

## *The System Corrupted*

Sadly, after the death of the apostles, the church began to leave Christ's revealed will by inventing for itself a system of church care. Take that word 'hierarchy', which we have already met, and which will come up again and again. There is, of course, a New Testament hierarchy in the churches of Christ. Within clearly defined limits, as long as the apostles were alive, they were over the entire people of God, over all the churches of Christ, with elders, overseers, bishops, leaders (as I have explained, the names are virtually synonymous), rulers over local churches. Paul, writing to believers, spoke clearly about those 'who are over you in the Lord' (1 Thess. 5:12; see also Heb. 13:17). So there is, *in this sense*, a New Testament hierarchy. But in this chapter I am going to look at the Fathers' corruption of the New Testament pattern, and one of the cardinal marks of their defection was the introduction of an unbiblical hierarchy, a worldly hierarchy. This was, and remains, abhorrent in the churches of Christ. So, when the word 'hierarchy' appears in the rest of this book, the context must decide whether or not we are talking about its proper New Testament use, or the deformed – abominable – idea which has done so much harm to the church of Christ these past two millennia.

Let John Owen sum up so far, and lead us on to the next stage:

When... a church was first planted by the ministry of the apostles, it was for a while continued under their own immediate care and inspection, and then usually committed by them unto the ministry of some evangelists... And in this state were they [that is, the churches] continued, until some were found meet *among themselves* to be made overseers and instructors of the rest (2 Tim. 2:2; Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). Upon their decease, others were called and chosen *from among themselves* to the *same* work by the church. And thus were the preservation and successive propagation of the churches provided for... And this course, namely, that teachers of the church should be educated thereunto *in the church*, continued inviolate until the public school at Alexandria.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Owen: *Hebrews* Vol.3 Part 1 p568, emphasis mine.

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Owen made some weighty points in that extract. If those of us who claim to regard Owen as a master-teacher (as I certainly do in many things) put his doctrine into practice in daily church life, the present-day churches would be radically different to what they are!

And this takes us neatly to the next step. Do not miss Owen's point about the 'violation' of the New Testament system. He was wrong, however, in one respect. Owen mistakenly thought the biblical system lasted 'until the public school at Alexandria', which was formed at the end of the 2nd century. Not so! The rot set in long before, as I now will go on to show. The simple, clear, biblical system of church government and care was quickly ruined, and the fall-out is with us today. It has caused grievous harm down the centuries, and it still does. Using Owen's word, it was a disaster of immense proportions that the biblical process continued 'inviolated' for a few years only, and that we are unable to say it has lasted 'inviolated' until this day, and will last 'inviolated' until the end of the age. The fact is, as I have said, the biblical system was quickly corrupted, the church fell away from – or moved away from – its original pattern, and invented its own way of doing things. All this, of course, was of the utmost consequence. It was, in Clarkson's words, 'a dreadful mischief'. To this I now turn.

The New Testament warns us to expect an attack upon every doctrine and practice instituted by Christ, to prepare for it, and to resist it (Rom. 16:17-19; 1 Tim. 4:1-8; 2 Tim. 3:1-9,13-17; 4:1-5; Jude 3-4, for instance). History records countless examples of such attacks in every age. I think we may safely say that there is not a single doctrine or ordinance of Christ which has escaped the attention of false teachers. Not least, the biblical, permanent system of church government and instruction, care and edification, arising out of and an integral part of the priesthood of all believers, has been distorted beyond recognition. As Jeroboam the son of Nebat wrecked Israel's worship by his inventions (1 Kings 12:26-33; 13:33-34; 14:7-9,14-16), so have men attacked and warped New Testament church life and order – and with similar catastrophic results for the churches. And speaking of Jeroboam – who became the infamous archetypical leader who brought Israel into sin (1 Kings 15:34; 16:2,19,26,31; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:31; 13:2,11; 14:24; 15:9,18,24,28; and so on) – some of the men who introduced

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novelties in the churches *ought* to have become as notorious as he. Sadly, this is not so. Quite the opposite, in fact. Many contemporary Reformed and evangelical teachers are returning to the Fathers; increasingly so, I am afraid.<sup>2</sup>

On the issue of church rule, a fine balance has to be struck. There are two main dangers – rebellious sheep and tyrannical shepherds. Believers must recognise, appreciate, respect, honour, reward, follow, obey and submit to their elders (1 Cor. 16:15-16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:17-19; Heb. 13:17). For their part, the teachers must not abuse their position to produce a culture of dependency, thereby virtually eliminating the priesthood of all believers. Rather, their ministry should stimulate and educate the believers to the improvement of their performance of the all-body ministry. Coming at it the other way, an unthinking obedience by believers to the stated ministry is wrong. Believers must never blindly accept their elders’ teaching, but always check it against the word of God, and do so for themselves (Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 10:15; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1). They must not listen to a teacher who does not teach the gospel, however ‘nice’ a man he might be (Gal. 1:6-10). And if an elder sins, as with any church member, he must be disciplined – even more so (1 Tim. 5:19-20). The elders must never lord it over the church (1 Pet. 5:1-3), mistaking authoritarianism for authority. Sadly, as with Israel under the old covenant (Jer. 5:31), too often believers *like* the abuse of Christ’s system. They *like* being lorded over, they *like* surrendering things to someone else who will take all responsibility for them, and do their thinking for them. They like it, I say! It absolves them of thinking for themselves, of taking responsibility for their souls, and the souls of

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<sup>2</sup> See my *Infant, Baptist Sacramentalism*. For Calvin, see Gerrish p291. For James Packer, see McGrath pp183-184,248-255,284. See Michael Haykin’s *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who they Were and How they Shaped the Church* (2011) in association with [andrewfullercenter.org](http://andrewfullercenter.org) – especially note 2 p14. I can imagine what Fuller would think of such an association! See Owen: *Causes* in *Works* Vol.4 p227; Gill: *Cause* (Part 4) pp220-221. See Sinclair Ferguson’s books on the Fathers recently published by the Banner of Truth. Note also the growing tendency for Reformed and evangelical (not excepting Baptist) books and magazines to put Papist or Orthodox paintings on the cover. And so on.

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others. It makes for an easy life; they simply hand everything over to the man in charge. As a result, it is too easy for them to accept without question all that comes across the pulpit desk. And this leads inevitably to professionalism; ministers become Ministers, then **MINISTERS**, then **MINISTERS**. We should never forget that the best of teachers are but men, *only* ministers. As Paul put it: 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, *but* ministers...?' (1 Cor. 3:5, NKJV). Do not miss the 'but'! The NIV is even more blunt: 'What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants...'. Only! Do not miss the 'only'!

Some might be puzzled by my use of 'professionalism', and some might be offended. This is so important, delicate, nuanced a point, I must explain what I mean by it, and try to remove any misunderstanding. I am not for a minute suggesting that there is any merit in an incompetent ministry. Not at all. Rather, I am trying to raise a protest against the notion of 'the ministry' as a 'profession', a 'job', a 'career'. In saying that, I do not intend to disparage any man who devotes his life to God's service, and does all he can to make himself as proficient as he can be at discharging his vocation, but 'the man of the cloth going into the Church' has his Nonconformist counterpart, I am afraid. This 'professionalism' began with the Fathers and has plagued the churches ever since. It carries nasty overtones. I do not think the best illustration of the believer is to picture him as an ignorant incompetent sitting in front of 'the expert', 'the man who knows best', the professional. But here again, let me correct a possible misunderstanding of what I am saying. It is perfectly right and proper for a believer to learn from an able, gifted teacher – that is why God raises up an edifying ministry! But this must not be allowed to elevate the teacher in the wrong way. All this is very tricky to balance, I know, but of vital importance.

The professional, it seems to me, is rightly detached, disinterested. I remember responding to my GP a few years ago, when we were discussing my symptoms and he seemed to need time to cogitate. I blurted out, in my well-meaning way: 'Don't worry about me'. He quickly disabused me. 'I'm not worrying about you!' He was perfectly right, of course. For a GP to be worried about me as a patient would turn him into a poor GP. He

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has to be detached. I recall my dentist telling me that his son was in hospital having a wisdom tooth extracted. ‘Was it too difficult to do here?’ I asked. ‘No’, he assured me – ‘but I don’t work on relatives! I tried it once. Never again. It makes things much harder for the patient’. When dealing with a relative, when personally involved, he couldn’t be disinterested, professional. We want a professional in the consultant’s chair. We want a professional approaching us, dental drill in hand. *But we don’t want professionalism in the churches.*

Of course, when I speak against professionalism, I do not imply the church should be a shambles. Rather, I want to get rid of the professionalism which is fed by sycophancy – that which Spurgeon called ‘ministerial airs’, that which makes some ministers ‘from head to foot, in garb, tone, manner, necktie, and boots... so utterly parsonic that no particle of manhood is visible’; in other words, ‘ministerial starch’. He went on:

The moment some men shut the pulpit door, they leave their own personal manhood behind them, and become as official as the parish beadle. There they might almost boast with the Pharisee, that they are not as other men are, although it would be blasphemy to thank God for it... When that gown is once on, how often does it prove to be the shroud of the man’s true self, and the effeminate emblem of officialism!

This professionalism, I would only add, does not show itself only in the pulpit, nor only with the gown on. Spurgeon had some pungent things to say about ‘parsonic twang’.<sup>3</sup> Sadly, in my experience, his words, if known, have not always been heeded.

