

## ***The Establishment of Bishops***

On Sunday morning in my Bible class Veronica asked about the establishment of bishops of the regions that eventually led to the papacy in Rome. I was unsure of the dates on the spot, so let me share some information I found that can be helpful. Of course, I must begin by saying that in the New Testament the churches were led by a plurality of elders (also called bishops, pastors, presbyters, shepherds, etc.). This is seen in Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11-16, I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, I Peter 5:1-4, etc. The only divergence we see in this pattern is in the middle of the second century when a handful of congregations began having lead bishops or head elders (<http://www.bible.ca/catholic-organization.htm>).

After the death of the apostles, specifically John (around 90 AD), there were some in the Christian community that wanted to follow apostolic traditions. The eyewitnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection were dying out. Since Jesus appointed successors, some Christians preferred the apostles appoint successors (mentor/protégé). It is assumed, by most Catholics, that there was an "apostolic succession" though it is not recorded in the New Testament or in documented in first century writings to my knowledge ([http://catholicism.about.com/od/organization/p/The\\_Bishop.htm](http://catholicism.about.com/od/organization/p/The_Bishop.htm)).

Also, because of heavy persecution and false teaching in the churches, Church leaders were starting to feel the pressure and felt the congregations needed stricter oversight. Therefore, in 110 AD Ignatius of Antioch suggested appointing regional bishops. As a side note, he is also the first to call all of the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16) the Catholic (universal) church when he writes a letter to the church at Smyrna. Was Timothy called upon to fulfill one of these regional bishop positions?

As I mentioned in class I have heard Catholics declare that according to their traditions, Paul consecrated Timothy as bishop of Ephesus, (65 AD) and he served for 15 years along side of the apostle John, but eventually was exalted to a regional position. This seems unlikely because by tradition, it was in the year 97 AD (at age 80) when Timothy was preaching of the gospel to some pagans who beat him, dragged him through the streets, and stoned him to death (see Foxes Book of Martyrs). I could not find anywhere in written documentation that Timothy filled such a position.

What I did find in my research was that in the year 250 AD, 150 years after Timothy's presumed death, that Fabian (now exalted by the Roman Catholic Church as a pope) appointed seven regional bishops. These regional appointments included: Gaius to Tours, Trophimus to Arles, Paul to Narbonne, Saturnin to Toulouse, Denis to Paris, Austromoine to Clermont, and Martial to Limoges ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_the\\_Roman\\_Catholic\\_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Roman_Catholic_Church)). Obviously, Timothy is not on this particular list. If Timothy was one of the seven regional bishops then either it happened before 250 AD or Timothy was a VERY old when he was appointed. This would also mean that this list is either incorrect or Timothy had a surname (unlikely).

I would also like to point out that the only references we can find to regional meetings of the churches were events like the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), which took place when the church was in its infancy. By the end of the book of Acts it seems that congregations were working autonomously under the oversight of elders in each congregation. In fact, it is not until the 300's, when Constantine enters the scene that Rome (or any other city for that matter) has any real power and influence over the other regions and congregations. And in 325 AD, after the Council of Nicaea, the church begins to enforce creeds and falls further from the pattern of the early church. It seems that the congregations of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, etc., are left behind and the political power of the Emperor becomes a religious stronghold as well. Of course, other councils would follow in the decades and century after until the Scriptures were pushed aside almost entirely for the sake of new traditions and the authority of the church fathers. Nearly any doctrine could be established if either endorsed by an ecumenical council or a majority vote by church leaders.

By the late 400's and early 500's it was decided to have 5 Patriarchs rule over the church as and Autocephalous oligarchy within their own respective territories. (Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem) Rome and Constantinople are seen as near equals (higher than the others), but neither Rome or Constantinople had universal authority (Notes on Church History, Wayne Kilpatrick). It was in 606 AD that Boniface III declared himself as the first pope (<http://www.bible.ca/catholic-organization.htm>).

Another important point to make that because the teachings of the Catholic Church are mainly tradition, and taught without much documentation, there are many conflicting viewpoints. One would almost have to alter history, or revise historical record, to teach certain things as fact. For instance, a full list of popes is given on many websites that begin with the apostle Peter ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_popes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_popes)), others exalt Constantine as the first pope (<http://www.reformation.org/pope-constantine.html>), Pope Vitalian is the first to use this name in written English records (Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People), but Boniface proclaimed himself as the first "Universal Bishop" so he is hailed as the first REAL pope.

If you wish to learn more about all of the positions of bishops I would encourage you to do some research on line (i.e. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop\\_\(Catholic\\_Church\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_(Catholic_Church)), <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop>). If you wish to see God's pattern for leadership in the New Testament church I urge you to get a Bible and read Acts, I-II Timothy, and Titus.