

TEO, ISSN 2247-4382
62 (1), pp. 57-67, 2015

The successors of the Apostles in the early Church

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Abstract

The Apostolic Age is the most important Period of Christianity Because starting with Jesus Christ, followed by the Apostles, we can understand the sacred work Properly That God has left to be Committed by mankind. The Ecclesiastical hierarchy emerges Even in times and the Enjoyed Those and respect No longer is meet in Any other was. The moral Standards That have Been touched by spiritual leaders from the 1st century reveals a Christian of conscience.

Keywords

Christianity, spiritual leader, servant, apostate bishop, priest, deacon

Jesus Christ - perfect model

If in the Old Testament, the Law makes it clear that any spiritual leader must be taken from among men and separated from them, Christ had no

need to be separated from other people, but rather „He became the all similar to the peers... to suffer... to die”¹.

Lord gives His followers authority, the foundation of Christian faith is precisely the participation of Christians in Christ’s “authority”².

Christ’s Priesthood is the source of strength and balance in the body of the church ...”³ and the Christian priesthood is ”extension in time and space of the priesthood of Jesus Christ”⁴; That being said, servant of holly altar symbolizes Christ that gathers leads and pray. Since the early Church the eucharist and forgiveness of sins is the foundation for the Christian servant of his ministry. In this sense, the priest and the bishop were “Church’s body parts as community”⁵.

The Apostle

If Jesus was preaching His own people, the Apostles and those around them started in the known world to preach the Word of God. They served in the benefit of “Church’s unity”⁶ and they kept in touch with the established community. The Apostle is known in Christianity as a “religious leader”⁷, who was with his community in every way. The successors of the Holly Apostles has remained engraved like a seal the Christian digni-

¹ Albert Vanhoye, *Le Pretre Christ notre east*, SEDAP, Toulouse, 1969, p. 28.

² Albert Vanhoye, Franco Manzi, Ugo Vanni, *Il della nuova sacerdozio ALLEANZA*, Ed. Ancora, Milan, 1999, p. 35.

³ Nikos A. Matsoukas, *Dogmatic Theology and symbolic*, vol. II, Ed. Byzantines, Bucharest, 2006, p. 363.

⁴ A. Vacant, *Dictionnaire de theologie catolique*, tom. Vacant, *Dictionnaire de Theologie catolique*, tom. XIII, Librairie Letouzey et ane, Paris, 1937, p. 441; XIII, Librairie Letouzey et Ane, Paris, 1937, p. 441.

⁵ Fr. Profprof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. III, EIBMBOR, București, 2003, p. 150;. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. III, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române (EIBMBOR), Bucharest, 2003, p. 150.

⁶ Dr. Constantin Preda, *Credința și viața Bisericii primare – o analiză a Faptelor Apostolilor*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii ortodoxe Române, București, 2002, p. 161; Constantin Preda, *Faith and life of the early church - a review of Acts*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2002, p. 161.

⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. I, MacMillan Publishing Company, New York, 1987, p. 356.

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ty that their ancestors showed, those that were not even accepted by their Jewish compatriots. Thus, from the pages of the New Testament Scripture (Acts. 4), we see the Apostles of the Savior, being investigated by the supreme authority of the Jews –The Sanhedrin.

The Apostolic succession

The Apostolic's activity was the foundation of the clergy. The Bishop had from the beginning the role of teach others to become priests "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me, among many witnesses, is transmitted truthful by people which by themselves are able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2: 1-2). Here we see the apostolic succession, with the condition of remaining in accordance with the truth provided by all those who conveyed, at any time to "reproduce the unadulterated message of the Apostles"⁸.

The religious ierarchy in the apostolic era

The ierarchy sits by "establishing local authority under closely dependence of apostles"⁹, which transmitted the powers they possessed in varying degrees: here we have the "origin of the differentiations that will appear later in the Church between bishops, priests, diaconate"¹⁰. To become members of the Church, the new followers "were recruited through personal ties and by the testimony of life"¹¹. The Christian life "was marked by the Eucharist and baptism of the new members"¹².

