

The Canon-Theologian's Cathedral Lecture 2012 ARE THERE ANY BISHOPS IN THE BIBLE?

Loveday Alexander

Loveday.alexander@btinternet.com

“It is evident to all men diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles’ time there have been these Orders of Ministry in Christ’s Church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.”
Book of Common Prayer, 1662

PART ONE: LIBELLOUS PAMPHLETS AND CHESHIRE PETITIONS

An old Ulster story that lifts the lid on some profound issues.

“Chapter and verse for your collar turned round the wrong way?”

“Chapter and verse for your collar turned round the right way!”

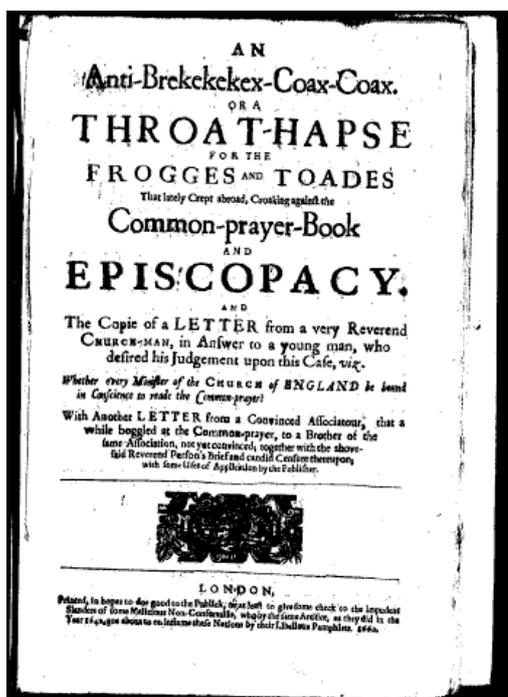
The fact is, Christians have always used the Bible to help us make decisions about how we order our own lives in the world today — whether individually or as a church — and it’s inevitable and right that we should. But the process raises questions about HERMENEUTICS — i.e. HOW we use the Bible, how we bridge the gap between a 2000-year old text and the world of the 21st century, how we deal with critical scholarship all the problems I drew attention to in my first Cathedral lecture, and have been circling round ever since

This year’s Library Exhibition celebrates the 350th anniversary of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. With the aid of a generous grant from the Prayer Book Society, we have put together an exhibition and booklet drawing on the treasures of the Cathedral Library to illustrate the development of what Cranmer called “Common Prayer” in the Church of England from the beginnings of the Reformation through to Common Worship. I hope you will take the opportunity to come and visit it! — either by arranging a group tour or by joining the tours which will follow the Wednesday *Bible Talks* in Feb and March (“The Bible and the Book of Common Prayer”).

This 1662 theme will be followed through in two upcoming events from the Chester Theological Society, which meets at Holly Bank on the University campus:

- **7.30 p.m., 29th Feb, Hollybank House, University of Chester:**
Between Prayer Books: the debate over ‘set’ and ‘free’ public prayer in Revolutionary England (1645-1660). The Revd Dr Judith Maltby, Corpus Christi College, Oxford.
- **7:30pm, Wednesday 2nd May, Hollybank House, University of Chester:**
Accommodating Dissent: Some Lessons from 1662. Professor Clyde Binfield, University of Sheffield.

My theme for today's lecture picks up another aspect of that 1662 theme. 1662 saw not only the restoration (and revision) of the Prayer Book but the return of the bishops, banned by Parliament in 1646. The debate over episcopacy, like the debate over the Prayer Book, spawned a rumbustious war of pamphlets in the 1640s which broke out afresh in the 1660s, like the wonderful 'Throat Hapse' (sic: read HASP) you have on your hand-out:



An Anti-Brekekekex-Coax-Coax, or, A throat-hapse for the frogges and toades that lately crept abroad, croaking against the Common-prayer book and Episcopacy and the copie of a letter from a very reverend church-man, in answer to a young man, who desired his judgement upon this case, viz. whether every minister of the Church of England be bound in conscience to reade the Common-prayer: with another letter from a convinced associatour, that a while boggled at the Common-prayer, to a brother of the same association, not yet convinced, together with the above-said reverend person's brief and candid censure thereupon, with some uses of application by the publisher. , London: Printed in hopes to doe good to the publick, or at least to give some check to the impudent slanders of some malicious non-conformists, who by the same artifice, as they did in the year 1642, goe about to re-inflame these nations by their libellous pamphlets, 1660.

Many of these debates (analysed in Judith Maltby's wonderful book *Prayer Book and People*¹) have a strong Cheshire connection — not only with the Civil War battles that were fought around the city and the county, but in a series of petitions attacking and defending episcopacy and the Prayer Book, submitted to Parliament in the 1640s by the puritan Sir William Brereton (of Handforth), and his royalist opponent Sir Thomas Aston (of Aston, near Runcorn).² Thus the BCP is making a carefully-constructed but quite polemical claim (carefully targeted both at the puritans and at the papists) when it says that:

It is evident to all men diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministry in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.

But I am not just talking about ancient history! Just as the Prayer Book controversy raises liturgy issues we are still struggling with today, so the 17th-century controversy about episcopacy raises issues which are still very much on the agenda. There are some hotly contested and important discussions going on in the church

¹ Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: CUP 1998).

² Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, chs 4 & 5 (esp. p.174n.)

today about the nature of church leadership — some of which I've been directly involved with myself.

- Those women bishops — before we ask what the Bible says about women bishops, maybe we should ask what the Bible says about bishops?
- 'Leadership' as a hot issue — what's distinctively Christian about leadership in the church? What do we have to learn from the secular world? What do we have to teach?³
- 'Re-imagining ministry' as one of the Archbishops' Council's keynote themes for the current quinquennium of General Synod — partly pragmatic, partly reflecting urgent questions about lay ministry, Pioneer ministry and Fresh Expressions, non-stipendiary ministry et al.⁴

Scripture plays a crucial role in these debates — and yet so often we find that the Bible doesn't answer our questions directly: we are constantly baffled when we try to find out 'what the Bible says' in relation to our problems. So in this lecture I want to begin by going back to the 1662 controversy (Part 2), which then sends us back to the Bible (Part 3) to try to understand what questions the biblical texts are answering — and finally try to draw out some fundamental principles for our deliberations today (Part 4).

³ There is an excellent discussion of this in Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church* (2nd ed.: London: DLT 2008), ch.2. (Attentive readers, however, will observe that my 'three dimensions' are different from Bishops Steven's.) My own work on this subject is part of a wide-ranging study of issues relating to Senior Leadership in the Church of England being undertaken by the Faith and Order Commission.

⁴ Cf. (just to pick out initiatives in which I have had some personal involvement) the December 2011 *Symposium on Lay Ministry* organised by the Bishop of Sodor and Man under the auspices of Ministry Council and the Central Readers' Council; the Joint Anglican-Methodist working party on the Ecclesiology of Fresh Expressions, due to report to General Synod in July 2012; the Morgan Report on self-supporting ministry presented to Ministry Council in 2011.

PART TWO: WHICH BIBLE?

So — are there any bishops in the Bible?

The first answer is: it depends which Bible you're reading!

The 1662 Ordinal prescribes two Epistles to be read at the consecration of a bishop: Acts 20.17ff, or 1 Timothy 3.1-7. If you chose the latest modern English translation to read from, the congregation might be a little puzzled: no bishop appears in either passage in the *Common English Bible*, which came out in 2011.

In the **Acts** passage, we read that Paul “sent a message to Ephesus calling for the church’s elders to meet him” at Miletus; his address includes the following words: (v.28) “Watch yourselves and the whole flock, in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as supervisors, to shepherd God’s church, which he obtained with the death of his own Son.”

In **1 Timothy ch.3** we find a passage headed “*Supervisors in God’s household*” with the following directives: “This saying is reliable: if anyone has a goal to be a supervisor^h in the church, they want a good thing.² So the church’s supervisor must be without fault. They should be faithful to their spouse, sober, modest, and honest. They should show hospitality and be skilled at teaching.³ They shouldn’t be addicted to alcohol or a bully. Instead they should be gentle, peaceable, and not greedy.”

A footnote in the second passage (but not the first) offers “bishop, overseer” as an alternative for the word translated ‘supervisor’: A similar footnote appears at Titus 1.7 and at Philippians 1.1 — the only hint that behind this rather banal piece of management advice lies the Greek word *episkopos* — the origin of our ‘bishop’.

Acts 20.17/28: Paul to the *presbuteroi* ... “God has made you *episkopoi*”

GNB	NIV [1984]	CEB	MESSAGE	CEV
Elders of the church	Elders of the church	The church's elders	Leaders of the congregation	Church leaders
Has placed in your care	Has made you overseers[*] [* trad. 'bishops']	Has placed you as supervisors	Has put you in charge	Has placed in your care

WYCLIFFE	TYNDALE	GENEVA	RHEIMS	KJV
greatest men of birth* of the church bishops *elder men	Elders of the congregacion overseers	Elders of the Church overseers	Auncients of the Church bishops	Elders of the church overseers

Philippians 1.1: “To the saints at Philippi, with the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi*”

GNB 1992	NIV [1984]	CEB 2011	MESSAGE 1993	CEV 1985
NIV	GNB	CEB	MESSAGE	CEV
Church leaders and helpers	Overseers[*] Deacons* [* Trad. 'bishops'] ** Christians designated to serve with the overseers / elders	Supervisors* Servants** * or overseers, bishops ** or servants	pastors ministers	Church officials and officers

WYCLIFFE	TYNDALE	GENEVA	RHEIMS	KJV
bishops deacons	Bisshops deacons	Bishops deacons	Bishops deacons	bishops deacons

1 Timothy 3.1-2: “If anyone desires *episkope* An *episkopos* must be “

GNB 1992	NIV 1984	CEB 2011	MESSAGE 1993	CEV 1985
Eager to be a church leader	Sets his heart on being an overseer[*]	Has a goal to be a supervisor*	Wants to provide leadership in the church	Desires to be a church official
A church leader	The overseer [* trad. Bishop]	The church's supervisor * bishop, overseer	A leader	officials

WYCLIFFE	TYNDALE	GENEVA	RHEIMS	KJV
A bishopric	The office of a bisshope	The office of a bishope	A Bishops office	The office of a bishop
A bishop	A bysshope	A bishop	A Bishop	A bishop

Titus 1.5-7: “Appoint *presbuteroi* ... For the *episkopos* must be”

GNB 1992 Appoint church elders in every town A church leader	NIV 1984 To appoint* elders in every town An overseer** * or ordain [** trad. Bishop]	CEB 2011 To appoint elders in each city supervisors* * or overseers, bishops	MESSAGE 1993 Appoint leaders in every town A church leader	CEV 1985 To appoint leaders* for the churches in each town Church officials** *or elders, presbyters, or priests ** or “Bishops”
WYCLIFFE Ordain priests by cities A bishop	TYNDALE Ordeyne elders in every cite A bisshoppe	GENEVA Ordeine Elders in every Citie A byshop	RHEIMS Ordaine priestes by cities A Bishop	KJV Ordain elders in every city A bishop

Acts 1.20 “His *episkope* let another take”

GNB 1992 Take his place of service	NIV 1984 Take his place of leadership	CEB 2011 Give his position of leadership to another	MESSAGE 1993 Take over his post	CEV 1985 Let someone else have his job
WYCLIFFE bishopric	TYNDALE bisshoprycke	GENEVA charge	RHEIMS Bishoprike	KJV bishopruck

1 Peter 2.25: Christ “the Shepherd and *episkopos* of your souls”

GNB 1992 Shepherd and Keeper of your souls	NIV 1984 Shepherd and overseer of your souls	CEB 2011 Shepherd and guardian of your lives	MESSAGE 1993 Kept for good by the Shepherd of your souls	CEV 1985 The one who is your shepherd and protector
WYCLIFFE Shepherd and bishop of your souls	TYNDALE Sheep-herd and bysshope of youre soules	GENEVA Shepherd and Bishope of your soules	RHEIMS Pastor and Bishop of your soules	KJV Shepherd and Bishop of your souls

A quick trawl of other modern translations reveals a similar picture — with a notable absence of bishops! There are none at all in the *Good News Bible* (1976) or *The Message* (1993); they appear only in footnotes in the NIV (1973/84) or (surprisingly) the 1968 *Jerusalem Bible*. Thus NIV has (in all the above passages) ‘overseers [traditionally: bishops]’⁵; JB has ‘overseers’ in Acts 20.28, ‘presiding elder’ in 1 Tim and Titus, with a note to the effect that ‘the word *episkopos* did not yet mean bishop’. NRSV (1995) has ‘overseers’ in Acts 20.28, but ‘the office of a bishop’ in 1 Timothy and Titus; so does the 1989 REB, with “has given you charge” at Acts 20.28. Most revealing perhaps is the 1961 NEB, which has “has given you charge” in Acts, and “To aspire to leadership” in 1 Tim 3.1; but this is followed in the next verse with “Our leader, therefore, or bishop, must be beyond reproach ...” — as nice a bit of fence-sitting as you could hope to see! Overall what this shows is that most modern translators (even the Catholic JB) have virtually ruled out the possibility that there might be any bishops in the Bible, illustrating graphically how Bible translation reflects not only the changing faces of historical scholarship, but the tradition and ecclesiology of the translators.