My point in pausing to explain what I mean by ‘professionalism’, is that I am convinced that the New Testament stated minister, elder, teacher is definitely *not* detached. He is involved. He is, in that sense, ‘unprofessional’.

Sadly, churches can encourage professionalism when, as they frequently do, they make too much of ministers – far too much. Let me give one brief illustration from my *Baptist Sacramentalism*: ‘In a discussion on a disputed issue with a Strict (or Grace) Baptist

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<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon: *Lectures: First Series* pp118-121,180-181. See also Bailie pp156-175; Lloyd-Jones: *Preaching* pp252-256.

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lady of many years' experience, when I asked her to tell me what she thought a certain text meant, what did it say to *her* – she replied that we have ministers to tell us that'.<sup>4</sup> And that is but one example. That is why I am writing now. Believers, in general, make far too much of ministers – in the wrong sense. Proof of it can be seen at a glance. How many believers and churches would use the word *only* when, allowing the phrase for a moment, talking about their Minister or Pastor?<sup>5</sup> Reader have you ever heard anybody say of their pastor: 'He's only a minister'?<sup>6</sup> Paul did! Just now I asked how *many* use the word 'only' in this context. I should have said how *few* would use 'only' in the sense in which Paul did (1 Cor. 3:5)?

In saying this, yet again I do not wish to be misunderstood. I do not denigrate the work of preaching in any way at all. How can I? How could I? I wouldn't dare to do it! Nor do I advocate 'roast pastor' for Sunday lunch! On the other hand, I wish there was more serious discussion of the sermon over the lunch! In any case, if anybody accuses me of denigrating preaching by what I have just said, they have put the wrong name on the envelope. They should address the accusation to him to whom it properly belongs – the apostle. After all, it was he who said it in the first place (1 Cor. 3:5). And he was not denigrating preaching and preachers!

Denigrating preaching and preachers? I wouldn't dream of it! Not at all!<sup>7</sup> What I *am* writing against is the frequent mistake – worse, the corruption – of elevating a preacher, an elder, to a position he should never have. Indeed, I am questioning the common notion of *The Minister* of a church, and I am questioning it because it is not to be found anywhere in the Bible. We have to get rid of this unbiblical exaltation of 'The Minister' and 'The Ministry', and start thinking scripturally. The only God-honouring spirit for a believer and for a church, the only safe and sure way, is to go back to Scripture, and stick to it.

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<sup>4</sup> See below for a fuller examination of 'ministers'. For more on professionalism, see my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

<sup>5</sup> I am using capitals because this is the way they are spoken of.

<sup>6</sup> More likely it will be: 'He's *the* Minister'.

<sup>7</sup> See my forthcoming book on Sandemanianism.

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Sadly, ministers can go off the rails (Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3, for instance). Paul feared for the Corinthians, telling them: ‘Your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ’ or ‘from the simplicity [and purity] that is in Christ’ (NKJV). How could this happen? ‘If someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough’ (2 Cor. 11:3-4). The Corinthians, remember, made too much of men – I will have more to say on this as we go on – and it was this tendency that exposed them particularly to the danger of being duped by ministers. Paul told them they had to recover the biblical perspective, and get rid of their gullible approach to ‘ministers’, and their ‘ministry’.

Of course, the fault is not only with the members. The minister, too, can like – and even encourage – the professional attitude, can like being thought of as ‘the Lord’s anointed’ who is above question. But from whatever quarter it rises, an overweening regard for man is wrong.

Why? Because if the minister is made too much of, immense dangers lie ahead. As I say, the people can think the minister is beyond question, and the minister himself can think it. Paul knocked that attitude on the head when he wrote to the Galatians. Wasting no time in spelling out his concerns, but calling a spade a spade, he thundered: ‘Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!’ (Gal. 1:8-9). *Anybody* said Paul, anybody; angel, so-called apostle, minister, ‘we’! Anybody! *No* minister is above scrutiny.

The apostle’s dictum is the only safe way. After all, the Holy Spirit saw fit to commend the Bereans for their watchful approach to preachers, especially for their willingness to subject to Scripture what they heard them say (Acts 17:11). They were not at all intimidated when listening to Paul! Quite right, too. We must cultivate the same spirit. We must not make too much of ministers. Too many do!

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How did we get into the state in which we find ourselves? I can summarise it very easily. It wasn't long after the death of the last apostle that the Fathers (perhaps unwittingly) began the process which led to the corruption of Christ's appointment, and, eventually, to the replacement of the universal priesthood of all believers by an invention of their own, based on a concoction of Jewish and pagan ideas – namely the special priesthood of the few. In that one sentence, reader, there lies a world of abuse, offence and misery. We live in its shadow to this very day.

Let me sketch the way the corruption arose and spread. As in the first chapter, I will divide the material into two, but in reverse order. *First*, I will look at the ruination of the New Testament teaching on church rule. *Secondly*, I will look at the corresponding ruination (the two moved in tandem) of the priesthood of all believers. In tandem? As the distortion of church rule was welcomed at the front door, the New Testament priesthood of all believers was confined to the servants' quarters below stairs, then it was called on less and less, and eventually it was allowed to drift out of the back door and wander off into the fog. Its demise was mourned only by an ever-diminishing number who, like the wretched farmyard creatures under the pigs in *Animal Farm*, had some vague recollection of the old days. Some – 'heretics' – had the 'audacity' to read the Bible for themselves and draw attention to the Emperor's lack of clothes, but they were quickly stamped on for their pains. As the corruption set in, and took increasing hold, Church power became more and more concentrated in the hands of a ruling class, while the uneducated, untaught millions languished in growing darkness and superstition, locked securely in place by their rulers, rulers who held, controlled and manipulated all the important levers of power – religious, political and social. Thus the masses would become enslaved, body, mind and soul, to Church hierarchy. Misery indeed! Let me set out the details.

### ***The corruption of New Testament rule of the churches***

The rot set in very quickly. It was inevitable – as one of the consequences of the fall. The history of Israel only too readily confirms the universal tendency of God's professing people to



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break his word. Thus it was, even in apostolic days, some elders were beginning to lord it over the churches; hence the need for Peter to denounce the practice (1 Pet. 5:1-5), and for John to warn of Diotrophes (3 John 9-10). Note the fact. The apostles saw the problem as it arose, exposed it, tackled it head-on, and denounced it. The Fathers, naturally, in their time, had to face similar issues. But, of course, when they met their problems, they had the apostolic template, ready-made, to hand. They had no need, they had no warrant, to dream up solutions of their own. The same goes for us, of course.

But if Christ's system was abused during apostolic days, around the end of the 1st century with the death of the last apostle – John – things began to move, and move with a vengeance with the dawning of the age of the Fathers. Seemingly small changes were introduced<sup>8</sup> which quickly led to a system of church government which would have been totally unrecognisable to New Testament believers. And the legacy is with us still. We have not been able to shake it off. In most cases, the churches don't want to shake it off. Even though most are unaware of it, the overwhelming majority of churches are largely affected by – infected with – unbiblical ideas which were introduced in those far-off days.

The question of authority was the great issue which occupied the churches as the apostolic age drew to a close. Who would replace the apostles? How would authority be maintained among the people of God? Who would define what the apostles had taught? Who would set out the authentic interpretation of Scripture, binding on all Christians? 'There is nothing new under the sun' (Eccles. 1:9)! Pilate had asked the question: 'What is truth?' (John 18:38). In their turn, the first believers had to face it. How can we tell who is speaking the truth? Where can we find the truth? Who will define it? And what was their answer? The Bible is clear. The Scriptures in the hand, mind and heart of believers possessed by the Spirit of God, is the New Testament way (Acts 17:11; 20:32; 2 Tim. 3:14 – 4:5; 1 John 2:27). Compare this with what follows.

Furthermore, while the New Testament churches had been distinct and independent, for the Fathers, the desperate need of the

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<sup>8</sup> Echoes of Clarkson's words – see the 'Introduction'.

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hour, so they thought, was for some kind of system or organisation which could unite these scattered churches, and so keep them from disintegrating in face of many and various enemies.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the Fathers, instead of keeping to the permanent system laid out in the New Testament – in fact, not even questioning whether the New Testament warrants the developments they introduced – began to dream up other ways of combining the churches, and ruling and teaching them. Twilight, which would soon become gross darkness, began to fall upon the independent churches of Christ as this new phenomenon arose.

It is time to talk about the Catholic – or Universal – Church.

One of the most remarkable things, to me at least, in all the changes which follow, is to see, after the death of the last apostle, how rapidly this Catholic or Universal Church fell away from the New Testament position on church governance. The pace of this degeneration, to me, is breathtaking. It reminds me of Israel in the days following the death of Joshua:

Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel (Josh. 24:31).

The book of Judges records the same (Judg. 2:7). But, and this is my point:

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers... They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the LORD to anger because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths (Judg. 2:10-13).

I am not saying that the parallel with the churches under the Fathers is exact. No! But it is there. And I am saying that after the death of the last apostle, within a very short time – a very short time – the

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<sup>9</sup> I am not saying that the original intention was not well meant. But, as history shows, organisation does not do the job. In fact, a good case could be made for saying that organisation becomes an integral part of the problem.

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Fathers had invented, and begun to develop, an entirely new way of governing the churches. Sadly, they compounded the problem and their error by taking biblical words, yet at the same time giving them an entirely new meaning. They anticipated Humpty Dumpty and adopted (if not invented) his philosophy. Humpty Dumpty? You will remember that Alice, of Lewis Carroll's *Through The Looking-Glass* fame, was confused. Humpty Dumpty explained: 'When I use a word', he said, 'it means just what I choose it to mean; neither more nor less'. Thus, the Fathers! If only they had coined new words for their inventions, we should all be able to see their error more clearly. But they did not!

