

PEDAGOGY OF THE ESCHATOLOGICAL COMMUNITY:

PREPARING FOR LIFE IN THE KINGDOM

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Early Christianity understood itself to be the eschatological renewal of the people of God and it understood the Holy Spirit to be the agent of that renewal. The Spirit's association with the renewal of Israel had been succinctly stated in Isaiah 44:1-5 as well as Joel 2:28-32. The theme had been further developed during the intertestamental period so that the return of prophecy and other charismatic manifestations of the Spirit were integral aspects of the expected Kingdom of God.¹ Thus the Spirit's work within the church was evidence par excellence God was at work in the world calling his people unto himself.²

It is the thesis of this paper that early Christianity developed a pedagogy for Christian formation that was congruous with its self perception as the eschatological community of the Spirit. During the formative period of Christianity pedagogy was an integral aspect of the community life of the church. Teaching and learning were constitutive elements of being the covenanted people of God. Formal and informal instruction permeated the gatherings of the believers.

The method of study will be that of a descriptive analysis. First, the identity of the church as an eschatological community of the Spirit will be studied in order to establish the context in which formation took place. Second, the pedagogy of the early church will be analyzed from the perspective of six classical questions of educational philosophy: What were the goals of learning? What was the environment for learning? What was the role of the teacher? What was the content of instruction? What was the role of the learner? What were the methods of instruction? The scope of this inquiry has been limited to the ante-Nicene period of the church.

The Pedagogical Context

The Eschatological Community of the Spirit

The social environment of early Christianity was that of an eschatological community living out the present realities of an age and kingdom which were yet to come. The consciousness of simultaneous existence within two ages is reflected in the terms and images used to identify the people of God. They were the *ekklesia*, the "called out ones." A study of the LXX and the Hebrew scriptures reveals *ekklesia* to be the common translation of *qahal*, a term which was used to designate any assembly which had been summoned in the sense of mustering.³ A related but more

¹Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984).

²Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* XXXIX, *ANF*, I, 214; LXXXVII-LXXXVIII, 242-243.

³Luther Coenan, "Church, Synagogue," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979) I, 219-292.

technical Hebrew term was 'edah which was almost exclusively translated in the LXX as synagoge.⁴ According to Lothar Coenan 'edah expressed "a concept of corporateness" with the stress falling not on the total of individuals, but on "the unity of the fellowship."⁵ Of special significance was the fact that 'edah was never used of any people other than Israel so that it represented the unambiguous and permanent term for Israel as the covenant community of God.⁶ Consequently, by the first century the synagogue existed as the house where the children of Israel gathered and had become a symbol of the Jewish religion with all its traditions. With only one exception (Jas. 2:2) the New Testament did not use synagoge to represent the Christian community or its meetings.⁷

At this juncture the significance of the use of the term ekklesia as a designation for the followers of Christ emerges. The early church identified itself with the eschatological gathering of the true Israel.⁸ As such it was the qahal of the 'edah, or the ekklesia of the synagoge. Christians represented a final mustering of a faithful remnant out of Israel. Paul extended the limits of the true Israel to cover Gentile Christians by applying the rubric of descent from Abraham by faith (Rom. 4; Gal. 3). Thus all who believed in Christ were the heirs of the promise to Abraham (Gal. 3:29; 4:28), and members of God's own household (Eph. 2:19).

As the people of promise, early Christians saw themselves as those who stood under the new covenant of God (2 Cor. 3:6), the covenant promised by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12; 10:16-17). The new covenant was not a replacement of the old one. Rather, the new fulfilled the old, bringing it to its intended end. The new covenant fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant in that it brought to fruition the promise of the older covenant; life and liberty to those who belong to Christ (Gal. 4:23-26). As will be seen below, the concept of being the covenant people of God emerged as a pivot point for Christian pedagogy.

The early church further identified itself with the kingdom of God. The roots of the kingdom idea lay in the Old Testament doctrine of the theistic monarchy; Yahweh alone is king and only those he appoints rule. With the failure of the kings of Judah to keep the covenant God had made with the house of David the expectation of an eschatological messianic king grew. The lordship of Yahweh was combined with the hoped-for lordship of the Messiah. The messianic son of David would be appointed by God and draw his authority as the representative of the kingly rule of Yahweh (Isa. 9:7; 11:1f).⁹ Intertestamental Judaism was highly influenced by this belief in the coming

⁴Wolfgang Schrage, "Synagoge," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), VII, 806-807.

⁵Coenan, "Church, Synagogue," p. 294.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Schrage, "synagoge," pp.829-840.

⁸The phrase "true Israel" was not used in the New Testament but does accurately reflect the early Christian understanding of the church as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. In the words of Justin, "As, therefore, Christ is the Israel and the Jacob, even so we, who have been quarried out from the bowels of Christ, are the true Israelitic race." Dialogue, CXXXIV, ANF, XI, 267.

⁹Bertold Klappert, "King, Kingdom," NIDNTT, II, 372-376.

Messiah. The apocalyptic writings gave pre-eminence to the expected arrival of the "son of man" who would possess the kingdom. The kingdom would be characterized by liberation from the total misery of human society; it would be a kingdom of peace, joy, and freedom.¹⁰ In the New Testament God and Christ alone had full right to the title king. Jesus was described as the messianic king of the Jews, the promised son of David. Jesus himself stressed the immanence of the future kingdom (Mk. 1:15; Matt. 3:2; 5:17; Lk. 21:31), as the rule of God was at hand (Matt. 24:32f; Mk. 13:28f; Lk. 21:29f). However, for him the kingdom was also already present (Mk. 2:19; Matt. 9:15; Lk. 5:34; 17:20f) because he, the son of David, was already present.¹¹

The christological kerygma substituted the crucified and resurrected Jesus for the kingdom of God. The church knew the exalted Christ as Lord (Phil. 2:9-11; Acts 2:36) and thus began to speak of the kingdom of Christ (Eph. 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18; 2 Pet. 1:11; Rev. 1:9).¹² In Christ the community experienced the rule of God.¹³

In close association with the kingdom of God concept, the Christian community also identified itself with the Hebrew image of the "saints," or "holy ones." The decisive element of the Old Testament concept of the holy was relatively direct contact with God or his divine power. God and God alone was holy. That which was near to him partook of his holiness. However, improper or profane contact would result in death. Daniel had prophetically applied the term to the eschatological people of God (Dan. 7:15-27). Intertestamental Judaism made Daniel's thought a normative description of the eschatological community.¹⁴ In the New Testament the term virtually always appeared in plural form as a synonym for the *ekklesia*. The emphasis was upon belonging to God as his own. The saints were at every point circumscribed by the Holy Spirit so that their lives were determined and empowered by him.¹⁵

This thought pattern was extended by another set of images that portrayed the covenant community as a holy habitation for God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; Eph. 2:21). The central idea behind these images was that the church constituted a glorious building constructed for the pleasure of God and was the focal point of communion between God and his creation. God, by the Spirit, was understood to dwell in the church so that the two were inseparable (1 Cor. 6:19).¹⁶

¹⁰French L. Arrington, Paul's Aeon Theology in 1 Corinthians (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1977), pp. 90-91.

