

Leadership in the Early Church During Its First Hundred Years

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Formal leadership roles in the Early Church can be broadly categorized into three types, two of which disappeared in the subapostolic period. Because the dynamics that influenced this development are still effective, a review of what happened in the first century of the history of Christianity can be instructive for the church in our own time.¹

Though the threefold categorization of ministry types is convenient and defensible, it must be conceded at the outset that the distinction is not always a sharp one and that the same person could be the bearer of more than one type of ministry and thus come under more than one category. It should also be noted that development was not uniform and proceeded at different rates in different localities. The three types, listed in order of appearance, can be denominated (1) charismatic, (2) familial, and (3) appointive. I am using the term “charismatic” not with the modern connotation, but in the original sense based on Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. The main distinction between the three types upon which I am focusing is the mode of reception and basis of authority. Charismatic leaders received a direct divine call. Familial leaders were blood relatives of Jesus. Appointive leaders were elected in some fashion by the church.

¹ Some readers of this paper will recognize that much of it is a development of material that appeared earlier in my article “Shapes of Ministry in the New Testament and Early Church,” in *Women in Ministry: Biblical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Nancy Vyhmeister (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1988), 45-58. Biblical quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version (RSV) unless otherwise noted.

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Charismatic Ministry

The first type of ministry can be called charismatic because it was marked by the bestowal of a spiritual gift and is listed among the *charismata* (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:4-11, 28; Eph 4:11-13; 1 Pet 4:10,11). For my purpose in this paper the most important feature of this type of ministry is that a person was called to it directly by Christ or his Spirit. It was not an office to which one was elected or humanly appointed. It was a function to which one was divinely called.² The church could extend its recognition of that calling, but its reception did not depend upon such recognition and normally preceded it.³

In the beginning Jesus chose, called, and appointed twelve men “to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14,15). The parallel in Matt 10:1 calls the Twelve “disciples,” while that in Luke 6:13 adds that Jesus named them “apostles.”⁴ The term “disciples” reflects Mark’s remark that they were “to be with him,” while “apostles” was an appropriate title for those who were “to be sent out” (Gk *apostolos* < *apostellō*, “to send out”). Luke is apparently using the term technically as a title, for Jesus is said to have “named” them thus.⁵ Both Matthew and Luke, immediately after their

² This feature is similar to the calling of Old Testament prophets. The case of Elisha, who was anointed by Elijah to be his successor (1 Kgs 19:16), though chosen by the Lord, may be a possible exception, but if so it stands in striking contrast to the calling of Moses, Samuel, and the classical prophets, such as Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

³ The confirmation or ratification of the divine gift by the laying on of hands somewhat blurs the distinction between the charismatic and the appointive ministries, but a person could apparently receive one without the other. It was normal, however, for the recognition by the community to follow the divine appointment. The Seven of Acts 6 were filled with the Spirit before being chosen and credentialed by the community. Paul and Barnabas were consecrated by the laying on of hands only after having been chosen by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2,3). The same association of divine call and official consecration was true also of Timothy (1 Tim 1:18; 4:14).

⁴ Important manuscripts insert into Mark 3:14 a second clause, “whom he also named apostles,” but this looks like a case of harmonization, influenced by Luke. It is also possible that the variant reading is authentic and the source of Luke’s statement, but the Marcan verse exhibits considerable textual confusion.

⁵ Judaism also had functionaries called apostles (in Hebrew *shaliach*). These were sent out from Jerusalem on various missions and errands to the Jewish communities scattered throughout the Roman empire and beyond. They also collected funds for the support of the temple, and generally kept the network of worldwide Judaism together (cf. Acts 28:21). Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was a Jewish apostle before he became a Christian apostle (cf. Acts 9:2). The term is used for Ezra as an emissary of the king of Persia in Ezra 7:14.

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report of the calling of the Twelve, describe their being sent out on a missionary journey. Mark reports this mission in his sixth chapter and there uses the title “apostle” in 6:30.

Apostles represent the one who sends them and come with the authority of the sender to the extent that they faithfully fulfill the mission that is committed to them. In John 13:16 Jesus says: “Truly, truly, I say unto you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sends him.” The Twelve were sent out by Jesus as his representatives with the assurance, “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me” (Matt 10:40).⁶

The Twelve chosen by Jesus were the apostles *par excellence*. The number twelve was significant, corresponding to the twelve Patriarchs and twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28; Rev 21:12-14). They were clearly not the only disciples Jesus had, but they occupied a special place in the scheme of things.

