

DISCIPLESHIP. SUPPLEMENT 19

[LEADERSHIP]

DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERSHIP IN CHURCH HISTORY

Today different Christian denominations have different kinds of leadership structures.

How did this development take place? This study does not intend to change the leadership structure of your Christian fellowship. It only wants to give a summary description of the historical development of several leadership structures in the worldwide Church AFTER THE COMPLETION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT REVELATION.

A. THE APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS (THE BIBLICAL TEACHING)(A.D. 30 - 97).

1. The New Testament teaches only the appointment of a body of elders.

(1) Jesus Christ leads through his Spirit.

The New Testament does not teach any kind of hierarchical leadership structure! There was no umbrella organisation above the independent churches. After the resurrection, ascension and enthronement in heaven, Jesus Christ continued the work he began on earth (Acts 1:1; John 7:37-39) and poured out his Spirit on his disciples (Acts chapter 2) (A.D. 30). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who has come to be “with” and “in” every Christian and to represent Jesus Christ on earth (John 14:16-18; John 16:13-15; Romans 8:9-10). The independent congregations were governed by their Head, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:20-22), through the Spirit of Christ (Acts 9:31) and the Word of Christ (John 8:31; John 14:21).

(2) The Spirit leads through the apostles and a body of elders.

The Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) used the Eleven disciples (Acts 2:14) to plant the first churches among the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-42) (A.D. 30) and in all Judea, Galilee and among the half-Jews in Samaria (Acts 8:1,4; Acts 9:31) (A.D. 30-40) and among the non-Jews (Gentiles) in Caesarea (Acts chapters 10 and 11) (A.D. 40) and in Antioch (Acts 11:19-24) (A.D. 44). The apostles of Jesus Christ were unique, were the leaders that planted the churches and possessed a unique, but temporary authority.

And after Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:1-30) (about A.D. 34) the Holy Spirit used him to plant churches in Cilicia in Turkey (Galatians 1:21-23) (A.D. 36-44) and in Syria (Acts 11:25-26) (A.D. 44-46). The church of Antioch sent gifts to the elders of the church of Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). Later the Holy Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas for missionary journeys to which he had called them (Acts 13:1-4).

On the first missionary journey (A.D. 47-48) they planted new churches everywhere: in Cyprus (Acts 13:4-5) and especially in Turkey (Acts chapters 13-14) and appointed a council of elders for every church (Acts 14:21-23). During the consultation at Jerusalem (about A.D. 50) between the church of Antioch and the church of Jerusalem (elders and the apostles who still resided in Jerusalem), the apostles Peter, John and James acknowledged God’s ministry through the apostle Paul (Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 2:1-10).

On the second missionary journey (A.D. 50-52) Paul and his co-workers planted churches in the cities of Turkey, Macedonia and Greece (Acts 15:36 to 18:22).

On the third missionary journey (A.D. 52-57) they ministered in Turkey and Greece (Acts 18:23 to 21:16), for 1½ years in Corinth (Acts 18:11) and for about 3 years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). At Miletus, Paul instructed the body of elders of the church of Ephesus, saying that the Holy Spirit had appointed the body of elders to be “the overseers” and “the shepherds” of the church (Acts 20:17,28) (A.D. 57).

During his first imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 60-61) Paul wrote his letters to the churches of Ephesus and Philippi and mentions that there were overseers and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1,12; Philippians 1:1).

On the fourth missionary journey (A.D. 61-64) the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:16) to write his letters to Timothy and Titus and gave instructions how each church should be led (1 Timothy 3:14-15), namely, through a body of elders (1 Timothy 4:14), their prerequisites, tasks and authority (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Timothy 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9).

The Holy Spirit also inspired the apostle Peter (A.D. 63-65) (cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21; cf. 2 Peter 3:1-16) to write his letters to the churches in the provinces of Turkey (1 Peter 1:1). He too gave instructions how each church should be led, namely, through a body of elders (“elders” in the plural). He too gave instructions about the necessary prerequisites, tasks and authority of the elders (1 Peter 5:1-7).

Thus, during the New Testament period the apostles and their co-workers established new churches and appointed a body of elders for each church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). In the original Greek a body of elders was called a “presbiterion”, “a council or board of presbyters (elders)” (1 Timothy 4:14).

The person with an leadership office was called “an elder”¹ (Acts 20:17; 1 Peter 5:1); and sometimes “an overseer”² (Titus 1:7, compare verse 5) or “a shepherd”³ (Acts 20:17,28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:21). Other words used for the leaders of the church were: “leaders”⁴ (Acts 15:22; Hebrews 13:7,17,24), “leaders” (literally: “persons standing at the head”)⁵ (rulers, directors, managers)(Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17) and “house stewards” (literally: economists, managers, NIV entrusted with God’s work)⁶ (Titus 1:7).

During the New Testament period (A.D. 30-97), the terms: “elder”⁷, “overseer”⁸, “shepherd”⁹ and “those standing in the front”¹⁰ (1 Thessalonians 5:12) or “directors”¹¹ (1 Timothy 5:17) all refer to one and the same person without any distinction (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-2), because the New Testament only speaks of the appointment of elders and not of any other kind of leaders above the elders!

A church was led by a body of elders (a board or council of elders)¹² (1 Timothy 4:14). All the elders were equal, even though some elders had the task of preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17). The elders received no theological training at a Theological Seminary or Bible School. They were simply the most mature believers in the church and were chosen to lead the church on the basis of the biblical qualifications and biblical tasks for leadership.

Every local church was organisationally independent from other local churches (See Dota manual 3, supplement 12, “the meaning of the word “church”¹³ in the Bible”).

(2) The New Testament does not teach the appointment of any umbrella organisation (Synod or Council).

After the great persecution of Christians at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4) (about A.D. 33), the believers spread to different countries and preached the gospel. A large number of people became believers in Jesus Christ in Antioch in Syria (before A.D. 44). The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to help them. He fetched Paul from Tarsus in Turkey to help him (Acts 11:25-27) (A.D. 44-46). The church at Antioch was founded as the result of all this missionary work.

Later a number of Jewish Christians travelled from Jerusalem to Antioch and tried to persuade these Gentile Christians that they first had to become Jews by getting circumcised before they could become Christians! Without physical circumcision they could not be saved (Acts 15:1). The church at Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul to meet the delegates from the church at Jerusalem in order to solve this problem. This consultation between two local churches was not a Synod or Council of all churches, because not all the churches in the region or the world were represented!

Moreover, Acts 15 only *relates* how a problem in Church History was resolved, but does *not teach* how a problem should be resolved. This is a good example how two local Christian churches can meet together to solve a mutual problem, but the Bible does not teach that God appointed a Synod or Council to preside (rule) over all the existing local churches in a country or in the world! All local churches were independent!

B. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BISHOPS (A HIERARCHICAL LEADERSHIP SYSTEM) (97 - 323 A.D.)

1. Historical characteristics.

This period of Church History is marked by many struggles inside the Christian Church. This was due to the internal influences of the religion of the Jews and the heathen religions of the Gentiles and the external influences of the politics of the Roman Empire and its heathen philosophies. In the end, the “world-wide” Christian Church was victorious. The word “world-wide” (Greek: *katholikos*) means “general”, “universal” in contrast to a single church.

2. The change of biblical terminology to form a hierarchical leadership system.

During the second century A.D. “the Old Testament leadership of the ceremonial law of the nation-state of Israel” (consisting of “the high priest”, “the priests” and “the Levites”) was changed into a hierarchy (a hierarchical leadership system) and imposed on “the New Testament leadership of the Church” without warrant.

¹ Greek: *presbuteros*, English: priest, elder

² Greek: *episkopos*, English: bishop, supervisor

³ Greek: *poimén*, Latin and English: pastor, shepherd

⁴ Greek: *hégoumenos*

⁵ Greek: *prohistamenos*

⁶ Greek: *oikonomos*

⁷ Greek: *presbuteros*, English: priest, elder

⁸ Greek: *episkopos*, English: bishop, supervisor

⁹ Greek: *poimén*; Latin: pastor and English: pastor, shepherd

¹⁰ Greek: *prohistamenous humón*

¹¹ Greek: *prohestótes presbuteroi*

¹² Greek: *presbuterion*

¹³ Greek: *ekklésia*

(1) The origin of traditional “bishops”.

During this period, the Greek term “episkopos” (now no longer translated with the word “overseer” or “supervisor”, but with the word “bishop”) no longer described one of the tasks of an elder, but began to describe a new leadership or leadership position above the elders of all local churches. Without any biblical warrant, the term “bishop” was reserved for a single individual who became a kind of New Testament high priest in the worldwide Church. Instead of being an overseer or supervisor in the local congregation, he became “a bishop” or district leader in the worldwide Church, the highest office in the worldwide Church.

“The apostles of Jesus Christ” had died and so without any biblical warrant “the bishops” were regarded as “the successors of the apostles of Jesus Christ”!

Gradually it was regarded that only bishops may perform the official ministries of the Christian Church as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, marriage and funeral services and ordaining new church offices. In this way the bishops made themselves indispensable for the Church! The bishops of the second and third centuries A.D. made themselves the leaders of the Church without any biblical authority or justification! A bishop led a whole area of local congregations or parishes. At this period of time the bishops themselves were not supervised by anyone (there were no archbishops yet).

(2) The origin of traditional “priests” (pastors).

During this period the Greek term “presbuteros” (now no longer translated with the word “elder”, but with the word “priest”) no longer described the original and only office of leadership in the Christian Church which was shared with other elders in a body of elders (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:2-4). Without any biblical warrant, the term “priest” was reserved for a single individual who became a kind of New Testament priest in a local church (parish). In stead of being just one of the elders in the council of elders, the priest became the only leader, shepherd or pastor of the local church or parish¹⁴.

Gradually it was regarded that only the priest (or pastor) may perform certain official ministries in the local church as preaching and later performing the sacraments. All priests and their parishes in a particular area were supervised by a bishop.

(3) The origin of traditional “deacons”.

During this period the Greek term “diakonos” (now no longer translated with the word “deacon” in some languages) no longer described the original office of service in the local congregation which was shared with other deacons (Acts 6:3; Philippians 1:1). Without any biblical warrant, the term “deacon” began to be used for a single individual who became a kind of New Testament Levite in a local church. A deacon was a kind of assistant or servant of the priest of the local church or parish. A deacon was supervised by a priest (pastor).

(4) But these traditional offices have no Biblical basis or authority.

Thus after the New Testament period, during the second and third centuries A.D., a historical development of the concept of “church leadership” took place. However, this historical development had no biblical basis or authority!

Ignatius (110 A.D.) was the only Apostolic Father who insisted on monarchical episcopacy (the rule by one bishop). But even he never stated that this was a divine institution. It was only his personal opinion. Jerome (384 A.D.) in his commentary on Titus 1:5 remarked that the supremacy of a single bishop arose “by custom rather than by the Lord’s actual appointment”, as a means of preventing schisms in the Christian Church. However, it became a means to rule and control everyone within the Church.

However, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament teaches any hierarchy of offices in the Christian Church! And Church History teaches us that even the appointment of bishops as a new church office did not prevent schisms! Precisely the struggle among the bishops for the highest position in the Church (in contravention of Matthew 20:25-28) led to a hierarchy within the leadership and to the multiplication of church schisms!

3. Bishops and bishoprics.

Everywhere in the Roman Empire and even beyond it, new Christian churches came into existence. The Bible teaches that Christians have only one “mother” (namely, the Heavenly Jerusalem)(Galatians 4:26). But a great number of priests (pastors) of so-called “mother churches” did not want to let go of their so-called “daughter churches” which they founded! So a new office (position) of bishop¹⁵ was created in the Christian Church. The TASK of an elder of an independent church (namely: being an overseer) was changed into a new OFFICE and position of power above all the elders of all the local churches and called “a bishop”. The bishop supervised the mother church as well as the daughter churches. The mother church with its bishop did not want to let go of her power. She wanted to rule and control!

In the New Testament the word “bishop” only described the TASK of the office of an elder. But during the second century the word “bishop” began to describe a new OFFICE or POSITION.

¹⁴ Greek: paroikia, English: parish

¹⁵ Greek: episkopos; English: bishop

In the New Testament a body of elders¹⁶ had the task to oversee¹⁷ an independent church. But during the second century A.D. a single bishop became the overseer or supervisor over all the dependent churches with their priests in a particular region!

The New Testament Church only had a presbyterial¹⁸ leadership structure, that is, every local church was independent and was led by a body of presbyters or elders (the word “elders” is always in the plural). But during the second and third centuries A.D. the Christian Church developed an episcopal¹⁹ leadership structure, that is, all previous independent local churches in a region were made dependent churches and were placed under a bishop (the word “bishop” is singular). The exact historical development from a presbyterial leadership structure into an episcopal leadership structure is not quite clear. All the dependent local churches in a particular region formed a bishopric²⁰ led by a bishop.

In the New Testament there was only an independent body or council of elders²¹ elected to lead an independent church. But during the second and third centuries A.D. there was a bishop²² leading a whole region of dependent churches. This bishop was independent from other bishops. This was the first step towards a hierarchical leadership structure of the Christian Church.

There is no biblical warrant for this historical development! The New Testament does not command, teach or even relate about a hierarchical leadership structure!

C. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SYNODS AND COUNCILS (A HIERARCHICAL UMBRELLA STRUCTURE) (AFTER A.D. 195 - 1870).

Church history shows how the leaders in the Christian Church manoeuvred themselves into higher leadership positions!

1. The synods (gatherings)²³ of churches.

In Acts chapter 15 two individual churches (Antioch and Jerusalem) gathered together in a consultation about the problem of circumcision. But this gathering was not a representative gathering of all local churches in a particular area!

During the second century A.D. we first read about representative gatherings of the Christian Church in the province of Asia (modern Turkey). The representatives of neighbouring churches were invited to participate in the appointment or dismissal of a bishop (!) and the excommunication of members of the churches that held false doctrines (of Montanism).

In A.D. 195 there was also such a gathering of the Christian Church in Gaul (modern France) where Irenaeus was bishop. The representatives at this gathering were elders, deacons and members of the churches.

2. The synods (councils) of bishops.

During the third and fourth century A.D. the monistic episcopate (a single bishop ruling over several local churches) continued to develop. During this period the gatherings (synods or councils) of the representatives of local churches changed into synods or councils (gatherings) of exclusively bishops.

The representatives at the synods of Rome (A.D. 254), Antioch (A.D. 264, A.D. 269) and Elvira (A.D. 305) were besides bishops, also elders, deacons and members of churches. But representatives at the second synod of Alexandria and Iconium (A.D. 235) were only bishops. At the synod of Nicea I (A.D. 325), in which deacons still participated, the decision was made that only bishops (!) are the official representatives of the churches!²⁴ That is why the Roman Catholic Church made the council of Nicea in 325 A.D. “the first council”! Although bishops were originally chosen by the members of churches, by the fourth century A.D. the members of churches were excluded from the synods (councils) and decision making became the exclusive prerogative of the bishops!

3. The provincial synods (under leadership of the metropolitans).

By the fourth century A.D. the bishop of a large city (metropolis) became more important than bishops from smaller cities and towns. Also the synods (counsels), which were held in these cities, became provincial synods (councils). First the bishop of a large city (the metropolitan) chaired these provincial synods as a privilege, but that soon changed into a legal right! In this way the bishop of a metropolis (later: “a metropolitan”) became the head of all the bishops in a province.

For example, in the West the bishop (metropolitan) of Rome became the head of all the bishops in Italy; the bishop (metropolitan) of Alexandria the head of all the bishops in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis; the bishop (metropolitan) of Carthage the head of all the bishops in West Africa; and the bishop (metropolitan) of Lyon the head of all the bishops in

¹⁶ Greek: presbuterion, English: presbytery, derived from the word “presbyter” which means “elder”.

¹⁷ Greek: episkopeó

¹⁸ The word “presbyterial” is derived from the word “presbyter”, which is the Greek word for “an elder”

¹⁹ The word “episcopal” is derived from the words “epi” and “skopeó”, which are the Greek words for “to over + see”

²⁰ A “bishopric” is a “see” or “a unit committed to a bishop or later an archbishop”

²¹ Greek: presbuterion

²² Greek: episkopos

²³ Greek: “sunodos” means fellow traveller and is figurative for people travelling the same road of love (1gnatius to the Ephesians 9:1-2)

²⁴ Christelijke Encyclopaedie, Kok, Kampen 1929

Gaul (France). Likewise in the East the bishop (metropolitan) of Jerusalem became the head of all the bishops in Palestine; the bishop (metropolitan) of Antioch the head of all the bishops in Syria; and the bishop (metropolitan) of Corinth the head of all the bishops in Greece.

The synod (council) of Nicea I (A.D. 325) decided that these large provincial synods should meet twice a year under the leadership of the metropolitan (the bishop of the metropolis) and that only bishops had the right to vote!

4. The ecumenical (worldwide) synods (councils).

(1) The 8 eastern and 13 western councils.

The growing power of the bishops led to their dominance in all the synods (councils). The ecumenical synods (councils) developed parallel to the provincial synods (counsels). Until the 21st century there have been 8 eastern councils and 13 western counsels, in total 21 councils²⁵. The first 8 (eastern) councils were called together by the (political) emperor of Rome: (1) Nicea I (325 A.D.), (2) Constantinople I (381 A.D.), (3) Ephesus (431 A.D.), (4) Chalcedon (451 A.D.), (5) Constantinople II (553 A.D.), (6) Constantinople III (680-681 A.D.), (7) Nicea II (787 A.D.), (8) Constantinople IV (869-870 A.D.).

(2) The 3 reformed councils.

The influence of the pope in the councils increased until the schism between the Eastern and Western Church became final at the plundering of Constantinople by western crusaders in 1204. The so-called reformed councils were: (1) the 16th council of Pisa (1407), (2) the 17th council of Constanz (1414-1418)²⁶, (3) the 18th council of Basel (1431-1443). These reformed councils tried to break the power of the pope (the bishop of Rome) and place the council of bishops above the pope. Unfortunately for the Christian Church the hierarchic principle was victorious and the bishop of Rome (the pope) was placed above all the other bishops!

(3) The anti-reformation council of Trent and the first Vatican council.

The Reformation that led to the Protestant Church began in 1517 with Martin Luther. (1) The 21st council of the Western Church (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church) of Trent (1545-1563) was an anti-Reformation council. (2) The 22nd council was held in the Vatican in Rome (1869-1870). Under great influence of the Jesuits this council decided on 18th July 1870 “the infallibility of the pope”, a doctrine which all Roman Catholics had to believe! All decisions made at future councils had to be ratified by the pope!

D. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF METROPOLITANS, PATRIARCHS AND POPES (A HIERARCHICAL TOP) (A.D. 325 - 600).

The power struggle among bishops within the councils was about who was the highest and most important bishop. Thus the unspiritual power struggle among Caesars in the world also became the unspiritual power struggle among bishops in the Church!

1. Historical characteristics.

During the first two centuries A.D. Christians were persecuted by the Roman Caesars. But because Christianity was growing and the heathen religions were loosing ground, Caesar Constantine promised protection for Christians. He and his co-Caesars issued the edict of Milan in A.D. 313 and accorded equal status of Christianity to the other religions in the Roman Empire. Between 306 and 323 two “Augusta” died and three other Augusta (Maxentius, Maximinus and Lucinius) were defeated. Constantine ascribed his victory to the God of the Christians and became “a Christian” in 323. However, he never attended a church service and his coins showed Christ and the invincible Sun-god on its two sides. From A.D. 323 Christianity became the state religion and Constantine called himself “the bishop for external affairs of the Church”. In A.D. 326 he made Byzantium the capital of the Christian World Empire and changed its name to Constantinople (which later became Istanbul). In A.D. 330 he also moved the political centre of power from Rome in the west to Constantinople in the east, probably due to the pressure of the powerful heathen families in Rome.

