

HIERARCHY OF THE CHURCH

The Catholic Church has a hierarchical structure consisting of bishops, priests and deacons. The Bishop of Rome, the Pope, enjoys a special role in this hierarchical structure. However, the Primacy of the Pope is considered in a separate document. The focus here is on the offices of bishop, priest and deacon.

Some anti-Catholics claim that these offices were not established by the Apostles, but were inventions of the Catholic Church sometime after the fourth century. The focus here will be on the teaching of the Church in first centuries.

FIRST CENTURY

Clement I (88-97)

St. Clement makes a clear distinction between the clergy and the laity. After drawing a comparison with the division of priests in the Old Testament, he adds:

“The layman is bound by the rules laid down for the laity”¹ He identifies the hierarchy consisting of bishops, priests, and deacons.

St. Ignatius of Antioch (50-115)

St. Ignatius repeatedly stresses the importance of the bishop together with the priests and deacons in preserving the unity of the Church. The bishop is God’s representative. Those who gather separately from the bishop cut themselves off from the true Church. The historian Philip Hughes points out that: “By the time of St. Ignatius of Antioch (i.e. the end of the first century, within thirty to forty years of the death of St. Paul) the new system – the so-called ‘monarchical episcopate’ – is so universal that he [St. Ignatius] takes it for granted as the basis of his exhortations.”²

To the Ephesians

“It is proper, therefore, in every way to glorify Jesus Christ, who has glorified you, so that you, joined together in a united obedience and subject to the *bishop* and the *presbytery* [priests], may be sanctified in every respect.”³

“United with him [the bishop], as the church is with Jesus Christ and as Jesus Christ is with the Father, that all things might be harmonious in unity. Let no one be misled: if anyone is not within the sanctuary, he lacks the *Bread of God* [referencing Jn 6:33].... Let us, therefore, be careful not to oppose the *bishop*, or order that that we may be obedient to God.”⁴

To the Magnesians

¹ Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. I, p. 48 citing # 40.

² Hughes, *A History of the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 50.

³ *The Apostolic Fathers*, # 2, p. 87.

⁴ *The Apostolic Fathers*, # 5, pp. 87-88.

“Be eager to do everything in godly harmony, the *bishop presiding in the place of God* and the *presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles* and the *deacons*, who are most dear to me, having been entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ.... Let there be nothing among you which is capable of dividing you, but be united with the *bishop* and with those who lead, as an example and a lesson of incorruptibility.”⁵

“Therefore as the Lord did nothing without the Father, either by himself or through the apostles for he was united with him, so you must not do anything without the *bishop* and the *presbyters*.”⁶

To the Trallians

“For when you are *subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ*, it is evident to me that you are living not in accordance with human standards but *in accordance with Jesus Christ*, who died for us in order that by believing in his death you might escape death.”⁷

“In the same way all should respect the *deacons* as they would *Jesus Christ*, just as they respect the *bishop as representing the Father* and the *priests* as the council of God and the college of the Apostles. Apart from these there is nothing that can be called a Church.”⁸

“Anyone who is within the sanctuary is pure and anyone who is outside is impure, that is to say, *no one who acts apart from the bishop and the priests and the deacons has a clear conscience*.”⁹

To the Philadelphians

“For all those who belong to God and Jesus Christ *are with the bishop*....”¹⁰

“*Do nothing without the bishop*. Guard your bodies as the temple of God. Love unity. Flee from divisions.”¹¹

To the Smyrneans

“Wherever the *bishop* appears, there let the congregation be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, *there is the Catholic Church*.”¹²

“Let all follow the *bishop* as Jesus Christ did the Father, and the *priests*, as you would the Apostles. Reverence the *deacons* as you would the command of God. Apart from

⁵ *The Apostolic Fathers*, # 6, pp. 94-95.

⁶ *The Apostolic Fathers*, # 7, p. 95.

⁷ *The Apostolic Fathers*, # 2, pp. 97-98.

⁸ Willis, *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, # 114, p. 53.

⁹ *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, # 115, p. 53.

¹⁰ *The Apostolic Fathers*, # 3, p. 107.

