

## The New Testament and Episcopacy

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### Method

There are two ways of reading the relevant New Testament material. Both are appropriate for different purposes, but since they have frequently been confused, it is important to clarify this issue at the outset.

In the first case, the New Testament can be studied as evidence for historical reconstruction. One is attempting to reconstruct what happened in earliest Christianity, and will try to ascertain whether forms of ministry varied over time and place, and how the ministry of pastoral oversight originated and developed. This requires many debatable decisions about the authenticity and dates of the various New Testament writings, and a good deal of speculative reconstruction. It should also make use of important extra-canonical evidence from the later New Testament period or soon afterwards, especially the *Didache*, 1 Clement, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch and the *Shepherd* of Hermas. If the task is understood as a purely historical task of describing how forms of ministry developed in the early church, then all relevant evidence for the chosen chronological period must be taken into account, and the New Testament writings ought not to be given a privileged status. Nor does it really make much sense to take c. 100 AD as the upper chronological limit of such a study, since it is really only with Ignatius (second decade of second century) that the dominant features of church order as it will be for long afterward emerge. An historical treatment of the origins of episcopal ministry would probably be well advised to take the end of the second century as its terminus.

The most influential form of historical reconstruction in modern New Testament scholarship (and hence also in theological studies of ministry, such as those by Küng and Schillebeeckx) depends on treating those Pauline letters whose Pauline authorship is undisputed (especially Romans, 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians) as almost the only evidence for the period of the first Christian generation, and dating other relevant New Testament texts towards the end of the first century or even in the early second century (Ephesians, Pastorals [i.e. 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus], Acts, 1 Peter). This makes it possible to contrast the charismatic freedom of the early Pauline churches, in which all ministries were charismatic gifts given by the Spirit and exercised in the freedom of the Spirit, with the more institutional structures evidenced in the later New Testament writings (especially the Pastorals). Charismatic gift is here contrasted with office, in the sense that the latter envisages the selection and appointment of suitable persons to recognized offices in the church, whether by superiors in office or by election, and expects the requisite gifts of the Spirit to be conferred in ordination. The Spirit comes to be, as it were, channelled in official structures, and authenticity of his gifts of ministry dependent on official endorsement and recognition. The egalitarian communities of the early Pauline churches give way to structures of hierarchical authority in which those who hold office (in later terminology: clergy) are distinguished from and set in authority over those who do not (in later terminology: laity). It is within this context that the

development of the moniscopacy (a single bishop presiding over a group of presbyters in each place) which became the norm by the end of the second century should be understood. Ignatius provides the earliest evidence for this (in some of the churches he knows, not all), though some find it in the Pastorals (implying a very late date for them). The story of the development of ministries from the later first century to the later second century is one of the growing concentration in a few office-holders of gifts which in the early Pauline churches were more widely distributed among variously gifted members of the community (teaching, pastoral oversight, prophecy). Prophets (itinerant or locally based) and itinerant teachers (such as are still important in the Didache) were, almost by definition, outwith the control of the local officials, and so declined. By the end of the second century there were few prophets and many of those who did prophesy were bishops. The bishops had not so much suppressed prophecy as taken it over and monopolized it (a process already visible in Ignatius). Finally, the development and growing dominance of institutional offices in the churches took place in conjunction with a felt need to define and preserve orthodox teaching (as can be seen both in the Pastorals and in Ignatius), especially in the conflict with Gnosticism. As the story is usually told, orthodoxy as well as institutional structure was a post-Pauline, 'early catholic' development. The story therefore culminates in the importance Irenaeus, in the late second century, attaches to apostolic succession in the major episcopal sees, meaning that orthodox, apostolic teaching is most reliably preserved in the institutional succession of bishops going back to appointment by the apostles themselves.