Since the world was marching into the Church, monastic orders emerged that came to stand between the laity and the clergy during the third and fourth centuries. While ordinary Christians had to obey the moral rules of God, the monks voluntarily bound themselves to “recommended things” like fasting and celibacy.

By A.D. 450 few people in the west could read Greek and by A.D. 600 few people in the east spoke Latin. In the political arena two mighty empires emerged: the Eastern Roman Empire with Constantinople as capital (until A.D. 1453) and the Western Roman Empire with Rome as the capital (until A.D. 476). In these centuries, the Greek speaking Church in the east and the Latin speaking Church in the west drifted apart from one another.

²⁵ See “www.catholicism.org/the ecumenical councils of the Roman Catholic Church”. It also contains a summary of all the dogma’s that had been formulated and the (so-called) false teachings which had been condemned at these councils.

²⁶ Counsel of Constanz. Read what happened at this council (e.g. in “Christelijke Encyclopaedie”, Kok Kampen, 1925).

In the period between 325 and 600 A.D. three developments took place within the Christian Church:

- The development of Christian doctrine in teaching.
- The externalising of Christian ceremonies in worship services.
- The development of Christian hierarchy in the leadership.

2. Metropolitans.

The bishops in the larger cities were called “metropolitans”. After this the metropolitans in the congregations that were founded by the apostles of Jesus Christ received an even higher status. These metropolitans were in the cities of (1) Jerusalem in Palestine, (2) Antioch in Syria, (3) Ephesus in Turkey, (4) Corinth in Greece, (5) Rome in Italy and (6) Alexandria in Egypt.

3. Patriarchs.

The Council of Nicea I (A.D. 325) placed the metropolitans of (1) Rome in the west, (2) Alexandria in the south and (3) Antioch in the east *above* the other metropolitans and gave them the title “patriarchs”.

The Council of Constantinople I (A.D. 381) added the metropolitan of (4) Constantinople and the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) added the metropolitan of (5) Jerusalem to the list of patriarchs. Thus there were five patriarchs: in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem. This was now the highest offices in the Church.

4. Popes.

(1) The pope.

Gradually there were two patriarchs competing for pre-eminence: the patriarch of Rome in the west and the patriarch of Constantinople in the east. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in A.D. 476, the bishops of Rome were not satisfied with the title “patriarch”. They made a bid for the absolute highest and most important office in the Christian Church by appealing to the following three arguments:

- They appealed to Matthew 16:18-19, which they interpreted as Jesus giving to Peter the highest position among the apostles of Jesus Christ.
- They appealed to the historical fact that both the apostles Peter and Paul had lived and worked in Rome.
- And they appealed to the church tradition that the apostle Peter was the first bishop of Rome.

In Constantinople the patriarchs were seldom anything more than an appointment and play ball of the Roman Caesars. They were merely a tool in the hands of the political leaders. Thus, Rome as one of the five seats of a patriarch not only received the most honorary position (Latin: *primatus honoris*) among the patriarchs, but finally also the absolute highest position (Latin: *primatus ordinis*) among the patriarchs by a so-called divine right, because they referred to Matthew 16:18-19. Thus in this power struggle between politics and religion, the Caesar won in the east, but the patriarch in the west!

(2) The monarchical episcopate.

As bishop of Rome pope Innocent I (401-417) arrogantly claimed for himself a higher authority than all the other bishops in the world. Thus the Church in the Western Roman Empire (the Roman Catholic Church) became “a monarchical episcopate” – a one-headed leadership of a college of bishops in the world, in which the highest authority in the Church rests with the bishop (metropolitan, patriarch) of Rome (the later pope).

The bishops of Rome called themselves with the title “papa” (pope), which means “father” (but note what Jesus says in Matthew 23:9). Originally all the bishops were addressed as “papa”, but now this title was finally reserved for the pope alone.

(3) The pontificate (the highest priest and the highest ruler).

• The Roman Catholic Church claims that the pope “has the highest authority in spiritual and worldly matters”. Pope Gregory I (590-615) is called the founder of the worldly power of the papacy (pontificate). The pope was not only regarded as the highest power in spiritual matters, but also as the highest power in worldly matters! Thus the pope took the place belonging only to Jesus Christ!

However, this claim only belongs to Jesus Christ! The Bible says, “God seated Jesus Christ at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be “Head over everything” (Greek: *kephalén huper panta*) for the church” (Ephesians 1:20-22)!

• The Roman Catholic Church claims that the pope is “the universal bishop of the whole Christian Church”. Only since the first Vatican Council (1870) the bishop of Rome (the pope) is also regarded as “the universal bishop of the whole Christian Church”. This claim was launched against the churches from the Reformation! Thus the pope also took the place of Jesus Christ as Bishop. The Bible says, “For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Greek: *episkopos*, English: Bishop) of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25)!

- The Roman Catholic Church claims that the pope is “the shepherd of the whole Christian Church”.

The pope is also regarded as “the shepherd of the whole Christian Church”. Thus the pope took the place of Jesus Christ as the Chief-Shepherd. The Bible says, “And when the Chief Shepherd (Greek: archi-poimenos) appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away” (1 Peter 5:4; see John 10:16; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25)!

- The Roman Catholic Church claims that the pope is “the representative of Christ on the earth”.

The pope is also regarded as “the representative of Christ on the earth”. Thus the pope took the place of the Holy Spirit as Representative (Greek: paraklétos) of Jesus Christ on earth. Jesus says, “And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor (Greek: paraklétos) to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17,26; cf. Romans 8:9-10)! “But if I go, I will send him to you. ... The Spirit of truth will guide you into all the truth. ... He will bring glory to me (and not to a human being as the pope) by taking what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:7-15).

- The Roman Catholic Church claims that “there is no salvation outside the Roman Catholic Church”.

On the basis of the above claims the Roman Catholic Church argues that there is no salvation possible outside the Roman Catholic Church”. Thus the Roman Catholic Church also took the place of Jesus Christ as the Only Saviour. “Jesus says, “I am the Way and the truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). And the apostles say, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12)! “You are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God, - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). As long as the Roman Catholic Church remains disobedient to Jesus Christ, the apostles and the Bible, she can never formally acknowledge the other Christian Churches in the world!

All true Christian Churches confess:

- that Jesus Christ is “the Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3), “the Saviour” (Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11) “the Shepherd”, “the Bishop” (1 Peter 2:25), “the Apostle” and “the High Priest” (Hebrews 3:1) of the whole Christian Church on earth
- that there is no salvation outside Jesus Christ
- and that the Holy Spirit is the Representative of Jesus Christ on earth!

E. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF DENOMINATIONS (THE SPLIT BETWEEN THE EASTERN ORTHODOX AND WESTERN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCHES) (A.D. 600 - 1517).

