

Apostolic Succession in the Apostolic Fathers:
A Doctrine of Community

Daniel A. Taylor

April 25, 2025

Apostolic Succession in the Apostolic Fathers: A Doctrine of Community © 2025 by Daniel A. Taylor is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

In 1965, the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican completed its wide-ranging, four-year effort to “*aggiornare*”—or “adapt”—the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching to better reflect the questions and practicalities of a modern and increasingly-secular world.¹ Among the sixteen “schemas” developed and approved by the council of assembled bishops was the *Unitatis redintegratio*, the decree on the reintegration of unity between the Christians of the Catholic Church and those of other denominations. In this remarkable document, the Council acknowledged the salvation and divine grace enjoyed by Christians outside of Roman Catholicism and expressed a desire that all Christians be unified—in practice as well as in mystical fact—under the care and authority of the universal Church.²

This ecumenical spirit notwithstanding, the Council did not overlook the difficulties incumbent in achieving practical reunification:

The differences that exist in varying degrees between [non-Catholic Christians] and the Catholic Church – whether in doctrine and sometimes in discipline, or concerning the structure of the Church – do indeed create many obstacles, sometimes serious ones, to full ecclesiastical communion.³

One such obstacle is the doctrine of *apostolic succession*, which is understood and accepted in differing degrees across the various Christian denominations. Put very generally, it is the doctrine that the work of the *Apostles*—those individuals sent by Christ for the purpose of

1. John XXIII, *Solenne apertura del Concilio Vaticano II*. Vatican website, 11 October 1962, accessed 24 April, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html.

2. Vatican Council II, *Unitatis redintegratio: Decree on Ecumenism* (Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1964), 2, 4, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html. (Hereafter cited as *UR*); Seán O’Riordan, “The Third Session,” *The Furrow* 15, no. 11 (November 1964): 692.

3. *UR*, 3.

spreading God’s message of redemption⁴—continued through subsequent generations via the ministers of the Church. In this way, it may be said that the Church itself is apostolic for, while the individual workers come and go, the work itself remains unchanged across the ages.⁵ Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians rely upon a similar, formal understanding of apostolic succession, which claims that each bishop is ordained into an apostolic tradition that traces its descent in a direct line from the Apostles; for the Apostles appointed some bishops, who then appointed others, over the years to the present day. This claim of succession is presented as proof that the bishops share in the same apostolic work as the New Testament Apostles, and therefore enjoy the same authority, status, and responsibilities.⁶ Protestant and evangelical denominations, in contrast, either consider apostolic succession differently in scope and authority—usually insisting that the nature of succession is less authoritative or formal than the Catholic position—or in some cases claim that the apostolic ministry was special to the Apostles, and therefore

4. *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Apostle,” accessed April 24, 2025, Logos Bible Software.

5. Vatican Council II, *Apostolicam actuositatem: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1965), 1, 19, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html. (Hereafter cited as *AA*); Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum ordinis: Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* (Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1965), 2, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat_ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html. (Hereafter cited as *PO*); Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, *The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God* (Rome: Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, 1988), I.11, <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese2.html>. (Hereafter cited as *SO*)

6. *PO*, 11; *SO*, IV. Roman Catholic and Orthodox views on apostolic succession are not identical, for they differ in the point of primacy. Their disagreement over the primacy of the bishop of Rome is rooted in their different understandings of apostolic succession. Additional studies on this point may begin with the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity publication, *The Bishop of Rome: Primacy and Synodality in the Ecumenical Dialogues and in the Responses to the Encyclical Ut unum sint* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2024), which has been made available online at <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/news/2024/2024-06-13-il-vescovo-di-roma-nuovo-documento-dpuc.html>.

ceased with their deaths at the end of the so-called *apostolic age*.⁷

Though esoteric at first glance, claims of apostolic succession are of critical importance to Christians who wish to comply with biblical teachings. For example, while completing their first missionary journey—as described in the *Acts of the Apostles*—Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders” for the sake of the believers in the nascent churches of Asia Minor. In recounting this episode, Luke, the author, did not elaborate upon the functions of these elders, except to say they were “committed to the Lord” and had received the “trust” of the two missionaries.⁸ This omission is understandable, for Luke wrote *The Acts of the Apostles* for an ostensible audience of one: Theophilus, a man who had already been taught the doctrines of the early church and would therefore have been familiar with its ecclesiastical structure.⁹ For the modern reader, however, Luke’s introduction of the office of elder raises a number of questions: What was the nature of this appointment? What were the functions of the elders? Were the elders able to lose their offices, or transfer them to others? What was an elder’s position among the lay Christians of their congregations? How should a modern Christian align himself accordingly?

In attempting to find appropriate answers to these questions, it may be illustrative to examine the non-canonical writings of the early church. These are the writings that survive from the *sub-apostolic age*, that period of time from about 100 to 150 *anno Domini* that began with the death of John, the last Apostle to survive. During this period, the early church was largely led

7. Thomas Smyth, “The Prelactical Doctrine of Apostolical Succession Examined, and the Protestant Ministry Defended Against the Assumptions of Popery and High-Churchism, in a Series of Lectures,” in *Complete Works of Rev. Thomas Smyth, D. D.*, vol. 1, ed. J. William Flinn (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Company, 1908), 42, <https://archive.org/details/completeworksofr01smyt/page/n5/mode/2up>; Edward L. Litton, *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*, New ed., ed. Philip E. Hughes (London: James Clarke & Co., 1960), 388-389.

