

THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE ROMAN SEE

The kingdom of God upon earth speaks of the episcopate of the Christian community at Rome as the *Apostolic* See. This title is familiar to all Catholics. Yet it has a meaning and a background that are not at all adequately presented by most of the theological manuals in common use today. It is unfortunate that this title is not generally explained at greater length because it involves certain revealed truths of which our Catholic people should be explicitly aware during these troubled times.

The *Sedes Apostolica* originally signifies a *sedes* or *cathedra*, a chair in which a teacher and ruler, commissioned as such by Jesus Christ Our Lord, sat to govern and instruct a Christian congregation. The great Basilica of St. Peter in Rome still preserves and honors the chair which, according to tradition, the Prince of the apostolic college used when he presided over the Christian congregation of the Eternal City. According to Eusebius of Caesarea, the chair used by St. James was still kept and venerated in Jerusalem in the fourth century.¹

By a perfectly natural process of metonymy, however, the *Sedes Apostolica* came to mean even in the earliest days of Christianity actual jurisdictional and doctrinal authority in the Church of God. The same sort of phenomenon is visible in our own day when one of the Holy Father's pronouncements is called a statement of the Vatican, and when the power of the White House means the authority of the President of the United States. It is, of course, in this secondary or transferred sense that the Church militant of Jesus Christ speaks of the Apostolic See of Rome.

In this metonymical sense, the term "Apostolic See" is capable of being interpreted in three ways. In its widest and least proper interpretation, the title "Apostolic See" can be applied to the office of any Catholic bishop. Because the bishop rules and teaches the particular portion of the Lord's vineyard entrusted to his care as a successor of the apostles and as a man endowed with their basic doctrinal and jurisdictional commission, he can truly be said to command and teach his people from an apostolic *cathedra*. In

¹ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VII, 19. In Migne's *Patrologia graeca* (MPG), XX, 682.

a more restricted sense, however, the term *sedes* or *cathedra apostolica* was commonly used by ancient Christian writers to designate the bishopric of an individual Christian community which had been founded or ruled by one of the original apostolic college. In its most proper sense and, incidentally, in the only way in which it has been employed regularly in modern times, the title is given only to the visible head of the Christian community in Rome. There are definite and highly important reasons, both in the constitution of the apostolic college and in the nature of the Church itself, why this designation applies most perfectly to Christ's vicar on earth.

In the famous thirty-second chapter of his *De praescriptione haereticorum*, Tertullian spoke of "those Churches which, because they are of a much later date, for as a matter of fact they are being founded daily, do not claim apostles or apostolic men as their founders" as being "accounted not less apostolic [than the local Churches which had been established by apostles] since they are akin in doctrine."² Thus, according to his teaching all of the local communities within the Catholic Church as well as the Catholic Church as a whole must be considered as apostolic because the teachings they propose and accept with the assent of divine faith are precisely those which the apostles themselves taught and believed as the divine revelation communicated through Jesus Christ Our Lord. The apostolic doctrine in function of which each individual local Church in the kingdom of God on earth is qualified as apostolic is the thing designated by St. Irenaeus as "the tradition which originates from the apostles, which is preserved in the Churches by means of the successions of the presbyters."³

St. Irenaeus mentions the successions of the presbyters in the local Churches as the means by which the apostolic tradition is preserved. The presbyters of each individual local Church constitute a sacerdotal brotherhood, the *presbyterium*, and are organized according to the divine nature of the Church itself for the exclusive purpose of aiding the bishop, the head of the *presbyterium*, in the direction and government of the flock entrusted to his care. Consequently both the successions and the authority of the

² Migne's *Patrologia latina* (MPL), II, 44.

³ *Adversus haereses*, III, 2. In Harvey's edition (Cambridge, 1857), II, 7 f.

presbyterium are measured only in terms of the episcopate itself. The presbyters of the Church are instruments in the teaching of Our Lord's message precisely because they constitute the brotherhood inseparably united with the bishop and available to him as the primary and divinely instituted instrument for aiding him in his jurisdictional and doctrinal labors.

It is the contention of St. Irenaeus that all Catholics throughout the world lived in individual Christian communities, subject to men whom the apostles had made successors to themselves in the apostolic ministry.

