

Chapter 2.03 Some Terms and Ideas

This chapter presents some terms and ideas. You can skim through it to read about what you want to know more about. I introduce other terms and ideas elsewhere as needed.

BC, BCE, AD, etc.

Modern politically correct people want a time reckoning system that is acceptable to all faiths, and which does not emphasize the role of Jesus while setting the zero point. This desire is reasonable. So the historical reference term “BC” became “BCE” while “AD” became “CE”. “BC” means “Before Christ”. “BCE” stands for “Before the Common Era”. “AD” stands for “Anno Domini” or “in the year of our Lord”. “CE” stands for “Common Era”. The zero point is still the traditional year of Jesus’ birth, which is probably about 3 or 4 years after his real birth. Thai Buddhists have a system for calendar time with the zero point set at Buddha’s death. Because Buddha lived before Jesus, you have to add 542 or 543 years to the BCE-CE year to get the Buddhist year (it depends on the year, and details do not matter). I use BCE and CE, and sometimes I put “AD” in parentheses after “CE”.

Hebrew, Israelite, Jew.

The term “Hebrew” covers a larger scope than the term “Jew”. A “Hebrew” was an ancestor of the Jews. The Hebrews were real but details about them are mostly mythical. You can tell fact from myth in what follows. In a myth accepted by Jews and Muslims, all Hebrews and Semites are descendants of Abraham. In real life, Hebrews both came from Egypt and might have been traders and herders in what is now the Sinai, Palestine, and Arabia. In Egypt, Hebrews might have been a distinct ethnic and vocational group, rather like “Gypsies” in the United States or the modern Jews in many places. The Hebrews overran Palestine beginning around 1500 BCE, eventually forming a Kingdom that was later called Israel. Israel was the “Promised Land” of the Tanakh (Old Testament). Traditionally, Jacob was the grandson of Abraham through Isaac. Jacob added the name “Israel” to his name after an encounter with God or with an angel. Jacob had twelve sons. The Hebrews traditionally had twelve tribes, which are like Scottish clans, each traditionally derived from one of Jacob’s twelve sons. The twelve tribes are called collectively “Israel” and the nation of the Hebrews came to be called “Israel”. Sometimes the people of Israel are also called “Jacob”. King David flourished around 1000 BCE. For reasons to be explained in later chapters, after David, eventually the tribe of Judah dominated all Israel and the other tribes pretty much died out. Then all Hebrews and Israelites came to be called “Jews” after “Judah”. Israelites were not called “Jews” in the time of King David unless they were from the tribe of Judah or living in the area controlled by the tribe of Judah. By the time of Jesus, most Israelites were called “Jews”. Now, the term “Israelite” usually refers to a resident of Israel in the past. The term “Israeli” refers to a resident of modern Israel. I use “Hebrew” for an ancestor of Israelites and modern Jews, and use “Jew” for most people in Israel about the time of Jesus and for modern Jews. For many people now, the terms “Jew” and “Hebrew” mean the same. Hebrew was the language of ancient Hebrews, the Kingdom of Israel, and it is the language of modern Israel. Modern Jews sometimes can speak Hebrew but often speak primarily the language of the nation in which they were born, such as English if they are from

America; or they speak a language related to both German and Hebrew, called “Yiddish”. Many Israelis now speak predominantly Hebrew from having grown up where it is spoken.

Semite.

The term “Semite” covers a larger scope than the term “Hebrew” or “Jew”. In myth, a Semite could be any descendant of Abraham but was especially a descendant through Shem, a kinsman of Jacob, and through Jacob. In modern understanding, a Semite is a Hebrew (including Jews), an Arab, or a member of related ethnic groups from the Middle East and North Africa that speak similar languages and likely share common ancestry. Egyptians, Jews, Moors, Phoenicians (Lebanese), Saudis, and Syrians are all Semites. “Arabs” are a branch of Semites. Sometimes Americans use the term “Arab” to mean all Semites except Jews, sometimes they use it to mean all Semites including Jews. For Americans, “Arab” is a term of contrast with Jews, as when we talk of “Arabs and Jews, fussing and feuding”. The term “Arab” used this way often indicates prejudice. Not all Semites are Muslims; Lebanese are Semites yet many Lebanese are Christians, as were many Syrians and Iraqis. Not all Muslims are Semites; the Iranians, Afghans, Kurds, and Pakistanis are Indo-Europeans and so are related to Europeans such as the Russians and English.

