

Patterns of Ministry in the New Testament Church

Bernard P. Robinson

Had I been asked back in the 1950's about the origins of ministry in the church, I should (being, in theological terms, a rather precocious teenager) have had a ready answer. The Lord had appointed apostles, answerable to Peter, who in turn had transmitted their authority to bishops, presbyters and deacons, all subject to Peter's successors, the bishops of Rome. (If pressed, I might have acknowledged that it was possible that presbyters and bishops were originally indistinguishable, and that the threefold ministry may have developed from an earlier twofold ministry.) Had not Clement of Rome shortly before the end of the first century spoken of the line of successors running from Christ to the apostles and then to those that they in turn appointed (1 Clement 42; 44)? The inspired author of Acts had testified that it was the practice of Paul and Barnabas to appoint presbyters in every city (Acts 14:23), and Paul in the Pastoral letters had indicated that the means of designation was the laying-on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14, 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6). The primacy of Peter was evident from Matt. 16:13–20; the intervention in the 90's by Clement bishop of Rome in the affairs of the Corinthian church reflected the fact that Rome was already then exercising the primacy bestowed on Peter. A decade ago, Fr Aidan Nichols gave an account of the origins of ministry which has much in common with this one,¹ but most of us now think that the way in which things came about was much more complex than that. Let us review the evidence in chronological order.

1. The Pauline Letters

In his first letter, written about the year 50, we find Paul writing: *We ask you to respect (literally, know) those who labour among you, lead (proistamenous) you, and admonish you in the Lord; esteem them very highly in love, because of their work* (1 Thess. 5:12–13). The nature of the leadership exercised is unclear, but it is not to these leaders that Paul writes but to the whole church; all are responsible. The vagueness of the language suggests that Paul does not have specific individuals in mind, much less specific offices; such respect is due to any who undertake a leadership role. Paul, we may suspect, had not designated any individuals to act on his behalf; it was up to the congregation to throw up men and women who could give a lead to others. Social position and the ownership of a house in which to entertain the church, and the time and means to serve others, will have been helpful though not essential qualifications; more important will have been natural endowments and spiritual gifts.

We may turn next to a text from 1 Corinthians, where in the mid-fifties Paul is doing battle with some enthusiasts who give themselves airs partly because they have the gift of tongues. The church, Paul says, is the body of Christ and all the limbs contribute to the health of the body. *There are varieties (?)² of charismata (gifts)³ , but the same Spirit; there are varieties of diakonia (ministry/service), but the same Lord; there are varieties of energemata (activities) but the same God...to each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...the Spirit makes allocation to each person as the Spirit wills (12:4–11).*

Ministry is for Paul not the preserve of a chosen few but, as he twice says (vv7,11), of *each person* in the church. Raymond Collins comments:

That the Spirit allots a ministerial gift to each one in the body of Christ is a key point in Paul's understanding of ministry...In God's allocation of ministerial gifts through the Spirit there is no discrimination based on gender, race or age. God is the ultimate equal opportunity employer. God provides the resources for each one to serve within the body of Christ.⁴

In verses 8–10 we have a list of gifts, which can be compared with two others elsewhere in Paul: in v28 of the same chapter and in Rom.12:

<i>1 Cor 12:8–10</i>	<i>1 Cor 12:28</i>	<i>Rom 12:6–8</i>
Words of wisdom	1. Apostles	Prophecy
Words of <i>gnosis</i> (knowledge)	2. Prophecy	<i>diakonia</i> (ministry)
Faith	3. Teachers	The teacher
Gifts of healings	Miracles	The exhorter
Workings of miracles	Gifts of healings	The giver
Prophecy	Helpings	The <i>proistamenos</i> (leader)
Distinguishing spirits	Administration	The compassionate
Various tongues	Various tongues	
Interpretation of tongues	Interpretation	

(In the perhaps deutero-Pauline Eph 4:11, we get a list which is much closer to these other two: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers.)

We may note that the word proistamenos, leader, which we have encountered in the plural in 1 Thessalonians, occurs in Rom. 12:8 well down the order. If proistamenoi were presbyters by another name,⁵ it would surely be remarkable that they only rate the penultimate place in one of Paul's lists.

