

**The church's mission is not an ideology or a system
of religious principles, but a person: Jesus Christ,
who is to be known, loved and imitated.**

**Pope John Paul II
Redemptoris Missio
(1990)**

My topic today is the apostolic.

Oh, boy!

Raising this topic in a group of charismatic Catholics and Protestants is a bit like attending a large family reunion in America and announcing that one of our activities will be to have a discussion of current U.S. politics. So, let's serve a round of sweet iced tea, and hang on!

Where do we begin? We are not the first group of Catholics and Protestants to engage the question of apostolicity. The Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (previously known as the "Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity") has had a number of these discussions. Each of these dicastery dialogues, whether with Protestant groups or with the Orthodox, has brought something unique to the table for consideration. (*Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue Document: "The Apostolic Tradition" Singapore 1991. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue Document: "The Apostolicity of the Church" 2006. Disciples of Christ-Roman Catholic dialogue Document: "Apostolicity and Catholicity" 1982*)

What does this group, New Church Charismatics (NCCs) and Catholic Charismatics (CCs) in the Gathering of the Holy Spirit (GHS), bring to the table regarding a discussion of the apostolic? Let's adopt a working metaphor I learned from the evangelical Quakers. Picture a prism set in the middle of a table with a group of people seated around that table. We will turn the prism and ask what each person sees as the light refracts through the prism. Because each of us is in a different location, we will have a different vantage point.

CCs and NCCs are sitting next to each other at the table. We share the vantage point of the priority of the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit. This for us is not just a practical aspect of our common ministry together; no, it serves as an epistemological (theory of knowledge) test of truth. It is the center of our relationship with Christ. It is the center of our apostolic world.

This then is where we will begin. I first will explore the centrality of Jesus through the Spirit in our apostolic authority and witness. In my second talk, I will step into the thorny issue of the apostolic in church history.

In a well-known passage from I Clement, Clement the Elder writes to the Corinthian church. The date is around AD 96. “The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent forth [*apestalmenos*] from God. So then Christ is from God, and the apostles are from Christ.” Christ, our Apostle, gives the gift of the gospel and the gift of apostleship to the Twelve plus. Clement goes on to say that these gifts are given to the church and the world through the power of the Holy Spirit (I Clement 42). This is a powerful statement about the presence of Christ to the church and the world through the apostolic. How did the church come to this place in AD 96?

At one of the most pivotal points in church history, Peter visited the house of Cornelius in Acts 10. The Lord had begun to create cognitive dissonance in Peter through the vision of the sheet descending with the unclean animals and the command to kill and eat. Just then there was a knock on the door and the invitation to Cornelius' house. After Peter arrived at Cornelius' home and while he was preaching, the Holy

Spirit fell upon the Gentiles – and that before baptism! Peter's shock was seen as he exclaimed, “These people need to be baptized!” It was the presence of the Holy Spirit that became the key factor in this important move. It was not theology or ecclesiology that was the major factor.

Think also of the apostle Paul in Acts 19. He encountered a group of disciples, and something in their discussion caused him to ask if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. “We’ve not heard of the Holy Spirit,” they replied. He then asked about their baptism. And of course you know the end of the story. Note that his question concerns both source and experience. Their lack of the presence of the Holy Spirit was connected to the meaning and experience of their baptism into Jesus. His main concern was not *who* baptized you, or *what* was their ecclesiology, but *into what or whom* were you baptized?

The presence of the Holy Spirit served as the key indicator, the key hermeneutic, in determining the truth. This common sharing of the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit can be missed so easily because this is the water we swim in, it is the air we breathe. My suggestion is that the presence of the Holy Spirit is central to the definition of the apostolic. I will be attempting to show this primarily through the Scriptures, our earliest apostolic witness, but also through the history of the church and the documents of the Catholic faith.

I will say at the outset that this approach should not be dismissed as some “Kumbaya” acknowledgment that the NCCs and CCs both have Jesus and the Holy Spirit. No, to say it bluntly, the apostolic is more than the missional undertaking. It is

more than the succession of bishops or the definitions of truth. **The core of the apostolic is Jesus through the Holy Spirit to His people and the world.** The following quote stands out to me:

The church's mission is not an ideology or a system of religious principles, but a person: Jesus Christ, who is to be known, loved and imitated.