If we go back to the period of the Reformation, the picture is very different. In the BCP itself, 1 Timothy 3.1 reads: “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife ...’ etc. This is the language of the KJV, but it is universally repeated, right through from Wycliffe and Tyndale, across the whole range of pre-1662 English Bibles (though with a wonderful range of spellings). The message is clear: the office of bishop is something that is commended by holy Scripture as ‘a good work’ — no room for question. 1 Timothy 3.1 was a favourite passage cited by supporters of episcopacy in the Commonwealth period, as was Philippians 1.1, where Paul addresses the ‘saints’ in Philippi, ‘with the bishops and deacons’ (again, uniformly so translated in the KJV and its predecessors). Acts 20.28 sends out a slightly more ambivalent message: KJV has “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” — so Tyndale and all the Protestant Bibles, though Rheims — and, surprisingly, Wycliffe — have ‘bishops’ here too. In fact Wycliffe and Rheims have more bishops than any other translator: I counted seven, all translating one form or another of the Greek word *episkopos*, including the reference to Judas in Acts 1.20 (“His bishopric let another take”), and to Christ as “the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” in 1 Peter 2.25 — both of which are taken up by the KJV.

This profligacy in the supply of biblical bishops is perhaps what we might have expected in the Catholic Rheims version, but at first sight rather surprising in Wycliffe and Tyndale. The early stages of English Bible translation (as we saw in last year’s KJV celebrations) reflect very much a “bottom-up” reformation, fuelled by populist radicals like the Lollards: they saw the medieval bishops as “proud prelates,” and oppressors of the poor, whose privileged position stood in diametric opposition to the simplicity of the biblical church. Wycliffe had the bishops in his sights from early on in his career: after a visit to Rome, as Foxe puts it, “he returned more strongly than ever determined to expose its avarice and ambition. ... He inveighed, in his lectures, against the pope — his usurpation — his infallibility — his pride — his avarice — and his tyranny. ... From the pope, he would turn to the pomp, the luxury, and

⁵ These marginal notes are omitted altogether in more recent editions of the NIV.

trappings of the bishops, and compared them with the simplicity of primitive bishops. Their superstitions and deceptions were topics that he urged with energy of mind and logical precision.”⁶ And this antipathy was reflected in his translation, which was (like Tyndale’s) spattered with intemperate footnotes exposing the sins of the Catholic hierarchy, and which sought to reflect in its vocabulary a more Protestant vision of primitive simplicity. This was one of the reasons (you may recall) why King James I disliked the Geneva Bible so much, and why Bishop Bancroft’s Rules for the new translation specified that “the old ecclesiastical terms” should be used, “viz. the word ‘church’ not to be translated as ‘congregation’, etc.”

There is a nice example of this at Acts 14.23, where the differing translations reflect a spectrum of puritan / catholic debates about the nature of church, priesthood, and ordination — with the Anglican KJV very firmly positioned right in the middle. Tyndale and the Great Bible have ‘ordained them elders by election in every congregation’. Geneva and the Bishops’ Bible swap ‘congregacion’ for ‘church’, but retain the ‘election’ of elders. KJV still has elders, but has them ‘ordained’ by Paul, and Barnabas, while Rheims offers a full-on catholic ‘ordained to them Priests in every church’. The variations reflect not just a difference of terminology (the Greek word *presbuteros*, ‘elder’, is the origin of our English word ‘priest’), but a fundamental difference between the rite of episcopal ordination and election by the congregation: as Calvin’s note *ad loc.* makes clear, the puritans had observed (quite correctly) that the word *cheirotonesantes* (‘laying hands on them’) in classical Greek can mean to elect by a show of hands. Calvin’s comment is worth quoting in full: ‘The Greek word means to decide something by raising hands, as they used to do in the assemblies of the people. Ecclesiastical writers, however, often use the word in another sense — namely, for the solemn rite of ordination by the laying on of hands. This idiom [sc. election] very well describes the right way to ordain pastors. Paul and Barnabas were said to appoint elders. Did they alone do this, by virtue of their own office? No; they allowed the matter to be decided by the votes of everyone. So the people had free elections in ordaining pastors; but in case of any disorder Paul and Barnabas presided as moderators. This is how we must understand the decree of the Council of Laodicea, which forbade elections to be left to the people.’

So we might expect to find bishops in the King James’s Bible; but it is at first sight rather surprising to find the term so widely used in Wycliffe and Tyndale (even Geneva has bishops in Phil 1.1, 1 Tim 3.1 & 2, Titus 1.7, and 1 Peter 2.25).⁷ The reasons for this are complex, but I would suggest three significant factors. First, the reformers (or most of them) sought not so much to abolish the episcopate as to **restore it to its biblical roots**. Luther had no quarrel with the title, rather a concern to reclaim a good biblical term for the Reformation by redefining what true *episcopus* was. So it suited the reformers to be able to quote biblical passages like 1 Timothy 3, which proved that a bishop must be a teacher and preacher of the Word, the husband

⁶ Fox’s *Book of Martyrs*, ch.7, ‘An Account of the Life and Persecutions of John Wickliffe’.

⁷ Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version* (Oxford: OUP 2010) p.36 glosses: “The implementation of this rule was a persistent source of puritan objections to the KJV, as puritans, appropriating Tyndale’s argument, preferred ‘congregation’ to ‘church,’ ‘wash’ to ‘baptize,’ ‘elder’ or ‘senior’ to ‘bishop,’ and ‘minister’ to ‘priest.’” The last two are simply wrong: *presbyteros* is translated ‘elder’ across the board at Titus 1.5, except for Rheims and Wycliffe who both have ‘priest’, presumably reflecting Vulg. *presbyteros*. At Acts 20.17 where KJV follows Geneva and the Bishops’ Bible with ‘Elders of the Church’, Tyndale and Great Bible have ‘elders of the congregation’. Wycliffe here has “greatest men of birth” reflecting Vulg. *maiores natu* (Rheims ‘Auncients of the Church’).

of one wife (not celibate, in other words), and able to control his own children. Calvin again is to the point [ad Acts 20.28, citing 1 Tim 3]: “there is no time to be idle in such an important calling; and those whom God has made stewards of his family have a greater degree of honour and therefore are less excusable if they do not match up to such great honour by doing their duty diligently.” The “bishops” whom the reformers found in their Bibles were diligent, humble and responsible preachers of the Word, the very antithesis of the medieval prince-bishops — and, as Sir Thomas Aston acknowledges, of many contemporary Laudian bishops who had brought the office into disrepute.⁸

The use of ‘bishop’ for *episkopos* also reflects the **political realities** of the Reformation in England. Luther would have been very glad to enlist the bishops on the side of Reform — if only he could have found any bishops willing to support him.⁹ In England, the situation was rather different. Where Luther struggled to find political support from the imperial princes and bishops, the reformation in England could claim a distinguished series of bishops among its martyrs. And the reformation found an unlikely political ally in Henry VIII. Having displaced the Pope as head of the Church in England, Henry (and his successors) *needed* bishops as part of the fabric of government.¹⁰ Episcopacy and monarchy were always closely intertwined in England (hence the famous dictum of James I: no bishop, no king) — and became even more so in the pre-Civil War period as Charles I, aided and abetted by Archbishop Laud, sought to govern without Parliament. Thus it was more or less inevitable that in the divisions of the Civil War period, the puritans (the ‘godly’ as they preferred to call themselves) should argue for a presbyterian form of church government (Parliament abolished bishops in 1646), while for the royalists, the restoration of episcopacy went hand in hand with the restoration of the monarchy.

These arguments are played out in the pamphlets and petitions of the period. Let me cite just a section from Aston’s Cheshire Petition (1641):

- Yet when wee consider, **that Bishops were instituted in the time of the Apostles;** ... That to them wee owe the redemption of the purity of the Gospell wee now professe from *Romish* corruption; **That many of them for the propagation of the truth, became such glorious Martyrs;** That divers of them (lately and) yet living with us, have beene so great assertours of our Religion against its common enemy of *Rome*; And that **their Government hath beene so long approved, so oft established by the Common and Statute-lawes of this Kingdome;** And as yet nothing in their Doctrine (generally taught) dissonant from the Word of God, or the Articles ratified by Law. In this case to call their Government, a perpetuall

⁸ ‘Is it onely our present Arch-bishop [Laud] hath op’d the gap of Calumny? ... I would draw all the world to my opinion; that is to reverence their Calling, preserve their order, yet with as free a resolution, and as respectlesse of their persons, submit to the exemplar punishment of such as staine the honour of their Coat; entrench upon our Liberties, negligently starve the flock, covetously engrosse the means of faithful Labourers, or with their Novelties distract the Church, as any man that lives’: Aston, cited in Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, p.162

⁹ Dorothea Wendebourg, ‘The Reformation in Germany and the Episcopal Office’, in *Visible Unity and the Ministry of Oversight: report of the Second Meissen Theological Conference* (London: Church House Publishing for CCU, 1997), pp.49-78. For Sir Thomas Aston, this is an example of the ambivalence of the reformers’ position: Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, pp.158-59. (“It was with palpable pleasure that Aston provided evidence that Calvin’s views on the Episcopal office were not abstract absolutes but changed to reflect actual circumstances.”)

¹⁰ John Findon, ‘Developments in the Understanding and Practice of Episcopacy in the Church of England’, in *Visible Unity and the Ministry of Oversight*, pp.79-92.