And yet I wonder if it would have made much difference, after all. For, when, from time to time, the Fathers did look for words from outside the Bible, where did they go for them? To the pagans. Pagans, I ask you! But that is what they did. They went to the pagans. As I have explained in previous works, by abandoning believers' baptism, and inventing infant baptism, the Fathers were able to receive unregenerate pagans into the Church. Naturally, these pagans brought their pagan ideas with them. Church authorities were willing to accommodate such ideas. Indeed, they even liked some of them. So much so, they took them over and 'Christianised' them. It was a catastrophe.

A catastrophe, yes – but hardly unexpected, was it? Since the Fathers, forsaking the New Testament, invented their own way of conversion and thereby attracted unregenerate pagans into the Church, they had to adopt pagan principles and practices in order to keep them. In the New Testament, pagans were regenerated, repented and believed and were baptised. They forsook their idols – their pagan ways and ideas – and turned instead to God, submitting to the Lordship of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 19:18-20; 1 Cor. 12:2; 1 Thess. 1:5-10; 1 Pet. 4:3-4). The apostles demanded such (Acts 14:11-18; 17:22-31). The Fathers abandoned this, and reaped the consequences. I cannot help pointing out that those churches today who are 'adapting' the gospel to attract and then accommodate the unregenerate will find they have to reap the same kind of harvest.

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Thus the Fathers adopted pagan words and pagan ideas. They did it with ‘sacraments’,<sup>10</sup> for example. As we shall see, as J.E.Riddle put it, in about 200, ‘Tertullian began to apply the term *sacramentum* to... baptism and the Lord’s supper... Hence came the use of the word “sacrament” in Christian theology – a word which, as being at once ambiguous and figurative [let alone borrowed from pagans – DG], could well be spared... This term, misinterpreted or misunderstood[!], has assisted in introducing false doctrines and erroneous views’.<sup>11</sup> But, grievous to say, the Fathers’ use of pagan words does not seem to disturb in the slightest many of today’s believers, and they quite merrily go on using them. Millions down the centuries have talked about sacraments – either not realising, or not caring, that they are using a pagan word to describe Christ’s ordinances. And I am not quarrelling about mere words. The *consequences* have been horrendous.

It is time that I sketched the history of this corruption.

### ***The first step: apostolic succession***

About the year 96, Clement of Rome wrote a letter in which he mooted the idea of apostolic succession. Because many regarded this letter as virtual Scripture, it greatly influenced the thinking of Christians for centuries, and apostolic succession soon became a weapon with which to wage war on heretics, and a tool to fashion and maintain truth. Or so it was thought. Of course, the church needs successive generations of *elders* (2 Tim. 2:2), but Clement alleged that the apostles had taught the idea of successive generations of *apostles*; as each generation passed, the recognised successors of the apostles would appoint their successors, and so on. In this way, since, it was claimed, the apostles had started the process, every generation would be guaranteed *apostolic* succession, that is, men who would be the authoritative teachers – mysteriously, mystically – linked to the apostles, able absolutely to

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<sup>10</sup> The notion that, in particular, baptism and the Lord’s supper are not symbolic but actually convey grace. There is a spectrum of views. For more on the unbiblical notion of sacraments, and the consequences, see my *Infant; Baptist Sacramentalism*.

<sup>11</sup> Riddle p67.

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define the faith for all the churches, and provide a guaranteed bulwark against error. Hmm!

Clement's letter was remarkably – though unwittingly, I guess – prescient of future erroneous developments. He played with fire by talking about church order and ministry in terms of the Old Testament levitical system. True, while he recognised three orders of Old Testament ministry, he kept to the New Testament order of only two in the church; the overseer (or presbyter) and deacon. He only turned to the Levites to illustrate God's love of order. But, as I say, he was playing with fire. While he bears the responsibility for apostolic succession – and that is more than enough for one man – he did not introduce Old Testament principles into the church. Nevertheless, that, in time, would come. Read on.

Clement made one other blunder, though. He used the word 'layman' when talking about believers.<sup>12</sup> If old sins cast long shadows, the shadow cast by this seeming peccadillo would be enormous. We continue to grope around in its gloom.

### ***The next step: the threefold order***

Ignatius of Antioch, in about the year 105, took another step down the slippery slope, by making one of the elders into the permanent single pastor or president of each church, calling him – of all things – the bishop.<sup>13</sup>

So what? Why the fuss? Ignatius' initial change no doubt appears small to some, but a new office was thereby created, and thus he was guilty of departing radically from the New Testament. Some might say it was only a step he took, and, harking back to Lot (Gen. 19:20), was it not a little one? A step? A little one? It was a leap, a giant leap! A leap in the dark. With apologies to Neil Armstrong, the first man to put his foot on the moon: It was one small step for a man, one giant leap for the churches of Christ. It was an invention, a pure invention! End of story!

Sadly, no, it is not the end of the story. It's only the start! As I said, to distinguish this invented chief-elder from the rest, Ignatius

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<sup>12</sup> I vehemently object to the term 'laity' or 'layman' – a gross abuse of a biblical word (*laos*) – and I will have a great deal more to say about it.

<sup>13</sup> This notion has gripped the churches from that time on and is still with us today. It is at the heart of the issue I am writing about.

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took a biblical word, misused it, and called the man in question a bishop. This was, of course, a further departure from the New Testament, an innovation in the practice of the churches of his day – which until then had kept to Scripture in this matter, ‘bishop’ and ‘presbyter’ being interchangeable. With Ignatius, this was no longer the case. Ignatius, failing to expose his innovation, neglected to make clear his departure from Scripture. Or was it deliberate? Whatever else it was, it was departure from Scripture. And he should have been up front and open about it. He should have chosen or coined a non-biblical word for the office he had invented. He had invented (coined) an office, he should have coined (invented) a word for it.<sup>14</sup> Something like Church-Master, Church-President, say; Church-Boss, even. A bit late I know, but I’ll have a go at it. How about the Ecclekurios, the Eccleproedros or the Eccledespot? Not very catchy, I’m afraid, but it’s the best I can come up with for now. But Ignatius didn’t bother his head with such a detail. No! He compounded his error by distorting a biblical word and twisting it to form an entirely new office, and thus radically altering the New Testament system established by Christ through his apostles. Much damage followed.<sup>15</sup> First round to Humpty Dumpty!

Ignatius, obsessed with his innovation, couldn’t stop talking about ‘the bishop’ – over and over again. And while he did speak of presbyters in the plural, he constantly emphasised the bishop as the single pastor over the rest of the elders. They were reduced to the role of his bishop-pastor’s helpers and advisers, he being the president. This president, although still nominally an elder, was thus raised to a higher status than the rest.<sup>16</sup> Of course, it was not

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<sup>14</sup> The word ‘coin’ is often badly misused, if not made virtually meaningless. I am using the word in its proper sense, ‘invented’. It does not mean ‘copied’. Ignatius was both an inventor, a ‘coiner’ of an office in the Church, and, at the same time, a warper of a biblical word.

<sup>15</sup> See the quotation from Clarkson in the ‘Introduction’. In talking of ‘much damage’, I deliberately understate the case.

<sup>16</sup> There is a huge difference between setting up a permanent presidency and an *ad hoc* selection of a chairman for a meeting of equals (see Acts 15, for instance). I will show how this notion of ‘the president’ is far from unknown today – even in the most orthodox of Reformed Baptist churches, as just one example. And *they* are not unique, I assure you!

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only the name. *The devil (by which I mean the poison, the evil – although the devil himself was in it!) was in the concept, the thinking which lay behind it all.* But the first step had been taken which would lead the bishop to assume the role of an apostle. Eventually one of these bishops would assume the place of Christ as head of the church on earth, Christ's Vicar. In other words, having become the head of the local church, the bishop would become the head of the National Church, then head of the Catholic Church, head of State, Monarch, Emperor, Pope. Once the mutilation of Christ's system had set in, there was no stopping it. And for 1300 years, it subjugated and ruined the peoples of western Europe, with appalling consequences in blood, and centuries of unrecorded misery for millions, as the State and the Church jockeyed for mastery. With each rise and fall of the see-saw (teeter-totter for my American readers), first the State, then the Church, then the State... got their hands on power. And, as I say, millions paid a heavy price for it – both temporally and eternally.

Years later than Ignatius, Jerome would try to argue that, though admitting that the early churches were governed by presbyters (in the plural), the making of one presbyter into a bishop was an expedient (I would add, dreamed up by the Fathers – Ignatius, in particular) to try to deal with the problems illustrated in 1 Corinthians 1:12; namely, party spirit. But it will not wash. The Fathers should not have altered Christ's system, however laudable their motive. And in any case, Paul wrote most of his material dealing with the twofold ministry of the church *after* 1 Corinthians. In other words, the apostles, even though *they* were aware of the problems at Corinth, did not tinker with Christ's system to cope with it, but were still enforcing Christ's regime right to the end of the New Testament. Peter, for instance, when he met abuse of Christ's system, did not change the system. Rather, he demanded its proper observance (1 Pet. 5:1-4) – just like Paul, as I have already mentioned, in 1 Corinthians 14. The entire nonsense of episcopacy – that the bishop is placed in a higher grade, like a general over an army, has no scriptural warrant, as Jerome himself (weakly) admitted. It is nothing but a human invention and tradition.