M.D. Goulder plausibly suggests that the first list in 1 Cor. 12:8–10 may come from the Corinthians themselves and reflect their own sense of priorities; the second will be Paul's own, in which he drops the first two items from the Corinthians' list, which are too pneumatic for his taste, and inserts a number of new gifts (apostleship, teaching, helping, administering): this highlights some unexciting but necessary ministries and stresses Paul's own position as apostle, apostleship being the highest gift of all in his view.⁶

F.J. Cwiekowski comments that 'the ordering of apostles, prophets and

teachers in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (“first apostles; second prophets, third teachers”)...may indicate that some process of formalization was already taking place.⁷ Perhaps so, but none of the lists mentions *presbyteroi*, elders. This surely makes it unlikely that the Pauline churches normally had presbyters as leaders, despite Acts 14:23 (Paul and Barnabas appointed *presbyteroi* in every church; cf 20:28). Nichols, it is true, argues that Corinthians such as Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:15–18) were presbyters. This, though, is pure surmise.⁸ It does not seem to me the most natural way to take the text. *The household of Stephanas...have devoted themselves to the diakonia (ministry/service) of the saints. You should all submit yourselves, says Paul, to such people [as Stephanas] and to every fellow worker and labourer...Give recognition to such people.* Despite being perhaps one of the grouping that was giving Paul so much trouble, namely the educated and wealthy élite often referred to as the Strong, Stephanas was clearly *persona grata* with Paul. Perhaps Paul had such confidence in him because he interpreted his leadership role in terms of *diakonia*, service, v15. (Possibly he had won respect by being a patron to the Christian poor in the famine of 51 AD.) Ben Witherington says:

While Paul drew on the benefits of the social structures of his day, he would not allow those structures to dictate the structure of relationships in the *ekklesia*. He made use of a person like Stephanas, but he also made clear that he endorsed Stephanas because Stephanas, like Paul himself, had voluntarily set aside his social status in order to serve other Christians in Corinth.⁹

If there was a system of recognized office-holders in Corinth, it is remarkable that Paul does not appeal to the embattled church of Corinth to submit to their authority. Why in 1 Cor. 5 does he not call on the office-holders to convene the meeting (v4) to deal with the man who has been sleeping with his father’s wife (his stepmother; or his deceased father’s concubine)? Why in 1 Cor.16 does he not get them to take charge of the Collection?

R.E. Brown thinks that Paul will have appointed *presbyteroi* in some cities, such as Philippi and perhaps Thessalonica, where he did not himself stay long; but he has no real evidence to back this up.¹⁰ The only Pauline church indeed for which there is any evidence of recognized office-holders at all as a professional class is that of Philippi: Phil. 1:1 sends greetings to *episkopoi* [overseers] and *diakonoi* [servants], perhaps senior and junior clergy, the *episkopoi* being the equivalent of the *presbyteroi* of the non-Pauline churches: cf Acts 20:17,28, Titus 1:5–9 (which explicitly equates the two terms), and perhaps 1 Peter 5:1,2; and the *diakonoi* possibly corresponding to the *neoterai*, ‘younger ones’, of 1 Peter 5:5. (Of the 1 Peter texts, more anon.) It may, however, be significant that there is no definite article with *episkopoi* and *diakonoi*. C.K. Barrett has noted that the word *episkopoi* in secular use sometimes denotes financial officers. ‘It is possible’, he writes, ‘that the *episkopoi* were those in Philippi who decided that a gift should be sent to Paul¹¹ and made the money available, and that the *diakonoi* were those who saw to the

transmission of the gift.¹²

If, as is the more common view, church officers are intended, it is possible that the system of *episkopoi* / *presbyteroi* and *diakonoi* / *neoteroi* reflects the organization of the Diaspora synagogues, where, many scholars say, there would be a board of elders (*zakenim*) and a group of liturgical/social assistants (*hazzanim*). R.A.Campbell, however, dissents from the view that the Jews had boards of elders. He also holds that the word *presbyteroi* in the New Testament does not denote office:

The elders are those who bear a title of honour, not of office, a title that is imprecise, collective and representative, and rooted in the ancient family or household.¹³

He thinks that the term denoted those to whom the community looked up because of age, experience and wealth. The earliest Christian churches, both Jewish Christian and Pauline, will have been house-churches, and the householder (usually a man, but sometimes a woman) will have exercised oversight (*episkope*). The *episkopoi* of Philippi will have been the heads of a number of house-churches in that town. I am not sure that I am convinced by this: why does Acts speak of appointing *presbyteroi*, if the term means simply household heads? And why are the *episkopoi* in Phil. 1:1 mentioned alongside *diakonoi*? On the whole, therefore, I incline to the view that the church of Philippi did have office-bearers.

How are the diakonoi to be related to the seven Hellenists (in the sense probably of Greek-speaking Christian Jews) who according to Acts 6 were appointed to diakonein, serve, at table? The connection is probably tenuous. The Seven are never called diakonoi, and soon after their appointment they start functioning not as distributors of food but as preachers (cf Acts 21:8, 'Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven'). Their connection with diakonia is probably a Lucan ploy to subordinate them to the Twelve. How long the institution of the Twelve survived is unclear. We never hear of replacements being appointed.