¹¹ *The Apostolic Fathers*, # 7, p. 108

¹² *The Apostolic Fathers*, # 8, pp. 112-113. This is the first use of the word “catholic” in Christian literature. It is used here in the sense of “universal.” However, by the year A.D. 200 the term “catholic” is technical designation of the “Catholic Church” as opposed to heretical sects. See footnote # 109, p 113.

the *bishop*, let no one perform any of the functions that pertain to the Church. Let that Eucharist be held valid which is offered by the *bishop* or by one to whom the bishop has committed this charge.”¹³

The Shepherd of Hermas (First/Second Century)

“The *tower* which you see being built is I, *the Church*, which appeared to you now and previously. . . . But the tower has been set on a foundation by the word of the almighty and glorious Name, and is strengthened by the unseen power of the Master.”¹⁴

“The stones that are square and white and fit at their joints, are the *apostles* and *bishops* and *teachers* and *deacons* who have walked according to the holiness of God and have ministered to the elect of God as bishops and *teachers* and *deacons* with purity and reverence.”¹⁵

SECOND CENTURY

St. Irenaeus (180-200)

“It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the *truth*, to contemplate clear the *tradition of the apostles* manifested throughout the whole world; and were in a position to reckon up those who were *by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches*, and [to demonstrate] the *succession* of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] now rave about.”¹⁶

“Suppose there arise a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the *most ancient Churches* with which the *apostles* held *constant intercourse*, and learn from them what is *certain and clear* in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the *apostles* themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary [in that case] to follow the course of the *tradition* which they *handed down* to those to whom they did commit the Churches?”¹⁷

“Now all these [heretics] are of much later date than the *bishops* to whom the *apostles* committed the Churches; . . . {These heretics} are forced into various by-paths. . . . But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as *possessing the sure tradition from the apostles*, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same.”¹⁸

¹³ *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, # 117, pp. 53-54..

¹⁴ *The Apostolic Fathers*, “Vision 3.3,” pp. 202, 203

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, “Vision 3.5,” p. 204.

¹⁶ *Against Heresies*, Bk. 3, Chapter 3, Willis, *The Teaching of the Church Fathers*, p. 76.

¹⁷ *Against Heresies*, Bk. 3, Chapter 4, Willis, *The Teaching of the Church Fathers*, p. 63.

¹⁸ *Against Heresies*, Bk. 5, Chapter 20, Willis, *The Teaching of the Church Fathers*, p. 64

“The true *gnosis* is the *doctrine of the Apostles*, and the *ancient organization* of the Church throughout the whole world, and the *manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of bishops*, by which *successions* the *bishops* have *handed down* the Church which is found everywhere; and the very complete *tradition* of the Scriptures, which have come down to us by being *guarded against falsification*, and which are *received without addition or deletion*; and reading *without falsification*, and a legitimate and diligent exposition according to the Scriptures, *without danger* and without blasphemy.”¹⁹

“But Polycarp also was not only *instructed by apostles*, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, *appointed bishop* of the Church in Smyrna, who I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffered martyrdom, departed this life, having *always taught the things which he learned from the apostles*, and which the *Church has handed down*, and which *alone are true*. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time.”²⁰

“It is necessary to obey those who are the *presbyters* in the Church, those who, as we have shown, have *succession from the Apostles*; those who have received, with the *succession of the episcopate*, the sure *charism of truth* according to the good pleasure of the Father.”²¹

“For all these [heretics] are of much later date than are the *bishops* to whom the *Apostles handed over the Churches*; and this fact I pointed out most carefully in the third book.... The path of those, however, who belong to the Church, goes around the whole world; for it has the *firm tradition of the Apostles*, enabling us to see that the faith of all is one and the same.”²²

St. Clement of Alexandria (150-214)

“A multitude of other pieces of advice to particular persons is written in the holy books; some of *presbyters*, some for *bishops* and *deacons*; and others for widows, of whom we shall have opportunity to speak elsewhere.”²³

“Even here in the Church the gradations of *bishops*, *presbyters*, and *deacons* happens to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the Apostles, and who have lived in perfect righteousness according to the Gospel.”²⁴

¹⁹ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, # 242.