Vassalage, an intollerable Bondage; And (*prima facie & inaudita altera parte*) to pray the present removall of them, or (as in some of their Petitions) to seeke the utter dissolution and ruine of their offices (as Antichristian) we cannot conceive to relish of justice or charity, nor can wee joyne with them.¹¹

- But on the contrary, when wee consider the tenour of such writings, as in the name of Petitions, are spread amongst the Common-people; the tenents preached publicly in Pulpits, and the contents of many printed Pamphlets, swarming amongst us ..., wee cannot but expresse our just feares that their desire is to introduce an absolute Innovation of Presbyterall Government, whereby **wee who are now governed by the Canon and Civill Lawes, dispensed by twenty-six Ordinaries** (easily responsall to Parliaments for any deviation from the rule of Law) conceive **wee should become exposed to the meere Arbitrary Government of a numerous Presbitery, who together with their ruling Elders, will arise to neere forty thousand Church Governours, and with their adherents, must needs beare so great a sway in the Common-wealth ...** [or: ‘9324 potentiall Popes’].¹²

And, thirdly, the debates shows that the reformers were happy to deploy a historical-critical reading of the text of Scripture to support their arguments.¹³ In Acts 20.28 and Titus ch.1 it is quite clear that the *episkopos* is interchangeable with the *presbuteros* or ‘elder’. This critical observation (which goes back at least as far as Jerome) lies behind the conclusion Calvin draws in his commentary on Acts 20.28:

Concerning the word **overseer** or ‘bishop’, we must briefly note that Paul calls all the elders of Ephesus by this name, without distinction. From this we gather that in scriptural terms ‘bishops’ are no different from **elders**. But through vice and corruption it came about that the chief ones in each city began to be called bishops. I call this corruption not because there is anything wrong with one man being the head in each college or company, but because it is intolerable boldness when people twist the words of the Scriptures to their own customs and do not hesitate to change the language of the Holy Spirit.

This is a theme that rumbles on through the controversies of the 17th century, for example in the letter to Lancelot Andrews from the French Protestant Peter Moulin (1618). Moulin makes three points:

The *First* is, that, I said, that the *Names* of *Bishop* and *Presbyter* are promiscuously taken, in the *New Testament*, for one and the same. The *Second*, that, I affirm'd, that there is but one and the same *Order* of *Presbyter*, and *Bishop*. The *Third*, and that the greatest, is, that I think the [...], the *Priority* or *Superiority* of Bishops, not to be of *Divine Right*, nor a point of *Faith*, but to be a thing wherein the *Primitive Church* used her liberty and prudence, when she judged the Preeminence of *One* to be fitter for the mantaining of *Order* and conserving of *Peace*, and that *Unity* may well be kept whole and intire between *Churches*, though they differ upon that point.

Andrews clearly regarded this as a piece of ‘intolerable boldness’ on the Protestant side. His polite but robust reply asserts:

¹¹ Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: CUP 1998), p.161 ‘The examples of men like Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley were “proof” to Aston that episcopacy and godliness were not mutually exclusive’.

¹² Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, pp.166-69.

¹³ Aston notes (and disdains) another bit of historical criticism deployed by the godly: ‘Paul, unto Timotheus ordained the first Bishop of the Church of the *Ephesians*. Novellists except at that, and will not allow it be Authenticke because, they say, [it] is not in some old Manuscript they have seen.’ Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, p.157.

What could they, who lately made all the stirrs among us, mutter more, possibly? Then, that 1. the *Name is taken confusedly*. that 2. *the Thing is not distinct*. 3. Finally, that *it is a Human invention*: being settled by man may be unsettled, and so stands or falls at the pleasure of the Commonwealth. *These Dictats* are too well known to the *King*: *He* hath been long usd to them: They have long since on all hands been rounded in *His* ears. *He* knows that there are still among us such, as will from *your* writings presently take a new occasion, perhaps, not to pluck up this *Order* of ours, that for so many ages hath taken root but, surely, to defame and calumniat it.

His point-by-point refutation, set out with strings of supporting patristic quotations ('one generall dash through all the Ecclesiastical Historians'), offers a firm re-statement of the Episcopal position that (even though the names may be confused in Scripture) the Orders themselves are clearly distinct:

But we very well know, that the *Apostles*, and the *Seventy two Disciples* were *Two Orders*, and those *distinct*. And this, likewise, we know, that every where among the *Fathers*, *Bishops* and *Presbyters* are taken to be after *their* example: That *Bishops* succeeded the *Apostles*; and *Presbyters* the *Seventy two*. That these *Two Orders* were by our *Lord* appointed in *those two*. *Cyprian*; [**Note:** *Epist. 65 ad Rogat.*] *Deacons must remember that our Lord chose the Apostles, that is, Bishops and Prelates: But the Apostles, after the Ascension of our Lord appointed Deacons for themselves, as Ministers of their Episcopacy, and of the Church*. *Nay, S. Hierom*; [**Note:** *Epist. ad Ma[...]el. ae Err. Mont. Epist. ad Evig. 1. c.*] *With us Bishops hold the place of the Apostles. All [Bishops] are successors of the Apostles*. And that is a famous place in *him*; in *him*; and *S. Augustine*, too, upon the 44. *Psalm*. In stead of thy *Fathers* thou shalt have children: *i.e. in stead of Apostles, Bishops*. *S. Ambros*, in 1. *Corinth. 12. 28. God hath set in the Church [Caput Apostolos] first Apostles. Now the Apostles are Bishops: the Apostle S. Peter giving us assurance of it; And his Bishoprick let another take. And a little after. Are all Apostles? He saith right: for in one Church but one Bishop. And in Ephes.4. The Apostles are the Bishops*.

But we must pardon you: you must speak the language of *your Church*, which hath *no Bishops; another kind of Presbyters, [Elders they call them,] another kind of Deacons*; and, I add, *another kind of Calling*, then ever the *Antient Church* acknowledged. I, for my part, in my best wishes for *your Church*, and so for *all the Reformed* do wish this, that *you* may keep constant in the other points of *Faith*, but for *Government* and *Order* that *God* would vouchsafe to *you* no other but that which *He* hath vouchsafed *Vs*, *i.e. by Bishops, Presbyters* and *Deacons*. Such as those we read of in the *Histories of the Church*, and in the *Councils*, and the *Antient Fathers*: unto whom (or self-conceit shrewdly deceives me, or) most like are *Our*: most like, I say, in their *Order*, not in their *Worth*; but would to *God* in their *Worth* also. And that no *Policy*, no form of *Government* in *any Church whatsoever* cometh nearer the sense of *scripture*, or the manner and usage of the *Antient Church*, then this which flourisheth among *us*.

This is an early example (1618) of a dispute that was to rumble on through the 17th century.¹⁴ At issue, as Judith Maltby argues, is a fundamental difference over the

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. Saravia's *Treatises Of the diuerse degrees of the ministers of the gospel and Of the honour which is due unto the priestes and prelates of the church* (1591); or Lancelot Andrew's *Of Episcopacy. THREE EPISTLES OF PETER MOULIN Doctor and Professor of Divinity. Answered By the Right Reverend Father in God Lancelot Andrews, Late Lord Bishop of Winchester* (published posthumously 'for the benefit of the publicke' in 1647); or the puritan Richard Baxter's *Five disputations of church-government and worship* (1659). Particularly interesting in the light of 20th-century developments in church order is Archbishop Ussher's *The reduction of episcopacie unto the form of synodical government received in the ancient church* (1660), which sets out a fascinating vision of a 'reduced' episcopate aided in its task by a 'synodical Government' drawn from the parish clergy.

shape of church order. Presbyterians and episcopalians agreed that every local church or congregation should have its own pastor, and both cited in their favour the NT pattern of ‘elders in every town’. What the reformers contested was the distortion of this essential ‘flat’ picture of church order by the elevation of the bishop to a higher order:

The crux of the matter, and here Episcopalians and Presbyterians would agree, is the superiority of one minister over another. Aston defended the superiority of ministers — of bishops over presbyters — from the NT and the Fathers. He cited Saint Jerome as saying that, in many ways, bishops and presbyters share the same ministry, but in order to avoid schism, they elected one to be authority over the rest. ... In other words, the bishop’s primary task was to keep the disparate elements within the church together; and he was aided in this task by the *imparity* between his office and the presbyters of his diocese.¹⁵

So you can see that behind the carefully-worded statement of the BCP is a century or more of debate about the office of bishop and its relation to the patterns of ministry found in the Bible and in the early church fathers. We might suspect, in fact, that the words are deliberately ambiguous. Lancelot Andrews, back in 1618, spotted a Freudian slip in the words of his French correspondent Peter Moulin.

You, while you follow and sway with it, follow not the bent of your own mind and iudgment; for I iudg of *your affection* by your *pen*; which was so well inclin'd toward *us*, that it had wrote (and, I think, not against your mind) that *Our Order of Bishops was a thing received in the Church even from the time of the Apostles*. And indeed your pen had wrote very right: *Mary*, you blotted out [*of the Apostles*] and, in lieu of it, put in [*next to the Apostles*.] But this, I beleeve, you did in favour of *your Church*. And, indeed, that was very true, which you put in [*next to the Apostles*] but that not a whit less true, which you blotted out. For *that Order* was not only from the *Age next to the Apostles*, but even from *the very Age of the Apostles*; or els all *Antiquity* deceives us, and there's not a *Church-History* left worth credit. That *all Antiquity* is for *us*, you your self deny not; and whether *We* must yeeld more to any *present Church*, then to *all Antiquity*, iudg you. If I know you well, the more free and ingenuous I am in writing thus to you, you will love me the better: and so shall I you, if you deal as freely with me in it.

The words of the Ordinal as they stand leave it open whether we are talking about an early church institution that can be attested ‘from the time of the apostles’ (exclusively, i.e. from just after the times of the apostles) or a scriptural order that goes back to the apostles themselves. For the Archbishop, there is no question that the threefold order of bishop, priest and deacon goes back to the Apostles themselves:

Could any then take it ill, that you said, *That Episcopacy was received, in the Church, from the very next times to the Apostles?* you said too little: you might have said more, and, if you had, *Antiquity* would have born you out; that it was received from the *Apostles themselves*: and that *they*, the *Apostles themselves*, were constituted in the *Episcopal Order*.

¹⁵ Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, p.160.

PART THREE: EPISKOPE IN THE PAULINE CHURCHES

But my subject is the Bible, not the Civil War (fascinating though that period is) — and the question I want to pursue is the historical one. Is the Prayer Book correct when it claims that “from the times of the apostles there have been these three orders in the church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons”? Did they have bishops in the churches of St Paul? What were the leadership structures in those churches? Who are these *episkopoi* who turn up here and there in Paul’s letters, and how do they relate to the apostles — and to the church today?

Just from that short excursion into the controversies of the 17th Century, I think you can begin to appreciate just how difficult it is to try to get behind the words of the Bible to try to reconstruct what was actually happening in the early church. It isn’t just about getting behind the English to the Greek (though that is an essential first step!). The problem is deeper: when we read the Greek words, we automatically process them in terms of the world we know — in this case, the church structures we know. So a scholar like Lancelot Andrews — with an impeccable knowledge of the Greek text — reads the words *diakonos*, *presbyteros*, and *episkopos* in his Bible, and reads them in the light of the English words (which of course are derived from the Greek) ‘deacon’, ‘priest’ and ‘bishop’. Andrews’ reading of the Bible, amply supported by the church Fathers, simply confirms the established order of church government: there is the three-fold order, ‘evident to all men’. But for Calvin — an equally learned scholar and exegete — the same texts open up revolutionary possibilities: the Bible for Calvin is way of getting back behind the established order and testing it against the revelation of God’s truth. So for Calvin, the *presbyteros* is not a priest but an elder, and the *episkopos* simply “one out of their number,” *primus inter pares*, chosen by the elders to preside in every city, “to whom specially they gave the Title of a Bishop, that there should not arise discord out of equalitie”.¹⁶ You can also see, I think, why the subject of church-order has almost dropped off the radar in NT studies: exegesis is so obviously integrated with ecclesiology that it is tempting to abandon the historical enterprise altogether in matters of church history. That at any rate was the view of the eminent church historian Professor Greenslade whose lectures on church history I heard in Oxford. When it came to the Papacy, he said, it was virtually impossible to disentangle the words of the historians from their ecclesiastical pre-conceptions: “all I can do is to tell you my personal bias so that you can discount it.”