8. Acts 14:23 (NIV).

9. Luke 1:4. Acts 1:1.

by those who had been appointed by the Apostles, those “elders” mentioned by Luke. This second generation of Christian leaders are often referred to as the *apostolic fathers*, based upon their relationships with the Apostles; either having been taught by them, been selected by them to shepherd a congregation of the church, or both.¹⁰ Though not all the writings extant from the sub-apostolic age were written by the apostolic fathers themselves, they constitute the best information available about the prevailing attitudes of the church of this period.¹¹ It does not strain expectation then, that these writings will prove useful for understanding how those closest to the Apostles understood the function of the sub-apostolic church, providing insight into contemporary claims about the doctrine of apostolic succession.¹² After initial consideration of two important *caveats* related to the use of the sub-apostolic writings to analyze doctrine, and a subsequent comparison of the various ideas that can be meant by the term “apostolic succession,” the narrative will identify and examine the relevant themes in the apostolic fathers’ *corpus* and, from them, explicate a sub-apostolic proto-doctrine of apostolic succession. Finally, this proto-doctrine will be compared to the different views of the modern doctrine, which will yield insights into how the doctrine should be best understood today.

10. *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, s.v. “Apostolic Fathers, The,” (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), accessed 24 April, 2025, <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/apostolic-fathers-the>; *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. Polycarp, Saint, accessed 24 April, 2025, <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/polycarp-saint>.

11. Bart Ehrman, “General Introduction,” *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume I: I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache*, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1, <https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL024/2003/volume.xml>.

12. Ibid., 12-14. As Ehrman notes, the fragile scholarly evidence supporting the authenticity of the *Apostolic Fathers’ corpus* perhaps makes it better to consider the collection as an assembly of convenience, rather than authority. As a reflection of the attitudes of the church in the sub-apostolic age, it is therefore likely to be adequate, if not comprehensive.

Two Caveats in Studying Sub-Apostolic Literature

Before embarking upon the study of apostolic succession in the sub-apostolic church, two issues must first be considered to ensure the analysis is likely to yield valid conclusions. The first is determining which ancient sources will be used in the analysis, and the second, establishing an analytical method that is likely to yield useful results. These prevent the potential errors of polluting the source material with spurious and distracting works, and of drawing conclusions that extend beyond what the source material will support.

Caveat One: Determining the Corpus of Study

There are a wide number of ostensibly sub-apostolic writings, each surrounded by various scholarly opinions either supporting or opposing their inclusion in the accepted *corpus* of sub-apostolic age Christian literature. Of these writings, sixteen are broadly considered to be genuine, either as writings by the apostolic fathers Clement, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp, or contemporaneous with them: the epistle of Clement to the Corinthians; the wrongly-attributed second epistle of Clement; the noninterpolated forms of seven epistles of Ignatius; Polycarp's sole surviving epistle, to the Philippians; the epistle written by an unknown author to his correspondent, Diognetus; the *Didache* or, translated to English, *The Lord's Teaching by the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*; the epistle commonly-attributed to Barnabas¹³; Hermas' work of allegorical vision, *The Shepherd*; an encyclical account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, and the

13. Ehrman, "Introduction to the Epistle of Barnabas," *The Apostolic Fathers, Volume II: Epistle of Barnabas. Papias and Quadratus. Epistle to Diognetus. The Shepherd of Hermas*, Loeb Classical Library 25 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5-6, <https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL025/2003/volume.xml>.; Though authentic to the sub-apostolic age, it neither claims to be, nor was it likely written, by the Apostle Barnabas of Antioch.

fragments and quotations of the apostolic fathers Papias and Quadratus that, sadly, are all that survive from their apparently prodigious output.¹⁴ Those works that are most concerned with the ecclesiastical functions of the church are, unsurprisingly, those written by the apostolic fathers Clement, Polycarp, and Ignatius, who were themselves bishops in their own local congregations. Their nine authentic epistles, therefore, along with the Papias and Quadratus fragments, will comprise the *corpus* of study.¹⁵

Though there are other works attributed to these authors, careful analysis supports their pseudo-epigraphical nature and, therefore, their exclusion from analysis. Ignatius seems to be the most common victim of these spurious epistles, with nearly as many inauthentic epistles to his name as genuine. The content of these spurious letters neither reflect the practical and doctrinal concerns common to the sub-apostolic age, nor comport stylistically with the earliest versions of Ignatius' authentic writings. These were clearly written after the sub-apostolic age by authors who were interested, perhaps, in having the ostensible opinions of an ancient hero of the faith on contemporary fourth-century doctrinal issues available for their use.¹⁶ Complicating matters further is the existence of both long and short versions of Ignatius' authentic epistles. The stylistic similarity of the long versions to the pseudo-epigraphical Ignatius letters, and the phenomenon of middle-ages Christian writers exclusively quoting from the short versions, has led to a broad consensus that the novel material in the long versions was interpolated after the

14. Ehrman, "General Introduction," 12-14; Ehrman, Bart, "Introduction to Papias and Quadratus," *Apostolic Fathers, Vol. II*, 86-90.

15. Brief biographies of these men may be found in the section, "Ministerial Themes in the Apostolic Fathers," below.

16. Ehrman, "Introduction to the Letters of Ignatius," *Apostolic Fathers, Vol. I*, Loeb Classical Library 24 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 209-208, 211, <https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL024/2003/volume.xml>.

life of Ignatius, and that the short, noninterpolated versions are most authentic.¹⁷

Brief consideration should be given to other texts that can be dated to the sub-apostolic age but nonetheless are not included in this study. These are works like the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, which were read by Christians during that period but are not included by scholars in the collected writings of the apostolic fathers, due to questions over their stated authorships. Since scholarly opinion considers it unlikely that Peter wrote the *Gospel of Peter* or Thomas the *Gospel of Thomas*, it is unlikely these works reflect the views of the apostolic fathers and so they may be safely excluded from this analysis of the prevailing church thought and practice of the time.¹⁸

Caveat Two: Avoiding Erroneous Conclusions

With the textual *corpus* prepared, a thought should be given to the methods of analysis it will be subjected to. These will include a detailed reading of the selected texts, and subsequent identification of their general themes that are relevant to the modern doctrine of apostolic succession. This is necessarily a subjective method and thus is prone to the assumptions and biases of the analyst. One such assumption relates to the nature of any discoveries that are made. Should the analysis reveal insights into the ecclesiastical attitudes and practices of the sub-apostolic church and apostolic fathers, is it more appropriate to consider these insights as merely historically descriptive, or can they be considered as prescriptions for modern-day church best-

