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THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MINISTRY
IN THE FIRST CENTURY OF THE CHURCH

SHORT TITLE

FIRST CENTURY MINISTRY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty
of Graduate Studies, U.S. Army
Department of Theological Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Divinity

by
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June 1960

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY	3
The Ministry to the Whole Church	3
The apostolate	3
The apostolic delegate	9
The Spiritual Gifts and Ministries of the Church	11
The Local Ministry of the Church	13
The presbyter-bishop	13
The deacons	17
III. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MINISTRY IN THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS	18
Possible Episcopate of James in Jerusalem	18
The Arrangement in the Didache	19
The Letters of Ignatius	22
The Letter of Clement to the Corinthians .	25
The Data Found in Polycarp and the Shepherd of Hermas	27
IV. CONCLUSION	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY	31

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The nature of the ministry and the organization of the Church which surrounds that ministry has been a disputed point among Christians, especially since the Reformation. Today, much of Protestantism is divided on this point alone. Denominations take their names from the form or organization of the ministry, for example, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational Churches.

Today, as the Church expands her work of preaching the Gospel in a world grown indescribably complex, the problem of organization continues to raise its head. What freedom does the Church have in organizing itself? Does a present organization suffice or can it be reworked into a more suitable system?

In order that the Church might know the possibilities, it is good to delve into the past and examine the methods of the Church which have been used through the centuries. A critical examination of the various organizations of the Church in history will result in ideas which may bear fruit in application to the situation of the Church in the modern world.

It is with a view to initiating such a study that I offer this investigation of the organization of the ministry

in the New Testament and in the earliest of the Church Fathers. Unfortunately, the period allowed for the completion of this project has made it impossible to consult materials outside the library of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri.

Nevertheless, a consideration of the materials which are available will certainly not be in vain.

The fountainhead of the ministry of the New Testament was the apostolate. This apostolate had the unique commission from our Lord to organize the Christian Church. Without the apostolate, there could be no other ministry.

The term *apostolos* has a broad usage in the New Testament. It is used in the simple sense of "messenger" or "envoy" in John 13:16. Figuratively, the messenger of the evangelists is called an *apostolos* in Philippians 2:25. In 2 Corinthians 11:12, this term is used in a possible sense of "ecclesiastical" in reference to Titus. The apostles are God's messengers with the prophets in Luke 11:49. Revelation 18:20, 21, and Ephesians 3:10. Even Christ is called an *apostolos* with *apostoloi* in Hebrews 3:1. But, the predominant use is for the apostles, a group of highly honored believers who had a special function.⁸

⁸ W. D. Miller, *The Ancient Church, Its History, Doctrine, Discipline and Constitution* (New York: Arno D. P. London and Co., 1907), p. 211.

⁹ E. A. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 69.

CHAPTER II

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY

The Ministry to the Whole Church

The apostolate

The fountainhead of the ministry of the New Testament was the apostolate. This apostolate had the unique commission from our Lord to organize the Christian Church.¹ Without the apostolate, there could be no other ministry.

The term *ἀπόστολος* has a broad usage in the New Testament. It is used in the simple sense of "one sent" or "messenger" in John 13:16. Epaphroditus, the messenger of the Philippians is called an *ἀπόστολος* in Philippians 2:35. In 2 Corinthians 8:23, this term is used in a possible sense of a missionary in reference to Titus. The apostles are God's messengers with the prophets in Luke 11:49, Revelation 18:20, 2:2, and Ephesians 3:5. Even Christ is called an *ἀπόστολος* with *ἀρχιερεὺς* in Hebrews 3:1. But, the predominant use is for the apostles, a group of highly honored believers who had a special function.²

¹W. D. Killen, The Ancient Church, Its History, Doctrine, Worship and Constitution (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1883), p. 212.

²W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 99.

That special function of the apostle was to testify of Christ. According to Bishop Gore,

He is one, who, having seen Christ after His resurrection and so become qualified to witness to that fundamental fact, has received by no mediating hands, but personally from Christ a definite mission.³

Under such circumstances the apostles were, indeed, extraordinary functionaries possessing a gift of inspiration.⁴ Their authority came immediately from Christ.⁵ All the apostles saw our Lord after His resurrection.⁶

By the very nature of the definition, the apostle must have a mission. Bishop Gore states it in this manner:

But for an apostle, it is essential that this mission should be direct from Him who said, "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you." Such a direct mission, actual and unmistakable, from Christ, Himself, St. Paul believed himself to have received and was recognized as having received by his fellow apostles, who had been appointed in the more normal way while Christ was still on earth.⁷

There is more here than the nature of a definition. In Romans 10:15, St. Paul indicated that there can be no preaching without a mission. "How shall men preach, except they be sent?"⁸

³Charles Gore, The Church and the Ministry (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913), p. 214, citing 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Gal. 1:1.

⁴John 14:26; 16:13; 20:22.

