Christian Ethics: The Church, Organizations, and Organizational Authority

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Introduction

Two motivations have prompted me to write this reflection. First, I see a need for a Christian ethical framework for organizations and organizational authority. Many books on Christian ethics focus on issues that come up relatively infrequently, like abortion and war. This is helpful, but it leaves gaping holes. Where is biblical reflection on issues that come up all the time, like our participation in organizations and our use of authority?

Second, I find myself needing to work out my doctrine of the church – that is, my ecclesiology, which I believe must attempt to address questions about gender, leadership, and engagement with human cultures. The church, broadly speaking, faces complex challenges. Migration across political boundaries now confuses church leaders at every level. People who are biracial or bicultural deal with more questions than mono-racial or mono-cultural churches can answer. They often have more potential for mission than a mono-racial or monocultural church can help them express. Yet we are ill-equipped for thinking about new cultural shifts. These are the realities that will reshape churches in many locations. Accountability and continuity of relationship are important, but the new realities of mobility and communication will challenge the idea that every individual should 'belong' to only one particular 'church.' This paper is a partial attempt to address that question. I have read Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant interpretations on the historical development of the church with some appreciation but much puzzlement. I have also read attempts by Trinitarian theologians like Jurgen Moltmann, Colin Gunton, and Catherine LaCugna who try to connect their doctrines of the Trinity to a doctrine of the church, with more appreciation but some skepticism that any such line can be drawn that easily. How do the Scriptures discuss church structure, authority, and membership? To do that fairly, I believe we must summarize (quickly) the teaching of Scripture about relationships in general.

Authority and Organization in Scripture

First, from creation, hierarchical relationships are unnatural and permitted only temporarily during childhood. There is no evidence from Genesis that there was a human power structure inherent from the creation. Adam may have been the 'source' for humanity, including Eve and all their children, and perhaps honored as such. But he was not explicitly or implicitly humanity's 'king' in a political or military sense. We know this because God himself brought an end to direct parental authority. That boundary was found in marriage: 'a man shall leave his father and mother' (Gen.2:24). This was revolutionary. Ancient Assyrian culture expressed the priority of parents over one's marriage: 'And if my daughter K. dies, then A. my adopted son shall under no circumstances leave my house, because he has to care for my gods and my dead ancestors.'[1] Confucian China, Japan, and Korea held (and arguably still holds) this belief: 'The Master said, 'Observe what a man has in mind to do when his father is living, and then observe what he does when his father is dead. If, for three years, he makes no changes to his father's ways, he can be said to be a good son.''[2] 'Meng Yi Tzu asked about being filial. The Master answered, 'Never fail to comply.''[3]

By doing the radically counter-cultural act of establishing a married couple as an independent unit, God declared that marriage should not serve political or power-mongering purposes. The unity of a married couple was stronger

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[1] K.R. Veenhof, 'Old Assyrian and Anatolian Evidence', Marten Stol and Sven Vleeming, editors, *The Care of the Elderly in the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, The Netherlands, 1998), p.133. Beyond Assyria, in the Ancient Near East generally, 'The head of household or paterfamilias, whether the father (the eldest male) or the eldest son, had complete charge of the household's property, represented the household in court, and was responsible for maintaining its prosperity and credibility within the community…marriages served not only to produce children and a new generation to inherit property, but they also established social ties, economic connections and a network of association that was designed to benefit both parties [families].' Victor H. Matthews, 'Marriage and Family in the Ancient Near East', Ken M. Campbell, editor, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003) p.2 and 7

[2] Confucius, *Analects* I, 11

[3] Confucius, *Analects* II, 5. 'In serving his parents, a filial son reveres them in daily life; he makes them happy while he nourishes them; he takes anxious care of them in sickness; he shows great sorrow over their death; and he sacrifices to them with solemnity.' Confucius, *Classic of Filial Piety*, discussed by Charlotte Ikels, *Filial piety: Practice and discourse in contemporary East Asia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 2–3. '…The three real obstacles to the spread of Christianity in China…are, first of all, the Confucian dogma that man is born good; secondly, the practice of ancestral worship, which, as has already been shown, is incompatible with Christian doctrine; and thirdly, the rules and practice of filial piety, due directly to the patriarchal system which still obtains in China. It has indeed been seriously urged that the unparalleled continuity of the Chinese nation is a reward for their faithful observance of the fifth commandment. In the face of this deeply implanted sentiment of reverence for parents, it is easy to see what a shock it must give to be told, as in Mark x. 7, 29, 30, that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; also, that if a man leaves his father and mother for Christ's sake and the gospel's, he will receive an hundredfold now in this time, and in the world to come eternal life.' http://www.sacred-texts.com/cfu/cair/cair10.htm.

and higher than the parent-child relations. The person who violated this command was Cain (Gen.4:1 – 26). Even though God cursed Cain to wander, Cain settled down. He took refuge in a city he named after his son, Enoch. After all, Enoch could farm, cultivate the ground, and defend and protect him; Enoch could overcome God's decree on behalf of Cain. Enoch could defend Cain physically. Enoch was now responsible for organizing this city, for providing for his father, for housing the murderer, for defending him from suspicion and insult, for making him feel secure in a world that is otherwise hostile to him.

Thus, human hierarchy begins with Cain and Enoch. Bound to his father in a new power relation, Enoch could not leave Cain. Whereas God decreed that a man shall leave his father and mother to cleave to his wife, Cain made this difficult if not impossible for his son. Enoch lived in the struggle to provide security and justification for his father. This is exactly what Babel in Genesis 11 is about. Human sin again takes the form of a city, which represents human hierarchy and is multiplied in many other places in Genesis 10 by Nimrod. Out of this type of society, God removed Abraham.

The objection can immediately be raised that God's covenant with Noah established the state (Gen.9:6). However, God's declaration about retaliation for bloodshed does not mean that suddenly states and governments were sanctioned or formed. Such an interpretation is biased by a western concept of the state; the state as such does not even exist today in many tribal cultures. Instead, that declaration to Noah sanctioned the principle of retaliation which itself was mitigated within Israel by the city of refuge. God permitted human beings to take the life of a killer in retaliation for the death of another human being. The state became one subset of this activity, as shown by Romans 12:17 – 13:10.

My point can be made even more clearly when we see that the book of Genesis begins by leveling a critique on human civilization. Scholarship has been done comparing Genesis to the oldest Near Eastern primeval history – the Akkadian version of the Atrahasis epic -- and the Greek mythic tradition exemplified by Homer's *Iliad* and Stasinos' *The Cypria.* Myths from other traditions are very concerned with overpopulation.[4] Atrahasis, for instance, records the Babylonian gods trying to control the spread of mankind with a plague, a famine, another famine, and a resolution to have natural barrenness in some women, a high infant mortality rate, and artificial barrenness by three types of cult priestesses. The Zoroastrian tale of Yima also deals with overpopulation and the gods' response to man's crowding the earth with a flood of snow. In the Greek tradition, war is the agent of the gods to combat overpopulation. *The Cypria* of Stasinos has the note:

> There was a time when the countless tribes of men, though wide-dispersed, oppressed the surface of the deep-bosomed earth, and Zeus saw and had pity and in his wise heart resolved to relieve the all-nuturing earth of men by causing the great struggle of the Ilian war, that the load of death might empty the world. And so the heroes were slain in Troy, and the plan of Zeus came to pass.

Interestingly enough, Genesis 1 – 11 seems to follow a five-fold structure that undergirds other ancient literature. I have slightly modified the structure ascribed to Genesis 1 – 11 by Kikawada and Quinn and also Garrett by placing a genealogy at the start of each subsection, which seems to me a more natural way to break up the text. This table may help in comparing the various traditions:

[4] Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), p.36 – 53; see also Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (2nd publishing Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publishing, 2000), p.105 – 109

Stasinos' Cypria (European)	**Atrahasis (Babylonian/Akkadian)**	**Zoroastrian Avesta (Old Iranian)**	**Genesis 1 – 11 (Hebrew)**
Problem: Overpopulation, wickedness, earth burdened	Creation (1.1-351): the work of the gods and the creation of humans	Creation: Ahura Mazda tells Yima (human) to be king over creation	Creation (1:1 – 2:3): God creates the world and humans and blesses them **to multiply**
First Threat: Zeus sends the Theban War; many destroyed	First Threat (1.352-415): Humans numerically increase; plague from the gods to limit overcrowding; Enki's help	First Threat: Overpopulation; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	First Threat (2:4 – 4:25): Humans corrupt themselves; God promises a deliverer to undo it; Cain kills Abel and builds a city 'on' his son for his own security; Seth hopes in God
Second Threat: Zeus plans to destroy all by thunderbolts; Momos dissuades Zeus	Second Threat (II.i.1-II.v.21) Humanity's numerical increase; drought from the gods; Enki's help	Second Threat: Overpopulation; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	Second Threat (5:1 – 9:29): **Human violence** threatens Noah and family, the last family of faith hoping for the deliverer; God protects them through the flood
Third Threat: Momos suggests that Thebis marry a mortal to create Achilles and that Zeus father Helen of Troy; war results between the Greeks and the barbarians	Third Threat (II.v.22-III.vi.4): Humanity's numerical increase, Atrahasis Flood, salvation in boat	Third Threat: Overpopulation; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	Third Threat (10:1 – 11:9): Humans build the city and tower of Babel, led by Nimrod the dictator; God disperses humanity
Resolution: Many destroyed by Trojan War, earth lightened of her burdens	Resolution (III.vi.5-viii.18): Numerical increase; compromise between Enlil and Enki; humans cursed with natural barrenness, high infant mortality rate, cult prostitution (to separate sex and procreation)	Resolution: Ahura Mazda sends a deadly winter with heavy snowfall to punish overcrowding; Yima told to build a three storied enclosure to survive; humanity destroyed outside while a boy and girl born in enclosure every 40 years	Resolution (11:10 – 26): Introduction of Abram as the heir of faith (In 11:27ff., God calls Abram and Sarai out of Ur to be a new 'Adam and Eve.')

We can see at a glance that the Hebrew tradition is also concerned with population, but in exactly the opposite sense. The Hebrew God, far from punishing human beings for population growth, orders them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Kikawada and Quinn argue, "This command, so long familiar to us, is in its cultural context utterly startling, as unexpected as the monotheism."[5] Frymer-Kensky says that this command to be fertile is "an explicit and probably conscious rejection of the idea that the cause of the flood was overpopulation and that

[5] ibid, p.38.

overpopulation is a serious problem."[6] Temple cult prostitutes who used various forms of birth control divorced sexuality and childbearing, but the Hebrew God unequivocally united the two. It is significant that such cult practices were coupled with overpopulation myths in ancient *cities*, because cities faced that problem. Kikawada and Quinn conclude: "All other traditions view population control as the solution to urban overcrowding. Genesis offers dispersion, the nomadic way of life. Population growth is from the very beginning of the Genesis primeval history presented as an unqualified blessing. The blessing in Genesis 1:28 finds a fulfillment in the dispersion 'upon the face of the whole earth,' which concludes the primeval history. Genesis 1-11 then constitutes a rejection of Babel and Babylon – of civilization itself, if its continuance requires human existence to be treated as a contingent good. For Genesis the existence of a new human was always good."[7]

Jewish creational monotheism thus begins with a strong ethical critique and condemnation of human civilization, or at least certain forms of it, along with certain activities like prostitution and war. While it affirms the goodness of creation, and while later Psalmists and New Testament writers would draw on the implications of the creation narrative to say that the natural world and all foods are good, or that the human body, as a part of creation, must therefore be resurrected into the new creation, Jewish creational monotheism carries with it a pessimistic view of the cultural and institutional matrices that are laid on top of the created world by human beings. There is a tension the biblical writers perceived between human conduct as originally intended and circumscribed by God for His covenant people, and the way in which human life was actually conducted everywhere else, and often among the chosen people as well. Its charter document, the Pentateuch, begins with a sophisticated polemic against the institutions and attitudes of Israel's pagan neighbors. Human civilization elevates itself at the expense of human life. Genesis 1 – 11 elevates human life at the expense of human civilization, because each person is made in the image of God and therefore precious. C.S. Lewis astutely remarks, 'Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live for ever, and this must be either true or false…And immortality makes this other difference, which, by the by, has a connection with the difference between totalitarianism and democracy. If individuals live only seventy years, then a state, or a nation, or a civilisation, which may last for a thousand years, is more important than an individual. But if Christianity is true, then the individual is not only more important but incomparably more important, for he is everlasting and the life of the state or civilisation, compared with his, is only a moment.'[8] To be precise, *every individual* has more dignity than the state or social order.

During the period of the patriarchs and matriarchs, each generation seemed to separate naturally from the previous. God made no mention of a recognizable government institution for the chosen people except for the prophecy of the scepter of Judah (Gen.49:10) and the star of Jacob (Num.24:17 – 19), which referred to the Messiah himself. The organized monarchy arose when Israel refused to accept God as king, when God gave them over to their own choices: The grisly book of Judges, when it says repeatedly that 'there was no king in Israel,' is not a political tract advocating the clear authority of the monarchy. It is a spiritual insight that Gideon's command, 'I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the LORD shall rule over you,' (Judg.8:23) had not been heeded. And the book of Samuel makes it clear that the institution of the kingship comes from the Gentiles (1 Sam.8), when Israel asks the prophet Samuel to give them a king 'like all the other nations.'

Second, God formed Israel and its laws independently of the formal institutional power structures the Gentiles had. Law in Israel was not a derivative expression of the state. In fact, law existed independently of the state for centuries and continued to operate quite independently even while the state was present.[9] Law was an expression of the will of God given to Israel as a covenant community, and YHWH was regarded as the one who adjudicated conflicts in Israel on an ongoing basis. Thus, in Israel, law was not a growing code of precedents which was meant to be applied with absolute consistency in formal courts. Such was Rome's judicial environment, but not Israel's. This also means that the 'delegated authority' of formal bureaucracy, part of the Roman system of law, was foreign to Israel. Instead, judgments were given by all manner of people who represented YHWH. YHWH shared his judicial responsibility with Moses, who then shared it with other elders in Israel (Ex.18; Dt.1:9 – 17; 16:18 – 22) and, in some regards, the whole community (Dt.13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:9, 21; 22:21; 24:7; cf. Judg.20:13). Sharing in God's judicial responsibility goes back to God's original commission to human beings to have 'dominion'

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[6] Tikva Frymer-Kensky. "The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for Understanding Genesis 1-9," *Biblical Archaeologist* 40 (1977):152. See also B.S. Yegerlehner, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* (Diss., Boston University, 1975) and David Daube's *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univerity Press, 1982).

[7] Kikawada and Quinn, p.36 – 53

[8] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1943, 1945, 1952), p.73

[9] The insights here come from Jacques Ellul, *The Theological Foundation of Law* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969)

(Gen.1:26 – 28). However, the role of adjudication also belonged to Levitical priests, individual prophet-judges on circuit like Samuel, the Davidic king, prophets operating independently of the Davidic king, and after Jehosaphat's reform, royally appointed judges in towns with a court of appeals in Jerusalem (2 Chr.19). Indeed, one gets the clear impression that these bodies of adjudication were rather spontaneous and ad-hoc: David's son Absalom judged cases (1 Sam.15:1-6), a group of elders rallied to exonerate Jeremiah *over against* a death sentence declared against him by Jerusalem's princes, priests, prophets, and officials (Jer.26), and Jesus was asked to spontaneously adjudicate a dispute over land inheritance (Lk.12:13). This proves that covenant law in Israel operated independently of the state even while the state was present. All these trials were spontaneous and – with the exception of Jesus, who declined to arbitrate – were conducted by a judge or a judging body who sought out the truth from witnesses who came with evidence (Dt.17:6).