17. Ehrman, "Introduction to the Letters of Ignatius," *Apostolic Fathers, Vol. I*, 209-211.

18. Ehrman, "General Introduction," *Apostolic Fathers, Vol. I*, 11.; Paul Foster, "The Disputed Early Fragments of the So-Called Gospel of Peter—Once Again," *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 4 (January 2007): 403-404, https://brill.com/view/journals/nt/49/4/article-p402_5.xml; M. David Litwa, "Thomas in Alexandria: Arguments for Locating the Gospel and Book of Thomas in Alexandria," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 143, no. 1 (2004): 163-165, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1431.2024.9>.

practice? The answer appears to lie somewhere between the two stated extremes. As Michael Ramsey states in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*:

Discussions of the primitive Christian ministry have filled a large place in modern theological literature. The adherents of almost every post-Reformation Church-system have sought to prove that their own form of ministry has the sanction of the New Testament, and the debates have often been tedious....

....*To burrow in the New Testament for forms of ministry and imitate them is archaeological religion: to seek that form of ministry that the whole New Testament creates is the more evangelical way* [emphasis added].¹⁹

Though written by an Anglican with every reason to favor an interpretation that supports subsequent developments in formal apostolic succession, the point is fair. To study the early church merely to find evidence to support a presupposed doctrine fails to truly reckon with the people who comprised that church and made decisions informed by the teaching they had received and their specific circumstances. Analysis of the writings of the sub-apostolic age, therefore, should be approached out of the desire to learn what those authors thought about both Christian practice and Christian disposition. While their practices may or may not be replicable in the modern church, the dispositions behind the practices are more likely to be instructive.

These two *caveats* considered, the argument turns next to a more detailed examination of the doctrine of apostolic succession itself, specifically the varying ideas that are held about it, which will inform the analysis of the *Apostolic Fathers* writings that follows.

The Three Views of Apostolic Succession

As previously discussed, apostolic succession is the general idea that the ministry of the Apostles did not end with their deaths, but rather continued on to the present day through the

19. Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, (1936; repri., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 72-73, Kindle.

ministers of the church. The Greek word *ἀπόστολος*—translated “apostle”—simply refers to one who is sent, which of course reflects Jesus’ eleven faithful disciples who were commissioned on the Mount of Olives to be Christ’s witnesses to the world.²⁰ In the New Testament, many people are called apostles, from Matthais—who was chosen by lot to replace Judas in the rolls of the Apostles²¹—and to Paul and Barnabas upon their first missionary journey.²² Paul calls many of his correspondents apostles, apparently referring to a missionary or emissary status they held,²³ which was distinct from the unique ministry of the twelve, Paul, Barnabas, and James the brother of Christ.²⁴ It appears believers in New Testament days were generally expected to be messengers of Christ—an attitude reflected in more modern times in Vatican II’s *Apostolicam actuositatem*, or *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. In this ruling, the assembled bishops indicated the apostolic work belonged to the laity as well as the presbytery:

The Church was founded for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth for the glory of God the Father, to enable all men to share in His saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might enter into a relationship with Christ. All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate, which the Church carries on in various ways through all her members.²⁵

The mission of the church is clearly to be shared by all its members, and in this way the laity can be referred to as apostles, of a sort. This evangelical mission is one of the points where Roman Catholics and many Protestants agree. The Southern Baptist Convention, for example, asserts in

20. Acts 1:8.

21. Acts 1:24-26.

22. Acts 14:14.

23. Rom. 16:7; Phil. 2:25, 2 Cor. 11:13.

24. Gal. 1:19.

25. *AA*, 2.

its statement of shared belief, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*:

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ....It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.²⁶

Since Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics—two groups that have often been defined by their disagreements—enjoy consensus on this topic, it may be assumed that apostolic behavior by the laity is not the point under debate.

In *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, Michael Ramsey considers the nature of the special office of Apostle in the New Testament as distinct from the general apostolic behaviors of all her members. Ramsey concludes the Apostles were set apart from the general laity by their authority over the nascent universal church, so they could draw the constituent Christians to a spiritual connection with Christ, and maintain an overarching unity between local congregations.²⁷ By exercising universal oversight, the Apostles were able to respond to questions of doctrine and practice that spanned locality, as they did when they travelled to Samaria to lay hands upon the new believers there, and when they came together in Jerusalem to discuss the question of how the church should consider certain Jewish rites.²⁸

This nature of the Apostles' special work informs the various understandings of apostolic succession. The simplest and, perhaps, least controversial is *apostolic succession for the purpose of doctrinal and procedural transmission*. When bishops pass their responsibilities and teachings

26. Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee, XI.

27. Ramsey, 77.

28. Acts 8:14-17; Acts 15:1-29.

to their successors, they ensure the Apostles' doctrines and practices of the church are accurately maintained. The church that does not have a shepherd with such a pedigree might therefore be suspected of introducing new doctrines that do not comport with those of the true faith.²⁹

A second understanding of the doctrine is *apostolic succession for the purpose of providing the functions of the universal church which the Apostles also performed*. With a few exceptions, it again seems that most Christian denominations would take little exception to this concept, as the evangelical pastor, the Anglican vicar, and the Catholic priest would all agree on the important role they play in the sacraments of the church, from the Eucharist to Baptism. Leading the church in these functions is a shepherd's role in nearly all traditions.³⁰

The third and perhaps most controversial understanding is *apostolic succession as a transmission of special grace* from its initial receipt by the Apostles, and then from bishop to bishop. As Vatican II pronounced:

In the measure in which they participate in the office of the apostles, God gives priests a special grace to be ministers of Christ among the people.³¹

This appears to be an assertion that the act of ordination—the biblical “laying on of hands”—passes a measure of mystical grace to the ordained man, of the same kind as the grace that was granted to the Apostles in their offices.³² How a person responds to this assertion reflects how he views the primary role of the Apostles: either that of authorities who rule over the behaviors of the church, or as that of participants, albeit special ones, within the church.