The Christian community has in its turn, from the beginning, true spiritual leaders, as Stephen the archdeacon, the one who suffered a martyr's death (Acts. 7) and the Church of Jerusalem was considered in the apos-

⁸ Corrado Ursi, *Sacerdozio ministerial*, M. D'Auria Ed. Pontifical, Naples, 1970, p. 51.

⁹ L. Cerfaux, *La theologie*, p. 386 la Albert Descamps, *Jesus et l'Eglise*, Leuven Unversity Press, 1987, p. 370; Cerfaux, *La Theologie*, p. 386. Albert Descamps *et l'Eglise Jesus*, Leuven University Press, 1987, p. 370.

¹⁰ Jean Danielou, *La Chiesa degli apostoli*, trans. în italiană de Pietro Lunghi, Ed. Archeosofica, Roma, 1991, p. 38; Italian Pietro Lunghi, Ed. Archeosofica, Rome, 1991, p. 38.

¹¹ Giovanni Filoramo, *History of Religions - Judaism and Christianity*, vol. II, trans. Cornelia Dumitru, București, Ed. Polirom, 2008, p. 188; Cornelia Dumitru, Bucharest, Ed. Polirom, 2008, p. 188.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

tolitic times as “a mother church”¹³. In Jerusalem, the Christian community has continued to attend the temple, but they also have their own cult. Outside Jerusalem, without the temple, the Christian worship is held by the synagogue model. Over time, the Christians being expelled from the synagogue, they had to organize a separate Jewish community and thus to practice their worship held in private houses. The leadership was owned by an apostle and in his absence by the “primate’s community, the bishop”¹⁴.

The New Testament illustrates a wide variety of servants: „the twelve, seven, evangelists, pastors, prophets, teachers, apostles, old servants, healers...”¹⁵. In the apostolic era, the preachers are joined from the beginning the “elders” and “bishops”. But there were also itinerant bishops since “the beginning, the great distance that separates the episcopal church from the new Christian communities led to the need of visitors elders, who had the mission to travel through the diocese”¹⁶.

Some say that the “organization of the church, meaning the bishop with his deacon, supported by the elders, is a direct borrowing from Hebrew synagogue, which was established a long time by a body of elders”¹⁷.

If the writings of St. Luke “show us the life of the Church in the early years, showing us not only how was set up, but also how it developed”¹⁸, in the oldest writing from the New Testament –The Epistle to the Thessalonians (V, 12) - St. Paul urges believers to honor in a great manner “especially those who labor among you (τοὺς κοπιῶντας ἐν ὑμῖν) and sit in front of you into Lord (προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν) and teaches you (νοθετοῦντας ὑμᾶς)”.

The Church took special care in choosing the persons who were to be consecrated to Lord. First “it was asked to all of them to have true faith

¹³ J.G. Davies, *La Chiesa delle origini*, trans. în italiană de Francesco Mei, Ed. Il saggiatore, Milano, 1966, p. 70; Italian Francesco Mei, Ed. The Assayer, Milan, 1966, p. 70.

¹⁴ Nicolae Chifăr, *History of Christianity*, Vol. I, University „Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu, 2007, p. 38.

¹⁵ Simon Dufour, Remi Parent, *and the Ministry*, ed. italiană în îngrijirea lui Roberto Laurita, Ed. Queriniana, Brescia, 1995, p. 31; Italian Roberto Laurita care, Ed. Queriniana, Brescia 1995, p. 31.

¹⁶ Metropolitan Emilianos Timiadis, *Priest, parish renewal*, trans. de Paul Brusanowski, Ed. Sofia, Bucuresti, 2001, p. 58; by Paul Brusanowski, Ed. Sofia, Bucharest, 2001, p. 58.

¹⁷ Margaret M. Mitchell, Frances M. Young, *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. I, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 417.

¹⁸ Dr. Constantin Preda, *op. cit.*, p. 159; *cit.*, p. 159.