The Pauline churches were never totally pneumatic in nature. Authority bulked large for Paul, but it was vested in one man, the Apostle himself. There is little sign that he made the sort of provision for what his congregations would need in the future that the author of Acts 14:23 supposed. But after his demise, the various churches, including even Corinth, must in course of time have furnished themselves with other human leaders, as Philippi had perhaps done just before his death (or earlier, if Philippians was written not from Rome but, as some believe, from Ephesus or Caesarea).

A word on Paul and the ministry of women. Paul was no anti-feminist. 1 Cor. 14:34–36, calling for the silencing of women in church, will very probably be a gloss which shares the patriarchal mindset of the pseudo-Pauline 1 Tim. 2:8–15, for the Paul of 1 Cor. 11:5 had no difficulty with women praying and prophesying in public. (Alternatively vv34–35 may be a quotation from the Corinthians' own letter to Paul, to which v36 will be the Apostle's indignant

reply.) It seems likely that Paul believed in a degree of subordination of women to men—the argument for the covering of women’s heads in 1 Cor. 11:2–16 implies that as God is superior to Christ, and Christ to the male Christian, so are men to women—but I am inclined to believe that he gave them a considerable role in Christian ministry. He was anxious to stress the complementarity of the two sexes (e.g. at 1 Cor. 7:3–5; 11:11). In 1 Cor. 11:5, as we have seen, he takes it for granted that women should pray and prophesy in public. Murphy-O’Connor may well be right that the reason why in Phil. 4:2 Paul is concerned about the dispute between Evodia and Syntyche is because they were church leaders, and their dispute would have repercussions for the church as a whole.¹⁴ Paul says of them that they, along with Clement and other *co-workers* [*synergountes*], have struggled along with himself in the interests of the Gospel. The word *co-worker*, along with *labourer* [*kopion*], is used of leaders at 1 Cor. 16:16 and *labourer* occurs at 1 Thess. 5:12. *Co-worker* [*synergos*] is applied in Rom. 16:3 to Prisca; and Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis are commended for *working* and *labouring* hard in the Lord (Rom. 16:6,12). The ‘apostle’ Junia/Julia commended in Rom. 16:7 will probably have been a woman. Murphy-O’Connor further thinks it likely that if the *diakonos* Phoebe was ‘patron’ [*prostatis*] of the Church of Cenchreae, one of the ports of Corinth (Rom. 16:1), this will mean that she will ‘probably [have] opened her house to the Christians of Cenchreae for their liturgical assemblies, and as host may have presided at the eucharist’. Murphy-O’Connor concludes that ‘in the framework of Paul’s theology all ministries were open to women’.

What has Paul to say of the role of Peter? He was always anxious to emphasize his own authority over against that of Peter and the Jerusalem church, witness in Gal. 2 his disparaging way of talking of the ‘so-called pillars’ and those who ‘seemed to be something’ in the mother-church (though he felt the need to assure himself that his teaching was consistent with that of the ‘pillars’ [2:2]); witness also perhaps some of the references to Peter in 1 Corinthians, including 3:11, *No one can lay any foundation other than that which is already laid, namely Jesus Christ, which I have interpreted as an attack on those who would speak of Peter as the rock-foundation of the church.*¹⁵ Paul, however, clearly regarded Peter as the leader of the mission¹⁶ to the circumcised (Gal. 2:7–9). There is nothing to suggest that he felt himself to be subject to Peter’s ‘jurisdiction’.

2. The Synoptic Gospels

Paul once mentions the existence of the Twelve (1 Cor. 15:5), but says nothing of the origins of this group. The Synoptics assign it dominical provenance, and nearly all scholars accept this as historical, so there is no need to labour the point here.

The position accorded by the Synoptics to Peter among the Twelve clearly involves some sort of leadership. Not only do they have Peter (‘the first’ as Matthew calls him, Matt. 10:2) act as the leader and spokesman of the disciples during Jesus’ ministry, but Matthew (Matt. 16:13–20 [*You are Peter...*]) and

Luke (Lk 22:31 [*Simon, Simon...when you have recovered, strengthen your brothers*]) seem to imply that they are aware of some sort of enduring Petrine role in their own day, a decade or more after the death of Peter.¹⁷