¹¹Klappert, "King, Kingdom," 378-383.

¹²The very title "Christ" was rooted in the Jewish expectation of the kingdom of God so that any association of the title "Christ" with the church was a direct association with the kingdom of God motif. See Wolhart Pannenberg, Avery Dulles, and Carl E. Braaten, Spirit, Faith, Church (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 109.

¹³So Justin said to Trypho, "And when Scripture says, 'I am the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, who have made Israel your king,' will you not understand that truly Christ is the everlasting king?" Dialogue With Trypho CXXXV, ANF, I, 267.

¹⁴Horst Seebass, "Holy," NIDNTT, II, 223-224.

¹⁵Minear, Images of the Church, pp. 136-139.

¹⁶The Pastor of Hermas, Commandment V, ANF, II, 41-42. Irenaeus, Against Heresies I.3.24.1, ANF, I, 458. Tertullian, On Baptism VI, ANF, III, 672.

One final image of the church must be noted. Paul expressed the divine unity of the church with the image of the soma Christou, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-30). Essentially Paul kept a Hebrew understanding of wholeness, that is, the several members do not constitute the whole. Rather, the various tasks of the members constitute their corporate nature. The soma constituted their unity. Paul most clearly expressed this sense of unity with the word koinonia, meaning fellowship. The root idea was the commonness of their existence, the communion they shared.¹⁷ It denoted a unanimity and unity brought about by the Spirit as they shared a common faith and relationship to Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16; 2 Cor. 3:13; Phil. 1:5; 3:10; Phlm. 6). This was tangibly expressed in the sharing of material goods according to need (2 Cor. 9:13).¹⁸

The imagery of the body of Christ was also a proclamation of shared hope. Participation in the body of Christ meant participation in his death and resurrection. Believers had followed Christ in death to sin and awaited their final redemption/transformation at his return (Rom. 6:5-11; 7:2-4). In the meantime the Spirit infused the believer with the life of Christ and called forth the hope of his inheritance (Rom. 8:5-25).

It may be concluded from these terms and images that the early Christians understood themselves to comprise a messianic community of God which existed as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. As such they perceived themselves to be living in the "fullness of times." By the power of the Holy Spirit they knew God, lived in his presence, and fulfilled his will. On the other hand there was a constant awareness their final destiny awaited the return of Christ.

The Pedagogy

Goals for Learning

The pedagogical objectives of the early church were rooted in the church's sense of identity and mission as the people of God. As the true Israel the church understood itself to be the object of the mission of Jesus, and, consequently, the extension of that mission to the Gentiles.¹⁹ The foundational objective of the church was to be the spiritual Israel which served as a sign to the nations, the means whereby all peoples might discover the glorious reign of Christ.²⁰ Even after the church moved out from Jerusalem it maintained a strong sense of being the symbolic presence of the people of God among the nations.²¹

¹⁷Lohfink, Jesus and Community, pp. 99-102.

¹⁸Johannes Schattenmann, "Koinonia," TDNT, I, 639-644.

¹⁹Joachim Jeremias, Jesus' Promise to the Nations, trans. S. H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, 1958), p. 70.

²⁰Lohfink, Jesus and Community, pp. 139-147.

²¹Clement of Rome exhorted the Corinthians to draw near to God "...lifting up pure and undefiled hands unto Him, loving our gracious and merciful Father, who has made us partakers in the blessings of His elect. For thus it is written...'Behold, the Lord taketh unto Himself a nation out of the nations, as a man takes the first-fruits of his threshing-floor; and from that nation shall come forth the most Holy.' Seeing, therefore, that we are the portion of the

This mission mandated pedagogical objectives suitable for life in the kingdom of God. The ultimate goal was to know God, to have union and communion with him, so that one could live in his presence (John 17:3). This knowledge was the knowledge of encounter and relationship that climaxed in an eternal state of unencumbered fellowship between creature and creator. In a very real sense this was attainable in the present life through the communion of the Holy Spirit within the church.²² However, present encounter of God was through the veil of the flesh. Believers would "know as known" only with the final redemption of their mortal bodies.²³

Thus the primary pedagogical objective was the preparation of persons for communion with God. Essentially this was to be accomplished through three sub-goals. First, individuals had to undergo a training of their characters in moral discipline, especially the control of the flesh.²⁴ Stated in positive form, the aim was to transform believers into "spiritual" persons suitable for being "planted in the paradise of God."²⁵ For Irenaeus this was a recapitulation of the original state of humanity, a rediscovery of "the pristine nature of man--that which was created after the image and likeness of God."²⁶

Second, the church aimed for the perfection of the believer's faith. Moral discipline came by the grace of the Spirit but did not consummate the believer's encounter with God. Only by faith could the individual become a descendant of Abraham, heir of the promise. However, the church did maintain the fundamental Hebraic understanding of covenant as essential to faith. Faith in Christ must be manifested in submission to him. Therefore, the building of the believer's faith included, but was not limited to, conformity to the faith of the church.

Third, the church aimed to prepare believers for their final union with God through their salubrious union with the body of Christ. Every Christian was to be united with the church in a manner that contributed to the well-

Holy One, let us do all these things which pertain to holiness..." Epistle to the Corinthians XXIX- XXX, ANF, XI, 12-13.

²²Irenaeus clearly saw union with God as a present reality that was preparatory for immortality: Jesus "has poured out the Spirit of the Father for the union and communion of God and man, imparting indeed God to men by means of the Spirit, and on the other hand, attaching man to God by his own incarnation, and bestowing upon us at his coming immortality durably and truly, by means of communion with God. . . ." Against Heresies V.1.1, ANF, I, 527.

