

X. TYPES OF GOVERNMENT – Part I

I. THE ISSUE. Since Christ is the supreme ruler of both the universal and local church, to whom has Christ committed or mediated authority to run the Church? Who are the proper subjects of Church power?

II. EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

"But as early as the latter part of the second century there was a perceptible change. The rise of heresies made it imperative to name some characteristics by which the true catholic Church could be known. This tended to fix the attention on the outward manifestation of the Church. The Church began to be conceived as an external institution, ruled by a bishop as a direct successor of the apostles, and in possession of the true tradition. The catholicity of the Church was rather strongly emphasized. Local churches were not regarded as so many separate units, but simply as parts of the one universal Church. The increasing worldliness and corruption of the Church gradually led to reaction and gave rise to the tendency of various sects, such as Montanism in the middle of the second, Novatianism in the middle of the third, and Donatism at the beginning of the fourth century, to make the holiness of its members the mark of the true Church. The early Church Fathers, in combating these sectaries, emphasized ever increasingly the episcopal institution of the Church. Cyprian (200-258 A.D.) has the distinction of being the first to develop fully the doctrine of the episcopal church. He regarded the bishops as the real successors of the apostles and ascribed to them a priestly character in virtue of their sacrificial work. They together formed a college, called the episcopate, which as such constituted the unity of the Church. The unity of the Church was thus based on the unity of the bishops. They who do not subject themselves to the bishop forfeit the fellowship of the Church and also their salvation, since there is no salvation outside the Church." (Berkhof, Systematic Theology, p. 558).

III. EPISCOPALIAN (Authority passed on to bishops) -prelatic, aristocratic, hierarchical.

- A. Christ, as the Head of the Church, has entrusted the government of the Church directly and exclusively to an independent order of bishops, as successors of the Apostles.
- B. The bishops are a separate, independent, self-perpetuating order, and the community of believers have absolutely no share in the government of the Church.
- C. Episcopal form of government is found in the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the AME Church, etc.
- D. OBJECTIONS TO THE EPISCOPALIAN FORM OF GOVERNMENT
 1. There is no succession of the Apostolic office. Because the Apostolic office was not permanent, it passed out of existence after the first century.
 2. The New Testament makes no distinction between the office of bishop and elder (Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7). Therefore, the office of bishop cannot be a separate office of the church.
 3. There is no evidence in the Bible for the concept of apostolic authority being

- passed on to others.
4. The bishops, under the Episcopalian system, have been given more power than the Apostles had in the first century.
 5. Many modern day Episcopalians do not recognize Apostolic succession but do acknowledge Apostolic authority in the Bible and believe that rule by bishops is the most effective means of government.

IV. ROMAN CATHOLIC (Authority passed ultimately to the Pope)

- A. Roman Catholicism is the episcopal system carried to its logical conclusion.
- B. The Roman Catholic system claims not only successors to the Apostles, but also a successor to Peter, who is said to have been primary among the Apostles, and whose successor is now recognized as the special representative of Christ. The Church of Rome is of the nature of an absolute monarchy, under the control of an infallible Pope, who has the right to determine and regulate the doctrine, worship and government of the Church.
- C. Under the Pope there are inferior classes and orders, to whom special grace is given, and whose duty it is to govern the Church in strict accountability to their superiors and to the supreme Pontiff. The hierarchy consists of a broad circle of lower clergy (priest and other inferior functionaries); then a smaller circle of Bishops; next a still smaller circle of Archbishops, and finally the most restricted circle is the College of Cardinals.
- D. The officers of the Church are a separate class in contra-distinction from ordinary members of the Church.
- E. The people have no voice in the government of the Church.

F. OBJECTIONS TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC FORM OF GOVERNMENT

1. The Apostolic office was not of a permanent nature and went out of existence after the first century.
2. There is no evidence in the New Testament for Apostolic succession.
3. The Bible does not make the office of bishop a distinct office.
4. While Peter was the leader of the Twelve because he was the oldest, there is no evidence that he was the first Pope or that he was even in Rome. Certainly it is clear from the Book of Romans that the Roman church looked to Paul as their Apostle, not Peter.
5. The New Testament gives no place for a liturgical priesthood, for it knows only of the spiritual priesthood of believers (1 Pet. 2:9,10).
6. The massive organization of the Roman Catholic Church cannot be sustained on a Biblical basis.
7. The Roman Catholic Church defines the external and visible church as consisting not of the whole body of the faithful, but of the hierarchy, consisting of the priests with the higher orders of bishops, archbishops, cardinals, with the Pope in supreme authority as Christ's vice-regent.

V. ERASTIAN SYSTEM (Authority lies in the State)

- A. The church as a society owes its existence and form to regulations enacted by the state.
- B. The officers are merely instructors, without any right or power to rule except that which they derive from the civil authorities.
- C. The State governs, exercises discipline and excommunicates if necessary.
- D. OBJECTIONS TO THE ERASTIAN SYSTEM
 1. Ignores the Kingly Headship of Christ.
 2. Ignores the independence of the Church from the State.