⁵Matthew 10:1; 28:18-19.

⁶Killen, op. cit., p. 207, citing John 20:26; 21:1; Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 9:1.

⁷Gore, op. cit., p. 214.

⁸Ibid.

For this reason, the mission of the apostles is found in great evidence in the Gospels. In Matthew 28:16ff., eleven disciples are expressly mentioned as receiving the commission to make disciples of all the nations. Again also in St. Mark, the specific number is given.⁹ St. John speaks of the mission as given to "the disciples." This is the term which commonly refers to the twelve in his Gospel.¹⁰

With the mission of the Apostle is also authority. Our Lord bestowed two types of authority on the Church. As is stated in Matthew 18:15-18, He promises authority to the Church as the Church. He also extends authority to the Apostles as the administrative officers of the Church as He promised to St. Peter in Matthew 16:18-19.¹¹ Not only is there authority to bind and to loose, but also the authority of pastoral care, governing, and feeding was involved in the apostolic commission.¹² In view of the conferring of this authority and commission,

With them alone He celebrates the Last Supper and institutes the memorial of His death, which He commits to them to be perpetuated in the Church; to them He addresses the last discourses, which are calculated to prepare them in character and intelligence for the withdrawal of His visible presence and the substitution for it of that new and higher mode of inward presence by His Spirit, which He should give to His Church when

⁹Ibid., p. 209, citing Matthew 28:16; Mark 16:14-15.

¹⁰Gore, op. cit., p. 210.

¹¹Ibid., p. 207.

¹²Ibid., p. 211, citing John 21:15-17.

He was glorified. In all this Christ was dealing with them no less as apostles than as representative disciples.¹³

So, from the very beginning the disciples appear as a body amongst whom eleven or, with Matthias, twelve are held to possess a ministerial office and commission direct from Christ.¹⁴

With such a great commission and authority, it follows that the qualifications must have been exacting. As mentioned in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (Revised Standard Version). The primary requirement of the ministry of the apostle is faithfulness to Christ.¹⁵ Moreover, the office of the apostle required and involved an absolute subordination and at the same time a lofty authority. On the one hand, the apostle was the slave of Jesus Christ. As he had no personal arbitrary lordship over the faith of the disciples, so he could proclaim nothing of his own; it was beyond his power to alter the tradition which made up his message.¹⁶ In the language of the New Testament the apostle was personally a *δούλος*, as in Romans 1:1. Officially he was an *ὑπερέτης* as in 1 Corinthians 4:1, or a *δούκονος* as in 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 4:1.¹⁷

¹³Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 215, footnote 2.

¹⁶Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, footnote 2.

Being a messenger and a slave to the One who sent him necessarily implies that the primary function of the apostle was the proclamation of his message. This was not only the primary function but also the highest.¹⁸ The message which the apostle proclaimed was the word of reconciliation which God had put in him (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).¹⁹ The exercise of this highest function led inevitably to the secondary functions of the organization of the first churches.²⁰ Bishop Gore expresses the idea well in this manner:

The apostle accordingly was a founder and ruler of churches, with divine authority given him for their edification--ruling them all alike on the basis of a common tradition of doctrine and practice, and claiming from them the obedience of affectionate children to their spiritual father.²¹

There was in the apostle more than a word which he proclaimed. There was given to him a power over the sins of individuals to retain or forgive them, not merely in a supernatural sense in the spiritual sphere but also in the physical sphere in which admonition in a physical sense could be administered by the apostle.²²

The apostle became a "steward of the mysteries of God"--

¹⁸Gore, op. cit., p. 214; Killen, op. cit., p. 213, citing 1 Cor. 14-17; Eph. 3:8.

¹⁹Gore, op. cit., pp. 215-216.

²⁰Killen, op. cit., p. 212.

²¹Gore, op. cit., p. 215, citing 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:14; 1 Cor. 4:15-21; 11:16-34; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10.

²²Gore, op. cit., p. 216, citing 1 Tim. 1:20; 1 Cor. 5:5.

an administrator, that is, of the divine revelations which had been the secret of God through the ages, but were now declared and proclaimed through Jesus Christ, our incarnate Lord. 1 Corinthians 4:1 uses the term *οἰκονόμος*.²³

But, in all this lofty mission and function, the apostle cannot be a lord or an autocrat. Although St. Paul feels that he has the Holy Spirit, he distinguishes carefully and clearly between his personal opinion and commands given by divine authority. This can be clearly seen in 1 Corinthians 7:6,10,12,25,40. Only verse 10 is stated as a holy command. This is an excellent example of St. Paul's careful handling of authority. Passages in 2 Corinthians 1:24 and 1 Peter 5:3 warn against domineering use of authority. The false use of apostolic authority in teaching error carries a curse with it (Galatians 1:8).²⁴

In spite of all their great gifts, the apostles were not to remain on earth for longer than a normal lifetime. As the years passed on, the apostles arranged for the transfer of the administration of the church to those who would carry on after their passing. As the Church assumed a settled form, the apostles mingled with the elders on terms of equality. At the Council of Jerusalem, they sat with them in the same deliberative assemblies.²⁵ Paul, addressing the

²³Gore, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

²⁴Ibid., p. 215, footnote 2.