And as for the Corinthian trouble itself, Paul had long since dealt with the problem of 1 Corinthians 1:12 in his letter – see 1

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Corinthians 1:10 – 4:21. So why did the Fathers invent their own ‘solution’? Why didn’t they follow apostolic precedent for dealing with the problem, as laid out in Scripture? *This is my point.* The Fathers, claiming apostolic succession, were in fact departing from the apostles! Whatever apostolic succession may mean, it surely involves, at the very least, not departing from, or adding to, apostolic doctrine and practice. Those who trumpet ‘apostolic succession’ the loudest, it seems, think they can play fast-and-loose with what the apostles taught, laid down and instituted as permanent for the church of Christ. Remarkable!

The fact is, ‘apostolic succession’ really means that the latest apostle has full right to introduce novelties and changes in the church – ‘revelation’ or ‘further light’. This is what it has meant ever since the notion took hold. And it still means it today. When believers, churches or denominations recognise men among them as apostles (even if they are not called that!), they expect such men to tell them what’s what – and tell them that what’s new is what, too!

Thus, Ignatius committed three errors. *First*, he invented a new office. *Secondly*, he deformed a biblical word, and, by this deformation, he perverted Christ’s gift of elders to his churches. And, *thirdly*, he started the trend which claimed that the bishop was equivalent to an apostle. So, by the year 200, the biblical system had been warped into a threefold order, with the bishop over the presbyters, who were over the deacons. All was done in the name of preserving unity. The more the authority of the top man – the president, no less – increased, the stronger the unity. Or so it was claimed.

At first, the bishop was the head of a single church only. Even so, within each church, he became the king pin, the hub around which all else turned; the church was, in effect, *his church*.<sup>17</sup> More, no bishop – no sacraments (another term invented by the Fathers – see above). No sacraments – no church. No bishop – no unity. Ignatius went as far as to say that men ought to regard the bishop as God, Christ himself. Otherwise, he said, there would be no church.

This revolutionary concept, utterly foreign to the New Testament, did not meet with universal approval – *at first*. The very

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<sup>17</sup> A way of speaking which has remained in constant use to this day, and to which I shall return.



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fact that Ignatius was so vehement in his advocacy of the new system tells us as much. The truth is, he could hardly stop talking about his novel threefold order – his letters (only one not mentioning it) teeming with calls for the strictest obedience to bishops. Why? The answer is obvious. He met with stiff opposition, and felt the need to overwhelm it by constant reinforcement – a temptation common to all fervent converts to a cause. If at first you don't succeed, clout and clout again. If the last hammer blow didn't clinch the nail, perhaps the next might.

And it worked. From Ignatius' point of view, it worked a treat! The majority quickly came to accept the new scheme, and all practical opposition to the threefold order was overcome. So much so, the notion of a single bishop ranked over elders and deacons soon became the universal, deeply entrenched rule. *Pares* had evolved into *primus inter pares*, and thence into *primus*. 'All equal' had become 'first among equals' which had become 'first'. From now on, the biblical order was well-nigh lost, supplanted by the invention of the Fathers. The equality of elders had vanished. And soon men were vying with each other to see who could find the most flamboyant language to describe the new hierarchy. Clement of Alexandria (c195), for instance, took some keeping up with when he said the 'grades' in the threefold order imitated 'the angelic glory'!

In this way, episcopacy quickly accomplished what its creators intended. At least... it created an *outwardly* united Catholic Church, swarming with bishops bent on control of the organisation, an expanding global corporation whose tentacles were grasping in more and more. Conferences of bishops determined what was orthodox for the Universal Church, and what, *and who*, were not orthodox. Conformity was the watchword; non-conformity was heresy. Conformity meant, of course, conformity to the Catholic Church as defined by the bishops. And, as only to be expected, granted the pride of man and his grasping after power, the lust of ambition and the imperatives of rank thrived in this febrile atmosphere.

What about the words of Christ, and the apostolic pattern? Did these restrain the madness? They did not. As I observed earlier, the Fathers and the churches of the 2nd century never even questioned

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whether the New Testament justified their innovations. Rather, politician-like, they looked to what they considered practical advantages in the adoption of their invented organisation, even though it was a signal departure from the churches of the New Testament. Advantages? What advantages? It was certainly much simpler to have power and decision-making vested in one man, for example. Now that was a distinct advantage! A plurality of equal elders in each church was out of the question; it is always easier to deal with one man – the boss! If you want something done, go to the top! Like Israel of old who demanded a king to ‘be like all the other nations’ (1 Sam. 8:5-10,19-20),<sup>18</sup> the churches of the 2nd century rejected – rather, ignored – the rule of Christ, preferring their own system, a system which aped the world, the Roman Empire in particular. They liked it, they wanted it, and they got it, even though Christ had specifically warned against the very thing they were doing:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25-28).

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you... (Mark 10:42-45).

The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves... I am among you as one who serves (Luke 22:25-27).

You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed [truly happy] if you do them (John 13:13-17).

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<sup>18</sup> I could have chosen Judg. 17 & 18. Those who have a predilection for ‘the pastor system’, besides being sure they do not join in the chorus: ‘We want a king like the rest’, had better make sure they steer completely clear of the superstition-and-promotion principles embedded in, say, Judg. 17:10-13; 18:4,19-20.

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Reader, we all know these scriptures, do we not? Heed then this particular verse: ‘Now that you know these things, you will be blessed [truly happy] if you *do* them’ (John 13:17). The reason I have written this book is not to list some interesting, though sad, historical facts at which we can all sagely and solemnly nod or shake our head. I have a much more important and pressing purpose. I want to do what I can to call today’s churches back from men like Ignatius, back to Jesus Christ. My thesis – offensive to many, I have no doubt – is that many (if not most) Reformed and evangelical churches, in this matter of ‘the ministry’, in the principles underlying it, pay more allegiance to Ignatius than to the Lord Christ. Ignorant of the fact they may be, but that is irrelevant. The Bible clearly tells us it *is* error! A sick man may not know the name of his disease, or how he got it, but he knows when he is ill. If he doesn’t, he’s sick indeed! Above all, surely he knows he needs a cure – not merely a detailed explanation of the rise and spread of his infection. He *wants* a cure, doesn’t he? The same goes for this disfigurement in the churches, doesn’t it?

To this very day, these patristic (of the Fathers) goings on still underlie the almost universal emphasis upon one man in the church – even where there is plenty of talk about the plurality of elders, and where the plurality of the elders is a feature of the basis of faith or trust document. I am glad I can say it is ‘almost’ universal, and not ‘entirely’ universal. But this, I am afraid, is only a small crumb of comfort when faced with the glaring widespread defection from the New Testament in this matter.

So much for the immense damage Ignatius did to the cause of Christ. Did? It is still going on!

### ***The next step: apostolic succession and the threefold order linked***

Irenaeus of Gaul (180) took the churches on another downward step when he linked the ideas of Clement of Rome and Ignatius to argue that apostolic succession comes through the bishops, as, he tried to claim, had been originally instituted by the apostles in the churches. This alone guaranteed orthodoxy, he thought. Writing against those he dismissed as heretics, Irenaeus argued along the lines: ‘We, the Catholic Church, have bishops who are successors of the apostles. You do not! You have no bishop consecrated in line of succession?’

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Anarchy and error must be the result! We, therefore, are right. You, therefore, are wrong. *Q.E.D.*' To top it all, Irenaeus alleged that this apostolic succession applies principally to the church of Rome – in his opinion the chief church, the church with which every other church should agree.<sup>19</sup>

Let me take up Irenaeus' talk of 'bishops, as originally instituted by the apostles'. Care is needed here. We must not forget that the word 'bishop' is in the New Testament, yes, but the word 'bishop' as used by the Fathers is a very different animal. The Fathers' bishop is of the genus 'Humpty Dumpty'. That's one difference – and a big one! What is more, the churches *recognised* their elders in the New Testament – the apostles did not impose them upon the churches. True the apostles and their delegates, the evangelists Timothy and Titus, made sure that elders *were* recognised in the churches – but it was the individual churches themselves, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who recognised their elders (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). There was no interference from other churches. On the fact that Paul and Barnabas 'appointed elders in every church' (Acts 14:23, NKJV), see later. The verse most definitely does *not* mean that 'in every church, the apostles instituted a bishop who had apostolic authority, so that he, in turn, could institute the next generation of (apostolic) bishops, and so on *ad infinitum*'. Irenaeus was wrong. It is as simple as that. Unfortunately, millions have believed him, and millions still do believe him and his Humpty Dumpty rigmarole, and ignore or reject Scripture.

### ***A hiccup: the shenanigans of Origen***

As for the quest for unity through apostolic succession, the experiences of Origen (184-254/5) exposed some of the fundamental flaws in the system; actually, they blew the system right out of the water. That which was *supposed* to bring unity did the opposite, proving rather to be a cause of controversy. It came about in this way: Origen, a 'layman',<sup>20</sup> scandalised his home bishop in Alexandria, Demetrius, by preaching when he was in

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<sup>19</sup> Naturally, this was disputed. 'Final' Roman supremacy came with the reign of Leo I (440-461).

<sup>20</sup> See earlier note.