Pope John Paul II
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When Jesus expressed His deep desire for the unity of His body, He did not stress ecclesiology or doctrine. He stressed the mystical invitation to enter the unity of the Father and the Son. This was a mysterious ontological invitation (John 17). We were invited to enter the trinitarian unity, the divine union, that has always existed and to express this unity to the world. To say this again, our hermeneutic, our epistemology must be the presence of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is through these presuppositions that we will see clearly into the question of the apostolic in history, doctrine, and truth.

Several years ago, a church leader asked if he could sit down with me and go through the process that his group used in making disciples in both a Catholic and a Protestant context. Over the next hour, he went into great detail explaining through graphs, data and examples the important process of how disciples are called and trained and how they turn and do the same for others. As he finished, he turned to me and asked, "What are your thoughts?" Attempting to not be condescending, I gently pointed out that over the last hour he had said nothing of Jesus and the work of the Holy

Spirit. He looked a bit shocked and meekly replied, “But it is presupposed in everything that I have written on the board.” My point here is that dedicated disciples often are more impressed by their methods and doctrines than they are with Jesus.

Unfortunately, something very similar also happens in discussions of the apostolic. There are times that we turn the prism and the question of the truth of the apostolic and the apostolic witness is necessary to stress. A good example here would be Irenaeus in his five-volume work *Against Heresies*. His main goal was to address the threat of gnosticism. The church was under threat and his response was to defend the faith doctrinally and historically. The point is not whether Protestants would agree with all of his points. The point is that this approach was apologetically warranted.

Another of his works, which was referred to in church history (Eusebius) but not found until a copy in Armeanian was located in 1904, is titled *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*. The approach Irenaeus takes here is very different. It is pastoral. A key aspect for Irenaeus in this book involved the work of the Holy Spirit as a witness to the truth of Jesus. It is addressed to an individual to prepare him for the Christian life. It may have been a catechism for baptism. This book on the apostolic is for believers.

These are the presuppositional glasses that I think are the most important for this discussion. We are believers. Our issue is not the truth of the gospel. Both NCCs and CCs might be surprised that the other has remained orthodox despite all of our baggage, but here we are.

A couple of years ago, I was at a silent place of prayer asking the Lord how best to express these things. All these pieces were moving about in my mind, but I needed

some simple way of expressing and teaching them. Within 30 seconds, I had a download which I believe was from the Holy Spirit, and I felt the Spirit say very simply,

“Say it like this:

'The core of the apostolic is this:

- 1.) The presence of Christ*
- 2.) The truth of Christ*
- 3.) The virtues of Christ*
- 4.) The power of Christ*

'Each of these is equally important, but only in this order. The presence of the Holy Spirit brings us the presence of Christ. The Holy Spirit penetrates and makes alive the truth of Christ (think the Bible and, for Catholics, the ecumenical councils). The Spirit lives in the virtues of Christ; they are the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit brings us the power of Christ, or else it is an alien spirit. Presence pervades, delivers, and empowers truth, virtue and power. Without the presence of the Spirit, we can honor the Bible (truth) above Christ. Without the presence of the Spirit, virtue is turned into moralism. Without the presence, power becomes magic or something manipulated by man.'”

Let's take a brief survey of Paul's application of this in 1 Corinthians. The Corinthians are dealing with a host of moral and truth issues in their community – division, sexual immorality and idolatry, to name a few. In each case the correction of these sins involves Christ's presence. “You are dividing the indivisible. Is Christ divided? ... Will you take Christ in to a prostitute? ... You know there are demons behind their altar because the real Christ is behind your altar. You cannot drink the cup of demons

and the cup of Christ.” This is the ontological imperative, not the moral imperative. The higher issue of violation in each of these areas was the violation of the very presence of Christ. This is true in every area of the Christian life, summarized above as truth, virtue and power.

