

# Roman Catholic Apologetics 2025: Early Church Polity & the Origen & Rise of the Papacy





# Historical View

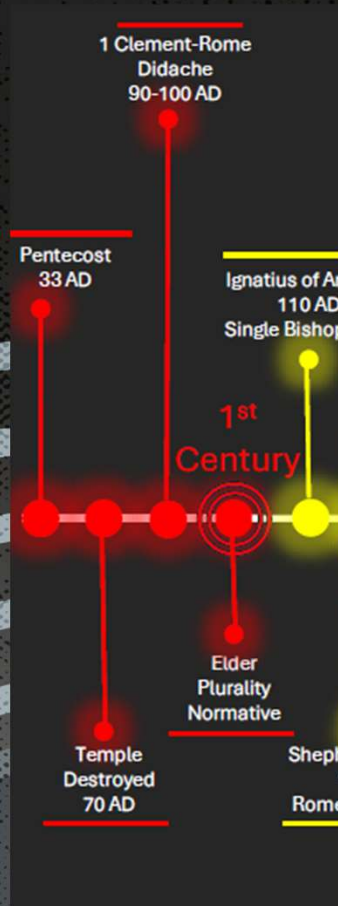
Vatican I. Session 3. Dogmatic Constitution: Chpt 2.9 (4/24/1870) In consequence, it is not permissible for anyone to interpret holy scripture in a sense contrary to this, or indeed against the unanimous consent of the fathers.





# Catholic Apologetics

## Origen & Rise of the Papacy



# 1st Century





## 1 Clement (90ish AD)

THE Church of God which sojourns at Rome, to  
the Church of God sojourning at Corinth

being obedient to those who had the rule over you,  
and giving all fitting honor to the presbyters among  
you. (1 Clement chpt 1)



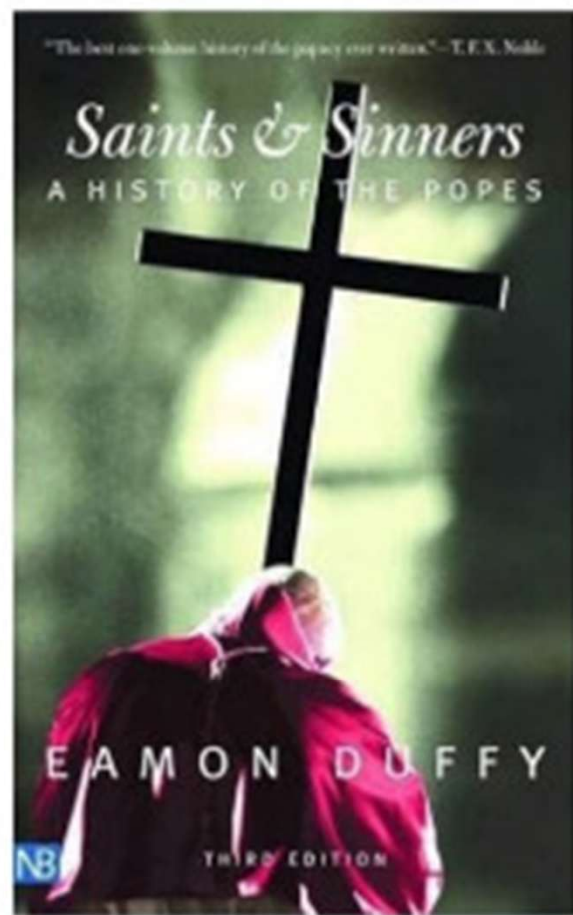
Ante-Nicene Fathers 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus



“Clement made no claim to write as bishop. His letter was sent in the name of the whole Roman community, he never identifies himself or writes in his own person. ... The letter itself makes no distinction between presbyters and bishops...

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Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 10.



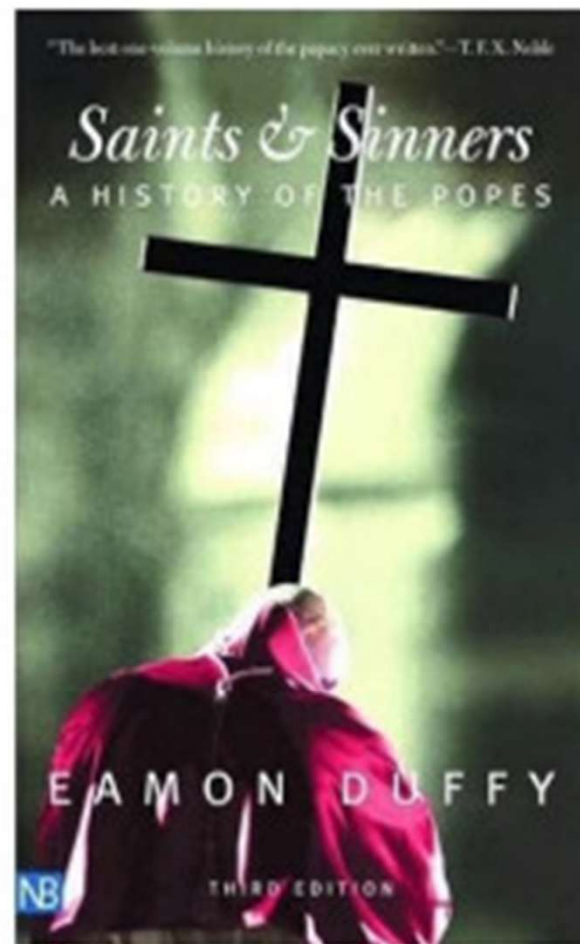




... about which it always speaks in the plural, suggesting that at Corinth as at Rome the church at this time was organized under a group of bishops or presbyters, rather than a single ruling bishop. A generation later, this was still so in Rome.”

