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The Use of ποιμήν in Church History

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Who are the Transformational Leaders in the Church?

The Use of "ποιμήν" in Early Christian History



Early Use of ποιμήν

New Testament

- Dating from 48-100AD
- The New Testament uses ποιμήν 18 times
- Only one instance is it used to refer to a position in the church (Eph 4:11)
- One other time, the verb form of ποιμήν is used to describe what leaders did in caring for the Christians (1 Peter 5:2).

Apostolic Fathers

- Dating from 67-180AD
- The word ποιμήν is used once in reference to God being the shepherd of the church (Ignatius' *Letter to Romans* 9)
- Once in reference to Christ (*Barnabas* 5)
- A metaphor for those who lead a spiritual flock (Ignatius' *Letter to Philadelphians* 2)

A mosaic depicting five men, likely church leaders, with various hairstyles and beards, wearing robes. A semi-transparent dark grey banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing a quote icon and text.

”

All other references to church leadership include apostle (40+ times), prophet (50+ times), teacher (10+ times), bishop (80+ times), elder (30+ times), and deacon (30+ times).

A mosaic of five men's faces, likely representing the apostles, with a golden background. The men have various hairstyles and beards, and are looking slightly to the right.

Leadership Structure in First Century

Adaptive Models

- Elders (Galatia)
- Bishops-Deacons (Philippi)
- Bishop-Elders-Deacons (Ephesus)

A mosaic background featuring five men's faces, likely apostles, rendered in a traditional style with gold leaf accents. A central gold circle contains a white double quote icon. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing white text.

”

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and for by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Eph 4:11-14



Leadership Structure in First Century

Adaptive Models

- Elders (Galatia)
- Bishops-Deacons (Philippi)
- Bishop-Elders-Deacons (Ephesus)

Five-Fold Leadership

- Apostles
- Prophets
- Evangelists
- Shepherd
- Teachers



Leadership Structure in Second Century

Modalities

- Bishop-Elders-Deacons (Ignatius and Polycarp)
- Bishops-Deacons (Didache)
 - Prophets and teachers


Sodalities

A mosaic depicting five men with various hairstyles and beards, wearing robes. A semi-transparent dark grey horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing a quote icon and text.

”

Appoint, therefore, for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord. These should be men meek and not lovers of money, truthful and proven. For they also serve you in the ministry of prophets and teachers. Therefore, do not despise them, for they are your honored ones, together with the prophets and teachers.

-Didache 15a



Leadership Structure in Second Century

Modalities

- Bishop-Elders-Deacons (Ignatius and Polycarp)
- Bishops-Deacons (Didache)
 - Prophets and teachers

Sodalities

- Apostles who were also prophets (cf. Eph 2:20)
 - Church planters
- Apostles (sent ones)
 - Missionaries
- Prophets (bringing God's word to bear on an issue)
 - Justice
- Teachers
 - "Professors;" eventually the doctors of the church
- Evangelists



Two Books: *Church History*

Eusebius of Caesarea

- Bishop of the church
- Wrote four editions of *Church History* between 311-324AD
- Spans the history of the church from the time of Christ to the time of Constantine (ca. 330 years)

Socrates of Constantinople

- Perhaps a teacher as he is also known as Socrates the Scholastic
- Covers Christian history from 305 to 439AD



The Use of ποιμήν

Eusebius

- Uses the word ποιμήν 12 times as a title or an office of certain central figures who were recognized as having care for churches.
- In some places, the word is synonymous with bishop and elder

Socrates

A mosaic depicting five men, likely the bishops mentioned in the text, with various hairstyles and beards, set against a gold background. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text and a quote icon.

