

# The Development of Hierarchy

## In the New Testament

3 John 9-10 ‘I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, receives us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and forbids them that would, and casts them out of the church.’

Worldliness – hierarchical leadership.

Man taking pre-eminence in the church.

John says Diotrephes wanted pre-eminence in the Church;

he would not allow John to preach;

he spoke against John;

he controlled the church by threatening to throw out anyone who received John.

The word pre-eminence (Greek: ‘philoproteuo’ means love to have first place). Leadership by one who loves to have first place. Lording it over the flock.

## **1. Church government in the New Testament.**

How was the church of the New Testament organised?

Elders appointed on the basis of experience. Paul appointed elders (presbyter) in every church on his first missionary journey, Acts 14:23. Where did the elders come from? The synagogue. Men of experience who recognised Jesus as their Lord and Messiah.

Overseers (episkopos) elders who desire the work. Chosen on the basis of a good reputation and ability to teach. 1 Timothy 3:1ff. ‘if anyone desire...’ (volunteers who are chosen).

Deacons (diakonos) must be examined and chosen on basis of character, 1 Timothy 3:10. The office is the means to ‘purchase a good degree’, 1 Timothy 3:13.

Supervisory role - Titus was to appoint elders in every city, Titus 1:5. This does not mean that Titus was above the elders in rank.

Ministry gifts – Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher (Ephesians 4:11).

Purpose of the ministry gifts – to build up the body of Christ.

See also Romans 12.

## **Peter - 1 Peter 5:1-3.**

New Testament leadership functioned as a body.

It was not hierarchical.

Serving one another in humility and love.

**Jesus washed His disciples feet as an example of leadership, John 13.**

## **2. The development of a threefold leadership.**

Development of hierarchy - Bishop, Elder and Deacon.

Separation of the clergy from the laity.

### **Rise of the importance of the Bishop**

#### **Ignatius (c. 50-117): Bishop of Antioch.**

Ignatius wrote seven letters on his way to Rome to be Martyred.

The authenticity of the letters is questionable.

The letters give explanation concerning the role of deacon, elder, bishop.

The bishop is to be honoured as the overall leader.

## **Epistle to the Smyrnaeans**

‘Follow, all of you, the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father; and follow the presbytery as the Apostles. Moreover, reverence the deacons as the commandment of God. Let no man do aught pertaining to the Church apart from the bishop. Let that Eucharist be considered valid which is under the bishop or him to whom he commits it....’ (VIII. 1.) ‘He that honours the bishop is honoured of God. He that does anything without the knowledge of the bishop serves the Devil.’ (IX. 1.)

## **Ignatius and the Sacraments**

Ignatius associated the position of the Bishop with the validity of the Eucharist.

**The rise of hierarchy led to the leaders of the Church being seen as priests.**

Threefold leadership - Bishop, Priest, Deacon.

Leadership develops into a hierarchy of priesthood based on the Old Testament.

Offering a sacrifice in contrast to teaching ministry.

A sacrificing priesthood – emphasis on the sacraments.

A teaching ministry – emphasis on the Word of God.

### **3. Rise of the papacy.**

The importance of the Bishop of Rome develops through the importance of the city, and the claim of descendants through Apostle Peter. Apostle Paul also died in Rome.

Importance of the city determined the importance of the Bishop.

Principal regions Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Carthage, Rome.

Bishop of Rome became more politically prominent after Constantine made Constantinople the capital of the empire.

## **Leadership built on the teaching of Apostolic Succession.**

Apostolic Succession of ordination.

First Bishop of Rome – Peter. The rock upon whom the church is built.

Bishop of Rome successor of Peter and head of the church.

The claim that the true Church had received its ministerial commission through Apostolic succession was used as early as the second and third centuries when careful attention was given to establishing the line of continuity from bishop to bishop in the churches.

Irenaeus (c.120/140-200/203) claimed that

‘in the various churches a perpetual succession of Bishops was kept up’.

( Irenaeus Against Heresies Book III. Preface.)

Irenaeus held that Apostolic succession provided the evidence that the faith of the sub-Apostolic Church was the same faith that the Apostles had held.