Nevertheless, it is my contention that it is possible, with the aid of a little historical discipline and a lot of careful reading of the texts, to move some way towards resolving the impasse between the presbyterian and the episcopal readings of the key texts: and that is what I want to do with you in the remainder of this lecture, before turning to draw out some of the implications for our understanding of church leadership today. And what I want to argue is that the church in the NT (more specifically the churches of St Paul, which is all I have time to look at today) does not offer unqualified support **either** to the hierarchical, top-down order of the episcopal churches (vertically 2-dimensional), **or** to the ‘flat’ order of the presbyterian churches (horizontally 2-dimensional). Instead, I shall argue, the NT offers us a ‘triangular’ or

¹⁶ Maltby, *Prayer-Book and People*, p.158.

three-dimensional structure of leadership which (properly understood) is highly resistant to either to flattening out or to hierarchicalization. Let me explain.

3.1. The Apostle and the Elders

Let's go back first to that Greek island ... or rather, to the Aegean coast just off present-day Turkey. and listen again to Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts ch.20. What is happening here?

First, we read that Paul (on his final voyage back to Jerusalem, island-hopping down the coast of Asia Minor) sent a message to Ephesus to ask the elders of the church to come and meet him when the ship docked in Miletus. Who were these elders? Luke doesn't tell us (he assumes we know) — but he does tell us in ch.14.21-23 that when Paul founded churches in Iconium, Lystra and Antioch, he went back (after a few months at most) to visit to the believers. After 'strengthening the hearts of the disciples and encouraging them' (14.22), Paul and Barnabas rapidly appoint elders in each church — and then (in one of the most remarkable statements in Acts), they leave them to get on with it, blithely entrusting these newly-hatched disciples to 'the Lord in whom they had come to believe' (14.23). Luke doesn't tell us that Paul did this anywhere else (he's not particularly interested in the day-to-day life of the church); he may expect us to assume that this was Paul's regular pattern. On the other hand, the church in Ephesus was not founded by Paul (it was there already before he got there: cf. Acts 18.24-28) — and it may have appointed its own elders. Either way, Luke clearly assumes — presumably because it was standard practice in his own day — that each church has its own local leadership team of *presbuteroi* or 'elders'. And (as we have seen), the 'elders' from Ephesus are also addressed by Paul in Acts 20.28 as *episkopoi*, 'overseers' or 'supervisors' of the local church — though this seems to be more a matter of function than of title.

We can also see another kind of leadership being exercised in these passages — the itinerant and trans-local leadership of the apostle. This passage reveals Paul's clear sense of his own apostolic commission as a *diakonia* ('ministry') received from God (v.24),¹⁷ a commission faithfully discharged in declaring the message of God's grace, God's plan (v.27). In response, Paul describes himself as God's slave or servant (*doulos*), serving God in humility, with tears and trials, bonds and tribulations (v.19), making himself of no account 'if only I may finish my course' (v.24). The speech offers fruitful material for reflection on the interactive relationship between Paul and the local elders ('my manner of being with you from the beginning' v.18).¹⁸ On the apostolic side, the relationship has two components, initial evangelisation (vv.18-21) and ongoing teaching (vv.25-35). The apostle acts as messenger (v.20), witness (vv.21, 24) and herald (v.25) to the good news of God's Kingdom. The continuing apostolic task includes teaching (*didache* v.20) and admonition (*nouthesia* v.31), issuing warnings about future tribulations and false teachers (vv.29-30), offering himself as a model (vv.33-35), and reminding the church of the words of Jesus (v.35). In response, the local church (represented here by its elders) is called to a relationship characterized by attentiveness (you know, you understand, you see) and memory: remember my words, observe the apostolic way of life (v.31).

¹⁷ There is a huge current debate about the meaning of *diakonia*, sparked by John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: OUP 1990).

¹⁸ 'You' here stands partly — as I suspect it does in the letters — for the whole church of which they are representatives, partly for themselves as leaders.

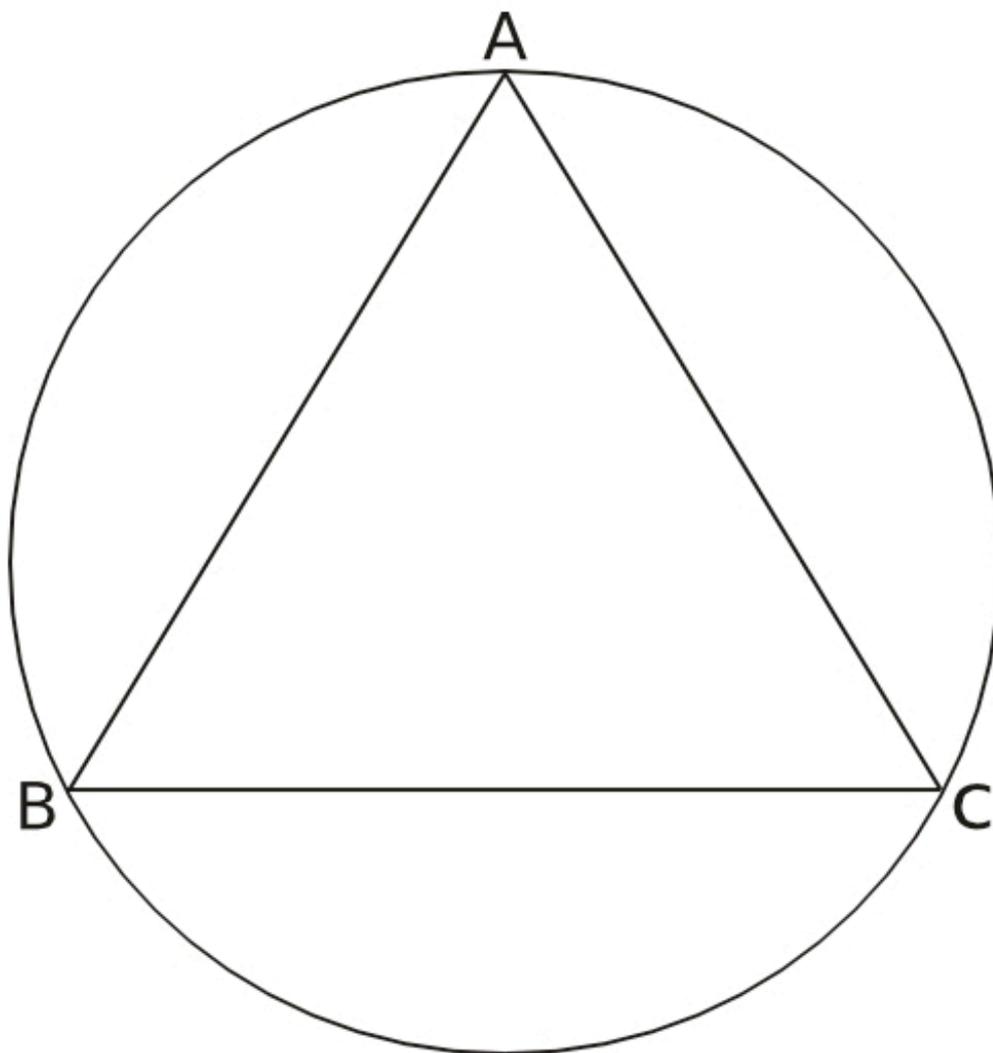
But there is a third dimension to this leadership structure. The local elders are not simply under-managers in the Pauline team. The church (the flock) which they are to ‘shepherd’ doesn’t belong to Paul, much less to themselves: it belongs to God, who ‘purchased it with his own blood’; and it is the Word of this same God that ‘is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified’ (20.32). As local leaders, the elders are placed in charge of the flock as ‘overseers’ (*episkopoi*) by the Holy Spirit (v.28). If we are looking for a line-manager, it isn’t Paul but the Holy Spirit under whose authority the elders exercise their own responsibilities as under-shepherds, tasked with pasturing (*poimainein*) the church of God. Note that the task of *episkope* is a task that belongs to the whole church, ‘the church of God which he purchased with his own blood.’ each local church is a locally-rooted instantiation of the whole church, created and sustained by God in the mystery of redemption. And it is this God to whom Paul, conscious that he is reaching the end of his ministry (‘I know that you will see my face no more’), is able to commit these local leaders, in a dynamic expression of confidence in the God who ‘is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified’ (20.32). This is an ecclesiology that presupposes an extraordinary level of **trust / confidence** on both sides: Paul himself was ‘entrusted to the grace of God’ to carry out his mission when he was sent out by the church in Antioch (14.26), and this is matched by his own experience of God at work (‘what God had done through them’ 14:27). Paul in his turn is emboldened to entrust the new disciples to ‘the God in whom they had come to believe.’ he can leave them to it, effectively, because of his confidence that their own faith (*pistis*) opens up a relationship of trust and confidence with this same God: that the God who has ‘opened up a door of faith for the Gentiles’ (14.27) is himself trustworthy, *pistos* (cf. 1 Thess 5.24).

What we have here, in effect, is a kind of leadership training manual for the early church: ‘elder paraenesis’. Interestingly, it is closely paralleled by two other late first-century texts, Hebrews 13 and 1 Peter 5 (and, I would argue, in the Gospels). All of these texts presuppose a distinctive leadership structure that is built on

- (a) **Dispersed authority**: leadership found both at local level (elders) and at trans-local level (apostles)
- (b) **Divine legitimation**: both local and apostolic leadership are directly authorised by and accountable to God.

The easiest way to represent the three-dimensional dynamic of relationships presupposed by this model is in the form of a triangular structure.¹⁹

¹⁹ A fuller description would also need to take account of the external relationships of the *ekklesia*, included in the diagram *via* the circle representing the world, with the three angles representing the points of contact between God and the world, Christian believers and the world, and church leaders and the world: it is important (and of course axiomatic) to note that the interactions of God and the world are not confined to the church, any more than the meaningful interactions of Christians and their leaders are confined to internal interactions within the church. But that is another story.



It is easy enough to look forwards from this point and see the foundations of the fully-developed catholic ecclesiology that emerges in the second and third centuries. But — looking backwards — can we regard this as a reliable guide to Pauline ecclesiology? Do Paul's letters actually support this kind of leadership structure, or is this Luke looking back with hindsight? Pauline scholars would identify two points of concern in Luke's story: (1) in the letters agreed to be authentic (the 'core Epistles'), Paul uses the term *episkopoi* only once (Phil 1.1) and he never uses the term *presbuteroi*: it only occurs in 1 Tim and Titus. And (2), who appointed the local leaders in the Pauline churches? Acts 14 pictures Paul appointing elders and laying hands on them himself. In the history of debate over church order, this is a momentous step: it implies some kind of 'apostolic succession', by which local leadership receives authority and legitimacy from a trans-local, 'catholic' leadership. Again, this is not borne out by the letters — or by Acts 20, which simply says that the elders were given their charge by 'the Holy Spirit' without specifying how. We shall need to bear in mind these reservations: it is quite possible that the structure as it appears in Acts (almost certainly written after Paul's death) is a little more settled and developed, a little further down the institutional road, than we find it in Paul's letters. Nevertheless, I want to argue that the underlying structure is amply confirmed in the

core Pauline epistles. In fact, as I am increasingly convinced, the letters themselves are designed precisely to form and reinforce this 3-way relationship.