1. The estrangement between the Eastern and Western Church.

The Middle Ages lasted from 600-1517. During the first centuries of this period estrangement between the Western Latin Church and the Eastern Greek Church developed. This estrangement finally led to a permanent schism in 1204.

(1) The Apostolic See in Rome.

In the first century the apostles of Jesus Christ had founded many independent (that is, self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing) churches.

However from the second to the fourth centuries the Church developed the hierarchical leadership structure with bishops and councils of bishops. Among the bishops in the Eastern Roman Empire there was a strong sense of equality, but in the Western Roman Empire one bishop wanted to be the sole ruler. In the beginning the eastern bishops were more active in the councils than the western bishops. Nevertheless the western Church accepted the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils. The eastern bishops were more a college of bishops, while the bishop of Rome functioned as a monarch. The pope in the Western Roman Empire claimed to be “the bishop of all bishops” (that is, “the archbishop” or “first bishop”). Thus Rome began to be regarded as the seat of “the archbishop” or “highest bishop”²⁷ because the apostles Peter and Paul had both laboured in Rome.

(2) The monarchy of the emperor in the east.

The monarchy of the Roman emperor at Byzantium (Constantinople or Istanbul) on earth was regarded as an “icon” (the Greek word for “image”) of the monarchy of God in heaven. In the eastern Roman Empire the emperor was regarded to be God’s representative on earth. In the Eastern Church people prostrated themselves before the *depicted icon* of Christ (the monarch in heaven) in the churches and before the *living icon* of the emperor (the monarch on earth) in his palace.

In the east there was no rigid line of separation between the Eastern Church and the Roman State. The Church and State were regarded as one organism. The Eastern Church (through its bishops or patriarchs) cared for *the souls* of people and the Roman Emperor in Byzantium (as God’s representative on earth) cared for *the bodies* of people. The Roman Emperor summoned councils, the bishops decided what was the true faith which people had to believe and the Roman Empire carried out the decrees of the councils!

²⁷ Greek: archi-episkopos. A “see of an archbishop” is the bishopric of an archbishop, someone who has been appointed above all bishops.

(3) Autocratic functions of the pope in the west.

The barbarian invasions in the west led to the downfall of the Western Roman Empire and this only served to strengthen the autocratic structure of the Western Church. Because the emperor no longer ruled from Rome, the pope in Rome assumed authority in the spiritual as well as the political realm.

During the Middle Ages many Germanic tribes were added to the Western Church.

- On the one hand, the population desired a State Church - that is, one Church within one State.
- On the other hand, the popes desired a Church State – that is, one State in the world ruled by the one Church of Rome.

The popes wanted to rule over the Church *and the State*. But in the west the pope was not yet regarded as God's representative on earth! So there was an ongoing struggle between the western political rulers on the one hand and the western ecclesiastical popes on the other hand.

(4) The clergy (the offices) and laity (the ordinary believers) in the west.

Many lay Christians in the east were *educated* men as well as lay theologians. They read, wrote and taught theology. But the barbarian invasions in the west resulted in the fact that most lay people in the west could not read or write. That is why they could not comprehend theological issues. Education and theology in the west became the preserve of only the priests in the Western Church. A sharp division between *the learned clergy* and *the illiterate laity* developed in the Western Church.

(5) Theological development in the east and the west.

The Eastern Greek Church became more *speculative*, while the Western Latin Church became more *practical*. The Eastern Greek Church understood theology in terms of *worship and liturgy*, while the Western Latin Church was influenced by *legal thought* originating from Roman Law.

When thinking about the Trinity, the Eastern Greek Church began with *the three-ness* of the divine being or divine nature²⁸, while the Western Roman Church began with *the unity* of the Godhead.

When reflecting on the crucifixion, the Eastern Greek Church thought primarily of Christ as *the Victor* (the Resurrected), while the Western Roman Church thought primarily of Christ as *the Victim* (the Crucified sacrifice of atonement).

The Eastern Greek Church talked more of *deification* (Christ as the Almighty God) (Greek: Pantokrator), while the Western Roman Church talked more of *redemption* (Christ as the Saviour).

While with regard to doctrine and life, the Eastern Church made doctrinal decisions subject to *the councils of all bishops*, the Western Church regarded the infallibility of their *popes* as their prerogative.

(6) The western pope claimed universal power.

The centralised and monarchical structure of the Western Church first led to the pope claiming absolute power in the west. But when the popes in the west began to also claim absolute power in the east, trouble was bound to arise.

(7) Some claims of the western popes.

- Pope Innocent I (401-417) claimed for himself a higher authority than all the other bishops in the world and he claimed the title "papa" (pope, that is, father) only for himself (but cf. Matthew 23:9).
- Pope Gregory I (590-615) claimed that the pope not only had the highest authority in spiritual matters, but also the highest authority in worldly matters (but cf. Matthew 28:18).
- Pope Nicolas I (858-867) elevated the power of the patriarch of Rome above the power of the other four patriarchs and all other metropolitans (archbishops) inside the Church and above the power of all Caesars outside the Church.
- Pope Nicolas II (1059) delegated the authority to elect a new pope to the "cardinals", which consisted of a college of 6 bishops, 50 priests and 14 deacons, all residing in the city of Rome!
- Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) enforced the disassociation of the Church with the world; enforced the ideals of *monasticism* onto the Church; enforced the existing *celibate* of the bishops and higher offices onto all the offices of the Church. Married priests were fired. Priests could no longer be *ordained* by lay politicians or worldly people. He tried to establish a *worldwide theocracy* via the Church-State, in which the pope (symbolised by the sun) took the place of Christ on earth and ruled over all kings (symbolised by the moon).
- Pope Innocent III (1215) defined "ex cathedra": the pronouncements of the pope from his holy chair became infallible new doctrine. He ratified the statement, "There is but one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved."
- Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) placed the (Roman) cardinals above all the bishops in the world and as honorary token they wore a red cap.
- Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) issued the papal bull called "Unam sanctam" (1302) in which the worldly sword and worldly power is *subject* to the spiritual sword and spiritual power. He even declared that faith in the absolute power of the pope was necessary for salvation!

²⁸ Greek: hupostasis

(8) The councils fail to limit the power of the pope.

The influence of the pope of the Western Church became greater and greater until the split between the Eastern and the Western Church became final with the military sacking of Constantinople in A.D. 1204 by western crusaders.

- The 14th council of Lyons II (A.D. 1274). The western councils were no longer “ecumenical” (world-wide), because since the 14th council of Lyons II the Western Roman Catholic Church failed to involve the Eastern Orthodox Churches in the councils!
- The reformed councils. The so-called reformed councils were the following: the unrecognised council of Pisa (A.D. 1409), the 16th council of Constance (Vienna)(A.D. 1414-1418) and the 17th council of Florence (Basel) (A.D. 1431-1443). The reformed councils tried to break the power of the pope and set the council of bishops above the pope (the bishop of Rome). Unfortunately this failed and the hierarchical principle gained the upper hand.