²⁵Killen, op. cit., p. 212, citing Acts 15:6; 16:4; 20:17-25.

elders of Ephesus for the last time, commends the Church to their charge emphasizing the importance of fidelity and vigilance. Aware that their circumstances were peculiar and that their services would not be available to the end of time, they left the ecclesiastical government, as they passed away one after the other, to the care of the elders who had meanwhile shared in its administration.²⁶

Bishop Gore summarizes in this manner:

It would appear, then, that Christ founded not only a Church but an apostolate in the Church, an apostolate, moreover, which was intended in some real sense to be permanent; this apostolic office included all that was necessary to perpetuate that mission on which the Father had sent the Son into the world: it involved the authority to teach in Christ's name, to govern, and to feed, and in this sense was described as a stewardship and pastorate: in order to its function of government, a supernatural sanction was attached to its legislative and judicial authority: and finally the two great sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist were committed to its administration.²⁷

The apostle had the care of all the churches. He represented the general church rather than the particular. His ministry was universal or catholic.²⁸

The apostolic delegate

Timothy and Titus were the apostolic supervisors of Ephesus and Crete respectively.²⁹ These men were not what

²⁶Killien, op. cit., p. 212, citing Acts 20:17-25,29-31.

²⁷Gore, op. cit., pp. 211-212.

²⁸Ibid., p. 217.

²⁹Ibid., p. 225.

St. Paul and the other apostles were, namely, the original proclaimers of a revelation. In this sense, they stand in the second rank. They were entrusted, rather, with the task of maintaining a tradition, of upholding a pattern of sound words.³⁰ Beyond the ordinary gifts for Christian life, the apostolic delegate was qualified for his work by a special ministerial gift, or charisma, imparted by the laying on of hands of the apostle or with the accompaniment of the laying on of hands by the presbytery.³¹ Their function was to govern the churches committed to their charge. They ordained men to the church orders after being duly satisfied of their fitness, and exercised discipline even over the presbyters.³² Bishop Gore considers the office of the apostolic delegate to be essentially that of the later episcopal office with the sole exception that it was not permanently localized. Dr. Lightfoot concurs with this view.³³ However, there is no clear evidence in these Epistles that Timothy and Titus were authorized to set up successors to themselves in their offices.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid., citing 2 Tim. 1:13; 1 Tim. 1:3; 4:11-13; 5:22; 6:3; Titus 1:5.

³¹ Gore, op. cit., p. 228, citing 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6-7.

³² Gore, op. cit., p. 225, citing Titus 1:5; 1 Tim. 5:22.

³³ Gore, op. cit., p. 226, footnote 2.

³⁴ Gore, op. cit., p. 227.

Bishop Gore summarizes this unique office in this manner:

All that we may fairly conclude is that St. Paul, after ordaining, or with a view to ordaining, the local ministers, bishops and deacons, appointed delegates to exercise the apostolic office of supervision in his place, both before and after his death.³⁵

The Spiritual Gifts and Ministries of the Church

According to Matthew 18:15-18, a supernatural authority inheres in the Church as a body but the Church has, by the authority of Christ, executive officers and it is through them that her judicial powers are put into effect.³⁶ In these executive officers, a great variety of spiritual gifts are given to the Church by God. Gore sees them as a

Spiritual heirarchy of graduated orders or powers, with apostles, prophets, teachers, rulers, helpers, ministers of mercy and exhortation, workers of miracles, speakers with tongues, interpreters--each class being not self-constituted, but instituted and empowered of God.³⁷

Being empowered by God, they each have the gifts or necessary for their respective offices. Ephesians 4:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 12:28³⁸ are lists of the offices and in 1 Corinthians 12 can be found the gifts connected with such offices.³⁹

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., p. 207.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 218-219.

³⁸Ibid., p. 218, footnote 3.

³⁹Killen, op. cit., p. 206.

Timothy and Titus, as well as Philip, had special commissions to assist in the organizing of the infant Church and were furnished with extraordinary gifts.⁴⁰

In the midst of the remarkable variety of gifts given the Church, it is extremely difficult to assign particular terms to individual offices. The *πρωτεύμενος* of the Thessalonians and the Romans is equivalent to the "office of government" among the Corinthians. The "bishop" of the Philipians is equivalent to the pastor-teacher of the Ephesians or the "presbyter" of the Pastoral Epistles. There is even a variance in the terms for the apostolate. 1 Corinthians 3:5 calls the apostolate a *δουκονία*. In Acts 1:20, it is also called an *ἐπισκοπή*.⁴¹

In spite of the lack of precision in terminology, there were certain characteristics which were definite. According to Bishop Gore,

There was, we should gather, a college or group of "presidents" or "bishops" in each community who discharged the office of government, and acted subordinately to the apostles and prophets, as pastors and teachers of the flock. To these was attached the "assistant" ministry of the "deacons." This is borne out in the Pastoral Epistles, where we learn further that these local "presidents" or "bishops" were also known as "presbyters."⁴²

This can be further understood in the sense of the terms

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, citing 2 Tim. 1:6; 4:5; Titus 1:5; Acts 8:5,13.