As often told, this account of developments tends to focus on a trajectory running from the undisputed Pauline letters through 1 Clement, Acts, the Pastorals and Ignatius to the later second century. However, it must be added that, consistently with the tendency of New Testament scholars to stress the diversity of early Christianity and its literature, there is often a recognition of diverse patterns of ministry existing simultaneously in the late first century, for example, the Johannine community and the Matthean community (i.e. the communities reconstructed by scholars as the implied audiences of the Gospel and Letters of John and the Gospel of Matthew). Institutionalization meant also the growing uniformity of both belief and structures in the emerging 'catholic Christianity' of the second century. Such qualifications to the picture of a single development in the 'Pauline' areas of Christianity open the way for the possibility that in Paul's time the more institutional structures which developed in the Pauline churches only later were already operating elsewhere, e.g. in the Jerusalem church (which in the person of James even had someone approximating to the role of a monarchical bishop, if not -as some have suggested - pope!). Indeed, it is arguable that many features of 'early catholicism,' including particularly the offices of local ministry, were of Jewish origin, taken over by Jewish Christianity from the beginning, even if not by the churches of the Pauline mission. Probably the strongest recent challenge to the dominant account of the development of ministry in early Christianity comes from James Burtchaell,<sup>1</sup> whose case for the early origin, even in the Pauline churches, of ministerial offices, even including moniscopacy, depends to quite a large extent on their derivation from the synagogue. Accepting the distinction between charismatics and office-holders, he sees a role for both and a fairly uniform pattern from the beginning, but with the emphasis of authority shifting, through force of circumstances, from the charismatics to the office-holders. Even if he has exaggerated his case, his work, like that of other

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<sup>1</sup>J. T. Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

dissidents from the dominant model, shows that we are dealing precisely with debatable historical reconstructions of greater or lesser probability.

The problem of a historical reconstruction is that it has so often been confused with the task of providing a scriptural norm for the church. Few of those scholars who have attempted historical reconstructions have been engaged in a purely historical exercise unrelated to the implications it might have for the contemporary church. In fact, in its most influential form the contrast between the charismatic churches of the early Pauline letters and the institutionalizing developments of 'early catholicism' has been closely related to the theological concerns of the German Lutheran tradition from which it stems. In this tradition, as it has taken historical shape in modern New Testament scholarship, the authentic (i.e. undisputed) Pauline letters represent authentic Christianity, from which most of the New Testament texts that are treated as later represent a serious decline. Non-Pauline tends to be synonymous with post-Pauline and 'early Catholic,' and where the Jewish (Christian) influence on 'early Catholicism' is recognized it is difficult not to see an aspect of the depreciation of Judaism and the exaggerated contrast between Judaism and Pauline theology that is characteristic of modern German New Testament scholarship and its influence. The problem is not just that 'early Catholicism' as a historical construct needs serious questioning, but also that doctrinal judgments are being presented as historical ones. The Lutheran tradition of treating the major Pauline letters as a 'canon within the canon' (the principle is Luther's, but the canon within the canon narrower than Luther's) is given historical form by treating the non-Pauline as later and assuming that the earliest (i.e. Pauline) is best and development decline. The approach seems to be caught in a vicious hermeneutical circle in which date and relative theological value each imply the other. Of course, one could accept the same historical reconstruction and evaluate it differently (as some have), viewing office, hierarchy and moniscopacy as the mature development, in comparison with which the unstructured charismatic freedom of the Pauline churches was an over-enthusiastic emphasis which could not have lasted. (A sociological model of religious movements that typically progress from charismatic beginnings to institutional development can be invoked.) While the dominant approach could be seen as ultra-Protestant (earliest is best), a different evaluation of the same historical construct could be seen as modern Catholic (the mature development is best: this is *modern* Catholic in that it fully accepts the fact of development, evaluating it positively).

How is one to judge between the two approaches? The problem lies, surely, in seeking a theological norm in a historical construct. The use of New Testament writings as evidence for historical development ('what actually happened') is being confused with the function of Scripture as theological norm. This is a theological historicism which is deeply rooted in the modern tradition of biblical studies insofar as it remains in some kind of relationship with church and theology. If Scripture is to function as Scripture, i.e. as norm for the church's belief and practice, then what matters is not what historians can reconstruct behind and around the texts, but what the texts present as normative to their readers. This requires a canonical rather than a historicist reading of the texts. It must take seriously the whole canon, not a canon within the canon, and must avoid confusing date with value. Chronology will matter only if and in the way that the texts themselves give it significance. Such an approach does not make all historical considerations irrelevant, nor does it solve all problems, but it avoids making highly debatable historical reconstructions, of which

the church until modern times had no inkling, necessary to the New Testament's functioning as normative Scripture.

