

(2) There is a strong emphasis on its uniqueness in distinction to the world about...this almost comes off as a sort of legalism although when we understand the total picture --

(3) as a community it is viewed as a corporate order in which persons have been willing to jeopardize their lives for the Gospel's sake. Linked closely to this are the teachings on baptism, communion, and chrism.

b. On the structure of the church the following are generally accurate:

(1) The terms "presbyters" and "deacons" are used in virtually synonymous fashion.

(2) The terms "bishop" and "pastor" are used in the same settings. The latter term is less used as the biblical episcopus takes precedence. But the duties of such are the same for all good ends.

(3) The bishopric logically proceeds from the presbyters and the leading presbyter is most likely to become the next bishop and serve the church as a "first among equals."

(4) This general distinction will then serve the body as the organization of the whole. A parity will be seen among the bishops.

(5) Several classes of membership will develop. These are intended to keep the body pure and to keep the Romans away. With these classes of membership will come more offices and these all serve immediate need functions. The growth of the organized structure, you see, is one borne of the need of the occasion, not the mandates of Scripture.

(6) Great authority is centered in the bishop. Those wishing to see the early statements of this will find them most clear in the writings of Ignatius (115 AD) as he urges the churches of Asia Minor to "stick with their bishops."

3. Growth of the Bishopric

The growth of the office of bishop is one of the more interesting aspects of this time. While the growth was gradual it eventually came to give the Bishop the dominant voice in the church. Cyprian (Bishop of Carthage, 250 AD) came to think of the power of the bishopric to this extent:

The Bishop could...

take presidency over the presbyters
maintain unity of testimony in his office
exercise pardoning power
express forgiveness of sins
veto unapproved presbyter actions
exercise discipline alone or in concert with
other bishops.