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Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 10.



# Didache (100ish AD)

Appoint, therefore, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, and truthful and proved; for they also render to you the service of prophets and teachers.



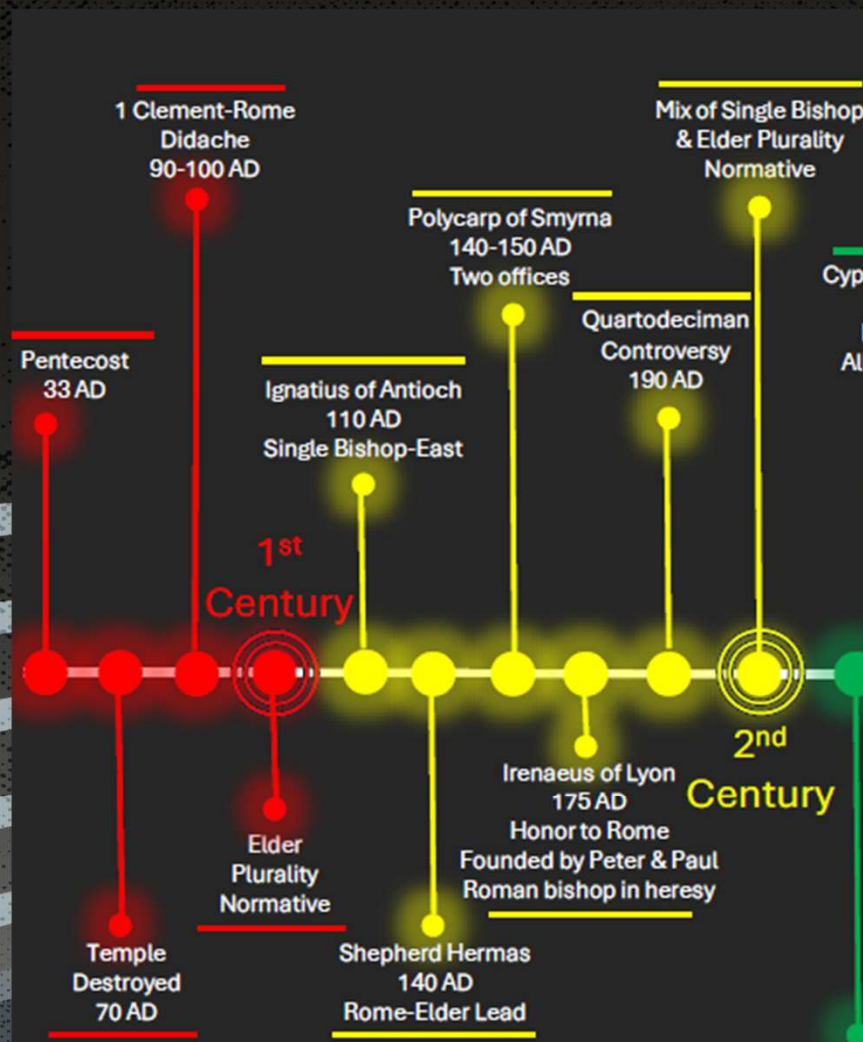
Ante-Nicene Fathers 7: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies



**Conclusion:** As 1st century closes, we have no evidence from scripture, 1 Clement, or Didache of a single leader ruling over a church. Instead, we have numerous examples of plurality in church leadership!









## 2nd Century Ignatius of Antioch (108ish AD)

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church;  
(Letter to Romans)

as Polybius your bishop has shown me (Trallians 1)





## 2nd Century Ignatius of Antioch (108ish AD)

ye do, to do nothing without the bishop. And be ye subject also to the presbytery, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ (Trallians 2)

bishop is the representative of the Father of all things, and the presbyters are the sanhedrim of God, and assembly of the apostles of Christ. Apart from these there is no elect Church, no congregation of holy ones, no assembly of saints (Trallians 3)



## 2nd Century Ignatius of Antioch (108ish AD)

Remember in your prayers the Church in Syria, which now has God for its shepherd, instead of me. Jesus Christ alone will oversee it (Romans Chp 9)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus



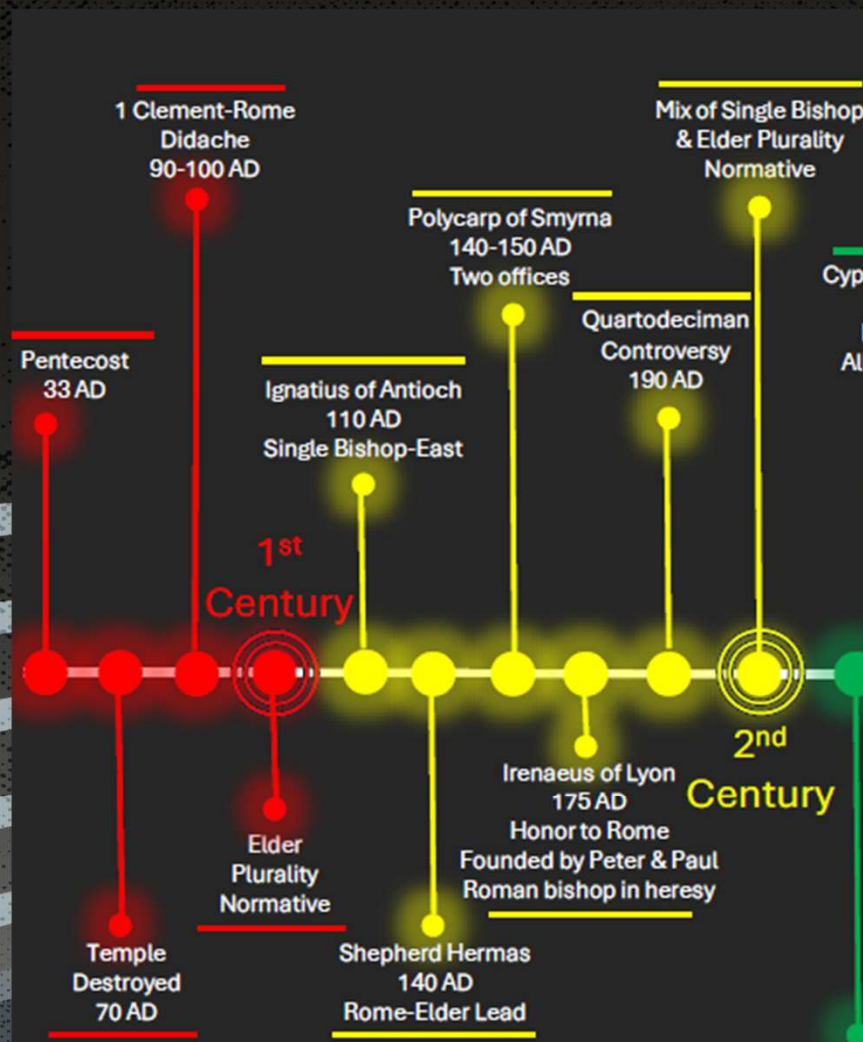
## 2nd Century Ignatius of Antioch (108ish AD)

to Polycarp, Bishop of the Church of the Smyrnæans, or rather, who has, as his own bishop, God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ (Polycarp)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus







# Shepherd of Hermas (140 AD)

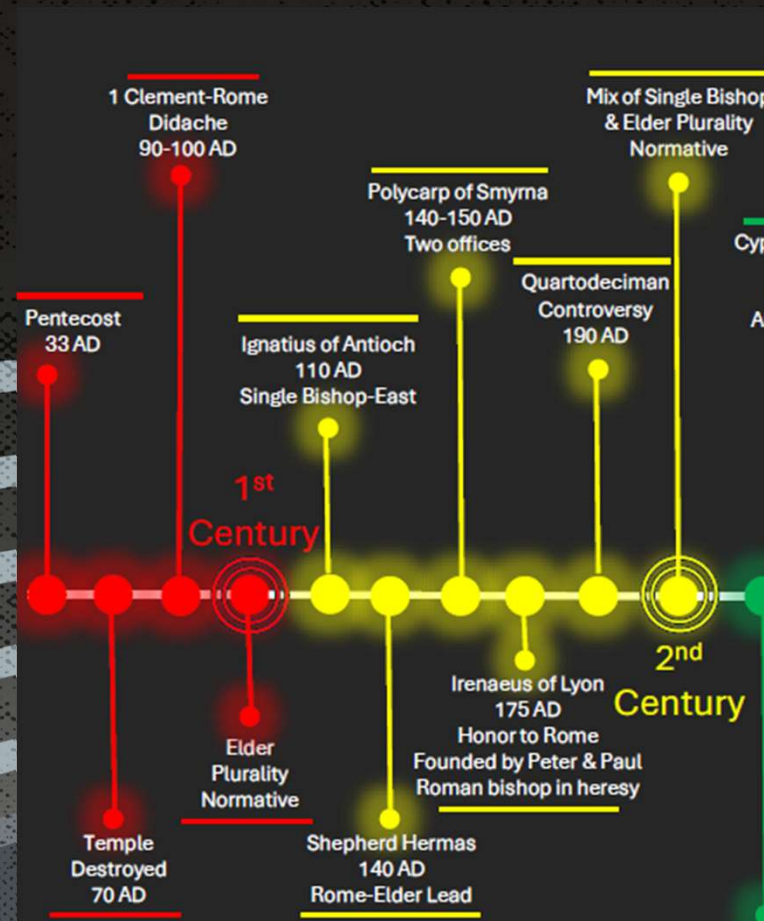
But you will read the words in this city, along with the presbyters who preside over the Church



Ante-Nicene Fathers 2: Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)