(9) The absolute power of the pope.

The Reformation that resulted in the Protestant congregations began in A.D. 1517 with Martin Luther in Germany. Protestants hold that only the Bible correctly interpreted is infallible.

- The 19th council of Trent (A.D. 1545-1549)

This council was an anti-Reformation council. It condemned the so-called *heresies* of Luther, Calvin, and others. It issued decrees on the Eucharist, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Sacraments (notably Baptism and Holy Orders)²⁹ and teachings on marriage, purgatory, indulgences and the use of images.

- The 20th council of Vatican I in Rome (A.D. 1869-1870)

This council declared on the 18th July 1870 under great influence of the Jesuit Order “the infallibility of the pope” and subjected the decisions at all the councils to the approval of the pope! The infallibility of the pope was a dogma in which all members of the Roman Catholic Church must believe! The patriarchs (the supreme bishops) in the Eastern Church held that in matters of the faith (the Christian doctrine and life) the final decision had to rest with a council representing all the bishops of the Christian Church.

Since the First Vatican Council, the members of the Roman Catholic Church regard the pope as “the shepherd and the universal bishop of the whole Christian Church”, a declaration in opposition to what the apostle Peter teaches in the Bible, namely, that Jesus Christ is “the Shepherd (Pastor) and Overseer (Bishop)” of the Church (1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4)! Thus, in violation of the Bible, the pope took the place of Jesus Christ (as the Shepherd and the Bishop of the Church)!

The Roman Catholic Church also regards the pope as “the representative of Christ on earth”. But also this statement violates what Jesus Christ Himself says about the Holy Spirit, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” This Other Counsellor (Representative) will always be with you and be in you. He will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:16-17,26). I will send this Counsellor to you. He will guide you into all the truth. He will glorify me. He will take from what is mine and make it known to you (John 14:16-17,26; John 16:7-15)! Thus, in violation of the Bible, the pope took the place of the Holy Spirit.

For these **reasons** the Roman Catholic Church teaches that “there is no salvation possible outside the Roman Catholic Church”. Thus, in violation of the Bible, the Roman Catholic Church took the place of Jesus Christ as the Only Saviour. This statement contradicts what Jesus says, “I am the Way. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). It also contradicts what the apostles of Jesus Christ say, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we *must* be saved” (Acts 4:12)!

That is why the Roman Catholic Church can never formally recognize the other Christian churches in the world! Nevertheless the Roman Catholic Church tries hard to get all Christian churches again under the control of the Roman Catholic Church.

(10) Matthew 16:18-19.

Jesus never gave to the apostle Peter “the highest position”. That would contradict the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 20:25-28: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first, must be your slave!”

The apostles of Jesus Christ have no successors. Jesus did make use of the apostle Peter to establish the first historic church among the Jews (Acts 2:14-42), the first historic church among the half-Jews (Samaritans, Acts 8:4-17) and the first historic church among the non-Jews (Gentiles, Acts 10:9-48). Thus he fulfilled the statement in Matthew 16:18-19.

The apostles as the historical foundation of the Church. Matthew 16:18-19 does not speak of Peter as the first pope, but as in Ephesians 2:20 and Revelation 21:14 of the apostles of Jesus Christ as *the historic foundation* of the Christian Church. A historic foundation cannot have “successors”. The apostles of Jesus Christ had no “successors”,

²⁹ Thus Protestants are not saved, because they have not been baptised in the Roman Catholic Church. And Protestant clergy are not acknowledged, because they have not been ordained by a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church.

because after them not a single person in human history would qualify as an apostle of Jesus Christ! According to the Bible an apostle of Jesus Christ had to be an eye-witness and ear-witness of the life and especially the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:21-22) and he had to be personally chosen, called, trained and sent out by Jesus Christ (Mark 3:13-14; Luke 6:13; John 20:21; Acts 26:15-18; 1 Corinthians 9:1)!

(11) The true Christian Church confesses only Jesus Christ as the Head of the worldwide Church

All true Christian churches confess Jesus Christ as **the** Shepherd or Pastor³⁰ and as **the** Overseer or Bishop³¹ of the whole Christian Church on earth (John 10:16; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4) and they confess the Holy Spirit as **the** Representative³² of Jesus Christ on earth (John 14:16-17,26; John 16:7-15)! No pope and no title claimed by some church leaders today (e.g. “apostle”, “prophet”, “bishop”, “priest”, “pastor”, “reverend”, etc.) can or may take this position of Jesus Christ!

2. The issue of the “Filioque”.

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325 and 381) originally read, “I believe ... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, *who proceeds from the Father*, who is worshipped and glorified together with Father.” This seems to have originated in Spain as a safeguard against Arianism (who attacked the divine nature of Christ) (cf. Romans 8:9-10; 1 Peter 1:11).

The Western Latin Church added the words “and from the Son” (in Latin: filioque) to the Creed during the Council of Toledo in Spain (589), so that it now read, “I believe ... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, *who proceeds from the Father and from the Son*, who is worshipped and glorified together with Father and the Son.” This addition spread to France and Germany, was welcomed by Charlemagne and adopted at the Council of Frankfurt (794), a semi-iconoclast council. Certain long-standing ideas were discarded at this council. Writers at Charlemagne’s court made the Filioque into an issue of controversy and accused the Eastern Greek Church of *heresy*.

In 1054 the western cardinal Humbert placed a Bull (a sealed open letter of the pope) of *excommunication* upon the altar of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, but the Eastern Orthodox Church rejected it. This event marked the beginning of the schism between the Eastern Church (Orthodox, Greek) and the Western Church (Roman Catholic, Latin).

In 1109 the eastern patriarch Sergius of Constantinople *excluded* the name of the western pope Sergius IV from the Diptychs, which is the list containing the names of all the patriarchs, living and departed, who are recognised as “orthodox”. This list was written in wax on the inside of two wooden pages folded against each other and which stood on the altar. Each patriarch kept such a list. Technically, the Eastern Church and the Western Church were *out of communion*.

3. The Crusades.

The Crusades (1096-1270) as “holy wars” were:

- on the one hand a response to the suppression and persecution of Christians and pilgrims in Palestine by the Islamic Fatimids and Seljuks
- and on the other hand a (very un-Christian) response to the call of pope Urban II at meetings in Piacenza and Clermont (1095) to free Jerusalem.

Christians must remember that Jesus Christ and the Bible absolutely forbids “holy wars” (Matthew 5:38-48)! The crusades were ordered and executed by political and military people who falsely claimed to be “Christians”, but were never real Christians! Real Christians reject the crusades as unbiblical and unchristian!