²⁰ *Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 3, Willis, *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, p. 21.

²¹ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, # 237.

²² *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, # 257.

²³ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, # 413.

²⁴ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Stromateis,” # 427.

“After the death of the tyrant, the [Apostle John] came back again to Ephesus from the Island of Patmos; and, upon being invited, he went even to the neighboring cities of the pagans, here to *appoint bishops*, there to set in order whole Churches, and there to *ordain* to the *clerical estate* such as were designated by the Spirit.”²⁵

Tertullian (c. 150-220 A.D.)

“For the conclusion of our brief subject, it but remains to impress upon you the manner of observance in giving and in receiving Baptism. In giving it, certainly, the primary right is had by the *high priest*, that is, the *bishop*; and after him, the *presbyters* and the *deacons*, though not without authority from the *bishop*, on account of the honor of the Church, which, when preserved, peace is preserved.”²⁶

“Let them [heretics] show the origins of their Churches, let them unroll the order of their bishops running down in succession from the beginning, so that their *first bishop* shall have for *author* and *predecessor* some *one of the Apostles* or of the *apostolic* men who continued steadfast *with the Apostles*. For this is the way in which the apostolic Churches transmit their lists: like the Church of the Smyrneans, which records that Polycarp was placed there by John; like the Church of the Romans where Clement was ordained by Peter. In just the same way the other Churches display those whom they have as *sprouts* from the *apostolic seed*, having been established in the *episcopate* by *the Apostles*.”²⁷

THIRD CENTURY

St. Hippolytus (c. 170-236)

“Let the *bishop* be *ordained* after he has been chosen by all the people.... Then *one of the bishops* present shall, at the request of all, *impose his hand on the one who is being ordained bishop*, and shall pray thus, saying... Pour forth now that *power* which comes from you, from your Royal Spirit, which you gave to your Beloved Son Jesus Christ and which *He bestowed upon His holy Apostles*, who established in every place the Church of your sanctification for the glory and unceasing praise of your name. You know the hearts of all, grant to this your servant, whom you have chosen for the *episcopate*, to feed your holy flock and to serve without blame as your *high priest*, ministering night and day *to propitiate unceasingly* before your face; and to *offer to you the gifts of your holy Church*; and by the Spirit of the high-priesthood to have the *authority to forgive sins*, in accord with your command.”²⁸

²⁵ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Who Is the Rich Man That Is Saved?” # 438.

²⁶ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Baptism,” c. 200/206, # 310.

²⁷ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “The Demurrer Against the Heretics,” # 296.

²⁸ *Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “The Apostolic Tradition,” # 394a.

“When a *presbyter* is to be *ordained*, the *bishop* shall impose his hand upon his head, while the *presbyters* touch the one to be *ordained*.”²⁹

“When a *deacon* is to be *ordained* he is chosen after the fashion of those things said above, the *bishop* alone in like manner imposing his hands upon him as we have prescribed. In the *ordaining* of a *deacon*, this is the reason why the *bishop* alone is to impose his hands upon him: he is *not ordained to the priesthood*, but to serve the *bishop* and to fulfill the *bishop’s* command.”³⁰

Origen (185-254)

“Not fornication only, but even marriages make us unfit for *ecclesiastical* honors; for neither a *bishop*, nor a *presbyter*, nor a *deacon*, nor a widow is able to be twice married.”³¹

“You ought to know, then, that the *bishop* is in the Church and the Church in the *bishop*; and if someone is not with the *bishop*, he is not in the Church. They vainly flatter themselves who creep up, not having peace with the *priests of God*, believing that they are secretly in communion with certain individuals. For the Church, which is One and Catholic, is not split nor divided, but is indeed united and joined by the cement of *priests* who adhere one to another.”³²

“We know that only in the Church, where *prelates* have been established by the *gospel law* and by the *ordinance of the Lord*, is it permitted to baptize and to give the remission of sins.”³³