Where did Matthew see Petrine leadership as residing for his own generation? Since it was in Rome that Peter had died, it is possible that he thought of it as exercised by the church at Rome. But, although it had originally been Jewish Christian in composition, by Matthew's day (not least because of Claudius' edict against Jews in 49 AD) that church will probably have become predominantly Gentile, and I find it hard to believe that Matthew will have turned to it for the direction of his own community. May he not rather have seen the church at Antioch (with himself perhaps as one of its principal spokesmen) as challenging the church of Jerusalem for the leadership of the church?¹⁸ There were those who made for James the brother of the Lord, who presided over that church, the sort of claims that Matthew 16 makes for Peter. On his first visit to Jerusalem c. 39 AD Paul met, he tells us, only Cephas; he then adds, 'Of the apostles, I saw only James the brother of the Lord' (Gal 1:18-19); on his second visit c.50 AD he was interviewed by the so-called pillars of that church, James, Cephas and John. The order in which they are named in Gal. 2:9 suggests that between the first and the second visit, James had taken over the direction of the church. In the Gospel of Thomas (ch12) when his disciples ask where they should turn after his departure, Jesus tells them that no matter where they find themselves they should look to James the Just 'for whose sake the heaven and the earth came into existence.' The Gospel to the Hebrews (15:4) has James as the first recipient of a vision of the Risen Christ. Hegesippus is quoted by Eusebius (*HE* 2.23.4) as teaching that James 'succeeded to (the leadership) of the church, with the apostles'. The Secret Book of James (16:5-11) has James present himself as the person who sent out the other followers of Jesus on their mission, while he himself remained in Jerusalem. So Matthew may be countering the claims made for James by invoking the memory of Peter as leader of the Jewish Christian mission. He may, though, be thinking in broader terms of the church as a whole, Jewish and Gentile, and may be presenting Antioch as leader of the rest of the Christian world, maybe as holding the line between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the same sensitive, pastoral way that Peter tried to do (though his endeavours were not well received by Paul) while he was in that city. This latter interpretation has the merit that it would fit also Luke's meaning in Lk 22:31 (*Simon, Simon ... when you have recovered, strengthen your brothers*); Luke, writing again in Antioch, may like Matthew have thought of Peter as still living on in the Antiochene church to reconcile Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Do the Synoptics give any evidence of the patterns of ministry to be found in the churches from which they emanate (perhaps Rome for Mark and Antioch for Matthew and Luke)? It is likely that the Synoptists' churches were predominantly served by peripatetic charismatics rather than by resident and salaried office-bearers, if, as is likely, the life-style prescribed for the disciples

at their commissioning (Mk 6; Mt 10; Lk 9) reflects the nature of ministry that the evangelists were themselves familiar with. They were itinerant preachers and healers, but unlike the Cynics they carried no bag, for they did not beg; rather they were supported by the communities that they visited. The Gospel picture is reminiscent of the life-style of travelling Essenes according to Josephus: 'they carry no baggage at all, but only weapons to keep off bandits. In every town one of the order is appointed specially to look after strangers and issue clothing and provisions' (*War* 2.125). Matt. 10:41 (no parallel) carries the same implication: it speaks of the duty of welcoming a prophet (not a presbyteros or an episkopos) for what he (or she?) is ('in the name of a prophet'). In 23:34 Matthew has Jesus speak of sending prophets, though also here sages and scribes are mentioned. The sages and scribes will refer no doubt to learned people such as the evangelist himself (cf 13:52). Perhaps Luke's church did not have such a category; he has (Lk 11:49) the divine wisdom (not Jesus) sending '[OT?] prophets and [NT?] apostles.'

3. Acts

The author of Acts (probably Luke) has Paul and Barnabas in 14:23 appointing [cheirotoneantes] *presbyteroi* in each church; and has Paul in 20:17,28 calling upon the *presbyteroi* of the church of Ephesus to be good pastors and *episkopoi*, overseers, of the church. Barrett protests at the opinion that Acts 'sets out the beginning of a story and a theory of ministerial succession from the apostles'¹⁹:

It would not...be far wide of the mark to say that what Luke means in his use of the word [*presbyteroi*] is that when Paul took leave of his churches in, say, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, he said to his earliest and best trusted converts, 'Please keep an eye on things for me until I can return', and that such people were, in Luke's day and in the churches known to him, described as presbyters.²⁰

As I have indicated earlier with reference to Campbell's book, I think that the use of the verb cheirotonein, to elect by a show of hands, to appoint, is hard to square with this. It is more likely that the author of Acts lived in a church where there was a formally designated rank of ministers known as *presbyteroi* and *episkopoi*. He perhaps assumed that Paul was accustomed to go around appointing such people to act for him, which, however, on the evidence of his letters is improbable. If, however, the author is indeed Luke, he probably was quite aware that Paul did not act like this but chose to represent him as anticipating, and thereby authenticating, later practice.