The apostles instituted bishops in the Churches [and]. . . they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their own successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men. . .⁴

The truth that the bishops of the genuine Catholic Church are actually successors to the apostles is to be found in that first monument of primitive Christian literature, the letter "from the Church of God which is in pilgrimage at Rome to the Church of God which is in pilgrimage at Corinth."⁵ Acting on this doctrine, St. Irenaeus taught that the testimony of the bishops in the true Church could and ought to be taken as the standard of Christian belief. According to St. Irenaeus, a man who accepts what the bishops of the Catholic Church teach as the divine message is actually giving his assent to the message which Our Lord Himself commanded all men to believe.

St. Irenaeus wrote against the Gnostic heretics. Various groups classified as Gnostics contended that their own teachings were really those of Christ, and that they had to come down to the second-century world through certain esoteric channels quite distinct from the apostolic *magisterium* of the Catholic Church itself. They imagined that Our Lord had reserved a highly secret teaching for certain more perfect disciples, that this secret teaching was quite distinct from and superior to the doctrine proposed as divine Christian revelation by the bishops in the Churches, and that the person who desired to become a perfect disciple of Christ would have to accept this secret teaching.

⁴ *Adversus haereses*, III, 3. Harvey, II, 8 f.

⁵ *Prima Clementis*, Int. In Funk's edition of the *Patres apostolici* (Tubingen, 1901), I, 98.

The prince of the Catholic controversialists countered their teaching by proposing the truth about the apostolicity of the Church. He insisted that the apostles were the chosen confidants of Christ and that the Catholic bishops were the men whom the apostles had constituted as their own successors in the government and the instruction of Our Lord's disciples. He saw that any reasonable man must regard it as axiomatic that those to whom Christ had committed His teaching would in their turn have entrusted this doctrine to the very men they had placed in charge of the disciples. The concept of a privileged group, entrusted with the fullness of Our Lord's teaching, but yet not entrusted with the care of His sheep, appeared to St. Irenaeus as a violation of logic as well as an historical absurdity.

Hence St. Irenaeus taught that the succession of a bishop to an apostle and the succession of one bishop to another in any Catholic see must be considered as the passing on of the deposit of revealed doctrine within the company of the disciples. Thus any Catholic bishop is a man commissioned and empowered to preach the Christian message by reason of his position as a successor of the apostles. In the last analysis, the process by which he is shown to be commissioned in this way centers around the proof that each bishop can trace his mandate, through his predecessors, to one of the members of the original apostolic college.

Writing during the last quarter of the second century, St. Irenaeus was convinced that such a procedure was quite possible for all of the episcopal sees then existent. He admitted, however, that the work would be long and irksome. He believed that the tracing of the succession of bishops for each individual see in Christendom was not at all necessary. Every local congregation within the Catholic Church must be in agreement with the Church of Rome, because of the pre-eminent authority of Rome. Consequently, for his purpose, it was enough to show that the then existent bishop of Rome held an office which he had inherited from an apostle and, as a matter of fact, from the prince of the apostles. Since no individual congregation could belong to the Catholic Church without being in communion with the Bishop of Rome, and since no one could be in communion with him without agreeing with the Roman Church in matters of faith, it followed that the entire Catholic Church's faith could be shown

as apostolic in provenance through the succession of the Roman Church itself.⁶

St. Irenaeus was well aware of the primacy of the Roman Church. He depicted this Church as apostolic in a special way, in a manner much more perfect than that according to which the other individual communities within the Catholic Church could be designated as apostolic. He recognized, however, a certain class of Churches within the Catholic society as possessing a degree of apostolicity inferior to that of Rome, but, at the same time, definitely superior to that of the other Christian congregations. He speaks of Polycarp as "appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna by apostles in Asia," and says that the orthodox teaching is something to which "all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time." Again, he tells us that "the Church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and having John remaining among them permanently until the times of Trajan, is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles."⁷

St. Irenaeus considered all of these apostolic Churches as competent to aid in the resolution of questions about the content of divine Christian revelation. "Suppose," he wrote, "that there should arise among us a dispute about a question of some importance. Should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles constantly conversed, and learn from them what is certain and clear with regard to that question?"⁸ Thus, long after the death of the last apostle, the individual Christian communities which had been instructed by the apostles themselves were considered to have a dignity and a doctrinal force greater than those of the other local Churches.

Like St. Irenaeus, Tertullian based his argument in favor of the Catholic Church on a demonstration of the apostolic commission given to that Church alone. The heretics can trace neither their teachings nor their communities to the apostolic college. On the other hand there exist within the Catholic Church certain local congregations whose records show that their bishops

⁶ Cf. *Adversus haereses*, III, 3. Harvey, II, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Harvey, II, 12, 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 4. Harvey, II, 15 f.

are successors to men who were placed in office directly by some of the apostolic college.