He wrote:

‘by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.’

Irenaeus described the Church as ‘ founded and built up’ by the Apostles, and that the succession of the episcopate in sub-Apostolic times was first ‘committed into the hands of Linus’. ( Irenaeus Against Heresies Book III. Par..3.)

## The tract of Tertullian (c.155/160-220) entitled *de Praescriptione Haereticorum*

maintained that the episcopal offices in the Church could show their succession to the Apostles.

He upheld Apostolic succession as the standard for determining the true Church from heretical sects, and he denied the authenticity of the sects on the basis that their bishops were not consecrated in the line of continuity from the Apostles.

He believed that every Church could

‘point out the individual to whom the superintendence of its doctrine and discipline was first committed by some one of the apostles’.

He wrote,

‘Let them show the origin of their churches; let them trace the succession of their bishops, and thus connect the individual who first held the office, either with some apostle, or some apostolic man who always remained in communion with the Church. It is thus that the apostolic churches show their origin.’

## **Augustine of Hippo (354–430)**

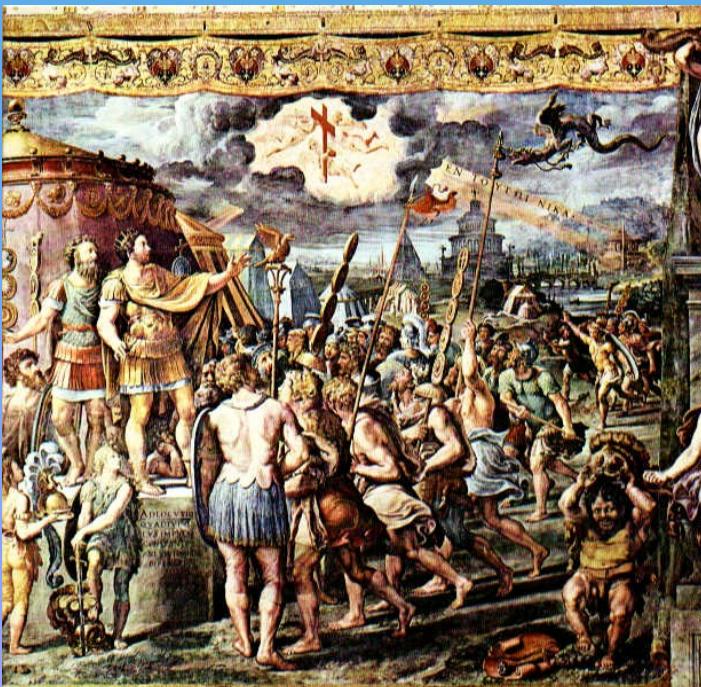
wrote that it is impossible for a bishop who has been legitimately consecrated to lose ‘his consecration or the power of conferring others’.

This was the view that was predominantly upheld by the Roman Catholic Church.

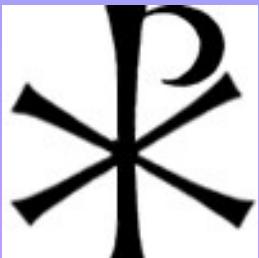
This goes against the teaching of Paul in 1 Timothy 3.

A person who leads the Church must be able to teach and lead by example.

## Constantine (c.274/288 –337)



In hoc signo vinces 'In this sign conquer'



The Chi Rho cross of  
Constantine

In 306 Constantine proclaimed Augustus by his troops in York

In 312 Marched on Rome and proclaimed Emperor by the Senate

In 313 Issued the Edict of Milan giving religious freedom.

In 324 Constantine proclaimed sole Emperor in East and West.

**Arch of Constantine erected to commemorate his victory over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge (312)**



## Leo the Great (c.400-461)

'For the solidity of that faith which was praised in the chief of the Apostles is perpetual: and as that remains which Peter believed in Christ, so that remains which Christ instituted in Peter.' (The Petrine Doctrine of Leo the Great)



Leo meets Attila.