²³Origen articulated the present-future realities of Christian union with God, "But both Jesus Himself and His disciples desired that his followers should believe not merely in his Godhead and miracles, as if He had not also been partaker of human nature, and had assumed the human flesh which "lusteth against the Spirit;" but they saw also that the power which had descended into human nature, and into the midst of human miseries, and which had assumed a human soul and body, contributed through faith, along with its divine elements, to the salvation of believers, when they see that from Him there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught, and which elevates to friendship with God and communion with Him every one who lives according to the precepts of Jesus." Against Celsus III.28, ANF, IV, 475.

²⁴The ability of the individual to bring the flesh under control was considered a gift of the Holy Spirit. Origen, Against Celsus, III.28, ANF, IV, 475. Tertullian, On the Veiling of Virgins, I, ANF, IV, 27.

²⁵Irenaeus, Against Heresies V.10.1, ANF, I, 536.

²⁶*Ibid.*

being of all the members of the body. As will be seen below, a process of controlled infoldment into the church emerged, one that climaxed in the covenantal initiation rites of baptism and holy unction.

Environment for Learning

Little can be said with certainty about the formal educational programs of the early church. Schools for specialized training and evangelism apparently existed from the time of the apostles. But there is little recorded about the character of those institutions and there is no indication they were integral parts of the common life of the church.²⁷ Rather, the education that would have been normative took place in the environment of the relationships and gatherings of the local assembly. Those relationships and gatherings were expressions of the church's perceived identity and mission as the eschatological community of the Spirit.

The Contrast Society. The kingdom of God called forth radically different standards for human relationships, standards that were rooted in the character of Christ and actualized through the conviction of his presence as Lord in the person of the Holy Spirit. Through these relationships the church presented itself to the world as a "contrast-society,"²⁸ the only reasonable alternative to the existing pagan social order.

This new order was characterized by koinonia. There was a strong sense of belonging to an intimate family, one that provided support for weak and needy members. Spiritually, converts generally received the personal attention of a sponsor until established in the church. Physically, even the pagans took note of the manner in which Christians provided for their widows, orphans, and sick.²⁹

In an age of slavery and economic and sexual domination, this was a radical social order. Christianity insisted on the nobility and worth of the individual with no consideration of economic or political status (James 2:1-9). Slaves and women, who were nonentities in the Hellenistic world, were able to rise to positions of leadership in the Christian ekklesia. Even marriage barriers between social classes were broken down. Fundamental for this new order was a denouncement of the use of power to control others. Christians served God and each other out of a sense of freedom and love.³⁰

The Christian Gatherings. The immediate environment for learning in the early church was that of the Christian gatherings. There were four types of gatherings that continued throughout the ante-Nicene period. Morning and evening prayer services were conducted daily. These provided opportunity for personal exhortation and mutual

²⁷E. Glenn Hinson, The Evangelization of the Roman Empire: Identity and Adaptability (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1981), p. 40.

²⁸The concept of "contrast-society" is most clearly developed by Lohfink in his seminal work Jesus and Community.

²⁹F.F. Bruce, The Spreading Flame: The Rise and Progress of Christianity from its First Beginnings to the Conversion of the English (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 188-191.

³⁰Ibid.

support in response to the moral and spiritual challenges of the day.³¹ Normal activities included instruction in the Word of God, the acknowledgement of transgressions, the singing of psalms, and prayers of praise and petition.³²

Feasts were a second type of Christian gathering. The pattern of Jesus in frequenting feasts was adopted and his instructions concerning the giving of feasts were taken literally. Emphasis was placed on feeding the lame, blind, and poor (Luke 14:12-13).³³ These "love feasts" apparently began as a part of the Sunday observance of the Lord's Supper. But the Eucharist was early separated from the meal and the feasts were moved to more private settings throughout the week.³⁴

Further emphasis was placed on the character and affects of these gatherings. In contrast to the frivolous feasts of the pagans, Clement of Alexandria described them as "a divine orchestra" in which human instruments were played by the Spirit.³⁵ But it was Tertullian who gave a most vivid description of these gatherings.

Yet about the modest supper room of the Christians alone a great ado is made. Our feast explains itself by its name. The Greeks call it agape, i.e., affection. Whatever it costs, our outlay in the name of piety is gain, since with the good things of the feast we benefit the needy; not as it is with you, do parasites aspire to the glory of satisfying their licentious propensities, selling themselves for a belly-feast to all disgraceful treatment,--but as it is with God himself, a peculiar respect is shown to the lowly. If the object of our feast be good, in the light of that consider its further regulations. As it is an act of religious service, it permits no vileness or immodesty. The participants, before reclining, taste first of prayer to God. As much is eaten as satisfies the cravings of hunger; as much is drunk as befits the chaste. They say it is enough, as those who remember that even during the night they have to worship God; they talk as those who know that the Lord is one of their auditors. After manual ablution, and the bringing in of lights, each is asked to stand forth and sing, as he can, a hymn to God, either one from the holy Scriptures or one of his own composing,--a proof of the measure of our drinking. As the feast commenced with prayer, so with prayer it is closed. We go from it, not like troops of mischief-doers, nor bands of vagabonds, nor to break out into licentious acts, but to have as much care of our modesty and chastity as if we had been at a school of virtue rather than a banquet.³⁶

³¹Gregory Dix, ed. and trans., The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome (London: S.P.C.K., 1937), p. 61.

³²Compare The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles III, ANF, VII, 378. Constitutions of the Holy Apostles II.7.59, ANF, VII, 422- 423; Ibid. VII.1.9, ANF, VII, 467; Ibid. VIII.4.35, ANF, VII, 496; Canons of the Church of Alexandria XXVII, ANF, V, 258; Epistle of Barnabas XIX, ANF, I, 148.

³³Irenaeus, Against Heresies V.33.2, ANF, I, 562.

³⁴Dix, Shape of the Liturgy, pp. 96-102. However, the continuation of a combined Agape and Eucharist was evident in the Didache IX-X, ANF, VII, 379-380 and as late as Tertullian's Apology XXXIX, ANF, III, 46-47.

³⁵Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor II.4, ANF, II, 248; see also The Instructor II.1, ANF, II, 238.