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(I Tim 3, 3); Canon 58, 80 Apostolic...”¹⁹. As regards to the conditions of entry into the clergy “since the early centuries it was obvious that a cleric must have certain qualities (gender, age, health condition, morality, science)”²⁰.

During the Apostles times, “the primary role of bishops and priests remains relatively of little importance in terms of outreach activity”²¹, which was made by the apostles. Some historians have argued that there was a close appreciation of the work of priests and bishops, in that it says it was more obvious the work identity of priests with the bishops. Therefore, the priests “enjoyed a close honor to bishops”²².

The fact is that the church hierarchy has not been imposed from the very first line. The clergy “was standing in the brethren’s shadow, except on worship, when he came back to known obligations of workshopping and committing the Holy Sacraments”²³.

In this era, the persecution endured by Christians by the Roman authorities put the clergy in large trials. Bloody persecutions began under Nero (54-68). Often, the persecutions, the plagues, or other circumstances leaked some churches or communities of their bishops, priests sometimes, leaving the faithful confused and uncertain situations.

The Bishop in the apostolic era

About the bishops is speak less in the beginning, because: “on one hand, their ordinations were done by the apostles who had the fullness of grace; and on the other, the terms were not yet specified and distinct, but were confused the bishop term with the priest one”²⁴.

¹⁹ Ioan Mihălțan, Bishop of Oradea, *Priesthood and the priesthood of Christ the Saviour Church*, Ed. Diocese of Oradea, Oradea, 2003, p. 90.

²⁰ Jean Gaudemet, *L’Eglise dans l’Empire romain*, tome III, Ed. Sirey, Paris, p. 122.

²¹ Charles Perrot, Filippo Serafini, *Ministri di Dio custodi del popolo*, ed. San Paolo, Torino, 2009, p. 54; San Paolo, Turin, 2009, p. 54.

²² Jean Gaudemet, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

²³ Fr. prof. dr. Ioan. Prof. dr. Ioan G. Coman, *Patrologie*, vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1984, p. 69; G. Coman, *Patristics*, vol. I, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1984, p. 69.

²⁴ Fr. dr. Ioan Mircea, *Dicționar al Noului Testament*, EIBMBOR, București, 1995, p. 152; dr. Ioan Mircea, *Dictionary of the New Testament*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1995, p. 152.

The chief priests (bishops) are descendants of the Twelve Apostles, in the greatest ecclesiastical degree, they can commit all mysteries and all religious services. The bishops symbolize the power and dominion of the Apostles. From the beginning the rights and obligations of bishops were “to ordain priests and deacons (cf. I Tim 3, 8), to learn and to sanctify (I Tim. 4, 1- 6) and lead the whole community”²⁵.

The title of bishop “is normally limited to the presidents of the councils of Elders, and such “bishops” have come to be distinguished both in honor and power, from the Elders, who were limited to get their authority by delegation from bishops”²⁶.

The bishop of a diocese

“must stay in communion with the bishops of other dioceses for the unity of doctrine, sacraments and commit to living in the Gospel assured by himself, in his diocese to be in accordance with the teaching, with the celebration of the sacraments and living in apostolic Church from everywhere”²⁷. To ensure this unity, since the apostolic times “was ordained that every new bishop to be ordained by three or at least two bishops, and before the ordination, to make in depth the confession of his faith, proving that it is the same as the bishops that are ordaining him on behalf of a whole episcopate autocephalous Churches which are in full communion with the Bishop of the Church”²⁸.

The spreading of gospel to villages too, causes the appearance of Chorepiscopos or countrybishops; some were fullbishops, others simple priests. They were subordinates to the ordinary bishops. Gradually, they were replaced by *periodeutes* (visitor clerics).

Hermann Hauser show the

“symbiosis between two structures: a type of structure with a group of «old people» which bears full responsibility for the doctrine and discipline in a community, and another type where

²⁵ Fr. prof. dr. George Remete, *Dogmatica Ortodoxă*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2012, p. 326; Prof. dr. George Remete, *Orthodox Dogmatic*, Ed. Reunification, Alba Iulia, 2012, p. 326.

