

174 Eleutherius became the twelfth “Bishop of Rome” since Peter & Paul

17 March 180 Commodus, son of Marcus Aurelius, became the Emperor at age 19.

“1. About the same time, in the reign of Commodus, our condition became more favorable, and through the grace of God the churches throughout the entire world enjoyed peace, and the word of salvation was leading every soul, from every race of man to the devout worship of the God of the universe. So that now at Rome many who were highly distinguished for wealth and family turned with all their household and relatives unto their salvation.” (Church History, Book 5, Chapter 21)

188

- Callistus, a professing Christian and the servant of a Roman banker who also confessed Christ, was entrusted with certain funds to be invested along side those of other Christians. Through misuse, these funds were lost & when he tried to skip town, he was caught & jailed in a debtor’s prison. Some Christians (presumably those who’d invested) later asked the banker to release Callistus so that he could track down accounts which he claimed to still control. Being released, he went to a synagogue, disrupted the Sabbath service, was beaten by the Jews & then arrested and put on trial where his master claimed that he was only trying to get himself killed because of the financial irregularities. Callistus was then banished to Sardinia to work the mines there with other Christians.

189 Victor became the thirteenth “Bishop of Rome” since Peter & Paul

- Victor quickly abandoned the use of Greek in which to write & worship, preferring Latin.

190

- Due to the intervention of Marcia, the widow of a Christian executed back in 182, but now the Emperor’s concubine, many Christians were released from Sardinia. When Callistus fell, weeping at the feet of the presbyter who carried the release order and begged to be included, his penitent behavior moved the elder to agree. While not happy that he’d been included in the release, Victor pitied his poor health enough to send him off to Antium (Anzio) with a monthly stipend.

Probably during the very early 190's

- During Victor's time, perhaps even at his instigation, the bishops held regional synods to vote on the question regarding the universal observance of Jesus' death & resurrection. Polycrates of Ephesus, representing the bishops of Asia province, basically told Victor in a letter they had no intention of abandoning their traditional observance in favor of his.

"9. Thereupon Victor, who presided over the church at Rome, immediately attempted to cut off from the common unity the parishes of all Asia, with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; and he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate.

10. But this did not please all the bishops. And they besought him to consider the things of peace, and of neighborly unity and love. Words of theirs are extant, sharply rebuking Victor.

11. Among them was Irenæus, who, sending letters in the name of the brethren in Gaul over whom he presided, maintained that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be observed only on the Lord's day. He fittingly admonishes Victor that he should not cut off whole churches of God which observed the tradition of an ancient custom and after many other words he proceeds as follows:

12. For the controversy is not only concerning the day, but also concerning the very manner of the fast. For some think that they should fast one day, others two, yet others more; some, moreover, count their day as consisting of forty hours day and night.

13. And this variety in its observance has not originated in our time; but long before in that of our ancestors. It is likely that they did not hold to strict accuracy, and thus formed a custom for their posterity according to their own simplicity and peculiar mode. Yet all of these lived none the less in peace, and we also live in peace with one another; and the disagreement in regard to the fast confirms the agreement in the faith."

[Eusebius' Church History, Book 5 (*written around A.D. 320*)]

31 December 192 Commodus assassinated at age 31.

193 The "Year of Five Emperors"

1 June 193 Septimius Severus became Emperor

- Official persecution of Christians gradually picks back up (by 202 for sure).
- Tertullian & Clement of Alexandria were writing during this time.