### **Ministries of oversight - local and trans-local**

The New Testament material relevant to our subject is that which portrays ministries of oversight. It is important to recognize that in the New Testament there are two rather distinct forms of such ministries, one local, functioning within the Christian community in a particular locality, the other 'trans-local,' a kind of ministry which is scarcely to be found in the second-century church.

(1) 'trans-local' ministries of oversight. Here the Twelve have a special role as ministers of the whole church (corresponding to the twelve 'phylarchs' of Israel in the wilderness, they are the constitutive leaders of the renewed Israel of the last days). Initially, they exercise this role from Jerusalem, where they are also the leaders of the Jerusalem church itself, the mother church. After their dispersal from Jerusalem, the Jerusalem church leadership (James the Lord's brother with a council of elders) continue to exercise a kind of oversight over the churches (Acts 15; 21:25; Jas 1:1). The NT leaves us to guess that this role of the Jerusalem church as the central authority of the Christian movement ceased in 66-70 (Jewish revolt and fall of Jerusalem).

As well as oversight exercised from Jerusalem, there are roving ministries, primarily the apostles, in the strong sense (people personally commissioned by the risen Christ in a post-resurrection appearance), including presumably the Twelve, the Lord's brothers, and others such as Paul, Barnabas, Silas (Sylvanus), Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7). From Paul's example it would seem these exercise oversight of the churches they have planted. As well as apostles, there are others, such as Paul's many colleagues and Philip (Acts 8). In the Pastorals Timothy and Titus are portrayed as Paul's apostolic delegates, supervising churches he and they have founded. These non-apostolic roving ministers are probably the 'evangelists' (Acts 21:8; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 4:5). While roving ministries also include travelling teachers and prophets, these exercise gifts of inspired utterance, not (it seems) oversight of churches.

(2) local ministries. The NT broadly paints a consistent picture in which the church in each place has a group of local leaders, known most often as elders (presbyters: presbuteroi: Acts 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim 5:17, 19; Tit 1:5; Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1; other references in Acts are to the elders of the Jerusalem church). Several of the texts imply that all churches had elders from the beginning (Jas 5:14 expects all Jewish Christian communities in the diaspora to have them; in Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas appoint elders in all the churches founded on their first missionary journey; 1 Pet 5 expects there to be elders throughout the churches of the large area of Asia Minor to which it is written). The consistent impression is that the whole church in each place has its elders, rather than each house church in communities large enough for there to be several. Even if particular elders were in charge of particular house churches (there is no evidence for this), they were nevertheless elders of the whole Christian community in that place.

These elders correspond to the elders who were the leaders of each Jewish synagogue community (e.g. Luke 7:3). There seems to be still fluidity between the technical meaning of the term, designating an office, and the ordinary usage (older in years) (1 Pet 5:1-5; 1 Tim 5:1, 17-19). Thus the idea that seniority in years (which would often mean also seniority in Christian experience, though certainly not always) qualifies one for leadership must be to some degree operative (in Tit 1:6 elders are assumed to have adult children). (Hence in 1 Tim 4:12, Timothy, not especially young, is told to let no one despise his youth.) Perhaps the ambiguity of the term itself encouraged the use of other terms also (which seem to lack Jewish precedent). Other terms which the texts demonstrate are used equivalently with 'elders' are 'overseers/bishops' (επισκοποι: Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:7; cf. the verb in 1 Pet 5:2 some MSS), 'shepherds/pastors' (ποιμηνε": Eph 4:11; cf. the verb in Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), and 'leaders' (ηγουμενοι: Heb 13:7, 17, 24, unless this is a broader term). In 1 Thes 5:12, they are called 'those who labour among you, and have charge (προϊ>σταμενου") of you in the Lord, and admonish you,' while in 1 Cor 16:15 they are (probably) those 'who have devoted themselves to the service of the saints.' (Other possible references: Phil 4:2-3; Philem 1-2; Rom 16:12.) The specific spiritual gift peculiar to these leaders of local churches is listed among spiritual gifts in Rom 12:8 (οἱ προϊ>σταμενοι": the same verb as in 1 Thes 5:12 and, of elders, in 1 Tim 5:17; for the meaning of the verb, see below) and probably 1 Cor 12:28 (κυβερνησι": the metaphor of steering a ship may not be entirely dead). (Those who insist there were no authoritative office-bearers in the early Pauline churches try to take these references [1 Thes 5:12; Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28; Phil 1:1] in other ways, but cumulatively the case is not convincing.)