Any ethnic or religious group can be prejudiced against any other group, but, because of the prevalence of prejudice against Jews and other Semites, and because many Semites are Muslims against whom many non-Muslims feel prejudice, it is useful to list out some patterns. The term “anti-Semitism” usually does not mean “prejudice against all Semites” but means “prejudice against (only) Jews”. There are no simple terms for “prejudice against the larger group of Semites including Jews”, for “prejudice against all Semites except Jews”, or for “prejudice against particular groups of Semites other than Jews such as Syrians”. In addition to prejudice against Jews, anti-Semites usually also dislike the greater group of Semites and dislike most Muslims too, as when some Americans dislike all “Arabs and Jews”. People other than White Christians can be anti-Semitic (anti-Jewish) and can be prejudiced against the greater group of Semites too. Black Christians are sometimes against Jews and other Semites. It is useful to know that Iranians, Pakistanis, Afghans, Malaysians, and Indonesians are Muslim but are not Semites. I have seen prejudice against Semites, including Jews and Muslims, in many places, as among Asians and Africans. I have seen non-Semitic Muslims dislike Jews, Semitic Muslims, and Muslims who are not Semites. I have seen Malaysians and Indonesians who are prejudiced against Jews and Arabs; I have seen Iranians who dislike Iraqis and Syrians. I have seen Semitic Muslims prejudiced against non-Semitic Muslims as when Muslims of Semitic Middle Eastern ancestry (such as Egyptians and Saudis) show prejudice against Malaysian, Indonesian, or American Muslims or against Iranians. Jews can show prejudice against other Semites. Semites other than Jews can be prejudiced against Jews or against Semites other than their own particular group. Egyptians are sometimes prejudiced against other North Africans. Semites, including Jews, can be prejudiced against non-Semites as when Semites are prejudiced against Europeans, Christians, or Buddhists. That is a lot to keep track of and a lot to get over. Nobody is immune from stupid ideology.

Torah, Tanakh, and “Old Testament”.

The basic meaning of the Hebrew term “Torah” is “teaching” or “instruction”. It now has many references. Its primary reference is probably the first five books of what Christians call the “Old Testament”, the books

that were supposed to have been written by Moses, called the “Pentateuch”, or “five books”. It also refers to the entirety of what Christians call the “Old Testament”. It also refers to the entire body of Jewish religious instruction including the Old Testament and commentary. When used with “the”, as in “the Torah”, it can also refer to a scroll on which the Torah (usually the first five books) is written, as when somebody says, “handle the Torah with loving care”. It can also mean “the Law”, as in the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament or the Mosaic Law and its elaborations with commentary. To avoid confusion, I try to use the term “Torah” only to mean the first five books. I use more elaborate phrases for its other meanings.

The Hebrew term for what Christians call the “Old Testament” is “Tanakh” or “Tanak”. The term is adapted from the first letter of “Torah” along with the first letters of two other Hebrew words that mean “Prophets” (“Navim”) and “Writings” (“K(h)etushim”). “Writings” includes such books as Psalms and the Song of Songs. In the same way, the word “Nabisco” comes from “National Biscuit Company” and the word “UNESCO” is pronounced “Yu-nesco”. The order of books in the Tanakh differs from the Christian Old Testament. For clarity and out of respect for the source, I use “Tanakh” to mean “Old Testament” and use “Old Testament” only when a specifically Christian meaning is needed. The term “the Bible” usually means all of the “Tanakh” except when I also include the New Testament. Jews are not entirely comfortable with the term “New Testament” because it implies that the Tanakh was made obsolete by writings about Jesus; but Jewish scholars now use that term, and there is no term better and widely known, so I use it too.