For this is the manner in which the apostolic Churches present their registers: as the Church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John; as also the Church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter. In exactly the same way the other Churches likewise point to those whom they regard as the transmitters of the apostolic seed since they have been assigned to their episcopal positions by apostles.⁹

It is quite evident that Tertullian regarded these original apostolic Churches as useful and highly effective witnesses of the divine apostolic tradition. He appeals to them directly in the *De praescriptione haereticorum*.

. . . . Consider the apostolic Churches in which the very *cathedrae* of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read, bringing the voice and representing the countenance of each one of them individually. Achaia is quite near to you. You find Corinth. Since you are not far from Macedonia, you have Philippi, you have the Thessalonians. Since you can cross over into Asia, you have Ephesus. Since, moreover, you are close to Italy, you have Rome, from which the authority comes even into our hands.¹⁰

To the mind of the Catholic Tertullian, Rome was an apostolic Church in a much more perfect way than were Ephesus, Thessalonica, Philippi, and Corinth. Such is the lesson we gather from the continuation of this passage.

How happy is its Church, upon which apostles poured forth all of their doctrine, along with their blood, where Peter endures a passion like unto his Lord's, where Paul wins a crown in a death like John's, where the apostle John was first plunged unhurt into boiling oil and whence he was sent to his island exile. See what she has learned, what she has taught, what fellowship she has had even with the Churches in Africa.¹¹

Tertullian considered as apostolic Churches, not only the Catholic communities which had been founded by the apostles, but

⁹ *De praescriptione haereticorum*, cap. 32. *MPL*, II, 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, cap. 49. *MPL*, II, 49.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

also those to whom they wrote. Even here, Rome occupies a place of pre-eminence.

. . . What comes down from the apostles is that which has been kept as a sacred deposit in the Churches of the apostles. Let us see what milk the Corinthians drank from Paul; to what rule the Galatians were brought for correction; what the Philippians, the Thessalonians, the Ephesians read; what utterance the Romans make especially, to whom Peter and Paul conjointly bequeathed the gospel, even sealed with their own blood. We have also the Churches nourished by John.¹²

In his masterly monograph, *Les normes de l'enseignement chrétien dans la littérature patristique des trois premiers siècles*, Damien Van den Eynde turns his attention to the famous passage from Tertullian's *De pudicitia* in which the African, now fallen into the heresy of Montanus, reproached Pope St. Callistus for "presuming" to believe that Our Lord's promises to St. Peter gave him (St. Callistus) the power to forgive sins.¹³ Tertullian had written: *idcirco praesumis et ad te derivasse solvendi et alligandi potestatem, id est ad omnem ecclesiam Petri propinquam*.¹⁴ Van den Eynde justifies an interpretation of the *omnem ecclesiam Petri propinquam* as the Church of the bishops, the Catholic Church, in contradistinction to the conventicle of the false charismatics, the community of the Montanists. If this interpretation be correct, then the apostolic authority of the Catholic Church is, in Tertullian's mind at least, the authority of Peter alone. The orthodox Churches are *propinquae* to St. Peter through their own bishops. Thus, according to this interpretation, it was the teaching of Tertullian that the individual Catholic bishops are successors, not only of the apostles in general, but of St. Peter in particular. And, when we consider the prominence Tertullian gives to the Church of the city of Rome in his writings, it is obvious that his teaching at least implies that the bishop of the Roman Church must hold a position of genuine pre-eminence in the society of the disciples.

¹² *Adversus Marcionem*, IV, 5. *MPL*, II, 366.

¹³ The work was published in Gembloux, Belgium, by Duculot, in 1933. The discussion of the passage from the *De pudicitia* is found on pp. 203 ff.

¹⁴ *De pudicitia*, cap. 21. *MPL*, II, 1024.

In the *Scorpiace*, however, Tertullian brings out this teaching on the Petrine primacy still more sharply. He insists that "the Lord has left the keys to Peter, and through him, to the Church."¹⁵ It is the first important statement of what was to become the basis for the standard Catholic teaching about the unique and sovereign apostolicity of the Roman See.