3.2. *The gifts of the Spirit and the Body of Christ*

What I am arguing, in other words, is that we should read Paul's letters as a 'sign, instrument and foretaste' of a robust, three-dimensional ecclesiology that presupposes the exercise of ecclesial authority at both local and trans-local levels. Fundamental to this ecclesiology is a three-way relationship between the apostle, the local church, and the God who calls and empowers both. This triangular set of relationships is deeply embedded in the grammar of the letters — which Paul uses precisely as rhetorical tool to reinforce this new three-dimensional social identity. This process of inscription begins in the address line, where Paul picks up the standard Greek letter-form ('X to Y, greeting') to identify the sender (the apostle and his associates), the recipients (the church in ...). and adapts them bring both the local *ekklesia* and the apostolic leadership team into a dynamic relationship with God: just look at the openings of Paul's letters.²⁰

Thus in order to understand how Paul's theology of leadership works, we need to begin with Paul's ecclesiology, his theological vision of the church as the people of God.²¹ Each local church or *ekklesia* is a local instantiation of the people of God, called into being by God and sanctified by his grace. Paul's letters are grounded in the confidence that the **whole church** is the recipient of divine **grace**, of the gifts of the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 2.3 'I am confident about all of you'). The whole church is 'called to be saints' (1 Cor 1.2), called to be God's holy people, the visible sign of the presence of God in a particular locality. The church as a body is the site of God's dynamic and energizing activity (1 Cor 12.4-6, Phil 2.13), and the church as a body is called to exercise priestly, liturgical and disciplinary functions: 1 Cor 5-6, 11-14. The church as a body is called to be 'lights in the world' (Phil 2.15). Central to Paul's exhortations to the churches he addresses is the repeated 'you' (plural): *you* are the place where God is at work in that place, *you* are the site of unmediated transcendence: 'God is truly among you' (1 Cor 14.25). Thus much of his energy goes into encouraging the church to realize its own spiritual potential, trying to avoid a dependency culture: you have the ability to judge angels, you sort out your own disciplinary problems (1 Cor 5, 6, 14) — though not to the extent of making up your own rules (1 Cor 14.36-40).

But right from the start there are signs of a progressive **differentiation of functions and ministries** within this congregational structure. As well as general spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1.3-9), the gifts of the Spirit include specific differentiated roles / tasks within the life of the church emerging within the body of Christ — confusingly also and/or people (1 Cor 12). The body image as Paul uses it here is not about

²⁰ The use and adaptation of the standard greetings-formula at the end of the letters also acts as a kind of social glue to cement relationships between the local church and other local *ekklesiai*.

²¹ As Tom Wright points out, Paul's ecclesiology has been largely discounted (at least in Protestant scholarship) in favour of individual soteriology: but in fact ecclesiology is central to Paul. "When you go to the shelves and pick out a volume of Pauline theology, the chances are there will be a chapter on the church, but it will probably come some way toward the back of the book. ... When we read Paul in his own terms, we find that for him the one, single community is absolutely central. The community of Christ, in Christ, by the Spirit, is at the very heart of it all. ... Wherever you look in Paul, you see him arguing for and passionately working for the unity of the church." In N.Perrin and R.B.Hays (ed.), *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N.T.Wright* (London: SPCK 2011), pp.265-66. Cf. Begbie, *ibid.* p.186: "Ecclesiology is intrinsic to the fact of salvation."

hierarchy (1 Cor 12.21-25) but about inter-connectedness. No one part of the body is inherently superior to any other, and no one part of the body can do without the other parts: even the head cannot do without the feet. But it is also about differentiation: the functions of one body part are not interchangeable with those of another ('If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?' 1 Cor 12.17).

It is revealing in this context to set the 'gift-lists' of 1 Cor 12 and Romans 12 side by side. In Rom 12.7-8 the list of differentiated roles within the church fall naturally into two groups: the ministry of the word (prophecy, teaching, encouragement); and practical and pastoral ministry, the relief of poverty, making financial contributions (*ho metadidous*) and almsgiving (*ho eleon*).²² It is noticeable that *ho proistamenos* ('the leader' NRSV v.8) comes right at the end, sandwiched between two forms of charitable giving, a collocation that might encourage us to link the term to a specific kind of advocacy or patronage associated with the hosts of house-churches.²³ In 1 Cor 12.28, again, the gifts fall naturally into groups, with 'apostles, prophets, and teachers' (ministries of the word) at the top and charismatic gifts (healing, tongues) at the bottom. The practical and administrative leadership associated with the churches' extensive systems of almsgiving and pastoral care comes well down the list. The lists testify to the vigour and variety of the Pauline congregations and of the multifarious ministries undertaken by different members, including prophecy and charismatic healing, almsgiving and pastoral care. We can see here in embryo the outline of the congregational activities which later coalesced around particular offices within the local church, activities that we might group roughly into prophetic and pastoral/patronal: both, incidentally, roles open to women (1 Cor 11.5; Rom 16.1-2).

3.3 Local leadership in the Pauline letters: Episkope at local level

Where does 'leadership' fit into this dynamic picture of the local church? We need to be careful of our English translations here — 'leadership' language is actually very rare in the NT in general, but modern versions (influenced perhaps by the vogue for leadership in contemporary ecclesiology) have a persistent tendency to smuggle 'leadership' language into Paul's letters (cf. esp. 1 Cor 12.28, Rom 12.8). Nevertheless, Paul's letters provide clear evidence that within the vocation and gifting of the whole church, certain individuals within the congregation perform a range of functions that we would associate with 'leadership'. Paul's letters in fact offer beneath the surface a surprising amount of evidence for groups of people exercising leadership functions in the Pauline churches right from the start. (We should note that these are multiple functions: there is no evidence in Paul for a *single* 'pastor' exercising all the functions we would associate with church leadership.)

- **1 Thessalonians**, probably the earliest of the extant letters, ends with a request (*erotomen*) to 'recognize' (*eidenai*, lit. 'know') those who offer you toil (*tous kopiontas*) and patronage/presidency (*tous proistamenous*) and admonition (*tous*

²² A similar duality seems to underlie 1 Peter 4.11. For the importance of almsgiving in Pauline thought, see now Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010): though Longenecker does not discuss the ecclesial aspects of this concern.

²³ Cf. Harry O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (ESCJ 12; Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion: Wilfrid Laurier, 2002).

nouthetountas: 1 Thess 5.12-13). The grammar shows that Paul is not talking about three distinct groups but about one group exercising all three functions.²⁴ It's clear that Paul is talking here not only about a group of leadership *functions* within the church at Thessalonica at a very early stage in its existence, but also about a group of *people* carrying out those functions. They may be democratically elected; they may be rotating offices;²⁵ they may have arisen naturally (within the social conventions of the time) in connection with householders or hosts of house-churches. We certainly don't have any indication that they were appointed by Paul, who does not even appear to know their names. But functionaries — that is, a distinct group arising from within the group — they certainly are.

- **1 Cor 16.15-18.** The final chapter of 1 Cor uses very similar language to 1 Thess 5. The household of Stephanas is singled out for special recognition for having 'appointed themselves to the service (*diakonia*) of the saints' (and apparently of Paul himself: v.17). They and others like them (*panti to sunergounti kai kopionti*) are to be 'recognised' (*hegeisthe* v.18) and 'obeyed' (*hupotassethe* v.16). Once again we see that the authority of these local leaders is created and sustained by a mutuality of respect: church members are urged to 'recognise' them (vv.15,18) as well as to 'obey' them, that is to 'rank themselves under' (*hupotassethe*) their leaders. Who appointed the household of Stephanas to this leadership position? There is no indication that they were appointed by Paul: in fact he pointedly says that they 'appointed themselves' to this ministry. But they have been in touch with Paul by visit, and may even be the carriers of the letter (1 Cor 16.17-18). This suggests that we should take seriously Paul's description of them as 'those who work with me in the gospel' (v.16). This is not just a nod in the direction of collaborative ministry but Paul's endorsement and recognition of self-appointed local leaders whom he perceives as co-workers (*sunergoi*), whether through their assistance in his initial evangelistic labours (*kopionti*) in Corinth or/and through their continued willingness to keep in touch with him (i.e. to recognise his authority).
- **Philippians** (one of the latest of the core epistles) contains the clearest indication yet of the emergence of church officers with titles, here addressed (uniquely) in the opening greeting as a distinct group within the church: **Phil 1.1**: 'with the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi*.' It is not clear who, where or how many belong to either group, or how they are differentiated. In **Phil 4.2-4** Paul gives names to some of these local leaders, two of them women (**Euodia** and **Syntyche**) who 'strove together with me in the Gospel together with **Clement** and the **rest of my co-workers** (*sunergoi*), whose names are in the book of life.' Again we have a small group of local church leaders (including women) whom Paul describes as his co-workers in the gospel, singled out for special instruction — and special encouragement.
- **The list of names in Rom 16** is full of co-workers (*sunergoi*); and while it would be excessive to suggest that all these are local leaders, it is hard not to suspect that at least some of them are. Paul (as we have seen) uses the greetings formula to support and reinforce the authority of local leaders by association with himself, and something like that seems to be going on here (perhaps especially important in a city with a long-established Christian presence independent of Paul). Many of these co-workers are women, mostly explicitly in **Rom 16.1-2**, where Paul formally introduces **Phoebe** (presumably the one who carried his letter from Corinth) and asks the

²⁴ A.J.Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Anchor Bible 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), *ad loc.*

²⁵ Plausibly suggested by Richard S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations* (WUNT 2/161; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 177.

churches in Rome to give her their welcome and practical support. Phoebe is described as ‘our sister’ who is a *diakonon* (deacon) of the church in Cenchreae (v.1, cf. Phil 1.1). Phoebe is also described as ‘*prostatis* (patron or benefactor) of many including myself’ (v.2), probably reflecting the support and advocacy Paul received, as a stranger in Corinth, from a well-networked local resident, after a pattern well documented in Acts.

Essentially conceived as part of the gifting and energizing activity of God in the local church, this leadership is fluid and flexible, and not exclusive, part of a wide spread of mutually recognised spiritual gifts. The titles of these leaders are still fluid — the titles of *episkopos* and *diakonos* appear only occasionally (and then not in the later ecclesiastical sense). There is no indication that they were appointed by Paul, indeed some indications to the contrary: nevertheless, Paul makes every effort to support and endorse their leadership, both by personal commendation and visits, and more generally by including them in his army of ‘co-workers.’ There is no trace in the core epistles of a process of ‘ordination;’ but their ministry is subsumed under the relationship of the whole *ekklesia* to God (1 Cor 12.4-6), and is implicit in the ideology of the gifts of the Spirit and the body of Christ (1 Cor 12.7-31, Rom 12.3-8), an ideology that precludes boasting (Rom 12.3, 1 Cor 1.31; 3.21) and competitiveness (1 Cor 12 — 14). But they also have real authority — an authority that demands respect (1 Thess 5.12-13).²⁶

3.4 Trans-local Leadership in the Pauline Letters: apostolic episkope.

Episkope is not a word used by Paul or any NT writer of the apostles: the closest we get is the riddling quotation from the Psalms in Acts 1.20, where Peter cites LXX Ps 109.8 (“his *episkope* let another take”) with reference to the replacement of Judas among the Twelve, thus implicitly allowing the identification of the apostolic office with *episkope*. Most of the early versions (including KJV) have ‘bishopric’ here:

GNB 1992	NIV 1984	CEB 2011	MESSAGE 1993	CEV 1985
Take his place of service	Take his place of leadership	Give his position of leadership to another	Take over his post	Let someone else have his job

WYCLIFFE	TYNDALE	GENEVA	RHEIMS	KJV
bishopric	bisshoprycke	charge	Bishoprike	bishoprick

However, we do not need the word *episkope* to tell us that Paul’s letters offer abundant evidence for the existence of trans-local leadership, leadership across time and space. It is often overlooked that the mere fact of the letters’ existence testifies to the apostolic dimension of leadership in the Pauline churches, as far back as we can go. *Contra* many modern historians of early Christianity, we simply don’t have evidence of a totally ‘congregational’ period in the history of the church, of local groups of Christ-believers totally unconnected with each other. ‘Connexion’ (to use the splendid Methodist term) has always been essential to the church. Paul’s own letters (mostly but not exclusively to churches he had founded) testify to the exercise of spiritual leadership over distance and over time — maintaining and building up