These truths can be demonstrated easily from almost a random sampling of Catholicism. Here are a few quotes from Pope Paul VI, Pope Benedict, and Pope Francis to instruct us.

The first involves the ministry of the laity from Vatican II: *“The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head, incorporate into Christ's mystical body through baptism and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. ... Christ, sent by the Father, is the source and origin of the whole apostolate of the church. The success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ.”* (Apostolicam Actuositatem, Nov. 1965, Pope Paul VI)

Our second is from Pope Benedict: “The apostolic proclamation does not consist in a doctrine but in a person: Jesus Christ crucified and risen.” (*Jesus of Nazareth* Volume 1)

Our last is from Pope Francis: “The core of the Christian message is the person of Jesus Christ, who died and rose for us. Evangelization is not simply teaching doctrines but bearing witness to that Person.” (The Joy of the Gospel, Evangelii Gaudium 2013)

Let's turn back to the Scriptures again. When the apostle Paul wants to express the priority of presence as central to the apostolic message, he often uses the Greek

pleroma, which most often in English is translated “fullness.” This word for Paul means completeness, totality, the sum of divine attributes and benefits especially in relation to Christ and the church. The following scriptures each give a picture of what he means:

Colossians 1:19ff

Ephesians 1:22-23

Ephesians 3:18-19

Ephesians 4:13

Colossians 2:9-12

This last passage is a great one to quote in full: *“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.”*

This fullness is Christ's presence given to the believer and the church. We can express it simply like this:

Christ has promised to be present to us

1. In individuals; “Christ in you the hope of glory”
2. In His body (His corporate presence); “you are the body of Christ”
3. In the sacraments, and
4. In the preaching of His Word.

This fullness of Christ comes to us through the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit. We get nothing of Jesus apart from the Holy Spirit! Without His Spirit we cannot even confess Jesus as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Let's return to our original question: What does this dialogue bring to the discussion of the apostolic? Let's turn the prism again with a personal story.

In 1987 I had the beautiful experience of attending the North American Congress of the Holy Spirit. Of the 50,000 or so participants, I would guess that two-thirds were Catholic. Attending the break-out sessions was an incredibly joyful experience for me. Catholics and Protestants moved freely among the well-known speakers with a joy and unity that often doesn't exist even within denominations where everyone agrees on theology. To a young adult, the experience was from heaven. Here were the answers to the issues that have plagued humanity: love, forgiveness, unity, solidarity and mission. It was the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit that made this possible. Our unity had become a witness to the principalities and powers (Ephesians 3:10). In Paul's day it was the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ. "His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." As Jew, Gentile, Barbarian, slave, free, men women, Catholic, and Protestant find unity in Christ, spiritual warfare occurs. Apostolic witness occurs.

The unity around the central doctrines of our faith and our common life in the Holy Spirit is a powerful witness to a divided Christendom that Jesus is present. This is the mystical unity expressed in John 17. This unity can come only through God's Spirit. The 1987 North American Congress of the Holy Spirit was an apostolic gathering in the

purist sense – a witness to a divided world of the presence and power of Christ. This is what our dialogue brings, that same spirit of apostolic unity.

It is simply a fact that wherever the gospel is spreading the most rapidly in the world, the groups involved will be those full of the Holy Spirit. A beautiful example in a Protestant context is the breathtaking spread of the gospel in Ethiopia among the Mekane Yesus Evangelical Church. Originally begun as a missional outreach of Norwegian Lutherans in the 1940s, it quickly exploded into an indigenous charismatic Lutheran church of 10 million. It is now the largest active Lutheran church in the world. It is still growing and has just planted its first church in Nashville, Tennessee, my hometown. Among the converts to this movement are not just the pagan, indigenous people groups, but also Muslims and the Oriental Orthodox, which make up half of the population of Ethiopia.

Why have the Mekane Yesus been so successful in converting both Muslims and the Orthodox? I remember standing in a compound in Ethiopia as spontaneous worship, healings and deliverance erupted from a Mekane Yesus gathering. A crowd of Muslim and Orthodox people gathered to watch demonstrations of the Spirit's power. A move of the Holy Spirit can be irresistible.

