.

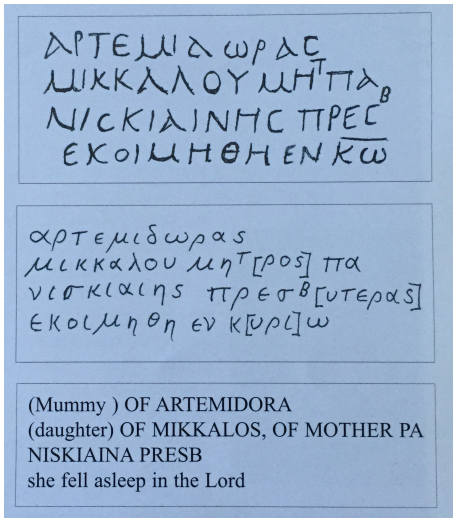
[209] See the "Bishops and Deacons" section in Chapter 2 above.

[210] Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 48

[211] Dorothy Irvin, *Calendars: The Archeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church: 2003-2007*

[212] Photo Credit to Dorothy Irvin, *Calendars: The Archeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church: 2003-2007*

On the island of Thera, an epitaph read “Angel of the Presbyter Epikto”. Like Artemidora, the inscription for Epikto dates to the second or third century. [213] No additional personal information is given. Likewise in Asia Minor another epitaph dating to the mid third century read only “Bishop Diogas in memory of Ammion the Presbyter.”[214] The tombstone to Ammion was one of several erected by Bishop Diogas to mark the people who served under his authority.[215] Perhaps the lack of information on both tombstones is telling in itself: neither woman needed additional explanation or celebration, they were just quietly remembered for serving their community.



v. Junia and Mary, Apostle

Unlike deacons, teachers, patrons and house church leaders, whose responsibilities were within pre-established faith communities, apostles travelled. In Romans 16:7, Andronicus and Junia are named and honoured for their leadership and their renown as apostles, and were recognized as part of Paul’s specific mission work amongst the Gentiles.[216] In an essay for *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, Eldon Jay Epp, one of the primary scholars on the person of Junia, identified her as a woman of Hebraic ancestry, who most likely converted to Christianity before Paul. “Confirmed to

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[213] Eisen, 123-124

[214] Eisen, 116

[215] Eisen, 117

[216] Schüssler Fiorenza, 172; Gillman, 69

be a woman by Origen (c.185-254) and into the 12th century, and a wise woman with the “title of apostle” by John Chrysostom (c.349-407), she was canonized in Constantinople (608 CE; feast day, May 17 in Eastern Orthodoxy).”[217]

Little more is said about the pair, apart from the reference to being with Paul in prison, which could have been mentioned because the people in Rome were either unfamiliar with that experience of Andronicus and Junia, or because Paul wanted to show he was well known by those respected in Rome, and should be taken seriously.[218] Scholars can only speculate about where the two originated, what they had done to establish themselves as esteemed even among the other apostles who were involved in mission work throughout the Mediterranean in the first century, and how they were related to Paul. There is a biased assumption that any time a woman is mentioned along with a man, they must be married, or less likely, that they are siblings. Either of those relationships could be true, but the assumption has to be moderated by the fact that many of those who were drawn to the Christian message in the first generations were freed women and men, who were not allowed to marry based on Roman law that restricted marriage to citizens.[219] It is quite possible that Junia and Andronicus were simply a missionary team, and that their relationship to Paul was through the familial language of the early churches rather than any true blood kinship.

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[217] Patte, p. 668

[218] It is safe to suggest that the first sixteen verses of Romans 16 is an attempt by Paul to show that even though the bulk of the Roman Christian community had never met him, significant members of their leadership had met him and would support his arrival and teaching authority.

[219] Stegemann and Stegemann, p. 390; While there is some suggestion that woman of Hebraic background were more likely to be married regardless of social strata, those considered freed or slave under Roman law would not have been given the privilege.

Regardless of their origin or relationship, Paul considered being an apostle to be the primary gift of the spirit, as outlined in his first letter to the Corinthians 12:28, so it is safe to assume he recognized Junia as having specific spiritual gifts, and acknowledged her as a church founder much like himself.

