

JBTS

VOLUME 6 | ISSUE 1

JOURNAL OF
BIBLICAL AND
THEOLOGICAL
STUDIES

Papal Bull: A Response to
Contemporary Papal Scholarship

by Tyler Dalton McNabb

Papal Bull: A Response to Contemporary Papal Scholarship

TYLER DALTON MCNABB

Associate Professor of Philosophy at USJ - University of Saint Joseph

Peter Lampe, in his work, *From Paul to Valentinus*, argues that until the second part of the second century, the church in Rome favored a fractured collegial Presbyterian ecclesiology.¹ The Catholic historian, Robert Eno, agrees with Lampe when he states the following:

But the evidence available seems to point predominantly if not decisively in the direction of a collective leadership. Dogmatic a priori theses should not force us into presuming or requiring something that the evidence leans against.... This evidence (Clement, Hermas, Ignatius) points us in the direction of assuming that in the first century and into the second, there was no bishop of Rome in the usual sense given to that title.²

And Eno is not the only Catholic historian who agrees with Lampe. Eamon Duffy, who served on the Pontifical Historical Commission, agrees that ‘all the indications are that there was no single bishop of Rome for almost a century after the deaths of the Apostles.’³ Using Bayesian reasoning, Jerry Walls, an analytic philosopher of religion, has recently argued that if there was a bishop in Rome in the first century, we should expect a mention of it in the Patristic writings. Walls puts the probability of Clement of Rome mentioning a bishop in Rome at .44, the probability of Shepherd of Hermas at .53, Ignatius at .33, and Justin Martyr at .27. Walls then goes on to calculate that the probability of there being at least one mention of a bishop in Rome in one of these writings, assuming there was in fact a bishop in Rome in the first century, would be about .87.⁴ And yet, since none of these documents mention a

1. Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the first two centuries* (London: T & T Clark International, 2006), 397.

2. Robert B. Eno, *The Rise of the Papacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 26, 29. Cf. Jerry Walls, “If Christ be not Raised”; If Peter was not the First Pope: Parallel Cases of Indispensable Doctrinal Foundations, *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 4/2 (2019); 252.

3. Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners* (New Haven: Yale Press, 2014), 2.

4. Walls does the following to get the aforementioned calculation:

$$1 - P(\sim CR \ \& \ \sim HR \ \& \ \sim IR \ \& \ \sim JR) = 1 - [P(\sim CR) * P(\sim HR) * P(\sim IR) * P(\sim JR)]$$

$$\text{Since } P(CR) = 0.44, \text{ and } P(CR \text{ or } \sim CR) = P(CR) + P(\sim CR) = 1$$

we know that

$$P(\sim CR) = 1 - P(CR) = 1 - 0.44 = 0.56$$

bishop in Rome, we have strong evidence to suggest that there was no bishop in first century Rome. Lampe, Eno, Duffy, and Walls are not in the minority with their opinions; in fact, they espouse the paradigm view within papal historical studies. In this paper, however, I will argue that it is reasonable to hold a skeptical attitude toward the paradigm view that there was no bishop in Rome in the first century. I will do this by examining the evidence for the paradigm view in each of the aforementioned Patristic authors. I will conclude with a brief argument for there being a monarchical bishop in first century Rome.

Clement of Rome

Traditionally, Clement of Rome is dated to have been written in 95 AD. This in part can be explained by Eusebius linking Clement's reign as Peter's successor with the Roman Emperor, Domitian.⁵ If Clement did not come into power until Domitian was already reigning, then Clement's letter to the Corinthians would have to be dated toward the end of the first century. Most scholars then, go on to read Clement 1:1's discussion of 'calamities which have befallen us' as addressing the famous Domitian persecution. Again, if the letter refers to Domitian's persecution, then only a later dating of 1 Clement is acceptable.⁶

Recently, the traditional dating of 1 Clement has been challenged. For example, Thomas Herron has argued that we should date 1 Clement to 70 AD. One reason one should prefer the earlier dating relates to Clement's discussion of the temple. When Clement discusses the temple in 40-41, Clement speaks of the temple in the present tense.⁷ It is as if the temple is still around. Moreover, he gives great detail about the procedures that take place when it comes to temple sacrifices. Clement is not speaking of the temple as if temple life is far removed from Jewish worship.⁸

