

How Did Christ and the Early Christians Worship

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Because of the different denominations that exist, several practices and teachings also exist. This leads to the confusion of several religious terms and even uncertainty as to what the terms mean. For example, when people learn that we are studying the Bible, they will ask what is our religion. If we say, "We are Christians," they will ask, "What kind of Christian?" Sometime, they would say, "Are you a born again Christian?" Normally, I do not answer them squarely, because if I answer them according to the Bible, they will not understand me. If I answer according to their definition, it is a misrepresentation. I normally tell them, "Let's study the Bible so that you will understand me." Then I will add, "If you know the religion of Peter, then I am of the same religion as Peter's." I will always emphasize that we should be like Peter, because if he was saved and we are like him in religious beliefs, then we have the assurance that we are saved. If Peter was saved and our beliefs and practices are different from his, then we have no assurance of salvation.

Other confusions still exist. For example, some of us still use the word "mass" to refer to our worship activities on Sundays. If Peter and the rest of the apostles used the term "mass" to refer to such activities, then by all means we have to use it. If they did not use it, then we have no authority to use it, especially if the meaning is not found in the Bible. Do we know the origin of the word "mass?" From the online Catholic Encyclopedia, we can read:

The word *Mass* (*missa*) first established itself as the general designation for the Eucharistic Sacrifice in the West after the time of Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604), the early Church having used the expression the "breaking of bread" (*fractio panis*) or "liturgy" (Acts 13:2, *leitourgountes*); the Greek Church has employed the latter name for almost sixteen centuries.

There were current in the early days of Christianity other terms;

- ✧ "The Lord's Supper" (*coena dominica*),
- ✧ the "Sacrifice" (*prophora, oblatio*),
- ✧ "the gathering together" (*synaxis, congregatio*),
- ✧ "the Mysteries", and
- ✧ (since Augustine), "the Sacrament of the Altar".¹

So it obvious that Peter and the early Christians did not use the word "mass." We have to note that in the Catholic Mass, they offer as a sacrifice the real body and blood of Christ. They have the so-called "Transubstantiation," where the bread and wine are transformed into real body and blood of Christ. In the concept of mass, every time the priest lifts the bread and wine, he sacrifices again the body and blood of the Lord. But Hebrews 9:24-26 tells us, "***For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another--He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.***"² In Hebrews 10:10-14, we can read, "***By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.***" So why offer Christ's body and blood again and again? That one sacrifice is enough!

1 From the Catholic Encyclopedia, available online at: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10006a.htm>

2 All Scripture quotations were taken from the New King James Version of the Bible.

So that we will understand how Christ and the early Christians worship, let us study the Bible and learn from what they were doing. Let us remember that the early Christians were Jews. Even Christ Himself was Jew. Do we know that it was Christ's custom to attend worship in the synagogue of the Jews? He is God, but He attended the worship assembly regularly. Is it our custom to attend the Sunday worship regularly also? Luke 4:16 tells us, ***"So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read."*** Let us read the continuation of this passage to see what Jesus did after that, and let us observe what they did during their worship gathering in the synagogue (Luke 4:17-29).

I hope we have observed that in their worship, where Jesus was one of the attendants, they read Scriptures and expounded them. Bible study is really a part of worship activities. That is one of the occasions where the Scripture is taught. Matthew 13:54 says, ***"And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, 'Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?'"***

In Acts 13:14-15, we can read, ***"But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, 'Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.'"*** You can read verses 16-41 and see how Paul grabbed to opportunity to preach Christ to those who worshiped there. In verse 44, we can read, ***"On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God."***

So we can conclude that scriptural discussion was a part of worship. Some Christians, even in Banilad, will not join Bible studies, and when they arrive, they complain that the Bible study is not yet over. That is a wrong kind of attitude.

What else is done during worship? Of course, prayer is also included. In Acts 6:13, we can read, ***"And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there."*** So prayer is another component of worship activities. I think we have no doubt about this.

What else is done during worship? In Acts 20:7 ***"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."*** Partaking of the Lord's Supper is also a part of worship activities. The Corinthians Christians had a problem in their worship assembly. So Paul corrected them. In 1 Corinthians 11:20-21, Paul says, ***"Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk."*** Here the Lord's Supper was not treated with importance anymore. That is why Paul had to correct them. In Acts 20:7, we can read Paul was giving a message to the assembly. This is the idea of giving a sermon.

What else is done in the assembly? In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, ***"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."*** So giving was also done during the assembly. Take note of this. The Seventh Day Adventists claim that the early Christians worshiped on Saturdays and not on Sundays. Acts 20:7 above tells us that the disciples meet together on the first day of the week to break bread, that is, to partake of the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul instructed them to do the collection on the first day of the week. If the early Christians met on Saturdays for worship, why not give their collections on that same day. Why come again on the following day (Sunday) to do the collections? So it must be that during the worship on Sundays the collection is also to be made.

In the above examples, it was not obvious that singing was included. But when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, we can read that they sang a hymn. In Matthew 26:26-30, we can read, ***"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from***

it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." In 1 Corinthians 14:15-19, we can read, *"What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue."* So we can see that when Paul used the word "sing," it was in the context of a church assembly.

So it clear that singing is also a part of activities to be done during the worship assembly. But what kind of singing? In Acts 16:25, we can read, *"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."* In Ephesians 5:19, we can read, *"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,"* and in Colossians 3:16, we can read, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* It is the kind of singing that uses the heart and the vocal chords as the instruments, not musical instruments. Founders of big Christian denomination knew fully well that early Christians practice "a capella" singing, not a band nor a choir.

Singing is important because as Christians we need to offer continually a song of praise to the Lord. In Hebrews 13:15, we can read, *"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."* We are called to become God's special people to proclaim His praises. In 1 Peter 2:9, we can read, *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."* Let us not think that singing is not part of our worship activities. It is part of worship activities so we need to make it a point to come and join us in singing praises to the Lord. So come early so that we can sing more praises to God.

Brethren, I hope we now understand what we are doing during our congregational worship. Worship activities include studying the Bible, singing of hymns, partaking of the Lord's Supper, listening to the sermon, joining in prayer, and sharing of blessings through giving. I hope we will make it our aim to participate in all these things, because these things constitute our worship service every Sunday. We offer all these things to God during our worship assembly.

If we have understood the significance of our worship assembly, then we can fulfill the purpose of gathering together. The major purpose for church assembly is to edify the members by way of encouragement. In Hebrews 10:23-25, we can read, *"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."* If we forsake the assembly and we already know the truth about its significance, then we are sinning willfully and we are in danger. In Hebrews 10:26-27, we can read, *"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries."*

Thank you very much. May God continue helping us to worship Him as we ought to do!

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