What will bring unity between these Protestant fervent believers and these ancient Orthodox believers? Only a powerful move of the Holy Spirit. Only a move like in the house of Cornelius where the Spirit trumps all of our (both Protestant and Catholic) objections.

What does this dialogue bring? The apostolic witness that Christ is glorified and

seen in the unity and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Like Irenaeus, may we know our time, our calling and our audience, and may we bring the strength of the apostolic message to bear where it is needed.

Let's step into the second area that was requested of me in this paper, the historical question of ecclesiology concerning the apostolic. There are so many directions here that we could go. I will first identify some of the presuppositions that NCCs bring to the table, identifying both agreements and disagreements that exist between us. I will then make some brief comments on the development of the monoepiscopate. These points are not intended to convert, only clarify. They are of course also from my perspective as an NCC. Understanding the background presuppositional commitments each of us bring to this discussion may aid in understanding. All comments are abbreviated and underdeveloped.

There are large areas of agreement and disagreement among our two traditions. Let's select one area to address. NCC Protestants agree that the Universal Church is apostolic. We believe that the apostles ordained church leaders to represent and carry on the central truths of our faith for the generations beyond them. "From what I received I pass on to you" ... "as many as the Lord our God will call." We might even agree that certain forms of church government, such as a monoepiscopate- or a bishop-led church might, in the face of threat (i.e., gnosticism), make sense. Most NCCs do not believe that to be apostolic means that we must assent to any particular form of ecclesiology.

Catholics, on the other hand, both East and West, believe that their church governments are part of the central apostolic truth that the Spirit of God intended for His

people. Any adequate explanation of the apostolic must include teaching on the structure of the church. The succession of bishops, the place of the Bishop of Rome, and the decisions laid out on the structure of the church by the seven ecumenical councils are a part of the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church. They are considered essential to the apostolic.

Often with discussions of history and theology, the most effective way of making progress in understanding is for each party to be clear about the presuppositions that are brought to the table. I will mention three presuppositions that most NCCs operate from (even if they cannot articulate them). This is the angle of the prism through which we are seeing the “facts of history.”

First for the NCCs, the Bible is the church's earliest apostolic document. It contains several discernible streams of early orthodox Christianity (i.e., James – Hebrew/Aramaic; Peter – Jewish diaspora; Paul – Gentile). The Bible is the Word of God and must have precedence in all questions of faith.

Second, because the canon of New Testament Scripture is restricted historically to the first century, we NCCs are generally “primitivist” in our perspectives. By this I mean we are deeply interested in preserving and replicating the life and beliefs of the primitive church of the first century. This includes not only christology but also ecclesiology, soteriology, pneumatology, etc.

Third, we NCCs are generally suspicious of institutional approaches. A phrase that resonates from my childhood concerning ecclesiology is “let life beg for structure, never let structure beg for life.” Institutional development generally most often is seen as

an impediment. These presuppositions (and others) affect our interpretations of history.

Most undergrads learn the tensions between the “facts” of history and the interpretations of those “facts.” Often NCCs and CCs see the same historical data and interpret it differently. Sometimes we disagree on the data of history. I will let a CC identify the presuppositions that Catholics bring to the table. I'm curious what they would be and whether they would in fact be seen as presuppositions.

Let's step in and see where we go. Our focus will be on the question of ecclesiological development, apostolic succession and the related question of the papacy. Again please keep in mind that this is a summary and not a fully developed academic paper.

Let's pick AD 100 as our beginning date. One area of general agreement among historians is that the ecclesiology of the pre-AD 100 local church consisted of elders (*presbyteros*) also called bishops/overseers (*episkopos*) and deacons (*diakonos*). Among those interacting with the local assemblies, often coming and going, sometimes settling among the *ekklesia*, were apostles, prophets and teachers. This dynamic, charismatic, local/extra-local ecclesiology (local is the local church; extra-local is the apostolic/prophetic/teaching teams of those traveling among the churches) is reflected consistently in the New Testament (our earliest apostolic documents) in all of the various orthodox streams (Paul, John, Peter, James, Hebrews). It is also the only form of church government in all of the non-canonical, first-century orthodox Christian literature. Clement of Rome (AD 90-98), The Didache (AD 70-100), The Shepherd of Hermas (AD 100-140?), and possibly Polycarp (AD 100-150) in his letter to the

Philippians reflect this two-tier local church government of elders and deacons in the local church plus apostles, prophets and teachers.