Orthodox and Catholic.

The term “orthodox” originally meant “straight belief”, or “correct belief”. “Ortho” means “straight and correct” as “orthodontics” means “straight teeth”. “Dox” means “idea” or “understanding” or “teaching”. “Dogma” has come to mean “rigid inflexible ideas that are to be imposed on people” but originally it meant only “orderly and therefore likely correct content of thinking and belief”. The “dog” in “dogma” is from the same root as the “dox” in “orthodox”. “Catholic” means “complete” or “whole” and is not limited to the Roman Catholic Church. “Apostolic” means “in the unbroken line from the original apostles”. See below. Originally the Roman Catholic Church was also orthodox and the Eastern Orthodox Church was also catholic. The mainline church as it developed after about 200 CE (AD) was called “orthodox, catholic, and apostolic”. It only split later. After the split, the term “orthodox” came to have two meanings. “Orthodox” refers to the Eastern Orthodox churches after the split between the Roman Catholic and the Eastern churches around 1500, such as the Greek Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church. The term “orthodox” also still refers to correct teaching. For example, any Christian who believes in the Trinity is “orthodox” whether he-she is Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant. Incorrect teaching still is “unorthodox” or “heretical”. The Orthodox Church still considers itself catholic (whole) but not Catholic (Roman Catholic). I do not know if Protestants consider themselves catholic. Of course, they do not consider themselves Roman Catholic. They consider themselves orthodox but not Orthodox. What most Americans call simply the “Catholic Church” I call by the more complete term of “Roman Catholic Church”.

Trinity.

“The Trinity” refers to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost). God is the Father while Jesus is the Son. The Holy Spirit is not the brother of Jesus or another son of the Father or another God exactly like

the father. In orthodox dogma, the three members of the Trinity are exactly equal and of the same “stuff” (“ousia” or “substance”). None is any better or more powerful than the others. They are the same, and not the same. Each has his own distinct “personality” (they are usually male). It is not clear whether they are manifestations of the same underlying thing (sometimes called “godhead”) but in orthodox dogma I think this idea is resisted. In theory, Jesus is not subordinate to God the Father even though in some passages of the Bible he talks and acts as if he was. In theory, the Holy Spirit is not subordinate to either God the Father or Jesus but, in the Tanakh, God uses the Holy Spirit like an instrument. The Orthodox Church has been careful to preserve the full equality of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity but the Roman Catholic Church adopted language in its version of the Nicene Creed that makes it seem as if the Holy Spirit is subordinate to God and Jesus – the “filioque” clause. The identity and activities of the Holy Spirit have never been well developed in Christian thought. Mary and Satan are not members of the Trinity, and they are not co-equal with members of the Trinity.

Satan.

“Satan” originally meant “the adversary” as in a court case. From being a persistent adversary as in the Book of Job, Satan developed into a persistent agent of evil, and then to the originator of rebellion and evil. He had already taken this identity before the time of Jesus. The name “Lucifer” means “bringer of light” in Latin. Satan did not have that name, or the identity as an archangel, until the middle ages. Satan is not the equal of Jesus or equally as powerful as Jesus. Jesus is above Satan because Jesus is God. If there is a counterpart to Satan among the group of “good guys”, it is probably Michael the archangel. In Tolkien’s “Silmarillion”, when God puts down Satan (Morgoth), God sends Michael, not Jesus.

Ideas about Satan are probably related to ideas about an Egyptian god called “Seth”. Seth was part of a holy family of gods, usually the highest holy family of gods, including Isis, Osiris, and Horus. He was the “bad boy” of the family, causing problems through jealousy and intrigue. He killed his father and/or brother, and was replaced by his father and/or brother, largely through the good-hearted diligent intervention of his mother Isis. The details are not important. In another book, the connections between Egyptian religion, Hebrew religion, and Christianity would be worth bringing out but I cannot do that here, and so I leave Seth pretty much alone.