The teaching on the pre-eminent apostolicity of the Roman Church, expounded somewhat sketchily in the works of Tertullian, stands out in considerably sharper relief in the writings of St. Cyprian. The Cyprianic teaching on this section of divine revelation is brought out quite forcefully in the Saint's *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate*. The manuscript evidence shows very clearly that there were two editions of this work, and patristic scholars have proved that both editions emanated from St. Cyprian himself. The first edition, the one containing the so-called "primacy text," was written in the year 251. It seems to have been occasioned by the schism of Novatian in Rome. The second edition was produced shortly afterwards, and the fourth chapter of the book was recast in order to stress the unity of the Catholic episcopate, a thesis dear to the heart of St. Cyprian.

The two editions of this work resulted in a multitude and a variety of conflate texts and thus in what was long considered to be a hopeless confusion in manuscripts and in printed editions. For a time the peculiarities of the "primacy text" were thought to be a Roman interpolation. The Anglican Benson and the apostate German priest Koch proposed this theory. What is accepted today as the proper resolution of the problem, a recognition of the fact that there were really two genuine Cyprianic editions, of which that of the "primacy text" came first, was propounded by Msgr. Pierre Batiffol, aided tremendously by the studies of Dom John Chapman and Fr. Adhémar D'Alès, and finally established by Fr. Maurice Bévenot.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Adversus gnosticos scorpiace*, cap. 10. *MPL*, II, 142.

¹⁶ Cf. Batiffol, *L'église naissante et le catholicisme* (Paris: Gabalda, 1927), pp. 440 ff.; Chapman, "Les interpolations dans le traité de S. Cyprien sur l'unité de l'église," *Revue bénédictine*, XIX (1902), 246 ff.; 357 ff.; XX (1903), 26 ff.; D'Alès, *La théologie de Saint Cyprien* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1922), pp. 91 ff.; Bévenot, *St. Cyprian's De Unitate, Chap. 4, in the Light of the Manuscripts* (Rome: The Gregorian University, 1937).

St. Cyprian held that all bishops of the Catholic Church possess what amounts to an equal authority. The episcopate itself is, according to his theory, one and undivided. The individual bishops hold this one episcopate *in solidum*. *Episcopatus unus est*, wrote the great martyr-bishop of Carthage, *cuius a singulis in solidum pars tenetur*.¹⁷

Against the background of this concept of the unity of the episcopate, St. Cyprian's teaching on the pre-eminent apostolicity of St. Peter and the logical consequence of a pre-eminent apostolicity of the Roman See stands out clearly. Thus, in the "primacy text" of the fourth chapter of the *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate*, he formulates this teaching.

He [Our Lord] builds the Church upon that one [St. Peter] and He entrusts to him the sheep that must be fed. And, although He gave like power (*parem potestatem*) to all the apostles, He nevertheless established one *cathedra* and, by His own authority, He disposed the origin and the nature of the unity. Certainly the rest of the apostles were what Peter was, but the *primatus* is given to Peter and there is shown to be one Church and one *cathedra*. And all are pastors, but the flock that is tended by all the apostles in unanimous agreement is shown to be one. Can the person who does not hold the unity of that Church believe that he holds the faith? Can the person who deserts the *cathedra* of Peter, upon which the Church is founded, be confident that he is in the Church? ¹⁸

The text of the second edition of this same fourth chapter brings out the lesson that the apostolic dignity and authority began with and from the prince of the apostles. In this edition there is no explicit mention of a *primatus* of Peter or of the *cathedra Petri*. Yet, despite the fact that these terms do not appear, the basic idea is quite similar.

He builds the Church upon one. And, although after His resurrection He grants like power to all the apostles, and says: "As the Father has sent me, I also send you. Receive the Holy Ghost; if you shall remit anyone's sins, they shall be remitted unto him, if you shall retain anyone's [sins], they shall be retained, nevertheless, in order to manifest unity, He disposed, by His own authority, that unity's

¹⁷ *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate*, cap. 5. *MPL*, IV, 501.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, cap. 4. I have used the texts in D'Alès, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

origin as proceeding from one. Certainly the rest of the apostles were what Peter was, endowed with like fellowship of honor and of power. But its beginning comes from unity so that the Church of Christ may be shown as one.¹⁹

Elsewhere in his writings St. Cyprian speaks of "one Church and one *cathedra*, founded upon Peter by the voice of the Lord."²⁰ He describes "one Church, founded upon Peter in origin and nature of unity."²¹ And, in the famous passage of the 59th Epistle, he speaks of "the *cathedra* of Peter and the *ecclesia principalis*, whence the sacerdotal unity derives its origin."²²

Thus, in the teaching of St. Cyprian, the conclusion which had been foreshadowed by Tertullian received an important elaboration. The saintly Carthaginian insisted upon the essential and inherent unity of the apostolic and episcopal office. That commission had been given to the Church primarily in St. Peter and it was in virtue of this function that Peter stands as the rock upon whom the Church of God is established.