Palestine. How did this cause offence? A ‘layman’ expound the Scriptures in a meeting when a bishop is present? Shocking! The old conservative, Demetrius, attacked the bishops of Caesarea and Jerusalem, Origen’s supporters in this ‘unheard of’ practice, and the rebel was packed off home. Alexander of Cappadocia, however, contradicted Demetrius in Origen’s defence. Later, Origen was ordained<sup>21</sup> – against the rules – by two bishops outside his own area, and this once again brought the wrath of Demetrius down upon his head. Origen, breaking ecclesiastical order by his teaching and by his practice, attracted the charge of heresy, and was the subject of quarrels between bishops. So much for the unity this episcopal system was supposed to produce! May I ask all present-day devotees of the Fathers: Is Origen a pukka Father or not?

***The next step: monarchical episcopacy***

Such little local difficulties, however, did nothing to stop the gadarene descent. Like a rolling snowball, the Fathers’ invention, once foisted on the churches, gathered momentum. On it rolled, on and on, remorseless. Enter Cyprian of Carthage (c200-258), a born leader, who has much to answer for. Much, I say. A very strong advocate of the new-fangled episcopal system, he had a great deal to say about the absolute supremacy of bishops and their domination of the Church. He did more than talk about it! Whereas Ignatius saw the bishop as the centre of unity, and Irenaeus saw him as the deposit of apostolic truth, Cyprian saw him as a monarch, ‘the absolute vicegerent of Christ’, who by exercising his autocratic independence as a bishop, ensures unity in the truth throughout the Catholic Church. And that is not all. To disobey the bishop is sin. Worse, to be without a bishop, is to be without Christ. The bishop, according to Cyprian, is ‘the indispensable channel of divine grace’.

Reformed people still fondly go along with Cyprian: ‘He has not God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother’.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See later.

<sup>22</sup> Following Calvin: ‘To those to whom he is a Father, the Church must also be a mother... The visible Church, let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, nay, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the

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Reader, don't be fooled. Do not be fooled, I say! In asserting that there is no salvation except in the Church, Cyprian was defining the Church against the Novatians.<sup>23</sup> He was saying there is no salvation for any unless they are in the Church with 'proper' bishops. Submission to the authorised episcopate, submission to the Catholic Church, is essential for salvation.

How wrong this is. It is atrocious. Under Cyprian, justification by faith in the person, merits and work of Christ (the New Testament position) is replaced by faith in the bishop. Submission to the Lord Christ is replaced by submission to the Lord Bishop. That is what it amounts to – in theory, and, for millions, in practice. That is why I say it is dreadfully wrong. A man can be in the Fathers' bishop-Church, but be unregenerate. A man can be anathematised by the Fathers' bishop-Church, and be saved.

Back to Scripture! *Christ* is the only foundation (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20), and *he* is the great and only essential for salvation (Acts 4:12). *Christ* is 'the way and the truth and the life', the only way to come to God the Father (John 14:6). *Christ* is all (Col. 3:11). Christ, I say! Christ, not the Church! Christ, not the bishop! Christ! Christ, nothing and nobody but Christ! Cyril Eastwood: 'The principal and only [*sic*] concern is not lest Christians should be

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womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and, in short, keep us under her charge and government... Moreover, beyond the pale of the Church no forgiveness of sins, no salvation, can be hoped for...' (Calvin: *Institutes* Vol.2 pp281,283). 'The visible Church... out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation' (Westminster pp102-103). 'We believe that... this holy assembly and congregation is the gathering of those who are saved and there is no salvation apart from it...' (Belgic Confession Article 28, [deafreformed.org/BelgicConfession.pdf](http://deafreformed.org/BelgicConfession.pdf)). Bearing in mind what the Reformed mean by 'visible Church' (see my *Battle*), such statements are frightening. One question suggests itself: Which 'visible' Church is the church?

<sup>23</sup> The Novatians, who flourished from mid 3rd century, calling themselves *katharoi* or 'puritans', protested against the lax and corrupt Catholic Church. Consequently, they re-baptised their converts. Similarly, the Donatists flourished in the 4th and 5th centuries in North Africa. They wanted the church to be composed of believers only, and refused to recognise baptism administered by those who defected under persecution in the reign of Emperor Diocletian.

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robbed of privilege, status, powers and rights, for these are of the earth earthy, but lest they should be robbed of Christ'.<sup>24</sup> Just so!

Cyprian placed a novel – and sinister – interpretation on the old covenant command to the Israelites to show proper respect for the aged (Lev. 19:32). To Cyprian, however, it meant men must rise when a bishop enters the room. Another rung up the ladder for the bishop! He also taught that it is bishops who have power over the appointment of another bishop, whose ordination must be in the 'right' way – 'the proper celebration' requiring the presence of all neighbouring bishops. Otherwise, there can be no apostolic succession, no ordination, and, ultimately, no salvation. Bishops, however, can only ordain within their own area. No bishop is to be allowed to muscle in on another's territory! By this rigmarole the episcopal godfathers were able to 'protect' the churches – a euphemism for 'keep control over their sphere of influence', 'run their syndicates, cartels or mafia'. 'Nothing new under the sun' (Eccles. 1:9)! If anyone objects to my use of such terms, may I suggest he glances at the canons of, say, the Council of Nicaea?<sup>25</sup>

By such means the ruling elite ensured the promotion of the 'right' men. Is he one of us? Is he 'reliable'? Now where have we heard *that* before?<sup>26</sup> This patronage of the hierarchy was repaid with sycophancy. Exalted claims were made for the big men. Phileas (c307), for example, reached the panegyric stratosphere, speaking of 'our sainted fathers', 'our great bishop and father [Peter of Alexandria], on whom we all depend', 'the superior father'. Phew!

The idea of hierarchy – the bishop over the elders over the deacons – was further reinforced by promoting men through the ranks from deacon to presbyter to bishop. Cornelius of Rome (251-253) was the first such. During the next hundred years, this system of career advancement through the newly invented offices became almost standard procedure. And sometimes it was pretty nippy.

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<sup>24</sup> Eastwood: *Believers* p13.

<sup>25</sup> Insert 'Nicene Canons' into an internet search engine.

<sup>26</sup> For the benefit of younger readers, or non-UK residents, it was the question Mrs Thatcher, when she was Prime Minister, would ask about Cabinet colleagues who looked as though they might not be 'sound'. 'Is he one of us?'

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Ambrose, for instance, was rapidly appointed through the lower orders to become bishop of Milan in 374 even though he was unbaptised at the time. From a standing start, his brisk promotion through the ranks was breathtaking.

A few pages back, from the life of Origen, I illustrated the discord which, despite its vaunted claim for unity, attended the episcopate from its earliest days. Under Cyprian, also, episcopacy proved to be a source of friction but, even so, he was able to use two particular controversies to tighten episcopal grip on the Catholic Church. In the first of these controversies, when dealing with those who had lapsed under persecution, he faced a struggle in North Africa, including the attempt to set up a rival episcopate. Cyprian triumphed. Then there was the question of whether or not baptism by heretics or schismatics was valid. This brought him (as bishop of Carthage) into bitter conflict with Stephen (as bishop of Rome). Cyprian gained a temporary victory, but only temporary; Rome would eventually win the day. Nevertheless, in these victories, Cyprian established the bishop as the supreme and absolute authority throughout the Universal Church, elevating episcopal synods to unheard-of heights. Cyprian's watchword was 'one undivided episcopate', the unanimity of the bishops guaranteeing the unanimity of the Church. It was, of course, a myth.

### ***The next step: the clergy/laity split***

The next downward step was to start talking of 'the clergy'. It was Tertullian who, in about 200, had started to use 'sacerdotal language', dividing the church into two – clergy and laity. Let me explain. Men are sacerdotalists when they delegate their worship to others who they feel are better able, more qualified to carry it out for them. In such a system, worship is a specialised task best left to a special class – priests. Hence arose the unbiblical notion of the clergy and the laity. The clergy are those who give ministry; the laity are those who receive it. The two classes are mutually exclusive. In fact, the one is defined in terms of the other; or, rather, in contrast with, to the exclusion of, the other. The clergy are not the laity; the laity are not the clergy. In this way, the church was divided into two. Is it not remarkable? Christ, by his death, broke down the 'wall of separation' (NKJV) between Jew and Gentile by



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making ‘one new man’ (Eph. 2:14-16), and yet the Fathers were so quickly bent on building another dividing wall – clergy/laity – so splitting that one body which Christ had created at such tremendous cost.

How did Tertullian pull it off? How did he get the ball rolling? Just as with *sacramentum* for sacrament, he espoused the Latin *sacerdos*, a priest, to describe the bishop, later to be applied to the minister. That is, he adopted a pagan word – *pagan*, mark you – to qualify, to mar, a New Testament word. And it was not only the word which was ruined – so was the concept. As I have explained, unregenerate pagans brought their pagan words with them into the Church, and this in turn brought pagan ideas which led to pagan practice – in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Hippolytus (170-235) confirmed the course Tertullian had mapped out, and took it further by making a greater distinction between the clergy and the laity, especially in the question of ordination. The clergy were ‘ordained’. In this way, he increased the role of the former, and diminished that of the latter.

But having given the part-players their ‘due’, it was, in truth, Cyprian who was responsible for the debacle. Taking up these ideas and developing them, it was Cyprian who used more extravagant language in support of the bishop than Ignatius a hundred and fifty years before – in itself, quite an achievement! It was Cyprian who stressed the sacerdotal to elevate the episcopate even more. All now depended on the bishop.<sup>27</sup> The bishop controlled everything. He was allocated massive spiritual power and authority – the right to pray, teach, celebrate the Lord’s supper, to rule, to discipline, and so on. Thus the gap between the ordained clergy and the non-ordained laity was increasingly widened. The former were more and more exalted; the latter more and more marginalised. Father after Father gave the ‘wedge’ clout after clout, ever widening the split between clergy and laity.