There is no convincing evidence in the New Testament of a single elder/bishop occupying a position of primacy among the elders (even though Jewish synagogue communities had a single 'ruler of the synagogue'). The one exception is James the Lord's brother in Jerusalem, and the circumstances in this case are so distinctive that no argument can be drawn from it to others. As we have noticed, Timothy and Titus, in the Pastorals, are not local bishops but apostolic delegates exercising roving ministries.

It is striking that, although we know from the New Testament the names of many people in category (1) ('trans-local' ministries of oversight), as well as the names of many members of local (especially Pauline) churches, we do not certainly know of any named individual who was a local elder/bishop in the NT period, though Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15) and Diotrophes (3 John 9) are very probable examples. Probably quite a number of the named individuals in Pauline letters were elders/bishops, but it is striking that they are never named as such. (By contrast we know the names of many bishops in the post-New Testament period, from the end of the first century onwards, when the roving ministries had disappeared.) In the Pauline churches at least, it appears that local leadership was relatively unimportant while Paul and his colleagues were overseeing the churches by visits and letters.

### **What did local leaders do?**

Their distinctive role was clearly pastoral oversight, indicated both by the hellenistic term 'overseer' (επισκοπο") and the more Jewish image of the shepherd (Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 5:2-3). The verb προϊ>στημι (Rom 12:8; 1 Thes 5:12; 1

Tim 5:17) can mean both 'to rule' and 'to care for,' and 1 Tim 3:4-5 strongly suggests that in these contexts there are overtones of both meanings. The elders have pastoral authority (both words being significant). Other Christians should obey and submit to them (Heb 13:17), 'esteem them very highly in love because of their work' (1 Thes 5:12), but the New Testament's distinctive understanding of authority as service is reflected in 1 Corinthians 16:15-16, which speaks of the relationship as mutual service, and 1 Peter 5:3, which tells elders not to 'lord it' over their flock. James 5:14 indicates that pastoral oversight included prayer and healing of the sick.

Were they also teachers? Teaching was certainly regarded as a distinct spiritual gift from that of leading the church (Rom 12:7-8; 1 Cor 12:28). Not all teachers, not even all teachers who stayed in their local community rather than travelling, were leaders. Not all elders/bishops also taught, but many did. The lack of an article before 'teachers' in Ephesians 4:11 probably indicates that 'pastors and teachers' are overlapping but not identical categories. 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9 require that elders/bishops be able to teach, but 1 Timothy 5:7 probably means that they did not all actually teach, or at least that it was not a regular, major activity for all.

There is no clear evidence of any other functions. Did they preside at the eucharist? Did anyone preside at the eucharist? The New Testament says nothing of this.

### **Gifts and offices**

According to Paul's teaching about spiritual gifts (especially in 1 Cor 12-14), all functions in the life of the church are charismatic gifts, given by the Spirit of God in his sovereign freedom. All Christians exercise one or more gifts, and the various gifts are complementary and reciprocal. Not even the apostle can say to the speaker in tongues, 'I do not need you.' Paul's emphasis is normally on mutuality rather than hierarchy, and there is a genuine sense in which his vision of the charismatic community can be called egalitarian, provided this is recognized as an egalitarianism of mutual service, rather than of rights. But this need not to exclude any notion of authority/ (Paul makes quite clear that as an apostle he himself has authority over his churches.)

Gifts can refer to the occasional or the regular exercise of a gift. Any Christian might be inspired to utter a prophecy at any time, but there are also people recognized as prophets, presumably because they prophesy regularly. Some gifts (e.g. charitable giving, speaking in tongues) do not need to be recognized by the community as regularly exercised by specific people, but others not only can be so recognized but need to be. Teaching may well be such a case. Certainly pastoral oversight has to be: it cannot be a spontaneous and occasional practice. Thus we must assume that elders/bishops always 'held office' in this sense: that the Spirit's gift of the charisma of leadership to them was recognized by their community and they were authorized to exercise it.

It is probably a mistake to contrast the charismatic freedom of the Spirit (1 Cor) with appointment to office (Acts, Pastorals). The latter does not have to mean

that people are appointed regardless of their charismata, and expected to receive the necessary charism automatically through ordination.