The decision-rendering judges and kings were considered to be informed by YHWH (e.g. Solomon in 1 Ki.3:28, Ps.72) – or at least this was the ideal (Ps.82) – and they had a certain amount of discretion (Dt.16:18 – 20, 17:8 – 13). Their goal was not to abide by or accumulate a codified body of common precedents and procedures, but rather to make a decision fairly, impartially, and without being influenced by bribery or favoritism. A decision was effective because the parties involved submitted themselves beforehand to whatever verdict was handed down. This is a completely different forum for adjudication than 'rational institutions.' It was a voluntary covenant between two parties to submit to the verdict of a third party within an overarching submission to God, a method clearly favored by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1 – 8, a text which would usually involve church elders and perhaps others. Law had no necessary relationship with a formal institutional power, since God was explicitly understood to be the judge, lawgiver, and king (Isa.33:22). With this longstanding emphasis, it is not surprising that Israel looked forward to the day when Israel's God would be recognized by the Gentiles, and when YHWH, the King of Israel, would be recognized as King of the whole world. Israel thus expected the full arrival of the Kingdom of God. The motto that arose, 'No king but God,' did not just refer to an inward disposition compartmentalized off from the socio-political realities of the day. It was a polemical expression which said that ultimately, Israel would tolerate no Gentile authority, and indeed no human authority other than YHWH Himself in the person of His ultimate human representative, the Messiah.

Third, Jesus formed the church as a flat community, not a hierarchical organization. To start with, Jesus chose twelve men. After challenging Nazareth and Capernaum (Lk.4:14 – 44), and receiving disappointing responses from them, Jesus started over with his own set of twelve, symbolizing a renewed Israel (Lk.5:1 – 11, 17 – 28; 6:12 – 20). But what was the purpose of these twelve? Jesus' earliest remarks about formal institutional roles are a series of challenges to it. Referring to an independent exorcist that was not part of the band of twelve disciples, he said, 'He who is not against you is for you.' (Lk.9:49 – 50). Apparently this confused the disciples who thought that this exorcist should report to them. The fact that Jesus took a 'loose' view of organization is important to notice. He did not want the disciples to think for a moment that formal organization is what guarantees unity or success. It is more true to say that common commitment to mission is what gives a basic sense of unity to the disciples, not some formalized relation of power. Even more important is the fact that Luke carries the saying into the life of the early church. Why would a Gospel writer circulate that statement if the early church had all kinds of 'authority problems' about what kind of 'institutional model' they were going to follow? Yet this resembles the earlier incident in Israel when Eldad and Medad unexpectedly received the Spirit who was on Moses (Num.11:26 – 29), when the seventy elders received the Spirit. It seems that the early Christians were quite comfortable with carrying such attitudes of Jesus over into their daily organization, or, as I will argue here, flexibility in organization. Later, Luke (Lk.22:24 – 27) also records Jesus' critique of the disciples' assumptions about power. In response to the question, 'Who will be the greatest?' Jesus replies, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.' Jesus established servanthood in the Christian community as a first-order character quality. Significantly, Jesus critiqued carte-blanche all Gentile (hierarchical) styles of authority. Given Jesus' context, we know that he certainly had at least Rome in mind, with its cascading levels of bureaucratic and delegated authority. Given Jesus' background in the Hebrew Scriptures, we know what he thought about it.

Given Jesus' emphasis on servanthood, the disciples defined the church primarily as a community, not as a hierarchical organization. Matthew contains the most interesting data for arguing for a 'flat' Christian organization. He says to the disciples, 'But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call

anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted' (Mt.23:8 – 12).

Even more important is that in Mark, Jesus' warning is to always be on guard against one's own desire for power. In Mark, the disciples are able to be victorious against various other sins, but not their desire for power. In the early part of the story (Mk.1:16 – 20), the disciples' reasons for following Jesus are not clear. We do not get a glimpse into their motivations for joining Jesus or continuing to accompanying him. But it becomes more clear as we go through the story that something is wrong with them. Simon and the others seem to have their own agenda for Jesus (1:36-37). It seems like the disciples had a hard time understanding the parables. And he said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables?' (4:13) Jesus says on the stormy sea, 'How is it you have no faith?' (4:40) Compare with Matthew, 'You of little faith' and Luke, 'Where is your faith?' Why is Mark so negative? Even the disciples ask in bewilderment, 'Who then is this?' (4:41) They aren't sure who Jesus is. They know less than the demons and are confused about him like the scribes and Pharisees. But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw Him and were terrified… and they were utterly astonished, for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened (6:49-52). The disciples think that Jesus uses a parable in talking about the human heart (7:17) even though it wasn't a parable. And He was saying to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'' (8:21)

In the second half of the gospel, the veil comes off. We see the major, and perhaps the particular, reason why the disciples had such a hard time. The disciples did not understand what Jesus' mission was. Jesus predicted his death and resurrection three times, in Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33-34. These predictions of the Cross and the Resurrection shape the narrative in the second half of the gospel. Whenever Jesus talks about his own suffering and death, the disciples are struck with fear and confusion. Further, their motive becomes clear: they only wanted to be the greatest next to a nationalistic military Messiah. Now that Jesus makes clear he wants them to serve, their faulty motive becomes exposed.

Prediction	Confusion	Corrective Teaching
And he began to teach them that the Son on Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 8:31	And he was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 8:32	But turning around and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter. And he summoned the multitude with his disciples and said, 'If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and follow me…' The Transfiguration, a foretaste of the resurrected Jesus, occurs, but the disciples are terrified rather than understanding. 8:33 – 9:13
He was teaching the disciples and telling them, 'The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and when he has been killed, he will rise three days later.' 9:31	But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask him. 9:32	And they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house, he began to question them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. And sitting down, he called the twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.' And taking a child, he set him before them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever receives one child like this in my name receives me, and whoever receives me does not receive me, but Him who sent me.' 9:33 – 37
And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking on ahead of them, and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again he took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to him, saying, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and will	James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, came up to him, saying to him, 'Teacher we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And they said to him,	But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?' And they said to him, 'We are able.' And Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you shall drink, and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized. But to sit on my right or left, this is not mine to give; but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.' And hearing this, the ten began to feel indignant with James and John. And calling them to himself, Jesus said to them, 'You know that those who are recognized as

deliver him to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit upon him and scourge him, and kill him, and three days later he will rise again.' 10:32 – 34	'Grant that we might sit in your glory, one on your right, and one on your left.' 10:35 – 37	rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them…but not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.' 10:38 – 45

The fact that the disciples were actually able to deal with most of their sins but one – their desire for power – is telling. They seem to not hear Jesus' call to take up their cross and follow him (8:33ff.). When Jesus talks about his impending death, the disciples talk amongst themselves about who will be the greatest (9:33 – 37). What a strange non-sequitur. The disciples were actually willing to submit to Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce, as well as give up their wealth (10:1 – 31). But they were not able to conquer their desire for power. Instead, immediately after Jesus' third and most graphic warning of his death, James and John, as if they had never heard him, come right out with the request, 'We want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' (10:35 – 37) There is an antithetical relationship between power and the crucifixion-love that Jesus expressed and demands. It is shown by these absurd non-sequiturs, the juxtaposition of the disciples' questions with the gravity of Jesus' calling, which is perhaps what we get when we ask Jesus about questions of formal power.

Fourth, the apostles had a collective, not individualized, authority. The apostles did not set up jurisdictions of the world that were impermeable to one another. That idea was completely foreign to them. Hence, Peter addressed the Galatians after Paul did (1 Pet.1:1); Paul and Peter both visited the Corinthian (1 Cor.1:12; 9:5) and Roman (Rom.1:11; Acts 28:14 – 31; tradition) churches on separate occasions; John addressed the Ephesians after Paul did (Rev.2:1); the author of Hebrews wrote from Italy all the way to the Jewish Christians in Judea (Heb.13:24); the late first century work 1 Clement was apparently written from the elders at Rome to the church at Corinth (1 Clem.1, 59); and the other patristic writings demonstrate this dynamic. There were no 'realms' of individual jurisdiction. They did not enter into debates of, 'Don't step into my part of the organization.' Nor did the apostles tolerate the notion that the early Christian congregations could say, 'You are not my apostle' (1 Cor.1:10 – 16). The fact that the New Testament documents circulated fairly quickly to Christian communities they were not originally addressed to demonstrates this. It is most descriptive to say that the apostles' authority was based on the *task* assigned them by Jesus, and that was a task they shared together. Thus, their authority was a collective authority that they shared together; it was not based on their 'individual authority.'

As we look at the apostles' way of managing themselves, we see a decentralized community with a hidden head, Jesus. They do not give any evidence that they 'reported' to Simon Peter in any meaningful sense. They were not centrally organized. Simon Peter appears to be a spokesperson for, but not an authority over, the other apostles. He could not appoint other apostles; that privilege was reserved for Jesus alone. Other people questioned his leadership when he went to Cornelius' house in Acts 10 – 11. And the Spirit in Acts used Peter and Paul to catch up and put a stamp of approval on the Spirit's activity as it crossed into new ethnic and geographical areas (Acts 10 – 11; 19). No central human leader sent Barnabus and Paul out from Antioch in Acts 13:1 – 2; Barnabus and Paul parted ways at their own discretion in Acts 15:35 – 41. Paul respected the other apostles as colleagues and checks on himself (Gal.2:1 – 10), but he didn't refer to their formal authority over him (i.e. they had accountability by transparency and love). In fact, in Acts 15, we see the need for a council in Jerusalem. Its decision making style is consensual. James the half-brother of Jesus appears to be the most prominent elder in Jerusalem. If a hierarchical organization was already in place, it would have been used in Acts 15, and the decision making process would have been hierarchical, not consensual.

In Acts and the ministry of Paul, house churches seem fairly decentralized. In Romans 16, 1 Corinthians 16, etc., Paul refers to house owners but never to particular city-wide leaders. The Christians seem to be a loose association of households. The apostles' commands are always to the city-wide Christian community, broadly speaking, and not to particular leaders. That is significant. People just ate together and shared their things. There was no set meeting day because Jewish Christians still wanted to attend the synagogue. In fact, the Jewish Diaspora synagogue system, which sometimes served as a model for early Christian communities (a day where corporate worship and reading of Scripture happens, etc.), was itself decentralized. We see this in Acts 13:14 when Paul visits Pisidian Antioch and is invited to speak in the synagogue meeting. Early Christianity inherited this fluidity. In fact, as Ephesians 4:12 – 16 suggests and later documents like the Didache show, there were itinerant bands of preachers

and prophetic figures who would visit Christian communities and preach, and people would weigh what they said afterwards. This is why 'Judaizers' followed Paul around and why he did everything he could to teach his new converts well – he didn't want them influenced by other wandering false teachers. I understand that this itinerant preaching and local testing happens in some African churches today.

Did Paul use a form or style of authority that he expected other leaders to duplicate after him? That is an interesting question, especially given his strong language on at least one occasion, 'Shall I come with a rod?' (1 Cor.4:21) He was probably referring to his specific authority, evidenced by signs and wonders, to call the community together to excommunicate someone from the community (1 Cor.5), which is the immediate context. More important is the fact that Paul viewed himself as the last apostle (1 Cor.15:1 – 11), the last one who saw Jesus' resurrection body and received this unique authority directly from him. I realize that people nowadays tend to use the term 'apostle' loosely, to mean just about anything they want, but a much more strict definition was held by the New Testament writers, seen below:

> '[1] Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, [2] by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. [3] For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, [5] and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. [6] After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; [7] then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; [8] and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. [9] For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. [10] But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. [11] Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.' (1 Corinthians 15:1 – 11)

Being a witness to Jesus' bodily resurrection is limited to a finite number, denoted in the creed. N.T. Wright notes, 'This reference to seeing the risen Jesus cannot therefore, in Paul's mind at least, have anything to do with regular and normal, or even extraordinary, 'Christian experience,' with ongoing visions and revelations or a 'spiritual' sense of the presence of Jesus. As is clear from 1 Corinthians 9.1, this 'seeing' was something which constituted people as 'apostles,' the one-off witnesses to a one-off event. The Corinthians had had every kind of spiritual experience imaginable, as the previous chapters have made clear; but they had not seen the risen Jesus, nor did either they or Paul expect that they would do so.'[10] Some of those apostolic witnesses had died, and Paul was the last of the apostles. The point of the creed, or at least part of the point, is to establish that there would be no more added to that number. That is also required by the fact that Jesus' bodily resurrection would not be available again to 'new apostles.' Arguably, it is also demonstrated by the fact that Paul encouraged the Corinthians to pursue 'prophecy' as the highest gift available to them, not 'apostleship,' which is the highest gift over all (1 Cor.14). So I'm amused and flexible with the use of the word 'apostle' today – since people use it to mean missionary, church planter, one skilled at governing the church, movement starter – but on a very basic level, we need to be clear that no one today has the authority of a true apostle. Apostolic authority is for the apostles, and it is collective and decentralized.

Fifth, Paul (and the other apostles, I believe) did not use authority when he operated outside the apostolic task. This qualitative difference is notable when Paul wrote to Philemon, when the occasion involved a question not directly related to Paul's task as an apostle. Paul spoke *very differently* when the issue at hand concerned a matter far too specific for an apostle. It belonged in the realm of Philemon's personal choice, and Paul did not violate that boundary. Paul did not introduce himself as an apostle (v.1). His appeal was based on a personal relationship with Philemon (v.9). He did not make a decision for Philemon 'without [his] consent' (v.14). He considered Philemon a 'partner' and asked Philemon to think of him in the same way (v.17); etc. Thus, the biblical evidence supports my view that God's authority rests primarily in *tasks*, not in *people*. If God's authority rested in *people*, then Paul could have told Philemon what market at which to buy his groceries, which people to speak to or not, and certainly what to do with the runaway slave Onesimus. Paul could have spoken authoritatively concerning any subject at all, even one outside his area of responsibility or expertise. Yet Paul did not do this. However, if, as I believe, God's authority rests in particular *tasks*, then the authority that Christian leaders exercise in the power of God is a *stewarded authority* to accomplish a *task*, just as Paul always referred to his apostleship as a 'stewardship of the

[10] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), p.318

gospel' (1 Cor.4:1; Eph.3:7). The authority is not theirs and does not rest in their persons. Rather, it rests in the *task* given by God. Therefore, the Christian leader cannot speak or behave authoritatively outside her/his given area of responsibility or expertise.

Sixth, elders also have a collective authority, derived from and shaped by the collective authority of the apostles. The apostles did not 'delegate' to elders their 'individual authority' or even their particular ministry emphases. That fact is shown in that Paul's churches did not become 'churches to the Gentiles,' nor did Peter's churches become 'churches to the Jews,' even though Paul and Peter had those distinct emphases on their own. The apostles created a community that was continually permeable to itself and centered around the teaching that is general to all Christians. The apostles' *collective* authority is invested in the New Testament, so elders are always accountable to that teaching, for their function derives from preaching it and teaching it. Neither did elders derive their particular 'callings' from particular apostles. The patristic writings 1 Clement from Rome to Corinth, Ignatius' epistles to multiple communities, and Polycarp's epistle from Smyrna in Asia Minor to the Philippians in Macedonia are all written from elders in one region to Christians in another; they demonstrate the sense of general authority, not geographically specific authority, that Christian elders had. That is further evidence of what I'm talking about: a specific 'geography' or 'strategy' or 'calling' was not passed down from individual apostles to elders. Common teaching was, and that was what elders were responsible for passing on. They did not enter into debates of jurisdiction.