²⁶ This request for mutual esteem is a constant in the NT discourse of local leadership (cf. also Heb 13, 1 Peter 5), and recurs in 1 Cor 16.18 and Phil 2.29-30.

contacts over time and space. This entails in itself a costly ongoing commitment in time, energy and personnel, not only Paul himself but in the small army of co-workers (like Timothy) who are also vital to the operation of the apostolic team.²⁷ Paul himself testifies to the personal cost of ‘the care (*merimna*) of all the churches’ (2 Cor 11.28-29), expressed not least in the time-commitment entailed in his prayer for all ‘his’ churches. The greetings at the end of each epistle are a function of and reinforce this trans-local dimension, as are Paul’s occasional references to ‘all the churches;’²⁸ and the organisation of the collection for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, which absorbed so much of Paul’s energies in the latter years of his mission, is a concrete and highly practical outworking of this inter-connectedness.²⁹

But the letters also reveal that Paul was not alone in exercising this trans-local apostolic calling. 1 Cor 9 reveals that most of the travelling apostles, including Peter (Cephas) exercised a right to hospitality and subsistence (travelling with a wife!) at the expense of the local church — a right Paul fiercely defends, even though he chooses not to exercise it himself. It is clear that the travelling apostles are not delegates of other local churches, or even of the Jerusalem church (Gal 1-2): their authority is somehow behind and above that of the network of local churches which they ‘surf’. Galatians 2.1-10 seems to imply a notional delimitation of apostolic spheres of influence (Paul to the Gentiles, Peter to the Jews), and Paul has a clear view of his own segment of the map (‘from Jerusalem as far round as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ’ Rom 15.19). But he never taxes Peter (Cephas) with straying outside his remit in visiting Corinth; neither does it prevent Paul from planning to preach the gospel in Rome (Rom 1.8-15; 15.22-24) and offering the Roman church a sizeable portion of apostolic advice and teaching. In other words, these itinerant apostles do not seem to be tied to particular regions like the bishops of the second century. Their apostolic *episkope* is exercised across the whole church of God.

How does Paul conceive the remit of the apostolic calling? Fundamental to Paul is the task of **preaching** the Gospel, especially in new territory (Rom 15.20) — though Paul concedes he is unusual in this, and his calling to preach to the Gentiles in very much his own. The task of making the Gospel known in the wider world is essential to the apostolic task, and is nowhere stated to be the task of local leaders. Equally important is the task of **teaching** and handing down apostolic tradition (1 Cor 11, 15): in other words, keeping the scattered congregations in touch with their common roots in the Jesus tradition, not only in words but by providing a model of the Christ-shaped life for imitation (1 Cor 4.15-16, 11.1; Phil 3.17). **Encouragement** (*paraklesis*) is a constant of the apostolic task: ‘building up’ the church (repeatedly in 2 Cor), not tearing down: but reproof (however reluctantly: cf. 1 Cor 4.14; 2 Cor) and discipline when necessary (1 Cor 5). **Networking** is also important: Paul spends a great deal of energy simply keeping the networks alive (cf. Rom 16) by a variety of means, including writing and visiting himself, sending his associates (1 Cor 4.17), and encouraging lateral links between congregations and reminding them of what they share with other churches (1 Cor 1.2). The exchange of greetings is a significant

²⁷ Cf. Loveday Alexander, art. ‘Paulusmitarbeiter’, *RGG*⁴.

²⁸ E.g. 1 Cor 1.2 ‘with all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours’. Cf. also 1 Thess 1.7-8, 2.14; 1 Cor 11.16, 14.33.

²⁹ On the Collection, cf. 1 Cor 16.1-4; 2 Cor 8—9; Rom 15.25-33. For a full recent discussion, see Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*.

factoring this commitment to catholicity, and is an important aspect of the letters. And fundamental to the whole apostolic task is **prayer**: just look at the opening paragraphs of all the letters! Paul's prayer for all his churches places all their mutual relationships within a 3-dimensional framework: it says, this is not just about me and you, but about you, me and God. Paul is constantly reminding his correspondents of the God-dimension in the life of the church.

3.5 The source of apostolic leadership: the God dimension

The relationship with God is fundamental to Paul's sense of being an *apostolos*. The word means 'one who is sent' on behalf of their principal, an emissary or agent. So it is crucial to the apostle's self-understanding to clarify who does the sending, whose delegate they are. When Paul defines himself in the address lines of his letters as *apostolos* of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1.1, 2 Cor 1.1) he is presenting himself as a witness of the risen Christ (Gal 1.15-16; 1 Cor 15.1-11). When his apostleship is challenged, his response is: 'Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' (1 Cor 9.1). The importance of this principle is what gives the edge to Paul's tone in the first chapter of Galatians, where he claims explicitly that his apostleship is independent of human agency (Gal 1.1) and came to him by direct revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal 1.11-24). He returns to the theme in more measured but equally emphatic tones in the extended address line of Romans 1.1-5, when he is introducing himself to a church he did not found. Like the church (and indeed in and for the church), the apostle is the recipient of an unmediated calling and gifting that comes direct from God. Compare the striking parallelism of *kletos* ('called') in Rom 1.1-6 and 1 Cor 1.1-2: both the church and the apostle are 'called,' just as both are recipients of divine grace (Rom 12.3-6).

Paul uses a variety of relational terms and metaphors to express this relationship. When Paul calls himself a slave (*doulos*) or bondsman (*desmios*) of Christ, he is describing a vertical relationship: Paul as servant of God. But more commonly he uses terms that express a three-cornered relationship: servant or agent of X (AC) to/for Y. Paul spells this out in Rom 1.5-6: 'Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we received apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the Gentiles' [RSV]. Thus with the phrase *theou diakonoi* at 2 Cor 6.4, the emphasis is not so much on service to God (though that is always implied) as on the message or commission he is entrusted to perform to a third party (the

³⁰ There are no signs in Paul that the sacramental functions of baptism and Eucharistic presidency were limited to the apostles. Paul does baptize on occasions, but does not regard baptism as his sole responsibility (1 Cor 1.14-17). Similarly there is no indication that Paul regarded presiding at the Eucharist as an apostolic task: indeed 1 Cor 11 suggests the opposite. It would have been impractical in any case! But 1 Cor 10 & 11 also indicates Paul was very much concerned with the proper regulation of the Lord's Supper, and has a strong sense of its meaning and what it should mean in the life of the church: he is concerned to pass on the authentic words of the Jesus-tradition, and does not hesitate to pronounce 'It is not the Lord's Supper that you eat' (1 Cor 11.20).

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recipients of the message): Paul is using the term *diakonia* here in its common sense of ‘go-between’: that is, a messenger or commissioned agent.³² A similar idea can also be expressed metaphorically in terms of the ambassador (*presbeus*: 2 Cor 5.20).³³

The ‘three-cornered’ aspect of this relationship comes out particularly clearly in the metaphor of the *oikonomos* (steward or household manager) in 1 Cor 4.1-7. It is a useful reminder that Paul (and his readers) are used to living and working in an *Upstairs-Downstairs* world, the world of enormous households and absentee landlords more familiar to the Victorians (or to Downton Abbey!) than to ourselves. As ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’, Paul (and Apollos) are fellow-servants with the saints, serving the same master, tasked with provisioning and resourcing the household of God — but not subject to its judgement. The only judgement Paul will submit to is that of the master himself (‘I am a servant, but I am not your servant’). Paul’s master is Christ, not the church: we may be ‘your servants’ but only ‘for Christ’s sake’ (2 Cor 4.5). But equally, the steward is a fellow-servant, not a master, and has no right to act as if he is: to ‘lord it over’ your fellow-servants (‘acting the master’ 2 Cor 1.24) is always suspect in the leadership paraenesis of the NT (cf. 1 Peter 5.3; Lk 22.25//). Paul uses the same image to make a different point in Romans 14.4: ‘Who are you to judge another’s servant (*allotriou oiketen*)? He will stand or fall before his own master. And he will be upheld, for the master is able to make him stand’. This stewardship metaphor also underlies many of the Gospel parables about the absentee landlord and the household servants (esp. in Matthew) — parables that may well be addressed to church leaders.

We are familiar enough with the concept of Christ as Lord (or Head: cf. Ephesians 4) of the church. What we often fail to perceive, however, is that this vertical relationship, this third dimension, radically destabilizes conventional models of leadership and authority.³⁴ It is this triangular relationship that gives apostolic leadership — indeed all church leadership — its distinctive ethos. Like his local leaders, Paul has an authority that is real and demands respect. But he is very reluctant to use it (1 Cor 4.18-21). His strategy is best understood as seeking to keep the triangular framework equilateral. Thus in 1 Cor 3, where Paul is concerned with a church that is inclined to accord too high a status to the various apostles and preachers who come their way, he is at pains to stress the subordination of the messengers to the master who sent them: ‘What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants (*diakonoi*) through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each’ (1 Cor 3.5). The servants may be conceived as gardeners (‘I planted, Apollos watered’: 1 Cor 3.6) or as builders (‘I laid a foundation, and another man is building upon it’: 1 Cor 3.10): none of that alters the hierarchical relationship between the *diakonoi* and their principal, the God who owns the field and makes the plants grow (3.7-9), or who owns the temple and (in a slightly mixed metaphor!) acts as its foundation-stone (1 Cor 3.10-11, 16). In 2 Cor, by contrast, where the church is inclined to under-value his apostolic credentials, Paul (without in any way collapsing the hierarchical relationship) stresses the dignity and ‘sufficiency’ of his status as *diakonos theou* (‘our sufficiency is of

³² As argued correctly by John N. Collins, *Diakonia*, pp.197-98.

³³ 2 Cor 5.20. Cf. A. Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ* (WUNT 2/92; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1997).

³⁴ As Steven Croft rightly observes, this is the essential and inescapable force of the Gospel teaching on leadership (Mk 10.41-45; Lk 22.24-27), and is unmistakably acted out in John 13. Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church* (2nd ed; London: DLT 2008), ch.4.

God') — though in an ironic manner that underlines that the essential character of apostolic ministry is determined by the paradoxical power-in-weakness of the cross of Christ.³⁵ The ideal relationship between leaders and led is the serene, healthy relationship Paul enjoys with the **Philippians**, with a strong, equally-balanced sense of God's faithfulness and empowering both of the church and of the apostle (chs 1, 2), both based on the cross-shaped paradigm of Christ (chs 2, 3). This establishes an equilateral relationship between Paul and the church, expressed in that wonderful phrase 'partnership [or: fellowship: *koinonia*] in the Gospel' (Philippians 1.5, 4.15), and in the ultimate expression of interactive confidence: 'My God shall supply all *your* need'.

3.6. The Pauline Legacy: Acts and the Pastorals

I conclude that the book of Acts offers a faithful reading of a three-dimensional model of leadership that is deeply embedded in the Pauline letters. The letters make it clear that Paul has high expectations of the local church as the body of Christ in a particular locality, called and empowered by God. He expects that local body to carry out within itself a number of (in our terms) 'leadership functions'; he expects there to be people within the body with the appropriate gifts to carry out those functions; and he expects the congregations to recognise and endorse them. He does not (in the core epistles) call them 'elders', but he does use a variety of other titles including *episkopos* and *diakonos*. The letters also make it clear that, though there is no evidence of Paul selecting or 'ordaining' such leaders himself, he does support and endorse their leadership, not least by enlisting them among his *sunergoi* or co-workers.