Much of the discussion about Junia has been focused on her name,[220] not her ministry. However, early church writers recognized her to be an accomplished woman. John Chrysostom wrote in his *Homily 31 on Romans*,

> Then another praise besides. *"Who are of note among the apostles."* And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even among these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! How great is the devotion of this woman that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle! But even here he does not stop, but adds another encomium besides, and says, *"Who were also in Christ before me."* For this too is a very great praise, that they sprang forth and came before others.[221]

Given that the Apostolic Era was between 35-90 CE, it is quite possible that Andronicus and Junia were either present at an appearance of Jesus, or subsequently commissioned. Paul does state that they were believers before he had become Christian.[222]

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[220] It was not until the Reformation and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular that questions arose about the name of Junia. Martin Luther was convinced no women would be given such a title, so he translated it 'Junias'. There was no other criteria for changing the name of a woman into that of a man aside from gender-based assumption. For an extensive discussion of this matter as it pertains to the naming of Junia (Romans 16:7), see Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (*Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005)*

[221] John Chrysostom as translated by E. B. Pusey et al (editors). *Library of the Fathers: The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom* (Oxford: Baxter Printer, 1841) 489; Web: www.newadvent.org/fathers/210231.htm (accessed April 9, 2018)

[222] "They were in Christ before I was" Romans 16:7 (NRSV); Gillman, 69

Although a character found outside both the letters of Paul and The Book of Acts, Mary Magdalene fits both definitions of witness to the resurrected Christ and someone told by Christ to tell the message. While not given the title 'apostle' within scripture, she was the first to tell the news of the resurrection. In his book *Gender and Ministry in Early Christianity and the Church Today*, Adolphus Chinedu Amadi-Azuogu argues:

> ... the post-resurrection Jesus commissioned women to be announcers of the good news. This indicates his acceptance of them to be ministers in his church, at all levels. When he commissioned them after the resurrection to be his commissioned messengers to the twelve, this has an elevated position, even higher than the priesthood.[223]

Even though her story comes to an abrupt end at the close of the Gospel of John, her significance as the first apostle, named the Apostle to the Apostles according to Thomas Aquinas, was recognized and celebrated well into the Middle Ages.[224] "Tradition" holds that this title for Mary Magdalene dates back to an anonymous writer in the early church, possibly Hippolytus, around 200 CE, in a commentary on the Song of Songs. However, there is no evidence to support this title being widely used or recognized at that time.[225] Her purpose for being included in this discussion as an apostle in the early church comes from the recent recognition by Pope Francis, that her feast day is to be celebrated with the equivalent recognition previously reserved for the named twelve male apostles. A seemingly innocuous phrase towards the end of the

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[223] Adolphus Chinedu Amadi-Azuogu, *Gender and Ministry in Early Christianity and the Church Today* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2007) 107

[224] Eisen, 55

[225] Bart. D. Ehrman, *Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 253; Earlier writings of Hippolytus in *In Canticum canticorum*, suggest the earlier churches also saw Mary as "Apostle to the Apostles", even though in that instance, Hippolytus conflates Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany. Cohick, 318

pronouncement by Pope Francis says, "...for she is the witness to the risen Christ and announces the message of the Lord's resurrection *just like the rest of the Apostles*."[226] (Emphasis added)

[226] On June 3, 2016 Pope Francis officially raised Mary Magdalene to the level of Apostles in terms of liturgical feast days. Web: www.aleteia.org/2016/06/10/mary-magdalene-apostle-to-the-apostles-given-equal-dignity-in-feast/ (accessed April 10, 2018)

Chapter 4

Changes for Women in Leadership

In addition to women named and recognized in the first few hundred years of the early churches, there were many more who were unnamed and lost to history. The involvement of women in worship leadership was cross-cultural in the first centuries of the Common Era, with women found in cultic leadership across Hebraic, Hellenistic and early Christian communities. While they might not have informed the worship expectations and practices for each other, they demonstrate that culturally around the Mediterranean, women sharing leadership in worship was acceptable and expected. Both women and men were elected to cultic leadership, with women in Hellenistic communities having more visibility and responsibility in cultic rituals than Roman women.[227] This could be due to the Roman cultic celebrations being linked to the continued survival of the Roman state.

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[227] Stegemann and Stegemann, 369-370

> In Paul's authentic letters one observes that during his evangelization and eventual establishment of cells of believers, thus churches, he relied heavily on female collaborators, working alongside women as well as men, expressed high regard for his female coworkers, referred to women as well as men as leaders of house churches, denoted the roles of some females with terms that he likewise used to describe his own roles or that of other makes, terms such as deacon (Romans 16:1-2), apostle (Romans 16:7) and some would argue, most likely included women also in the plural terms he used to refer to bishops and deacons (Philippians 1:1).[228]

When Paul addressed the congregation gathered at Corinth, he spoke to worship that both men and women participated in and led. 1 Corinthians 11:5 speaks to the appropriate head covering of women while they offered prayer and prophecies. This expectation was in keeping with the wider cultural norms that insisted women of respect wore head coverings in most of their daily activities. The address also points to how aware Paul was of the impression the Corinth church was making on their neighbours, and the problems that might have arisen if women were seen as equal to men (i.e. head uncovered).[229] Propriety was very much a concern.