Yes, Cyprian has a lot to answer for. And there is more to come!

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<sup>27</sup> In episcopal circles, in recent years it has been claimed that ‘should the [episcopal] ministry fail [whatever *that* may mean – in my book, it *has* failed from the start; being an unbiblical invention], the apostolic Church... would disappear with it’ (Bishop Kirk in Colquhoun pp8-9).

***The next step: the church ordered according to the Old Testament***

Who was responsible for *this* disastrous step, so obviously at variance with the New Testament and the new covenant? At variance? It was a direct contradiction of the principle of the new covenant, so plainly revealed in Scripture (Heb. 7:18; 8:7-13; 9:1-15)! Who was responsible for this 180° shift? Wait for it. It is generally reckoned to be, once again, Cyprian who brought into the church this idea of a priesthood based on the Israelite system of the Old Testament. Cyprian is the man responsible, even though Clement of Rome, as I have noted, had used the Old Testament to illustrate his claims, and the *Didache* (c80-140)<sup>28</sup> had referred to the prophets as ‘your high priests’, with hints of a similar nature in the works of Clement of Alexandria. Origen (c228), too, had often spoken of bishops as ‘the Lord’s priests’, calling them Levites and priests – the top men being called *high* priests. Challenged about this – that this was presuming upon Christ as high priest – he said the bishops were in the order of Aaron and not Melchizedek! That, apparently, made it all OK!

Having said all that, however, it is Cyprian who is the real culprit for the ordering of the Church according to the Old Testament. What a reputation! What a legacy! Indeed, what a remarkable twisting of Scripture! What a distortion of the gospel! As I have just observed, the writer to the Hebrews took the greatest pains to prove that Christ has fulfilled and abolished the priesthood and sacrificial system of the old covenant (Heb. 7 – 10). In essence, Cyprian brought it back!

The apostles, of course, had known – been steeped in – the Mosaic system from their earliest days, being Jews who read and were taught the Old Testament. Old Testament allusions, nuances – leave alone direct references – abound throughout the New Testament, as I explained in my *The Priesthood of All Believers*. Moreover, as I further explained, *that* priesthood depends on comparison – better, contrast – with the old covenant. Yet nowhere in Scripture is the rule of the church based upon the Mosaic system. Nowhere! The apostles never once turned to it for instruction or

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<sup>28</sup> The *Didache* was a Greek manual of morals and church order. To date it precisely has proved impossible, but the estimate given is the most likely.

illustration when talking about church governance. This silence is remarkably eloquent. The rule of the church based on the ceremonies, priests, sacrifices, observances and rituals of the old covenant? Far from it! The shadows of the old covenant have been fulfilled and abolished by Christ, not perpetuated and extended, and set in concrete!<sup>29</sup> Let me change the figure. The price of the Fathers' submission of the church to the old covenant has to be measured in the blood and the eternal loss of a countless number.

Cyprian, as I say, went completely against the Scripture, and introduced the notion of a special priesthood in the church – a sort of old covenant priesthood, in the church of all places!

Cyprian regarded Tertullian as his 'master'. And it was Tertullian who thought he had discovered the threefold order of bishop, presbyter and deacon in the Jewish hierarchy of high priest, priest and Levite. Nevertheless, it was Cyprian who went the whole hog and taught that the bishop takes the place of the Jewish priest, while the presbyters and deacons represent the Levites. Note how Cyprian even placed the Old Testament above the New Testament when he said that presbyters *represent* Levites – reserving the idea of priesthood for the bishop, not the presbyter. In parallel with the Jewish priests, the bishop had to 'offer sacrifices'; it was the kernel of his responsibilities, his primary duty.

But what of the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of *all* believers? In the years before Cyprian, there had been some references to this important principle. Irenaeus (c180), for instance, Clement of Alexandria (c195), and even Tertullian (c198), had written of it. But as the concept of an ordained priesthood captured the Church, as sacerdotalism proved itself to be a deep-rooted weed of rampant growth, the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers went by the board. It was muted, withered, and was allowed to die. Naturally. The two 'priesthoods' – the ordained, special priesthood of the few, and the priesthood of all believers – are mutually exclusive. As one flourished, the other was bound to decay. So much so, it could be said that the Fathers' inventions led inevitably to the forging of the medieval Church into nothing less

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<sup>29</sup> This principle is of fundamental importance. I intend to publish on it in my forthcoming book on the law. See also my *Infant*.

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than a vast machine in the hands of an oligarchy, by which they inexorably abolished the priesthood of all believers.

### ***Sacerdotalism was reinforced by the laying on of hands in ordination***

The history of ‘the laying on of hands’ merits study in its own right, since the rite, once the Fathers got a grip on it, had a considerable reinforcing effect on the notion of sacerdotalism, and gave huge impetus to the notion of the power and specialness of the clergy. Here, I can only hint at some of the leading points.

Using Simon Magus and the extraordinary episode with the Samaritans (Acts 8:14-24), coupled with misuse of another extraordinary episode in Acts (Acts 19:1-7), people soon began to think that certain men had the power to convey grace to them by laying their hands on them. In the beginning, this was thought of in connection with baptism. But as infant baptism began to grip the Church, belief in this supposed ability to dispense grace by the rite was strengthened, especially when it was connected with another invented rigmarole, namely, confirmation.

It was not long before the Fathers began to link the idea to ‘ordination’. Once a man was ordained, having received his gift from a previously ordained man by the laying on of *his* hands, the newly ordained man himself now had the power to ordain others in succession. And so on. While it is not possible to fix precise dates to the way this process developed, we may certainly agree that, by the 4th century, things were pretty well settled. Increasingly, the rite was attended with flummery, mumbo-jumbo and all sorts of quasi-magical gesticulations, bowings and scrapings. Thus, in the eyes of the duped masses, the clergy were ‘ordained’ men, ‘miraculously’ set apart, gifted in a highly specialised way. ‘Mysticism’ is the word, if not ‘magic’, ‘occult’ or ‘esoteric’. The down-to-earth effect, as Marjorie Warkentin observed, was that:

The sacerdotal ideas of the 4th century reinforced the connection [between the laying on of hands and the bestowal of gift], and led the Church to restrict the imposition of hands to the higher orders of the clergy.

What the common people understood by it all is an open question. But one thing they did know. Their souls (that is, the souls of the

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laity), and their eternities, were no longer in their own hands. Oh no! Rather, they were now securely imprisoned in the grip of this special band of priestly men, ordained clerics, mystically empowered men, who disposed of them as they willed. The clergy controlled and manipulated the laity, body, mind and soul.

Augustine might try to limit the damage by his usual tortuous metaphysics but, as Warkentin remarked, ‘popular belief obviously did not make such distinctions [as Augustine offered], but instead leaned toward a sacramentalism that finally found its full flowering in the Middle Ages’.<sup>30</sup> It is the old, old story. The theologians may say one thing – actually, half the time they say a dozen things, mutually contradictory things – but the common people believe what their eyes and experience tell them. They believe what they want to believe. That is how it was in those far-off days. And it is the same today. The majority believe that ordained men are different! Allowing for every highfalutin philosophical distinction and every caveat, once all the rites have been duly performed, ordained men are clerics. They are no longer *ordinary*; they are *ordained*!

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Let me sum up where we have reached. As I have shown, the churches, with little fuss, adopted a threefold ministry instead of the New Testament twofold order. Once the new system was in place, the bishop grew in importance while, inevitably, the presbyters were given a lesser and lesser role. In fact, they shrivelled to virtual inconsequence. The bishop became a quasi-apostle; presbyters became, in the end, mere administrative assistants, assistants who were ‘*usually* consulted’, leaving the bishop to run the show in conjunction with his fellow-bishops; the indispensable bishop being the centre of unity, the custodian of orthodoxy, the ‘vicegerent of Christ’, the dispenser of grace to ‘the faithful’.

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<sup>30</sup> Warkentin p42.

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The *Apostolic Constitutions* (compiled c390)<sup>31</sup> gathered all the threads together: The bishop is a sacrificing high priest, mediating the grace of God, to be given the offerings of God's people. The other orders have no such powers or rights. Nothing must be allowed to pervert this arrangement,<sup>32</sup> for 'God is not the God of confusion'.<sup>33</sup> Inferior persons (laity) should not 'tyrannically' assume functions which belong to their superiors (clergy). The *Constitutions*, pronouncing on the 'proper' way to 'ordain', allocated four powers or rights to the bishop, which powers became essential components of his authority:

1. Only a bishop could ordain. When the bishop was first introduced, presbyters were associated with him in ordination, but before long this power was confined to the bishop.
2. At ordination services, bishops from other churches would attend as representatives in order to play their part in the ordination.
3. The bishop became, for all practical purposes, the church. Correspondence between churches, for instance, was carried out at bishop level. Indeed, it went further – the bishop became more important than the church.
4. The bishop became the symbolic centre of Church unity in the battle against heretics. He became the pillar and guardian of truth.