29. Ramsey, *Gospel and Catholic Church*, 85.

30. Ramsey, *Gospel and Catholic Church*, 85.

31. *PO*, 2.

32. Arthur Headlam, *The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion; being the Bampton Lectures for the Year 1920* (London: John Murray, 1921), 127-128.; Ramsey, *Gospel and Catholic Church*, 85-86.

With these three modern concepts of apostolic succession understood, it is now possible to engage the central question of this analysis: whether a proto-doctrine of apostolic succession can be derived from the writings of the apostolic fathers. If so, it should be possible to compare it with these modern understandings of the doctrine to determine the extent to which the sub-apostolic church and the apostolic fathers would have recognized the modern episcopate.

Ministerial Themes in the Apostolic Fathers

As stated previously, the epistles and fragments of the apostolic fathers will serve as the analytical *corpus* for isolating themes related to apostolic succession. After identification of these themes, they will be used to develop a proto-doctrine of sub-apostolic age apostolic succession.

Biographical Details of the Apostolic Fathers

Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp are well-established as apostolic fathers, due to both their primacy in the sub-apostolic church and their relatively strong claims of being students of the Apostles. Though less is known about Papias and Quadratus, their apparent influence upon the teachings and people of the early church necessitates their inclusion here, such as it is.

Clement

Church tradition holds that Clement is the same person mentioned favorably by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:3, and that he studied under Paul alongside Luke at one point. He also appears on lists of the Roman bishops and thus is considered by Roman Catholics to be one

of their earliest popes.³³ Claims of his authorship of the epistle to the Corinthians are found as early as the middle of the second century *anno Domini* in the writings of Dionysius of Corinth, lending the claim credence due to Dionysius' temporal proximity to the time of the epistle's composition and his role in the very congregation to which the epistle was addressed.³⁴

Polycarp

Polycarp served as the bishop of Smyrna during part of the sub-apostolic age, and appears to have enjoyed a warm relationship with Ignatius, which is thought by some to have stemmed from a period of time in their youths when they learned together at the feet of John, or else from a meeting later in life when Ignatius' arrest led him to go through Smyrna on the way to Rome. Some consider him to be the very "angel of the church in Smyrna" addressed in John's *Revelation*.³⁵ His martyrdom is colorfully described in another sub-apostolic work, an encyclical originating in the church of Smyrna and shared with other congregations.³⁶

Ignatius

Bearer of the honorific *Theophorus*—or God-Bearer, due to the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit within him—Ignatius is thought by some to have learned Christianity from John the Apostle, and to have been a member of the church in Syrian Antioch, where he may have learned

33. "Pontiffs," The Holy See, accessed April 24, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en/holy-father.html>.

34. Ehrman, "Introduction to the First Letter of Clement," 21-23.

35. Rev. 2:8.

36. Ehrman, "Introduction to the Martyrdom of Saint Polycarp," 357.; Ehrman, "Introduction to the Letters of Ignatius," 204.; A. Cleveland Coxe, "Introductory Note to the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians," *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1*. (Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997), 65-66.

under Peter before taking over from him as bishop. It was in that role that Ignatius was arrested under official persecution, and sent on a long trip to Rome to stand trial before Emperor Trajan. Interestingly, this event resulted in the entirety of his extant work, for it was during this trip that Ignatius wrote his seven authentic epistles that survive.³⁷

Papias and Quadratus

Papias was bishop of Hierapolis about the time of Polycarp. Apparently, the two had both studied together with John, though there is some dispute over this point. There are indications that Papias knew Polycarp and was even friends with him. We know from Eusebius and Jerome, who quoted him in their later writings, that his book, *Expositions of the Sayings of the Lord*, was quite influential in the sub-apostolic church, though only fragments survive today. What can be gleaned about Quadratus is even less: that his lost *Apology*, intended to defend Christians from their Roman persecutors, was popular and much read seems to be indicated from Eusebius' editorial comment on the single and short quotation of Quadratus he uses, which constitutes the entirety of his extant work.³⁸

Ministerial Themes in the Epistles of the Apostolic Fathers

Eleven works within the *Apostolic Fathers* collection seem likely to have been written by the apostolic fathers themselves: the epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, the epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, the seven authentic, noninterpolated epistles of Ignatius to the Ephesians,

37. Ehrman, "Introduction to the Letters of Ignatius," 203-205.; A. Cleveland Coxe, "Introductory Note to the Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians," 65-66.

38. Ehrman, "Introduction to the Fragments of Papias and Quadratus," 86-89.

Magnesians, Trallians, Romans, Philadelphians, Smyrnaeans, and to Polycarp himself, and the fragments of Papias and Quadratus.³⁹ From them, three distinct ministerial themes can be drawn: 1) the succession and authority of church ministers, 2) the transmission of the Apostles' doctrine, and 3) humility, subjection, and community in the church.

The succession and authority of church ministers

Among the works of the apostolic fathers, little is written about the most directly applicable theme of this analysis—that of apostolic succession as a doctrine—though perhaps not surprisingly so. During a period when only the second and third rounds of bishops in each local church were being appointed, the question of how the determined successors had been appointed was perhaps not critical yet. We do see signs, however, of simmering tension in Clement's epistle to the Corinthians, which Clement opens by declaiming the schism that had arisen among the Corinthians:

...and especially to that shameful and detestable sedition, utterly abhorrent to the elect of God, which a few rash and self-confident persons have kindled to such a pitch of frenzy...⁴⁰

The schism, according to Clement, came from the Corinthians' success as leaders of virtue and hospitality. This success engendered pride among the laity, and thus:

...the worthless rose up against the honored, those of no reputation against such as were renowned, the foolish against the wise, the young against those advanced in years. For

39. Quadratus' fragment is included in this list as a reflection of his apparently equal status with the other names listed, as bishops and writers of renown in the sub-apostolic church. His single fragment, however, is not included in the following discussion simply because the topic it covers does not appear to be germane. It is important to indicate, however, that it was reviewed along with the others listed here.