Paul continued to address the behaviour of the women and men leading worship in Corinth, by then addressing the issue of speaking in tongues, one of the ministries of

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[228] Florence Morgan Gillman, "Women in Early Christianity", in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Civilization, Volume IV*, 2516

[229] One of the challenges understanding the message Paul was delivering to the communities who received letters is trying to figure out the original issues that necessitated his response. On the matter of women wearing head covering, there seems to be an issue of proper social etiquette and gender order. Women were not to praise God while their heads were uncovered, as was expected for men, but rather should cover themselves as respectable women did. There is no distinction for married women rather than single women, widows or worship leaders. All women were expected to cover themselves when speaking. It might have been because to uncover their heads was to be seen as either equating themselves with men, or it could be that the congregation did not want their women to appear socially shamed. The text does not give enough information for any satisfying conclusions. Stegemann and Stegemann, 389-399; In their *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version, (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds, furthers this discussion by saying "Roman women covered their hair in public (except during mourning, weddings and certain festivals)… veiling was also normative for married women in Jewish culture. Uncovering or shaving a woman's head were forms of shaming, punishment or mourning." 305

the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:10). Again Paul does not differentiate between men or women as the worship leaders, but calls upon both women and men to truly asses whether or not their style of worship was legitimate, and how welcoming the practice was to potential new adherents (1 Corinthians 14:9-12). In addition to propriety, Paul was concerned with the mission of all the churches he addressed in his letters, and attempted to make correctives when he saw the need. It was important that they presented themselves with the highest integrity (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Women be Silent

The evidence of the cultic leadership of women is challenged by 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which the majority of scholars agree were verses added to the text at a later time in history, and were not part of the letter Paul originally sent the Corinthians.[230] Verses 34-35 are considered “interpolation” verses, and have caused great controversy over the decades since feminist interpretation of canonical and non-canonical text, along with grave markers and artwork, some of which has been explored above, have revealed the activity of women in the development of the nascent church.[231] Scholars have tried to understand why those verses were dropped into a passage that dealt with two specific forms of Spiritual gifts, namely speaking in tongues and prophesy. These verses which have commonly been the cornerstone of denying women cultic leadership within Christian communities, were not known to the first centuries of Christian writers, most of whom wrote extensively on the first letter to the Corinthians.[232]

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[230] Payne, 226

[231] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 174

[232] Payne, 251

The first recorded acknowledgement of verses 34-35 within Christian documentation was found in Tertullian c. 200 CE,[233] and his work *On Baptism*. Women being silent is not the focus of the chapter, however, but rather a side comment used to validate his negative attitude about the document "*The Acts of Paul and Thecla*" c. 170 CE,[234] (or *The Acts of Paul*), which was written within the decades before Tertullian began to write his treatises.

> But the woman of pertness, who has usurped the power to teach, will of course not give birth for herself likewise to a right of baptizing, unless some new beast shall arise like the former; so that, just as the one abolished baptism, so some other should in her own right confer it! But if the writings which wrongly go under Paul's name, claim Thecla's example as a licence for women's teaching and baptizing, let them know that, in Asia, the presbyter who composed that writing, as if he were augmenting Paul's fame from his own store, after being convicted, and confessing that he had done it from love of Paul, was removed from his office. For how credible would it seem, that he who has not permitted a woman even to learn with over-boldness, should give a female the power of teaching and of baptizing! "Let them be silent," he says, "and at home consult their own husbands."[235]

Tertullian was not writing against all women in all leadership in this document, but rather the specific act of presiding over baptism, an act of worship leadership he considered to be the purview of the bishop, with presbyters and deacons performing the initiation ritual only if a bishop was not present. "Of giving it, the chief priest (who is the bishop) has the right: in the next place, the presbyters and deacons, yet not without the

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[233] Payne, 252

[234] "Paul and Thecla" in F. L. Cross, editor, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1049; The work "The Acts of Paul and Thecla", was a highly popular apocryphal story, that was read as scripture by some communities in the early churches. While scholars are open to the idea that there is some historic accuracy to the story, it is impossible to separate fact from fiction. An extensive conversation on the historical significance of The Acts of Paul and Thecla, can be found in Osiek and MacDonald, *A Woman's Place*, 240-242

[235] Tertullian on Baptism, chapter 17.2, www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian21.html (accessed April 17, 2018)

bishop's authority, on account of the honour of the Church, which being preserved, peace is preserved."[236]

An extensive study on the insertion of the two verses of 1 Corinthians 13:34-35 can be found in *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*, by Philip B. Payne. The four theories of how the two verses came to be added to the letter from Paul are as follows:

1. Paul required silence of all women in all assemblies of the church,
2. Paul required women to be silent in some qualified sense,
3. The verses cite a false prophecy by a self-proclaimed Corinthian prophet,
4. These verses are an interpolation.[237]

After fully exploring and dismissing the first three hypotheses, Payne spends the remainder of chapter 14 using textual and linguistic criticism to review the issues with these verses and how they could not possibly have been part of Paul's original letter. Of particular note is that the style of verses 34-35 does not fit with those verses that surround it, and present a Hellenistic formula known as the "three-fold utterance", which uses three forms of making the same statement, all without context or condition.[238] There are word usages that do not match with the surrounding verses, including the contradictory "For you can all prophesy one by one, so that *all may learn* and all be encouraged" (emphasis added), 14:31, while women are restricted to learning from home in 14:35. Also, Paul referencing the law without giving it context or a reference to

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[236] Tertullian on Baptism, chapter 17.1

[237] Payne, 219

[238] Payne, 218

Hebraic scripture is unique. This pattern of writing is not found anywhere else in the writings of Paul.[239]

A frequent assessment is that Paul was speaking from his cultural context, but Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, in their *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version*, disagree with that conclusion. In their textual notes on the scripture passage, they write: "Paul's injunction to an imagined normative misogynist "rabbinic background" lack any basis. Jewish women spoke publicly in their capacity as civil leaders and leaders of synagogues."[240]

The general scholastic conclusion is that later generations of the early churches read 1 Corinthians 14, through the lens of 1 Timothy 2:12, but went even further than the latter letter to Timothy.[241] By the third or fourth generation, moving into the second century of the Common Era, those contemporaneous with 1 Timothy, or at least those who were in receipt of the letter, were beginning to impose restrictions on the ministry of women. However, 1 Timothy addresses women as teachers of men only, not as teachers of women and children. The letter does not address women as worship leadership for the wider community. This restriction was not considered absolute though, as even John Chrysostom c. 390 CE felt that if a woman was more learned and faithful than her husband, that she should teach him out of her own wisdom and faith.[242]

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[239] Payne, 257

[240] Levine and Brettler, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 310

[241] Payne, 254, 262

[242] Barbara Pappas, *First and Second Corinthians: A Study of Paul's Letters*, (Salisbury, Massachusetts., Regina Orthodox Press, 2005), 181; John. Chrysostom, Homily 7.7, www.newadvent.org/fathers/200107.htm (accessed April 17, 2018)

Increasing Injunctions on Women in Leadership

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her book *In Memory of Her*, does not support the conclusion of interpolation of verses 1 Corinthians 14:34-35,[243] arguing textual evidence. Instead she suggesting that those women being addressed were wives only, not all women.[244] This argument does have some support in the word usage; according to Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, “Women (“gynaikes”) could be translated “wives”; a husband who interprets his wife’s utterances would be subordinate to her, contravening 11:8-9."[245] However, Schüssler Fiorenza shifts focus on the discussion away from textual criticism toward the inverse argument that women were obviously in leadership in the church of Corinth, if there was a perceived need to silence them.[246]

It would be fanciful and perhaps naive to suggest women in the first centuries of the Christian church experienced parity with the men around them. Even with the dismissal that Christianity was the purview of ‘women, slaves and the gullible,’ and the earliest church writer thanking both women and men equitably for their work, they were still part of a wider Hebraic and Greco-Roman world where women were not equal to men in any capacity. Women in households that were not fully Christian, women who were slaves, women who were freed but limited by their own enterprise were no more powerful within Christianity than they would have been in the wider Greco-Roman society, as Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald underscored in *A Woman’s Place*.

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[243] Schüssler Fiorenza, 230

[244] Schüssler Fiorenza, 231

[245] Levine and Brettler, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, 310

[246] Schüssler Fiorenza, 226; Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 175

The Roman economy was still a slave-based economy where those on the upper social strata depended on the exploitation of those on the lower end. While women might have experienced more freedom and respect within the strict limits of the Christian community, that would not have extended into wider society.[247]

As the early churches moved away from the organic structures of the first generations of the nascent church to become more organized, structure and expectations were written down and shared between bishops and congregations. *The Didache*, presumed to be written for the Syriac church sometime between the late first century and early second century CE, is believed to be the first document composed to give guidance for church order. It was primarily concerned with the decorum of believers and the proper practice of the celebrations of the bread and cup and initiation through baptism, as well as fasting and prayer.[248] It laid out expectations around the treatment of others in the community ensuring they remembered to focus on God and not personal benefit. There was also a heavy emphasis on how to welcome guests to the community and discern if they were authentic teachers or false prophets (sections 11:3 - 13:7). *The Didache* made room for those claiming to be teachers, apostles and prophets to be either male or female.[249] Language did not become gender specific until section 15:1, where the method was given for the replacement of male deacons and bishops.[250] When *The Didache* was written, only the two-fold local offices of bishop and deacon were recognized, but already some distinctions had been made between liturgical