Messiah and Christ.

“Messiah” is the Greek transliteration (“sounding out”) of a Hebrew word that is spoken something like “meschiach” (or “massiach”), and means “anointed person”. It originally referred to the act of pouring oil on the head of a person to signify that God chose that person for a special role. Eventually “messiah” came to mean anybody chosen by God for a special role whether oil poured had been poured on his-her head or not, although it was good if he-she did have oil poured on his-her head. All messiahs that I know of were men. The term originally applied to many characters in Hebrew history, including prophets, kings, judges, and even one Persian king. It was used as part of a title, or as a title in itself. Eventually it came to refer mostly to the King of Israel, especially David or a king in the line of David. After the fall of Israel from about 700 BCE (BC) onwards, at the hands in turn of the Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, “the Messiah” came to mean the expected heir of the Davidic kings who would reunite Israel into a single free nation with its own territory. I return to this idea later in the book when I talk about Jesus as messiah.

“Christ” comes from “christos” which is a Greek translation of “anointed person”. It was originally part of a title, “Iesou Christos”, which in English should be translated as “Jesus the Christ”, not as “Jesus Christ”. “Christ” is a title. The word “Christ” is not a name to be used apart from referring to an anointed person. “Jesus Christ” is not a name; it is not the same name as for example “Davy Jones”. Strictly speaking, the term “Jesus Christ” does not make sense unless it implies “Jesus the Christ”. When some Christians say “Jesus Christ” they do have in mind “Jesus the Christ”, where “the Christ” refers to the Davidic savior and the Christ of theology. But I think most Christians now do not understand this reference and instead wrongly treat “Christ” as if it were Jesus’ last name or the name of an important god, like “Apollo”. Even within a few years after Jesus’ death, people already used “Christ” as a last name, maybe because it is similar to a common Greek name, “Chrestos”, which means roughly “good and faithful”. Residents of the Empire used “Chrestos” to name a god in some of their mystery religions. “Chrestos” can also be a slave name indicating the master’s hopes for the character of the slave. Some residents of the Empire, including some Christians, might have thought of Jesus as “Jesus Chrestos” and thus as “Jesus Christ” with “Christ” as a name. I do not know if the present use of “Jesus Christ” as a name comes from this use of “Jesus Chrestos” and “Jesus Christ” in the Empire.

It is not proper to refer to Jesus as simply “Christ”. Where I grew up, we could refer to a person by his-her last name only, so we could refer to “Davy Jones” as “Jones”. So, to me, just saying “Christ” seems like shorthand for “Jesus Christ” as a first name and last name. Some Americans wrongly use simply the one word “Christ” as a kind of shorthand for the longer phrase “Jesus the Christ”. The term “Christ” can be shorthand for a theological idea: “the key Christ among many lesser Christs, the one and only universal savior Christ who was incarnated as Jesus”. Some theologians use “Christ” that way. I don’t think most people who refer to Jesus as simply “Christ” have that high theological use in mind. Most people who refer to Jesus as “Christ” seem to use the term as a reference to an important god.

Just as there has been more than one President in American history, there was more than one Christ in Hebrew history. I do not know if Jews refer to the expected Davidic Savior as “the Christ” (I think not) but Christians soon after Jesus thought of Jesus as the one-and-only expected Davidic Savior and referred to him as “the Christ” to show that. From calling Jesus “the Christ”, Christians came to call him simply “Christ”, again as if it were a last name.

When we use “Christ” we should indicate the particular anointed person to whom we refer as in “David the Christ” or “Saul the Christ”. Ideally, we should not use “Christ” without “the”, as in wrongly saying “David Christ”. To use “Christ” to refer to Jesus and only to Jesus is like using “President” to refer to Ronald Reagan and only to him. To call Jesus “Jesus Christ” is like saying “Ronald President” so that “Ronald President” means “Ronald the President”, “President” becomes his last name, and no other President can be referred to as “President”. To use the term “Christ” to mean “Jesus” is like using the term “President” to mean Ronald Reagan and only Ronald Reagan, and to insist that the term “President” can never be used to refer to any other President or any other person. To say “President loves you” (“Christ loves you”) would mean “President Ronald Reagan loves you and you do not have to think about anybody else loving you”.