4. 1 Peter

The date and provenance of this letter are disputed. Some take it to be an authentic letter of the Apostle, penned just before his death in the mid-60's. The majority view, however, is that it is post-Petrine, coming from sometime later in the century (or even at the beginning of the next). Since 1:14,18; 2:10; 4:3-4 indicate that the addressees were mainly Gentiles, and 1:1 probably that they

lived in areas of Asia Minor evangelized by Paul,²¹ authorship by Peter, in Paul's lifetime, is decidedly implausible. 'Babylon' as a cipher for Rome (5:13) points to a period after the Romans had, like the Babylonians before them, destroyed the Jerusalem Temple.²²

1 Pet. 5:1–5 gives directions for *presbyteroi*. Many scholars take these to be paid office-bearers in the church. When they are called to exercise their *episkope*_, oversight, over those allotted to their charge,²³ gently and without looking for personal advantage, the implication will be that these presbyters were already falling for the temptations of such a position. When in v5 the *neoteroi*, juniors, are told to submit to the *presbyteroi*, the author may be calling for the junior clergy (proto-deacons, if you like) to be submissive to those of senior rank. It is equally possible, however, that office-bearers are not in question at all. Having called for submission by all to the civil authorities (2:13–17), for the obedience of slaves to their masters (2:18–25), for the subordination of wives to husbands (who must, however, respect their wives) (3:1–7), the author (perhaps by way of an afterthought after the summing up in 3:8) now calls on those who by reason of their age exercise a natural rather than an appointed leadership-role not to abuse their position, and for the rest of the community to defer to these senior members. In favour of this second interpretation is the way that the author speaks of ministry in 4:11: 'If anyone speaks, let it be as the words of God; if anyone ministers, let it be as from the resources that God provides.' It scarcely sounds from this text as if ministry had yet become the preserve of professionals.²⁴

5. The Church(es) of the Pastoral Epistles

It is a majority view of scholars, to which I subscribe, that 1 Timothy and Titus are post-Pauline compositions, written some decades after the Apostle's death in the mid-60s. (Most such scholars would say the same of 2 Timothy, but with J. Murphy-O'Connor and M. Prior I believe it to be Pauline.)

1 Timothy speaks of the task of oversight, *episkope* (3:1), and of *episkopoi* (3:1), *presbyteroi* (5:1,17,19) and *diakonoi* (3:8,10,13) and of their qualifications, and Titus has 'Paul' tell Titus to appoint *presbyteroi* in every city (1:5) and speaks of the duties of an *episkopos* (1:7). It seems very likely that we here have evidence that by, say, the 90's of the first century, there existed in some parts of the Christian church a system of formally constituted office-bearers, appointed by the laying-on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14).²⁵ The *diakonoi* will have constituted the junior clergy, and the senior will have been known by two alternative titles, *episkopoi*²⁶ and *presbyteroi* (unless *episkopoi* were a sub-group within the *presbyteroi*: those elders who exercised oversight). *Episkopos* does not, however, yet denote a supremo; the 'monarchic episcopate' is a post-biblical development.

At 1 Tim. 3:11 the *gynaikes* may be the wives of deacons, but, since the qualities required of them are virtually identical to those listed in vv8–9 for the

diakonoi, and since there is no similar reference to the wives of *episkopoi/presbyteroi*, the author probably refers here to women *diakonoi*.

6. The Johannine Church(es)

In the Fourth Gospel, the figure of the Beloved Disciple not only portrays an ideal of discipleship but it also probably stands as a charismatic corrective to the institutionalism which the figure of Peter seems to represent. In 13:23–24 Peter has to appeal to the Beloved Disciple in order to discover Jesus' thinking; in 19:26, it is the Beloved Disciple not Peter that stands beside the Cross and receives the dying Jesus' commendation; in 20:2–10 the Beloved Disciple outruns Peter to the tomb and believes in the Resurrection rather than, or at least before, Peter does; in 21:7 the Beloved Disciple tells Peter that the figure before them is the Risen Lord; in 21:15–25 Peter is told by Jesus to concentrate on the task of following Jesus and not to envy the position of the favoured disciple. For John, authority in the community was located not in office-bearers but in charismatic leaders and teachers as represented by the Beloved Disciple (in contrast to Peter). They were the embodiment of Jesus' Spirit; they played Elisha to his Elijah. They had something of the role of a *caliph*. In them, Jesus' teachings were recalled and expounded, and attacks on him were refuted. But they themselves were also under attack and as well as embodying the Paraclete they were themselves sustained by Jesus in the Spirit-Paraclete. Jesus was still with them, upholding their cause by guiding them and challenging the charges brought against them by the prosecution. This work he had already done for them during his earthly ministry, as the first Advocate (14:15), and would continue to do so as the 'other' Advocate (14:16). Despite the delay in the Parousia, Jesus has not left his disciples *bereft / orphaned* (14:18). John was clearly aware that in some Christian communities of his day office-bearers were occupying an increasingly high profile. Without condemning the role of office-bearers (Jn 21, which may due to a different hand from the original evangelist's, seems to want in vv14–17 to affirm the importance of church-office, perhaps more particularly of a Petrine office), John wishes to emphasize Jesus' presence in charismatic phenomena and the church's need for prophets as well as for office-bearers.