³⁶Tertullian, Apology XXXIX, ANF, III, 43. The pedagogical significance of these events is stressed by Tertullian's assertion that their affect was that of a "school of virtue." See also The Octavius of Minucius Felix, XXXI, ANF, IV, 192.

Sunday was the great festival day³⁷ of the early church that called forth regular gatherings of distinctive significance. Noted as the eighth day of the week because it fulfilled the Jewish Sabbath and age and inaugurated the new creation brought forth in the resurrection, Sunday quickly became the symbolic embodiment of the new age of God's kingdom.³⁸ Consequently, these gatherings conveyed a special sense of realized eschatology to the participants.³⁹

Justin described the Sunday services. They included lengthy readings from the Scriptures ("apostles" and "prophets"), pastoral instruction and exhortation, corporate prayer, and the Eucharist. The Eucharist included a pastoral prayer of thanksgiving "according to his ability." Following the supper an offering was received and distributed to the needy.⁴⁰

Tertullian's description of the Sunday gatherings conveyed something of the spirit that prevailed. Prayer was offered up in united force as if with violence in order to please God by wrestling with him in supplications. Intercession was given "for the emperors, for their ministers and for all authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation."⁴¹ Scripture readings were selected as needful for the "peculiarity of the times" in order to nourish faith, animate hope, make confidence steadfast, and confirm good habits. Exhortations from the Scriptures included rebukes, sacred censures and judgments against individuals.⁴²

The climax of the Sunday gatherings was the celebration of the Eucharist. Prior to that ceremonial meal the unbaptized and those deemed unworthy of the sacred communion of Christ and his church were dismissed. Only those walking in harmony with Christ and his church were allowed to eat the celestial food which infused the believer with the very life of Christ.⁴³

Christians also gathered for special ecclesiastical events. Chief among those were baptisms, ordination services, and common feast days such as Easter and Pentecost. In general special events culminated in the celebration of the Eucharist so that the environment was essentially the same as the Sunday gatherings but with intensified

³⁷Ignatius gave instruction, "let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all days (of the week). Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, "to the end, for the eighth day," on which our life both sprang up again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ . . ." Epistle to the Magnesians XI, ANF, I, 163. Likewise, fasting and kneeling in worship were forbidden in some circles on the Lord's day. Tertullian, The Chaplet III, ANF, III, 94.

³⁸So Justin argued that the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday was the true circumcision, cutting away deceit and iniquity. Dialogue with Trypho 41, ANF, I, 215.

³⁹Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians IX, ANF, I, 63. See Jungmann, Early Liturgy, pp. 20-24; Dix, Shape of the Liturgy, p. 337.

⁴⁰Justin, First Apology, LXVII, ANF, I, 186.

⁴¹Tertullian, Apology XXXIX, ANF, III, 46.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³⁴³Didache XIV, ANF, VII, 381.

meaning.⁴⁴ Each event contributed to the aura and conceptualization of belonging to the covenant of the Lord Jesus.⁴⁵

The Spirit's Presence. A distinctive factor in the environment of the gatherings of the early church was the sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The leaders and activities of the gatherings were perceived to be under the immediate direction of the Spirit.⁴⁶ But perhaps the greatest impact of the Spirit upon the gatherings as an environment for learning was through the ongoing presence of the charismata. The gifts of the Spirit, especially prophetic utterances and healings, were common until the end of the second century and clearly continued to a lesser degree throughout the ante-Nicene period.⁴⁷ It would be difficult to overstate the impact of these manifestations. To meet together was to meet with God who attested his presence through signs, wonders, and gifts by the Holy Spirit.

The assembly of the saints was not a school to learn about God; it was a living temple in which God dwelt by his Spirit and therefore was known by encounter. In the church truth was an experience of the ultimate (God) rather than a mere pursuit of reason. Thus the church constituted an environment for learning which, because of the dynamic presence of the Spirit, placed the believer in a tension between the realities of the two worlds. Life in the kingdom of God was both a future expectation and a present reality.

The Role of the Teacher

The Holy Spirit was understood to be the primary teacher of all spiritual knowledge. He worked within the individual to effectuate godliness. He also worked through the church to nurse the convert into the family of God.⁴⁸ Three types of human teachers emerged in early Christianity. Each was closely associated with the work of the Holy Spirit as teacher but represented different modes of instruction. Two of the three were referred to as teachers. The third was called a sponsor but by description conformed to modern variations of the office.

Pastor-teachers. One type of teacher recognized by the early church was that of the pastor-teacher. Pastor-teachers were characterized by their pastoral relationship with the people and their functions of preserving and transmitting the traditions of the apostles. By the end of the first century or early second century the pastor-teacher was incorporated into the office of the bishop and remained thus throughout the early church. Deacons, presbyters and others functioned as pastor-teachers, but only as extensions of the bishop.

⁴⁴Justin, First Apology 44-47, ANF, I, 184-186. Tertullian, Apology 39, ANF, III, 46-67; The Chaplet 3, ANF, III, 94-95; On Baptism 6-8, ANF, III, 672-673; Cyprian, Epistle 69, ANF, V, 376; Didache 7, 9, 10, 14, ANF, VI, 379-381.

⁴⁵Hinson, Evangelization of the Roman Empire, pp. 73-95, 131-146.

⁴⁶Hippolytus described the ordination of bishops, presbyters and deacons with a special emphasis upon their reception of the Spirit to aid them in their ministries. Hippolytus, The Apostolic Tradition, 3-10, Easton, 34-39.

⁴⁷A. N. Kydd, Charismatic Gifts in the Early Church: An Exploration into the Gifts of the Spirit During the First Three Centuries of the Church (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1984), pp. 5-87.

⁴⁸See especially Clement of Alexandria's The Instructor for one understanding of how the Spirit and the church worked together in Christian formation.

