

Dogmatic Theology

THE PRIESTHOOD



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Christ, as Head of the church and therefore the One on whom the whole body of the church depends (Eph. 4:15; Cor. 1:14) and as “High Priest of the good things that have come” (Heb. 9:11), chose a number of men and named them apostles (Lk. 6:13; Jn. 15:16). By the full authority that was committed to Him, He commanded them to go forth and baptize people everywhere and teach them to observe His commandments (Mt. 28:18-20).



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These men were thus solemnly set apart, invested with a certain authority, and entrusted with the task of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and preaching the kingdom of God (Mt. 10:1-7).



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They alone were given the power of forgiving sins or withholding forgiveness (Jn. 20:21-23). For the proper fulfillment of His task throughout the ages, these apostles appointed bishops and priests in the same manner, according to the sacrament instituted by our Lord, and they, in turn, were succeeded by others in all the apostolic churches of Christendom.



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Adherents of some nonapostolic churches tend to minimize the significance of this sacrament, arguing that all faithful members of the congregation can be considered ministers to the Lord. It is evident, however, that besides the above-mentioned facts of the divine institution of this mystery, it was essential to have an ecclesiastical structure whereby the spiritual welfare of the faithful,



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their protection against heresies and unsound teachings, and the administration of discipline could be consigned to certain trustworthy individuals after the apostles themselves had departed this life.



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Thus, the apostles ordained bishops, presbyters, and deacons in all the churches that they established. At Jerusalem they appointed seven deacons by praying and laying their hands on them (Acts 6:3-6); St. Paul and Barnabas appointed presbyters and committed them to the Lord (Acts 14:23); St Paul set up Timothy as bishop at Ephesus, exhorting him not to neglect the spiritual gift that he was given under the guidance of prophecy, through the laying-on of hands of the presbytery (1 Tm. 4:14),



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and prompted him to confide his own teaching into the hands of other competent and trustworthy men. Likewise, having named Titus bishop in Crete, St Paul instructed him to carry out his intention in so doing, that is, to set up presbyters in each town (Ti. 1:5).



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THE ECCLESIASTICAL HIERARCHY



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The threefold structure of the priesthood is analogous to, And reflects that of, the angelic host, each also having its own three subdivisions.

The latter consists of :

1. The CHERUBIM (Ex. 10:18), the seraphim (Is. 6:2), and the thrones (Col. 1:16);



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2. Dominions, principalities, and authorities (Col. 1:16);
3. Powers (I Pt. 3:22),
ARCHANGELS, and ANGELS
(Rom. 8:38; 1 Thes. 4:16).

The ecclesiastical hierarchy includes :

1. Pope or patriarch, metropolitan, and bishop;
2. CHOREPISCOPUS, protopresbyter (hegumenos), and presbyter
3. Deacon, subdeacon, and reader (Chanter).



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Perhaps the first and earliest of the early fathers to dwell upon this analogy was St CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (c. 150-215): "In the Church the gradations of bishops, presbyters, and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the Apostles, and who have lived in perfect righteousness according to the Gospel" (1970, p. 184).



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In the writings of the early fathers there is ample (plenty) evidence that ever since the apostolic age, the principle of an organized priesthood was closely followed. In the words of St Clement of Rome (fl. c. 96), "The Apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ . . . they went forth proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, They appointed the first fruits (of their labors), having first proved them by the Spirit to be bishops and deacons" (1956, p. 16).



RANKS OF THE CHURCH

Patriarch	Archdeacon
Metropolitan	Deacon "Diakon"
Bishop	Sub-Deacon "Epi-diakon"
Hegomen	Reader "Anaghanostos "
Presbyter	Psalter "Psaltos"
	Qayem
	Laity



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THE EARLY FATHERS

St IGNATIUS, bishop of Antioch (c. 35-107), wrote to the Ephesians, "I exhort you to study to do all the things with a divine harmony, while your bishop presides . . . and your presbyters . . . along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ."



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To take holy orders is to become a member of the community that the Lord designated as the "salt of the earth" (Mt. 5:13) and "the light of the world" (Mt. 5:14). It is necessary, therefore, that candidates for the priesthood have a genuine and unmistakable vocation for it, with no motive other than to participate fully and wholeheartedly in the sublime "service of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:8). It is because of this that Saint Paul warned Timothy against hastily ordaining unfit persons (1 Tm. 5:22).



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Among the early fathers who dealt with the subject, Saint Jerome (c. 342-420) grasped the essence of priesthood: "A clergyman . . . must first understand what his name means; and then . . . must endeavor to be that which he is called.

For since the Greek word [cleros] means "lot,' or "inheritance,' the clergy are so called either because they are the lot of the Lord, or else because the Lord Himself is their lot and portion."



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