7. The Immediate Sequel: the Period of the Apostolic Fathers

Corinth had *episkopoi / presbyteroi* by 96 AD, but the fact that 1 Clement has to criticize some in the church who are disloyal to them (1 Clement 47) and are trying to eject men from their *episkope* (44) suggests that some of the Corinthians did not take kindly to these new-fangled office-bearers. The church of the *Didache* (an early second century document, but composed, probably in Syria, largely from 1st century material)²⁷ may also have been slow to incorporate *episkopoi / presbyteroi*. It takes it for granted that prophets preside over the Eucharist (10:7), and says that *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* are to share in

the ministry of prophets and teachers (15:1,2).²⁸

The 'monarchical episcopate' seems only to have emerged in the second century (it is first attested in Syria and Asia Minor).²⁹ It is ironical that Rome may have been one of the last churches to adopt it: Ignatius' *Letter to the Romans*, written c.110 AD, alone of his letters mentions no bishop in the church to which he is writing, and the *Shepherd of Hermas* (c.150?) speaks of the 'presbyteroi who are in charge of the church' of Rome (Vision 2.4.3).³⁰ Clement of Rome at the end of the first century will not have been monarchical bishop of that church. The Letter to the Corinthians commonly known as 1 Clement is in fact anonymous, though the name of Clement was associated with it from the second century. It is, as it states at the beginning, from 'the church sojourning in Rome', and the author uses 'we' and 'us' throughout. Even in Asia Minor the monarchical episcopate seems not to have been adopted with equal alacrity in all areas: as G.Bornkamm notes, the energy with which Ignatius asserts the dignity and importance of the monarchic episcopate (Philadelphians 8:1, &c) has to be set alongside the fact that his near contemporary Polycarp speaks in his letter to the Philippians only of deacons (5:2) and presbyters (5:3).³¹

8. Conclusion

Jesus chose Twelve of his disciples to be the leaders of a reconstituted Israel (cf. Matt. 19:28 par.). The institution of the Twelve did not survive very long, partly perhaps because it was 'an early casualty of the failure of the expected imminence of the kingdom'³² and partly because alongside the Jewish Christian church which was struggling to survive (with, after Peter's departure from Jerusalem, James as director of the Jerusalem congregation and Peter as the leader of missionary activities), the Gentile Christian mission under Paul rapidly outstripped it.

In the Gentile churches, Paul saw himself as the permanent authority figure. Many church members of both sexes exercised ministerial functions in the various congregations, but it is doubtful whether any of them (except perhaps at Philippi) had a set sort of office to which they had been appointed. Certainly at Corinth the impression we get from 1 Cor. 14 is that people got to their feet to sing, teach, give a revelation, speak in tongues, or interpret tongues, as they felt called to do. Paul's only requirement was that they must not all perform at once, otherwise their ministry would be in vain. The sort of 'disarray' (1 Cor. 14:33) that such a charismatic church order could produce may be the reason that towards the end of the first century, on the evidence of Acts, 1 Timothy, Titus, and perhaps 1 Peter, a more institutional form of church ministry emerged. Quite late on in the first century, though, some parts of the church, such as the Johannine community and elements in the community of the Didache, were still unhappy about increased institutionalism.

After Peter's death, some Christians thought of the leadership that he had exercised among the disciples during Jesus' lifetime and in the mission to the

circumcised afterwards (Gal. 2:7) as persisting still. Matthew 16 and John 21 may perhaps envisage leadership only of Jewish Christians, but in Luke 22 Gentiles are clearly included. Matthew and Luke may well have thought of Peter's role as being exercised in their day by the church of Antioch. (In Matthew's case, a polemic against claims made for James and Jerusalem may well be implicit.) By perhaps the last decade of the first century, however, we find evidence of people thinking of the church of Rome as exercising the Petrine role. In 1 Peter (if, as is probable, this letter is pseudonymous) a Christian leader writes *in persona Petri* from Rome ('Babylon', 5:13) to Christians of largely Gentile stock. Since Rome was the capital and Peter had died there, it is readily understandable that that church should have come to be seen as embodying the Petrine legacy. In writing to the Corinthian church in the 90's, in the letter we call 1 Clement, the church of Rome perhaps thought of itself as exercising that ministry. We should note, however, that it will have been some time before a monarchic bishop of Rome will have come to be seen as successor to Peter. As we have seen, the Roman church had a collective leadership exercised by presbyters into the second century.³³

It is a striking fact that we have no explicit evidence from the New Testament as to who presided at celebrations of the Eucharist. Did Paul when he was present? The fact that he clearly seldom performed baptisms (1 Cor. 1:14–17)³⁴ makes this very uncertain. Did heads of households normally undertake this in the Pauline churches? It may well be so, but we have no direct evidence that it was. It is likely that in churches such as those of Acts, 1 Timothy and Titus (also perhaps within Paul's lifetime in the church of Philippi), *presbyteroi / episkopoi* presided, but we do not know for sure.³⁵