The qualifications for elders/overseers and deacons are stated most clearly in two New Testament books/sections (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). These sections include both moral qualifications and maturity leadership qualifications. They are seen as a *charism*, a Holy Spirit-given calling. The job is to love, guide and serve the church, the body of Christ. Besides the extra-local leadership apostle/prophet/teacher, there is no other office.

Let's take the Didache as a representative of this primitive ecclesiology. Many scholars date this document to the first century. One of the most important reasons involves the need to instruct new converts and churches with a protocol for interacting with traveling apostles, prophets and teachers: "Whosoever, therefore comes and teaches you all these things that have been said before, receive him. ... Concerning the apostles and prophets. Act according to the decree of the gospel." Their behavior in the local church is to be evaluated and judged by the local leadership, appointed "bishops (elders) and deacons worthy of the Lord" (The Didache Chapters 11& 15).

Note the absence of a chief bishop. Local church authority is being directly addressed concerning traveling leaders, and there is no authority above the local presbyters and deacons. Most scholars view the Didache as originating in a Jewish diasporian church in Syria and written to Gentile churches as a sort of early church handbook. Many believe that it was from this region that the three-tier leadership structure (bishop, elder, deacon) evolved. This three-tier structure has not yet appeared

in the Didache.

The same is true in the Roman Church. The early church at Rome knows nothing of the three-fold government structure, the primacy of the See of Peter and apostolic succession. The Catholic historian Eamon Duffy says the following of Clement and the first-century church at Rome: "The Christians of the city (Rome) were thought of by themselves and others as a single church. ... The social reality behind this single identity was a loose constellation of churches based on private houses ... without any single dominate ruling officer, its elders or leaders sharing responsibility." (*Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* Second Edition, pp. 28-32)

This quote from Josef Lossl: "Apostles ... did not, initially at least, develop and strengthen institutional hierarchies and ministries, but outlined to their communities the charismatic potential of their existing structures. ... Over time (the early second century AD) the office of presbyter (elder) ... became more fully established." (*The Early Church: History and Memory* 2009)

We see that this began to change in the early second century. Ignatius is our earliest witness writing sometime around AD 107. He teaches a three-tier ecclesiology of the local church (sometimes citywide) which he considers to be binding upon the church. This structure consists of a bishop (pastor) who is the unmistakable leader, elders, and the deaconate. A quote from his letter to the Magnesians shows this structure: "Take care to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God, and the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles, and the deacons ... entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ" (6:1).

Let's note the specific things that Ignatius says. First, he says the bishop stands in the place of God. Granting some hyperbole, this is still a jarring thing for modern ears. Then he says the elders are synonymous with the council of apostles and the deacons with the servants of the church. Note that it is the elders who are seen as the inheritors of apostolic authority and not the bishop. We will come back to this perspective of Ignatius later when discussing apostolic succession. Catholics will point out how early this developed in the church and how early understanding included this specific three-tier ecclesiology.

Obviously a change has occurred. This change will increasingly become the norm for the now-Gentile church as it expands into the Greco-Roman world. What to make of this change? Over years I have heard various explanations from Catholic sources. Let's look at a few of these.

The first is to read the first century through the glasses of later church development. Even a careful scholar such as Pope Benedict does this when he calls Clement of Rome the "Pope" of Rome. While he acknowledges the primitive structure of the church in the first century, he lapses into an unfortunate historical projection. Acknowledging the etymology of the word "pope" as father, something else is inferred here. Clement in no way sees himself as THE successor of Peter. He does see himself and others as the recipients of the apostolic message and authority of Christ as one among a plurality of elders (Corinthian letter 42, 44). He functioned as many pastors do today, the first among equals, one of the presbyters with a call to lead, not "The Presbyter."