²⁶ F.L. Cross, E.A. Livingstone, *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1944-1968, p. 1119.

²⁷ Fr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *op.cit.*, p. 168; Prof. D. Stăniloae, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169.

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the individuals were distinguished by exercising various charisms (with a tendency to aggregate functions)²⁹.

Thus, each bishop is the head of a local Church, “the head of Christ’s fullness”³⁰.

The priest in the apostolic era

The Apostolic College and the College of Elders formed together “the first authority of the apostolic Church”³¹.

In the Jerusalem church, the elders exercised an administrative and economic role, then a deliberative and legislative role, and even of meeting with the officers of the Church. The activity of the elders evolved by the extent required by the Church after the death of the apostolic college leadership.

The elders College from Jerusalem, headed by its president, was the initial hierarchy in Jerusalem. But this organizational model is extended to other churches, and we have some reports in some archaic Christian writings. Thus in *Kerygma Petri*, which is an archaic judeo-christian document introduced in *Décrétați Clementine* is stated that “Peter settled in the Palestinian coastal cities, some local hierarchies consisting of 12 elders are headed by a bishop”³². In this respect, Hamack believed that “elders formed the group leaders, while bishops and deacons were the liturgical leaders and administrators”³³.

In the apostolic era the priests appear grouped in a group of priests, whose role was “to assist the bishop and be its board”³⁴. The elders were

²⁹ Hermann Hauser, *L’Eglise a l’age apostolique*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 1996, p. 158.

³⁰ Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, *St. 2*, 99, PG 35, col. 501 la Pr. prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. III, EIBMBOR, București, 2003, p. 155; 501 to Fr. Prof. D. Stăniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. III, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2003, p. 155.

³¹ M. Dumais, „*Comunaute et mission*”, p. 57 la Dr. Constantin Preda, *Credința și viața Bisericii primare – o analiză a Faptelor Apostolilor*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii ortodoxe Române, București, 2002, p. 164; Dumais, *et Comunaute „mission”* p. 57 to Dr. Constantin Preda, *Faith and life of the early church - a review of Acts*, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 2002, p. 164.

³² J. Danielou, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

³³ *Bible Dictionary*, Romanian Missionary Society, Ed. „Christian Book”, Oradea, 1995, p. 397.

³⁴ A. Vacant, *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique*, tom. Vacant, *Dictionnaire de Theologie catholique*, tom. XIII, Librairie Letouzey et ane, Paris, 1937, p. 153; XIII, Librairie Letouzey et ane, Paris, 1937, p. 153.

accompanying the bishops on a regular basis and not as mere delegates, but presided the Saint Eucharist, establishing “a permanent relationship between the priest and the Eucharist”³⁵.

The priest now fulfill three basic functions: “those of the priest (acts of worship), doctor (soul) and of divine graces distributor”³⁶.

In the New Testament, for the first time, it’s talking about priests, in the sense of church ministers on the second level of the hierarchy, in Acts 11, 30 during the story of a reference aid from Antioch to Jerusalem.

Another important text to express the existence and the functionality of the priests stage is in Acts 14, 23 which testifies the local church founders concern to invest some people with responsibility and dignity of the hierarchical priesthood step, they remaining in those communities to continue the gracious Church life and to watch. Here it is shown that the Apostles Paul and Barnabas they ordained a priest in every church... and brought them to the Lord in whom they believed.”

The importance of the priesthood stage and the its close to the episcopate stage, is proven by the fact that the Apostle Peter called himself “together priest” (I Peter 5: 1).

The lack of elders of the Pauline letters can be explained by the presence of equivalent positions. For example, in Ep. I to the Thessalonians, the Apostle of the Gentiles says: “those of you who labor among you, are taking care to teach you in the Lord.” Then, in the Epistle to the Corinthians he exhorts Christians to obey the family of Sthepanus whom being converted earlier seems “to have a certain authority over the rest of the community”³⁷. And the Apostle of the Gentiles sees in the mission of the priest the role of a mediator between God (Heb. 5. 1).