As for the supremacy of the bishop, and the reservation of spiritual duties to him, what about the 'problem' of Philip and Ananias (Acts 8 and 9) who, though they were not bishops, not even presbyters, nevertheless baptised the eunuch and Paul respectively? How shocking! Actually, more than shocking – Philip and Ananias had destroyed the episcopal system before it had been invented! But, never fear, the *Constitutions* found a way round the problem: any man who dared to question the new system – an audacity indeed – was simply dismissed out of hand. This, if one is prepared to accept

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<sup>31</sup> Reader, do not misunderstand. Whatever else these *Constitutions* were, they were not 'apostolic'; they were certainly not drawn up by the apostles. Note the date. Three centuries had passed since the apostles.

<sup>32</sup> What about the perversion of the *biblical* order?

<sup>33</sup> Nor of this wicked nonsense.

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the conclusion before reading and weighing the argument, is a pretty effective way of ‘dealing’ with any problem. Many have found it a sovereign remedy. *Ad hominem* arguments are the key. ‘If you can’t get the ball, get the man’. Actually, in theological discussion, too often it seems to be: ‘Get the man. The ball will take care of itself’.

In any case, in this way, during the first three centuries, the ordained clergy – with the bishop at the apex – captured and appropriated the power and the ministry of the Church, leaving the *hoi polloi* – the laity – bereft of both. The priesthood of all believers was devalued, allowed to wither and eventually die out altogether – apart from among the radical and minority rabble, that is, the so-called heretics.

Which reminds us – protest was not unknown. While I do not say that these ‘heretics’ got everything right, at least they spotted this unbiblical arrogation of power by the bishop – and protested against it. Allowing that it is far more complicated and debated than I spell out here, I have already mentioned the Novatians, and then the Donatists of North Africa. Earlier, in the second half of the 2nd century, Montanus had proved a nuisance to the establishment. He was silenced, of course, but his ideas did not altogether die out. Novatian in the 3rd century stood for the main principles of Montanism, including opposition to episcopacy. Aerius,<sup>34</sup> in the 4th century, asserted the equality of bishop and presbyter, denying the need for episcopal ordination. He, too, was dismissed as a heretic, and his view as ‘frantic’. No doubt there were others, but as always, history is written by the victors.<sup>35</sup> And the victors were the sacramentalists and sacerdotalists.

J.C.Ryle was right:

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<sup>34</sup> Not to be confused with Arius (250/256-336).

<sup>35</sup> Nor has protest ceased – witness this book of mine. The cost to me, however, is trivial. But in the past, protest has been expensive. The Council of Toulouse in 1119 condemned those who rejected the priestly system. Tanchelm, killed about the year 1115, Henry of Lausanne, about 1116, were but two of those who suffered. Although I mentioned Tyburn in passing, I don’t feel in any great risk of its equivalent. At least, I hope not! But I’m far less sanguine about Coventry.

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Experience supplies painful proof that traditions once called into being are first called *useful*, then they become *necessary*. At last, they are too often made *idols*, and all must bow down to them, or be punished.<sup>36</sup>

### ***The next step: political power***

It was not long before the bishop came to be regarded as the bishop of a city, not simply a single church. I have dealt with the idea of a single bishop – but where does the idea of a bishop over a *city* come from?

What about Titus 1:5, Paul's command that Titus should 'appoint elders *in every town*' (NIV) or 'city' (AV, NKJV, NASB)? In addition to noting the apostolic plural, the question is this: Should Titus have appointed<sup>37</sup> elders in every town, *whether or not a church existed there*? Certainly not; to have done so would have been patent nonsense. Titus 1:5 does not sanction the appointment of elders over a town or city. Rather it sanctions the appointment of elders in every city *where there is a church*. In addition, it surely goes without saying, the elders are elders over *the church*, not the city. The proposal that biblical elders, whose remit is to care for regenerate church members, are to be set over pagans is ludicrous. It only makes sense when the biblical concept of a church has grievously broken down, broken down so as to be unrecognisable. What biblical mechanism would enable elders spiritually to rule, teach and discipline pagans who have not the slightest interest in the gospel – and worse, who are utterly at war with Christ? Even if Titus could have set elders over pagans, who would guarantee pagan submission to biblical rule?

It might help to drive the point home if a comparison is made with Acts 15:21. 'Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times'. This, of course, as James went on to explain, occurred because the books of Moses were being 'read in the synagogues on every sabbath'. The idea that pagan Gentiles were reading – let alone preaching – the law of Moses in cities *where there was no synagogue*, and had done so for 'many generations' (NKJV), is ludicrous.

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<sup>36</sup> Ryle: *Mark* p138, emphasis his.

<sup>37</sup> As before, I will come back to 'appointed'.



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Nevertheless, the Fathers thought it would be a good idea if bishops *were* appointed over cities. Once that was up and running – surprise, surprise – somebody had the bright idea of ‘improving’ on it. During the 3rd century, this led to the idea of metropolitans or patriarchs. A metropolitan was a specially dignified bishop; pomp piled upon grandeur. He was afforded special honour because he ruled over a metropolis in a province of imperial Rome. Wow! Next, a hierarchy appeared even among the metropolitans. Three, the bishops of the three leading Roman cities – Rome, Alexandria and Antioch – were accorded greater powers and dignity than the others. Naturally, there had to be some outward recognition of all this hierarchy. As the prestige of bishops increased, so did their social status and insignia of rank – robes, staff, mitre, and so on.

Now that princely bishops had been introduced into the Church, naturally a political struggle for mastery among them was inevitable – one bishop trying to climb over another to reach the top of the greasy pole, and thus get his hands on the global corporation. There is nothing to wonder at in this. The church had aped the world. It ended up like the world. In fact, it ended up more worldly than the world!

To trace all the steps in detail would be tedious and utterly unedifying. ‘Sordid’ is a word that springs to mind. Let me briefly summarise things.

The struggle for mastery! Stephen of Rome (254-257), for example, denounced Cyprian of Carthage, and in so doing appealed to Matthew 16 in an attempt to claim that the bishop of Rome was Peter’s successor and, therefore, the chief bishop. In 314, this move was taken further at the Council of Arles. Until then, while all bishops had been addressed as ‘Your Holiness’, the bishop of Rome was now given the title of ‘Bishop Most Glorious’. Damasus, a later bishop of Rome (366-384), took a further step. He defined Rome as ‘the apostolic see’; perhaps, to capture his emphasis, I should have said ‘The Apostolic See’.<sup>38</sup> Then the First Council of

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<sup>38</sup> A ‘see’ was originally the official seat (or throne) of a bishop. This seat, which is also known as his *cathedra*, and is a symbol of his authority, is placed in his main church building; hence, a cathedral. ‘See’ is also the cathedral’s location. In addition, it is the area over which the bishop

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Constantinople (381) acknowledged Rome as the principal see of the Church, whose bishop consequently became the highest ranking bishop of all. Rome and its bishop had become top-dog of top-dogs. The Council of Chalcedon (451) recognised the bishop of Rome and his successors as Pope over all others, the Emperor calling him the ‘chief wearer of the apostolic crown’.

While there was some resistance to this rise of the bishop of Rome, it was of little avail. During the following century, the bishop of Rome assumed the exclusive use of the title Pope to become the Universal Bishop of the entire Catholic Church.

Well... that’s not quite the whole story! In the 2nd century, for example, the Pope of Rome had flexed his muscles and tried to impose his will on the entire Church. But he had failed. The eastern Church would have none of it, and, as a result it was excommunicated by the frustrated Pope. Then there was the region of Milan (Lombardy, Piedmont and the southern provinces of France). From the 4th to the middle of the 11th century, Milan was a constant thorn in the side of Rome – and even after 1059, when the Milanese were ‘reconciled’ to the Papacy, the Waldenses continued their resistance. And what about the papal schism – when for a time there were two – and then three – rival Popes excommunicating each other? But in general, in the west, Rome ruled. OK?<sup>39</sup>

And how! Climbing to new heights (or, perhaps it would be better to say, plumbing new depths), the Council of Florence (1438-39) proclaimed the Roman Pontiff supreme over all the world, the true Vicar of Christ, and head of the whole Church, the Father and Teacher of all Christians, the Successor of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. In short, the Council of Florence asserted that Christ has committed the full power of feeding, ruling and governing the Universal Church into the hands of the Roman Pope. In 1870, Pius IX took the Papacy to even dizzier heights. From that time, the Pope speaking *ex cathedra* has been infallible. That is, when he

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exercises authority, a diocese. Notice how complicated things become when we move away from Scripture.

<sup>39</sup> I do not mean to be flippant. Rome claimed to rule. She wanted to rule men and nations, for time and eternity. If anybody objected, they paid the price.

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says so, in his arrogated possession of supreme apostolic authority, what he pronounces is unquestionable and unalterable. Those who dare to question this pretended absolute power and authority of the Pope over the entire Church are anathematised. A remarkable insight into what the Pope means by claiming to be ‘servant of the servants of Christ’.<sup>40</sup> Even to this day, if he pronounces that the moon is made of green cheese, over a billion men and women believe it. And if, tomorrow, he says it is made of blue cheese, those same millions change their mind. Or so they pretend.

And, let us not forget – or kid ourselves – such ‘popery’ is not confined to Rome. By no means!

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In this way, the simplicity of the New Testament was corrupted, and a spiritual monster put in its place. Once again, reader, I remind you of Clarkson’s warning about seemingly small and trivial departures from Christ’s rule. It is highly dangerous – it is wrong – to let unscriptural things come into the church. The consequences will be horrendous.