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[247] Osiek and MacDonald, 249-250

[248] Leaney, 199-200; Torjesen, 25; Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 47

[249] "*The Didache* chapters 11-13", Milavec (translator), 27-33; Eisen, 70

[250] Milavec, 35

leadership of the community and missionary leadership of travelling teachers within the Syriac community. Section 15:2 hints at local leadership being less respected than travelling prophets/teachers, and the attempts by the writer of *The Didache* to place the two ministries on par: “Do not, then, look down upon [bishops and deacons]; for they themselves are your honoured ones with prophet-teachers.”[251]

Over one hundred years later a new document emerged from the Syrian church dating to the first half of the third century CE. *The Didascalia Apostolorum* further outlined ecclesiastical structure, liturgical practices and episcopal authority.[252] The language still identified women as deacons, but their role had become defined. Women deacons were restricted to serving only women. This included instructing the catechumens, anointing women with oil at baptism, and visiting women in their homes.[253]

There was almost 200 years between Phoebe and the writing of *The Didascalia*, and over one hundred years between the two women who appeared before Pliny the Younger, and the women identified in *The Didascalia*. While Phoebe and the two unnamed women from Bithynia were considered on par with male deacons, this new description of the responsibilities for women deacons in Syria made the women deacons

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[251] Milavec, 35

[252] Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, eds, *Ordained Women in the Early Church* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) 107; According to Daniel Patte in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, *The Didascalia apostolorum* was written during the early half of the 3rd century, most likely in Syria. 324

[253] Alistair Stewart-Sykes (translator), *The Didascalia apostolorum* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2009), 192-195

of the early second century subject to the authority of the male deacons as well as the bishops and priests.[254]

The Didascalia apostolorum further enshrined this hierarchy through imagery comparing the church officials to the emerging sense of the Trinity. The bishop was seen as a representation of God, while male deacons were a representation of Christ and female deacons a representation of the Holy Spirit.[255] This made sense in Syriac where the Holy Spirit was understood in the female gender, as it was in Hebrew,[256] however it also firmly established that the bishop represented the authority of God on earth.

Widows came under much harsher criticism, which has been suggested to originate in widows abusing the largess of the communities where they received support.[257] Others suggest it was a bid to take control and centralize authority in the bishop, thus restricting the role of widows from teaching, disciplining and baptizing, to one of prayer and submission.[258]

> Thus it is neither fitting nor necessary that a woman should teach, in particular about the name of the Lord and redemption of his passion. For you women, especially widows, are not appointed to teach but solely to pray and beseech the Lord. For the teacher himself, when he sent us, the twelve, to instruct the people and the nations did not send with us the women disciples who were with us, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the daughter of James and Salome, to instruct or save the world. If it were necessary for women to teach our master would himself have commanded them to give instruction alongside us.[259]

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[254] Stewart-Sykes, *The Didascalia apostolorum*, 25

[255] Madigan and Osiek, 107

[256] Schaefer, 137

[257] Madigan and Osiek, 110

[258] Torjesen, 146

[259] Torjesen, 185

Those against women teaching took issue with women teaching men, not women teaching in principle. The church quickly moved from the first decades, where Prisca taught Apollos and was celebrated for doing so, to a more patriarchal model where anything that contributed to women having authority over men was disavowed.[260]

On women baptizing the following was said:

> As to whether a woman may baptize, or whether one should be baptized by a woman, we do not counsel this, since it is a transgression of the commandment and a great danger to her who baptizes as to the one baptized. For were it lawful for a woman to be baptize our Lord and teacher would himself have been baptized by Mary his mother; he was, however, baptized by John just as others of the people.[261]

The Apostolic Tradition was the third book on church order produced prior to the First Council of Nicaea, originated on the other side of the Roman Empire from *The Didache* and *Didascalia.* Chapter 2 developed the contents of that church order, as the positions of bishops, presbyters and deacons were examined. The restrictions of women outlined in *The* Didascalia were amplified in The Apostolic Tradition. Aimed at women who were either virgins or widows, thus not likely to run their own households, they were restricted to praying and fasting, but not encouraged to active participation in the cultic celebrations.[262]

> Hippolytus[263] employs a circular argument to exclude women from public ministry: women do not perform liturgical ministry because they are not ordained; therefore they do not need to be ordained (indeed, may not be) since ordination is for liturgical ministry, which

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[260] Kraemer, 188

[261] Stewart-Sykes, *The Didascalia apostolorum*, 189

[262] Stewart-Sykes, *The Apostolic Tradition 10,* 95

[263] See footnote 70 for a discussion on the authorship of Hippolytus.