# Polycarp of Smyrna (140ish AD)





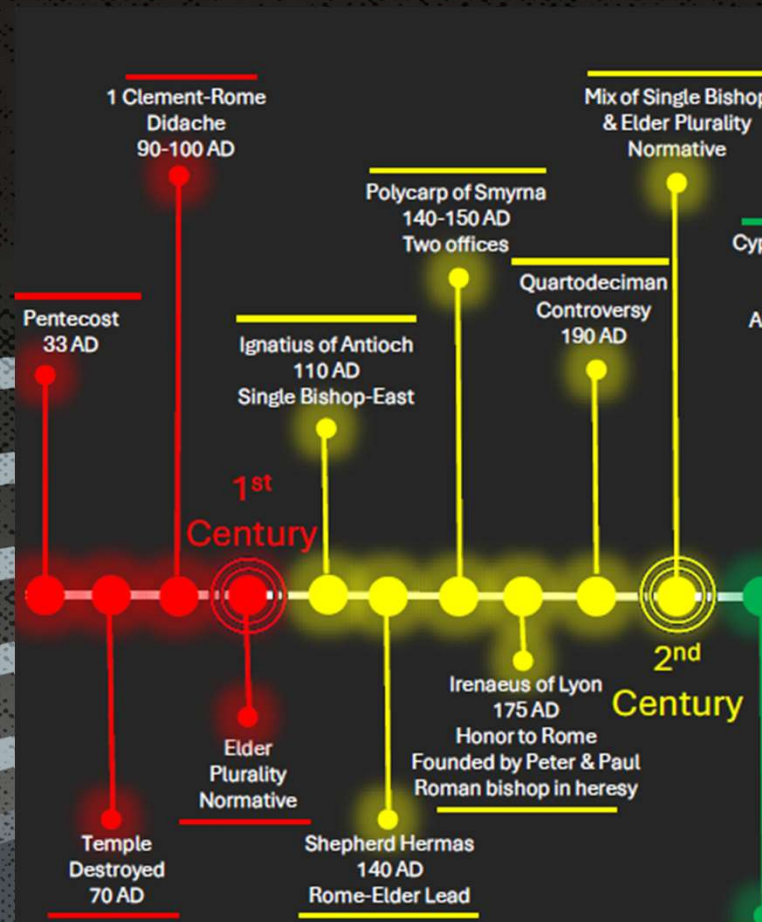
Wherefore, it is needful to abstain from all these things, being subject to the presbyters and deacons, as unto God and Christ (Letter to Philippians Ch. 5)



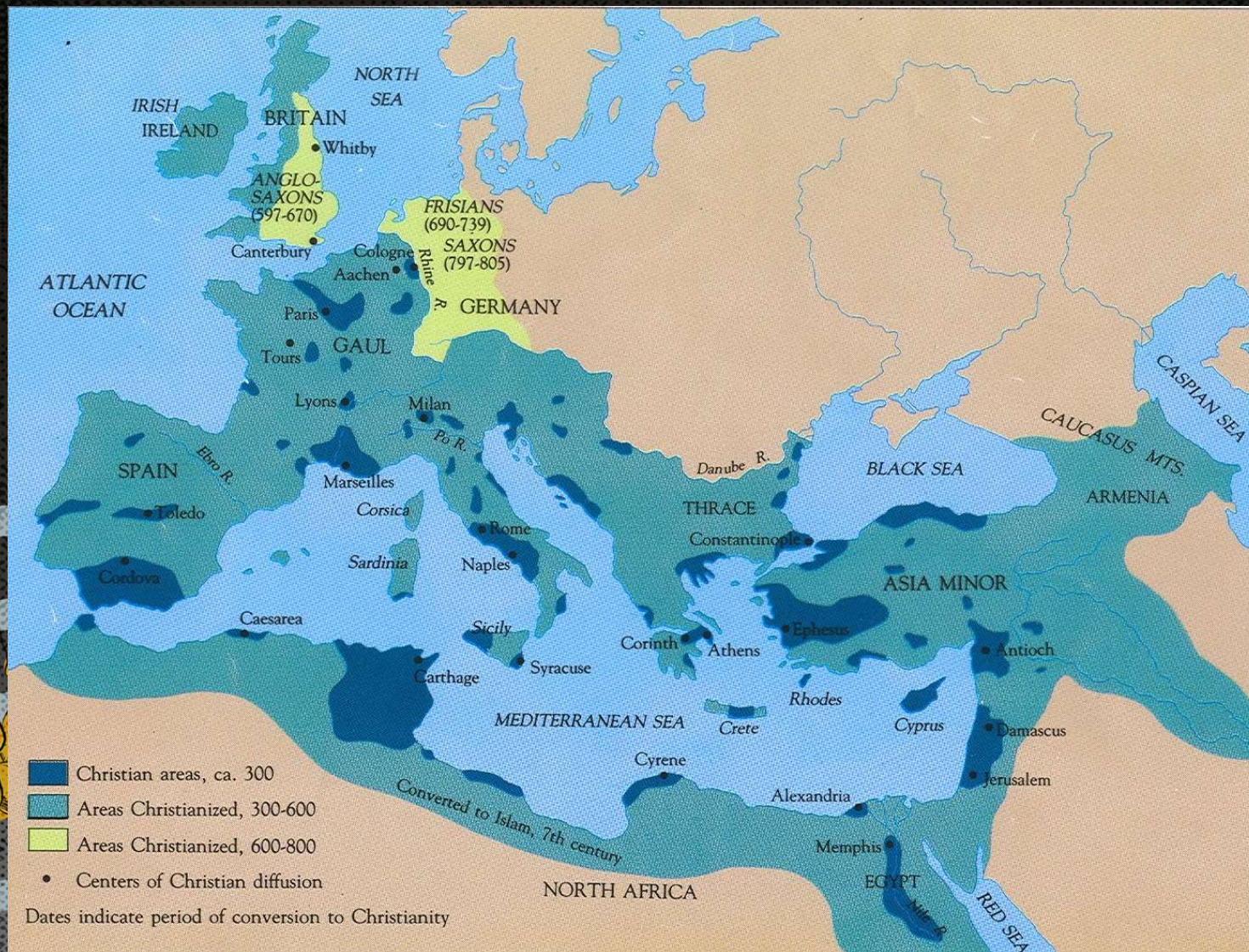
Ante-Nicene Fathers 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus



# Irenaeus of Lyon (175ish AD-France)









by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul (Against Heresies; 3.3.2)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus



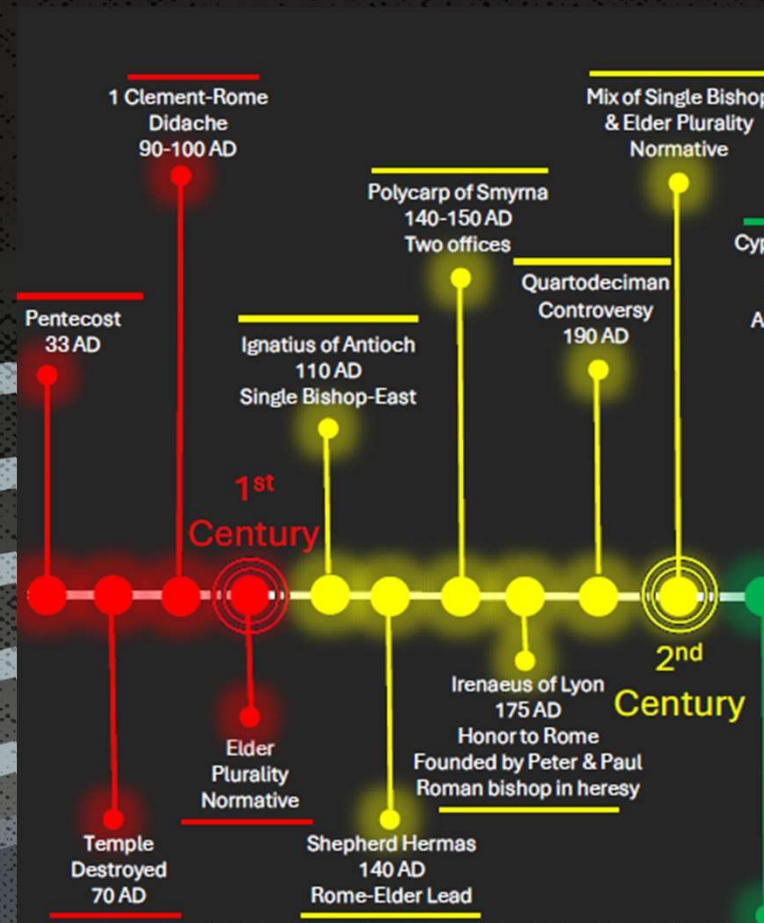
He it was who, coming to Rome in the time of Anicetus caused many to turn away from the aforesaid heretics to the Church of God, proclaiming that he had received this one and sole truth from the apostles (Against Heresies; 3.3.4)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 1: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus

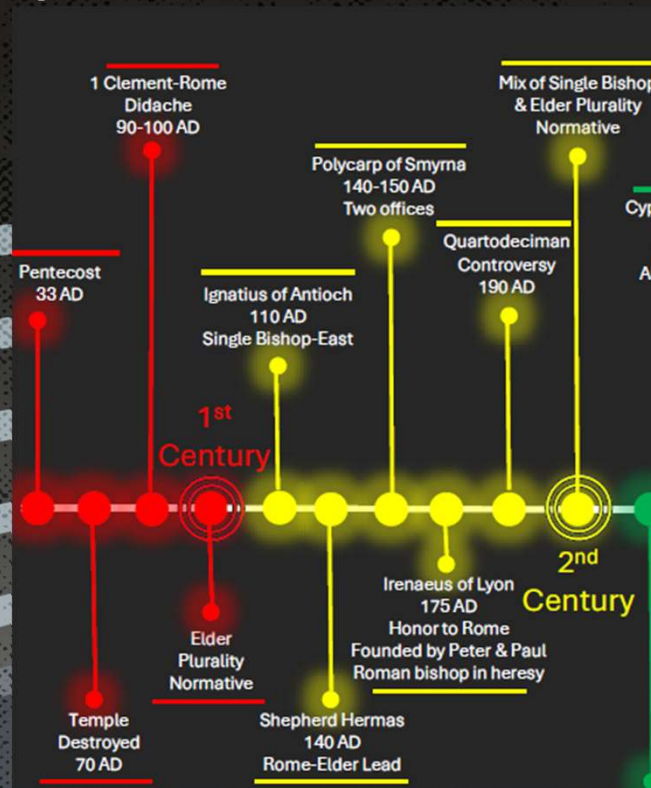


# Quartodeciman Controversy (190 AD)



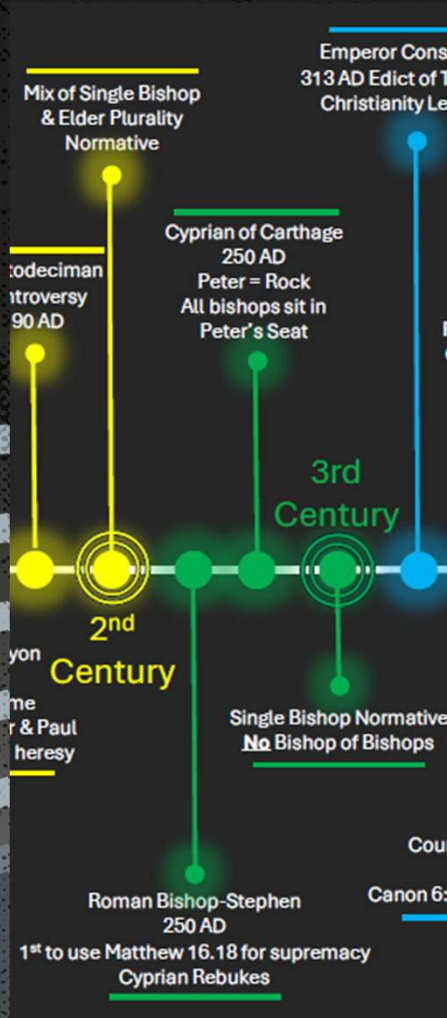


**Conclusion:** 2nd Century evidence begins to show us a mix of single leader churches but also those with plurality. Seems like there is development! Historical evidence indicates there was not a single bishop in Rome until after at least 140 AD.