These teachers served both as guardians of the faith and shepherds of the flock. This pattern was set in the Pauline schemata of ministry in which the overseer was to be able to teach (I Tim. 3:2), "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9 NAS). The preeminence of the bishop as teacher is reflected in the words of the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, "he is the minister of the word, the keeper of knowledge, the mediator between God and you in the several parts of your divine worship."⁴⁹ As guardians of the sacred truths they were to be esteemed as prophets as it was believed the Spirit protected them from error.⁵⁰

Prophet-teachers. A second type of teacher recognized by the early church was that of prophet-teacher.⁵¹ These gifted persons taught through a form of ecstatic prophecy. They apparently served no other official function than to speak "in the Spirit." They characteristically traveled from one community to the next but were also known to exist as resident teachers. Because of their mobility and lack of accountability strict guidelines were imposed on their activities.⁵²

A true teacher of this type did not answer questions or respond to general requests for instruction. The Holy Spirit "speaks only when God wishes it to speak."⁵³ Rather, the Spirit responded to the prayers of the righteous who had faith in the Spirit. The mode of delivery for these messages from God varied. Direct prophetic speech seems to have been the most common but visions, dreams, glossolalia with interpretations, and xenolalia⁵⁴ were also known.⁵⁵

Sponsor-teachers. The third type of teachers present in the early church were those who functioned as sponsors for new converts. Sponsors were essentially coaches, mentors, dialogue partners and spiritual guardians. During morning and evening prayers they offered training and encouragement in the development of moral discipline. They fasted and prayed for and with the new convert in order to ward off any demonic attack or influence. They attended catechetical lectures and other activities with their wards in order to coach them in understanding Christian

⁴⁹Constitution of the Holy Apostles 2.4.26, ANF, VII, 410. See also Hermas, Shepherd 1.5, ANF, II, 14. Origen, Against Celsus III.48, ANF, IV, 483. Commodianus, Instructions IL, ANF, IV, 216.

⁵⁰Didache XV, ANF, VII, 381. Constitutions 2.4.20, ANF, VII, 411. Ignatius, Epistle to the Philadelphians VII, ANF, I, 83.

⁵¹I have chosen the phrase "prophet-teacher" in order to convey their common characteristic of immediate inspiration. Prophets and teachers were distinguishable in the earliest period of Christianity but the basis of distinction has been lost. Prophets were understood to teach through their prophecies and some teachers functioned in the same manner. Their close association makes it reasonable to class them together as one type of divine instruction within the church, instruction rendered under the direct influence of the Spirit. Compare Hermas 2.10-11, ANF, II, 26-28; Didache XI-XV, ANF, VII, 380-381; Justin, Dialogue With Trypho XXXIX, ANF, I, 214; Novatian, Concerning the Trinity XXIX, ANF, V, 640-641.

⁵²Kydd, Charismatic Gifts, pp. 66-68.

⁵³Hermas II.11, ANF, II, 27-28.

⁵⁴Harold Hunter, "Tongues-Speech: A Patristic Analysis," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, 23 (1980), 125-127.

⁵⁵Kydd, Charismatic Gifts, pp. 44, 67, 68.

truths. Finally, they stood with their charges at their presentation for baptism and holy unction as a testimony to their preparedness to receive the full grace of God.⁵⁶

The Content of Christian Instruction

The most pervasive activity attributed to the Holy Spirit by the early church was that of speaking. The Spirit spoke through the Old Testament prophets, the apostles, pastor-teachers, prophet-teachers, the doctrines of the church, and even the traditions of the church, including rituals. The Spirit brought the message of God and spoke it in a fresh manner to every generation of the church. Thus the authoritative content of Christian pedagogy was the message of God as spoken by the Spirit

Old Testament Scriptures. Until the middle of the second century the Old Testament Law and Prophets were the only canonical Scriptures for the church.⁵⁷ Three characteristics of the church's understanding of the inspiration of Scripture stand out; it was Christocentric, it was a verbal inspiration, and it was an active, ongoing reality.

The early church interpreted the Old Testament Scriptures through the lens of the advent of Jesus Christ. For them it was a book about Christ. According to the Lucan Resurrection narratives, the pattern began with Jesus himself (Luke 24:26-27, 44-47). Irenaeus represented well the Patristic understanding:

If any one, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling (vocationis). For Christ is the treasure which was hid in the field, that is, in this world (for "the field is the world"); but the treasure hid in the Scriptures is Christ, since He was pointed out by means of types and parables.⁵⁸

The early church adhered to a manic and plenary verbal view of the inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures. The Spirit was the controlling force in the process, acting upon the prophets as if they were but musical instruments.⁵⁹ The words of the Scriptures were the words of the Holy Spirit.

The early church also approached the Old Testament Scriptures as if they were written for the age of the church. According to R. P. C. Hanson they held a view that was essentially oracular. They were "obsessed" with the conviction that the inspired writers knew a great deal about Christ and the Christian doctrine.⁶⁰ Thus the Spirit spoke through them truths hidden to their own time but evident to all who believe in Christ. The overall thrust was to approach the Scriptures as a medium through which the Spirit was currently speaking to the church.

⁵⁶Hippolytus, Apostolic Traditions, trans. Dix, p. 31.

⁵⁷Henry Barclay Swete, The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church: A Study of Christian Teaching in the Age of the Fathers (London: Macmillan & Company, 1912), pp. 381-382.

⁵⁸Irenaeus, Against Heresies IV.26.1, ANF, I, 496-497.

⁵⁹Justin, Address to the Greeks VIII, ANF, I, 276.

⁶⁰R. P. C. Hanson, "The Bible in the Early Church," The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol. 1, From the Beginnings to Jerome (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 419- 422.

The Teachings of Jesus. There was no stronger tradition about Jesus than that he was a teacher and he claimed divine authority for his teachings. Thus the earliest purely Christian content for instruction was no doubt a compilation of the teachings of Jesus.⁶¹ The Pauline epistles antedated the written Gospels and contained numerous references to the words of Jesus. Paul clearly expected his widely dispersed readers to recognize the sayings and obey them.⁶² The Didache also contains "Commandments of the Lord" apparently based upon an established oral tradition.⁶³

The Apostles. The apostles served as a direct link to Christ. The New Testament recorded a high level of veneration for them and their words. With their passage from the scene even greater significance was given to their words. By the close of the first century a lineal connection through the apostles to Jesus was firmly established as a basis of authority.⁶⁴ Authentic Christian teaching came only through the legacy of the apostles. For two centuries their precepts were passed down in authoritative oral form.⁶⁵

The New Testament Scriptures. In spite of the esteem placed on the apostles, their gospels and epistles did not gain full acceptance as Scripture until the middle of the second century.⁶⁶ But once established they were considered inspired in the same sense as the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Rule of Faith. Beginning late in the second century, and with great frequency during the third, the "Rule of Faith" was frequently mentioned by Christian writers. It was considered universal and authoritative but was apparently not based upon a fixed formula.⁶⁷ Justo Gonzalez has concluded it was probably a summary of the fundamental contents of the Christian message intended as a corrective for heretical teachings.⁶⁸

Creeds. The earliest creed was a simple profession of belief, "Jesus is Lord." In the title "Lord" converts among Jews and God-fearers confessed the divine lordship of Jesus and surrendered to his sovereignty.⁶⁹ Matthew recorded an alternative form with the use of the three-fold name: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Before the end of the first century the threefold creed had been established as the standard

⁶¹Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 143-157.