Seventh, our biblical obedience to church elders is first and foremost our obedience to Christ and the worldwide corporate community in Christ (i.e. the apostolic teaching of the New Testament). Our obedience to any particular specialty sub-ministry of the church, and the organizational authority structures in place to execute that task, are always conditional, limited, and permeable. Local elders are to be living examples of the servanthood Jesus taught (1 Tim.3:1 – 11; Ti.1:5 – 9; 1 Pet.5:5 – 6; cf. 1 Th.5:12 – 13; Heb.13:17). But their authority as elders is quite specific to their task as elders, which is *teaching*. Elders may at times have handled the funds of the local community on behalf of the needy (modeled after the apostles from Acts 4:31 – 34; 6:1 – 15), but this responsibility was on one celebrated occasion delegated to deacons (in Acts 6), and does not seem to be necessarily limited to either elders or deacons. Elders are responsible to preach and teach ('able to teach' is the only functional job requirement listed in 1 Tim.3:2; and 'who work hard at preaching and teaching' is found in 1 Tim.5:17), but do *not* exercise 'leadership' or 'authority' in all possible forms.

I believe this to be the case for two major reasons. First, alongside elders, other trusted and wise figures in the church steeped in the teaching of Jesus and the biblical narrative might also be involved in settling disputes between Christians over civil matters, if the Christians opt for them to play that role in any given case. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for not pursuing that option: 'Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?' (1 Cor.6:1 – 3) Paul's admonition is built on Jesus sharing his authority to judge with his people (Mt.19:28; Jn.5:22, 26; 2 Pet.2:4; Jude 6; Rev.20:4). That was anticipated by the prophet Daniel in his vision that the messianic age would come with 'the Son of Man' ascending on the clouds to be enthroned, and 'the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom' to share in the role of adjudication. 'Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One' (Dan.7:22, 27). This vision for elders and other qualified leaders among God's people comes from another theme in Israel's history after the Exodus. God delivered the people by judging Egypt for oppression. He then shared his judicial responsibility with Moses, who then shared it with other elders in Israel (Ex.18; Dt.1:9 – 17; 16:18 – 22) and, in some regards, the whole community (Dt.13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:9, 21; 22:21; 24:7; cf. Judg.20:13). Sharing in God's judicial responsibility goes back to God's original commission to human beings to have 'dominion' (Gen.1:26 – 28). Hence, as Jesus is the 'new Adam' (Rom.5:12 – 21; 1 Cor.15:24 – 28, 45 – 47), those who are in him and understand his wise authority and the principles of his teaching can render perceptive and ethical judgments. Clearly in 1 Corinthians 5, the *Didache,* and *Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians*, formal elders did not have a monopoly on that ability. For instance, excommunication was a responsibility of the whole believing community (Mt.18:15 – 20; 1 Cor.5), not just elders, modeled on Israel when the whole community was involved.

Second, spiritual gifts, including the gift of leadership, are distributed by the Spirit across the body. Everyone is empowered. Ministry can spring up spontaneously. The topic of spiritual gifts comes up in extended fashion in 1 Corinthians 12 – 14, but it comes up in a very significant place in the *order* of topics in Ephesians and Romans. After the theological portions of those letters (Eph.1 – 3; Rom.1 – 11), Paul discusses humility (Eph.4:1 – 3; Rom.12:1 – 2) and spiritual gifts (Eph.4:4 – 8; Rom.12:3 – 8). Significantly, Paul's placement of spiritual gifts as the first 'practical' item (after humility) is very important. Paul does not seem to believe that apostles and elders, per se, were responsible for providing a tops-down strategy for 'church growth.' Paul seems to have placed greater weight on the bottoms-up development of spiritual gifts, and then presumably from there, strategic or administrative goals. This means that, in biblical times and therefore in biblical ethics, elders and deacons did not have monopolies on any particular gifts or a particular ministry vision, including the gift of leadership. They might train up and bless people into certain ministries, or perhaps gather the community so the community can make a decision, but they are not the gatekeepers of ministry. Hence, when the apostles command the rest of us to be subject to elders (Heb.13:17, 1 Pet.5:5 – 6; 1 Th.5:12 – 13), they probably did not have in mind being subject only to 'our' elders but not 'other' elders, or being subject to elders in all the possible things elders could tell us to do, because they were talking about our common commitment to the apostolic teaching, which is now documented in the New Testament, and ought to be embodied in *teaching elders who teach and nurture people's spiritual gifts*. We have reason to privilege Ephesians and Romans on this issue because of their nature. Paul wrote Ephesians not to address a particular problem, but to give his great vision of Christ and the church. Paul wrote Romans to give a general explanation of his ministry, especially in relation to the questions involving Jews and Gentiles.

Implicit is another limitation on the authority of elders: If elders develop a specialized passion to do a particular ministry (e.g. develop a specialized spiritual gifting, inner city ministry, college ministry, outreach to Jews or Muslims, etc.), as that could happen with any other Christian person, then others might opt to be a part of that particular ministry based on our own individual sense of passion, but that is not what is meant by this more general call to obey our elders, since *it is not the function of an elder to be specialized*. Not all leaders are elders, nor do all elders always function in a teaching capacity as elders, and that is fine in my opinion. But for someone to claim the authority of an 'elder' to call people to a narrow and specialized ministry (e.g. to one ethnic group, etc.), or a narrow and specialized community, is a misuse of the biblical text. That is simply not what is meant by the obedience that is due elders.

Finally, eighth, although much would later be made of top-down 'apostolic succession' and 'appointment' in church history, the New Testament evidence on 'appointment' itself leans towards a bottom-up process. The question here is not whether 'appointments' happened (they did), but whether 'appointments' in New Testament usage is top-down or bottom-up. Jesus certainly 'appointed' Paul (2 Tim.1:11), and the other apostles (e.g. 'I chose you' in Jn.15:16). Timothy appears to have been appointed, in some sense, by a group of elders laying hands on him in prayer (1 Tim.4:14), among whom was Paul (2 Tim.1:6). While in Ephesus, Timothy was apparently given the task of selecting elders (1 Tim.3:1) and evaluating them (1 Tim.5:1 – 2, 17 – 20). Similarly, while in Crete, Titus was given the task of 'appointing' elders (Ti.1:5). Yet this top-down method was not used all the time, and the language used here may not be exclusively referring to a top-down method of selection. In Acts, the twelve apostles asked the congregation in Jerusalem to select seven 'deacons' in a bottom-up decision-making fashion, and notably, the apostles then laid hands on them to ratify that decision (Acts 6:3 – 6). T.F. Torrance notes that the number seven had meaning in the Jewish synagogue tradition:

> 'According to the Mishnah tractate 'Sanhedrin' it was laid down that a large Jewish community might have 23 elders, presumably plus its president, making 24 in all, but if a community were 120 strong it was allowed to have its 'seven' elders… Regarded in this light, the fact that the original disciples, who with Peter formed the original Christian community in Jerusalem, was numbered 120 (Acts 1:15), is rather significant. It helps us to understand why shortly afterwards the twelve Apostles appointed specifically 'seven' disciples (presumably as 'presbyters' not 'deacons' as is usually held) to serve the needs of the primitive church in Jerusalem, while they gave themselves over 'to prayer and the ministry of the Word' in fulfillment of their universal apostolic ministry. We also learn, however, that in due course with the growth of its membership the Jerusalem church came to have a Christian sanhedrin of seventy presbyters, probably in line with the seventy disciples sent out by Jesus on the mission of the Kingdom mentioned by St. Luke

(10:1, 17), but again in accordance with Jewish regulations, presided over by James, not the Apostle but the brother of our Lord.'[11]

So when Luke later tells us that Barnabus and Paul 'appointed elders for them in every church' before they left each community (Acts 14:23), we should not assume that the method for appointing these elders was strictly top-down. If Paul and Barnabus followed the twelve apostles' precedent in Jerusalem in Acts 6, which is somewhat likely, then the congregation played a bottom-up role in the process, for which the word 'appointed' serves as a shorthand. Moreover, the decentralized nature of Christian mission tilts against the argument that 'appointment' to leadership was a top-down event. Luke tells us that Paul and Barnabus were sent out by the Holy Spirit from Antioch (Acts 13:2) without mention of authorization from the Jerusalem church or the twelve apostles. If Christian mission unfolded in a decentralized and spontaneous way, it must have been organized and evaluated primarily by *agreement on content*, not by succession from this or that apostle, although personal connections like that served as a kind of shorthand to support the claim that one's doctrinal *content* was sound. I am sympathetic to that as a shorthand, but in historical fact, already in the ministry of the apostle John, it neither guaranteed orthodoxy nor established itself as an independent criteria (1 Jn.2:19; 3 Jn.5 – 10). Likely Paul's reference to 'men from James' (Gal.2:12) indicates something similar, where some men were claiming James' stature and name without actually agreeing with his apostolic content.

Authority and Organization in Early Church History

Examining church history during the apostolic age and beyond, we find the following trends: *The major questions and crises of the early church did not cause them to immediately adopt hierarchical solutions; in fact, on some occasions, they quite resisted it.* Something as vitally important as the writing of the New Testament Scriptures and its canonization reflect a remarkably decentralized Christian community. The apostles did not consult each other before traveling or writing. The need for subsequent church councils in the third century and beyond (Nicaea in 325, Constantinople in 381, Ephesus in 431, Chalcedon in 451, etc.) shows that the church was still not centralized. If a hierarchical organization was already in place, it would have been used, and the decision making process would have been hierarchical, not consensual. Doctrinal concerns were serious but hierarchy was not seen as a solution to that. The New Testament writers saw teaching Scripture to the community as the best defense against heresy. In fact, the early church weathered the storms of the early heresies quite well without it.

We can begin by examining the *Didache*, a short Christian treatise dated to the mid to late 1st or early 2nd century. I am inclined towards an earlier date because of the mention of 'apostles and prophets' as an itinerant order of traveling ministers.[12] The *Didache* appears to be an early manual on Christian community life. It is very Jewish in idiom and expression, possibly meant to circulate in the sphere of Palestine and the diaspora Jewish community where Christian faith had taken hold. It concerns three main subjects: Christian ethics, liturgy, and how to regard leaders. The material on leadership occurs in chapters 11 – 15. Several notable features of the *Didache* emerge. First, the *Didache* assumes that the young Christian congregations have the knowledge and ability to evaluate itinerant apostles and prophets based on two criteria: the content of their teaching (described in chapters 1 – 10), and their desire not to financially presume on the local community.

> '[1] Whosoever, therefore, comes and teaches you all these things that have been said before, receive him. [2] But if the teacher himself turn and teach another doctrine to the destruction of this, hear him not; but if he teach so as to increase righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord, receive him as the Lord. [3] But concerning the apostles and prophets, according to the decree of the Gospel, thus do. [4] Let every apostle that comes to you be received as the Lord. [5] But he shall not remain except one day; but if there be need, also the next; but if he remain three days, he is a false prophet. [6] And when the apostle goes away, let him take nothing but bread until he lodges; but if he ask money, he is a false prophet…'

> '[1] But let every one that comes in the name of the Lord be received, and afterward you shall prove and know him; for you shall have understanding right and left. [2] If he who comes is a wayfarer, assist him as far as you are able; but he shall not remain with you, except for two or three days, if need be…'

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[11] T.F. Torrance, 'The Ministry of Women' (*Touchstone Magazine*, Fall 1992), p.5

[12] John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (SCM Press 1976), argues for a date between 40 – 60 AD.

> ‘[1] But every true prophet that wills to abide among you is worthy of his support. [2] So also a true teacher is himself worthy, as the workman, of his support. [Matthew 10:10; cf. Luke 10:7] [3] Every first-fruit, therefore, of the products of wine-press and threshing-floor, of oxen and of sheep, you shall take and give to the prophets, for they are your high priests. [4] But if you have not a prophet, give it to the poor. [5] If you make a batch of dough, take the first-fruit and give according to the commandment. [6] So also when you open a jar of wine or of oil, take the first-fruit and give it to the prophets; [7] and of money (silver) and clothing and every possession, take the first-fruit, as it may seem good to you, and give according to the commandment.’[13]

The reference to ‘high priests’ in 13:3 is clearly a metaphor, for no other trappings or stable institutions tied to the Old Testament Levitical priesthood were in place. The metaphor was intended to ascribe honor to these prophet-teachers such that their material needs would be provided for by the community *for up to three days but no more*. Yet, at the same time, we detect a shift in language. The apostle Paul referred to himself and the other apostles as oxen serving *human beings* (1 Cor.9:8 – 10), or priests serving *in the Temple* (1 Cor.9:13 – 14). Paul’s metaphors for his relationship as an apostle to the community went from lesser to greater. In the order of creation, oxen are clearly lesser than the human beings; in the context of the Temple, the priests were clearly lesser than the Temple itself. In the *Didache*, it is not clear how the metaphor works, for there is no reference in the treatise to the church as a holy temple unto the Lord, or corporately indwelled by the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor.6:18 – 20; Eph.2:17 – 22; 1 Pet.2:4 – 10). This vagueness opens the door for a later reversal of the metaphor as being from greater to lesser, as we see in *1 Clement*, which I believe is problematic.

The *Didache* then speaks of the stable leaders of the Christian community who are not itinerant: the ‘bishops and deacons’:

> ‘[1] Appoint, therefore, for yourselves, bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, [1 Timothy 3:4] and truthful and proved; for they also render to you the service of prophets and teachers. [2] Despise them not therefore, for they are your honoured ones, together with the prophets and teachers. [3] And reprove one another, not in anger, but in peace, as you have it in the Gospel [Matthew 18:15 – 17] but to every one that acts amiss against another, let no one speak, nor let him hear anything from you until he repent. [4] But your prayers and alms and all your deeds so do, as you have it in the Gospel of our Lord.’[14]

‘Bishops’ (*episcopoi*) or ‘overseers’ in this instance appears to be another term for the ‘elders’ (*presbyteroi*) of Paul’s pastoral epistles (1 Tim.3; Ti.1) and elsewhere. Otherwise, an entire category of leadership already named in the apostolic writings would have to be considered missing. As I argued above regarding ‘appointment’ of leaders in the Book of Acts, here we have the congregation given the task to ‘appoint, therefore, for yourselves’ these leaders, given the criteria. As T.F. Torrance suggests, the model here appears to be patterned after the Jewish synagogue traditions of bottom-up election, not top-down selection.

The organizational fluidity and openness of the apostolic church clearly left it vulnerable to splinter movements like that of Diotrephes (3 Jn.9 – 11). For the apostles and those Christians who would claim to follow them, the manner of response to heresy was textual study and reasoned, if at times furious, debate. Not until 385 AD did both heretic and orthodox Christians use the power of the state, in the case of Priscillian. And not until Augustine in the early 400’s did a theologian produce a justification for Christians to use state-sponsored religious persecution. The Christians’ lack of recourse to political power for centuries basically ensured that both the orthodox and the heretics had to work for widespread literacy for the common folk, become quite creative in thinking about liturgy and hymnody, promote the rise of textual scholarship of biblical texts in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Syriac, and Coptic, engage in serious reflection on Greek philosophy and other intellectual influences having a bearing on Christian thought, and above all engage in public debates about theology in multiple languages.