⁴¹ Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 221, footnote 1.

⁴² Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 221, citing Titus 1:5-7.

used in 1 Corinthians 12:28. Here we find *κυβερνήσεις*, government, administration, and *βοηθήσεις* helps listed among the offices and ministries which God has placed in the Church.⁴³ According to Lindsay, the elders had the government or the administration and the deacons were the helps.⁴⁴

The Local Ministry of the Churches

The presbyter-bishop

Πρεσβύτερος is a term which had a broad usage in both secular and religious spheres of life. In the Graeco-Roman civilization, it denoted an official or ruler.⁴⁵ The Jews applied the same term to an official of the synagogue before 70 A.D. Bearing in mind the connotations of both Jewish and Gentile usage, the Christian Church used the term for officials of both secular and religious natures.⁴⁶ Considering the religious use of the term in the Church, a number of scholars have attempted to establish the relationship between *ἐπίσκοπος* and *πρεσβύτερος* as one of function and the

⁴³Thomas M. Lindsay, The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries (New York: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), p. 149.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 154.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Arndt and Gingrich, op. cit., p. 706.

technical name of the respective office.⁴⁷

The fact that the *ἐπισκοπος* is also called a *πρεσβύτερος* may also imply a dignity which is due to age. The term, in itself, retains its natural meaning and can be used in antithesis to young men as it is in 1 Peter 5:5 and Clement to the Corinthians 1:3. However, this cannot be pressed too far as still another term can be called forth to represent old men, *πρεσβύτερος*, as in Titus 2:2.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, it appears that the two terms were used interchangeably in the New Testament. These terms were also equivalent to pastors and teachers as they also involved instruction and government.⁴⁹ There was a plurality of elders in each church, constituting the *πρεσβυτέριον*.⁵⁰ They were appointed to take care of the Church of God.⁵¹ The elders were the guardians and rulers of the "flock of God," styled pastors and shepherds. They were required to act as faithful

⁴⁷Lindsay, op. cit., p. 160, citing Lightfoot, Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians (6th edition; 1881), pp. 95ff.; Loening, Die Gemeindeverfassung des Urchristentums (1889), pp. 58ff.; Loofs, Studien und Kritiken (1890), pp. 682ff.; Schmiedel, Encyclopaedia Biblica (1902), pp. 3134ff.

⁴⁸Gore, op. cit., p. 223, footnote 1-2.

⁴⁹Killen, op. cit., p. 208, citing Acts 21:17-28; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Peter 5:1-2; 1 Timothy 3:1,2,5.

⁵⁰Gore, op. cit., p. 224, citing 1 Tim. 4:14; Killen, op. cit., p. 208, citing Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; James 5:14.

⁵¹Killen, op. cit., p. 209, citing 1 Tim. 3:5.

pastors under Christ, the Chief Shepherd. While some were only pastors or rulers, others were also teachers.⁵² The elders that ruled well were to be considered worthy of double honor.⁵³ Those that did not rule well were to be looked after. But, in order that there be no unjust slander, no accusation against an elder could be considered unless it was supported by at least two witnesses.⁵⁴

Apart from the similarities with regard to ruling which the Christian presbyter had in common with his Jewish counterpart, there were certain aspects about his ministry which were unique. Bishop Gore describes these aspects in this manner:

But, on the other hand, while Jewish presbyters had been merely judicial officers, and not officers of worship, nor teachers, the Christian presbyters have assigned to them by St. James a "ministry of healing" (James 5:14-16), both of body and soul, with accompanying prayer, which has no analogy in the Jewish presbyterate, while it accords naturally with general pastoral functions assigned to the presbyterate by St. Peter (1 Peter 5:1-5).⁵⁵

Lindsay feels that nothing but the name "elder" was borrowed.⁵⁶ The presbyter-bishops shared the apostolic stewardship, not only in the sense of administration but also in

⁵²Killen, op. cit., p. 208, citing Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; 1 Tim. 5:17.

⁵³Killen, op. cit., p. 209; Lindsay, op. cit., p. 147.

⁵⁴Lindsay, op. cit., 147, citing 1 Tim. 5:17-20.

⁵⁵Gore, op. cit., p. 232.