⁶²James D. G. Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975) pp. 236-238; 277. Bruce, The Spreading Flame, pp. 77-78.

⁶³R. M. Grant, Cambridge History, Vol. 1, p.289.

⁶⁴H. von Campenhausen, Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries, trans. J. A. Baker (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969), pp. 9- 20.

⁶⁵Irenaeus, Against Heresies IV, "Preface," ANF, I, 462; Ibid., III.1 ANF, I, 415.

⁶⁶Grant, "The New Testament Canon," p. 293.

⁶⁷R. P. C. Hanson, Tradition in the Early Church, p. 77.

⁶⁸Justo L. Gonzalez, A History of Christian Thought, Vol. 1, From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 415 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970) pp. 157-158.

⁶⁹Bruce, Spreading Flame, pp. 238-240.

confession for catechumens desiring baptism.⁷⁰ In the face of growing heresies it was expanded until it became what is now known as the Apostles Creed.⁷¹

Hymns. One of the earliest and most consistent forms of expressing Christian truth was the hymn. Some are embedded in the text of the New Testament. Psalms from the Hebrew Scriptures were incorporated into Christian worship. Spirit inspired songs were equated with prophecy (1 Cor. 14:13-17). Sound doctrine was stressed.⁷²

Prophecy. A final form of authoritative content for Christian instruction was ongoing prophetic speech and activity. Some prophecies were personal while others were more general in addressing the needs of the church. Apocalyptic themes were common as were visions of angels and heaven. Most were considered pertinent only for the moment, but some were written down and circulated. In either case those deemed authentic by the church were considered messages to be heard.

Other Content. Several other forms of instructional content emerged which did not carry the endorsement of divine inspiration. Manuals were written for catechumens to help them prepare for baptism. Early examples such as the Didache were written as guide books for those charged with preparing persons for baptism. Later examples like Clement of Alexandria's Pedagogue were written like textbooks for catechumens. The emphasis of both types was on moral discipline as preparation for baptism accompanied by exhortations as to the grace of God to help in this endeavor.

Biographies of the saints were another significant form of literature. While generally not used as texts for study their stories surely served as resources for illustration and dialogue. Epistles by church leaders were also widely circulated.⁷³

The Learner

The early Christian view of human existence was primarily an extension of Hebrew thought but was clearly influenced by interaction with the Hellenistic world. At the heart of the varying systems of Greek anthropology was a deeply-rooted dualism which contrasted matter and reason and distinguished between the person as body and the

⁷⁰Didache VII, ANF, VII, 379.

⁷¹Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, Vol. 1, Beginnings to 1500 (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 135.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Earle E. Cairns, Christianity Through the Centuries (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), pp. 75-83.

person as mind.⁷⁴ The general result was to understand the individual as a composite of two or more parts which worked against each other.⁷⁵

In Hebrew thought the differing aspects of human existence were always seen as dimensions of a whole.⁷⁶ Human nature found its focal expressions in the creation and fall of Adam and Eve. As originally formed they existed in dignity with sovereignty over nature in a fashion analogous to God's own dignity and sovereignty. They enjoyed an unimpaired relationship with their maker and each other.⁷⁷ The impact of the fall on human nature was illustrated rather than spelled out in the Old Testament. The choice to disobey God resulted in alienation and tension in relationships; human with human, human with creation, human with God.⁷⁸

According to Herwart Vorlander, in the New Testament the human being always appears as man vis-a-vis God: in his creatureliness (as distinct from other creatures and from God), in being addressed and chosen by God, in his transitoriness and disobedience, and as subject to the wrath of God.⁷⁹

Thus, the essential questions of human existence were those relationship to God, i.e. sin and redemption.

However, the patristic writers made two accommodations to the Hellenistic understanding of human existence. First, in the process of apologetics they accommodated themselves to a partite view of the species in order to stress the redemptive work of Christ for the total human being.⁸⁰ The thrust of their arguments was that the entire substance of the believer (body, soul and spirit) was destined to salvation.

Early Christian thought also accommodated to the Greeks in its perception of humans as having the ability to improve themselves through reason as a faculty of the mind. In the New Testament the mind was but one aspect of

⁷⁴Harold B. Kuhn, "The Nature of Man," The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), IV, 53-55.

⁷⁵The Greek language provided three primary parts: the body (soma), the soul (psyche), and the mind (nous); Herwart Vorlander, "Anthropos," NIDNTT, II, 564.

⁷⁶Edmond Jacob, "Psyche," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1964), I 617- 631.

⁷⁷Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol. 3, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), pp. 207-220.

⁷⁸G. C. Berkouwer, Man: The Image of God, trans. James E. Davidson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 20-32.

⁷⁹Vorlander, "Anthropos," p. 565.

⁸⁰Precedence for this shift in thought was taken from New Testament passages such as 1 Thess. 5:23 ("and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved . . ." NAS) and Hebrews 4:12 ("as far as the division of soul and spirit . . ." NAS). See Tertullian, "On the Resurrection of the Flesh," XLVII, ANF, III, 581; Irenaeus, Against Heresies V.9, ANF, I, 534 and Against Heresies XIII, ANF, I, 540; Mathetes, Epistle to Diognetue VII, ANF, I, 27.