Acts thus offers a helpful vantage point from which to survey the future development of church office. Like Hebrews and 1 Peter, Acts stands at a point where the apostolic generation is passing away (Paul is about to leave them) and shows a consciousness for the future training and validation of the local leadership. One way to secure this is to demonstrate an 'apostolic succession' by making explicit the endorsement and training of local leaders that is implicit in the core epistles: to have Paul lay hands on elders in Lycaonia, and address them in person in Miletus. 1 Peter 5 follows a similar strategy, and 1 Clement (and eventually Eusebius) cement the relationship more firmly. The Pastoral Epistles also stand at this moment of transition. We don't know whether these letters are from the hand of Paul himself, or "school of Paul" (// "Jazz-funk-fusion Paul"//), perhaps incorporating fragments of genuine Paul — or even if they were all written by the same person.³⁶ But they certainly come from a late stage in the apostle's ministry, after the end of Acts, and show a similar set of concerns: Paul in prison (2 Tim), concerned about false teaching, managing and organising his team and preparing them to carry on without him. 1 Tim and Titus show this delegation in action, creating an apostolic link to the elders of the local churches via Timothy and Titus and offering a very specific set of instructions for leadership training.

So are there any bishops in the Pauline churches? Yes, but not as we know them!

As you will have noticed (I hope!), the *episkopoi* in Philippians and Acts (the earliest references we have) belong very clearly to the (group) leadership of the local church.

³⁵ 2 Cor 3.1-6; 2 Cor 12 – 13.

³⁶ On the debate over the authorship of the Pastorals, cf. Howard Marshall's ICC commentary.

Episkopoi are differentiated from *diakonoi*, but the term seems to be interchangeable with *presbuteroi* (and may indeed simply be a local variant, used in Asia Minor but not in Macedonia). So do we have a three-fold order in Paul's letters? Not exactly — but we can begin to see where it came from. What we do find in Paul's letters is:

- A pluriform **local leadership**, covering multiple functions including the ministry of the word and the administration of practical and pastoral support; various terms are used to describe these functions, including *diakonos* and *episkopos*. Though there is no clear indication as to how they are differentiated, we can see here in embryo the two-fold order of presbyter and deacon.
- Plus the **trans-local, itinerant ministry** of evangelism and exhortation (visiting and building up scattered local congregations), exercised by the apostles across the whole church.

At this stage, then, we might say that it is the apostles, not the local *episkopoi*, who represent the third order of trans-local oversight. The *episkopoi* may have some kind of second-order supervisory role over 'deacons' and other local ministers, but they belong firmly within the leadership of the local church. The plural in Philippians 1.1 makes it clear that these are not territorial bishops in the later mode (a town the size of Philippi would never have more than one 'bishop'); but we should remember that since all Christians met in 'house-churches' at this date, the *episkopoi* may be some kind of local leadership team drawing together the leaders of house-churches — we simply don't know! Even in the Pastorals, where we can begin to see a gradual shift from a two-fold order of *presbuteroi* and *diakonoi* (Titus) to a three-fold order where one of the *presbuteroi* is singled out as *episkopos* to have some kind of supervisory role or 'oversight' over the rest (1 Tim), there is no sign that the *episkopos* has taken over the role of the itinerant apostle. That still belongs to Paul and his travelling team.

And this is still a long way from the developed system of the monarchical episcopate as we see it in Ignatius and Polycarp in the second century. In fact the move from 'local' to 'trans-local' leadership — and the bid to capture the teaching authority of the apostles — happens quite slowly and piecemeal over the second and third centuries.³⁷ The *episkopoi* in effect remain leaders of the local church: they just gradually

- assume a *primus inter pares* primacy within the local teams of *diakonoi* and *presbuteroi*;
- enlarge and solidify the definition of locality to include a city and its surrounding region (*dioikesis*);
- capture the apostolic authority of the trans-local apostles (apostolic succession), which they then transmit by ordination to local *presbuteroi* (I Clement);
- create a concept of local *monarchia* to isolate and marginalise all other forms of spiritual authority within their *provincia* (Ignatius);
- and in the process marginalize the range of leadership roles open to women (patronage, prophecy).
- Moving to a priestly view of ministry may also have helped in creating an increasingly firm (even ontological) distinction between clergy and laity.³⁸

³⁷ The *Didache* (ch.11) is revealing here: there are still itinerant 'prophets and apostles', who are treated with residual respect but also with a marked degree of suspicion; priestly tithes to be given to local teachers.

³⁸ On the distinction see further Karen Jo Torjesen, 'Clergy and Laity,' in Susan A. Harvey & David G. Hunter (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: OUP 2008), pp.389-405.

- (g) But the bishops (at least in the East) always maintained a healthy resistance to any kind of global primacy.³⁹ The view expressed trenchantly in Pearson's *Exposition of the Creed*, in which Christ remains the sole head of the church and sole focus of unity, is much more in line with the NT and early church.

But the church is still (even in the second century) a long way from the developed form of *episkope* as it appears after Constantine, with the bishop as an equivalent of the secular magnate, exercising monarchical authority within his own tightly-controlled diocese or *dioikesis* (significant that this is a term taken over from secular administration of the Roman empire), and a tiered (and increasingly tightly-controlled) hierarchy of *presbuteroi* and *diakonoι* beneath him. This form of episcopacy was only fully consolidated after the Constantinian settlement.

³⁹ On eastern (and western) resistance to Roman claims to exercise a primatial leadership over other sees, cf. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.22-24. Loveday Alexander, 'Community and Canon: Reflections on the Ecclesiology of Acts,' in Anatoly Alexeev, Christos Karakolis, Ulrich Luz, & Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (ed.), *Einheit der Kirche im Neuen Testament: Dritte europäischer orthodox-westliche Exegetenkonferenz in Sankt Petersburg 24.-31. August 2005* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008): 45-78.

PART FOUR: THREE-DIMENSIONAL EPISKOPE TODAY

If we reframe the question, *where* do we find *episkope* in the NT, the answer is that it is there, not always verbally, but clearly visible in all 3 dimensions

- *Episkope* at local level: the ‘bishops and deacons’ of the local church
- *Episkope* at trans-local level: the *Episkope* of the apostles
- *Episkope* in the 3rd dimension: the shepherd and bishop of your souls.

This snapshot of emergent church order that we find in Paul reveals a complex, three-dimensional leadership structure that does not readily fit the structures of top-down management theory. Leadership is found at different levels. There is indigenous leadership operating at local level, within the congregation (‘your leaders’). There is leadership of a different kind operating at trans-local level, speaking in the voice of authoritative teaching and *paraklesis* to a group of churches, sending delegates and greetings, promising to visit: leadership in a second dimension. And both types of leadership profess allegiance and accountability to the Lord of the Church, leadership in the third dimension.

Such a leadership structure might seem impossibly complex: but in fact analogies are not far to seek. We might, for example, compare the structure of a modern orchestra, where the ‘leader’ of the orchestra is neither the owner nor the employer of the orchestra, but the (elected?) leader of a collegial body of independent musicians. Another level of leadership (itinerant, trans-local, visionary, charismatic) is offered by the conductors who visit the orchestra and lead it in performance: their relationship is symbolized by the handshake between conductor and leader at the end of a performance. But both would claim to be operating in the service of a higher allegiance to the music itself, offering an interpretation, articulation or embodiment of the author’s designs. A football team might provide another illuminating analogy (cf. the importance of the ‘role model’ aspect of leadership in the recent rows over the captaincy of the England football team).

The next stage — in an ideal world — would be to sit down (preferably in groups) and do a ‘mapping exercise’ to work out how our own structures fit into this pattern. Whenever I’ve done this with a group, we always spend long time arguing over where the Vicar fits onto the map — and normally conclude that the traditional parish priest comes at the intersection of ‘local’ and ‘trans-local’: ‘apostolic’ in being ‘sent’ from outside the parish (traditionally selected and trained outside the parish, and ushered in by the bishop complete with flying phalanx of local clergy), but called to exercise a very distinctive kind of local leadership, rooted in (and answerable to) a particular parish (with all the tensions that implies).

But we need to beware the hermeneutical trap of thinking we just have to rediscover the primitive truth of some notional ‘biblical pattern’ and think ourselves back into it. Church history is littered with attempts to do this — which are always illusory, and always fail. In fact one of the first conclusions we can draw from this exercise is that church order is never static — it keeps evolving to fit the ever-changing needs and challenges of a changing world (as we saw in the reformation period). In fact arguably this is one of the prime tasks of ‘re-imagining ministry’ — the task of listening with attentiveness and sensitivity to the needs of God’s world and the call of God’s Spirit. But that listening process also has to be attuned to the roots of

our tradition, and to the words of Scripture: and I believe the Bible does give us, not a transferable, once-for-all blueprint of church order, but the fundamental principles ('canons', in the Greek, carpenter's rules) by which we need to order the life of the church in our generation, responding to our world. (And perhaps here we might take a second lesson from the 17th century — let's not have a Civil War about it!) The task of 're-imagining ministry' is to seek forms of church life adapted to our changing circumstances, while retaining continuity with the tradition and congruity with the unchanging truths of scripture. So in this final section I want to draw out what I believe are some of the enduring principles of Pauline ecclesiology — *episkope* for a 21st-century church.

4.1 The church needs the local dimension of episkope.

The original Pauline *episkopoi* were, as we have seen, part of the local leadership team; and this aspect of *locality* points, I believe, to an essential aspect of the well-being of the church under God. Essentially, this means that the first 'order of ministry' in the church of the NT is the *laos*, the people of God, living out their calling to be God's people in the particular locality where they live. The local church in Paul's ecclesiology is never just a sub-department of a global organisation: it is *the* church in Philippi or Corinth or Rome, a local instantiation — 'incarnation,' we might say — of what it means to live within the reality of God's kingdom in the world. And its 'locality', its localization in a particular place, is of the essence of what it means to be the church, rooted in, listening to, and answerable to a particular *local* community.⁴⁰ We need to recover the insight that the local church (warts and all, as Oliver Cromwell might have said) is God's prime agent for carrying out God's mission in the world — you and me, in other words: the people of God, empowered and energised by God for God's work in the world. Like Roland Allen, I return again and again to the astonishing trustfulness of an apostle: *you* (he says) are the people of God, *you* are the place where God is at work.⁴¹

And the proliferation of multiple forms of local ministry is the concrete evidence (*arrabon*) and outworking of this divine energy: *because* God is at work in you, there are varieties of gifts, and varieties of ministries (1 Cor 12.4-6). That was Paul's experience — and I believe it is one of the remarkable (and hopeful) signs of God's energy at work in the church today that we have seen such a proliferation of local ministries in recent decades, both lay and ordained. This can be theorized as the re-discovery of "every-member ministry" — or of "the ministry of all the baptized" — or "the order of the laity". Sometimes it is experienced (as so many of us have experienced it) as the call of God to individuals, to serve as Readers, or PWs, or NSM, or OLM, or worship leaders, or youth workers Sometimes it is experienced simply as a practical necessity — parish re-organization, part-time clergy, falling numbers of stipendiary clergy, you name it — with all the negative connotations of change ('it's not like it was in the old days'). Of course it was much easier when you

⁴⁰ Steve Croft has some good things to say on this — cf. *Ministry in Three Dimensions*, pp.70-72. In my triangular diagram, this would be the point at which the local dimension of ministry encounters the world — the local community.