What are the implications of all this for the present-day church? An awareness that the development of the threefold ministry and of the Petrine role of the see of Rome, however providential it may have been, was not a linear process will perhaps encourage a less blinkered view of such things than I was brought up in. We have underestimated the diversity exhibited by the New Testament, glossing over for example, the fact that apostleship meant something different to Paul from what it meant to Luke. Patterns of ministry should, in my view, continue to evolve, should become more flexible (to let the institutional stifle the charismatic can only impoverish the church), and should provide more scope for the ministerial role of the sex which makes up the bulk of regular church attenders. At present those of us who are Roman Catholics have a church in which the author(s) of 1 Timothy and Titus would be more at home than would, I venture to suggest, the Apostle of the Gentiles or the Fourth Evangelist.

- 1 A.Nichols, *Holy Order: The Apostolic Ministry from the New Testament to the Second Vatican Council* (Oscott Series, 5). Dublin, Veritas, 1990.
- 2 *Diareseis*: either 'varieties' or (Barrett, Conzelmann, &c) 'assignments'/'allotments' (the verb occurs in the sense 'to assign/allocate' in v9).
- 3 *Gifts...service...activities*. If the nouns mean different things, *gifts* may point to divine origin, varieties of *ministry/service* may connote different ministries (apostleship,

- prophecy...), and *activities* may refer to effects (miracles, glossolalia, &c).
- 4 R.F.Collins, 'Ministry and the Christian Scriptures', in *The Ministry of the Word, Essays in Honor of Prof. Dr. Raymond F.Collins* — Louvain Studies 20 (1995) 112–25, 122.
 - 5 Nichols, *Holy Order*, 24; H.W.Beyer, in G.Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. and ed. G.W.Bromiley, vol. II. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1964, 619.
 - 6 M.D.Goulder, *A Tale of Two Missions*. London, SCM, 1994, 54–56.
 - 7 F.J.Cwiekowski, *The Beginnings of the Church*. Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1988, 122.
 - 8 Nichols would rather say that it is a natural assumption for the reader to make, since we should practise 'a "hermeneutic of recognition" whereby we who share the developed consciousness of the later Church come to the evidences of the earliest Church in *positive expectation of finding* the seeds from which the great tree of the *Catholica* has grown' (Nichols, *Holy Order*, 4). Adoption of such an hermeneutic would, I should have thought, greatly impede scholars from making the uncomfortable discoveries that the advance of knowledge often relies upon.
 - 9 B.Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*. Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 1995, 321.
 - 10 R.E.Brown, *Priest and Bishop. Biblical Reflections*. London, G.Chapman, 1971, 71. Brown notes the similarity between 1 Thess. 5:12, 'Those who labour among you and rule over (*proistaménous*) you in the Lord and admonish you' and what is said of *presbyteroilepiskopoi* in 1 Tim. 5:17 ('those who labour in word and teaching'), but if 1 Timothy is, as is likely, deutero-Pauline, the echo will tell us little about Paul's thinking and practice.
 - 11 cf Phil. 4:10, where Paul acknowledges receipt of a gift from Philippi.
 - 12 C.K. Barrett, *Church, Ministry, and Sacraments in the New Testament* (The 1983 Didsbury Lectures). Exeter, Paternoster, 1985, 34.
 - 13 R.A. Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity*. Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1994, 246.
 - 14 J. Murphy-O'Connor, 'St Paul: Promoter of the Ministry of Women', *Priests and People* 6 (1992) 307–11, 310.
 - 15 See further B.P.Robinson, 'Peter and his Successors: Tradition and Redaction in Matthew 16.17–19', *JSNT* 21 (1984) 85–104.
 - 16 After the death of James the brother of the Lord (in the 60's according to Josephus [*AJ* 209.1] and Hegesippus [Eusebius *HE* 2.23.18]) the Jerusalem church was governed by another relative of Jesus, Symeon/Simon. Opposition to rule by the Lord's family may explain the very sharp terms in which Mark treats Jesus' kith and kin (Mk 3:21,31–35).
 - 17 Robinson, 'Peter and his Successors'.
 - 18 See K.L.Carroll, "'Thou Art Peter'", *NT* 6 (1963) 268–76. (I find myself more in agreement with Carroll now than I did at the time of my 1984 article.)
 - 19 Barrett, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments*, 79.
 - 20 Barrett, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments*, 52. More recently, however, Barrett has written of this text: 'This was, no doubt, a kind of ordination, in that it gave some Christians a special sort of responsibility and service...The word *cheirotonein*, however, implies nothing with regard to the imposition of hands': Barrett, *Acts I–XIV*. (ICC). Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1994, 687.
 - 21 R.E.Brown, however, thinks it probable that *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia* in 1:1 refers not to the Roman provinces so named but to 'more restricted regions or districts within those provinces reflecting ancient national origins...northern Asia is meant; and Paul had probably not been in that area' (R.E.Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*. Doubleday Image, 1997, 720).
 - 22 R.E.Brown, *Introduction*, 722.
 - 23 Their charges, *hoi kleroi*, may mean small groups of laity that they ministered to; it has been noted that 1QS 6.6 and CD 13:1–2 have every group of ten laypeople directed by a priest (or Levite).
 - 24 See Barrett, *Church, Ministry and Sacraments*, 40–43. R.E.Brown thinks that 5:1 refers to 'established presbyters, seemingly appointed and salaried', but that the reference to