The distinction between Christians who 'hold office' and those who do not is a pragmatic one, which not even the Pastorals clearly make (are widows enrolled on the list [1 Tim 5:9, 11] being appointed to an office of widow?). The primary theological point is that the various gifts of all Christians are mutually necessary. Perhaps all gifts carry some kind of authority, but those more obviously authoritative, in the common sense, need especially the Christian redefinition of authority as service. All the gifts are forms of service, creating a community of reciprocal service. The authority of leaders is one such form of service.

### **A 'top-down' or a 'bottom-up' model?**

The apostles Paul and Barnabas appoint elders in the churches they have founded (Acts 14:23), and Titus, as an apostolic delegate of Paul, appoints elders/bishops (Tit 1:5). Similarly Timothy 'lays hands on' people, commissioning them as elders (1 Tim 5:22). However, this 'top-down' procedure is probably not an alternative to a 'bottom-up' one. The appointment of the Seven in Acts 6, though they are not elders, is instructive: they are 'selected' by the whole Jerusalem church, then 'appointed' by the apostles, who lay hands on them (Acts 6:3, 6). Thus 'appointment' seems to refer to commissioning rather than selecting. The Seven are also to be 'men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom' (6:3), which resembles the qualifications for 'office' in the Pastorals.

Also instructive is Timothy's commissioning, though again he is not appointed an elder, but a missionary colleague of Paul's. He received the Spirit's gift through the laying on of hands by Paul and the local elders in the church at Lystra (2 Tim 1:6; 1 Tim 4:14), but prophecy was also involved (1 Tim 4:14). This probably means that a prophecy given by the Spirit indicated Timothy for this task, as in Acts 13:2-3, where the Spirit through a prophecy requires Paul and Barnabas to be set apart for God for missionary service, and they are then commissioned by the laying on of hands. So when Paul in Acts 20:28 tells the Ephesian elders that the Holy Spirit made them bishops, this may mean more than that the Spirit was at work through the process of selection and appointment: it may mean that, like Timothy, Paul and Barnabas, they were singled out for service by specific words of prophecy. The evidence is too slender to conclude that this was the norm, but nor do we know that it was not. In the end, the NT tells us rather little about such things.

### **Major Paulines and Pastorals**

Though it has often been exaggerated, there is a real contrast between the near absence of local church leaders in the undisputed Pauline letters and the prominence of elders/bishops and deacons in 1 Timothy and Titus. As has often been observed, it is remarkable that when Paul deals at length with the chaos the Corinthian worship meetings have become (1 Cor 14), he never even hints that there are local leaders whose responsibility it should be to keep order. But the contrast can be at least partially understood by the following considerations: (1) The pastorals are addressed to people whose job it is to appoint and supervise elders. (2) The only indication Paul

gives of regarding some gifts as more important than others comes in 1 Cor 12:28: 'first apostles, second prophets., third teachers.' He then stops counting, but if we go on we find the gift of leadership comes seventh in a list of eight gifts. Priority for Paul belongs to those gifts which communicate God's message, in various forms, to his people. But in 1 Timothy and Titus it seems to be *as teachers* that elders/bishops are really important, in a situation where authority for sound teaching is vitally important if false teaching is not to take over the churches (see especially Tit 1:9). (3) Paul's early letters are written to churches whose local leadership and local teachers (supposing they had any yet) would be recent converts with little experience. (Note that in 1 Cor 12-14 he stresses the value of prophecy in the context, but refers to teaching only in 12:28-29. It is Apollos the Corinthians are valuing as a teacher, though for the wrong reasons, not any local person.) False teaching (in 2 Corinthians, Galatians, probably Philippians) comes from outside these churches, and Paul cannot expect the local leaders and teachers to be very competent to recognize and refute it. He has to rely on his own letters to do this. In the Pastorals there are experienced men, with the ability to teach and to confute false doctrine, available in the local churches to be elders and teachers, just as probably the false teachers are local people.

Thus to understand the material in the Pastorals we do not need to place them on a historical trajectory running from the freedom of the early Pauline churches to the authoritarianism of Ignatius. They make their own canonical sense alongside the early Pauline letters, and can be read as complementary rather than in tension with the latter.