> they do not do. In turn, the argument defines the nature of clerical office: ordination is for the clergy because of their liturgical ministry.[264]

Slowly the Christian community began to establish common principles of structure and operation. By the Council of Nicaea, bishops from the east and a few from the west were ready to talk. One canon emerged from Nicaea placing restrictions on women and the living arrangements between women and men who were not related by blood (aunts, sisters and mothers).[265] Though the canon was focused on the respectability of women and men living outside of a biological relationship and preventing clergy from having younger women living in their homes, it affected communal living and shared monastic houses of women and men.[266] Again the role of women was reduced and made less secure as the church moved towards tougher restrictions on those in leadership.

Conclusion

The 'traditional' understanding that women were excluded from early Christian leadership in all its forms is not historically accurate. Women living in the first centuries of the pagan, Hebraic and early Christian communities have been identified, by name and title, as participating and leading in cultic worship and mission. There is, however, a comparative timeline that suggests the roles of women in ministry became more restricted as the ministries of the earliest churches became formalized.

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[264] Kraemer and D'Angelo, 307

[265] No mention is made for or against wives, so that remains an open question.

[266] Archbishop Peter L'Huillier, *The Church of the Ancient Councils* (Crestwood, New York: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 35

The language of priesthood and leadership crossed all cultural groups from Pagan to Hebraic to Christian, showing how the various religious traditions used terms in common.[267] Ross Shepard Kraemer forcefully points out in *Her Share of the Blessings* that it is only Christianity that spends time denying the involvement of women in religious leadership. Pagan and Jewish communities do not engage in such fruitless discussions.[268]

While the evidence supporting women in leadership in the early church does not describe with clarity the role of women named, the same holds true for men. Apart from Paul who spoke about himself at length, we do not have a clear picture of the leadership provided by anyone in the centuries before the First Council of Nicaea established the emerging standards for cultic leadership roles and obligations across the Christian church.

Two difficulties that will forever challenge the study of women in worship and missionary leadership in the first centuries are the fluidity of terminology, and the stark contrast between the number of church workers Paul describes with the sparsity of named leaders after his death. Paul focused on people who shared his work and shared a personal connection. Archeological evidence following the death of Paul is almost sterile in comparison, as it lacks embellished ministry descriptions in writings, epitaphs or statuary. The socio-economic status of most of the earliest church congregations adds to the challenge of finding evidence of early church ministries for either women or

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[267] See Appendix II for a timeline of women involved in early Christian ministry, and the cultic leadership of Hebraic and pagan religious traditions during the same time periods. There has also been an inclusion of the approximate dates of the writings of the earliest church communities.

[268] Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 174

men, which was further amplified by the well supported assumptions that the earliest congregations prioritized money for missionary work over recordings for posterity. Documentation that specifically identified women after the death of Paul was primarily interested in restricting the ministry of women, or ignored it altogether, not thanking them for their work.

> Nothing in Paul's comments justifies the conclusion that these women worked in ways that differed either in kind or in quantity from the ways in which men worked. Indeed, all of the individuals listed appear to be engaged in tasks of ministry, a fact that needs to be taken into account in any assessment of the roles of women in early Christianity.[269]

The language of the early churches did borrow and redefine specific established terms from the wider Hebraic and Greco-Roman cultic communities, and there is ample evidence that both women and men held these roles. The limitations of terminology only emerge when looking through the lens of 'tradition' when speaking of women in identified roles, never the men. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza states that this "androcentric interpretative model leaves no room for the alternative assumption that women were missionaries, apostles, or heads of communities."[270] Based on strictly historic and archeological evidence, however, and seeing the number of women in the first centuries that were named in these roles, the issue of whether women held those roles has be answered.[271]

The roles of Christian women in the first centuries must be viewed at face value with their names and titles seen as legitimate within the early church. Women like

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[269] Newsom and Ringe, 320

[270] Schüssler Fiorenza, 48

[271] See Appendix III for map showing the dispersion of named women discussed in this paper, and their roles in the cultic leadership of the first centuries of the Christian church.

Phoebe, Prisca, Julia, Lydia and Mary were part of a wider Greco-Roman world of women involved in cultic leadership. Christianity was not the first religious movement to employ women in places of authority, nor were the early churches simply copying what they saw in other religious traditions. For the nascent church looking at the wider cultural context that included the pagan and Hebraic cultures, women in leadership would have been natural and normative.

"Women are prominent in [Romans 16:1-27], with no hint of subordination or denigration. They belong to the esteemed circle of those ministering to and with Paul… Add to that the far-reaching implications for women as belonging equally with men to this community of persons, and we have far more than a postscript."[272] While there is no way to know if women had parity with men in the first two generations of the early church based upon the letters of Paul, it did not take long before women began to experience the restrictions outlined by male authority by the third and fourth generation. By the second century, those restrictions had become more pronounced, and the roles of women were marginalized.