For the pope with the full historical weight of his office to call Clement “the Pope of Rome” is misleading historically for NCCs. I have also heard Catholic apologists describe the elders of James 5 as the Priests of the church. The Greek word is *presbyterous* not *hiereus* (priest). Besides Christ as our High Priest (Hebrews 4) and the “priesthood of all believers” (1 Peter 2), this word is never used for a Christian office in the New Testament. Both of these examples are anachronisms.

The second is to claim that the second-century structures existed in the first-century church, but were present only in an underdeveloped way. Sometimes the ministries of Titus and Timothy are referred to as those of the bishops. While there are similarities, such as the authority to ordain elders and deacons, most Protestant scholars have seen their authority as flowing from the apostolic authority of Paul. I have preferred the phrase “apostolic representatives” or “lieutenants.” Sometimes it is noted that the early proximity of Ignatius (AD 107) and Irenaeus (AD 150?) to John, the last living apostle, guarantees that their ecclesiology was reflective of the apostles' views.

Two quick responses are offered here. The first is that it is not clear which John is the author of the Johannine literature in the New Testament. Is he John, one of the Twelve, or is he John the Elder clearly attested to in church history (see Bauckham *Jesus and the Eye Witnesses*, and Eusebius)? The Gospel of John and 1, 2 and 3 John and the Book of Revelation in our New Testament reflect none of this later complexity. The second is the well-known sociological fact that the authority structures of renewal movements often move quickly from flexible charismatic structures to organized institutional structures. The renewal movement I was raised in moved from charismatic

and flexible to institutional and rigid within 30 years of its beginning (*Discovering Our Roots*, Allen, Hughes). The history of the Methodist movement also can be referenced here. Beginning as a fiery revivalist movement in the 1730s, it had slowed and become institutionalized by the mid-1800s.

The most common way Catholic leaders explain these changes is to say that God's Spirit continued to guide the church into fuller truth in accordance with Jesus' promise of the guidance of the Spirit "into all the truth" (John 16:13). In other words they grant the simplicity historically of the first-century church and say that it was God's will and guidance that a more developed church of the second century succeeded it. This is the position of Francis A. Sullivan, SJ, in *From Apostles to Bishops*. This is, I think, the most consistent view historically.

Let's allow Sullivan, SJ, to sum this up for us:

Christian scholars from both sides agree that one does not find the threefold structure of ministry, with a bishop in each local church assisted by presbyters and deacons, in the New Testament. They agree, rather, that the historic episcopate was the result of a development in the post-New Testament period, from the local leadership of a college of presbyters, who were sometimes called bishops (episkopoi), to the leadership of a single bishop. ...The question that divides Catholics and Protestants is not whether, or how rapidly, the development from the local leadership of a college of presbyters to that of a single bishop took place, but whether the result of that development is rightly judged an element of the divinely willed structure of the church" (Preface of *From Apostles to Bishops*). This development appears to have occurred first

in the second century in the churches of the East rather than the West. Again Sullivan: The development of the episcopacy “took place earlier in the churches of Syria and western Asia Minor, than it did in those of Philippi, Corinth and Rome.” (*From Apostles to Bishops*, pp. 14-15)

This discussion leads naturally to the question of apostolic succession (A.S.). The view most often mentioned in dialogues like this is what I will refer to as the “maximalist view” (M.V.). Stated succinctly, it is the belief that there is an unbroken chain of bishops ordaining bishops from St. Peter in Rome to the present. This is the prominent view in both the Roman Church and in Eastern Orthodoxy. As I mentioned earlier, all Protestants believe in apostolic succession. They however focus on the continuance of the apostolic message and the preservation of the apostolic church regardless of its ecclesiology. Let's call this the “continuance view” (C.V.). Protestants reject M.V. for both historical and theological reasons.