“The Church is one; and it is not possible to be both within and without what is one, if the Church is around Novatian, it was not around Cornelius. And indeed, if it was around [Pope] Cornelius, who succeeded Bishop Fabian by a legitimate *ordination* and whom the Lord glorified with martyrdom even beyond the honor of the *priesthood*, than Novatian is not in the Church, nor can he be reckoned as a *bishop*, since, in contempt of *evangelic and apostolic tradition*, he succeeded to no one but sprang up of himself. He that was not *ordained* in the Church can neither have nor hold the Church in any way.”³⁴

“The teaching of the Church has indeed been *handed down* through an *order of succession from the Apostles*, and remains in the Churches even to the present time.”³⁵

²⁹ *Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “The Apostolic Tradition,” # 394b.

³⁰ *Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “The Apostolic Tradition,” # 394c.

³¹ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Homilies on Luke,” # 477a.

³² *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Letter of Cyprian to Florentius Pupianus,” # 587.

³³ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Letter of Cyprian to Jubaianus, a Bishop in Mauretania,” # 594.

³⁴ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Letter of Cyprian to a Certain Magnus,” # 589.

³⁵ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “The Fundamental Doctrines,” # 443.

“But what is his error, and how great is blindness, who says that the remission of sins can be given in the synagogues of the heretics, and who does not remain on the *foundation of the one Church* which was *founded upon the rock by Christ*, can be learned from this, which Christ said to Peter alone: ‘*Whatever things you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed in heaven;*’ and by this, again in the gospel, when Christ breathed upon the Apostles alone, saying to them: ‘*Receive the Holy Spirit: if you forgive any man his sins, they shall be forgiven; and if you retain any man’s sins, they shall be retained.*’ Therefore, the *power of forgiving sins was given to the Apostles* and to the Churches which these men, *sent by Christ, established;* and to the *bishops who succeeded them by being ordained in their place.*”³⁶

St. Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200/210 – 258).

“The *episcopate is one*, of which each *bishop* holds his part within the undivided structure. The Church also is one, however widely she has spread among the multitude through her fruitful increase.”³⁷

“*Our Lord*, whose precepts and admonitions we ought to observe, describing the honor of a *bishop* and the *order of His Church*, speaks in the Gospel, and says to Peter: ‘I say unto you, that you are Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven’ [Mt 16:16-18]. Thence, through the changes of times and *successions*, the ordering of *bishops* and the plan of the Church flow onwards; so that the *Church is founded upon the bishops*, and every act of the Church is controlled by these same rulers. Since this, then is *founded on the divine law*, I marvel that some, with daring temerity, have chosen to write to me as if they wrote in the name of the Church; when the *Church is established in the bishop and the clergy*, and all who *stand fast* in the *faith*.”³⁸

“This unity we ought to hold firmly and defend, especially we *bishops* who *watch over the Church*, that we may prove that also the *episcopate* itself is one and undivided. Let no one deceive the brotherhood by lying; let no one corrupt the faith by a perfidious prevarication of the truth. The *episcopate* is one, the parts of which are held together by the individual *bishops*. The *Church* is one which with increasing fecundity extends far and wide into the multitude, just as the rays of the sun are many but the light is one, and the branches of the tree are many but the strength is one founded in its tenacious root, and, when many streams flow from one source, although a multiplicity of waters seems to have been diffused from the abundance of the overflowing supply nevertheless unity is preserved in their origin. Take away a ray of light from the body of the sun, its unity does not take on any division of its light; break a branch from a tree, the branch thus broken will not be able to bud; cut

³⁶ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Letter to Cyprian,” from Firmilian of Caesarea, # 602.

³⁷ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Homilies on Numbers,” # 494.