A church that started out working towards the ideal of theological baptismal equality, as expressed in Galatians 3:28, very quickly found itself rooted in cultural context. Within a few generations the church that promised to no longer to distinguish between Jew and Greek became a Greek-dominated religion. The church that promised no longer to distinguish between slave and free created its own rigid hierarchical structure. Lastly the church that promised no longer to distinguish between male and

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[272] Frank Stagg, *Knox Preaching Guides: Galatians Romans*, (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1980), 125

female because all were one in Christ, picked up the gender divisions around them and increasingly restricted the ministry of women.

Women celebrating the Eucharist. Photo Credit to Dorothy Irvin,
Calendars: The Archeology of Women's Traditional Ministries in the Church: 2003-2007

APPENDIX I **Biblical References to Leadership Roles and Responsibilities**

	Apostle	Bishop	Deacon	Presbyter/ Elder	Minister/ Servant	Teacher
Matthew	10:2					
Mark	3:14					
Luke	6:13					
John						
Acts	1:25-26	20:28		14:23; 20:17	19:22	13:1
Romans	1:1; 16:7		16:1			
1 Corinthians	1:1; 9:5; 15:7			3:5	3:5	
2 Corinthians	1:1; 8:23					
Galatians	1:1					
Ephesians	1:1; 3:5				3:7; 6:21	
Philippians	2:25	1:1	1:1			
Colossians	1:1				1:7 (‘slave’) 1:23; 4:7	
1 Thes					3:2	
2 Thes	1:1					
1 Timothy	1:1; 2:7	3:1-7	3:8-12			2:7
2 Timothy	1:1; 1:11					1:11
Titus	1:1	1:5-11				
Philemon						
Hebrew						
James						
1 Peter		2:25				
2 Peter						
1 John						
2 John				1:1		
3 John				1:1		
Jude						
Revelation	2:2; 18:20					

APPENDIX II

Timeline of the early Christian Church*

Women in Pagan Ministry	Women in Hebraic Ministry	Women in Christian Ministry	Year CE	Event in Christian History	Events in Greco-Roman History
		Mary Magdalene (Apostle to the Apostles)	c. 30	Jesus' death and resurrection	
			35	Saul becomes Paul	
			48	Paul in Jerusalem	Council of Jerusalem
		Lydia converted and becomes House Church leader	49	Paul travels to Syria and Asia Minor	Expulsion of the Hebraic cult from Rome
		Prisca in Corinth teaching Apollos, House Church leader; already Christian	50	Paul in Corinth; first letter to Thessalonians	
		Prisca traveled with Paul to Ephesus; start new house church	55	Paul travels to Ephesus; writes first letter to Corinthians	
		Eudoia and Syntyche named as Paul's co-workers in the church of Philippi	55	Paul writes to the Philippians while imprisoned in Ephesus; mentions church structure in Philippi that includes bishops and deacons	