Irenaeus (AD 180) was the first church father whose writing we have that attempts to name the bishops that flow from Rome (*Against Heresies*). This was important to him in his apologetic undertaking in addressing the heretics. Eusebius (AD 315), mainly relying on Irenaeus and also Hegesippus, also provides us with such a list. History mitigates against their pre-AD 100 conclusions. The high ecclesiastical view that single individual bishops (the monoepiscopate) were appointed in a straight line from Peter is not present historically. Note again Ignatius. In the words of Gavin Ortlund, “For Ignatius, the bishop has congregational not diocesan jurisdiction” (Ortlund, *What It Means to Be Protestant*, p. 125). Ortlund quotes Herman Bavinck: “In the writings of

Ignatius, the episcopal idea is still at the beginning of its development. The bishop here is not the bearer of tradition, nor a New Testament priest, nor apostolic succession. ... He is an office bearer in a local church and has no authority outside of it" (*Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 4*). It is the council of elders that for Ignatius stands in the place of the Apostles. Irenaeus says much the same thing in Book 4 of *Against Heresies*: "Wherefore it is incumbent to obey the presbyters who are in the Church – those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles." Certainly he believed this of "The Bishop" as well (Book 4, Chapter 26). If this is taken to mean that the church (elders, pastors, bishops) possess the true apostolic doctrine of Christ, to this NCCs heartily affirm. The full perspective of the high M.V. that the church holds today did not form until the third century. Recall our earlier quote from Ignatius' letter to the Magnesians. The bishop is obviously the leader of the local church. He is the one "in charge." The authority he has, however, is not that expressed by the M.V. He is not in the direct line of the inheritors of the apostolic. That is the place of the council of elders. This is not a quibble. Remember that we are addressing only the M.V. A high M.V. necessitates a direct apostolic laying on of hands from the time of St. Peter in Rome until the present.

There are at least four views of the origin of the three-tier, Bishop-led church, what we will call The Episcopate (Ortlund).

1. The episcopate is from the first century and divine.
2. The episcopate is a later development and divine.
3. The episcopate is a later development and good/acceptable, but not divine.

4. The episcopate is a later development and wrong.

For our purposes #2 and #3 hold the most promise for dialogue. I would characterize #2 as the standard Catholic position and #3 for the position that most NCCs (and those with whom I normally fellowship) hold. The fourth position is the one I was raised with and I am aware that a number of New Church leaders (primarily in Third World settings) hold to it still. It just is of little interest to me and most in my world.

Obviously what was said earlier about the presuppositions each side brings with them determines where we land on #2 and #3. Catholics believe that they have the authority of the church which insures their perspectives. NCCs see none of this in the New Testament and none historically before AD 100. Each of us is “turning the prism” and seeing different things.

An interesting question is natural to ask here: Since Protestants rely in part on historical arguments about the pre-AD 100 church, is there any historical evidence of position #3 in the church fathers? The surprising answer is yes. While his perspectives are not widespread, Jerome is an important voice. The fourth-fifth century translator of the Latin Vulgate and contemporary of Augustine says in a letter to the presbyter Evangelus, “When subsequently one presbyter was chosen to preside over the rest, this was done to remedy schism and to prevent each individual from rending the Church of Christ and drawing it to himself” (Letter 147).

In his commentary on Titus there is the following famous statement: “to the men of old, the same men who were priests were also the bishops; but gradually as the seed beds of dissensions were eradicated, all solicitude was conferred on one man.

Therefore, just as the priests know that by custom of the church they are subject to the one who previously appointed over them, so the bishops know that they, more by custom than by the truth of the Lord's arrangement, are greater than the priests." (St. Jerome's *Commentaries on Galatians, Titus, and Philemon* trans. Thomas Scheck 2010)

Why is all of this important? Real progress has been made in recent years to close the gap of understanding and to restore a common vision on some important doctrinal areas between Protestants and Catholics. An example of this is the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed Oct. 31, 1999, by Edward Cardinal Cassidy of The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and The President of the Lutheran World Federation, Christian Krause. In this declaration a consensus (with minor exceptions) was reached concerning the difficult question of Salvation by Grace Through Faith. This was a major step in repairing a long theological divide that many considered insurmountable. What remains? The question of "the Apostolic" remains as the most important barrier on the way to greater communion and unity. From it flows the question of the ministry and place of the papacy, the sacraments and the nature of the true church.