'varied charisms' in 4:10–11 suggests a 'transitional period' for composition, one before the writing of 1 Timothy (Brown, *Introduction*, 719). Presbyteroi are mentioned also in the Epistle of James (date and authorship uncertain): they anoint and pray over the sick (Jas 5:14). It is not clear whether they are office-bearers or simply senior members of the congregation. Some commentators think that the 'teachers' of Jas 3:1 sound as if they may be office-bearers.

- 25 2 Tim. 1:6 mentions also the laying-on of hands, but I have argued [B.P.Robinson, 'Paul's Character in the Face of Death (Phil. 2:17–18; 2 Tim. 4:6–8)', *Scripture Bulletin* 28 (1998) 77–87, 78 n.8] that this should be interpreted differently, not in terms of the designation of office-bearers, but of a prayer for divine blessing, as when (Acts 9:17) Ananias laid his hands on Paul (before the latter's baptism!) to give him recovery of sight and the gift of the Spirit, or as when (Acts 13:1–3) the prophets and teachers of Antioch (not presbyters!) laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas to designate them for their first missionary journey.
- 26 The term *episkopos* may be related to the Hebrew *mebaqqer*, the word for the Overseer or Guardian of the community in the Qumran Manual of Discipline and the Damascus Document.
- 27 See N.Niederwimmer (ed.), *The Didache* (Hermeneia). Minneapolis, Fortress, 1998, Introduction.
- 28 Probably there were two categories of ministers of the Eucharist in the church of the Didache, and the one category, that of the Prophets, as distinct from the *episkopoi* and *presbyteroi*, had the greater prestige because they were charismatics. So A. de Halleux, 'Ministers in the Didache', in J.A. Draper (ed.), *The Didache in Modern Research*. Leiden, Brill, 1996, 300–320, 314.
- 29 'The idea that Timothy was bishop of Ephesus and Titus was bishop of Crete has no explicit basis in the Pastoral Epistles. Rather these men are pictured as delegates of the apostle checking on the authorities of the local churches': R.E.Brown, *Priest and Bishop*, 35 n21.
- 30 Some have found it incredible that, given his high estimation of the monarchical episcopate, Ignatius would have had any time for the church of Rome if it had been governed by presbyters. It has been therefore been suggested by Peter Elliott that either the 'see' was vacant at the time of Ignatius' letter, or Ignatius did not name the 'bishop' lest the publicity should expose him to persecution (letter, *The Tablet*, 12.ix.1998, p.1184). Adrian Hastings has suggested that that, though Rome may not have had a monarchical episcopate, the presbyters will have claimed apostolic succession, and this will have been enough to satisfy Ignatius. He further suggests that Peter operated as one of the Roman presbyters (letter, *The Tablet*, 26.ix.1998, p.1253; 17.x.98, p.1364). All this is highly speculative, especially the last idea, which arguably would reduce the Apostle Peter to a territorial leader (see Eamon Duffy, letter, *The Tablet*, 3.ix.98, p.1283). Perhaps Ignatius' view was that the emergence of episcopacy was providential; that in congregations where it had developed nothing should be done without the bishop (*Smyrn.* 8:1); but that churches which did not yet possess the institution were in no sense second-class churches.
- 31 G. Bornkamm in G. Friedrich (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, tr. and ed. G.W.Bromiley, vol. VI. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1968, 651–83.
- 32 S.Brown, *The Origins of Christianity. A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (The Oxford Bible Series). Oxford, &c., OUP, 1984, 134.
- 33 On the figure of Peter in the New Testament see further R.E.Brown, K.P.Donfried, J. Reumann (edd.), *Peter in the New Testament. A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars*. London, &c., G.Chapman, 1974; P.Perkins, *Peter, Apostle for the Whole Church* (Studies on Personalities of the New Testament). Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1994.
- 34 cf 2 Tim. 1:11, *I was appointed as herald, apostle and teacher*.
- 35 'The presbyter-bishops of the Pastorals do not exercise a sacramental role' (S.Brown, *Origins*, 148).