40. Clement, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997): ch. 1.

this reason righteousness and peace are now far departed from you...⁴¹

In short, members of the laity had fancied themselves the betters of the Corinthian bishop in both position and knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that Clement should go on to express a foundational sentiment for the doctrine of apostolic succession:

Christ...was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God...And thus preaching through countries and cities, [the apostles] appointed the first-fruits, having first proved them be the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons.⁴²

and afterwards:

Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. We are of the opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry.⁴³

Herein is the doctrine formally established that bishops are to be appointed by bishops, one from the other, from a line reaching to the Apostles themselves, and that this mechanism was set up by those very Apostles. In the immediate matter of the Corinthian church's schism, Clement supports the side of the duly appointed bishop against those who would take his authority for their own. Being wise, however, he seasons his support with conditions, understanding that bishops might arise one day who are "wolves in sheep's clothing," intending to lead the flock

41. Clement, *Corinthians*, ch. 3.

42. *Ibid.*, ch. 42.

43. *Ibid.*, ch. 44.; With our knowledge of the subsequent history of strife and sectarianism in the church, Clement's concerns certainly seem prescient.

astray⁴⁴ Thus, he states that bishops and deacons are to be appointed by the existing bishops and deacons—but only with the entire church consenting—and are to exercise humility, peace, and hearts of service. Though he does not explicitly define a mechanism for doing so, Clement implies that a bishop can be removed for failing to live up to these standards.

Polycarp deals with this final condition in his letter to the Philippians, in which he references the previous removal of a presbyter, Valens, whose covetousness, sexual immorality, and lies (it may be assumed from the context) had necessitated his removal from the episcopate:

I am greatly grieved for Valens, who was once a presbyter among you, because he so little understands the place that was given him....I am deeply grieved...brethren, for him and his wife; to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! And be ye then moderate in regard to this matter, and “do not count such as enemies,” but call them back as suffering and straying members, that ye may save your whole body. For by so acting ye shall edify yourselves.⁴⁵

Valens, in his sin, disdained the critical nature of the ministerial role he was given, and thus grieved both Polycarp and his church. His actions threw those who knew him into chaos, such that Polycarp had to encourage them to seek his repentance, and thus not count him lost from salvation forever. The serious nature of removing an ordained minister is therefore emphasized, as is the importance of appointing to those offices only men of good repute. In this way, Polycarp’s work reinforces Clement’s.

Lest one draw a cynical view of the presbytery from this episode, elsewhere in the epistle Polycarp is careful to state that—in writing so candidly about Valens—it is not the ministerial

44. Matt. 7:15.

45. Polycarp, *Epistle to the Philippians*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997): ch. 11.; Though beyond the scope of this work is the development of the presbyter in the second century *anno domini* as a kind of under-bishop, to aid the bishop in caring for an ever-growing ministry. Further reading on this point can be found in *SO*, III.

office he is criticizing. Instead, he intentionally directs the Philippians to:

...[be] subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ.”⁴⁶

Ignatius’ copious output does little to develop the mechanical doctrine of apostolic succession, but rather emphasizes the respect the ministers are due from the laity. Ignatius warns the Ephesians:

...not to set ourselves in opposition to the bishop, in order that we may be subject to God....⁴⁷

and that:

we should look upon the bishop even as we would look upon the Lord himself.⁴⁸

He likewise instructs the Philadelphians:

...as children of light and truth, [to] flee from division and wicked doctrines; but where the shepherd is, there do ye as sheep follow.⁴⁹

To the Magnesians, he repeatedly encourages their submission to their bishops, presbyters, and deacons, on account of their holiness and office, and praises those who so submit:

Since then, I have had the pleasure of seeing you through...my fellow-servant the deacon Sotio, whose friendship I may ever enjoy, inasmuch as he, by the grace of God, is subject to the bishop and the presbytery, in the law of Jesus Christ.⁵⁰

and:

Now it becomes you also not to treat your bishop too familiarly on account of his youth,

46. Polycarp, *Philippians*, ch. 7.

47. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Ephesians* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997): ch. 5.

48. Ibid., ch. 6.

49. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Philadelphians* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997): ch. 2.

50. Ignatius, *Epistle to the Magnesians* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997): ch. 2.

but to yield him all reverence, having respect to the power of God the Father...⁵¹

In short, the apostolic fathers affirm in their writings the ideas that bishops succeed from and are appointed by the Apostles and their successors, but are also approved by the assembled church; that bishops are to be held to the highest standards of meekness and righteousness—and should be removed when they fall short of this mark—but, when they are so behaving, must be treated with the greatest respect, deference, and obedience by the laity.

Transmission of the Apostles' doctrine

The apostolic fathers clearly emphasize that the unadulterated doctrine of the Apostles must continue to be taught. By the sub-apostolic age, some false teachers had already arisen, teaching a strange gospel. Polycarp, for example, gently reminded the Philippians of the folly of the Docetaen heresy,⁵² using the germane words of the Apostle Paul to prove its falsehood while expanding upon them:

“For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is antichrist;” and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to his own lusts, and says there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan.⁵³

In this example, Polycarp uses the apostles' teaching to insulate the Philippians against doctrinal errors that might lead them to stray from fellowship with God. There is, however, another consideration, for to be out of fellowship with God is also to be out of fellowship with the church. The apostolic fathers consider transmission of the apostolic teaching as a key element for

51. Ignatius, *Magesians*, ch. 3.

52. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. Docetae, accessed 24 April, 2025, <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/docetae>.; The sect believed that Christ had not come in the flesh, but merely appeared in the “semblance” of a man.