Painting by Raphael  
(1514)

Attila falls back in  
terror at the sight  
of Peter and Paul.

Leo (16th century)  
is the figure  
representing Leo  
the Great.

## Sermon of Leo the Great

III. S. Peter's work is still carried out by his successors.

The dispensation of Truth therefore abides, and the blessed Peter persevering in the strength of the Rock, which he has received, has not abandoned the helm of the Church, which he undertook. For he was ordained before the rest in such a way that from his being called the Rock, from his being pronounced the Foundation, from his being constituted the Doorkeeper of the kingdom of heaven, from his being set as the Umpire to bind and to loose, whose judgments shall retain their validity in heaven, from all these mystical titles we might know the nature of his association with Christ.

And still to-day he more fully and effectually performs what is entrusted to him, and carries out every part of his duty and charge in Him and with Him, through Whom he has been glorified. And so if anything is rightly done and rightly decreed by us, if anything is won from the mercy of GOD by our daily supplications, it is of his work and merits whose power lives and whose authority prevails in his See.

**The early church was built upon the Apostle's doctrine.**

**Simplicity of faith – the gospel of Jesus Christ**

**The authority of Scripture alone (the Apostle's doctrine).**

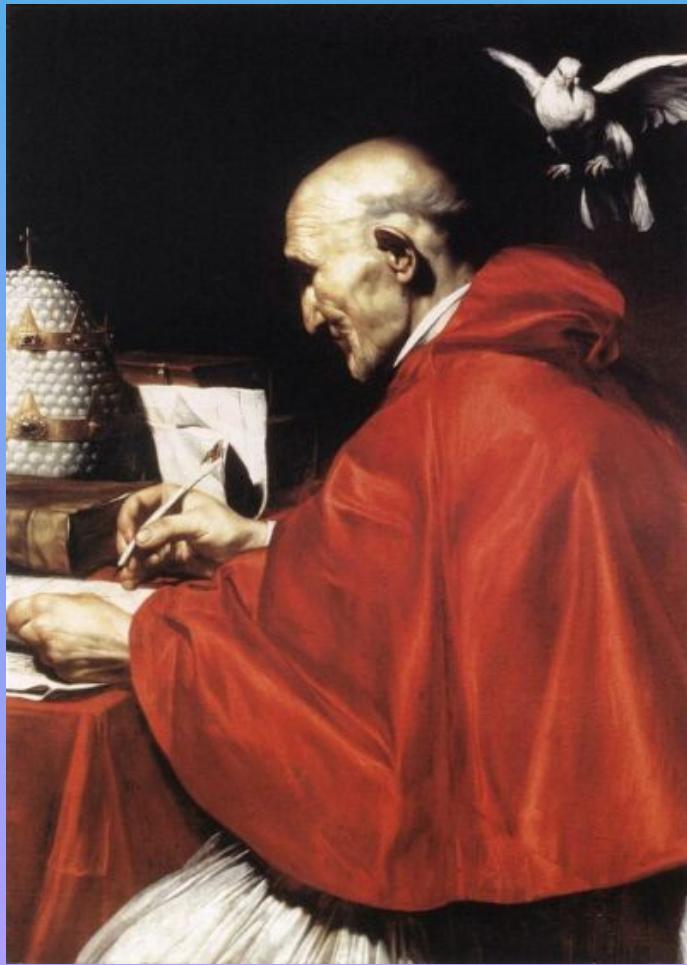
**The simplicity of faith in the authority of Scripture alone was replaced by unquestioned submission to the authority of the Church built upon tradition and faith.**

**Tradition held to be of equal authority as scripture.**

**The Church becomes the final authority**

**Pope holds the Keys.**

## Gregory the Great (c.540 – 604)



Held highest civil office until he resigned after he inherited father's wealth in 575

Made father's home a monastery.

And in the same year (575) became a monk (Benedictine Order).

Built 6 other monasteries in Sicily

Became strict ascetic.

Appointed ambassador to Imperial Court in Constantinople 578 – 585.

Returned to Rome made Abbot of Monastery he founded.