# 3rd Century



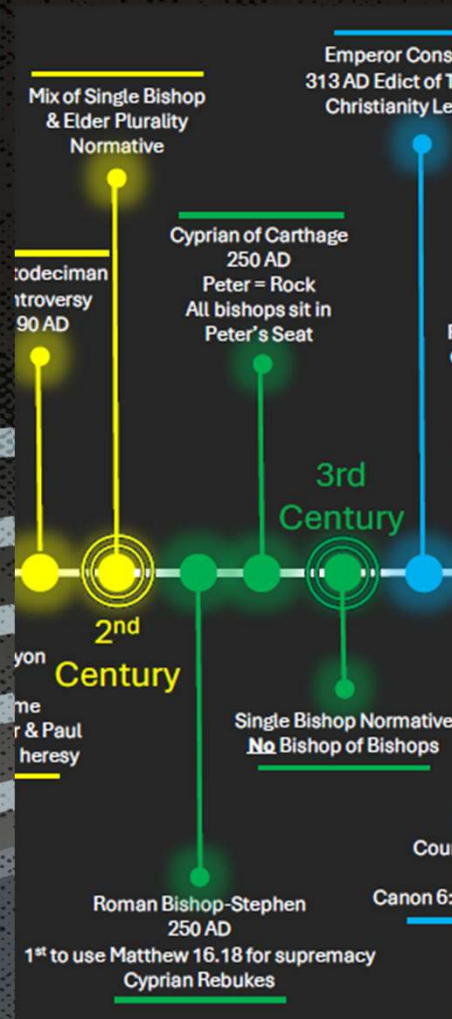


Vatican 1 (July 1870; Session 4.1.4): To this absolutely manifest teaching of the sacred scriptures, as it has always been understood by the catholic church, are clearly opposed the distorted opinions of those who misrepresent the form of government which Christ the lord established in his church and deny that Peter, in preference to the rest of the apostles, taken singly or collectively, was endowed by Christ with a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction.

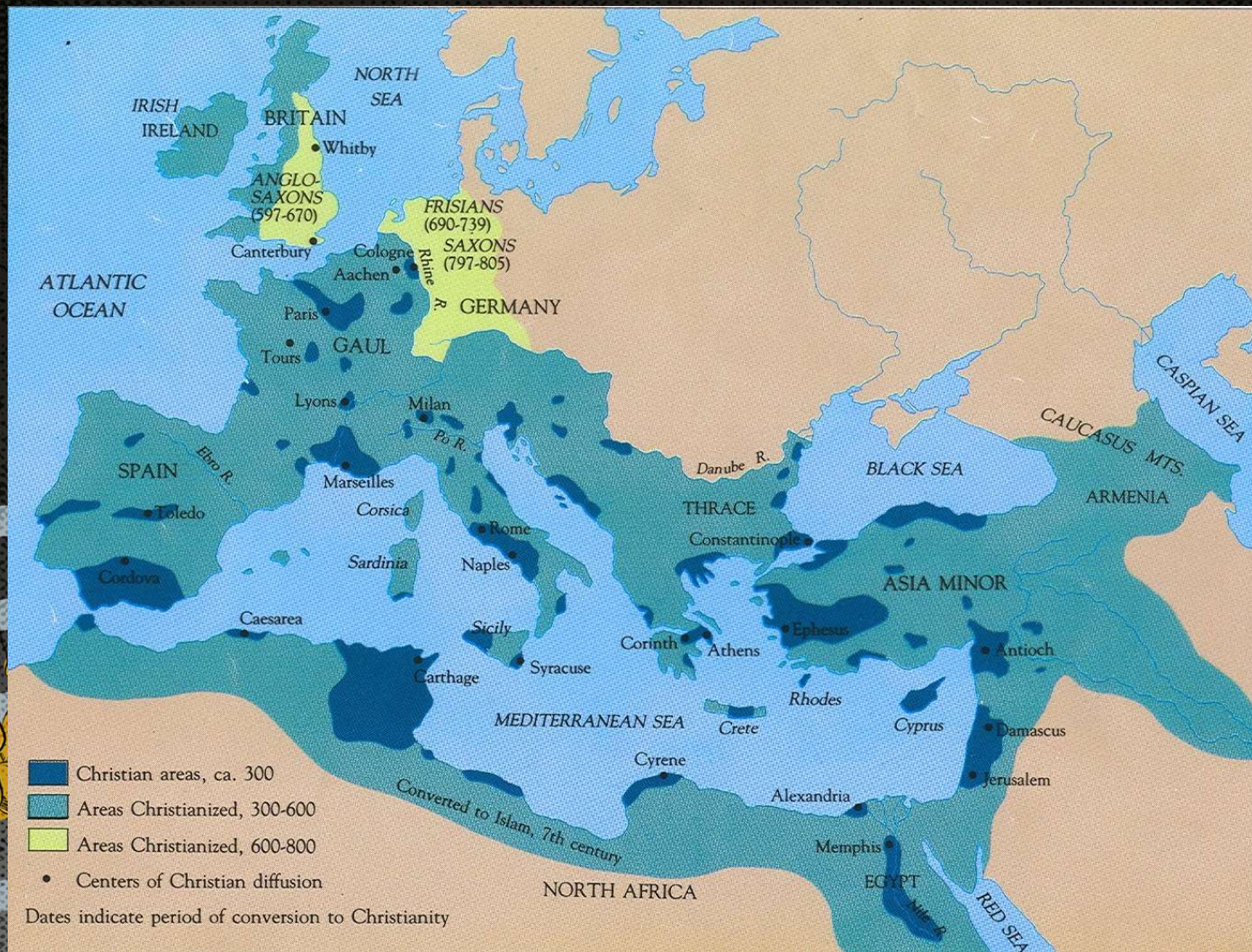
Vatican 1 (July 1870; Session 4.2.2): For no one can be in doubt, indeed it was known in every age that the holy and most blessed Peter, prince and head of the apostles, the pillar of faith and the foundation of the catholic church, received the keys of the kingdom from our lord Jesus Christ, the saviour and redeemer of the human race, and that to this day and for ever he lives and presides and exercises judgment in his successors the bishops of the holy Roman see, which he founded and consecrated with his blood [46] .