- Zephyrinus had apparently developed a working relationship with Callistus. He quickly brought him back to Rome where he puts him in charge of a Christian cemetery & made him an advisor.
- Zephyrinus was a pragmatic administrator & not a Bible scholar, therefore Tertullian & Hippolytus had very low opinions of him.
- “In opposition to this (modesty), could I not have acted the dissembler? I hear that there has even been an edict set forth, and a peremptory one too. The *Pontifex Maximus*—that is, the bishop of bishops—issues an edict: “I remit, to such as have discharged (the requirements of) repentance, the sins both of adultery and of fornication.” O edict, on which cannot be inscribed, “Good deed!” And where shall this liberality be posted up? On the very spot, I suppose, on the very gates of the sensual appetites, beneath the very titles of the sensual appetites. There is the place for promulgating such repentance, where the delinquency itself shall haunt. There is the place to read the pardon, where entrance shall be made under the hope thereof. But it is in the church that this (edict) is read, and in the church that it is pronounced; and (the church) is a virgin! Far, far from Christ’s betrothed be such a proclamation! She, the true, the modest, the saintly, shall be free from stain even of her ears. She has none to whom to make such a promise; and if she have had, she does not make it; since even the earthly temple of God can sooner have been called by the Lord a “den of robbers,” than of adulterers and fornicators.” (Tertullian’s *On Modesty*)
- “Zephyrinus imagines that he administers the affairs of the Church—an uninformed and shamefully corrupt man.” (Hippolytus’ *Refutation of All Heresies*, Book 9, Chapter 2)
- “Callistus attempted to confirm this heresy,—a man cunning in wickedness, and subtle where deceit was concerned, (and) who was impelled by restless ambition to mount the episcopal throne. *Now this man moulded to his purpose* Zephyrinus, an ignorant and illiterate individual, and one unskilled in ecclesiastical definitions. And inasmuch as *Zephyrinus* was accessible to bribes, and covetous, *Callistus*, by luring him through presents, and by illicit demands, was enabled to seduce him into whatever course of action he pleased. And so it was that Callistus succeeded in inducing Zephyrinus to create continually disturbances among the brethren, while he himself took care subsequently, by knavish words, to attach both factions in good-will to himself. And, at one time, to those who entertained true opinions, he would in private allege that they held similar doctrines (with himself), and thus make them his dupes; while at another time *he would act similarly towards* those (who embraced) the tenets of Sabellius. But *Callistus* perverted *Sabellius* himself, and this, too, though he had the ability of rectifying *this heretic’s error*. For (at any time) during our admonition *Sabellius* did not evince obduracy; but as long as he continued alone with *Callistus*, he was wrought upon to relapse into the system of *Cleomenes* by this very *Callistus*, who alleges that he entertains similar opinions to *Cleomenes*. *Sabellius*, however, did not then perceive the knavery of *Callistus*; but he afterwards came to be aware of it, as I shall narrate presently. Now *Callistus* brought forward Zephyrinus himself, and induced him publicly to avow *the following sentiments*: “I know that there is one God, Jesus Christ; nor except Him *do I know any* other that is begotten and amenable to suffering.” And on another occasion, when he would make the following statement: “The Father did not die, but the Son.” *Zephyrinus* would in this way continue to keep up ceaseless disturbance among the people.” (Ibid., Chapter 6)

- Hippolytus withdraws fellowship from Callistus, criticizing him greatly in writing.

8 October 222

CALLISTUS to our most dearly beloved brethren, all the bishops settled throughout Gaul.

By the report of very many, we learn that your love, by the zeal of the Holy Spirit, holds and guides the helm of the Church so firmly in the face of all assaults, that by God's will it is conscious neither of shipwreck nor of the losses of shipwreck. Rejoicing, therefore, in such testimonies, we beg you not to permit anything to be done in those parts contrary to the apostolic statutes; but, supported by our authority, do ye check what is injurious, and prohibit what is unlawful.

Now we have heard that the crime of conspiracies prevails in your parts, and it has been shown us that the people are conspiring against their bishops; of which crime the craft is hateful, not only among Christians, but even among the heathen, and it is forbidden by foreign laws. And therefore the laws not only of the Church, but of the world, condemn those who are guilty of this crime; and not only those indeed who actually conspire, but those also who take part with such. Our predecessors, moreover, together with a very numerous body of bishops, ordained that any *guilty of this offence* among those who are set in the honour of the priesthood, and who belong to the clergy, should be deprived of the honour which they enjoy; and they ordered that others should be cut off from communion, and expelled from the Church; and they decreed, at the same time, that all men of both orders should be infamous (*infames*); and that, too, not only for those who did the deed, but for those also who took part with such. For it is but equitable that those who despise the divine mandates, and prove themselves disobedient to the ordinances of the fathers, should be chastised with severer penalties, in order that others may fear to do such things, and that all may rejoice in brotherly concord, and all take to themselves the example of severity and goodness. For if (which may God forbid) we neglect the care of the Church, and are regardless of its strength, our slothfulness will destroy discipline, and injury will be done assuredly to the souls of the faithful. Such persons, moreover, are not to be admitted to accuse any one: neither can their voice, nor that of those who are under the ban, injure or criminate any man.

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Let no one, again, trespass upon the boundaries of another, nor presume to judge or excommunicate one belonging to another's parish; because such judgment or ordination, or excommunication or condemnation, shall neither be ratified nor have any virtue; since no one shall be bound by the decision of another judge than his own, neither shall he be condemned by such.

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No primate, no metropolitan, nor any of the other bishops, is at liberty to enter the seat of another, or to occupy a possession which does not pertain to him, and which forms part of the parish of another bishop, at the direction of any one, unless he is invited by him to whose jurisdiction it is acknowledged to belong; nor can he set about any arrangement or ordinance, or judgment there, if he wishes to keep the honour of his station. But if he presume to do otherwise, he shall be condemned; and not only he, but those who co-operate and agree with him: for just as the power of making appointments (*ordinatio*) is interdicted in such circumstances, so also is the power of judging or of disposing of other matters.