There have been some who have suggested that perhaps religious Jews continued to sacrifice at the temple even though the temple was in ruins; thus, the details that Clement gives us are to be expected with a later dating. But, as Herron points out, Kathleen Kenyon's archeology work makes this view implausible.⁹ Kenyon found

and we can conclude that

$$P(\text{CR or HR or IR or JR}) = 1 - [(0.56) * (0.47) * (0.67) * (0.73)] = 1 - 0.1287 = 0.87.$$

See Kenneth J. Collins and Jerry L. Walls, *Roman but Not Catholic: What Remains at Stake 500 Years After the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 249.

5. Thomas J. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome: On the Dating of Clement's First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2008), 6.

6. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 21.

7. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 13-21.

8. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 13.

9. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 18-19.

remains of various worshippers around the temple. Surely, if observant Jews were still sacrificing in the ruins, they would have at least buried their neighbors.

Clement's discussion of the temple, however, is not the only reason for Herron's early dating of 1 Clement. At the end of 1 Clement, we read that three emissaries are being sent to the Corinthians, along with Clement's letter. The first two emissaries mentioned are Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Vito. It is likely that these were slaves who obtained their first names from the Emperor Claudius and his wife, Valerius.¹⁰ Given that according to Roman law, one must be at least thirty years of age to be released from slavery, and, assuming that Ephebus and Vito were freed before their masters died (Valeria died in 48 AD and Claudius died in 54 AD), Ephebus and Vito would be much too old to be emissaries and make the journey to Corinth at the end of the first century.¹¹ An earlier dating of 1 Clement however, could account for how Ephebus and Vito were able to make such a journey.

The third emissary mentioned is Fortunatus. This was a very common name for the time, so it is unexpected that there is no additional information about him, unless of course, they were already familiar with Fortunatus. There is a mention of a Fortunatus in 1 Cor 16:11. It seems plausible that Clement assumes that the Corinthians would simply recognize who he was referencing if the Fortunatus mentioned is the same Fortunatus that Paul references. But again, if this was the Fortunatus that Paul referenced, would he not be too old to be an emissary if 1 Clement was not written until 95 AD?¹² It seems like we would expect the names of the emissaries on the hypothesis that 1 Clement was written closer to 70 AD than the hypothesis that it was written in 95 AD.

If 1 Clement should be dated to around 70 AD, it is not a surprise that Clement does not appeal to his status as a bishop. For starters, he would not have been a bishop at the time. Moreover, it is not surprising that he would not mention the authority of some other bishop, given that Peter and Paul would have just died; the Petrine Office might not have had sufficient time to develop.

Shepherd of Hermas

But what about the Shepherd of Hermas? Should we expect a mention of a bishop in this Patristic writing? It is important to note that most scholars think that the Shepherd of Hermas has multiple authors.¹³ The first 24 chapters was likely written much earlier than the rest of the book. With respect to 1-24, it lacks reference to a bishop or successor to Peter. While it does reference Clement as an elder, (likely,

10. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 10.

11. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 10.

12. Herron, *Clement and the Early Church of Rome*, 10.

13. Clayton N. Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006).

Clement of Rome) it does seem to downplay his role significantly.¹⁴ He doesn't come across as a monarchical bishop.

It is typically understood that Shepherd of Hermas is difficult to date. While 1-24 has been dated to the 70s by some,¹⁵ others have dated it to the 90s.¹⁶ As Holmes suggests, the reference to Clement 'point[s] to the end of the first century.'¹⁷ Of course, the reference to Clement would only point to the end of the first century if we assume that Clement was only in leadership during this time. However, as Herron has argued, we have good reason to think that Clement was in leadership long before then. If one assumes that 1 Clement should be dated to around 70, the reference to Clement does not provide any evidence for a later dating of Shepherd of Hermas. If 1-24 should be dated to around 70, we again have little reason to expect a mention of Clement being a bishop or there being a successor to Peter.