# Cyprian 250 AD









The Lord speaks to Peter, saying, “I say unto thee, that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Unity of Church 4)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 5: Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix



Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as was Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power (Unity of Church 4)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 5: Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix



5. And this unity we ought firmly to hold and assert, especially those of us that are bishops who preside in the Church, that we may also prove the episcopate itself to be one and undivided (Unity of Church 5)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 5: Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix



Basilides, after the detection of his crimes, and the baring of his conscience even by his own confession, went to Rome and deceived Stephen our colleague, placed at a distance, and ignorant of what had been done, and of the truth, to canvass that he might be replaced unjustly in the episcopate from which he had been righteously deposed. (Cyprian Ep 67.5)





But I put off deciding what was to be arranged about the case of the lapsed, so that when quiet and tranquillity should be granted, and the divine indulgence should allow the bishops to assemble into one place, then the advice gathered from the comparison of all opinions being communicated and weighed, we might determine what was necessary to be done (Epistle 51.4)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 5: Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix



According, however, to what had been before decided, when the persecution was quieted, and opportunity of meeting was afforded; a large number of bishops, whom their faith and the divine protection had preserved in soundness and safety, we met together; and the divine Scriptures being brought forward on both sides, we balanced the decision with wholesome moderation, so that neither should hope of communion and peace be wholly denied to the lapsed (Epistle 51.6)





since you have desired that what Stephen our brother  
replied to my letters should be brought to your  
knowledge, I have sent you a copy of his reply; on the  
reading of which, you will more and more observe his  
error in endeavouring to maintain the cause of heretics  
against Christians, and against the Church of God  
(Epistle 73.1)





he who, forgetful of unity, adopts the lies and the contagions of a profane washing (Epistle 73.2)

or what presumption, to prefer human tradition to divine ordinance (Epistle 73.3)

To this point of evil has the Church of God and spouse of Christ been developed, that she follows the examples of heretics (Epistle 73.4)



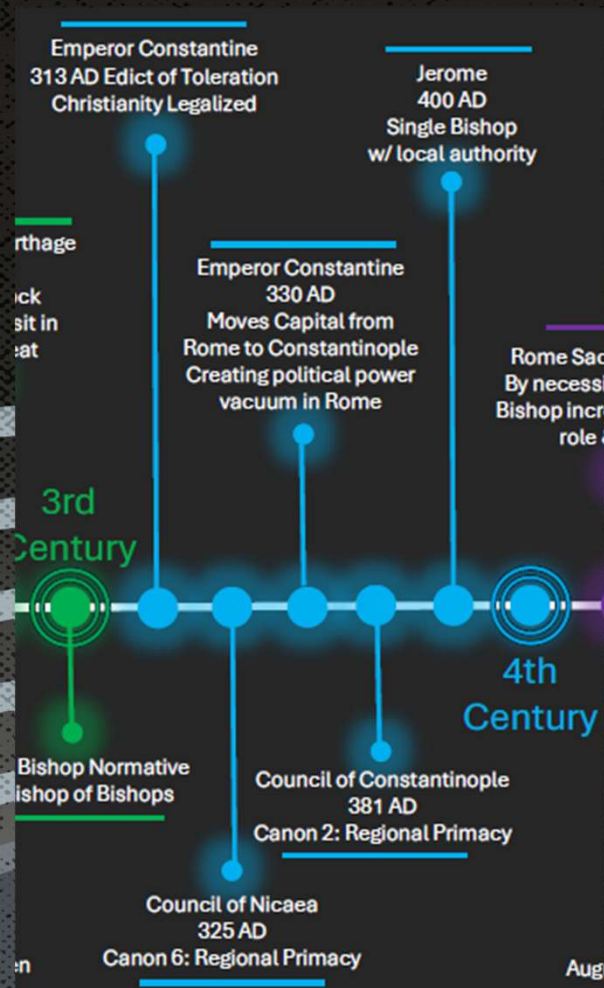
For neither does any of us set himself up as a bishop of bishops, nor by tyrannical terror does any compel his colleague to the necessity of obedience; since every bishop, according to the allowance of his liberty and power, has his own proper right of judgment, and can no more be judged by another than he himself can judge another. (Seventh Council of Carthage)