I do not believe Jesus sought out the title “Christ” or would have accepted it as American Christians use it now. I believe modern Christians mislead in using “Christ” to refer to “the Christ”, the anticipated Davidic

savior, and to refer to Jesus. I think modern Christians are sloppy at best in calling Jesus “Jesus Christ”. To avoid problems with the term “Christ”, I try to avoid the term altogether and I tend to say just “Jesus”. When I need to include “Christ” I tend to say “Jesus the Christ” instead of just “Christ” or “Jesus Christ”; and I mean “one among many anointed persons” rather than “the Christ who was also the anticipated Savior”. If Jesus was the Christ in that sense, then I am sure he will forgive me for not stressing that role, for trying to respect Jewish custom, and for trying to keep titles and ideas clear. If you mean “Jesus”, then just say “Jesus” and do not get caught up in the titles and their implications.

Aramaic and the name “Jesus”.

Jesus’ native language was Aramaic, which is related both to Hebrew and to the Semitic language spoken around the area of southwestern Syria. Aramaic was the common business and political language in the Middle East during the time of Jesus. It was well known even in Israel (Judea). Thus Jesus’ native language was not the same as the language in the Tanakh (Old Testament).

Jesus’ real name was spoken something like “Yeshu” or “Yeshua”, probably with a stress on the “shu”. I think some modern Jews still use it as a given name and still say it “Yeshua”. “Yeshua” is the same as “Joshua”. The original full name was “Yehoshua” in the Tanakh. The “Ye” part of “Yehosua” or “Yeshua” is of the same root as “Yahweh” or “Jehovah”. The change from “Yehoshua” to “Yeshua” occurred with the original Joshua in the Tanakh, and was continued on afterwards. Already by the time of Jesus, “Yeshua” had been further shortened to become “Yeshu” from which comes “Jesou” or “Iesou”. If a similar change had occurred in English, “Jehoshua” would have become “Joshua”, then “Joshu”, and then “Josh”. I do not know if Jesus was called “Yeshu” or “Yeshua”. In Greek, Jesus’ name was originally rendered as “Iesou” or “(y)ee-ay-sou” without the final “a” of Hebrew “Yeshua” or the final “s” of English “Jesus”. That would make sense if Jesus was called “Yeshu”. The modern name “Jesus” comes from the English sounding out of the Greek version “Iesou” with an “s” added. I do not know when the “s” was added or why. If the “a” was originally present (“Yeshua”) and then dropped (“Yeshu”), I do not know. Some languages, such as Spanish, did not add the “s” so that “Jesus” is still “Jesu”. I use the term “Jesus” mostly because everybody knows it and because I do not want to impose on readers by using “Yeshu” or “Yeshua”.

After the rise of Christianity, the name “Yeshu” or “Yeshua” was so stigmatized among Jews that it nearly dropped out of use among them for a while. I think the name “Joshua” is acceptable now among Jews. I think Christians use the name “Joshua” without understanding it is the same name as “Jesus”. Christians from Northern Europe avoid giving their children the name “Jesus” although they do bestow the name “Joshua” or “Josh”. Other Christians give their children the name “Jesus”. In Spanish, the name is common and is pronounced something like “hay-sous”. Many Americans who do not understand Spanish hear “hay-sous” without understanding that it is the Spanish form of “Jesus”.

Biblical Languages.

The original language of the Tanakh (Old Testament) was Hebrew. The original language of the New Testament was Greek, although some of the people that wrote the New Testament could also speak Hebrew or Aramaic, and likely had some Hebrew or Aramaic texts about Jesus for reference, or had lists of supposed quotations from Jesus. The original language of any book in the Bible was not

English. The words in the King James Version are not the original words of Jesus, God, Moses, or anybody else in the Bible. Jesus probably spoke a little Greek and maybe even some Latin. Scholars debate whether or not Jesus was literate but I think that he was, and that he probably read the Tanakh.