The Crusaders from the Western Latin Church *captured* Antioch from the Turks in 1098, Jerusalem in 1099 and set up Western Latin patriarchs. By 1187 there was an Eastern Greek patriarch at Jerusalem and a Western Latin patriarch at Acre. The two rival bishops claimed the same throne and the two so-called “Christian” communities (eastern and western) introduced a spirit of *hatred and bitterness*.

- The Eastern Byzantine residents *massacred* many Western Latin residents at Constantinople in 1182.
- The Western Crusaders responded and *sacked* Constantinople in 1204.

This made the split or schism between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic Church definite.

4. The eastern and western Christian communities.

(1) Patriarchs.

The rivalry between the patriarchs of Rome and Constantinople finally led to the first great split in the worldwide³³ Christian Church. The Christian Church in the east consisted of several independent Orthodox Churches (denominations), each with its own patriarch. The Christian Church in the west was called the Roman Catholic Church

³⁰ Greek: poimén

³¹ Greek: episkopos

³² Greek: paraklétos

³³ Greek: katholikos

(also a denomination) and had the bishop of Rome (the pope) as its head. The patriarchs in the east and the pope in the west now lorded it over all bishops in the world under them.

(2) Archbishops.

Later there were so many bishops in the West that another layer of leaders was created between the bishops and the pope, namely: “the archbishops” (literally: the first bishops). An archbishop presides over all the bishops in his province (country). The hierarchical leadership systems in the West and in the East had finally reached their present form.

(3) Sinful Church History

Christians must remember that this historical development was “a sinful Church History” created by unspiritual church leaders and which has no Biblical authority or justification at all! Christians who “do not go beyond what is written” in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6) reject this historical development of leadership in the Western Roman Catholic Church as well as in the Eastern orthodox Churches.

F. THE CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT OF DENOMINATIONS (THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION) (A.D. 1517).

1. Forerunners of the Reformation.

(1) John Wiclif (Wycliffe)(1324-1384).

He lived in Oxford and Lutterworth in England. He was a doctor in theology. He openly opposed the misuse of power of the pope, translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate to English in about 1381 and fought against the use of relics, images, letters of indulgence, and against the mass and especially the doctrine of transubstantiation, against the confession, the priesthood, the monastery life and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. He died before he could be condemned at the council of Constanz (1415). In 1417 his bones were dug up and burned (because heretics were burned)!

(2) Johannes Hus (1369-1415).

He lived in Bohemia (Poland) and was influenced by the theses of Wicliffe against the Roman Catholic Church. He fought against the abuses within the Roman Catholic Church. His theses were condemned in Prague and he was condemned and burned in 1415 during the council of Constanz.

2. The second great split in the Christian Church.

(1) The Reformation.

During the sixteenth century, the abuses of several leaders inside the Roman Catholic Church were so great that numerous people started a reformation inside the Roman Catholic Church. People like Luther (31st October 1517), Zwingli (1522), Calvin (1536), Knox (1546) and others wanted to reform the Roman Catholic Church from the inside, but the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church at that time resisted the reformation and held on to their power.

The 19th council of Trent (A.D. 1545-1549) condemned Luther, Calvin and others as “heretics” and they were excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. But excommunication from the denomination of the Roman Catholic Church does not result in excommunication from the one worldwide Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13)! It led however to the second great split within the worldwide Church between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the Reformation in 1517.

(2) The emphasis of the Reformation.

The Church of the Reformation wanted to return to the New Testament Church of the first century A.D. While the Roman Catholic Church had sought and found their identity and power in outward things, the Church of the Reformation called people to inward reformation. The Roman Catholic Church emphasised the power of the church offices (priest, bishop, archbishop, pope), the sacraments and good works. The Church of the Reformation emphasised the Word of God as recorded in the Bible, justification by faith and sanctification (a transformed life).

3. The ongoing split of the Christian Church into many church denominations.

(1) The evangelical movement.

Already in the sixteenth century, several evangelical movements started in Europe, England and America. The enormous increase of *individualism* in the west led to the founding of many church denominations. Because these church denominations are human organisations, they split again and again into other church denominations. Each church denomination developed its own form of church leadership.

(2) Sinful Church History.

Christians must remember that this historical development was “a sinful Church History” created by unspiritual church leaders and which has no Biblical authority or justification at all! Christians who “do not go beyond what is written” in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6) reject this historical development of splitting into denominations each with its own form of leadership. God calls the splitting up in different denominations *carnal or worldly*. The real reason for this disunity is immaturity: Christians remained “children” (in the Faith) that quarrel and split up into factions (denominations) and remain unchanged like non-Christians in the world (*Read* 1 Corinthians 3:1-4)!

G. THE MAIN DENOMINATIONS (THE MODERN PERIOD).

1. The episcopal churches.

The episcopal churches generally believe that there is only one true Church and that it is “catholic” (spread throughout the world). The local churches have no independence. The Church must remain a visible unity under one leader within the world. The visible unified Church is a reflection of the ancient Roman Empire.

The emphasis is on the office of the bishop, who embraces all the other church offices.

They regard Christ as governing the worldwide Church *by means of* the Council of bishops (or in the case of the Roman Catholic Church: by the bishop of Rome - the pope) and as governing the local churches by means of a bishop.

2. The congregational churches.

The congregational churches generally believe that every local church (a congregation) is completely and fully a church and completely independent. The independent churches (congregations) are a reflection of independent people in the age of enlightenment and individualism.

Wherever the gospel is preached, people come to faith. The believers gather themselves into a congregation, that is, an independent local church in which Christ is present (Matthew 18:20). The members freely bind themselves to carry out the biblical calling. The congregations are deliberately kept small in order to emphasise *the office of the believer*. New independent congregations split off from the older independent congregations. Several independent churches often form a loose federation of churches in which each congregation remains completely independent.

The emphasis is on the office of the believer, who is a priest, prophet and king within his own circle of acquaintances.

They regard Christ as governing every independent congregation of believers directly by means of the Holy Spirit, the Bible and the general meeting of the congregation, in which the believers make all the important decisions according to democratic principles. Under influence of modern individualism and democracy, the general meeting of the local church chooses *a church committee*, which executes the decisions made during the general meeting of the congregation. The highest authoritative body is the general meeting of the congregation.

3. The synodical churches.

The synodical churches generally believe that every local congregation is completely and fully a church of Christ, but that it is not completely independent from the other local congregations and should be organised under *an umbrella organisation* within a nation or state. The umbrella organisation is called *a synod* (which literally means “a coming together” of representatives). The synod is a gathering of elders that have been chosen to represent the local congregations as a whole. The synodical churches are a reflection of the nationalism of the nation or state.

