

# EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

The First 300 years

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**The Developing Church**

***“Polity and Doctrine  
of the Second & Third Centuries”***

# ***Preserving a “Catholic” Church***

## **Unbiblical Trends**

### **1. Clergy/Laity Distinctions**

#### **A. Growing separation**

- Emphasis on bishops
- Elevated ordination by other bishops
- Focus on a single man
- Vocational ministry

#### **B. Abuses**

- Creating a spiritual hierarchy
- Losing the concept of “the priesthood of all believers”

## 2. Sacerdotalism

### ***Defining the leadership offices in the church in terms of a priesthood***

- A. First 150 – 200 years
  - the ministry is never represented as a priestly office
- B. Development
  - Tertullian (220) – first to directly apply priestly function to this office
  - Cyprian (Bishop of Carthage; 258) – applies all duties of the Aaronic priesthood to the officers of the church
  - By late third century, becoming customary to use term “priest” directly and exclusively to the clergy
- C. Theology
  - Mediatorial role of clergy—diminish priesthood of believers
  - Foundation of coming “Catholic” doctrines

## ***Preserving a “Catholic” Church***

### **Emergence of different teachings:**

- Gnosticism – special knowledge
- Marcion/Valentinus – special canon
- Montanism – prophetic movement
- Monarchianism – denial of three persons
  - Jesus was just a special prophet
  - Modalism – God appears in three modes

**(use of the word “catholic” – *of the whole*)**

### **Maintaining a visible, catholic church**

1. Recognition of the canon
2. Development of early creeds
  - “symbol of faith” (*Apostles Creed*)
3. The office of Bishop – great importance

## Growth of the Episcopate

### 1. Review

- Early distinction between the episcopate and the presbyters
  - ❖ Centralized authority and succession from the Apostles
- Congregational bishops – not diocesan

### 2. Further Development – hierarchy

- a) bishops of country/village churches
- b) metropolitan bishops – capital cities of Roman provinces
  - ordain bishops of their province
- c) apostolic mother-churches
  - Jerusalem, Ephesus, Corinth, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome
  - Patriarchal: Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome

*(seeds of the coming papacy)*