⁵⁶Lindsay, op. cit., p. 153.

the sense of being entrusted, though subordinately, with the function of teaching.⁵⁷ Each one was expected to apply himself to that particular department of his office which he could manage most efficiently.⁵⁸

In view of the responsibility and honor attached to the Christian presbyterate, it is not surprising to find that the office was desired and that there was a need for careful selection.⁵⁹ This was especially true in that the office bearers held office for life after they were once elected by the laity. The person elected to the presbyterate or episcopacy had to submit to the presbytery for ordination. In this manner, the Church guarded against the intrusion of unworthy people into office.⁶⁰ Qualifications for the offices of the Christian Church are specifically outlined in the Scriptures. The Christian bishop must not only be morally fit but also be able to rule and to teach.⁶¹ He must not be a recent convert. He must have had some experience in Christianity, whose character has stood the test of time. This can best be seen in the manner in which the character has displayed himself in the family. Finally, he must be a man respected

⁵⁷Gore, op. cit., p. 224, citing 1 Tim. 5:17; 3:5.

⁵⁸Killen, op. cit., p. 209, citing Romans 12:6-8.

⁵⁹Lindsay, op. cit., p. 146.

⁶⁰Killen, op. cit., p. 220.

⁶¹Gore, op. cit., p. 224, citing 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9.

by Christian and heathen alike.⁶²

The people were admonished to respect and to sustain their spiritual instructors.⁶³

The deacons

There were a plurality of deacons in each Church.⁶⁴ Their duties were not strictly spiritual in character. They were subordinate to and acted under the advice and guidance of those entrusted with the government of the Church. They were called helps and attendants.⁶⁵ Their qualifications were similar to those of the presbyter-bishops. They were to be morally fit, showing forth their good character in their family relations.⁶⁶

⁶²Lindsay, op. cit., p. 146, citing 1 Tim. 3:5-10.

⁶³Killen, op. cit., pp. 211-212, citing Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 9:14.

⁶⁴Killen, op. cit., p. 208, citing Acts 6:3.

⁶⁵Killen, op. cit., p. 207, citing Acts 6:2-4.

⁶⁶Lindsay, op. cit., p. 147; Gore, op. cit., p. 224, citing 1 Tim. 3:8-13.

CHAPTER III

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MINISTRY IN THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Possible Episcopate of James in Jerusalem

According to Hegesippus, an ancient historian recorded in Eusebius, James received the Church in succession with the Apostles.¹ Also recorded in Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria says,

Peter and James and John, after the assumption of the Saviour, though even the Lord had assigned them special honour, did not claim distinction, but elected James the just bishop of Jerusalem.²

Bishop Gore quotes Dr. Lightfoot in agreement with this view, "As early as the middle of the second century all parties concur in representing him as a bishop in the strict sense of the term."³

In the Scriptures, James is shown to have ranked with the Apostles.⁴ Rather than roaming the earth with the

¹Charles Gore, The Church and the Ministry (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913), p. 250, citing Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiastica, II, 23, "δεδεξετο τὴν ἐκκλησίαν μετὰ τῶν ἀποστόλων." Hereafter Historia Ecclesiastica will be referred to as H.E.

²Gore, op. cit., p. 250, footnote 5.

³Ibid., citing "Dr. Lightfoot refers to Hegesippus in Eusebius, H.E., II, 23; IV, 22; Ep. Petr., init.; Ep. Clem., init.; Clementine, Hom., XI, 35; Recog. I, 43, 68, 93."

⁴Gore, op. cit., p. 250, citing Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Acts 15.

Gospel, he is seen to be localized in Jerusalem, presiding with the elders.⁵ At the apostolic conference, he is seen to speak with some degree of authority in suggesting the apostolic decree.⁶ According to Bishop Gore,

Thus it has been common from the earliest times to see in James the "bishop of Jerusalem" in the latter sense, i.e. a localized apostolic ruler of the Church and this commends itself to most modern critics.⁷

This episcopate was held by relatives of Christ. Symeon, we are told, was chosen as the cousin of the Lord. He was a descendent of David and a Christian.⁸ The chief authority in the Church was not yet, even amongst Jewish Christians, in all cases a localized or diocesan authority.⁹

The Arrangement in the Didache

The Didache is a manual for the local church.¹⁰ It is dated in the first century. Composed by a Jewish Christian for a Jewish community, it was originally attributed to Syria or Palestine. However, recent evidence points to Egypt.¹¹

⁵Gore, op. cit., p. 250, footnote 3, citing Gal. 1:19; Acts 12:17; 21:18.

⁶Gore, op. cit., p. 250, citing Acts 15:13,19-20.

⁷Gore, op. cit., p. 250.

⁸Ibid., p. 252, citing Eusebius, H.E., IV, 22.

⁹Gore, op. cit., p. 253.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 258.

¹¹Ibid., p. 253.