53. Polycarp, *Philippians*, ch. 7.

maintaining the community of the church. Ignatius saw this clearly, as he wrote to the church in Magnesia:

Study, therefore, to be established in the doctrines of the Lord and the apostles, that so in all things, whatsoever ye do, may prosper both in the flesh and spirit; in faith and love; in the Son, and in the Father, and in the Spirit; in the beginning and the end; with your most admirable bishop, and the well-compacted spiritual crown of your presbytery, and the deacons who are according to God. Be ye subject to the bishop, and to one another, as Jesus Christ to the Father, according to the flesh, and the apostles to Christ, and to the Father, and to the Spirit; that so there may be a union both fleshly and spiritually.⁵⁴

Ignatius demonstrates why the accurate transmission of the apostolic doctrine is essential: it unifies the laity with the ministers, the ministers with the laity, and both groups with the Divine, inculcating them from schism by granting them a unified faith. As he tells the Philadelphians:

...there are many wolves that appear worthy of credit, who, by means of a pernicious pleasure, carry captive those that are running towards God; but in your unity they shall have no place.⁵⁵

Papias puts this advice into practice. In the first of the fragments from his lost masterpiece, *The Exposition of the Oracles of the Lord*, he describes his method for writing the book and, in so doing, demonstrates how critical the apostolic teaching is:

But I shall not be unwilling to put down, along with my interpretations, whatsoever instructions I received with care at any time from the elders, and stored up with care in my memory, assuring you at the same time of their truth. For I did not, like the multitude, take pleasure in those who spoke much, but in those who taught the truth; nor in those who related strange commandments, but in those who rehearsed the commandments given by the Lord to faith, and proceeding from truth itself. If, then, any who attended on the elders came, I asked minutely after their sayings...For I imagined that what was to be got from books was not so profitable to me as what came from the living and abiding voice.⁵⁶

54. Ignatius, *Magnesians*, ch. 15.

55. Ignatius, *Philadelphians*, ch. 2.

56. Papias, *The Fragments*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997): 1.

Though interview is a method unavailable to modern scholars of the early church, Papias' enthusiasm for eyewitness accounts reflects the importance of the Apostles' teaching to the sub-apostolic church. While there were still some alive who had heard and seen the acts of the Apostles, Papias made it his mission to hear from them, to ensure as little was lost as possible. In this way, the apostolic doctrine could be retained for future generations of Christians.

In his seventh fragment, Papias describes the method of another historian of the early church, John Mark, author of the *Gospel of Mark*. Having apparently had a chance to interview him, Papias described how John Mark ensured his gospel was an accurate representation of Peter's memoirs:

Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, who wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them.⁵⁷

More than a mere interesting interpretive comment, this fragment also demonstrates the importance of doctrinal soundness to the early church and the apostolic fathers. Papias was concerned, as any thoughtful scholar might be, that the readers of John Mark's gospel understand how it was written and for what it was intended. Such assiduous scholarship helps even modern Christians, who have at times become concerned over seeming inaccuracies between the *Gospel of Mark* and the other synoptic gospels. With his explanation of the nature of Mark's gospel, Papias comforts modern readers as assuredly as he did his sub-apostolic contemporaries.

The Apostles' teaching, therefore, was of critical importance in the early church, with the apostolic fathers recognizing how vital it was that their accurate teachings be transmitted across

57. Papias, *Fragments*, 7.

generations of Christians, both to prevent error and to ensure the community of the early church was not interrupted by peddlers of spiritual falsehood.

Humility, subjection, and community in the church

As previously mentioned, Clement's epistle to the Corinthians was written to specifically speak to the problem of division in the church. Though the implications for apostolic succession are what scholars often consider in this epistle, they are not its point but merely one of its implications. In fact, Clement's epistle to the Corinthians can be said to be an early review of the phenomena of churchwide schism and unity, in which Clement considers the danger the former holds for the latter. Schism, he claims, arises from envy and jealousy, and those who engage in it therefore are the successors of Cain, Esau, the Israelites who rebelled against Moses at Kadesh-Barnea, and even those who, quite recently, had martyred the Apostles Peter and Paul.⁵⁸ Unity, however, is founded upon yielding and obedience, both to God and to one another. Clement identified that humility is the key to unity, just as pride is the core of schism, and thus explored the humility of Old Testament figures, of Christ, and of the Apostles, to make his case for how the Corinthians should behave.⁵⁹ He concludes:

Wherefore, having so many great and glorious examples set before us, let us turn again to the practice of that peace which from the beginning was the mark set before us; and let us look steadfastly to the Father and Creator of the universe, and cleave to His mighty and surpassingly great gifts and benefactions of peace.⁶⁰

Clement demonstrates that by learning to yield to one another in the church, in a spirit of all

58. Clement, *Corinthians*, chs. 4-5.

59. *Ibid.*, ch. 9-18.

60. *Ibid.*, ch. 19.

humility and obedience, the Christian gains *peace*—a ceasing of strife—with his immediate fellows, and, in so doing, participates in a small way in the universal peace God ordains for all the world. If schism in the church is based upon strife, so is unity based upon peace.

Ignatius repeats a similar refrain throughout his works but emphasizes the role of the minister in church unity. For Ignatius, unity in the church is not a negative—a mere absence of strife (which may be one way to define peace)—but rather a positive harmony of individual Christians submitting to one another to bring about something new:

Wherefore it is fitting that ye should run together in accordance with the will of your bishop, which thing also ye do. For your justly renowned presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp. Therefore in your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. And do ye, man by man, become a choir, that being harmonious in love, and taking up the song of God in unison, ye may with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ, so that He may both hear you, and perceive by your works that ye are indeed the members of His Son. It is profitable, therefore, that you should live in an unblameable unity, that thus ye may always enjoy communion with God.⁶¹

Such rhapsodic language reflects Ignatius' intention to define and clarify the centrality of the bishop in the creation of churchwide harmony. Harmony transcends the mere absence of strife, bringing forth something new from the joint efforts of all participants: a community of mutual humility, submission, and faith. With the bishop as an expert conductor, he is able to do more than convince the different players to simply play the same tune. As he submits to their expertise and abilities, so too do they submit to his authority and vision, and their mutual expertise grows in the perfection of their common Christian life.