Constantin the Steward, in the epistolary collection of the three stages of the priesthood, shows that the 70 “were called disciples, to differentiate from the twelve... They were priests in every sense, meaning celebrants, as he called them suggestive Synodico”, “The Divine and Holy Synod

³⁵ Alan Richardson, John Bowden, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, SCM Press Ltd, Norwich, 1983, p. 465.

³⁶ A. Vacant, *op.cit* , p. 441; Vacant, *op. cit.*, p. 441.

³⁷ Pietro Tacchi Venturi, Giuseppe Castellani, *Storia delle religioni* , vol. IV, Unione Tipografico Ed. Torinese, Torino, 1971, p. 74; Pietro Tacchi Venturi, Giuseppe Castellani, *Storia delle Religioni*, vol. IV, Unione Tipografico Ed. Torinese, Torino, 1971, p. 74.

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gathered in Jerusalem, consisting of holly teachers and apostles, from the celebrant priests and brothers with them”³⁸.

It should be emphasized that the ministers and believers attended church services frequently and actively, “the authority and influence of priests”³⁹, being made for the good order of the Church.

The priests were clearly subordinated to the bishop, but there were situations where the members of the priest college were equal: “on Alexandria there were priests who participated in the consecration of the bishop”⁴⁰. In fact, there was a close appreciation of the work of priests and bishops, by the fact that it was stated that it was more identified the identity of the priests with the one of the bishops. With time, however, the difference was felt increasingly more, because their work began to be much better known.

The presence of elders in smaller communities where there was no need for the presence of a bishop occurred since the apostolic age, because, “Nowhere is shown on those times documents that there was a too large number of bishops on how big was the number of Christian communities”⁴¹.

In the apostolic era, the priests preaching is highlighted by the rite kept under the name: Peregrinatio Sylvaniae (Sec. IV):

„Here (on Jerusalem) is the custom... that among of all the priests who are present, all who wish to speak, and after all, the bishop is preaching. Therefore, these sermons are forever held on Sundays because every time is needed to train people in the Scriptures and in the love of God”⁴².

³⁸ K. Oikonomou, *Despre cele trei trepte sfințite ale Bisericii*. Oikonomou, *About three steps holy Church. Culegere epistolară*, Nauplia, pp. 77-78 la Sf. Nectarie de Eghina, *Despre preoție*, trad. *Epistolary collection*, Nauplia, pp. 77-78 in St. Nectarios of Aegina, *On the Priesthood*, trans. din limba neogreacă de Parascheva Grigoriu, Ed. Sofia, București, 2008, p. 23; in Modern Greek language of Paraskeva Grigoriu, Ed. Sofia, Bucharest, 2008, p. 23.

³⁹ Nicolae Bolea, *Pages of Christian history: the symbol niceoconstantinopolitan and Romanian autocephaly*, Cluj-Napoca, Risoprint Publishing, 2010, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Albert Dufourcq, *Le christianisme Primitif*, Ed. Plon-Nourrit et Cie, Paris, 1924, p. 161.

⁴¹ Arhid. Prof. dr. Ioan. dr. Ioan N. Floca, *Drept canonic organic*, vol. I, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1990, p. 174; N. Floca, *organic Canon Law*, vol. I, EIBMBOR, Bucharest, 1990, p. 174.

⁴² L. Duchesne, *Origines du culte chretien*, Paris, 1927, p. 59 la Pr. prof. Constantin Galeriu, *Preoția ca slujire a cuvântului*, în rev. Duchesne, *Origines du cults Swept*, Paris, 1927, p. 59 Fr. Prof. Constantin Galeriu, *Priesthood as a ministry of the word*, the rev. ”Orthodoxia, nr.2/1979, p. 307; Orthodoxy”, no. 2 / 1979, p. 307.