The theology of the Didache is inadequate. Gore thinks that it suggests the condition of belief of those Christians to whom the Epistle to the Hebrews was directed in order to lift them out of the rudimentary knowledge which was all they possessed.¹²

The fifteenth chapter of the Didache exhorts the local church to ordain bishops and deacons for themselves.¹³ These local officials shared the same ministry as the apostles, prophets, and teachers and were, therefore, not to be overlooked.¹⁴ The officers were elected by the Churches without appointment from above. This was somewhat more democratic than usual.¹⁵ Over the local ministry of the bishops and deacons were prophets, apostles, and teachers, who exercised a ministry not localized in any particular church.¹⁶

The apostles of the Didache are not the twelve apostles but they correspond to the New Testament evangelists, ambulatory messengers of the Gospel.¹⁷ The apostles are also

¹²Ibid., p. 254.

¹³Ibid. "χελοτονήσαντε οὐν ἐπίσκοπος καὶ δακόνους. The οὐν connects the ordination of officers with the preceding chapter 14 about the Sunday celebration of the 'pure sacrifice.'"

¹⁴Gore, op. cit., p. 256; Thomas M. Lindsay, The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries (New York: George H. Doran Co., n.d.), p. 175, citing Didache, XV.

¹⁵Gore, op. cit., p. 257.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 254, footnote 2, citing Didache, XI, 3; XII, 2.

¹⁷Gore, op. cit., p. 254.

virtually identified with the prophets. The Didache (XI, 5) speaks of the apostle who stays in a church more than two days as a false prophet.¹⁸ The prophets or apostles of the Didache were to be tested by the standard of right teaching and moral character.¹⁹ There was to be no selfish motive in the apostle. Any sign of an inclination to fasten himself upon a church, or to abandon the holy poverty of his calling, was to stamp him as a false prophet.²⁰

Along with this rigid standard, however, there were also privileges. In the Eucharistic celebration, the prophet had the privilege of giving thanks without the restriction of the set form which had to be used by the local ministry.²¹ They also had the right to the first fruits of the produce of the community.²²

The most significant of the privileges of the prophets for this study is that they had the right to settle permanently in any church.²³ This could conceivably be one way

¹⁸Ibid., footnote 4; Lindsay, op. cit., p. 175, citing Didache, XI, 6.

¹⁹Gore, op. cit., p. 255, footnote 1, citing Didache, XI.

²⁰Gore, op. cit., p. 255, citing Didache VI, 1; XI, 11.

²¹Gore, op. cit., p. 255, footnote 3; Lindsay, op. cit., p. 174, citing Didache, X, 7. τοῖς δὲ προφήταις ἀληθεύς, θεῶν κληρονομία πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἡ δὲ ἐστὶ τῆς πόλεως αὐτοῦ.

²²Gore, op. cit., p. 255; Lindsay, op. cit., p. 174, citing Didache, XIII, 4.

²³Gore, op. cit., p. 256, citing Didache, XIII, 1.

in which these churches acquired bishops. Ignatius, the martyr-bishop of Antioch in Syria, claimed the gift of prophecy. Polycarp is spoken of as "having been an apostolic and prophetic teacher, bishop of the Holy Church in Smyrna." In the fifth chapter of his letter, he describes a vision of his own martyrdom.²⁴

The Letters of Ignatius

Ignatius was a bishop of Antioch in Syria. The letters which are attributed to him were written on his journey to Rome and to martyrdom, under the custody of ten soldiers, the "ten leopards" to whom he refers to in one of his letters. While he was at Smyrna, deputations arrived from Tralles, Magnesia, and Ephesus to do honor to him. At Smyrna, he wrote four of the extant letters. Three others were written from Troas.²⁵

There has been a long standing controversy over the seven letters of Ignatius. The letters, which were known in medieval times, were long suspected to be spurious as they did not always agree with the quotations found in the Church Fathers. In 1644, seven shorter letters in Latin were found by Bishop Ussher. These are now recognized as being translations of the genuine letters. In 1646, the Greek text of

²⁴Gore, op. cit., p. 257, citing Ignatius, To the Philadelphians, VII; Polycarp, V, XVI.

²⁵Gore, op. cit., p. 266.

the shorter letters appeared. By 1666, these letters were attacked as spurious by French Presbyterians, who saw in them a threat to the historicity of their Church polity. The letters were, in turn, defended by a Bishop Pearson with the publication of Vindiciae Ignatianae. The controversy cooled for many years until, in 1845, Dr. Cureton published a Syrian version of the letters of Ignatius. These were offered as a version lying behind even the Greek versions.

It was not until 1873 that Zahn, in his work Ignatius von Antiochien, proved that the Syriac version was a digest of the original letters. Dr. Adolf Harnack is cited as considering the genuineness of the shorter Greek letters as "certain" and the internal grounds for it as "overpowering."²⁶ After some initial dissent, Dr. Harnack also agreed that the letters of Ignatius were composed between 109 to 117 A.D. or, at the latest, 117 to 125 A.D. He is quoted by Bishop Gore,

Die Ignatiusbrief und der Polycarpbrief sind echt, und sie sind in den letzten Jahren Trajans verfasst (109-117) oder vielleicht einige Jahre spaeter (117-125).²⁷

The letters of Ignatius speak of a well organized three-fold ministry. Submission to that ministry is considered essential in the Church. This can be seen from the following quotations from the letter of Ignatius:

It is meet, therefore . . . that being perfectly joined

²⁶Ibid., p. 265, footnote 1, quoting Dr. Harnack, Expositor (January, 1886), pp. 10-15.