YHWH.

“YHWH” is how the name of God is rendered in the Tanakh when it is rendered at all. Written Hebrew did not use very many vowel marks, so we do not know for sure what the vowels were between the consonants, and so we do not know for sure how it was spoken. It is sometimes written out as “Yahweh” or “Jehovah”. I use “Yahweh” when I need to because I guess that is close enough. I am not sure how YHWH would be best translated into English but I think something like “I am”, or “I am that I am” or “I am what (really) is”. Hebrews and Jews did not like to say the name at all. They tended to use substitutes, such as “Adonai”, which is translated into Greek as “Kyrios” and into English as “Lord”. They also used phrases such as “Blessed One” or “Heaven”. “The Kingdom of Heaven” meant “the Kingdom of God (YHWH)”. Not every instance of “adonai” in the Tanakh or in Jewish literature, or “kyrios” in Greek literature, means “Yahweh” but many instances do. Scholars argue about which instances do and which do not, and what the various instances mean for ideas about God and Jesus. They argue whether particular instances implied divinity for Jesus. Some Jews still do not like to speak God’s name or even to write it, so I am not happy about using “YHWH” or “Yahweh” but I do not know what else to do. Mostly I use “God”, which, for me, means “Yahweh” or “YHWH”.

Biblical Names.

Most Biblical names have meanings, some of which are useful to know. “Adam” means “son (child) of the earth” or “of the earth”. “Adam” could be used generically to mean “man” or “person”. Apparently Semitic people are more elaborate in their daily speech than the English-speaking people I grew up with because they use flowery-sounding phrases sometimes for variety. A Hebrew way to refer to any person is “son (child) of Adam”. I do not know about “daughter of Eve”. A variant on this use is “son of man”. Any person could be referred to as “son of man” or “daughter of man”. In C.S. Lewis’ “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe”, human children are called “sons and daughters of Adam”. As we will see later in the book, the phrase “son of man” was also a title for a particular character in the book of Daniel from the Tanakh. Jesus referred to himself as “son of man”, and scholars debate whether he meant “person” in general, the particular character from the Tanakh, or something else.

“Angel” comes from Greek “angelos” and means “messenger”. The Tanakh and the New Testament had several (probably) different non-human persons that came from God (I include the “Elohim”), some of which were messengers, some of which carried out duties without necessarily bringing messages, and all of which were referred to in Greek by the term “angels”. By the time of Jesus, various groups of Jews had developed elaborate theories about non-human beings, including Satan, and about their relations to one another and to God. Christians took over those ideas, and added ideas from other cultures as well. The Greek word “evangelist” comes from “eu” (spoken “ev”), meaning “good”, and “angelos”. It meant “messenger of good news”. It now means a person intent on advancing orthodox Christianity, which is good news to him-her.

Disciples and Apostles.

In Greek, a “disciple” is a follower, usually a follower of a teacher but also a follower of a way of life. Greek has a different word for “student” (“mathetes”), and disciples were not primarily students originally. Disciples were followers of the way of life of Jesus. When a modern church calls itself “Disciples of Christ”, I think they have that original meaning in mind. An “apostle” is an emissary, messenger, or ambassador. An apostle had a close relation with Jesus. Usually apostles had to be disciples first. However, the exact meaning of “apostle” is tricky because Paul claimed to be an apostle based on a vision of the risen Jesus even though he had never seen Jesus (before Jesus died) and even though he was not a disciple in the original sense. To insist that apostles be disciples first implies denying Paul the right to be an apostle. Apostles were supposed to be the ideal examples of what people were like in the Kingdom and also were the teachers of the Kingdom and its way.