³⁸ Willis, *The Teaching of the Church Fathers*, # 105, p. 50

off a stream from its source, the stream thus cut off dries up. Thus too the *Church* bathed in the light of the Lord projects its rays over the whole world, yet there is one light which is diffused everywhere, and the unity of the body is not separated. She extends her branches over the whole earth in fruitful abundance; she extends her richly flowing streams far and wide; yet her head is one, and her source is one, and she is the one mother copious in the results of her fruitfulness. By her womb we are born; by her milk we are nourished; by her spirit we are animated.”³⁹

“Whence you ought to know that the *bishop* is in the Church, and the Church in the *bishop*; and if any one be not with the *bishop*, that he is not in the Church, and that those flatter themselves in vain who creep in, not having peace with God’s *priests*, and think that they communicate secretly with some; while the Church which is Catholic and one, is not cut nor divided, but is indeed connected and bound together by the *cement of priests* who cohere with one another.”⁴⁰

Emperors Decius (249-251) and Gallienus (253-268)

The persecution of Decius recognized the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, because bishops, priests and deacons were its chief targets. A few years after Decius’ death the Emperor Gallienus, Valerian’s son, wrote a letter to the *bishops of the Catholic Church* easing the persecution:

“I have ordered that my kindly abrogation be published throughout the world. Consequently, your places of worship have recently been restored to you. You may also use my rescript to prevent any further disturbances against you.”⁴¹

Councils

A council is a formal meeting of bishops, evoked to deliberate, clarify, study and enact decrees pertaining to the life and belief of the Catholic Church. Priests and deacons often attended councils, but only bishops voted.

Councils provide ample evidence of the hierarchical structure of the Church. The earliest known council occurred in 175 at Rome to deal with the problem of Montanism. About the same time, the bishop of Ephesus called a council to discuss the Easter controversy, that is, when should Easter be celebrated? By the year 200 a series of Asiatic council had met and condemned Montanism. Pope Victor (189-199) ordered a series of councils in 190 to resolve the different calculating the date of Easter in the East and in the West.

These gatherings of bishops were particularly popular and frequent in Africa. Around 220, bishop Agrippinus called together seventy bishops from Africa and Numidia. From the time of St. Cyprian synods and provincial councils came to be the favored resource of administration. We know from St. Cyprian’s letters that, except in time of persecution, the African bishops met at least once a year in the springtime, and sometimes again in the

³⁹ Willis, *The Teaching of the Church Fathers*, # 144, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁰ Willis, *The Teaching of the Church Fathers*, # 145, p. 66.

⁴¹ Rahner, *Church and State in Early Christianity*, p. 19.

autumn. Six or seven councils, for instance, were held under St. Cyprian's presidency during the decade of his administration (249-258).

Councils were but no means the exclusive practice in Africa. For example, in 264 and 268 councils were held at Antioch to deal with the theological aberrations of Paul, the eccentric bishop of Samosata. Around the year 300 an important council was held in Elvira (Illiberis), which is at or near the present city of Granada in Spain. Nineteen bishops were present, including the celebrated bishop Ossius of Cordova, along with twenty-six priests and deacons. Two of its canons pertain to the hierarchical structure of the Church:

Council of Elvira in Granada (300)

*"Bishops, presbyters, and deacons may not leave their own places for the sake of commerce, nor are they to be traveling about the provinces, frequenting the markets for their own profit."*⁴²

*"It is determined that bishops, presbyters, and deacons, or all clerics stationed in the ministry, are to restrain themselves completely and are to keep themselves away from their wives and are not to beget children. Anyone who does beget children is to be expelled from the honor of the clerical estate."*⁴³

FOURTH CENTURY

Persecution Under Diocletian (281-305)

Like the persecution under the emperor Decius, Diocletian's persecution was aimed with a particular vehemence at the Catholic clergy. So many bishops, priests, and deacons were arrested that prisons burst their capacity. Even murderers were set free so more clergymen could be squeezed into filthy prison cells where torture and execution awaited them unless they agreed to sacrifice to the pagan gods. This terrible persecution began in 303 and lasted until the Edict of Milan in 313.

Council of Arles (314)

The Council of Arles met in August 314 with 46 bishops from all over the empire attending. After a careful review the Council condemned and excommunicated all who persisted in the Donatist schism. Re-baptism and re-ordination were again forbidden. The canons of the Council were then submitted to Pope Sylvester I with a very deferential letter that respected his primacy.

Council of Ephesus (325)

The emperor Constantine to deal with Arius, who denied the divinity of Christ, called this council. Constantine made a ceremonial entrance resplendent in purple and gold, but he respectfully seated the bishops, about 300 in number, ahead of himself. The bishops, not

⁴² *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, "Canon 18," # 611j.