⁴¹ This was the burden of Roland Allen's seminal essay, *Missionary Methods: St Paul's or Ours?* (London: Robert Scott, 1912; repr. London: World Dominion Movement, 1960).

could leave it all to the clergy ...but maybe we should stop grumbling and rejoice at the re-emergence of a more biblical pattern of ministry.⁴²

These new patterns of ministry place new demands on both clergy and laity. Clergy are much more likely now to find themselves working in a ‘leadership team’ — another return to the biblical pattern, where the lone pastor was unknown — and managing a confusing variety of lay ministries. Clergy increasingly report finding their time taken up in ‘management’ rather than in front-line pastoral work.⁴³ Again, it is refreshing to return to the Pauline churches and discover that ‘leadership’ (whatever you call it) is just one among many of the gifts of the Spirit — but that it is a real gift, demanding specific skills — and real respect (leadership as a 2-way process). Leadership isn’t needed in a one-man band! Paul’s letters are a rich resource for practical models for team-work and collaborative ministry, operating in a much more fluid and complex ministry structure than what we regard as the ‘norm’ of the traditional parish structure.⁴⁴

You might respond that the Church of England has never lost its commitment to ‘locality’, and in many ways I would agree. The parish structure (‘a Christian presence in every community’, as it says on the C of E website) is one of the glories of the Church of England — a commitment valued and recognised even by non-Christians in an era when local pubs, shops, and businesses are under threat, and the vicar is often the last ‘professional’ left who actually lives over the shop. It’s one of the things that makes me proud to be an Anglican. The problem is not that the parish has ceased to be important (I think it’s crucial) but that society is changing around it, and with it our experience of locality. *Mission-Shaped Church* and the Fresh Expressions movement have encouraged us to think more searchingly about what we mean by ‘locality:’ is our ‘locality’ where we eat and sleep and send our kids to school (and not much else), or where most adults spend their waking hours — i.e. in the workplace? Is it where we shop? Or is it the virtual world we inhabit when we’re on-line? What are we doing to resource a Christian presence in those (equally real) localities, and how do they relate to the actual physical church buildings that imprint God’s presence so powerfully on our landscape? Much food for thought there — not in competition with the parish but as an enhancement of it.

4.2 The church needs the trans-local (‘apostolic’) dimension of episkope.

It is no coincidence that the period after the death of the apostles saw the *episkopoi* of the local church gradually assuming a more ‘apostolic’ role. As a historian, I have to concur (I’m afraid) with Peter Moulin and the reformers over against Lancelot

⁴² Let’s be frank — these new forms of ministry often rub along uneasily with the inherited parish structures developed over centuries, where the vicar is seen as an ‘external’ ministry coming from outside, and often in tension with the ongoing internal stewardship (and sensitivity to local issues) of the home team. There is an urgent need for parish structures to catch up with cultural change within the church — we can no longer work on the inherited assumption of that a parish team consists of one parson and 2 church wardens per parish.

⁴³ This is one of the clearest findings from recent Ministry Division research exercises, and of studies such as Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions* (ch.1).

⁴⁴ For a refreshing and engaging dialogue between Paul’s leadership style and contemporary management theory, cf. Richard S. Ascough and Sandy Cotton, *Passionate Visionary: Leadership Lessons from the Apostle Paul* (Ottawa: Novalis [St Paul University] 2008). ISBN 81-7109-769-3.

Andrews on this: this was essentially a contingent and human historical process, responding to changing circumstances. But this doesn't mean that it was all about the corruption of power, as Calvin argued (though, humans being human, that will always be a factor to reckon with). Neither does it mean such contingent and human processes are outside the providence of God (as Andrews feared). However we might analyse the social and human mechanisms by which this move took place, I believe it has to be seen as a recognition of and response to an essentially theological perception: that the well-being of the Church, its right ordering under God, demands the kind of trans-local *episkope* that the apostles provided. The Church simply could not afford to lose the foundational gift of apostolic leadership, which had been exercised by Paul and the other apostles right from the start (Eph 4.11, 1 Cor 12.28), and had to find ways of accommodating it into the new post-apostolic world — and to find stories and succession mechanisms to maintain the essential continuity between the two worlds.

The key elements of this form of *episkope* are traditionally summed up under three heads: catholicity, apostolicity, and unity.

- **Catholicity:** One thing that is absolutely clear from Paul's letters is that there is no place in biblical ecclesiology for the go-it-alone church: catholicity, connectedness, is built in to the church's DNA right from the start. Luther recognised this is a function of the episcopate: "How, in what institutional form, it occurs is variable .. But that it should happen cannot be open to discussion, for in it a dimension of the church is expressed which belongs to its essence: its catholicity, that is to say its unity in the truth through space and time. This dimension of catholicity is given with the Gospel itself and therefore with the ministry of proclamation in preaching and sacrament in itself."⁴⁵ Other reformed traditions have developed different modes of maintaining this 'catholic' dimension of oversight (in the Methodist church, for example, oversight operates through the instruments of Connexion, especially the President of Conference): but no church can afford to dispense with it altogether.
- The maintenance of **Unity** was early recognised as an essential function of the episcopate — a function, as Calvin recognised, precisely of the *imparity* of the office. Luther again: "The unity of the Church therefore consists in this being linked together under one head through the same Gospel and the same ministry. ... But so that everything should happen in an orderly fashion in the Church according to the rule of Paul and the shepherds should be more strongly bound together ..., and that the one should take on a duty of care for the other and divisions or schisms should be avoided, the useful rule came about, that out of many presbyters one bishops was elected, who should lead the Church through the teaching of the Gospel and the upholding of discipline, and should preside over the presbyters.... This ordering of the Church, if those who preside carry out their duty, is beneficial for the upholding of the unity of the Church."⁴⁶ But the Bible makes it clear that maintaining apostolic unity is not about masking or glossing over substantial differences and disagreements:

⁴⁵ Wendebourg, 'The Reformation in Germany and the Episcopal Office,' p.54.

⁴⁶ Wendebourg, 'The Reformation in Germany and the Episcopal Office,' p.54.

you've only to look at Galatians 2 to see Paul standing up to Peter ("I accused him to his face") to appreciate the real force of Paul's commitment to unity in 1 Cor 1-3. Paul's letters are a rich resource on the centrality and the cost of maintaining unity-in-diversity, in the apostolic body.⁴⁷

- The third function, that of **apostolicity**, is classically seen in the maintenance of continuity in the teaching ministry of the church. This goes right back to Paul himself (cf. his quotations of apostolic tradition in 1 Cor 11 and 15), and surfaces prominently at the time when the apostolic generation is seen to be passing away: it's no coincidence that Paul's Miletus speech shows the same concern over false teachers as the Pastorals and the later epistles. Crucial to the biblical concept of apostolicity is fidelity to the Jesus tradition: the apostles were (before the Gospels were written down) the living chain of tradition that kept the church in touch with its Master, the ones who told the stories and maintained the memory that kept alive the scattered churches' umbilical link with Jesus. But this is not just about words or books: integral to Paul's concept of the apostolic lifestyle is *imitatio, mimesis*: the apostle is called first and foremost to model the Christ-like life, to be a living paradigm for a life centred on the cross of Christ.

4.3 The church must never lose sight of the vertical ('heavenly') dimension of episkope.

It's very easy (as much in the church as anywhere else!) to get caught up in 'leadership-speak,' in analysing and managing the relationships between leaders and led, local and trans-local, laity and clergy, stipendiary and non-stipendiary — all the fascinating complex of relationships on the horizontal plane, across the bottom of the leadership triangle I've been encouraging you to imagine. But all that is two-dimensional — it's important to get it right, but it needs to be relativized (and transformed) by what I've called the third dimension, the calling and empowering of *both* the church and its leaders by the one Lord and Head of the church. Somewhere recently I saw the wonderful maxim, "The main thing in any organisation is — that the main thing must *be* the main thing." As Archbishop Sentamu said in the Cathedral last week on his visitation to the diocese, the real challenge for the church today is — God.

It's interesting that the language of 'visitation' which we still use in connection with episcopal visits is a distant echo of the biblical concept of *episkope* as something *God* does. "The day of his visitation" (1 Peter 2.12, cf. Lk 19.44) is a phrase you might remember if you were brought up to read the AV — or to sing the *Benedictus* at Mattins:

- *He hath **visited** and redeemed his people*
- *The day-spring from on high hath **visited** us*⁴⁸.

The Greek verb *episkepsomai*, which lies behind this, is part of the same word-group as *episkopos* or 'bishop': hence the wonderful phrase (rather lost in modern

⁴⁷ Irenaeus' words are worth pondering on: 'And nonetheless all these lived in peace, and we also live in peace with one another, and the disagreement in the fast confirms our agreement in the faith'; 'And they parted from one another in peace, for the peace of the whole church was kept both by those who observed and by those who did not' (cited in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 5.24.13, 17).

⁴⁸ Luke 1.68, 78.

translations) in 1 Peter 2.25, “Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.”

GNB 1992	NIV 1984	CEB 2011	MESSAGE 1993	CEV 1985
Shepherd and Keeper of your souls	Shepherd and overseer of your souls	Shepherd and guardian of your lives	Kept for good by the Shepherd of your souls	The one who is your shepherd and protector

WYCLIFFE	TYNDALE	GENEVA	RHEIMS	KJV
Shepherd and bishop of your souls	Sheep-herd and bysshope of youre soules	Shepherd and Bishope of your soules	Pastor and Bishop of your soules	Shepherd and Bishop of your souls

When the verb is used of God, it has a range of meanings from judgement (“when he comes to hold assize” NEB 1 Pet 2.12) to salvation (“When God came to save you” GNB Lk 19.44). Either way, it is a salutary reminder that the Lord of the church is also the Lord of the world, the absentee master who leaves his servants to deploy their talents and run the household on his behalf, but will come back — at some unspecified time — to settle accounts. This familiar household metaphor lies behind a lot of biblical teaching on leadership: leadership in the church is always a commission to act on behalf of someone else, someone to whom leaders will have to render account (Heb 13.17). The awareness of this third dimension of leadership runs through all the biblical teaching on leadership, and has a profound effect on its ethos. 1 Peter expresses it nicely in terms of the shepherd and under-shepherds: “Feed the flock of God which is in your charge ... not lording it over the flock [assuming the status of lord, *kurios*, which doesn’t belong to you], but being examples to the flock; and when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory ...” (1 Pet 5.2-4). Shepherds do really have to lead their flocks — but the ethos that underlies this is the antithesis of top-down management. We find the same complex of ideas explored all over Paul’s letters (as we have seen) and the Gospels (which I haven’t had time to look at).

This is why the *apostolic* aspect of leadership (and indeed of the church) is important: to be an “apostle” is an agent, someone “sent” to act on another’s behalf — it gives you authority, but also responsibility (answerability) to your principal. But the apostles never act as agents of some global organisation called ‘the church plc’ — they are (as we all are) sent by Jesus Christ to act and speak and suffer in his behalf as his witnesses in the world. And this means being constantly thrown back to the example of leadership set by Jesus himself, a type of leadership diametrically opposed to secular models of leadership:

“The kings of the nations exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you: let the greatest among you be as the younger, and the leader [that is the word used here] as the one who serves [*ho diakonon*]. For which is greater, the one who sits at table, or the one who serves? Isn’t it the one sitting at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.” [Lk 22.25-27].

Enough! I could go on, but you’ve sat here long enough. I started with the question, “Are there any bishops in the Bible?” I hope I’ve said enough to indicate that while the question raises a fascinating set of historical questions, it also takes us into

something much deeper and (I believe) much more important. What I've tried to show (principally from St Paul) is that while the Bible doesn't give us a clear blueprint for or against episcopacy, it does give us a clear model for church leadership which (I believe) has profound implications and offers a rich resource for reflection on the challenges that face us today.

The Bible, to sum up, gives us:

- A dispersed model of authority: local and trans-local always in healthy tension.
- A collegiate model of authority: recognises authority in others. Requires trust. Allows for strong differences of opinion
- A three-dimensional model of authority: Christ as apex and sole focus of unity. Implications for communion?

What we see in church history, not least in the acrimonious disputes of the Civil War period (and still reflected in Bible translations) is a constant tendency to flatten out this complex 3-D model into something much simpler in management terms (but not necessarily more effective): catholic (ACB) or Protestant (ABC). Both, I would argue, are a travesty and distortion of the biblical pattern we find in the letters of Paul (and in the rest of the New Testament).

THANK YOU!

Loveday Alexander

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