“Apostolic succession” refers to getting the authority for being a church official directly in an unbroken line from an apostle, or keeping a church continuously in an unbroken line directly from a church founded by an apostle. Apostolic succession confers legitimacy. A person with apostolic succession may confer it on more than one other person. All the original apostles were men. All the people that received apostolic succession were men. In theory, all bishops, priests and other similar officers of major churches have apostolic succession. Major bishops all claim apostolic succession, such as the Bishop of Rome and the Bishop of Constantinople. The Bishop of Rome claims apostolic succession directly from Peter. At first (see below), a person that got apostolic succession became a bishop, and only bishops could confer apostolic succession. I do not know the situation now in various churches. In a church that depends on apostolic succession, only officials that have apostolic succession may set dogma. One community (church) that had legitimate apostolic succession could confer the status on another community (church), usually when the bishop of one church “laid hands” on the bishop of another church. For example, an apostolic church in Corinth could confer the status of “apostolic” on another new church in Athens. This is how the church grows. This conferring often happened when a new “daughter” church broke off from a “parent” church. When churches separated in a non-friendly way, both churches usually claimed apostolic succession for themselves while denying it to the other. The Eastern Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church claim apostolic succession and generally recognize each other’s claim. Some Protestant Churches claim apostolic succession but I do not know on what they base their claim, and I do not know if other churches accept it. I think the Roman Catholic Church denies apostolic succession to most Protestant churches. Some Protestant groups deny the claim of the Roman Catholic Church to apostolic succession. I do not know what they think about the Eastern Orthodox Church. Some Protestant groups deny valid apostolic succession to any church because they say that all legitimate lines were broken in the past and have not been re-established. In that case, I do not know on what they base the authority of their church other than the Bible (which is a pretty good authority in itself).

Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons, and Priests.

It is convenient to think of the original church office as “bishop” and to see other offices in relation to the bishop. Originally all bishops were men. The term “bishop” comes from the Greek “episkopos” for “supervisor” or “overseer” but not necessarily in the sense of “boss”. Bishops both carried out rites and made decisions about church personnel and policies. They were a “justice of the peace” for the church community. The religious duties of the bishop were like the religious duties of the Jewish “cohen” (I omit the high priests). The Greeks would have thought of a bishop as a kind of “hieros”, their term for a

religious functionary, and from which we get the term “hierarchy”. A “presbyter” is from Latin, from Greek, and means “elder”. Presbyters were helpers to the bishops. Some presbyters assisted in both rituals and administration while others helped only in administrative duties. The term “priest” comes from “presbyter”. The office of priest evolved out of the presbyters who assisted the bishop in both his duties as administrator and as hieros or cohen. Some presbyters came to be thought of as a “junior bishop”. Even now, technically, when the priest carries out religious offices, he-she does so not entirely on his-her own authority but as representing the bishop. In some Protestant churches, apparently the priest or his-her equivalent has independent authority. I do not know the status of priest in all the various churches. In English, the term “priest” expanded meaning so that Americans now use “priest” to cover all sacred functionaries of all religions, including even Buddhist monks. This is how Greeks tended to use the word “hieros”. The word “deacon” comes from the Greek and means “one who has energy [to carry out tasks]”. Deacons were one of the original offices of the church, coming into being along with bishops. The deacons assisted the bishop in mundane tasks such as administration, and later assisted the priest after the office of priest developed. Originally, most deacons were men although there were some women assistants that should be called deacons. I do not know how common women deacons are now. The order of authority is bishop highest, then priest, and then presbyter and deacon roughly equal.