⁴³ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, "Canon 33," # 611t.

the emperor, ran the council, which opened about May 20, 325. When bishops complained to the emperor about their colleagues, Constantine replied in a remarkable deference to the hierarchical structure of the Church:

“I am only human, and it would be an offense against God were I to claim jurisdiction in these matters, for both accused and accusers are bishops.”⁴⁴

In addition to affirming the divinity of Jesus Christ, the Council of Nicaea made important declarations regarding the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church and the Eucharist.

“Since many things, either through necessity or because of pressures brought to bear by men, have taken place contrary to the ecclesiastical canon, in that men but recently come over to the faith from a pagan life and instructed for only a short time are led immediately to the spiritual washing [Baptism] and at the same time as their Baptism advance to the *episcopate* or *presbyterate*, it seemed to be proper that in the future such things should not be done, since for catechetical instruction and for further probation after Baptism, time is necessary.”⁴⁵

The great council absolutely forbids a *bishop*, *presbyter*, *deacon* and any other cleric to have a woman living with him, except it be his mother, or sister, or aunt, or any person only on whom suspicion cannot fall.”⁴⁶

“This, too, has become known: that some *deacons* are now receiving the Eucharist even before the *bishops*. All this is to be discontinued, and the *deacons* are to keep within their own proper bounds, knowing that they are *the servants of the bishop* and that they are *less than presbyters*. They are to receive the Eucharist, in accord with their *rank*, after the *presbyters*, either a *bishop* or a *presbyter* giving it to them. And neither are the *deacons* permitted to sit among the *presbyters*; for this is contrary to rule and order. If anyone, after these directives, still does not tender his obedience, he is to be deposed from the *diaconate*.”⁴⁷

St. Athanasius (296-373)

“But the word of the Lord which came through the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea remains forever.”⁴⁸

“The *bishops* [at Nicaea] wrote as they did, not as men inventing phrases of themselves, but as having the *witness of the Fathers*. Indeed, nearly one hundred and thirty years ago former *bishops* of *Great Rome* and of our city wrote and censured

⁴⁴ Rahner, *Church and State in Early Christianity*, p. 41.

⁴⁵ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Canons of the Council of Nicaea,” # 651h.

⁴⁶ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Canons of the Council of Nicaea,” # 651i.

⁴⁷ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Canons of the Council of Nicaea,” # 651x.

⁴⁸ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Synodal Letter to the Bishops of Africa,” # 792.

those who were saying that the Son was a creature and not of the same substance as the Father.”⁴⁹

“Theognius, Maris... came into our Diocese alleging that they had received orders to investigate certain ecclesiastical affairs, among which they spoke of the breaking of a cup of the Lord, of which information was given them by Ischyras, whom they brought with them, and who says that he is a *Presbyter*, although he is not, - for he was ordained by the *Presbyter Colluthus* who *pretended to the Episcopate*, and was afterwards ordered by the whole Council, by Hosius and the *Bishops* that were with him, to take the place of a *Presbyter*, as he was before; and accordingly all that were *ordained by Colluthus resumed the same rank which they held before*, and so Ischyras himself proved to be a layman.”⁵⁰

Council of Sardica (343)

“Bishop Ossius said: It is necessary also to impose this decree, that *bishops* are not to go over from their *own province* to *another province* in which there are *bishops already established*, except perhaps, lest it might seem that we are closing the door on charity, they be invited there by their own brothers.”⁵¹

Council of Laodicea (343/381)

There is a question regarding the date of this council. Some scholars assign a date of 343, while others believed it occurred some time between 343 and 381. Sixty canons, largely of a disciplinary nature, have come down to us, but there is no authentic list of the signatories of the council.