St. Cyprian's theology about the Roman See is not completely perfected and developed. Moreover, on the matter of the rebaptism of heretics, he persevered in a stand directly at variance with that of the Roman Pontiff. Yet, precisely in the light of this attitude, what he has to say about the Church of Rome is of particular importance. The Bishop of Carthage, so jealous of the independence of the African Churches, and so vitally interested in setting forth the rights of the Catholic episcopate, speaks of Pope St. Fabian as having been "in the place of Peter."²³ He speaks of the Roman Church as the *Cathedra Petri* and as the *ecclesia principalis*.²⁴ Obviously, according to St. Cyprian's point of view, every Catholic bishop is to a certain extent in the place of Peter. Every Catholic bishop holds an apostolic authority which the apostolic college held and holds from the prince of the apostles. Yet Fabian, as the head of the *ecclesia principalis*, is in an unequalled way the occupant of Peter's see and thus in Peter's place.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ep. XLIII*, cap. 5., in *CSEL*, III, 594.

²¹ *Ep. LXX*, cap. 3, *CSEL*, III, 769.

²² Cap. 14. *CSEL*, III, 683.

²³ *Ep. LV*, cap. 8. *CSEL*, III, 630.

²⁴ *Ep. LIX*, cap. 14. *CSEL*, III, 683.

It would be a complete perversion of St. Cyprian's thought to imagine that he believed St. Peter to have held the *primatus* in merely a chronological sense, that he was merely the original possessor of the power which all the rest of the apostolic college came later to hold. The apostolic see of Peter is represented in St. Cyprian's teaching as both the source and the manifestation of ecclesiastical unity. The oneness of the episcopate itself is said to be derived from the authority of Peter. Hence the doctrine of St. Cyprian may be said to contain, in its first and undeveloped form, the basis of that teaching which the twentieth-century theology sets forth in the theses about the jurisdiction of bishops which comes to them from God through the Roman Pontiff as the successor of Peter in the Apostolic See.

It remained, however, for St. Optatus of Milevis to gather together the elements found in a comparatively undeveloped stage in the writings of Saints Irenaeus and Cyprian and to formulate a much more complete theology of the Apostolic See. St. Optatus wrote against the Donatist bishop Parmenianus. The Donatists, it seems, realized that no religious community could hope to obtain recognition as the true Church of Jesus Christ unless it was in communion with the Bishop of Rome. They hoped to avoid this difficulty by the somewhat naive process of sending one of their own bishops from Africa to the Eternal City to preside over the religious gatherings of any of his associates who might happen to find themselves there. St. Optatus seized eagerly on this inept procedure, and went about the task of contrasting the prerogatives of the genuine Roman Bishop with the creature sent by the Donatists. In the course of his exposition he gave the following explanation of the Roman See's apostolicity.

Therefore you cannot deny that you know that the episcopal *cathedra* was originally brought by Peter into the city of Rome, [the episcopal *cathedra*] in which Peter, the head of all the apostles sat, whence he was called Cephas: in which one *cathedra* the unity would be preserved by all, lest the other apostles should each defend his own [cathedra]: so that now anyone would be a schismatic and a sinner if he were to set up another *cathedra* against this one.²⁵

²⁵ *Contra Parmenianum Donatistam*, II, 2, 3. *MPL*, XI, 947.

Thus, according to St. Optatus, the Roman See is essentially not merely an apostolic *cathedra*, but pre-eminently and perfectly the apostolic See. It is the one teaching authority against which not even the other apostles themselves could ever be permitted by God to set up a rival. It is the position from which the Church as a whole is meant to hear the definitive judgment of the apostolic teaching.

St. Optatus also considered communion with the seven Churches mentioned in the Apocalypse of St. John as a note of the genuine Church of Jesus Christ. He speaks of "our comrades in Asia, to whose Churches John the Apostle writes, with which Churches you are proved to have no fellowship of communion."²⁶ He states that "outside the seven Churches, whatever is without, is foreign [to the Church of God]."²⁷

In the fifth century the secondary type of apostolic Church, that of any Christian community founded by an apostle, entered into the controversy against the claims of the upstart Church of Constantinople. Anatolius, the Bishop of Constantinople, was reminded by Pope St. Leo that he ought to content himself with his position as the head of the Church in the imperial city, and that he could never hope to make it an apostolic see.²⁸ St. Leo also insisted that Alexandria and Antioch had certain privileges in virtue of their connection with St. Peter, privileges which Constantinople was powerless to change or to remove.²⁹ The attempt on the part of later Byzantine prelates to claim an apostolic origin for the Church in the eastern capital through St. Andrew the apostle is an evidence that even this politically minded community was not entirely unmindful of the dignity of an apostolic *cathedra*.