²⁷Gore, op. cit., p. 265, footnote 1, quoting Dr. Harnack, Chronologie (Leipzig, 1897), p. 406.

together in one submission, submitting yourselves to your bishop and presbytery, ye may be sanctified in all things.²⁸

Submission to them is as to God. In another passage, Ignatius mentions specifically three distinct orders:

Forasmuch, then, as I was permitted to see you in the person of your godly bishop, Damas, and your worthy presbyters Bossus and Appolonius and my fellow servant the deacon, Sotion, of whom I would fain have joy, for he that is subject to the bishop as unto the grace of God and to the presbytery as unto the law of Jesus Christ:--Yea, and it becometh you also not to presume upon the youth of your bishop, but according to the power of God, the Father to render unto him all reverence, . . . yet not to him, but to the Father of Jesus Christ, even to the Bishop of all. . . . For a man does not so much deceive this bishop who is seen, as cheat that other who is invisible.²⁹

Still another passage in the same theme is found in chapters two and three:

When ye are obedient to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, it is evident to me that ye are living not after men, but after Jesus Christ. . . . It is therefore necessary, even as your wont is, that ye should do nothing without the bishop, but be ye obedient also to the presbytery as to the Apostles. . . . And those likewise who are deacons of the mysteries of Jesus Christ must please men in all ways. For they are not deacons of meats and drinks, but servants of the church of God. It is right that they should beware of blame as of fire. In like manner let all men respect the deacons as Jesus Christ; even as they should respect the bishop as being a type of the Father and the presbyters as the council of God and as the college of apostles.³⁰

²⁸Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 268, citing Ignatius, To the Ephesians, II-VI, XX; To the Magnesians, IV, VI-VII, XIII.

²⁹Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 270; Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 191, citing Ignatius, To the Magnesians, II-III.

³⁰Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 271, citing Ignatius, To the Trallians, II-III, VII, XIII.

Other passages supporting the three-fold ministry can be found in the letters to the Smyrnans and to the Philadelphians.³¹

In the third chapter of the Epistle to the Trallians, Ignatius asserts that without this ministry no church has a right to the name.³²

Campanhausen sums up the idea of the ministry in Ignatius with this passage:

Den einen Bischof umgibt als seine "Ratsversammlung" der geistliche Kranz des Presbyteriums--dieser unpersonliche Ausdruck tritt jetzt meist an die Stelle der aelteren Nennung von "Presbytern"--und unter beiden stehen die Diener der Kirche Gottes, die Diakonen.³³

The Letter of Clement to the Corinthians

This letter belongs to the period shortly after that of the letters of Ignatius. It was written by a Clement of Rome on the occasion of the rebellion of some of the people of the Church of Corinth, which resulted in the deposition of some of the presbyters.³⁴

The material in the letter of Clement to the Corinthians concerns itself mainly with the authority of the ministry as

³¹Gore, op. cit., pp. 271-272, citing Ignatius, To the Smyrnans, VIII-IX; To the Philadelphians, III-IV.

³²Gore, op. cit., p. 271; Lindsay, op. cit., p. 191.

³³Hans Fischer von Campanhausen, Kirchliche Amt und Geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten (Tuebingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1953), p. 105, citing Ignatius, To the Magnesians, XIII.

³⁴Gore, op. cit., p. 282.

is seen in the following quotations from the letter:

The Apostles were sent to us with the Gospel from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Christ was sent forth from God. Christ, then, is from God and the Apostles from Christ; it took place in both cases in due order by the will of God. They then having received commandments, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God, with full assurance of the Holy Spirit, went forth preaching the Gospel that the Kingdom of God was about to come. Preaching then in country and town they appointed their first fruits, when they had tested them in the Spirit, for bishops and deacons of those who were about to become believers. And this was no new thing, for of old it had been written about bishops and deacons. For thus says the Scripture: "I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith" (Isaiah, 60:17).³⁵

Provision for the succession of the ministry had been made by the Apostles. Men were to be appointed to the ministry with the assent of the Church which they were to serve.

This is the sense of Clement in this passage:

The Apostles foreknew that there would be contention over the title of bishop. They, therefore, made provision for approved men to succeed to the ministry of those fallen asleep. Those who were appointed by the Apostles or other distinguished men of the church with the consent of the whole church and who have exercised their ministry blamelessly ought not to be deposed.³⁶

The ministry represented the authority of government and so claimed obedience, as Clement stated in this passage:

Let us fear the Lord Jesus whose blood was given for us; let us reverence our rulers, let us honor our

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 287, citing Clement, Letter to the Corinthians, XLII; Isaiah 60:17, in the Septuagint reads, "καὶ δώσω τοὺς ἄρχοντας σου ἐν εἰρήνῃ καὶ τοὺς ἐπισκόπους ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ."