”

Of the martyrs in **Phoenicia** the most distinguished were those devoted pastors [gr. ποιμένες] of the spiritual flocks of Christ: Tyrannion, bishop of the church of **Tyre**; Zenobius, an elder of the church at **Sidon**; and Silvanus, bishop of the churches about **Emesa**

-Eusebius, *Church History* VIII.13.3



The Use of ποιμήν

Eusebius

- Uses the word ποιμήν 12 times as a title or an office of certain central figures who were recognized as having care for churches.
- In some places, the word is synonymous with bishop and elder
- In another place, it seems ποιμήν is distinct from the bishop and not as prominent in the ecclesial hierarchy

Socrates

A mosaic depicting five men, likely bishops or elders, in a synod. They are shown from the chest up, wearing traditional ecclesiastical or Roman attire. The background is a golden mosaic. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the image, containing text and a quote icon.

”

Thereupon a very large synod assembled at Rome, sixty bishops and a great many more elders and deacons, while the pastors [gr. ποιμένων – genitive case] of the remaining provinces deliberated in their places privately concerning what ought to be done.

Eusebius, *Church History* VI.43.2



Summary of Eusebius

- Those who held the title **ποιμήν** seemed to have responsibility for all believers in a city.
- There was generally only one **ποιμήν** as we see in Dionysius the **ποιμήν** of Corinth (*Church History* III.4.11).
- Other prominent **ποιμήν** included Onesimus in Ephesus (*Church History* III 36.5), Marcus in Alexandria (*Church History* IV.11.6), and Cyprian of Carthage (*Church History* VII.3.1).
- Their role seemed to include occasionally meeting with their peers to address issues of heresy as with Novatus (*Church History* VI.43.2) and Paul of Samosata (*Church History* VII.27.1).
- Spanning ca. 330 years of early church history, Eusebius only uses the word **ποιμήν** 12 times



The Use of ποιμήν

Eusebius

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Socrates

- Uses the accusative form of ποιμήν four times.
- Three of those instances refer to a person (*Church History* I. 12, II.23).
- In Book I.12, the word is used twice.

A mosaic depicting five men, likely saints or church fathers, with various hairstyles and beards, wearing robes. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing text and a quote icon.

”

With respect to Spyridon, so great was his sanctity while a shepherd [gr. ποιμένα], that he was thought worthy of being made a Pastor [gr. ποιμένα] of men. And having been assigned the bishopric of one of the cities in Cyprus named Trimithus, on account of his extreme humility he continued to feed his sheep during his incumbency of the bishopric.

Socrates, Church History I.12

A mosaic depicting five men, likely church leaders, with various hairstyles and beards, set against a gold background. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the lower half of the image, containing text and a quote icon.

”

Over the centuries, the unfortunate consequence of elevating “pastor” as a title has discriminated against other leadership roles and functions in the church which were clearly present even in the time of Eusebius and Socrates.

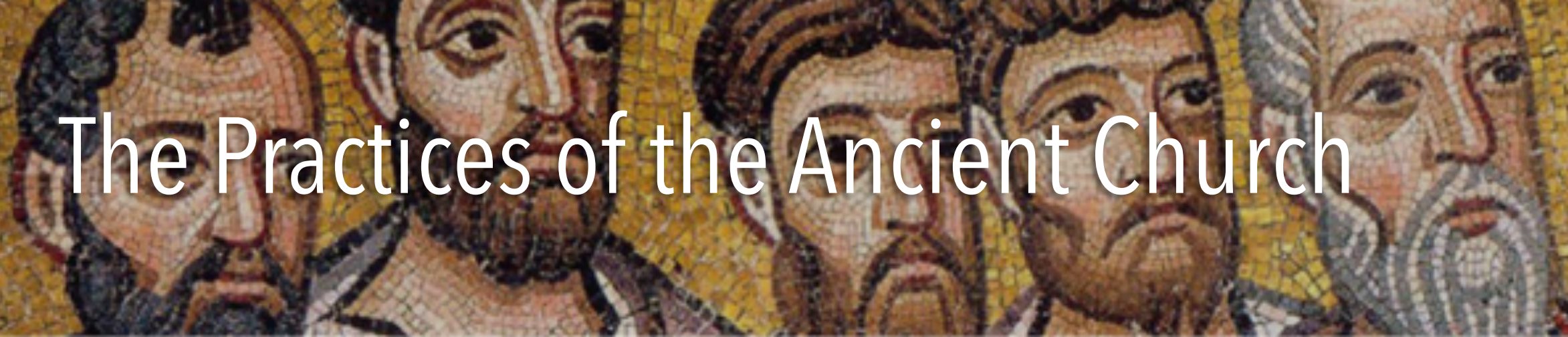
Four Areas of Focus for Transformational Leadership in the Church