We must not allow ourselves to forget that in the early Christian times the lesser apostolic Churches exercised from time to time a kind of directive influence over other local communities within the kingdom of God on earth. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote in tones of authority to five Churches of Asia.³⁰ One of his suc-

²⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 6. *MPL*, XI, 959.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Cf. *Ep. CIV*, cap. 3. *MPL*, LIV, 995.

²⁹ Cf. *Ep. CVI*, cap. 5. *MPL*, LIV, 1007.

³⁰ They were the Churches of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia, and Smyrna.

cessors in the Antiochian see, the great Bishop Serapion, addressed the Church of Rhossos in the same manner.³¹ From Smyrna St. Polycarp gave directions to another apostolic Christian community, that of Philippi.³² Dionysius of Corinth wrote "catholic epistles," and was revered by all the Churches.³³ Melito, Bishop of Sardis, was venerated by all Christendom.³⁴ In the third century, Dionysius of Alexandria also exercised tremendous influence.³⁵

Yet the literary remains of even these earliest times are sufficient to show that these lesser apostolic Churches, as a group, were cognizant of Rome's apostolic supremacy. St. Ignatius spoke firmly to the Asiatic Churches, but he showed deference and reverence for the Church of Rome.³⁶ Dionysius of Alexandria virtuously submitted his teaching to the judgment of the Roman see.³⁷ The lesser apostolic sees were never independent of Peter's *cathedra* at Rome.

The lesser apostolic sees have, however, long since ceased to have any particular function in the Church of God. In olden times they were valuable aids for the universal Church because of a particular proximity to apostolic teaching in these communities. The bishop and the people of a local Church which had been founded by one of the apostles might reasonably have been expected to possess certain memories of their apostle which would not exist in other places. For a time, during the early days of the Church, such local memories and traditions were of great service to other communities. The time came, however, when the particular remembrances of these lesser apostolic Churches faded. These communities and their episcopal sees were not the divinely constituted centers of the Catholic Church.

³¹ Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 12. MPG, XX, 545.

³² Eusebius (*op. cit.*, IV, 14), speaks of it as "most powerful." The document has come down to us, and is published in the various collections of the Apostolic Fathers.

³³ Cf. Eusebius, *op. cit.*, IV, 23. MPG, XX, 384.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, IV, 26. MPG, XX, 392.

³⁵ The sixth and seventh books of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* tell of his activity and influence. St. Athanasius called him the "teacher of the Catholic Church."

³⁶ Cf. *Ad Romanos*, Int. Funk, *op. cit.*, I, 252.

³⁷ Cf. Batiffol, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

The see of Rome, however, was and is apostolic in quite another way. In this Church Peter had labored, not merely as the apostolic founder, but as the bishop. He, the Rock upon whom the Church of Jesus Christ is founded, held and exercised in the city of Rome that fundamental episcopal power and authority which Christ had granted to him. All of the subsequent bishops in God's Church received and still receive their episcopal authority from Our Lord through Peter and his successors in the See of Rome. The unbroken apostolic power of the episcopate in the Catholic Church derives its unity from the supremely apostolic Church of Rome.

Furthermore, the Church's dogmatic teaching about the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff centers around the concept of the apostolic *cathedra* of the Eternal City. The Vatican Council defined that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra*, "exercises, through the divine assistance promised to him in the blessed Peter, the infallibility with which the divine Redeemer wished His Church to be endowed in defining doctrine on faith or morals."³⁸ The Holy Father is said to speak *ex cathedra* when, "acting in his capacity as the pastor and teacher of all Christians, with his supreme apostolic authority he defines doctrine about faith or morals to be held by the universal Church."³⁹

The visible head of Christ's Church on earth is competent to speak infallibly from his Roman *cathedra* because that *cathedra* is the *sedes Petri*, and thus in a complete and unique manner the *cathedra apostolica* of the Church universal. From the apostolic see of Rome, St. Peter, speaking through his successor, teaches infallibly the divine message delivered to God's kingdom on earth by the apostolic college.

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³⁸ *DB*, 1839.

³⁹ *Ibid.*