We can also see this because of the sustained heretical movements that developed early on from both Jewish and Greek quarters. Already in the ministries of Peter and Paul in the mid-first century we find the Judaizers (Gal.2; Acts 15), who might have been the earliest Ebionites, a group of Jewish ‘Christians’ who asserted that Jesus was the

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[13] *Didache* 11:1 – 6; 12:1 – 2: 13:1 – 7
[14] *Didache* 15:1 – 4

Jewish Messiah while rejecting his divinity, in an apparent attempt to uphold the transcendence of God; they insisted on the necessity of following various Jewish rites and customs. This movement lasted at least into the fourth century, and perhaps almost a millennium longer, possibly influencing the rise of Islam. It was in some sense an attempt to make Jewish culture and concerns a logical priority over other biblical and theological concerns. And during the late first century, while the apostle John was in old age, we find the Hellenistic 'Gnostic' heresy arising to plague the church. Hellenistic Gnosticism claimed that Jesus was divine but not truly human, reproducing Greek cosmological beliefs about the strict separation between spirit and matter, soul and body. The Gnostics believed that Jesus' humanity was an illusion of some sort. This had deleterious effects on the Christian view of the body, marriage, and sexuality. This heresy would occupy most of the intellectual energy of the church, and cause its bishops to close ranks. But the *Didache* bears historical witness to a period of time in the church where other concerns were held to be more important. It appears to me that Jesus and the apostles courted these challenges because of what it meant for them to love God with the human mind and with freedom of the human will. In the coming centuries, both orthodox and heretical Christians sought to outdo one another using ministerial appointments, often in the same city.

Then in Ignatius of Antioch, around 110 AD, we find an argument for the role and importance of the so-called 'monarchical bishop' which, in his mind, represents God to Christ, and Christ to the church.

> 'I exhort you to study to do all things with a divine harmony, while your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons, who are most dear to me, and are entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the beginning of time, and in the end was revealed. Do ye all then, imitating the same divine conduct, pay respect to one another, and let no one look upon his neighbour after the flesh, but do ye continually love each other in Jesus Christ. Let nothing exist among you that may divide you; but be ye united with your bishop, and those that preside over you, as a type and evidence of your immortality.'[15]

> 'See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid.'[16]

Here we find a full blown attempt to argue from greater to lesser using theological metaphor. In a stunning reversal of Paul speaking of the apostles and the congregations using analogies of lesser to greater (1 Cor.9:8 – 14), Ignatius argues that the bishop is *greater* than the elders and the congregation. Simultaneously, however, two other features of Ignatius' notion of church authority is notable. First, Ignatius seemed to believe that any such bishop, administering the sacraments of baptism and communion, invites the whole church in principle in an open manner, without a notion of geographical jurisdiction. 'Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.' That last detail is significant in my argument. The idea of geographical jurisdiction had yet to emerge.

Jean Daniélou, in his impressive study of early Christianity in its Jewish, Hellenistic, and Latin developments, surmises that Jewish Christians who fled Jerusalem in 70 AD settled in Antioch and reproduced a certain type of leadership model which had developed in the church community in Jerusalem. James the half-brother of Jesus had been a leader in the Jerusalem church in the mid-first century. It is clear from Acts 15 and Galatians 2 that James was highly regarded. Whether James was regarded as occupying a higher rank than any other church leaders in Jerusalem during his own lifetime or afterwards cannot be ascertained. Daniélou surmises that James was, in memory if not during his lifetime, regarded by other Jewish Christians as a local 'successor of the Apostles.'[17] When the Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem, the Jewish Christians scattered, mostly to Antioch and other parts of Syria. This explains, on Daniélou's thesis, why an Antiochene leader like Ignatius would use heightened

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[15] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 6
[16] Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrneans* 8
[17] Jean Daniélou, *The Development of Christian Doctrine Before the Council of Nicaea, Volume One: The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1964), p.355 – 356.

argumentation for his role as bishop. As evidence, Daniélou also notes that a small group of Jewish Christians remained in the Transjordan, gathered around the successor of James, a man named Simeon, and this small Jewish Christian splinter group was eventually called 'the Nazarenes.'[18] Daniélou suggests that Ignatius of Antioch uses the term 'bishop' (*episcopos*) in a functionally elevated way to mean what would eventually be labeled an 'archbishop' (*archiepiscopos*). For the largest and most prestigious cities, the role and title was invested with the authority of the twelve apostles by linear succession wherever possible (although Alexandria and Carthage could not claim that, and Constantinople had to draw on the prestige of smaller local communities like Thessalonica, Philippi, and Ephesus). That a Roman Catholic theologian of Daniélou's stature – a Jesuit patristics scholar and Catholic cardinal – would admit that the evidence points in this direction is quite remarkable.

Ignatius also roots the bishop's authority in the sacraments. For this reason, advocates of a 'sacramental theology' claim an anchor in Ignatius. In my opinion, that move is by no means straightforward, for reasons I explore below, despite the language the bishop of Antioch uses. We cannot map Ignatius or other early church leaders onto the positions promoted by various Catholics and Protestants in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, because neither Ignatius nor others were setting about to answer questions of how the bread and wine participate in, or represent, the body and blood of Christ, or why exactly the bishop must be present to make them valid. I think it best to surmise that baptism and the eucharist were coordinated with accurate knowledge of the Christian past, and represented by those practices. In many ways, the earliest Christian community seems to have received these practices in a way modeled after its Judaic heritage, whether via the 'altar' function of the Temple where a meal was shared, or the 'preaching' function of the synagogue where the Scriptures were expounded, or some combination of both.

Regardless, we do know that Jesus instructed his followers to share meals, teach, and repeat certain content at certain moments, or surrounding them. At baptism, the one name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit was recalled in connection with receiving 'all' the teaching of Jesus and committing one's self to teaching others (e.g. Mt.28:18 – 20). At the eucharist, memory of Jesus' death and resurrection was repeated, presumably with an explanation of the significance of that death and resurrection in connection with the Jewish Passover and exodus deliverance (e.g. 1 Cor.11:17 – 32 and 5:1 – 13). Both practices were anchored in the Old Testament and were dependent on the Old Testament for fuller explanation. At a time when the New Testament canon was still taking formal shape as a symbol of the faith, these community practices would have been vitally important. And as the Gnostic heresies were already spreading, the bodily nature of both baptism and eucharist as Christian practices linking both the material and spiritual realms would have been important as well.

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, is also important in connection with Ignatius because he collected, copied, and forwarded Ignatius' letters to the Philippians and encouraged their distribution and reading.[19] This is significant because Polycarp looms quite large on the scene in the generation immediately after the apostles: an outstanding leader of the Christians in Asia Minor; enterprising coordinator of mission to the Latin and Celtic peoples to the west; mentor to Pothinus and Irenaeus, the first and second bishops of Lyons in Roman Gaul; defender of orthodoxy to the Gnostic followers of Marcion and Valentinus in Rome; representative of the Eastern observation of Easter to Anicetus of Rome. Did he believe everything Ignatius said about the 'monarchical bishop'? Quite possibly. But Ignatius' writings admit more than one possible meaning. We cannot be certain, for example, whether Ignatius and Polycarp believed that apostolic succession was effectively symbolized and conveyed by the sacraments, or if continuity of apostolic teaching was the main concern built into the sacraments, or if a sacramental theology was already in place, however unlikely that seems.

In Polycarp of Smyrna's *Epistle to the Philippians*, dated around the time of Ignatius' martyrdom before 120 AD, we have a fascinating example of elders themselves being clearly subordinate to the apostolic teaching as expressed by the congregation. In chapter 11 of that letter, written sometime in the first half of the second century, we have the extremely provocative case of the Philippian church community having deposed one of their own elders, Valens, because he had demonstrated *covetousness*.

> 'I am greatly grieved for Valens, who was once a presbyter among you, because he so little understands the place that was given him [in the Church]. I exhort you, therefore, that ye abstain from covetousness, and that ye be chaste and truthful. 'Abstain from every form of evil.' [1 Thessalonians 5:22] For if a man

[18] Ibid, p.356, citing Hegesippus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV, 22:4
[19] Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 13

> cannot govern himself in such matters, how shall he enjoin them on others? If a man does not keep himself from covetousness, he shall be defiled by idolatry, and shall be judged as one of the heathen. But who of us are ignorant of the judgment of the Lord? 'Do we not know that the saints shall judge the world?' [1 Corinthians 6:2] as Paul teaches. But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you, in the midst of whom the blessed Paul laboured, and who are commended in the beginning of his Epistle. For he boasts of you in all those Churches which alone then knew the Lord; but we [of Smyrna] had not yet known Him. I am deeply grieved, therefore, brethren, for him (Valens) and his wife; to whom may the Lord grant true repentance! And be ye then moderate in regard to this matter, and 'do not count such as enemies,' [2 Thessalonians 3:15] but call them back as suffering and straying members, that ye may save your whole body. For by so acting ye shall edify yourselves.'[20]

Lest this action seem relatively easy to do for our modern ears, consider the enormous emotional weight and cost for people in traditional, non-Western cultures to publicly challenge a biological family member over a small matter, much less a formal leadership position and full participation in the community. If this action seems straightforward to us, might I suggest that it is because we live in the wake of various social movements that placed the principle of meritocracy over nepotism. The deposition of Valens is quite important because next to Paul's *Epistle to Philemon*, Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* might be the earliest example of a Christian character-based meritocracy of sorts, which challenged all other social considerations: seniority, age, gender, and economic class.

Ostensibly Valens committed an observable infraction: embezzlement, theft, perhaps even ostentatious living. Some commentators believe that Valens had committed some kind of sexual sin, but others maintain materialism, which I regard as more likely because his wife is mentioned as a *collaborator*, not a victim. It is remarkable, given the American cultural context by contrast, that the congregation held one of their own elders accountable for a money-related sin, and even more remarkable that the sin was described not by saying that he crossed a 'black and white,' observable line like theft (or, in the less likely case, adultery), but the less measurable sin of covetousness! Polycarp, who was bishop of Smyrna, and perhaps the Christian leader with the highest stature near the Philippians, wrote to them to commend them for deposing Valens, as well as his wife, from being elder(s?) in the Philippian church.

Elders seem to be subordinate to the authority of the apostolic teaching and the New Testament as 'sacred Scripture,' called such by Polycarp in chapter 12. If an elder does not carry out his (or her) role faithfully, he (or she) is to be removed from it by the community itself. Remarkably, then, the *role* carries the divine authority from Jesus and the apostles, but the *person* inhabiting the role per se does not, and the divine authority carries within itself the means for deposing the person abusing the authority of the role. Polycarp even quotes from 1 Corinthians 6:2, about the saints judging the world, as part of his approval that the Philippian congregation deposed Valens the elder (!), not about any action on Polycarp's part. All this is quite remarkable in terms of the Christian practice of transparency, accountability, and the discerning nature of divine and human authority. To reiterate: The divine authority carries within itself the sanction for deposing the human person who may be standing within that role and abusing its authority.

However, Clement of Rome's *Epistle to the Corinthians*, written perhaps in 94 AD, does make the argument that the apostles personally appointed 'bishops and deacons.'

> 'And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labours], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe. Nor was this any new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place, 'I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith.'' [alluding to LXX Isaiah 60:17][21]

Once again, the word for 'bishop' probably means 'elder' as in Paul's pastoral epistles and the *Didache*. But the basic meaning is clear. Clement is arguing for an apostolic succession of people in a top-down selection process into leadership offices. Clement's creative but dubious use of Isaiah 60:17 is worth not only examining, but correcting. Isaiah said, 'And I will make peace your administrators, and righteousness your overseers' (Isa.60:17).

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[20] Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 11
[21] Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians* 42

Clement reversed the *gifts* God gives (peace, righteousness) with the anthropomorphic *mode* by which God would place those gifts over people (to be administrators, overseers). Clement made the *administrators and overseers* out to be the gifts themselves. Clement continues:

> 'Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect fore-knowledge of this, they appointed those [ministers] already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. We are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties. Blessed are those presbyters who, having finished their course before now, have obtained a fruitful and perfect departure [from this world]; for they have no fear lest any one deprive them of the place now appointed them. But we see that ye have removed some men of excellent behaviour from the ministry, which they fulfilled blamelessly and with honour.'[22]

This letter needs to be placed alongside Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* because the occasion for writing – the deposition of church leaders elsewhere – is curiously similar. Polycarp affirmed not only the Philippians' perception of the problem in their church elder(s), Valens and his wife, but also their bottom-up deposition of this couple without mention of any previous involvement by him. Did Polycarp view himself as able to override their decision in principle, as Clement and the Roman elders seem to have viewed themselves in relation to the Corinthians? Only if we make of Clement the higher principle – forgiving him for his questionable use of Isaiah – and Polycarp only one instance of that principle in practice. But whether it is appropriate to do that, we will never know, and many remain doubtful, if only for the reason that Asia Minor at this time was the center of Christian orthodoxy intellectually and also of mission to the West. Even if we grant that Clement and other observers in Rome were correct to be concerned about the Corinthians deposing some of their own leaders, questions remain regarding the Christian communities in both Corinth and Rome.

Regarding the Corinthian church, if it was founded by Paul over an eighteen month period (Acts 18:1 – 18), an unusually long visit by Paul's own standards, and had elders and bishops appointed (in some sense) by Paul himself, why is that fact not clearly evidenced by either of Paul's epistles to the Corinthians? Why did the Corinthian Christians so easily depose elders some forty years later? Did they have grounds? Did they, like the Philippians, draw from 1 Corinthians 6:1 – 8, which was after all addressed to them only one generation previous?

Regarding the early Roman church, many questions can be asked as well. Why did Clement conceal his own name in the letter? He closes with 'us' and 'we' in ch.59; why did he write as a member of a church council as opposed to writing with the weight of his sole authority? Does this reflect a still decentralized house church network? Peter Lampe, in what is regarded by some as the most comprehensive study of early Christianity in Rome for the first two centuries AD, believes so.[23] He maintains that the institution of the monarchical bishop in Rome only emerged in the late 2nd century, despite the encouragement of Ignatius of Antioch, apparently. For the more serious question is whether how we position *1 Clement* in the unfolding history of the Roman church.

Luke tells us that the Roman church was founded as a church of Jews and Gentile proselytes to Judaism who returned were visiting Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:10). This means they must have spent some time with the twelve apostles, including the apostle Peter, and the earliest Christian community. It is true that Irenaeus of Lyons in Roman Gaul, who was the earliest writer on this subject next to *1 Clement*,[24] traced leadership of the Roman church back to Peter's personal visit to Rome around 60 AD, but even if there is truth to this claim, why was there no leadership appointed by Peter when the Roman Christians were in Jerusalem in roughly 30 AD, when they first encountered him? Instead, we have evidence of a Jewish synagogue-style board of seven elders, including Priscilla, remembered as an early Roman Christian leadership structure, which better fits what Luke tells us of their origins, especially if they had stayed in Jerusalem long enough to see the seven officers selected by the community in a

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[22] Clement of Rome, *Epistle to the Corinthians* 44
[23] Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (London: Continuum, 2003), p.397
[24] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.2.2 and 4.26.2; Irenaeus studied under Justin Martyr in Rome in the mid-second century

bottom-up manner (Acts 6:3 – 6).[25] Why did the apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Romans in 57 AD, seem unconcerned about the lack of identifiable leaders appointed by apostles (Rom.1:8 – 17)? Why did Paul seem unconcerned to establish one, either in his epistle or in his actual visit to Rome while under house arrest (Acts 28:14 – 31)? Admittedly, Luke might not have wanted to document the names of Christian elders in Rome, right under the Emperor's nose. But given the pattern in Acts, Luke was not leaving much doubt that they existed, either.