- Church planting for the ongoing expansion of the gospel locally and around the world (the role of the apostle and evangelist)
- Justice in the community as a way to establish the reputation of Christianity (the role of the prophet)
- Theological education that ensures proper Christology (the role of the teacher)
- Care for the spiritual and physical needs of the congregation (the role of the shepherd, aka ποιμήν)

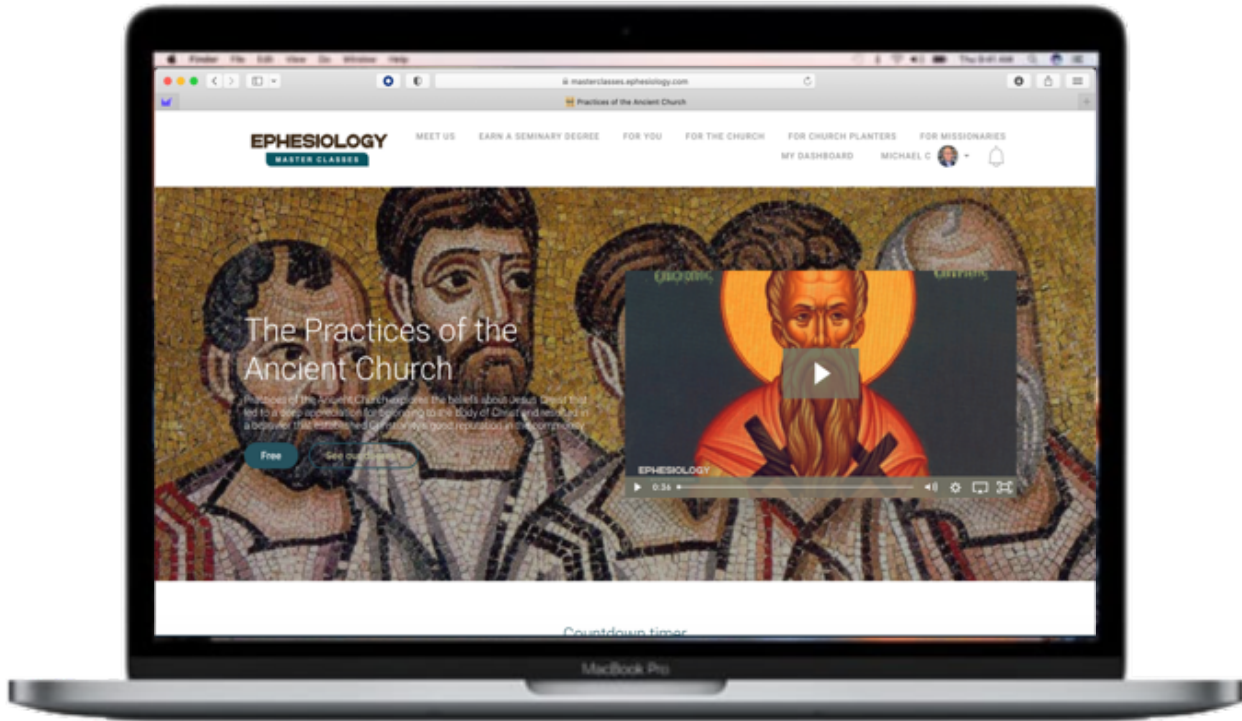
A mosaic depicting five men's faces, likely apostles or church leaders, arranged horizontally. The style is traditional with a grid of small tiles. The men have various features like beards and hair, and are set against a golden background.

Discussion

- Students: What does the leadership structure and adaptive nature of the church of the second century mean for your ministry?
- Pastors: What does the leadership structure and adaptive nature of the church of the second century mean for your church?
- Professors: What does the leadership structure and adaptive nature of the church of the second century look like for equipping seminary students?



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