“That the so-called *presbyteresses* or *presidenteses* are *not to be ordained* in the Church.”⁵²

“That *bishops* are to be appointed to ecclesiastical leadership by the judgment of the *metropolitans* and their *surrounding bishops*, after they have been examined at length as to their knowledge of the faith and quite frankly as to their deportment.”⁵³

“That the election of those about to be *ordained to the priesthood* is not to be referred to the people.”⁵⁴

St. Epiphanius of Salamis (315-403)

“*At Rome* the first *Apostles and bishops* were Peter and Paul; then Linus, then Cletus; then Clement, the contemporary of Peter and Paul, whom Paul remembers in his

⁴⁹ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Synodal Letter to the Bishops of Africa,” # 792.

⁵⁰ Willis, *The Teachings of the Church Fathers*, “Defense Against the Arians, # 941, p. 432.

⁵¹ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Canon 3,” # 702a.

⁵² *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Canon 11,” # 745f.

⁵³ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Canon 12,” # 745g.

⁵⁴ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Canon 13,” # 745h.

Epistle to the Romans [actually Phil 4:3]. It should surprise no one that others received the *episcopate from the Apostles* before him who was the contemporary of Peter and Paul; for He was, at any rate, the contemporary of the Apostles. The *succession of bishops in Rome* is as follows: Peter and Paul, Linus and Cletus, Clement, Evaristus, Alexander, Sixtus, Telesphorus, Hyginus, Pious, Anicletus, who I have already mentioned above in my enumerating of the *bishops*.”⁵⁵

St. Jerome (340/2-420)

“The Apostles were either virgins or remained continent after their marriages. Those persons chosen to be *bishops, presbyters, or deacons* are either virgins or widowers; or certainly, having once received the *priesthood*, they remained forever chaste.”⁵⁶

“Just as among men an order of dignity is perceived by reason of the kind of work in which they engage, and while *bishop* and *presbyter* and every rank in the Church has its own *order*, all remain men, so too among angels there are different merits while all continue in their angelic dignity.”⁵⁷

“I do not deny that it is the practice of the Churches in the case of those who, living far from the larger, cities, have been baptized by the *presbyters* and *deacons*, for the *bishop* to come to them to invoke the Holy Spirit upon them by the imposition of his hand.”⁵⁸

“I am told that some one has been mad enough to put *deacons* before *presbyters*, that is, before *bishops*. For when the apostle clearly teaches that *presbyters* are the *same as bishops*, must not a mere server of tables and of widows be insane to set himself up arrogantly over men through whose prayers *the body and blood of Christ are produced*? Do you ask for proof of what I say?... In the Acts of the Apostles Paul thus speaks to the *priests* of a single church: ‘Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, in which the *Holy Ghost has made you bishops*, to feed the church of God which He purchased with His own blood’ [Acts 20:28]. And lest any should in a spirit of contention argue that there must then have been more *bishops* than one in a single church, there is the following passage which clearly proves a *bishop* and a *presbyter* to be the same. Writing to Titus the apostle says: ‘For this cause left I you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are wanting, and *ordain presbyters* in every city, as I had appointed you; if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a *bishop* must be blameless as the steward of God’ [Tit 1:5-7].... When subsequently one *presbyter* was chosen to preside over the rest, this was done to remedy schism and to prevent each individual from rending the Church of Christ by drawing it to himself. For even at Alexandria from the time of Mark the Evangelist until the *episcopates* of Heraclas

⁵⁵ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. II, “Against All Heresies,” # 1092

⁵⁶ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. II, “Letter of Jerome to Pammachius,” # 1350.

⁵⁷ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. II, “Apology Against the Books of Rufinus,” # 1394.

⁵⁸ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. II, “Dialogue Between a Luciferian and an Orthodox Christian,” # 1359.

and Dionysius the *presbyters* always named as bishop one of their own number chosen by themselves and set in a more exalted position, just as an army elects a general, or as *deacons* appoint one of themselves whom they know to be diligent and call him archdeacon. For what function excepting *ordination*, belongs to a *bishop* that does not also belong to a *presbyter*?⁵⁹

St. Basil the Great (330-379)

“For those who first withdrew had their *ordination* from the Fathers, and through the *imposition of their hands* they had the *spiritual charism*. But, having broken away, they became *laymen*, and had the power *neither to baptize nor to ordain*, nor could they any longer *confer on others that grace of the Holy Spirit* from which they themselves had fallen away.”⁶⁰