Origen accepted the Platonic view of the pre-existence of the soul. However, Tatian held that the soul was mortal and could obtain immortality by union with the Holy Spirit; Tatian, Admonition to the Greeks XIII, ANF, II, 70-71.

human existence which, like all others, needed transformation.⁸¹ The patristic writers maintained the position that knowledge of God comes only by grace and through encounter, but they developed an elevated view of reason as complementary to the work of Spirit.⁸²

Stages of Learning. Reason had its place, but for the early Christians all truth, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding came from God. The highest expressions of each could only be attained by union with him. In the church, especially at baptism, believers were understood to see God and receive eternal illumination.⁸³ The act was instant and in some mysterious way all encompassing.⁸⁴ Yet, there was for the early church a sense in which the Spirit taught in gradations, individuals gradually progressing to levels of greater understanding.⁸⁵

The church classified learners in terms of relationship to God and the church. Individuals were either (1) outside of God and the church, (2) attached to the church as catechumens seeking to know God, (3) preparing for divine illumination and the acts of infoldment into the church, or (4) spiritual persons going from perfection unto perfection.

Each stage represented a progression toward the ultimate goal of life in the presence of God. In as much as the presence of God was realized in the church, the stages also represented a progression toward the individual's salubrious union with the body of Christ. Functionally, the two goals were synonymous. Advancement from one stage to another represented a change of relationship with God and the church. It further represented a fundamental change in the character of the individual. Therefore, each stage had its own goals, content and methods for learning.

⁸¹D. M. Lake, "Mind," ZPDB, IV, 229.

⁸²So Irenaeus termed "spiritual" those who "walk according to the light of reason." Against Heresies V.8, ANF, I, 534.

Anthenagoras, A Plea for the Christians X, ANF, II, 133;

Tertullian appealed to reason as God's gift whereby believers understood the "why" of church tradition, The Chaplet IV, ANF, III, 95.

Clement of Alexandria repeatedly called believers the true gnostics of the world because they superceded all other systems of learning; "I call him truly learned who brings everything to bear on the truth; so that, from geometry, and music, and grammar, and philosophy itself, culling what is useful, he guards the faith against assault And how necessary is it for him who desires to be partaker of the power of God, to treat of intellectual subjects by philosophizing!" The Stromata I.9, ANF, 309-310.

Clement further stated, ". . . philosophy, being the search for truth, contributes to the comprehension of truth; not as being the cause of comprehension, but a cause along with other things, and co-operator, perhaps a joint cause." The Stromata I.20, ANF, II, 323.

⁸³Hinson, Evangelization, p. 177.

⁸⁴A common reference was to obtaining "perfection" through baptism.

⁸⁵The church maintained a view of gradual progress toward God even in the midst of its battles against gnosticism. See especially Origen, De Principiis I.3.8, ANF, IV, 255; Against Celsus III, 59, ANF, IV, 487.

Methods of Learning
According to Stage

The methods of instruction utilized by the early church were carefully selected to lead the individual through the stages of relationship with God and the church. In general the Holy Spirit working through the church was understood to gradually but powerfully engage the individual with divine truth in a manner that meticulously transformed the individual into a truly spiritual person, one who enjoyed union and communion with God. The methods were those of controlled inculturation and followed the pattern of Jewish proselyte initiation. The focal point of the process was entrance at baptism into the covenant which defined the church as the people of God.

The Call to Repentance. The first stage of Christian pedagogy was one of confrontation through proclamation, dialogue, and demonstration of the power of the Spirit. Through these methods the church instructed those outside of its sphere of influence. In essence the church went everywhere preaching the good news of Jesus Christ and calling on all persons to repent and believe. Of great significance was the church's desire to teach all classes of people including slaves and soldiers.⁸⁶ Academic skills were not a prerequisite and the proclamation was not in words alone. It incorporated all that the church was, said, and did by the

power of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ Ramsay MacMullen concluded it was the witness of ongoing miracles, especially the driving out of spirits and healings, which had the greatest affect in the evangelization of the Roman empire.⁸⁸

Persons who wanted to inquire further found the church anxious and ready to present Jesus as the answer to every noble human quest. The Old Testament Scriptures were the primary basis for dialogue with prospective converts. Jews were shown how they pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. Persons given to philosophy were challenged to discover from the writings God's incarnate son, the source of all truth.

These learners were assigned one fundamental task, to repent. From the inception of the gospel, a penitent heart was a prerequisite for membership in the kingdom of God (Matt. 3:2, 8; Mark 1:4, 15; Luke 3:8; Acts 2:38). As the church infiltrated pagan societies and sought to serve the destitute it became necessary to distinguish the sincere from charlatans.⁸⁹ Before entering the tutelage of the church individuals were to show themselves sincere about achieving a virtuous life.⁹⁰

⁸⁶Hinson, Evangelization, p. 38. Origen boasted that wool and leather workers, fullers, and uneducated persons were spreading the gospel everywhere; Against Celsus III.55, ANF, IV, 486.

⁸⁷So the Apostle Paul proclaimed his preaching was not in word only but in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:4; 2 Cor. 6:6-7; 1 Thess. 1:5).

⁸⁸Ramsay MacMullen, Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400) (London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 36-40.

⁸⁹Origen stated the church was careful to "first invite all men to be healed, and exhort those who are sinners to come to the consideration of the doctrines which teach men not to sin. . . ." Against Celsus, III.59, ANF, IV, 487.

⁹⁰See also Hippolytus, Apostolic Traditions in Dix, pp. 24- 27.

Training in Righteousness. Formal preparation for initiation into the covenant began when the individual was accepted into the Catechumenate. The aim of this stage was preparation for baptism and the holy unction through moral transformation and indoctrination. Entrance into the divine kingdom required a life that had ceased to sin and an understanding of the precepts and responsibilities of membership in the family of God.⁹¹

Catechumens were carefully infolded into the life of the church through limited participation. Each received close personal supervision from a sponsor who daily gave advice, instruction and encouragement. These sponsors served as spiritual umbilical cords in that they provided a direct link between the unborn child of God and the body of Christ.⁹²

Catechumens were prompted through a process of limited participation to seek birth into the church. At the agape feasts they could see the impact of Christian fellowship but were forcefully reminded of their own status as outsiders when required to eat a different bread and drink from a different cup. During Sunday gatherings they sat as a group in the presence of the church for the reading of the Scriptures, sermons, hymns, and prayers but were ejected prior to the celebration of the Eucharist.⁹³

To be a catechumen was to enjoy limited access to the kingdom of God. They received ongoing instruction in proper behavior for the kingdom. The primary content was the Scriptures and the guidebooks on Christian behavior such as the Didache. Progress in discipline indicated the Spirit's presence within having begun the process of healing their souls and forming their characters.⁹⁴ If sincere in their faith they were protected by the grace applied to the church.⁹⁵ They received a steady diet of instruction which bore the markings of control by the divine Spirit. They had things revealed to them through prophet-teachers who spoke in a form of ecstasy. In short, the Kingdom of God was at their finger tips.