In the first three or so decades after Jesus died, groups of his followers did not have bishops in the modern sense although they did have specialists such as prophets, healers, and teachers. I do not explain more here. Certainly by 100 CE (65 years after Jesus died), the Church had recognizable bishops, presbyters, and deacons. Priests evolved soon afterwards. They were seen as natural and integral, not as different and imposed. Each large or medium-sized city had its own bishop, and all bishops were roughly equal at first. The only clearly dominant center was under James the Just, the brother of Jesus, in Jerusalem. Originally all high offices in the Church were variations on the bishop, as the Roman Catholic Pope is the Bishop of Rome, and the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church comes from the Bishop of Constantinople. Later, Jerusalem declined, offices developed, offices were ranked, and places were ranked. Rome and Constantinople came to be most important. Now, for example, the head of the Diocese of the Greek Orthodox Church of Los Angeles seems to outrank the head of the Greek Orthodox Church in Portland, Oregon. A “cardinal” outranks most bishops in the Roman Catholic Church while a “metropolitan” outranks most bishops in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Some Protestants such as Episcopalians and Lutherans have similar differentiation and ranking. I do not know how all Protestants handle differentiation and ranking. All Protestants seem differentiated and ranked in practice even if they do not recognize the fact officially.

Original Church Organization.

From time to time, groups of Christians wish to recover the original way of Jesus by going back to the organization of the original Church. Usually they denounce formal religious institutions, in particular the archbishops, bishops, priests, etc. of churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. They dislike too many offices and they dislike ranking between offices and between places. They draw the line in various years and various ways between the genuine-upright-original Church versus the corrupt-degenerate-later churches. Sometimes they draw the line between followers of the early decades versus everybody else. Sometimes they draw the line between the mildly differentiated and hierarchical church of 100 CE versus the strongly differentiated and hierarchical church later on, especially after Constantine about 400 CE. They adopt various organizations instead of modern

hierarchical churches. Yet often they then evolve their own complex offices and hierarchies later on after having split off first as a movement to preserve simplicity and equality.

I have no opinion to offer people who pursue this quest. I am not sure we know enough about the organization of followers of Jesus during his lifetime and right after his death so we can have a model of proper organization for our time. I do not know what organization would prevent complications and stratifying. I am not sure that all groups of followers correctly understood and followed Jesus even when he was alive. I am fairly sure that groups of followers changed their character within a few years after Jesus died, perhaps right after he died. Groups of followers began to get centralized, hierarchical, and complex almost immediately after Jesus died; and so it is hard to draw the line. It is not clear that a later version of the Church was necessarily less true to the ideals of Jesus than an earlier version. I am not sure that the Church at 100 CE was less faithful to Jesus than his followers right after he died. I am not sure the church at 300 CE was less faithful to Jesus than the church at 100 CE or than early followers. I am not sure that organized hierarchical churches are less faithful to Jesus than egalitarian churches, especially if egalitarian churches are unrealistic, unsustainable, or hypocritical. I am not sure that a sustainable un-hypocritical egalitarian Church would necessarily be more faithful to Jesus but it might be. I have seen no sustainable un-hypocritical egalitarian churches in my lifetime.

Church.

The original term for a group of Christians was the Greek “ecclesia” (“eh-klee-see-uh”). Greeks still use that term. The term “church” developed later from variations of Greek “kyrios” or “lord”. “Church” is cognate with the Scottish word “kirk” as in “James Tiberius Kirk”, Captain of the USS Enterprise. I explain both terms, and their relations, more fully later in the book. The term “Church” now can mean all Christian Churches in general or can mean one Christian church group in particular such as Methodists. To scholars, “the Church” can mean the mainstream church before Constantine (early 300s), or before it split into Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox (1491), or can refer to the entire ideal community of Christians. Yet even to scholars, the term “the Church” can mean the particular church to which they hold their allegiance and which they believe is the one and only true descendant of the original followers of Jesus. Many Americans, even Protestants, use the term “the Church” to mean the Roman Catholic Church. By “church”, Christians can mean both a physical location with buildings and a community of believers. The community of believers can belong to one particular physical location or can include the general group of similar believers in several physical locations. For instance, the church as community of believers can be the parishioners at one St. James Roman Catholic Church located at Vine Street and Holly Avenue in Springfield, or all the members of the Roman Catholic Diocese of North America, or all the members of the entire Roman Catholic Church, or even all Christians. Non-Christian religions tend to be clearer in that they usually have distinct words for a physical location and for the community of believers; but the Christian usage is not hard to learn. The exact meaning should be clear from context.