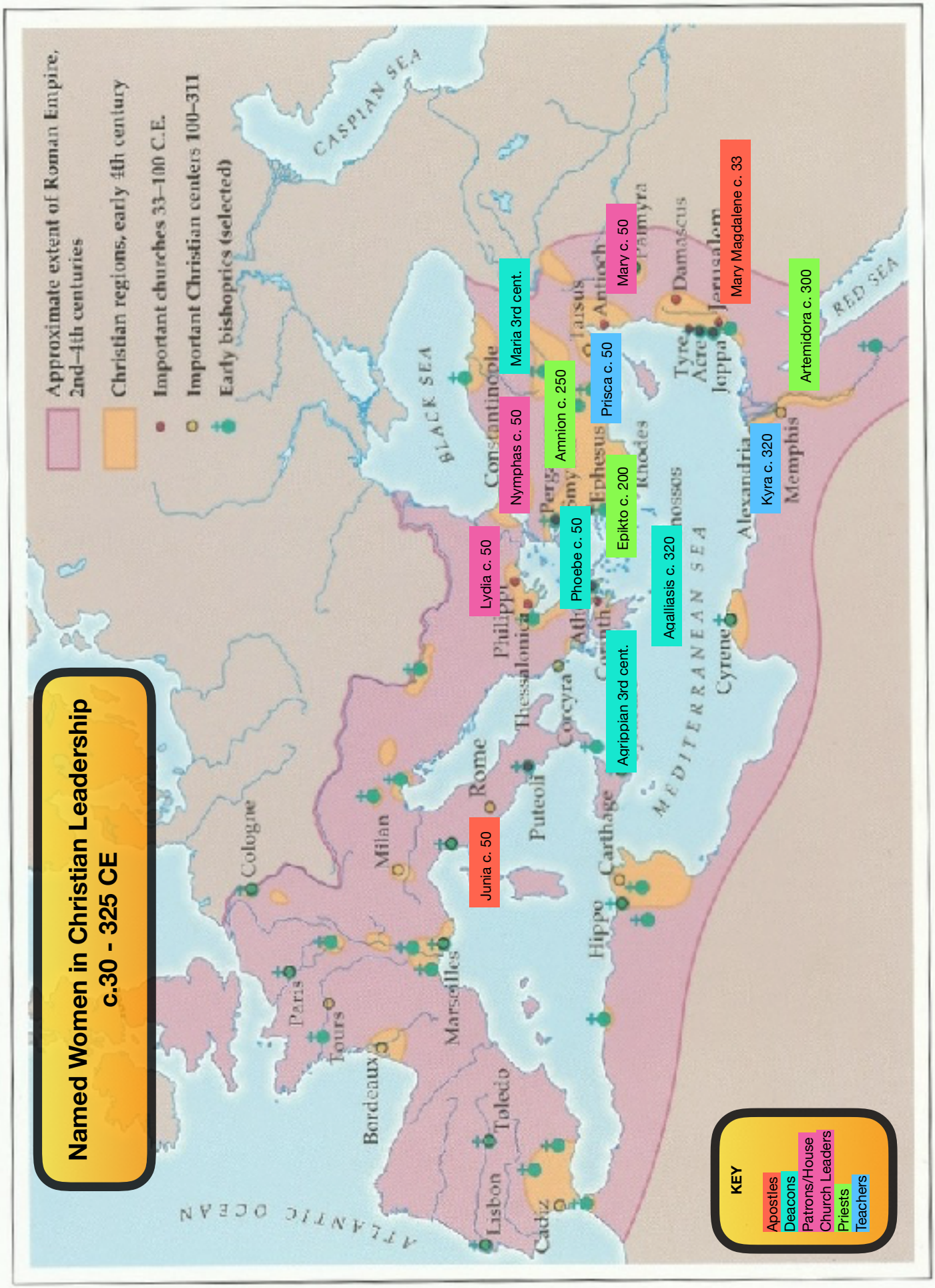
* Dates for Paul's travels and writings are taken from Oda Wischmeyer, ed., Paul Life, Setting, Work, Letters. London: T&T Clark International, 2012

✦ For the purposes of this paper, Mary Magdalene is considered an historic figure. Explanation for her inclusion can be found in the section on Methodology, page 6.

Women in Pagan Ministry	Women in Hebraic Ministry	Women in Christian Ministry	Year CE	Event in Christian History	Events in Greco-Roman History
		Apphia is named as a 'sister', and possibly house church leader	55	Paul writes to house church leader Philemon	
			55/56	Paul writes to the Galatians from Ephesus	
		Phoebe (deacon) working with Paul Prisca (teacher) now in Rome Junia (apostle) currently in Rome Tryphaena and Tryphosa named as Workers in the Lord Mary and Persis named as a hard worker in the Lord Julia and Olympas part of a Christian community in Rome	56	Paul in Corinth; writes letter to Rome	
			54		Nero begins his reign of Rome
			c. 60	Paul is executed in Rome	
			64		Nero blames Christians for the burning of Rome, starting the first persecution
			66		Revolt in Judea begins

Women in Pagan Ministry	Women in Hebraic Ministry	Women in Christian Ministry	Year CE	Event in Christian History	Events in Greco-Roman History
			c. 70	Gospel of Mark; Didache thought to written between 70 and 110 CE	Second Temple in Jerusalem is destroyed; most Hebraic people in Jerusalem sold into slavery and taken out of Judea
			c. 80	Gospel of Matthew	
Vestal Virgin Cornelia put to death			c. 90	Gospel of Luke	Pliny the Younger acknowledges Cornelia and her death
Cantria Longina, priestess of Isis			c. 100	Gospel of John	
		Two women claiming to be deacons appear before the court of Pliny the Younger	c. 112		Pliny the Younger writes to his uncle Emperor Trajan
	Sara Ura, Presbytera		c. 120	Acts of Apostles; First letter to Timothy outlines requirements of women deacons	
Alexandria, priestess of Isis	Rufina from Smyrna, Head of Synagogue Maria, Mother of Synagogue		c. 200	Didascalia Apostolorum presumed to be written in the first part of the third century	
	Gaudentia of Rome, Priest		c. 300	The Apostolic Tradition dated mid-fourth century	
			325	First Council of Nicaea	Reign of Emperor Constantine

Appendix III



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