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For those are in error who think that the priests of the Lord, after a lapse, although they may have exhibited true repentance, are not capable of ministering to the Lord, and engaging their honourable offices, though they may lead a good life thereafter, and keep their priesthood correctly. And those who hold this opinion are not only in error, but also seem to dispute and act in opposition to *the power of* the keys committed to the Church, whereof it is said: "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven."

21 November 222

CALLISTUS, archbishop of the Church Catholic in the city of Rome, to Benedictus, our brother and bishop, greeting in the Lord.

By the love of the brotherhood we are bound, and by our apostolic rule we are constrained, to give answer to the inquiries of the brethren, according to what the Lord has given us, and to furnish them with the authority of the seal of the apostles.

Fasting, which ye have learned to hold three times in the year among us, we decree now to take place, as more suitable, in four seasons; so that even as the year revolves through four seasons, we too may keep a solemn fast quarterly in the four seasons of the year.

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In this, then, we ought to be all of one mind, so that, according to apostolic teaching, we may all say the same thing, and that there be no divisions among us. Let us then be perfect in the same mind, and in the same judgment; in ready zeal for which work we congratulate ourselves on having your affection as our partner. For it is not meet for the members to be at variance with the head; but, according to the testimony of sacred Scripture, all the members should follow the head. It is matter of doubt, moreover, to no one, that the church of the apostles is the mother of all the churches, from whose ordinances it is not right that you should deviate to any extent. And as the Son of God came to do the Father's will, so shall ye fulfil the will of your mother, which is the Church, the head of which, as has been stated already, is the church of Rome. Wherefore, whatsoever may be done against the discipline of this church, without the decision of justice, cannot on any account be permitted to be held valid.

Moreover, let no one take up an accusation against a doctor (*teacher*), because it is not right for sons to find fault with fathers, nor for slaves to wound their masters.

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Moreover, let no one take up an accusation against a doctor (*teacher*), because it is not right for sons to find fault with fathers, nor for slaves to wound their masters. Now, all those whom they instruct are sons of doctors; and as sons ought to love their fathers after the flesh, so ought they to love their spiritual fathers. For he does not live rightly who does not believe rightly, or who reprehends fathers, or calumniates them. Doctors therefore, who are also called fathers, are rather to be borne with than reprehended, unless they err from the true faith. Let no one, consequently, accuse a doctor by writing (*per scripta*); neither let him answer to any accuser, unless he be one who is trustworthy and recognised by law, and who leads also a life and conversation free from reproach. For it is a thing unworthy that a doctor should reply to a foolish and ignorant person, and one who leads a reprehensible life, according to the man's folly; as Scripture says, Answer not a fool according to his folly.

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For I am mindful that I preside over the Church under the name of him whose confession was honoured by our Lord Jesus Christ, and whose faith ever destroys all errors. And I understand that I am not at liberty to act otherwise than to expend all my efforts on that cause in which the well-being of the universal Church is at stake (*infestatur*).

5 September 222

The property, moreover, in the possession of the several parishes was left in the hands of the bishops, who hold the place of the apostles; and it is so to this day, and ought to be so in all future time. And out of those possessions the bishops and the faithful as their stewards ought to furnish to all who wish to enter the life in common all necessaries as they best can, so that none may be found in want among them. For the possessions of the faithful are also called oblations, because they are offered to the Lord. They ought not therefore to be turned to any other uses than those of the Church, and in behoof of Christian brethren before mentioned, and of the poor; for they are the offerings of the faithful, and they are redemption moneys for sins (*pretia peccatorum*), and the patrimony of the poor, and are given over to the Lord for the purpose already named. But if any one act otherwise (which may God forbid), let him take care lest he meet the condemnation of Ananias and Sapphira,

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By the increase, therefore, and the mode of life which have been mentioned, the churches over which the bishops preside have grown so greatly with the help of the Lord, and the greater part of them are now in possession of so much property, that among them there is not a man who, selecting the life in common, is kept in poverty; but such an one receives all necessaries from the bishop and his ministers. Therefore, if any one in modern or in future time shall rise up and attempt to divert that property, let him be smitten with the judgment which has been already mentioned.

Furthermore, as to the fact that in the churches of the bishops there are found elevated seats set up and prepared like a throne, they show by these that the power of inspection and of judging, and the authority to loose and bind, are given to them by the Lord.

These things, then, we have set before you, most dearly beloved, in order that ye may understand the power of your bishops, and give reverence to God in them, and love them as your own souls; and in order that ye may have no communication with those with whom they have none, and that ye may not receive those whom they have cast out. For the judgment of a bishop is greatly to be feared, although he may bind one unjustly, which, however, he ought to guard against with the utmost care.

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For all the faithful ought to receive the Holy Spirit after baptism by imposition of the hand of the bishops, so that they may be found to be Christians fully;

So far, this is the oldest, excavated building used as a gathering place for the Church (about A.D. 230). More information is available at https://secure.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/wiki/Dura-Europos_church.