Ante-Nicene Fathers 5: Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix



# 4<sup>th</sup> Century





# Council of Nicaea: 325 AD

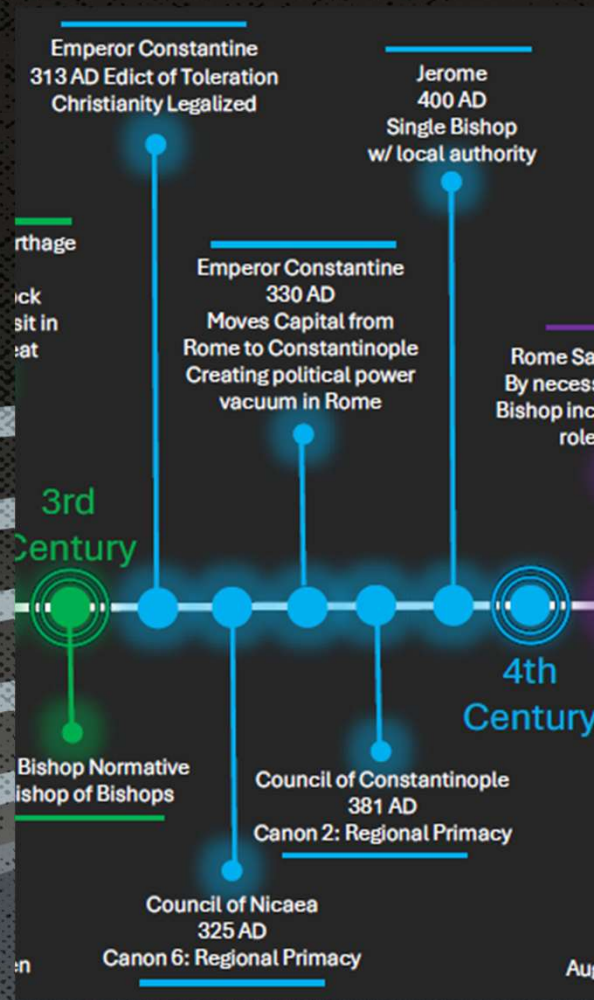
## Canon 6

Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis prevail, that the Bishop of Alexandria have jurisdiction in all these, since the like is customary for the Bishop of Rome also. Likewise in Antioch and the other provinces, let the Churches retain their privileges. And this is to be universally understood, that if any one be made bishop without the consent of the Metropolitan, the great Synod has declared that such a man ought not to be a bishop. If, however, two or three bishops shall from natural love of contradiction, oppose the common suffrage of the rest, it being reasonable and in accordance with the ecclesiastical law, then let the choice of the majority prevail.





# Emperor Constantine



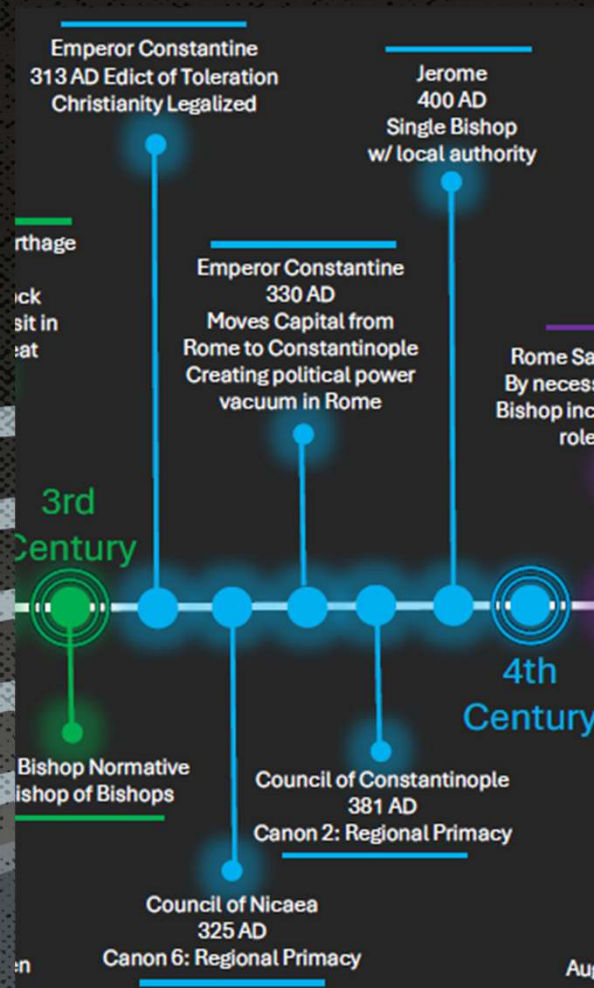


# Council of Constantinople: 381 AD

Canon 2: The bishops are not to go beyond their dioceses to churches lying outside of their bounds, nor bring confusion on the churches; but let the Bishop of Alexandria, according to the canons, alone administer the affairs of Egypt; and let the bishops of the East manage the East alone, the privileges of the Church in Antioch, which are mentioned in the canons of Nice, being preserved; and let the bishops of the Asian Diocese administer the Asian affairs only; and the Pontic bishops only Pontic matters; and the Thracian bishops only Thracian affairs. And let not bishops go beyond their dioceses for ordination or any other ecclesiastical ministrations, unless they be invited. And the aforesaid canon concerning dioceses being observed, it is evident that the synod of every province will administer the affairs of that particular province as was decreed at Nice. But the Churches of God in heathen nations must be governed according to the custom which has prevailed from the times of the Fathers.



# Jerome (400ish AD)





For when the apostle clearly teaches that presbyters are the same as bishops (Letter 146 to 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 by drawing it to himself.