The emphasis is on the office of chosen and appointed elders. Elders must be chosen on the local level on the basis of the biblical instructions and must be represented on the national level by a synod.

They regard Christ as governing the national or state church on the local level by means of his Holy Spirit, the Bible and the appointed church offices such as pastors, elders and deacons and on the national level by means of regional synods and one national synod.

4. The independent churches.

The independent churches believe that every local church (congregation) must with respect to race (ethnically), culture and organisation (leadership) be completely independent from other churches. Sometimes they think that they are the (only) true church (denomination) for their group. The independent churches are a reflection of race and independent grouping within a culture. Independent churches are often led by a charismatic or authoritarian leader, who is often also “the founder” or “planter” of the independent church. Such leaders often claim super titles for themselves, like: “prophet”, “apostle”, “bishop”, “priest” or “pastor” etc. The members of independent churches sometimes wear clothes that must distinguish them from other churches. They also follow liturgies that distinguish them.

The emphasis is on the one hand the language, the culture and the distinguishing doctrines of the group and on the other hand the charismatic and authoritarian leader who presents himself as THE priest, THE prophet, THE king, THE apostle or THE bishop within his own church denomination.

They believe that Christ leads the independent church by means of the charismatic and authoritarian leader. If his church has a church council or board, these usually ratify the decisions of the authoritarian leader. In this way some charismatic leaders take the place of being “a mediator” between people and God.

5. The presbyterial churches.

The presbyterial churches³⁴ believe that every local church (congregation):

- is a complete and visible revelation of the Church of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27)
- is completely independent with respect to organisation
- but is mutually dependent on other local churches with respect to consultation and cooperation

The presbyterial churches are a reflection of the teaching of the Bible. Imperialism, individualism, nationalism and racism may not have any influence!

The emphasis is on the office of elders³⁵ and elders must be chosen on basis of the instructions in the Bible. A local congregation is governed by a body or council of elders³⁶. The emphasis is also on the office of every believer. Every believer is a priest, prophet and king within his own circle of acquaintances.

They regard Jesus Christ as the only and highest leader in the Church (Ephesians 1:20-23) and that he governs every local church (congregation) by means of his Holy Spirit (John 16:1-15), the Bible (Ephesians 6:17) and the body of elders of the independent local church (congregation)(1 Timothy 3:1-7,14-15). Each local church chooses its own body or council of elders only on the basis of the teaching of the Bible and during a meeting of the whole congregation. Thus, the body of elders and the general meeting of the whole congregation continually hold one another in check. The highest authority is the teachings of Christ in the Bible. Above all the body of elders must see to it that Christ and the sound teachings of the Bible continue to stand central in the church. Only in the second place does the body of elders carry out the goals (objectives) of the general meeting of the congregation. The body of elders wholeheartedly consults and cooperates with other bodies of elders in the Body of Christ.

H. THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING (ELDERS IN THE OFFICE).

1. The body of elders.

The New Testament teaches that a local congregation is not led by any individual, but by “a body of elders” (1 Timothy 4:14).

- All the elders (Acts 20:17) are called bishops (overseers) and pastors (shepherds) in accordance with their tasks (Acts 20:28)!
- All the elders (Titus 1:5) are called bishops (overseers) in accordance with their tasks (Titus 1:7).
- All the elders (1 Peter 5:1) are called pastors (shepherds) and bishops (overseers)(1 Peter 5:2) in accordance with their tasks and function under the Chief Pastor, who is Jesus Christ.

This clearly shows that Luke, Paul and Peter used the three terms “elder”, “overseer” (bishop) and “shepherd” (pastor) interchangeably! In spite of what these terms have come to mean in Church History and may still mean today in different denominations, the New Testament makes no distinction between the words: “elder”, “overseer” and “shepherd”! There was no hierarchy of leaders in the Old Testament or in the New Testament Church! There was never just one leader in charge of a congregation.

“A council of elders”³⁷ was appointed for every local church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). It always consisted of elders in the plural (1 Timothy 4:14). All elders in the council shared the leadership responsibilities within an independent church with one another.

Leadership in the Bible is always “shared leadership” and “servant leadership” (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:2-4)!

2. The meaning of these different terms.

The three terms: elders, shepherds and overseers do not describe three different church offices or three different church positions. All three terms refer to the one church office, namely, that of the elder. They describe the one group of church leaders from two points of view: from their office and from their job descriptions (tasks/functions):

- The term elder³⁸ is the name of the office and expresses the spiritual maturity, experience and greater respect the leader commands.
- The terms shepherd³⁹ and overseer⁴⁰ describe the nature of the tasks of the elder. The elders lead the people as shepherds do and they manage the activities and possessions of the congregation as overseers do. Also the other terms for leaders in the Bible describe the nature of their tasks: “leader or guide”⁴¹ (Hebrews 13:7,17,24), “person

³⁴ The term “presbyterial” must not be confused with the name Presbyterian Church (a denomination), just as the term “catholic” must not be confused with the name Roman Catholic Church (a denomination).

³⁵ Greek: presbuteros

³⁶ Greek: presbuterion

³⁷ Greek: presbuterion

³⁸ Greek: presbuteros, English: priest

³⁹ Greek: poimén, Latin and English: pastor

⁴⁰ Greek: episkopos, English: bishop (meaning: overseer)

⁴¹ Greek: hégoumenos

standing at the head” (ruler, director, manager)⁴² (Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17) and “house steward or manager” (literally: economist)⁴³ (Titus 1:7).

The New Testament teaches that all the elders of a local congregation are shepherds and overseers of that congregation. All the elders of a local church have a share in the *official* preaching, teaching, pastoral and managerial functions in that church!

3. The temporary leadership team.

When new churches are planted, the leadership consists of a missionary, a church planter or an elder of another local church and several Christians with skills needed to establish the new church (congregation) (cf. Paul, Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, Luke and Titus in Acts 13:1-5; Acts 15:36-41; Acts 16:1-3; Acts 16:6-10; 2 Corinthians 8:23). This team may be called “a church planting team”, “a leadership team” or simply “the team”. They should not be called “deacons”, because deacons should only be appointed when there is already a council of elders.

The tasks of the leadership team are:

- church building by means of evangelism, discipleship, pastoral care, and equipping believers for various kinds of service.
- and leadership development by means of equipping some men to become future elders (cf. Acts 14:21-23).

4. Conclusion.

The leadership in the Christian Church has gone through a long and turbulent period of development. This summary of history does NOT intend to set you up against the leaders of your own church!

But this study may help you and your church to become more biblical in your “leadership” and to foster the biblical attitudes of biblical leaders, namely that “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:25-28).

⁴² Greek: *prohistamenos*

⁴³ Greek: *oikonomos*