Glimpsing such a vision of community further clarifies the tragedy of schism. Just as one wayward player can ruin the most excellent symphony, so too can one envious layman upset the

61. Ignatius, *Ephesians*, ch. 4.

song of the church:

...[S]ome indeed give one the title of bishop, but do all things without him. Now such persons seem to me to be not possessed of a good conscience, seeing they are not steadfastly gathered together according to the commandment.⁶²

and:

As therefore the Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him, neither by Himself nor by the apostles, so neither ye do anything without the bishop and presbyters.⁶³

Ignatius provides us with a picture of mutual respect and deference between brethren, but with the brethren playing distinct roles: the bishop in the center, conducting, and the laity surrounding and following, all working together to create a shining, harmonious community around their shared faith.

Critical to such a vision is the nature of the conductor. In writing to the Trallians, Ignatius expounds upon the bishop's ideal disposition for such a congregation:

...I have received the manifestations of your love, and still have it with me, in your bishop, whose very appearance is highly instructive, and his meekness of itself a power, whom I imagine even the ungodly must reverence...⁶⁴

This meekness, which is necessary for unity, is repeatedly modelled by the apostolic fathers themselves. In Polycarp's epistle, he is careful to indicate that he was only writing because the Philippian church had asked for his counsel on the question of righteousness, and not because he felt he had any particular expertise to advise them.⁶⁵ Ignatius likewise does not insist upon the

62. Ignatius, *Magnesians*, ch. 4.

63. Ibid., ch. 7.

64. Ignatius. *Epistle to the Trallians* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997): ch. 3.

65. Polycarp, *Philippians*, ch. 3.

honor that he requests be given to other bishops, but rather reiterates his humble status:

I do not issue orders to you, as if I were some great person. For though I am bound for the name [of Christ], I am not yet perfect in Jesus Christ. For now I begin to be a disciple, and I speak to you as fellow-disciples with me.⁶⁶

Not even on the subject of his honorific does Ignatius express jealousy. The fact that the sub-apostolic church knew him far and wide as *Theophorus*, or God-Bearer, speaks to the esteem in which they held him and his actions. Yet, Ignatius is quick to point out that all his fellow Christians likewise may be called *Theophorus* (for they all too had the Holy Spirit of God within them):

Ye, therefore, as well as all your fellow-travelers, are God-bearers [*Theophorus*], temple-bearers, Christ-bearers, bearers of holiness, adorned in all respects with the commandments of Jesus Christ.⁶⁷

Though it is clear from their words and actions that the apostolic fathers expected meekness in the bishops, meekness taken too far can prevent a bishop from performing the central, organizing, conducting roles of the office, for fear of elevating himself unnecessarily. In a personal letter to Polycarp, Ignatius reminds him to:

Let nothing be done without your consent; neither do thou anything without the approval of God, which indeed thou dost not, inasmuch as thou art steadfast.⁶⁸

In instructing Polycarp to ensure all his actions have God's approval, Ignatius provides the failsafe for paralyzing meekness. Though it may be a failure of meekness to assert oneself and insist on one's own due, it is also humble to obey the will of God. The wise bishop, operating in an atmosphere of support and unity, will have the grace to blaze this narrow path by keeping his

66. Ignatius, *Ephesians*, ch. 3.

67. *Ibid.*, ch. 9.

68. Ignatius. *Epistle to Polycarp* [Shorter Version], *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997): ch. 4.

eyes fixed on Christ and the harmonious community he desires his church to enjoy.

A Proto-Doctrine of Apostolic Succession

By considering the three emergent themes running through the epistles of the apostolic fathers—the succession and authority of church ministers; the transmission of the Apostles’ doctrine; and humility, subjection, and community in the church—it is possible to propound a synthesis on the subject of apostolic succession. Though the formal doctrine would continue to develop over subsequent years, a foundation for this development—the ostensible proto-doctrine—can be drawn from the writings of the apostolic fathers.

Apostolic succession in the sub-apostolic age, therefore, can be stated as the belief that bishops (and, in the later sub-apostolic age, presbyters) were ordained by the Apostles or their appointed successors, and as such enjoyed significant authority to establish community in the church to ensure continuation of its functions. These functions included ensuring the apostolic teachings were accurately taught, maintaining a unified community around their common faith, and acting as examples of righteousness, obedience to God, and meekness of action. Though not explicitly stated by the apostolic fathers, it does seem that, in these actions, the special work of the Apostles was largely thought to be continued by the sub-apostolic bishops.

How then does this proto-doctrine comport with the modern understanding of apostolic succession? Compared to the three interpretations of apostolic succession discussed above, it holds up quite well. As the reader will recall, these three ideas are apostolic succession as 1) the mechanism of doctrinal and procedural transmission in the church, 2) the assurance that the sacramental and congregational functions will continue, and 3) a special transmission of grace to the bishop. The first and second of these are clearly found in the writings of the apostolic fathers, as the preceding discussions on the transmission of the Apostles’ doctrine and the community of

the church demonstrate. It can therefore be said that these modern ideas of apostolic succession would have been as familiar to the sub-apostolic church as they are to a modern-day parishioner.

The idea of apostolic succession as transmission of grace is perhaps more challenging, for no mention is made of such a transaction in the writings of the apostolic fathers. There may be an answer, however, in Ignatius' concept of the church as an harmonious community. As Ramsey explains:

Grace is bestowed always by our Lord Himself and through the action of His whole Church. Every act of grace is His act and the act of the one Body which is His. And the succession of Bishops is not an isolated channel of grace, since from the first Christ bestows grace through every sacramental act of his Body. But certain actions in this work of grace are confined to the Bishops; and thereby the truth is taught that every local group or Church depends upon the one life of the one Body, and that the Church of any generation shares in the one historic society which is not past and dead but alive in the present. Thus the Church's full and continuous life in grace does depend upon the succession of Bishops, whose work, however, is not isolated but bound up with the whole Body.⁶⁹

In this view, bishops receive grace sufficient to support the special role they are called upon to play in the church, and therefore their transmission of grace is only different in scope from the grace the laity receive for their apostolic work. In the economy of grace established in the church, each is granted grace sufficient for his needs, and no one goes without. There is no scarcity to create competition over authority or position, and the meek—rather than the strong—are exalted. It is in this climate that the vision of the church singing an increasingly perfect song to its savior is possible, a climate without competition or rivalry. This work of establishing and maintaining this divine community is the promise of the church and the Apostolic function of the Christian minister in every age.