What attracts the attention from the story of "Peregrine", is especially the practice of the Church of the East, to take more sermons at the same Mass, by all the ministering priests. This ordinance was an old tradition, even during the Apostles, when the charisms were blooming, and is confirmed by the "Apostolic Constitutions", which by depicting the structure of the divine worship from the primary era, decided to do so: "And when the Gospel is read, all priests and deacons and all the people listening to sit very quietly... And finally, priests to counsel people, each of them at a time, not all at once; and finally the bishop, who is as the helmsman of the ship"⁴³.

However, in the daily life of early Christian communities, the elders "had an inferior importance from deacons, the main helpers of the bishop..."⁴⁴. And even if in this apostolic period activity the priest's functions were shadowed by the preachers and the missionary, the priests during the persecution were "those who were involved in particularly way when there is a court case against a Christian"⁴⁵.

The deacon in the apostolic era

In the New Testament, the first case of ordination was the laying hands on the seven deacons, which is recounted in Acts Chapter 6. The effects of the hands laying of the Apostles stood out immediately by the special gifts of the Holy Spirit, because, "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6. 8).

The deacons were elected "just to help the Church's mission"⁴⁶. By the virtue of their ordination, they were sent "to serve the church congregation in performing religious services and ensure the apostolic faith, being in the mission outposts"⁴⁷. They were "servants of the word"⁴⁸. The deacons

⁴³ *The writings of the Apostolic Fathers with Settlements and Apostolic Canons*, trans. de pr.prof I. Mihălcescu, 1928, p. 76 la Pr.prof.Constantin Galeriu, *Preoția ca slujire a cuvântului*, în reFr. prof I. Mihălcescu, 1928, p. 76. C. Galeriu, *The ministry of the word priesthood*, the rev. "Ortodoxia, nr.2/1979, p. 307;Orthodoxy", no. 2 / 1979, p. 307.

⁴⁴ Karl Baus, *La chiesa e apostolica subapostolica*, vol. I, Ed. Jaca Book, Milan, 1992.

⁴⁵ Didasc. 2, 34,3 la Karl Baus, *op.cit*, p. 446;2 34.3, Karl Baus, *op. cit.*, p. 446.

⁴⁶ I. Mihălțan, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁴⁷ Gilles Routhier Alphonse Borras, *Les nouveaux ministeres*, Ed. Mediaspaul, Montreal, 2009, p. 99.

⁴⁸ Giuseppe Bonsirven, *Dizionario biblico*, Ed. Paolina, Rome, 1961, p. 57.

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assumed pastoral functions, encouraging community and gave advice, helping the community to work, giving the money and food. They also “ran baptisms”⁴⁹, meaning that their particular activity was to baptize those who wanted to be Christians.

In the first centuries of Christianity “the number of deacons in a diocese was often limited to seven”⁵⁰.

Conclusions

The sacramental priesthood, with three stages: bishop, priest (presbyter) and deacon, appears clearly established in the early days of the Church. New Testament writings show that every church had a sacramental hierarchy, first bishops, placed by the Apostles themselves, having among others, the duty to care for each community to have the necessary priests and deacons to commit the holy.

In the old Church, the role of the hierarchy, and especially of the bishop was more important than it is today. The moral stature that arose during the persecution of the Christian clergy “have set the standards for the pastoral care of a bishop”⁵¹. Therefore, the relationship between clergy and people, were better and stronger than ever, and the faithful respect for their pastors went to awe.

The effervescence of faith of those times was admirable, if we consider that both the Apostles and Christian missionaries were not afraid even of death or other harmful things, but boldly going where the Church was sending them. We, today, remain with the vivid image of the Christian minister of that time, which was as humble and ordinary, as the people and cities they served.

⁴⁹ Jonathan Hill, *Guide of the history of Christianity*, ed. Book House, Oradea, 2008, p. 36.

⁵⁰ Patrick J. Dunn, *Priesthood*, White House, New York, 1990, p. 50.

⁵¹ Augustine Casiday, Frederick W. Norris, *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, Vol. II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 363.