### **Summary and implications**

Read as canonical Scripture, the New Testament portrays a ministry of pastoral oversight, exercised in the local Christian community by one or more members of it. This ministry is one of the Spirit's many gifts which the Spirit freely distributes among all Christians, creating a community of reciprocal service and complementary activities. As one of those gifts which require formal recognition in order to be exercised effectively, the ministry of pastoral oversight is also an office, for which people are selected and to which they are appointed. Those in pastoral oversight are among a Christian community's authorized office-holders, and therefore exercise authority, but in the way in which the New Testament not infrequently takes care to define authority, as authority exercised in service to their brothers and sisters. Charismatic gift and office do not need to be at odds: recognition and authorization of those appointed to office is understood as recognition of the Spirit's gift and as guided by the Spirit. That the Spirit makes people elders/bishops is emphasized rather than any particular process of selection and appointment.

Those appointed elders/bishops are those whose specific and distinctive gift from the Spirit is pastoral oversight in the local Christian community. They may also exercise the gift of teaching, but need not, and there may also be teachers who are not elders/bishops. However, in situations where the maintenance of sound teaching is problematic, it is appropriate for the gift of teaching and for the oversight of this gift exercised by others to be a centrally important function of those who exercise pastoral oversight.

The fact that the exercise of some gifts of the Spirit, including pastoral oversight, requires formal authorization does not necessarily imply too hard a distinction between office-holders and others. Nor need it imply a strongly hierarchical structure, so long as it retains its place within an understanding of charismatic ministry which recognizes the various gifts of all Christians as complementary and mutually necessary.

As well as the local ministry of pastoral oversight, the New Testament knows 'trans-local' ministries of apostles and evangelists. These are not defined by the gift of pastoral oversight in the way that elders/bishops are. Pastoral oversight of a group or area of churches, in many cases of those they have founded, is one of their functions, but authoritative witness to the Gospel is the defining characteristic of apostles, who (as those who had been specifically commissioned by the risen Christ) had a unique role in this respect, while church planting is a prominent function of both apostles and evangelists.

Unless we insist that the New Testament must prescribe a specific form of church order (as some among the Protestant Reformers and their successors did) and so are obliged to deduce one from it, it is difficult to read the New Testament as prescribing a specific form of church order. Too much is left vague and undefined. What is most plausibly regarded as normative is that certain ministries, of which pastoral oversight is one (if not perhaps the most important), are essential to the life and health of God's people, as well as the way in which this ministry is to be exercised, as a gift of the Spirit alongside many other gifts and as carrying the kind of authority that is exercised in service both to God and to those over whom oversight is exercised. The New Testament points towards the appropriateness of those in pastoral oversight also playing a significant teaching role, though it does not represent the combination of the two gifts in the same persons necessary for the exercise of either.

Since episcopacy has been closely associated with apostolicity at least from the time of Irenaeus, we should attend also to the role of the apostles in the New Testament. Though by no means limited to the Twelve (or to men!), apostleship in the sense which Paul means when he ranks it first among the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:28) is limited to those commissioned by the risen Christ in a resurrection appearance. Hence Paul saw himself as 'last' among the apostles - chronologically the last to be appointed. It is by virtue of this special qualification that the apostles exercise the special role of witnessing to what the Gospel is. Their church planting and their pastoral oversight of churches - neither specific to apostles - are subordinate to their defining role as uniquely authoritative witnesses to the Gospel. Irenaeus's understanding of apostolic succession does not deny this uniqueness of the apostles themselves, but presupposes it when it envisages the situation in which there are no longer apostles. How can the church be maintained in the truth of the Gospel the apostles taught when it no longer has apostles? Irenaeus's answer to this is twofold. The church has the apostolic writings, the canon of the New Testament Scriptures, which embody the apostles' own special gift in written form for all time. It also has bishops who can trace their succession from the apostles, who first appointed their predecessors, in a line of succession of people who can be named and who publicly taught the Gospel. The value of episcopal succession as succession to the apostles for Irenaeus is that of an evident continuity of public teaching, by contrast with the secret traditions which the Gnostics claimed to have come to them from apostles via

unknown persons. In this way, moniscopacy came to have a function which elders/bishops in the New Testament itself do not have, but which was required precisely in the post-apostolic age because it was the post-apostolic age. They also - by a longer historical process - acquired something of the trans-local ministry of oversight of churches which apostles and others exercise in the New Testament. A certain continuity of function can be recognized here, even though historically trans-local ministries after the New Testament period developed out of local ministries, not in historical continuity with the trans-local ministries portrayed in the New Testament.