69. Ramsey, *Gospel and Catholic Church*, 87.

Conclusion

That apostolic succession should have been a contentious doctrine among people of different Christian denominations is perhaps inevitable. It is the nature of men, upon receiving power, to lower themselves to the basest applications of it, and power within the church has been no exception.⁷⁰ When bishops do not act in a manner befitting the office, it leads the laity to despair of the promise of community made by the church.

As such, the Second Vatican Council's *Unitatis redintegratio* proves itself to be an increasingly remarkable document. Were it a mere call for Christians outside of the Roman Catholic Church to rejoin it, it would arguably be a waste of paper, for it would do nothing to restore the severed community of the universal church or address the grievances of those hurt. It is, however, a gracious statement, meek in nature, that presents the Roman Catholic Church's doctrines clearly, while acknowledging that, for many of the major schisms in church history, "...often enough, men of both sides were to blame,"⁷¹ and goes on to declare that "all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ's body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church."⁷² The decree, so written, flows with humility, and thus reflects the disposition of the apostolic fathers Ignatius, Clement, and Polycarp. The extent to which the church of the twenty-first

70. Anyone who doubts this need only read one of the Protestant treatments of the issue, which often contain litanies of offenses perpetrated by the Roman Catholic Church against its members. The Presbyterian minister Rev. Thomas Smyth's treatment of this question is as good a place to start as any, and may be found on pages 23 through 28 of his work, *The Prelactical Doctrine of Apostolical Succession Examined, and the Protestant Ministry Defended Against the Assumptions of Popery and High-Churchism, in a Series of Lectures*, which is available at the following web address: <https://archive.org/details/completeworksofr01smyt/page/n5/mode/2up>.

71. *UR*, 3.

72. *Ibid.*, 3.

century embraces such an attitude when dealing with one another is the extent it will be able to build a community together as its earliest bishops wished.

Bibliography

- Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee, *Baptist Faith & Message 2000*. Nashville, TN: Southern Baptist Convention, 2000. <https://bfm.sbc.net/>.
- The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. <https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/>.
- Clement. *Epistle to the Corinthians*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- Coxe, A. Cleveland. "Assorted Introductions." *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- Ehrman, Bart D., ed. and trans. *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. I: I Clement. II Clement. Ignatius. Polycarp. Didache*. Loeb Classical Library 24. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. <https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL024/2003/volume.xml>.
- . *The Apostolic Fathers, Vol. II: Epistle of Barnabas. Papias and Quadratus. Epistle to Diognetus. The Shepherd of Hermas*. Loeb Classical Library 25. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. <https://www.loebclassics.com/view/LCL025/2003/volume.xml>.
- Foster, Paul. "The Disputed Early Fragments of the So-Called *Gospel of Peter*—Once Again." *Novum Testamentum* 49, no. 4 (January 2007): 402-406, https://brill.com/view/journals/nt/49/4/article-p402_5.xml.
- Headlam, Arthur C. *The Doctrine of the Church and Christian Reunion; being the Bampton Lectures for the Year 1920*. London: John Murray, 1921. <https://archive.org/details/doctrineofchurc00headuoft/page/n5/mode/2up>
- Ignatius. *Epistle to the Ephesians* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- . *Epistle to the Magnesians* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- . *Epistle to the Philadelphians* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- . *Epistle to Polycarp* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 1. Edited and

- translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- . *Epistle to the Trallians* [Shorter Version], The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 1. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- John XXIII. *Solenne Apertura Del Concilio Vaticano II*. Encyclical Letter. Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1962. Accessed 24 April, 2025. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/it/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html.
- Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. *The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church with Particular Reference to the Importance of Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God*. Rome: Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, 1988. <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-in-inglese2.html>.
- The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016. Logos Bible Software.
- Litton, Edward A. *Introduction to Dogmatic Theology*, New ed. Edited by Philip E. Hughes. London: James Clarke & Co., 1960. <https://archive.org/details/introductiontodo0000litt/page/n5/mode/2up>.
- Litwa, M. David. "Thomas in Alexandria: Arguments for Locating the Gospel and Book of Thomas in Alexandria." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 143, no. 1 (2024): 163-183, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1431.2024.9>.
- The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 7. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- O'Riordan, Seán. "The Third Session." *The Furrow* 15, no. 11 (November 1964): 685-694. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27658847>.
- Papias. *The Fragments*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- Polycarp. *Epistle to the Philippians*, The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1867-1885. Reprint, Albany, OR: AGES Software, 1997.
- "Pontiffs." The Holy See, accessed April 24, 2025. <https://www.vatican.va/content/vatican/en/holy-father.html>.

- Ramsey, Michael. *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*. 1936. Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010. Kindle.
- Smyth, Thomas. “The Prelactical Doctrine of Apostolical Succession Examined, and the Protestant Ministry Defended Against the Assumptions of Popery and High-Churchism, in a Series of Lectures.” In *Complete Works of Rev. Thomas Smyth, D. D.* Vol. 1, edited by J. William Flinn, 1-558. Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Company, 1908.
<https://archive.org/details/completestworksofr01smyt/page/n5/mode/2up>.
- Vatican Council II. *Apostolicam actuositatem: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1965.
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html.
- . *Presbyterorum ordinis: Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*. Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1965.
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html
- . *Unitatis redintegratio: Decree on Ecumenism*. Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1964.
https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.