Is it possible that a demographic shift from Jewish to Roman in the Roman church – starting from Emperor Claudius' expulsion of Jews from the city in 49 AD and a lack of Jewish Christians still evidenced by Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* in 57 AD – contributed to a cultural shift from Jewish democratic synagogue tradition to Roman bureaucratic tradition? This is certainly the case when it came to the question of whether Christians should celebrate Easter on the 14th of Nisan, on the Jewish calendar, which would place it closer to the Jewish community (as Polycarp and those of Asia Minor did), whereas the Roman church already practiced an observance on the first Sunday after the spring equinox (as Anicetus of Rome articulated, and as Victor would later make a sticking point). Did this include a reinterpretation of the memories of leadership appointments as a top-down affair rather than bottom-up? If Peter, following Paul's first visit to Rome, did participate in appointing someone there (Linus, according to some traditions), which is certainly possible, did some in the Roman church then later neglect completely the history of the Roman church prior to 60 AD, interpret Peter's action to be a top-down appointment, and universalize it across the entire church? Might Peter himself have interpreted it as a bottom-up process? Did the persecutions of Christians in Rome (Nero in 64 AD; arguably Domitian in the mid 90's) and the many heresies circulating among the Romans (Valentinus and Marcion in the mid second century had large followings in Rome, as did Montanus, and even Pope Eleuterus had to be corrected by Irenaeus in 177 AD) in strengthen the Roman Christians' interest in showing forth the stability of their leadership? This might explain the view present in *1 Clement*.

While Hegesippus, the chronicler in Rome, and Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons in Roman Gaul (both writing ~180 AD), find significance in the tradition of direct appointment from the apostles, it is very noteworthy that others writing before them did not. The *Shepherd* of Hermas, also during the early to mid-second century, identifies a 'Clement' as being a courier of two copies of one book, to two parties: Christians external to Rome (which explains *1 Clement*), and 'the *presbyters* who preside over the church' within Rome.[26] That reference suggests either a Jewish-style, bottom-up, synagogue-like system of representation, perhaps with each major house church being represented by its own presbyter. There is not any suggestion that Clement operates like a 'monarchical bishop.' Similarly, the heretic Marcion, in 144 AD, convened a meeting of 'presbyters and elders' but did not see himself facing a monarchical bishop.[27] Justin Martyr, writing his *First Apology* from his school in Rome in the mid second century, just three decades before Hegesippus and Irenaeus, speaks of a 'president' (*proestos*),[28] which hearkens back to the bottom-up process of the Jewish synagogue elders electing one among them to be a presider and spokesperson.

The two historical observations can certainly exist side by side. Hegesippus and Irenaeus may be genuinely truthful on the matter of apostolic lineage when they argue for doctrinal stability. But the actual form of governance in the Roman church appears to be not identical or coterminous with that reality. Furthermore, Hegesippus' own writings are physically lost to us and only known through Eusebius of Caesaria (c.260 – c.340 AD), who was unapologetically pro-Constantine and presenting the lines of Roman emperors and Roman bishops as two unbroken successions culminating in the era of Constantine. Can Eusebius be fully trusted on this issue? Not entirely.

What of Irenaeus? Did he really believe in a top-down succession, as is often claimed? Or was he just using a shorthand to denote continuity of doctrine as part of his argument that heretics had no organic connection back to Jesus and the unity of the apostolic faith? The latter is perfectly amenable to Irenaeus' purpose in writing and actual content. For instance, Irenaeus in the following statements, says that the apostolic faith and orthodox teaching precedes the bishops, and serves as the litmus test for anyone claiming to be a leader in the church:

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[25] T.F. Torrance, 'The Ministry of Women' (*Touchstone Magazine*, Fall 1992), p.5

[26] Hermas, *The Shepherd*, Vision 2.4.3

[27] Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (London: Continuum, 2003), p.399

[28] Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chs.65, 67; cited in James L. Papandrea, *Reading the Early Church Fathers: From the Didache to Nicaea* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), p.50 but unfortunately without discussion; Lampe, ch.41, credits Victor, bishop of Rome circa 189 – 199 AD, with consolidating the house churches that had been 'fractionalized' from the beginning of Christian faith in Rome.

> 'Nor will any one of the rulers in the churches teach doctrines different from these (however highly gifted he may be as to eloquence)—for no one is greater than the Master. Nor, on the other hand, will he who is deficient in power of expression inflict injury on the tradition. For the faith is ever one and the same. So he who is able to teach at great length regarding it makes no addition to it. Nor does he who can say but little, diminish it.' [29]

> 'By this [succession], they have handed down that Church which exists in every place and which has come down even unto us. She is guarded and preserved without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine. She neither receives any addition to, nor does she allow any diminishing of the truths which she believes.'[30]

Irenaeus' prioritizing content over organization is consistent with three other facts that we know about him. First, in 177 AD, when Irenaeus – while a priest of Lyons – was sent from Lyons to Rome to treat with Eleuterus, bishop of Rome (circa 174 – 189 AD), he discovered that Eleuterus was overly sympathetic to, or had become, a Montanist. Irenaeus then corrected him.[31] Second, when Irenaeus returned from Rome to Lyons later that year, he discovered that Pothinus, the previous bishop, had been martyred under Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius. Irenaeus was *elected* bishop in a bottom-up manner.[32] Third, Irenaeus succeeded in persuading Victor, bishop of Rome from 189 – 199 AD, not to excommunicate the Christians of Asia Minor (Irenaeus' own homeland) for following the Jewish calendar in their observance of Easter (on the 14th of Nisan) rather than on the first Sunday after the spring equinox, since the Christians in Caesaria, Jerusalem, and Alexandria had decided to follow the Western, Latin practice. So Irenaeus did not believe in Rome being doctrinally impeccable or having some kind of 'universal jurisdiction' over the other churches in principle. At most, Irenaeus can be said to support a collegiality of bishops, but in the manner of bottom-up election.

In any case, the evidence of Clement, Justin Martyr, Hermas, and even Marcion about the actual governance of the Roman Christian community being a plurality of elders (presbyters) is solid. This data is all the more likely to be accurate given that it is incidental and not intimately connected to any major argument of theirs. It fits well with T.F. Torrance's interpretation of the fresco painted in the Catacombs of Priscilla where seven elders including Priscilla sat at the table over the eucharist. Clement was a spokesperson for a body of elders in *1 Clement*. Whether they wrote to the Corinthian church as concerned peers, or whether they thought of themselves as having some kind of special jurisdiction over the Corinthian church, is unknown.

Meanwhile, in Egypt and Roman North Africa, the same pattern is observed. The Alexandrian Church until the Council of Nicea in 325 AD was well-known for having continued their tradition, rooted in the Jewish synagogue pattern and its enormous Jewish community, of *electing* its leading bishop from among its other elders, and no one questioned that.[33] The Alexandrian church knew nothing about an apostolic appointment of their bishops, even though tradition held that Mark founded their community, and Mark was known to be Peter's associate and 'son' (1 Pet.5:13).

In Carthage, Tertullian (160 – 225 AD) asserted that recently formed churches, such as his own, which started with groups of unknown martyrs, could be called apostolic if they 'had derived the tradition of faith and the seeds of doctrine' from an apostolic church.[34] Tertullian ultimately relied on an argument from *apostolic content* because the heretics were also claiming 'apostolic succession':

> 'Let the heretics contrive something of the same kind [i.e., a list of episcopal succession back to the apostles]… However, even if they were to produce such a contrivance, they will not advance even one step. For when their very doctrine is compared with that of the apostles, its own diversity and discrepancy proves that it had neither an apostle nor an apostolic man for its authorship… The heretics will be put to this test by those churches, who, although they do not have as their founder the apostles or apostolic men

[29] Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 1.10.2
[30] Ibid 4.33.8
[31] Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume I: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867), p.834
[32] John E. Toews, *The Story of Original Sin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), p.51
[33] K.J. Woollcombe, 'The Ministry and the Order of the Church in the Works of the Fathers' in Kenneth M. Carey (editor), *The Historic Episcopate* (Dacre Press, 1954), p.31f; Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume 4*, p.4 notes that 'papal authority, or again of the justifiableness of religious persecution…appear to be at any rate foreign to the mind of Athanasius.'
[34] Eric G. Jay, *The Church* (John Knox Press: 1978), p.51 citing Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics* 20, 21

> (as being of much later date, for churches are in fact being founded daily), yet, since they agree in the same faith, they are considered to be no less apostolic because they are alike in doctrine. Therefore, let all the heresies, when challenged to these two tests [i.e., episcopal succession and apostolic doctrine] by our apostolic church, offer their proof of how they consider themselves to be apostolic… They are not admitted to peaceful relations and communion by the churches that are in any way connected with the apostles. For the heretics are in no sense themselves apostolic because of their diversity as to the mysteries of the faith.'[35]
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> 'No other teaching will have the right of being received as apostolic than that which is at the present day proclaimed in the churches of apostolic foundation.'[36]

Tertullian's disciple Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200 – 258 AD), who served as bishop of Carthage from 249 – 258, followed suit. Cyprian is often cited for his support of the bishop of Rome. However, elsewhere, Cyprian makes important qualifications. He was more rigorous about what to do with Christian leaders who sinned, which is another topic in itself. What matters for my purpose here is that Cyprian clearly states that local congregations had the power to depose their leaders for sin, or for deviating from apostolic teaching:

> 'In the ordinations of priests, we should choose no one but unstained and upright ministers. In that way, the ministers who offer sacrifices to God with holy and worthy hands may be heard in the prayers that they make for the safety of the Lord's people… On this account, a people obedient to the Lord's commandments, and fearing God, should separate themselves from a sinful prelate. They should not associate themselves with the sacrifices of a sacrilegious priest. This is especially so since they themselves have the power of either choosing worthy priests or of rejecting unworthy ones.'[37]

In the Syrian-speaking church, the document called the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a practical handbook of church liturgical order and governance, clarifies that there are unlawful means by which a man might become a Christian leader. For doing that, such a person needs to be 'deprived and suspended.' No Scripture is explicitly referenced in these declarations, but I regard them as coming rather straightforwardly from passages like 1 Timothy and Titus.

> 'If any bishop, or even a presbyter or deacon, obtains that office through money, let him and the person who ordained him be deprived. And let him be entirely cut off from communion, as Simon Magus was by Peter. If any bishop uses the rulers of this world and by their means comes to be a bishop of a church, let him be deprived and suspended—together with all who communicate with him.'[38]

This means that the bottoms-up responsibility of the average Christian to compare their leaders against Scripture was significant.

Intriguingly, the early Assyrian Church of the East did not know the term 'bishop' (*episkopos*) at all, which is a sufficient historical argument in my mind to render the very concept of a 'bishop' ranking above 'elders' to be a matter of *culture*, not the gospel itself. Church historian Samuel Hugh Moffat observes:

> 'Nothing written by Christians in the Church of the East before the end of the second century, whether by the writer of the *Odes of Solomon*, by Tatian, or by Bardaisan, mentions a bishop. There is no mention of a bishop in the *Chronicle of Edessa* before the early fourth century. The *Acts of Thomas* (early third century) has an apostle and a deacon, but no bishop. The first mention of a church officer corresponding to a bishop is in the *Doctrine of Addai*, but that is no earlier than late third or fourth century. It calls the first-century missionary Addai the "Guide and Ruler" of the church in Edessa and though it ascribes to him the functions of a bishop, such as appointing officers, teaching the Bible, and instructing Christians in "the ordinances and the ministry," it does not use the word "bishop."'[39]

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[35] Tertullian of Carthage, *Prescription Against Heretics*, chapter 32
[36] Tertullian of Carthage, *Against Marcion*, book 1, chapter 21
[37] Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 67*, paragraphs 2 – 3
[38] *Apostolic Constitutions*, book 8, chapter 67, paragraph 30 – 31
[39] Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia, Volume I: Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), p.59

How and why a major segment of the church could operate this way, crossing the unfriendly Persian Empire and reaching Vietnam[40] and Japan[41] through its missionary efforts, is worth considering in much greater depth than I can do here. For now, however, I maintain that this data strongly suggests that a church-with-bishops (however they took office) was a cultural and pragmatic adaptation of some sort. It was either derived from the bottom-up Jewish practice of the synagogue elders electing one of their own to be a representative president,[42] or, as in Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, it was emulating the top-down Roman bureaucratic model of authority of summoning the whole church (in theory) around the sacraments. It was not an intrinsic part of the gospel message itself. Therefore, as soon as a church-with-bishops was undertaken by some Christians, it created the opportunity and authority for a parallel church-without-bishops to be expressed by other Christians *in those very same cultures,* simply to bear witness to another expression of Christian community life, unified not by a chain of clergy through personal apostolic succession but by their commitment to the common apostolic teaching, and recapitulating the body of Christ in any given locality through the elders and congregation committed to that content.

Over time, we see clergy centralizing responsibilities that once belonged to individuals and communities. In the earliest church, there was no formal marriage service. 'Neither episcopal blessing or benediction was necessary to validate marriages among the early Christians. We can only assume that marriage was witnessed and validated by the entire believing community, because not until the fifth century did an official benediction become a universal custom, and in the sixth century a special form of service became widely common.'[43] This responsibility, originally left to the church community, was thus gradually monopolized by the clergy. We can find other examples of this in the centralization of priests' power over excommunication, baptism, communion, etc.

In Alexandria, Egypt, according to Eastern Orthodox scholar John Anthony McGuckin, up until the time of Origen and bishop Demetrios,

> 'Up until his day the presbyters of the Alexandrian church seem to have elected one of their number to represent them; after the time of Demetrios the strict separation of presbyteral and episcopal identities is enforced.'[44]

When Origen was traveling in Palestine in 215 – 216 AD, and received ordination as a priest by bishops Theoctistus of Caesarea and Alexander of Jerusalem, Demetrios of Alexandria was infuriated and demanded the return of "his" catechist.[45] One can see the development of centralization and 'jurisdictions' over personnel by bishop Demetrios of Alexandria, which does not align well with the 'monarchical bishop' of Ignatius of Antioch over a century prior. 'Official' church leaders like elders and bishops struggled at times with itinerant Christian teachers, itinerant gnostic teachers, settled academic teachers, monastic solitaries, monastic communities, and so on. British Orthodox patristics scholar John Behr questions the role of Demetrius himself! In a lecture, Behr says:

> 'It's really only after the persecution ceases and Demetrius comes back that we hear anything about Demetrius who is said to be the bishop of Alexandria. But in fact, this is part of the emergence of a centralized episcopal system. It's not there yet. It's not really there even until the early fourth century.'[46]

From Alexandria a century after Origen comes another important data point. A story is told by church historians Rufinus of Aquileia (died 410 AD) and Sozomen (died circa 450 AD) about bishop Alexander of Alexandria (died 326 – 328 AD) seeing the young Athanasius (297 – 373 AD) and other boys imitating the baptismal rites while at play on the beach. This results in Alexander's inquiry of the boys, introduction to Athanasius who had been acting

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[40] Pham Van Sohn, in *Viet Su Tan Bien*, published in Saigon by the Dai Nam, 1961, examines the earliest history of Christianity in Vietnam. See http://www.vnbaptist.net/Tai_Lieu/History_of_VN_bible.htm. During the Hau Le period in the 16th century, the remains of Christian stonework were unearthed; Governor Si Nghiep had built many churches, statues, and monuments of Jesus on the cross.

[41] A building was erected in 603 AD in Kyoto, Japan for Christian worship. It was destroyed by fire in 670 AD, and the Koryuji Buddhist Temple was erected in its place in 818 AD. This missionary accomplishment is claimed by the Nestorian Christians. Even if that claim per se is true, the missionary effort must have been built by the Assyrian Church of the East *prior to Nestorius* (386 – 450 AD). The Church of the East was resourced by the Christian center of learning at Edessa and the network of monasteries stretching across Asia. See Moffett, chs.3 – 8.