³⁶ Gore, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-288, citing Clement, Letter to the Corinthians, XLIV.

presbyters, let us instruct our young men in the lesson of the dear of God, let us bring back our women to the standard of good behaviour.³⁷

In Clement, there is an official or officials who are mentioned separately from the presbyters. A passage in chapter one, asserting that they are rulers, reads, "ὑποτασσόμενοι τοῖς ἡγουμένοις ὑμῶν καὶ τμητῶν τῆν καθήκουσαν ἑπινοέμεντες τοῖς παρ' ὑμῶν πρεσβυτέροις ."³⁸

Besides ἡγούμενος, προηγούμενος seems to signify a ruler in Clement. Ἐπισκοπος is still another term applied to the officials of the church.³⁹ Lindsay asserts that the term ἐπισκοπή is always applied to the office.⁴⁰

The Data Found in Polycarp and the Shepherd of Hermas

In the Martyrium of Polycarp, he is termed a bishop of an apostolic and prophetic nature.⁴¹ Polycarp also lists qualifications for deacons. They were not to be devilish, double-tongued, and lovers of money, but were to be disciplined and compassionate according to the truth of the Lord.⁴²

³⁷Gore, op. cit., p. 290.

³⁸Ibid., p. 284, citing Clement, Letter to the Corinthians, XXI.

³⁹Lindsay, op. cit., p. 160.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 160, footnote 4.

⁴¹Gore, op. cit., p. 298, footnote 3, citing Polycarp, Martyrium, V.

⁴²Gore, op. cit., p. 297, citing Polycarp, Martyrium, V.

There is very little in the Shepherd of Hermas. The date is disputed. The mention in the Muratorian Fragment dates the Shepherd at about 140 A.D. However, the situation of the ministry accords more with the time of the Clement, who is mentioned in the Shepherd.⁴³ In the Shepherd, there is distinction made between the *προϊκουμενοι* and the *προκαθημενοι* among the officials of the Church.⁴⁴

⁴³Gore, op. cit., p. 300, citing Shepherd of Hermas, Vision II.

⁴⁴Gore, op. cit., p. 301, footnote 4, citing Shepherd of Hermas, Visions III, IX.

A second theory asserts that the bishop was hidden in the presbyterate and that long after the bishops were distinct from the presbyters, this term could be applied to both. The confusion of terms and the interchangeable use of both words will be used in support of this theory.¹

A third theory has apostolic men, serving on an itinerant ministry, eventually settling down and forming the presbyteries of the local churches, leaving behind the bishops of these churches. The words of Polycarp and Ignatius, both claiming apostolic gifts, and the provisions for this in the Roman law support to this theory.²

Although the material in this study may seem to have been of assistance in it, there are some significant differences to be noted:

1. There is great freedom in the use of terms, both

¹ See Charles Gore, The Church and the Kingdom (New York: Green and Co., 1913), pp. 243-246.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In view of the material of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers, three theories have been formulated for the development of the episcopal system which characterized the organization of the Church in the following centuries:

- a. According to one theory, there were originally colleges of equal presbyter-bishops in each church. Later, the powers of ordination and episcopal functions devolved upon one man. He became the bishop while the others continued with reduced authority.
- b. A second theory asserts that the bishop was hidden in the presbyterate and that long after the bishops were distinct from the presbyters, this term could be applied to both. The confusion of terms and the interchangeable use of both could well be used in support of this theory.¹
- c. A third theory has apostolic men, carrying on an itinerant ministry, eventually settling down and joining the presbyteries of the local church, thereby becoming the bishops of those churches. The cases of Polycarp and Ignatius, both claiming prophetic gifts, and the provisions for this in the Didache lend support to this theory.²

Although the material in this study may seem to have little of significance in it, there are some significant points to be observed:

- a. There is great freedom in the use of terms, both

¹Supra, p. 14.

²Supra, p. 21; Charles Gore, The Church and the Ministry (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913), pp. 303-305.

in the New Testament and in the Apostolic Fathers.³

- b. Provision was made to prevent the intrusion of unworthy people into office. Either the candidates had to submit to the presbytery for ordination or the appointment was made from above with the consent of the whole Church.⁴

Scripture rarely speaks of an office as a status in itself but rather emphasizes the function and the qualifications necessary for the fulfillment of that function.⁵

The Apostolic Fathers reflect the flexible use of terms of the Scripture.⁶ Ignatius clearly speaks of a three-fold ministry with a bishop as distinct from the presbyters. This is also possible in Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas.⁷

³Supra, pp. 14, 27, 28.

⁴Supra, pp. 16, 26.

⁵Supra, pp. 3, 7, 16.

⁶Supra, p. 27.

⁷Supra, pp. 23-25.

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