Acts of Infoldment. In the events surrounding baptism the individual was infolded into the family of God. In this process the Spirit was understood to become the immediate instructor of divine truth. Thus the primary objective specifically associated with baptism was illumination. The church existed in the era and realm in which light was overcoming darkness. In that context, to be born again was to be born into a kingdom of light.⁹⁶ The light was from above and connoted the glory of the face of God. Thus, to be illumined in baptism was to see God, to know him.⁹⁷

⁹¹Hinson, Evangelization, pp. 38-40, 76-77.

⁹²Clement of Alexandria makes extensive use of the imagery of the church as mother and the catechumens as unborn children. He also describes them as infants nursing at the breast of the church, drinking the sincere milk of the Word; see his The Instructor, ANF, II.

⁹³Hippolytus, Apostolic Traditions, in Dix, pp. 27-31.

⁹⁴Clement of Alexandria, Instructor I.6, ANF, II, 216-222.

⁹⁵Cyprian, Epistles XII, ANF, V, 293.

⁹⁶Justin, Dialogue VII, ANF, I, 198.

⁹⁷Hinson, Evangelization, p. 81. Justin, First Apology XLI, ANF, I, 183. Clement of Alexandria, The Instructor I.6, ANF, II, 215-216; Exhortation to the Heathen X, ANF, II, 198. Cyprian, Epistles I.3-4, ANF, V, 275-276.

Baptism was engulfed in a period of intense study and preparation. Candidates were expected to make a pledge of faith based upon the essential doctrines of the church. The covenant they were about to enter required absolute commitment. The learners were drilled in the Rule of Faith and its rational foundations in the Scriptures. With the passage of time memorization of credal forms took on increasing significance but understanding remained the primary concern throughout the ante-Nicene period.⁹⁸

Preparation for baptism also included fasting. Persons were expected to have ceased sinning and to have their own flesh under control. They presented themselves as morally clean and above reproach in conduct. Sponsors and others were called upon to testify in their behalf.⁹⁹ These activities served to make more distinct the boundaries of the kingdoms of Christ and Satan. Entrance into the covenant would begin, not end, their warfare with the demonic.¹⁰⁰

Following baptism the individual was taken to the place where the church was gathered and received the holy unction, an anointing with oil symbolizing the reception of the Holy Spirit. This event signaled the individual's entrance into the charismatic community and served as ordination for ministry within the church. For the first time the converts were allowed to pray for the saints (with the laying on of hands?) and give the pure "kiss of peace" to others.¹⁰¹ These rites of initiation culminated in the believer's first participation in the eucharist indicating full acceptance at the table of the Lord's kingdom.

Tutelage of the Spirit. After their salubrious incorporation into the body of Christ, believers were understood to live under the careful tutelage of the Holy Spirit. The objective of this stage was to carry the believer on unto perfection as members of God's new creation. The process included all the avenues of instruction open to the catechumens plus those associated with the restricted ceremonies. The principle diet of study for the baptized believer was the Scriptures but these were supplemented by prophecies and heroic testimonies. The sacramental rituals of the church served to help each person recapitulate the fundamental truths of the kingdom. Through personal study, private meditation and the shared experiences of the church the Holy Spirit was perceived to be working within the believer to provide deeper understanding of the things of God especially as revealed in the Scriptures. As spiritual persons they were also possible recipients of visions, dreams, and prophecies.¹⁰²

Thus they understood themselves to be perfected and yet striving after perfection. They were the true gnostics of the world. Clement of Alexandria said of them: "The gnostic is consequently divine, and already holy, God-bearing, and God-borne." Origen clarified this state by insisting the believer must grow in blessedness, "... the more we perceive its blessedness, the more should be increased and intensified within us the longing for the same,

⁹⁸See Origen, Against Celsus III.51, ANF, IV, 484-484.

⁹⁹Justin, First Apology LXI, ANF, I, 183.

¹⁰⁰Hinson, Evangelization, p. 78.

¹⁰¹Hippolytus, Apostolic Traditions, trans. Dix, p. 49.

¹⁰²Novatian, Treatise Concerning the Trinity XXIX, ANF, V, 640-641. Irenaeus, Against Heresies III.241, ANF, I, 458. Tertullian, Against Praxses II, ANF, III, 600.

while we ever more eagerly and freely receive and hold fast the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."¹⁰³ Failure to grow would result in a gradual falling away.¹⁰⁴

Conclusions

Early Christianity existed as an eschatological community of the Spirit. As such it developed a system of Christian formation that stressed preparation for life in the kingdom of God. The system aimed at bringing the individual into a living relationship with God, one that could be described as union and communion with him. Union with God mandated union with the people of God so that the process was one of controlled infoldment into a "contrast society". The strategy pivoted around the rites of initiation into the church as a covenanted community.

Several factors stand out about this system of pedagogy. First, the entire process relied heavily upon the precept that encounter with God was an experiential reality. Human beings can see God, know God, and live. God's presence was believed to be tangibly experienced in the church. The system would not have worked without overt manifestations of the Spirit.

Second, the system might best be described as controlled inculturation. There were high relational standards for belonging to the family of God. The method was characterized by limited but extensive participation. Full participation and corresponding blessings were available to all who sought them but were restricted to those who were willing to "pay the price" of total surrender to God. Moral preparation and sincerity of heart took precedence over all other forms of self improvement, i.e. intellectual pursuits.

Third, the Scriptures and other forms of inspired content were authoritative and binding, but they were treated in a utilitarian manner. Knowledge of the Scriptures was never an end in itself. Instead, they were either a tool to point persons toward God or they were a means of communion with God.

Finally, reason and cognitive knowledge were at most ancillary to the processes. Full participation in the kingdom of God was only marginally dependant on knowledge of doctrine. Relationships and character had priority over philosophy. The critical issue was moral preparedness to live in the presence of God.

¹⁰³Origen, De Principiis I.3, ANF, IV, 255.

¹⁰⁴Ibid. Also, Cyprian, Epistles LXXV.14, ANF, V, 401.