“A *deacon* who has committed fornication after being admitted to the diaconate is to be dismissed from the ministry; but, reduced to the rank of the laity, he is not barred from the reception of Communion.”⁶¹

St. Gregory of Nyssa (335-394)

“This same power of the word also makes the *priest* venerable and honorable, *separated from the generality of men* by the *new blessing* bestowed upon him. Yesterday he was but one of the multitude, one of the people; suddenly, he is made a guide, a president, a teacher of piety, and instructor in hidden mysteries.”⁶²

Council of Constantinople I (381)

“*Bishops* outside their diocese are not to be set over Churches beyond their confines, nor are they to disturb the Churches; but, according to the canons, the *Bishop* of Alexandria is to have charge only over Egypt; the *bishops* of the East are to rule only the East, while keeping intact the prerogatives of the Church of Antioch, in accord with the canons of Nicaea; and the *bishops* of the diocese of Asia shall rule only throughout Asia; and those of Pontus, only over Pontus; and those of Thrace shall have charge only over Thrace. *Bishops* are not to go outside of their diocese to ordain or for any other acts of ecclesiastical administration, except they be invited.”⁶³

St. John Chrysostom (347-407)

“The *bishop* ought to have as through a knowledge of the world as those who live in close association with it, yet at the same time his spirit ought to be even more free

⁵⁹ Willis, *The Teaching of the Church Fathers*, # 124, p. 56.

⁶⁰ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. II, “Letter of Basil to Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium,” # 919.

⁶¹ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. II, “Letter of Basil to Amphilochius, Bishop of Iconium,” # 919b.

⁶² *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. II, “Sermon on the Day of Lights or On the Baptism of Christ,” # 1062.

⁶³ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. I, “Canon 2 of the First Council of Constantinople,” # 910c.

than that of the monk who lives on a mountain. The austerities which a monk can undertake depend on his physical constitution but the virtues of the *bishop* belong to the soul and may be developed in any circumstances.... Great is the *office of a bishop* and it needs much wisdom and courage, for Christ teaches us that we must lay down our lives for the sheep: we must never desert them but stand up against the wolf.”⁶⁴

FIFTH CENTURY

St. Augustine (354-430)

”These men are *bishops*, learned, grave, holy, and most zealous defenders of the truth against garrulous vanities, in whose reason, erudition, and freedom, three qualities you demand in a judge, you can find nothing to despise.... With such *planters, waterers, builders, shepherds, and fosters* the holy *Church grew after the time of the Apostles.*”⁶⁵

“If the very order of episcopal successions is to be considered, how much more surely, truly, and safely do we number them from *Peter himself*, to whom, as to one representing the whole Church, the Lord said: ‘*Upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not conquer it*’ [Mt 16:18]. Peter was succeeded by Linus, Linus by Clement, Clement by Anacletus, Anacletus by Evaristus, Evaristus by Sixtus, Sixtus by Telesphorus, Telesphorus by Hyginus, Hyginus by Anicletus, Anicletus by Pious, Pious by Soter, Soter by Alexander, Alexander by Victor, Victory by Zephyrinus, Zephyrinus by Callistus, Callistus by Urban, Urban by Pontianus, Pontianus by Anterus, Anterus by Fabian, Fabian by Cornelius, Cornelius by Lucius, Lucius by Stephen, Stephen by Sixtus, Sixtus by Dionysius, Dionysius by Felix, Felix by Eutychian, Eutychian by Caius, Caius by Marcellus, Marcellus by Eusebius, Eusebius by Melchiades, Melchiades by Sylvester, Sylvester by Mark, Mark by Julius, Julius by Liberius, Liberius by Damasus, Damasus by Siricius, Siricius by Anastasius. In this order of succession not a Donatist bishop is to be found.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Carroll, *The Building of Christendom*, pp. 76-77.

⁶⁵ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. III, “Against Julian, Defender of the Pelagian Heresy,” # 1900.

⁶⁶ *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, Vol. III, “Letter of Augustine to Generosus,” # 1218.