Ignatius

Does Ignatius' letters act as evidence for the paradigm view? As Walls points out, Ignatius spends a lot of time talking in his letters about the importance of the bishop, and yet, his only letter that is missing a reference to a bishop is in Ignatius' letter to the Romans.¹⁸ If the Romans had a designated bishop, would we really expect Ignatius to be silent on the matter?

The content (or the lack thereof) of Ignatius' letter to the Romans has led some to believe that Ignatius did not believe there was a bishop in Rome. But this reasoning does not take seriously into account other statements made by Ignatius about the necessity of a bishop. For example, Ignatius does not seem to think that one can even be called a church unless one has a bishop:

In like manner, let all reverence the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as the Sanhedrim of God, and assembly of the apostles. Apart from these, there is no Church.¹⁹

14. *Shepherd of Hermas* 4[8]:3.

15. Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2006), 37-38.

16. See Jefford, *Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament*.

17. Michael Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers in English* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2006), 37-38

18. Kenneth J. Collins and Jerry L. Walls, *Roman but Not Catholic: What Remains at Stake 500 Years After the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 245.

19. Ignatius, *Trallians*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. From *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885.) Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0106.htm>>.

And yet, in his letter to the Romans, Ignatius seems to treat the Romans as if they have a church. In chapter four, he seems to indirectly include Rome as one of the churches that he is sending a letter to when he says that he is ‘writing to all the churches’ and only the Romans can hinder him. Moreover, in chapter three, Ignatius seems to indicate that the Romans are teaching other churches as they have ‘taught others’. It is hard to imagine that Ignatius both thinks a bishop is necessary to be a church, and yet, while the Romans lacked a bishop and therefore were not a church, they are still first in charity and are responsible for teaching various churches.

Because of this, if anything, Ignatius letters give us evidence that there was a bishop of Rome in the early part of the second century, not that there was not. Having stated this, I move on to discuss whether Justin Martyr’s lack of mentioning a bishop in Rome should cause us to endorse the paradigm view in historical studies.

Justin Martyr

Justin Martyr addresses the Roman Emperor to give a defense of the Christian faith. However, as it has been pointed out, Justin makes no mention of a bishop in Rome. This should not cause us to be skeptical that there was not a bishop in Rome however. For starters, it might have seemed wise to not let the Emperor know that there is another person reigning in Rome. This could have been a death sentence for the current bishop.

Moreover, it simply might not have been relevant to mention that there is a bishop in Rome. As a Catholic philosopher, I have written various defenses of the Christian faith, and yet, rarely do I mention the papacy. Perhaps, it simply seemed irrelevant to Justin at the time.

Finally, it is important to point out that Justin’s Apologies were written around sixty years into the second century AD. We know that just a couple of decades or so after the Apologies were written, there were references to there being bishops in Rome. The least controversial example can be found in Irenaeus. Irenaeus famously articulates a list of the successors to Peter.²⁰ Given this is the case, it seems that we can conclude one of four things:

1. Irenaeus was clueless about the shape of Roman ecclesiology two decades prior to his writing.
2. Irenaeus was lying.
3. Irenaeus was delusional.
4. Irenaeus was telling the truth.

20. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.3.

(2) seems implausible given Irenaeus' deeply rooted Christian character. (3) seems unlikely given the coherence of Irenaeus' writings. So, that leaves (1) and (4). In order to be committed to (1) it seems like one would have to come up with a plausible explanation as to why someone as brilliant as Irenaeus got his short-term history so wrong. Of course, you might think that he was lied to but the person postulating as much seems like they would have the burden of proof to demonstrate this as a likelihood. (4) then, seems like the best option.

Perhaps one objects to these options and argues for a fifth option, namely that Irenaeus was merely reading his present situation into very recent history. Since there is a bishop of Rome during Irenaeus' time, Irenaeus makes the unjustified assumption that previous important elders in Rome (e.g. Clement) were also bishops. This, however, seems to just affirm that Irenaeus did not really know what he was talking about. And thus, option (5) would really be a variation of (1). And this being the case, it seems reasonable to hold a skeptical attitude toward the paradigm view that there was no bishop in Rome in the first century.