[42] T.F. Torrance, 'The Ministry of Women', *Touchstone Magazine*, Fall 1992, p.5 – 6

[43] Edwin Yamauchi, 'Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:539 (July – September 1978), p.241 – 252; available on line at http://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac135-539-05

[44] John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen* (London, Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), p.8

[45] Ibid, p.9 – 10

[46] John Behr, *Origen and the Early Church, Part 1* (OnScript Podcast | Apple Podcasts, Aug 27, 2019; https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/theology-fr-john-behr-origen-and-the-early-church-pt1/id1073724153?i=1000447899567) at 12:33.

the role of bishop, decision to treat the baptisms as valid because of Athanasius' accuracy in enacting the rite, request of Athanasius to refrain from performing more baptisms for reason of the baptized had not properly been taught, and request of Athanasius' parents to let Alexander personally take on Athanasius' education.[47] What matters here is not the historical veracity of the story but the fact that it was circulated broadly to celebrate Athanasius' acumen and spiritual life from a young age. I also point out that one's theological position on the nature of the sacraments could at one time be separated in principle from the question of whether an ordained clergy or the broader community can administer them. Yet stories like this would not be encouraged much longer.

The prolific scholar and teacher Jerome (c.347 – 420 AD), a Latin speaking Christian who was a student of Pope Damasus I of Rome, nevertheless, despite the location of his theological training and his prestigious mentor, says quite frankly in his commentary on Titus:

> 'The presbyter is the same as the bishop, and before parties had been raised up in religion by the provocations of Satan, the churches were governed by the Senate of the presbyters. But as each one sought to appropriate to himself those whom he had baptized, instead of leading them to Christ, it was appointed that one of the presbyters, elected by his colleagues, should be set over all the others, and have chief supervision over the general well-being of the community. . . Without doubt it is the duty of the presbyters to bear in mind that by the discipline of the Church they are subordinated to him who has been given them as their head, but it is fitting that the bishops, on their side, do not forget that if they are set over the presbyters, it is the result of tradition, *and not by the fact of a particular institution by the Lord*.'[48]

Jerome's historical witness must trouble anyone who sees any leadership institution above 'elder' as God-ordained. Appealing to the Holy Spirit to justify the hierarchical organization of the church is perhaps the only recourse at this point. But this claim might be debated on other grounds.

Augustine of Hippo, writing about the same time as Jerome, around 400 AD, goes even further to discuss the relationships between the "bishops":

> 'For neither does any one of us set himself up as a bishop of bishops, or by tyrannical terror force his colleagues to the necessity of obeying, since every bishop, in the free use of his liberty and power, has the right of free judgment, and can no more be judged by another than he can himself judge another.'[49]

Augustine does not appeal to the bishop of Rome as an arbiter. This is notable, because of the five "apostolic seats" of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and Constantinople, which had the highest "honors" out of the far-flung church, Augustine was most proximate to Rome. And, by this time, bishops in conflict had voluntarily appealed to Rome or sought the support of Rome, most notably Athanasius when he was in exile. This contributed to the growing "prestige" of Rome. Yet Augustine asserts that no one is a "bishop of bishops." This means that in Augustine's view, the church was a "flat organization" at the level of the bishops. This, from the most influential theologian of "the Latin West."

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD sought to give organizational structure to monasteries, schools, and other Christians who started or engaged in these communal forms of Christian service. Once again, the local bishop acquired more organizational authority, and the concept of territorial jurisdiction became more important.

> 'Let those who truly and sincerely lead the monastic life be counted worthy of becoming honorable; but, forasmuch as certain persons using the pretext of monasticism bring confusion both upon the churches and into political affairs by going about promiscuously in the cities, and at the same time seeking to establish Monasteries for themselves; it is decreed that no one anywhere build or found a monastery or oratory contrary to the will of the bishop of the city; and that the monks in every city and district shall be subject to the bishop, and embrace a quiet course of life, and give themselves only to fasting to prayer, remaining permanently in the place in which they were set apart; and they shall meddle neither in ecclesiastical nor in secular affairs, nor leave their own monasteries to take part in such; unless, indeed, they should at any time

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[47] Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Volume 4*, p.19
[48] Jerome, *Commentary on Titus* 1:7 emphasis mine
[49] Augustine of Hippo, *On Baptism Against the Donatists* 6.6

> through urgent necessity be appointed thereto by the bishop of the city. And no slave shall be received into any monastery to become a monk against the will of the master. And if any one shall transgress this our judgment, we have decreed that he shall be excommunicated, that the name of God be not blasphemed. But the bishop of the city must make the needful provision for the monasteries.' (Canon 4)
>
> 'Let the clergy of the poor-houses, monasteries, and martyries remain under the authority of the bishops in every city according to the tradition of the holy Fathers; and let no one arrogantly cast off the rule of his own bishop; and if any shall contravene this canon in any way whatever, and will not be subject to their own bishop, if they be clergy, let them be subjected to canonical censure, and if they be monks and laymen, let them be excommunicated.' (Canon 8)

If we take Jerome and these other historical developments seriously, then what else can we do with the 'monarchical bishop' of Ignatius of Antioch, except to see it as a cultural development and treat it in an appreciative but relativized way? We can certainly be sympathetic to the need to maintain some kind of awareness of the community's theological and relational boundaries. But I do not think that this strategy of defining the church by its leaders ever worked beyond the apostles' lifetime. The church must continue to educate people and raise up leaders, but perhaps in a more flexible way where its precise boundaries remain unclear.

Authority and Organization from Constantine Onwards

Christianity's relationship to the state complicated and brought rigidity to its organization. Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 AD, which granted religious liberty and made toleration the official imperial policy. However, Constantine gave favors to the church and then played a political role in debates about orthodoxy and heresy. He issued edicts against heretical groups, and on occasion confiscated property. Vacillating between the Nicene Creed and Arianism, he famously exiled bishops on either side. Eventually, Theodosius, who reigned as Emperor in 375 – 395 AD, revoked the Edict in 380 AD and tried to enforce Nicene Christianity throughout the Empire.

Christian leaders in the Roman world had to take up new administrative tasks, especially after Constantine. Constantine allowed the church to possess property, like former pagan temples, which he confiscated and gave to Christians. And because the Roman court system was overtaxed, non-Christian people in the Roman Empire were given the option of seeing a Christian bishop to adjudicate conflicts.[50] While all this might had some social benefit, it took a toll on the church as well; Augustine, for instance, complained that he didn't have enough time for preaching. If he had only found time to learn Greek, the entire trajectory of Western theology might have been utterly different.[51] When Gregory (the Great) became bishop of Rome in AD 590, in the face of the insecure and unpredictable barbarian threat, he centralized the selection of church leadership; previously church leaders had been locally elected. He centralized financing, social welfare (hospitals), and education programs, too. Sacred actions, people, and times began to be reestablished. A clergy class began to form and take on a 'super-authoritative' quality. It is not surprising that this bureaucratization of authority, jurisdiction, and administration occurred largely under Gregory, who had once been a secular bureaucrat: governor of Rome in AD 573.[52] But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

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[50] See the Wikipedia article 'Ecclesiastical Court'

[51] David Bentley Hart, *The Story of Christianity: An Illustrated History of 2000 Years of the Christian Faith* (London: Quercus, 2012), p.77 writes, 'Such was the force of St. Augustine's intellect that some of his ideas entered permanently into Western theology. The most obvious, perhaps, is that of 'predestination,' the idea that God from eternity elects some to save, while 'reprobating' the rest to damnation, which Augustine believed to be the teaching of St. Paul. Such an idea never really arose in the Eastern Christian world. The Latin word 'praedestinare' is a far stronger verb than the original Greek 'proorizein,' which really means little more than to 'mark out in advance.' [My note: Augustine did not know Greek!] More importantly, Augustine's interpretations of certain passages in Paul were quite novel… All Christians believe that we are born in sin – that is, enslaved to death, suffering corruption in our bodies, minds and desires, alienated from God – but only in the West did the idea arise that a newborn infant is somehow already guilty of transgression in God's eyes. In part, this is because the Latin text of Romans 5:12 with which Augustine was familiar contained a mistranslation of the final clause of the verse, one that seemed to suggest that 'in' Adam 'all sinned'. The actual Greek text, however, says nothing of the sort; it says either that as a result of death all sinned, or that because sin is general all things die; but it does not impute guilt to those who have not yet committed any evil.' See also John Cassian's critique of his contemporary, Augustine, in Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), ch.4, or John Cassian's *Conferences* XIII; for an modern Eastern Orthodox critique of Augustine's understanding of predestination and God's will can be found here: https://benedictseraphim.wordpress.com/2005/03/31/st-john-cassian-on-grace-and-free-will/. Sadly, Luther and Calvin looked to Augustine for help with understanding God's will and predestination, landing on 'monergism' and 'double predestination' and thereby passing a certain kind of irrationality in Western Protestant theology.

[52] Lewis Mumford, *The Condition of Man* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1944), p.100 – 104

Constantine first favored the church and then played a political role in debates about orthodoxy and heresy. He did issue edicts against heretical groups, and on occasion confiscated property. Vacillating between the Nicene Creed and Arianism, he famously exiled bishops on either side. However, sociologist Rodney Stark has recently questioned Constantine's policy commitments on religious matters.[53] Arguably, imperial edicts had some resemblance to political theater and were never strictly enforced or carried out. Nevertheless, the threat was present. And it set the stage for the following events.

Two famous cases involving the Roman state strengthened clergy power over time. First is the case of Priscillian (born around 340 AD, died 385 AD). Priscillian was a wealthy nobleman in Roman Hispania who promoted a strict form of asceticism probably rooted in a Gnostic outlook, starting around 370 AD. He won people over by his moral example and eloquence. Despite a synod convened in Zaragoza, Spain in 380 AD which condemned, not Priscillian himself, but certain titles and practices used by him, two bishops who were sympathetic to Priscillian appointed him bishop of Avila. He was then serving under metropolitan bishop Ithacius of Lusitania. In response to an attempt by Priscillian to oust him, Ithacius obtained from Emperor Gratian an edict against 'false bishops and Manichees,' which threatened the Priscillian camp because the Roman Empire had outlawed Manicheism prior to legalizing Christianity because of its connection to Persia.[54] Priscillian went to Rome and somehow succeeded in procuring from Macedonius, the imperial *magister officiorum*, a warrant for the arrest of Ithacius, bishop of Lusitania. But in 383 AD, Ithacius presented his case before Magnus Maximus, who had rebelled against Gratian and succeeded. Maximus transferred the matter from a synod of bishops to a secular court because he treated the issue not as a rivalry between clergy but as of morality and society.[55] He also stood to benefit financially by confiscating Priscillian's property.[56] Despite giving bishop Martin of Tours a promise to not execute Priscillian, Maximus did execute him and persecuted his followers. To their great credit, other Christian bishops like Martin, Ambrose of Milan, and Pope Siricius protested this ruling and the execution, and worked to reduce the persecution. Siricius censured both bishop Ithacius and Emperor Maximus. He excommunicated Ithacius and his close associates. Ambrose refused to acknowledge Ithacius on an official visit, 'not wishing to have anything to do with bishops who had sent heretics to their death.'[57] Martin similarly broke off relations, and restored relations only when the Emperor stopped persecuting the followers of Priscillian. But the gateway had been opened for the church to use the state, not as an influence for a general human rights-oriented posture of social justice and the reduction of corruption in the state, but for purposes that specifically benefited the church, or one faction of it.

The second case involved Augustine of Hippo, who was the first theologian to offer a justification for keeping that gateway open. He believed that the church could coerce people to be orthodox because Jesus coerced Saul of Tarsus to become Paul the apostle. 'But we have shown that Paul was compelled by Christ; therefore the Church, in trying to compel the Donatists, is following the example of her Lord… Wherefore, if the power [of the sword] which the Church has received by divine appointment in its due season, through the religious character and faith of Kings, be the instrument by which those who are found in the highways and hedges--that is, in heresies and schisms--are compelled to come in, then let them not find fault because they are compelled.' And: 'Why, therefore, should not the Church use force in compelling her lost sons to return, if the lost sons compelled others to their destruction?'[58] While Augustine's predecessors would have condemned his position,[59] the reality is that Augustine's teaching led to the 'Christendom' model of Europe, and over a thousand years of religiously-inspired persecution, which carried over into the magisterial Reformers.

These trends taken together reached an interesting convergence when Pope Leo I in Rome (circa 400 – 461 AD) asserted his authority over Hilary of Arles in Gaul. The circumstances of Leo's assertion are important to note. In 445 AD, Leo appealed directly to Emperor Valentinian III *for legal and military support* for a *non-heretical matter*.

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[53] Rodney Stark, Cities of God: *The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (Harper Collins: New York, 2006), p.189 – 194; cf. Stark, *The Triumph of Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2011), p.178 – 180

[54] Philip Hughes, *History of the Church*, Volume 2 (London: A&C Black, 1979), p. 27 – 28

[55] Henry Wace, *Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., with an Account of the Principal Sects and Heresies* (London: John Murray, 1911)

[56] Patrick Healy, 'Priscillianism' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 12 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911)

[57] Hughes, p.27 – 28

[58] Augustine, *De Correctione Donatistarum* 23 – 24

[59] Tertullian (c.145 – 225 AD), wrote, '[I]t is a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions: one man's religion neither harms nor helps another man. It is assuredly no part of religion—to which free will and not force should lead us.' Lactantius (c.240 – 320 AD), argued for tolerance because only uncoerced faith is meaningful: 'If you wish to defend religion by bloodshed, and by tortures, and by guilt, it will no longer be defended, but will be polluted and profaned. For nothing is so much a matter of free-will as religion; in which, if the mind of the worshipper is disinclined to it, religion is at once taken away, and ceases to exist.'

This was yet another step down the road to hierarchy for its own sake. Leo won from the Emperor a decree that asserted the primacy of the bishop of Rome in this matter. The Emperor decreed that any bishop who refused to answer a summons from Rome could be forcibly removed by the Roman imperial governors of that province. This was without doubt an ecclesial innovation. Obviously, Leo's model of top-down church governance was not only *modeled* after the Roman bureaucratic state in its administrative style, but actually *dependent* on it for teeth. In my view, Leo immediately created the opportunity and authority for a parallel church in Arles that was not under his direct ecclesial jurisdiction.

Leo argued for the decree based on the idea of his succession from Peter, the honor of Rome as a city, and the sixth canon law at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD which accorded exceptional authority to the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome in their respective regions. While the rationale of Rome's honor as a city is clearly non-theological, the first and third rationales are worth examining in more detail. On Leo's first argument, I believe the matter of appointment from the apostle Peter is inconclusive, as I stated above. Jerusalem and Antioch pointed out that Peter appointed successors in those cities also, so the Roman church was not unique in that sense. And, as I have observed above in considering the occurrences of 'appointment' to leadership in the Book of Acts and other places, the biblical data more often portrays 'appointments' as bottom-up from the congregation, not top-down from the apostles, as the *Didache* still bears explicit witness, and Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* perhaps implicitly.