Appointed Pope in 590

Pope Gregory sent Augustine to evangelise the British Isles.

Augustine arrived in Britain in 597 went to Canterbury with the aim of converting King Ethelbert.

## **Gregory the Great (Pope 590 – 604 AD)**

Held tradition to be equal with scripture, and upheld the doctrines of:

- Good Works
- Penance
- Purgatory
- Veneration of Relics
- Mass as a sacrifice of the literal body and blood of Christ
- Celibacy of the clergy
- Liturgy in worship
- Episcopacy – Promoted the authority of the Bishop of Rome as head of the Church
- Missions – He sought the conversion of Anglo-Saxons.
- Music – Gregorian Chant
- Believed Church had the right to be involved in matters of State.
- Interpreted the Bible allegorically

# The Donation of Constantine



12<sup>th</sup> century fresco from Rome showing the Emperor Constantine transferring worldly power to Pope Sylvester I during the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century the donation of Constantine was shown by Nicholas of Cusa to be a forgery.

It was forged in the 8th or 9<sup>th</sup> century during the Frankish Empire

## The Donation of Constantine

...affirms that Constantine, when he was baptized by pope Sylvester, a.d. 324 (he was not baptized till 337, by the Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia), presented him with the Lateran palace and all imperial insignia, together with the Roman and Italian territory.

The object of this forgery was to antedate by five centuries the temporal power of the papacy, which rests on the donations of Pepin and Charlemagne.

The only foundation in fact is the donation of the Lateran palace, which was originally the palace of the Lateran family, then of the emperors, and last of the popes. The wife of Constantine, Fausta, resided in it, and on the transfer of the seat of empire to Constantinople, he left it to Sylvester, as the chief of the Roman clergy and nobility.

Hence it contains to this day the pontifical throne with the inscription: "*Haec est papalis sedes et pontificalis.*" There the pope takes possession of the see of Rome. But the whole history of Constantine and his successors shows conclusively that they had no idea of transferring any part of their temporal sovereignty to the Roman pontiff.

History of the Christian Church, (1910 edition) Volume IV, Chapter IV, § 60, by Philip Schaff

## Pope crowns Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor (800 AD)



The power of the Pope was increased through Charlemagne and Pepin. Land was given to the Pope and Charlemagne accepted his crown from the hands of the Pope

## The False Decretals

In the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century a collection of letters belonging to Isidore, a Spanish bishop who died in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, were produced.

The letters consisted of Church law and pope's letters. But also some letters claiming to have been written by Bishops of Rome from Apostolic times.

The letters claimed that the pope had been appointed by the Lord to be head of the Church, to govern according to his own will, and the pope had always used this delegated power.

The collection of letters are called the 'False Decretals'.

The letters were held to have been authentic and increased the power of the Pope.

## Hildebrand

Became **Gregory VII** (c.1020/1025-1085)

1. Increased power of the papacy
2. Introduced celibacy as a requirement of priesthood.
3. **Investiture controversy** – appointment of church officials.

Pope Gregory VII's Dictatus Papae (1075) claimed that only the Pope as head of the Church could appoint Church officials.

## Gregory VII (c.1020/1025-1085)

Henry IV wrote to Pope Gregory VII taking away his protection.

Pope Gregory VII excommunicated Henry IV.

Henry IV backed down

1077 Henry IV walked to Canossa  
in Northern Italy.

Henry IV stood as a penitent before  
the Pope.

Wore a hairshirt

Stood in the snow barefooted.

Pope lifted the excommunication.



The fact that the Pope was able to humiliate a King in this fashion elevated papal authority in the minds of the people.

## **Summary:**

1. New Testament leadership consisted of elders who were overseers and deacons. Leaders were to be clothed with humility serving the body. The fivefold ministries of the church functioned through this leadership.
2. The development of a hierarchical leadership happened soon after the Apostolic era. Ignatius promoted a three tier form of leadership with pre-eminence of the Bishop over the elders and deacons.
3. Leadership became associated with a sacrificing priesthood; Bishop, priest and deacon. The doctrine of Apostolic Succession lifted up the office of the Bishop.