When a railway track divides at points, at first the change is minute, hardly perceptible. But two trains, taking different lines, will end up in very different places. It is the terminus which counts. But it is the set of points which is the cause.

As Clarkson pointed out:

The first step to the Pope’s throne was the inequality introduced among ministers, by one degree after another, rising to a papal height. There was granted to one person, first a presidency over others, then a sole power of ordination, then a sole power of jurisdiction over the rest; and that first over all in a city or diocese, then over all a province, then over all in several provinces, then at last over the whole world. If this inequality, in the former degrees of it, had not been yielded to, the man of sin could never have advanced himself above all that is called God. If that egg had never been laid, or had been crushed when it first appeared, this cockatrice had never been hatched; it had never become a dragon, or such a fiery flying serpent as we now find it.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Coined by Gregory I (590-604), and assumed exclusively by the Pope since the 12th century.

<sup>41</sup> Clarkson p505.

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Listen to Sir Henry Vane the younger, speaking in Parliament on the Root and Branch Bill, June 11th, 1641. Vane argued:

The hierarchical structure of episcopacy grew from a spirit of pride... first exalting itself above its fellow-presbyters under the form of bishops; then over its fellow-bishops under the title of archbishops, and so still mounting over those of its own profession, till it came to be Pope... Episcopacy was not established by Christ and must therefore represent the spirit of Antichrist. Through it, superstition and corruption in worship and doctrine have been introduced.<sup>42</sup>

And while the Papacy has continued to develop the warped system, refining it until it has reached its present state of abomination, many others still fondly hope they can steer clear of Rome and yet build on the misguided notions introduced by the Fathers, tradition and speculation. They still try to argue black is white: Episcopacy involves no new principle, they say. Oh? The Church has the right to increase the powers of any particular office, they claim. Does it? The power of the episcopate today is not quite the same as during the time of the Fathers, they allege. Does this make it right? And in any case, leaving aside the Fathers, what, I ask, about the churches of the New Testament?

Yet, as I have already mentioned, even as I write, Reformed and evangelical teachers, scholars, writers and publishers are increasingly turning to the Fathers and encouraging their followers to do the same. Baptists are doing it. It is incredible.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Enter Constantine***

In passing, I have only hinted at the role played in all this by the Roman Emperor. Let Diprose spell out Constantine's pivotal role in the 4th century:

Constantine reorganised the Church, using as his model the administrative structures of the Roman empire. This factor, wedded to the hierarchical structure inherited from Alexandria and from Cyprian, radically changed the concept of the church from that of a body whose leaders were servants, to that of 'a fixed order where some were permanently set over others'... The 'people' were counted as part of the

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<sup>42</sup> Adamson and Folland p157.

<sup>43</sup> See my earlier note. I mean 'incredible'. I know it happens, but I can hardly credit it.

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Church only through their link with the bishop who incarnated the Church's true substance. Constantine believed that his religious role as 'pontifex maximus' (supreme priest) included being high priest of the... Church as well as of pagan religion. Hence he felt it his duty to maintain order in the Church; for example by convening Councils to resolve doctrinal disputes.

And the upshot? Just this:

By such interference, and the creation of ecclesiastical regions, [Constantine] left an indelible mark on the Church... Constantine's religious policies... favoured the concept of the territorial Church; they consolidated the division between clergy and laity; and they contributed to the development of a medieval theocracy... Constantine gave architectural<sup>44</sup> expression to the separation of the clergy from the laity. He also rendered<sup>45</sup> the idea that the main function of the clergy was the administration of the sacraments, in particular of the Eucharist [the Lord's supper], on an *altar of sacrifice*, in *the most holy place*. Baptisteries were usually built separately. While proclamation [preaching] was still important, it was shown not to be central. From this point on, in the popular understanding, the basilica with its officiating ministers, would be perceived as *the Church* while the laity, who received the ministrations offered by the hierarchical Church, become the *faithful* who *attended* Church.<sup>46</sup>

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Let the Anabaptist, Sebastian Franck, have the last word in this brief account of the ruin of the governance of the churches. Franck knew that, as I have traced out, the rot set in long before Constantine: 'The outward church of Christ was wasted and destroyed right after the apostles. This is what the wolves, that is the Fathers, amply prove'. Just in case his use of 'wolves' should not be a clear enough indication of how he viewed these men, Franck was far from squeamish in spelling out what he thought of those 'highly famous doctors... [whose] works, especially [those] of

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<sup>44</sup> I am somewhat at a loss with 'architectural' in this context. Did Diprose mean 'byzantine', 'bureaucratical', or 'structural' or what?

<sup>45</sup> I am somewhat at a loss with 'rendered'. Did Diprose mean 'put forward' or 'whitewashed'? Or could it be 'tendered' – 'held out'?

<sup>46</sup> Diprose pp129-130,132,134-135, emphasis his. For more on Constantine and others, see my *Battle, Infant, Baptist Sacramentalism*.

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Clement, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Chrysostom, Hilary, Cyril, Origen and others which are... quite unlike the spirit of the apostles, that is, utterly filled with commandments, laws, sacramental elements and all kinds of human inventions'. Franck castigated them as 'wolves, the doctors of un wisdom, apes of the apostles and antichrists'. Speaking warmly of the so-called heretics, he asserted that in the days of the Fathers – but distinct from the Fathers – there were those:

Who understood the truth of these things [but] their writings and instructions were suppressed by these as godless heresies and nonsense; and in their place in esteem came foolish Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory... [who] mix the New Testament with the Old, as also today their descendants do. And when they have nothing with which to defend their purposes, they run at once to the empty quiver – that is, the Old Testament – and from it [attempt to] prove [the legitimacy of]... priesthood, and praise everything and ascribe this all forcibly to [the church of] Christ without his will. And just as the Popes have derived all from this, so also many of those who would have themselves called evangelicals [the magisterial Reformers – see below] hold that they have nobly escaped the snare of the Pope and the devil, [yet they] have nevertheless achieved... nothing more than that they have exchanged and confounded the priesthood of the Pope with the Mosaic kingdom!<sup>47</sup>

So much for the corruption of the New Testament order of the rule of the church. Very quickly after the death of the apostles, the church had fallen from its original condition, and, by the close of the 15th century, had become a very different body indeed. Moreover, it had been in that wretched state for centuries. Could anything be done about it? It had fallen – but had it fallen beyond repair?

Before I look at that, however, let me now say something about the corresponding corruption of the priesthood of all believers. As I have hinted on the way, as the Fathers brought in the special priesthood – the clergy – so they allowed the universal priesthood to wither on the vine. It was inevitable. Ultimately, the two cannot co-exist.

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<sup>47</sup> Franck in G.H.Williams pp148-152. I have omitted even stronger sentiments.

***The corruption of the priesthood of all believers***

Make no mistake about it. Just as the doctrine and practice of church rule has been ruined, so has the doctrine and practice of the priesthood of all believers. It is inevitable. As the one rises, the other must fall. As the New Testament rule of the church was twisted into a monstrosity, so the New Testament priesthood of all believers fell into disuse and decay. Very largely, it remains so to this very day. And this has brought corresponding damage to the biblical concept of an all-body ministry in the church. I will have more to say on this vital matter.

The question at this point is: How did we get here? How, and when, was ‘the priesthood of all believers’ deformed? Surprise, surprise, just as the Fathers invented a non-New Testament way of governing the churches, in tandem with that they set in place a system which weakened the power of ‘the priesthood of all believers’, they allowed it to shrivel, and, eventually, virtually to die out. Let me sketch the history of this dreadful and costly decline.

After the death of the apostles, the priesthood of all believers continued more or less intact for about 150 years – until the time of Cyprian (c200-258). And just as he was the major figure in the ruination of the New Testament church rule, so he was responsible for starting the breakdown of the priesthood of all believers. The early Fathers, until Cyprian’s time, had largely held to the principle of the priesthood of all believers.

But then came Cyprian. As we have seen, it was Cyprian who introduced the concept of the levitical priesthood into the Church. In so doing, he shattered the New Testament way of treating the old covenant, turning the Bible on its head. Instead of the Church taking old covenant principles and shadows and applying them in a spiritual way within carefully nuanced limits as defined by the New Testament, Cyprian introduced into the Church the notion of a *special* priesthood – ministers, priests, the clergy – thereby fatally weakening the new-covenant priesthood of *all* believers. Not only so, as I have shown, the Church went to the pagans and the Roman Empire, grabbing any passing practice or terminology that took their fancy, and, lo and behold, it was not long before steps were

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being taken which would lead to wholesale priestcraft, sacramentalism and sacerdotalism – with the offering of a real sacrifice in the Mass – and Popery. A carnal monstrosity had replaced the new-covenant principle of the priesthood of all believers. The new-fangled unbiblical priests were all. The people – whether they were true believers, the new-covenant priests of Christ, or were downright unconverted pagans – were ciphers.

It will come as no surprise to learn that the priesthood of all believers, once lost, was far from easy to find again. And, even when it has been found, it has proved even harder to reinstate in all its New Testament glory. As a result, the churches in general, and believers in particular, both corporately and individually, have been immeasurably the poorer. Not only so. Unbelievers, too have suffered immense loss. How? They have too often been confronted, not with the vibrant effects of the priesthood of all believers, but with the stultifying, professional and institutionalised Fathers' invention of the special priesthood of the clergy. As a result, they have not been shown Christ, but Christendom. It has been a tragedy of colossal proportions.

In the next chapter, I will trace the attempts that have been made down the centuries to recover the New Testament position.