On Leo's third point, I believe the same logic applies when we distinguish the Nicene Creed from the canon laws that follow it. The granting of extra authority to the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome in the sixth canon law of Nicea immediately created the opportunity and the authority of a parallel church who held to the Nicene Creed but did not recognize the extra ecclesial authority of those patriarchs. Hence, Protestant evangelical Christians, for example, can fairly claim adherence to the theological content of the Nicene Creed without adopting the sixth canon law. Similarly, the twentieth canon law of Nicea, which called for standing rather than kneeling while praying at Sunday services (kneeling was thought to connote penitence, and interestingly enough, the occasion for that expression was segmented off from Sunday services), is an obvious example of a culturally-specific expression of a kingdom value, especially since the apostle Paul said he bowed, i.e. *knelt*, in prayer in Ephesians 3:14! Paul was not penitential in that instance. I surmise that that particular canon law could be either practiced or ignored in other cultural contexts. In any case, I believe bishop Leo of Rome overstepped bounds that were already questionable by extending the dubious notion of 'jurisdiction.' In my view, from biblical-theological and missiological-cultural perspectives, while the Christians at Arles in Gaul had the freedom to align with Leo in this way, dissenting Christians at Arles equally had the freedom to decline, and certainly should not have been pressured by the Roman government authorities. Indeed, I believe the Coptic Christians in Alexandria were fully justified in declining to align their ecclesiastical practices with Rome when Leo also tried to assert his primacy over Alexandrian patriarch Dioscoros in 445 AD. This diversity of ecclesial expressions and ties should have been interpreted not as an embarrassment to the church as a mark of disunity and confusion, but as a demonstration that the church was drawing into itself different expressions of human culture which could exist side by side. If people of various tribes and tongues would be gathered around the throne of Jesus (Rev.5:7), and since language is an expression of human culture, then we can conclude that culture as a broader category is being refined, healed, and transformed by the gospel and the power of the Spirit. That includes forms of leadership that are culturally varied.

Finally, these trends culminated in leadership struggles between Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch. At the end of the sixth century, Gregory the Great, Bishop of Rome, denounced John the Faster (Patriarch of Constantinople) for his assumed title of 'Universal Patriarch.' However, in A.D. 606, Boniface III proclaimed himself 'Universal Bishop' over all the churches.

To sum up my views of authority in the church proper, I maintain that Scripture and history both tell us that strong clergy governance with centralized power over pragmatic aspects of Christian life is a late, and in many ways, anti-Christian, development. It does seem to me to reflect a *cultural* shift from Jewish to Greco-Latin practices, and then various attempts at universalizing the latter. This is not just an issue where a principle can be contextualized differently based on the situation and viewed neutrally, as if it were a situation just as good as any other. The centralization of church power in particular individuals *without* a corresponding freedom for others represents a sad betrayal of the Old Testament's total critique of institutionalized power and the human desire for stability, Jesus' severe warnings about Gentile forms of hierarchy and the desire for power that stand in continuity with the Old Testament, and the apostolic paradigm of the church community as 'community' first and foremost gathered around teaching, and hierarchical 'organization' a very distant second. Hence, I am fairly cautious about the veneration of

the 'senior pastor' or the investment in 'elders' more authority than what we see them using in the New Testament: preaching and teaching a steady diet of Scripture, the nurturing of people's spiritual gifts for service in the world regardless of their location within the church (they are Christ's gifts to the church at large), and the settling of civil disputes between believers. The ownership and administration of buildings, in particular, must be carefully considered because ownership of property has been known to change the priorities and principles of church leadership quite significantly.

I understand that my conclusions will be difficult for those Christians from hierarchical churches, or perhaps churches in non-Western cultures, or churches in working class communities, where hierarchy seems important to maintain order. Also, once a church community makes financial commitments to a building, for example, possessiveness of people tends to set in, and priority is given to stability. On a personal level, I certainly sympathize a great deal with these communities and the struggles they face, and I have worked within a few of them. Pragmatically, I can appreciate the importance of looking to church leadership where, in a turbulent world of persecution, theological and biblical education is established and more reliable, such as the schools in Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, Constantinople, and Edessa. But neither do I agree with everything. I do not accept the idea that the church must be hierarchical in its essence, or that 'ecclesiology' requires a clergy class. The Jewish community (both Christian and non-Christian) oppressed by Rome did not demonstrate or idealize a hierarchical response. The early Irish Christianity of St. Patrick was rural, and they had a decentralized – not hierarchical – style of Christian community leadership. The flat style of early Irish Christianity serves as the well-known counterpoint to the hierarchical Roman style of Christianity which was modeled after the Roman imperial government. Likewise, British evangelicalism confronted the ravages of the British Industrial Revolution (e.g. vagrancy, crime, neglect, alcoholism, etc.) by proliferating organizations, not so much by strengthening existing churches and traditions. Neither did the lay-persons' bible study movement of Kanzo Uchimura in Japan in the early 1900's, which involved many working class folk disaffected by the rapid rise of capitalism, become hierarchical.

All of this is to say: I do not believe that one can simply say 'culture,' 'circumstance,' or even 'mission' and impose 'hierarchy' as a solution that is immune to criticism. I repeat my exegetical conclusions: (1) Hierarchy is unnatural and is, at best, temporary and limited. (2) God formed Israel and its laws independently of the formal institutional power formed among the Gentiles. (3) Jesus formed the church as a community, not an organization. (4) The apostles had collective authority, not individual authority. (5) The apostles did not use authority outside the apostolic task, thus showing that their authority came not from their persons, but from the task given them by Jesus. (6) They did not 'delegate' their authority to elders. Rather, elders have their own task of preaching and teaching what the apostles taught; and that task itself has authority. (7) Our biblical obedience to church elders is first and foremost our obedience to the reality of our individual identity in Christ and our corporate *community* in Christ (i.e. the apostolic teaching of the New Testament). Our obedience to any particular specialty sub-ministry of the church and the *organizational* authority structures in place to execute that task is always conditional, limited, and permeable. What is specific to some Christians is always qualified by, and subjected to, what is true for all. And (8) the biblical data on 'appointment' into leadership affirms bottom-up selection by the congregation as much as it does top-down selection by existing leaders, so the criteria of 'apostolic succession' to identify a genuine church does not have a strong footing. I believe commitment to apostolic content determines the genuine church. This forms the foundation for a Christian ethical approach to organizations and organizational authority.

The Need for a Christian Ethics of Organizations and Authority

I have been impressed by the long history of Western Christianity's use of multiple modes of human organization. In the early church, traveling apostles and prophets, along with widows, seem to be regarded as special subgroups in the church in the New Testament. The development of other groups occurred relatively rapidly. Schools and groups of Christian scholars quickly emerged, such as the great Christian school (supposedly started by the apostle Mark) connected to the Library of Alexandria; or Jerome's informal school in Bethlehem for the last 34 years of his life. The *parabolani*, those Christians who entered plague-stricken cities to care for the sick and dispose of dead bodies, were another remarkable subgroup.

One institution is especially relevant: the monastery. In the late third century, the Egyptian monk Anthony was the first to develop the organizational form of a monastic order.[60] Inspired by that form of Christian life, John Cassian

[60] Moffett p.76 notes that Tatian the Assyrian and the Encratites were radical ascetics who turned to the desert a century before Anthony in Egypt, but the anti-body, anti-marriage, and anti-material heresies of that group make claiming Tatian and the Encratites a bit problematic from an orthodox Christian point of view.

and Benedict developed the earliest Christian monasteries in Western Europe. Benedict designed his famous community rule – now known as the Rule of St. Benedict – for use by monks living in community. It was, essentially, a kind of mutual contract for what community life would look like. Irish missionaries also developed monasteries for spiritual formation and learning. The Nestorian Christians developed a monastery system as they evangelized Asia. In Western Europe, the Catholic Church took a step further. They developed 'orders' like the Franciscans (1209), Poor Clares (1212), Dominicans (1216), and Jesuits (1540). This was a kind of mobile monastic community, organized around a 'charism,' or spiritual gifting, or 'vocation.' During the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church also developed Christian guilds and brotherhoods, around secular vocations and professional commitments. Meanwhile, the monasteries were exploding with technological innovations from the field of agriculture to eyeglasses. British evangelicalism multiplied voluntary societies. And from other Protestant societies, the early state-chartered corporations emerged as a secular parallel to the Christian orders and guilds. Eventually, in the U.S., the shift from state-chartered corporations to corporations as permanent legal entities (and controversially, 'persons') occurred.

On the one hand, pragmatically speaking, these modes of human organization were, and are, fundamentally necessary to give individuals the ability to take jobs that their parents did not do. Theologically speaking, they are necessary to express a rich and varied sense of personal vocation, to organize subgroups of Christians towards some specific goals, and to develop people's spiritual gifts. In a mode of supporting professions more broadly, they were essential ways of organizing people according to a merit-based system rather than a nepotistic system of family favors and overlooking lack of integrity, and nurturing a culture of integrity among some people in a broader society which might be quite corrupt.[61]

On the other hand, from the standpoint of Christian ethics and pastoral theology, I am critical of specific aspects of this development. I am impressed by the Roman Catholic orders, but on the whole I wish they had also made it possible for Christians to join orders without taking lifelong vows. I am also quite concerned about male-only and female-only orders which become not just modes of service but modes of life. For if male and female are both required to image God (Gen.1:27; 1 Cor.11:2 – 16), then the church must be a community in which men and women are not entirely segregated, however meaningful the service is to which they aspire. Relations between men and women in the church were surely negatively impacted by the underlying view from the early church that the only justifiable sex was sex for procreation within marriage – as opposed to the enjoyment of marital union itself. That view can only be seen as the influence of Greek stoic culture, and perhaps the overreaction to the very real sexual trauma of pedophilia endured by many in the Greco-Roman city, and a departure from Christianity's Jewish roots, where the *Song of Songs* celebrates marital sex for its own sake, not simply for a procreative purpose. I think the secularization of orders and guilds into corporations was an appropriate development given the stabilization of political structures, but I firmly believe that 'limited liability' is an ethical problem; the modern corporation now escapes full responsibility for its actions and products, and I wish that British and American evangelicals had more strongly resisted that legislation. And I believe modern economics and law are grossly mistaken when they treat labor and land as reducible to capital, and subject to the lowest bidder, which denigrates both people and the environment. Nevertheless, despite these significant criticisms and others, I would still affirm the development of human organizations in the West.

This brings us to the need to have a clear ethics of organizational authority from a Christian standpoint, with biblical-theological and missiological-cultural considerations. I will offer some reflections on explicitly Christian organizations first, and then secular organizations.

Ethical Point #1: An Ethic of Transparency

Jesus tells us to fulfill our promises (Mt.5:33 – 37) and Paul tells us to discharge our debts and owe nothing to anyone (Rom.13:8). But when one party changes the terms of the relationship without the other party's knowing consent, the second party is not under oath to fulfill it. Scripture consistently warns the more powerful person against modifying (i.e. breaking) oaths to more vulnerable people. Scripture demonstrates that by condemning characters like Laban the deceiver, who changed the terms on the more vulnerable Jacob multiple times to basically enslave him (Gen.29 – 31).

[61] Although I appreciate the work of the 'social Trinitarians' like Rahner, Moltmann, LaCugna, and others, I do not see how any straight line can be drawn from one's doctrine of the Trinity to one's doctrine of the church. I currently understand this kind of organizational diversity as a combination of ethical principles, spiritual gifts, and missionary directives all contextualized thoughtfully and dynamically into particular cultures where various modes of leadership can be expressed.

Within the Sinai covenant, the overarching concern about the stability of contracts seems integrated into two commandments: the commandment to not steal and the commandment to not bear false witness against your neighbor (Ex.20:15 – 16; Dt.5:19 – 20). Hence, in the very first section of case law following the Ten Commandments, Moses commanded protections for the betrothed girl who lived as a guest in another household waiting for marriage; if the betrothal was not kept, she was free to go with honor and without debt (Ex.21:7 – 11). If your spouse cheats on you (Num.5:11 – 31; Mt.19:3 – 12), or perhaps had significantly falsified himself/herself to you prior to marriage (Dt.24:1), s/he has changed the terms of your relationship; while you could certainly forgive and remain with the person, you would not be under oath in principle to remain in the marriage. Israelites were to not deceive the more vulnerable aliens and foreigners in economic transactions; so Israel had to have just weights, balances, and measures to be fully transparent with them in trading and making economic promises (Lev.19:33 – 36; Dt.25:13 – 16).

Deuteronomy is an extended reflection and elaboration of the Ten Commandments. I think that two entire groups of commandments – commandments in Dt.21:15 – 22:4 relating to theft and in Dt.22:5 – 23:14 relating to telling falsehoods – support this ethic of transparency in contractual relationship. My conclusions do not depend on whether this literary arrangement of the book of Deuteronomy is correct, but the material is easier to perceive this way:

Parallels Between the Decalogue and Structure of the Covenant Stipulations (Dt.12:1 – 26:19)[62]

Chapter	*Commandment*	*Parallel Theme*
12:1 – 14:21	1, 2, 3 (monotheism, idols & swearing)	Purity of worship, exclusion of foreign gods, name of God (12:3, 5, 11, 21)
14:22 – 16:17	4 (sabbath)	Holy rhythms of daily life and concern for the poor
16:18 – 18:22	5 (honoring parents)	Respect for legitimate human authority: judge, king, priest, prophet
19:1 – 21:9	6 (murder)	Situations dealing with loss of human life
21:10 – 14	7 (adultery)	Marriage to a woman taken captive from wartime
21:15 – 22:4	8 (theft)	Various commands instilling a community ethos of care and compassion towards the weak and the poor
22:5 – 23:14	9 (false witness)	Various commands about representing one's self or others accurately
23:15 – 26:19	10 (covetousness)	Various commands about greed, protection of the vulnerable

Indeed, in the 'theft' category are: the law protecting the rights of the firstborn, even in cases where there are two wives (Dt.21:15 – 17) which, if broken, would be the falsification of the role of husband and father; the law for how the family of a rebellious son can publicly distance itself from that son (21:18 – 23), which, if not followed, might stigmatize the entire family; the law obligating the Israelite to help a neighbor's stray livestock (22:1 – 40), which, if broken, falsifies the meaning of the term 'neighbor.'

In the 'false witness' category are: the law against cross-gender dressing (Dt.22:5), the law against taking a mother bird along with her eggs (22:6 – 7), and the law requiring a parapet on one's rooftop (22:8). Cross-gender dressing might have been done to falsify one's own appearance. It might strain or break trust in many, many ways, such as: gaining someone's trust dishonestly; forming misleading emotional entanglements; receiving the economic support by impersonating someone else; etc. Taking a mother bird along with her eggs (22:6 – 7) would falsify Israel's relationship to the creation which originates from God's command to rule the creation in such a way that will lead to its flourishing and not its spoiling. Not having a secure parapet on one's rooftop (22:8) would falsify an offer of hospitality (rooftops were like modern day porches or balconies, designed for leisure, and needed the railings) by endangering the guest; and so on. So changing the nature of a contract in a hidden way, or coercing a less powerful person to accept a changed contract, involves falsifying one's self and bearing false witness to a neighbor about one's intentions.

[62] Modified by Mako A. Nagasawa from Robert I. Bradshaw, *The Book of Deuteronomy*; http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_deuteronomy.html; last accessed May 5, 2015

The second century Christian apologists relied on an ethic of transparency. I cite three examples here: First, the *Epistle to Diognetus*, written in 130 AD. Diognetus is thought by some to be the tutor of Marcus Aurelius – a conclusion which would increase the likelihood that author's (or authors') intention was to disseminate a letter which was very widely read. The Epistle reads:

> 'Since I see thee, most excellent Diognetus, exceedingly desirous to learn the mode of worshipping God prevalent among the Christians, and inquiring very carefully and earnestly concerning them, what God they trust in, and what form of religion they observe, so as all to look down upon the world itself, and despise death, while they neither esteem those to be gods that are reckoned such by the Greeks, nor hold to the superstition of the Jews; and what is the affection which they cherish among themselves; and why, in fine, this new kind or practice [of piety] has only now entered into the world, and not long ago; I cordially welcome this thy desire, and I implore God, who enables us both to speak and to hear, to grant to me so to speak, that, above all, I may hear you have been edified, and to you so to hear, that I who speak may have no cause of regret for having done so.'[63]

The author of the Epistle goes on to candidly critique pagan idolatry (ch.2) and Jewish practice (ch.3 – 4) in terms that appear to be standard Christian rhetoric. Hiding nothing, he then describes Christian social practice, attitudes towards political authority, theological thought, and biblical exposition (ch.5 – 12). It may be that this letter was intended to clarify Christian faith to those in imperial power, with the hope of bringing an end to the Roman persecution. But the appeal made in the Epistle is also evangelistic. The Christian wish to be politically tolerated could not be separated from the Christian responsibility to do evangelism. And a fair presentation of Christian faith was required, since any Roman official could easily prove false any false information presented, simply by walking into a Christian worship service and interviewing members of the community. So the ethic of transparency is confirmed among the second century apologists as we find them clarifying, not obscuring, Christian faith and practice.

Athenagoras of Athens, in his *Plea for the Christians*, addressed 'the Emperors Marcus Aurelius Anoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, conquerors of Armenia and Sarmatia, and more than all, philosophers.' The letter is clearly intended to be read widely and publicly, as any letter addressed to the Emperor would. Athenagoras wrote to defend the Christian community against false accusations, and to describe Christian thought and practice faithfully:

> 'Three things are alleged against us: atheism, Thyestean feasts, Oedipodean intercourse. But if these charges are true, spare no class: proceed at once against our crimes; destroy us root and branch, with our wives and children, if any Christian is found to live like the brutes… But, if these things are only idle tales and empty slanders, originating in the fact that virtue is opposed by its very nature to vice, and that contraries war against one another by a divine law (and you are yourselves witnesses that no such iniquities are committed by us, for you forbid informations to be laid against us), it remains for you to make inquiry concerning our life, our opinions, our loyalty and obedience to you and your house and government, and thus at length to grant to us the same rights (we ask nothing more) as to those who persecute us. For we shall then conquer them, unhesitatingly surrendering, as we now do, our very lives for the truth's sake.'[64]

Justin Martyr in Rome addressed his *First Apology* to Emperor Titus, his son Verissimus the Philosopher, Lucius the Philosopher, and to the sacred Senate, with the whole People of the Romans. He addressed his *Second Apology* to the entire Roman Senate. In both cases, the extensive nature of Justin's description of Christian faith and practice affirms my interpretation that the apologists relied on an ethic of transparency to outsiders and especially towards those who wielded political power.

By contrast, nowhere has a lack of transparency been more apparent to me than in the Southern Baptist Convention. I have known wives abused by their husbands and told by Southern Baptist pastors to submit to their husbands and to the abuse. I have heard of more without direct personal contact. It is one thing to be a biblical complementarian on marriage. It is quite another to believe that an abused wife has no recourse to church leadership, no ability to request church discipline for her husband, and no grounds for separation and/or divorce at some point. And then, on some occasions, the wife is told not to talk about her plight with others, on the grounds that it is 'gossip.' These

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[63] *Epistle to Diognetus* (130 AD), ch.1
[64] Athenagoras of Athens, *A Plea for the Christians* (177 AD), ch.3

women are made to bear additional emotional and mental stress because of church policy on marital conflict. I believe that the cloak of 'no gossip' has been wrongly expanded to serve as a cloak, but even if I were to grant that particular church leaders ought to be protected from personal attacks, I see nothing wrong with speaking about organizational policies and their impact. Particular interpretations of Scripture (which I think are defective) can and do lead to the further victimization of already wounded wives (and others) who deserve more protection and support. Unfortunately, not only are some Southern Baptist churches in the New England area not very forthcoming with their positions on marriage, gender, and conflict, they also hide the fact that they are Southern Baptist. Liberal Protestant churches, by contrast, love to share up front that they are 'open and affirming' or have this or that position. It is to their advantage in the permissive, liberal culture of Northeastern United States. But when Southern Baptists and other churches find their conservative views at odds with secular culture, they hide their views higher up in the organization. In my analysis, this lacks transparency and integrity. If you are going to hold positions that will impact people deeply at some point, especially at a vulnerable point in their lives, it behooves you as church leaders and members to make your position explicit, and very early on in your friendship with people visiting the congregation. The church used to be the most transparent of all organizations, as shown by the second century apologists onward. It is unacceptable that the church of today has tried to hide scandals of child abuse and spousal abuse.

We can apply this ethic of transparency to organizations outside of local churches per se. An organization cannot present itself falsely to consumers or care-recipients, shareholders, or workers. An organization cannot make faulty parapets, for instance, and pass them off as safe (to consumers), or provide less-than-agreed-upon care (to care-recipients). Nor can an organization lie on its accounting and financial statements, or misinform stakeholders about its viability (to shareholders). Nor can an organization lie about the purpose of the organization, its ethical stance towards the organization's care-receivers or consumers, employee wages, worker safety, or the limits it places on work hours for the sake of work-life balance (to workers). In short, transparency is a requirement in biblical ethics. Where uncertainty is involved, it must be acknowledged. Especially in situations of organizational change or instability, transparency is a strict requirement. Otherwise, the organization is probably guilty of some kind of theft: the theft of people's health, time, resources, and/or labor.

These themes in biblical ethics concerning transparency at the start of agreements and faithfulness to those agreements guide us on a few levels. Specific groups of Christians can form or join particular organizations to accomplish particular tasks for particular times and seasons, but those tasks and those organizations must always surrender to God, who breaks into confining places on behalf of the individual and/or His mission, even at the cost of the organization and the task at hand, to reassert His lordship directly over those people (e.g. 1 Cor.7:17 – 35). The more hierarchical the organization is, whether through intensity of work or through commitment to some principle that is only a subset of the balanced principles by which life or ministry ought to unfold, the more unnatural and stressful a Christian's life becomes within it. Therefore, the more hierarchical an organization is, the more the voices of authority within the organization need to be balanced by an outside voice, and the more these times of 'spiritual discernment' will be necessary to permit people to leave in a way that does not psychologically scar them. I believe this is a factor in Christian managerial maturity. In modern churches and non-profit organizations, including the Christian non-profit, special care needs to be taken to respect these principles.

The mission and culture of non-profit organizations, including Christian ones, are often intense because of idealistic visions, funding crises, lack of resources, and understaffing. Supervisees may feel overworked and voiceless. They may internally feel ashamed to say 'no' to tasks, draw boundaries to have a normal workweek, or have conflicts with their supervisors because they feel they are jeopardizing the idealistic mission of the organization. In addition, because of tight budgets, non-profit organizations will not have a human resource department or an ombudsman to mediate supervisor-supervisee conflicts. Therefore, supervisors need to rigorously self-evaluate and self-police their use of authority, but more importantly, a clear code of ethics and path of recourse needs to be spelled out in non-profit organizations, as much as in for-profit organizations. Others outside the organization should have transparency into the organization to verify the health of these commitments.

Therefore, a supervisor who wants to be a spiritual leader in a church or parachurch setting would be wise to provide people with a non-judgmental way to reflect on the task of the organization and their relationship with their authority figures. People within the organization need access to Christians who have absolutely no investment at all in the organization's survival, so that God's voice might speak with freshness on behalf of the person. A manager cannot do this for her/his employees because that person has a conflict of interest (organizational outcomes at the

expense of individual health) and because that manager psychologically represents the organization, especially to younger employees. This continues the principle I stated above about apostles and elders having an authority that is permeable to other apostles and elders by definition: all parts of the Christian body need to be permeable to its other parts. If I am a manager, I am grateful for people who feel led to stay. But I also need to warmly bless people who will no longer participate in the organization to leave, with the attitude that this was an important part of their life discernment process and that my way of doing ministry is only one slice of the whole. This is the practice that ensures that the organization does not become an idol, and organizational authority does not become abusive. Theologically, we must train people to pick up and lay aside organizations. A mentor once advised me, 'Have loyalty to people and to missions, but not to organizations.'

I believe that because any organization that functions hierarchically must continue to ask people whether they are okay with the authority exercised on behalf of the task. People need to be spiritually helped to discern whether they should continue with or leave the organization. The issue is the pastoral encouragement to separate our 'identity in Christ' from our 'job assignment' so that our 'identity in Christ' can be strongly affirmed while our 'job assignment' remains flexible and open. This is similar to what initiates do in a Catholic order in the early phases of their involvement with that order. A for-profit corporation like Microsoft, a non-profit corporation like CityYear, a local church with a pastoral staff team, and a parachurch organization like WorldVision are not Catholic orders, but they are organizations with a certain mission, culture, and intensity. There are probably particular spiritual disciplines that are helpful for employees while they work for any organization.

Also, I believe that strategic and even theological changes are always possible in a ministry-oriented or task-related organization, but that all affected people need to be released in an open-handed way to continue pursuing ministry inside or outside the organization, not to force them out of the field. For example, I have been in the role of ministry leadership of my church, The Gathering Christian Fellowship, during a change process of merging with another church, Rescued Church Boston. Because my wife Ming and I were the leaders of our branch of a house church, and because we were initiating a change, we believed that total transparency and open-handedness were important. As we discerned for ourselves as a family over a period of a few months, we were very clear with our church elders about what we were thinking and sensing in prayer. We were also very clear with everyone else in our branch that they could talk to whomever they wished, and that at any time, they could switch over to the other branch of the house church, or come with us to Rescued, or do something entirely different. We expressed love and friendship no matter what, without judgment, and without trying to hold people to any commitments they had implicitly or explicitly made to us or to our house church. Our elders did the same with us.

Ethical Point #2: Clarifying and Limiting Power in Organizations

Although modern employer-employee relations are not specifically covered in Scripture, since master-slave relations are not quite the same, I think there is enough to see how various principles would apply. I believe that those with power in an organization must permit and even encourage people less powerful to talk about power dynamics. It is healthy for labor to talk about their experience with managers and, if such is the case, 'capitalists,' i.e. equity share-holders who technically 'own' the company. The First Amendment protects freedom of speech and assembly. Though it was unevenly applied to deny Blacks their rights, the Fourteenth Amendment applies the Bill of Rights to the individual states, which in turn has its own constitution and bill of rights providing equivalent guarantees. Labor unions have given concrete expression to those ideas and the U.S. Supreme Court has specifically applied the First Amendment to protect workers' discussing difficulties with their supervisors, organizing, taking political action, non-violent picketing, etc. Supervisors cannot forbid dissenting speech altogether. If someone is having difficulties with the Executive, grievances should be told to the Board of Directors. We can fire people for being insubordinate or being outside our ability to manage, but not forbid them from speaking in those ways. It is healthy for labor to talk about their experience with managers and capitalists. In fact, Christians have often sided with labor, and legitimately in my view.

For example, the three relationships described in Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9 involve relations of power where the person in power is limited precisely in his ability to abuse his speech. In fact, the greater truth in Ephesians that one needs to wrestle with is why, if all believers are equally in Christ and seated with Christ on his throne (Eph.2:4 – 7), whether power differentials between Christians are acceptable at all. Paul shows us how that works. (1) The husband (5:25 – 33) is not to accuse his wife, thereby separating himself emotionally from her in violation of the head-body unity of marriage; but he is reminded that Jesus washes his wife with the word. That is, Jesus speaks to the church not to condemn her, but to express his unity with her in love and build her up. (2) The father (6:4) is not

to exasperate, anger, or embitter his children but to teach them patiently. (3) The master (6:9) is to 'do the same' as the slave in what the slave was commanded (!), i.e. respect, fear, serve with sincerity, and additionally, 'to give up threatening.' One can imagine that any power relationship, not just these three, would follow this pattern. In my case, I am not only a husband and father, but also a landlord, a supervisor, and one day I will be a caretaker of elderly parents. This Ephesians passage is helpful because it assumes that power is a fundamental reality in human relations. Yet in every case, power is subverted for a distinctly Christian purpose, especially but not exclusively regarding how we speak. This is what leads the Christian community into being a community where songs of praise and a symphony of thanksgiving break forth from everyone, the vision of the church that Paul gives in Eph.5:18 – 20 right before talking about these three relationships where power is involved. The church is to be a singing symphony where we all have a part. To be 'filled by the Spirit' as Paul says is to be a community where all speak, not just the powerful.

What happens if the wife, child, or slave needs to address the sin of the husband, parent, or master? What happens if the latter is not behaving according to the vision of Ephesians 5 – 6? How should accountability and reconciliation be carried out? If we bring Jesus' process for reconciliation in Matthew 18 together with Ephesians 5 – 6, we get a very important insight. According to Matthew 18, they can confront their counterpart in private (18:15), with one or two witnesses (18:16), and then before the church (18:17) for not repenting in a way commensurate with what reconciliation in Christ requires.

In a Christian organization, the authority of Christ does not rest in the supervisor's *person*. It comes from the *task* of the organization, and is stewarded by its leaders. For example, I worked for a ministry to college campuses. When I was a supervisor, I supervised many people in their early twenties, an impressionable age. I also lived in an urban neighborhood and am passionate about serving people in the low-income, high-crime neighborhood in which I live. I had to think through various situations. If I had asked my supervisees to step away from college students and do urban ministry in my neighborhood, I would have misused my authority. On the strictly human level, my authority over my supervisees comes from their employment agreement to do campus ministry. Urban neighborhood ministry was not what they signed up for. On the spiritual and theological level, my authority over my staff comes from an alignment of the organization's calling, my calling, and their callings. For me to require my supervisees to do something outside of the organization's calling on the time and money of the organization would be to misuse the authority the organization has given me, to wrongly divert resources away from the mission the organization has, and to misuse the position of trust my supervisees had given me.

In both for-profit companies and Christian ministries, one of the questions I had to consider was whether firing someone was ethical from a Christian standpoint. Reading about an early character-based meritocracy in Polycarp's *Epistle to the Philippians* and starting this study were helpful to me. I concluded that if I were to hire or retain supervisees who, in good conscience, were not actually qualified, then I would be mishandling my authority. I was hired to make good choices in line with the *task* of the organization's goal. If I hired an incompetent person who I liked as a friend, I would be misusing my authority. If I hired someone with emotional and psychological problems who wanted to be counseled by me but didn't demonstrate real competence in the organization, I would be misusing my authority. If I refused to fire someone who, according to clear success criteria, was causing problems in the organization because I thought I could help them, I would be misusing my authority. My job is not to enable dysfunction or make personal exceptions for people I like or think I can help. Within the organization, it is to exercise the authority I was entrusted with to help accomplish the task of the organization. Often, enabling a person to continue with poor performance is a disservice to that person. And, if care and counsel can be given and received, it is best done outside the organizational context.

If I were to have a conflict with one of my supervisees and forbid them from approaching my supervisor about this conflict with me, I would be mishandling my authority. A healthy organization always allows for and, in fact, encourages recourse to someone higher up. This fits with the vision of Paul in Ephesians that the church is a community of speech and praise, and those in positions of power have limitations placed on their speech precisely to allow for the speech of those in positions of relative weakness. It also comports with the principle Jesus taught about having recourse to others in the church (Mt.18:15 – 20). If I were to require my supervisees to work an inordinate amount of hours per week, which they did not agree to, then I would be mishandling authority. Or, if I were to tell my supervisees where to buy their groceries, how to do their hair, or where to go to church (assuming several good options), I would be mishandling authority. Those tasks are not related to the task of the organization, and my authority over my supervisees must be restricted to the organizational task we share in common. If they

come to me for advice about something not related to that task, I am happy to give advice but I must state my opinion as mere opinion and not allow their decisions to affect the way I treat them.

MORE TO COME