So important was the number twelve in the thinking of the infant church that they felt it necessary to fill the vacancy left among the twelve apostles by the defection of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26). “The Twelve” was so firmly established as a synonym for the original group of apostles that Paul referred to them thus even when they had become only eleven (1 Cor 15:5)! Furthermore, it was important that the office not be seen as bestowed by human choice or appointment, so the vacancy was filled by casting lots after prayer (Acts 1:23-26). The words of the prayer are significant: “Show which one of these two men Thou hast chosen” (Acts 1:24). But Peter, who chaired the meeting at which this occurred, did lay down special qualifications that must be met even to be considered as a candidate: an apostle must have been an eyewitness to the resurrection of

⁶ Mishnah *Berakoth* 5:5 says, “A man’s *shaliach* is as himself.” We find later *apostoloi* of churches, as in 2 Cor 8:23 (where the RSV translates the term as “messengers”). When used in this sense, apostleship might have become something more like an appointive office than a charismatic one, but we do not know how such *apostoloi* may have been chosen. It may well be that a church merely ratified the Holy Spirit’s choice revealed through prophets, as in Acts 13:1-3 (cf. 1 Tim 4:14).

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Jesus (Acts 1:21, 22; cf. 2:32).⁷ The lot fell on Matthias, about whom we read nothing more in the New Testament.⁸

It is understandable, then, that the earliest Christians in Palestine, all Jews for whom the Twelve were especially significant, were unwilling to concede that anyone other than the Twelve could be a legitimate apostle. But this limitation was shattered by the divine calling of Paul to the apostolate in a development that was vehemently resisted by many. Paul needed constantly to defend his apostleship. In 1 Cor 9:1,2 he did so by insisting on his qualifications: he was an eyewitness to the risen Lord (a claim supported in 15:8 and by Acts 9:3-5 and 22:6-11) and had done the work of an apostle. In Gal 1:11-19 he argued that by revelation he received his commission directly from the Lord, not from any human authority or body, so that his apostleship was in no way inferior to that of the Twelve.⁹

With Paul as the “point man,” as it were, for expanding the apostolate, the number soon increased. Both Paul and Barnabas are called apostles in Acts 14:14, 4. The list that can be compiled from the New Testament also includes at least Apollos (1 Cor 4:6, 9), Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1; cf. 2:6), Titus (2 Cor 8:23, Greek), and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25).¹⁰ It must also include Andronicus and a woman, Junia (Rom

⁷ This clearly only meant being an eyewitness to the risen Lord, able to give personal testimony to seeing Jesus alive after he died, since none of the Twelve had actually seen the resurrection event itself occur. Only angels and perhaps some Roman soldiers saw that. The first witnesses afterward were two women, “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary.” See Matt 27:65–28:15.

⁸ That nothing more is heard of Matthias in the New Testament is not unusual, for the same can be said of the majority of the Twelve. Nevertheless, it has often been claimed that the 120 brethren under the leadership of Peter who filled the vacancy with Matthias made a mistake and should have kept the place open for Paul (who, of course, had not been converted yet). A typical expression of this view is by G. Campbell Morgan: “Casting lots was wholly out of place, and was never resorted to after the coming of the Spirit. That the action was a mistake is revealed in that in His own time and way God found and fitted an apostle. It is to be noted how in consequence of this initial blunder, Paul had constantly to defend his right to the place of apostleship” (*An Exposition of the Whole Bible* [Westwood: Revell, 1979], 450.) Needless to say, this is baseless speculation, but the fact that Paul was not one of the Twelve did have consequences, as will be noted.

⁹ It may also be significant that when Herod Agrippa killed James the brother of John (Acts 12:2), there is no record of an attempt to replace him and thus maintain the number of the Twelve.

¹⁰ In the case of Epaphroditus it can be argued that *apostolos* is not used in the same way as elsewhere, but only in the sense of one sent by a congregation and representing it.

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16:7).¹¹ In three of Paul's letters we find lists of spiritual gifts, and in three of these lists we find apostles, in each case heading the list (1 Cor 12:28; 12:29-30; Eph 4:11). By placing apostleship among the charismata, Paul completes its "democratization," making it available to anyone to whom the Holy Spirit should choose to distribute it.

Another gift associated with leadership is prophecy. Ephesians 2:20 declares that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." The sequence "apostles and prophets," rather than "prophets and apostles," suggests that it is the New Testament prophets that are in view, not those of the Old Testament. In our sources the two ministries are often lumped together or mentioned together with "teachers" (as in Acts 13:1 and Didache 15:1,2).

While apostleship occurs in only three of Paul's lists, prophecy appears in all of them. In Peter's Pentecost sermon he begins by quoting Joel's prediction that in the last days "your sons and your daughters will prophesy" and God will pour out His Spirit on His "menservants and maidservants" (Acts 2:17,18). The book of Acts is witness to the presence of prophets in the early church—often several in one congregation. Thus, in the church at Antioch there were five "prophets and teachers" (Acts 13:1,2) who are named. They included Barnabas and Saul (Paul), who are elsewhere known as apostles. This shows that the reception of one gift did not preclude others, and indeed apostles at times had visions and delivered inspired speech. Philip the evangelist had "four unmarried daughters, who prophesied" (Acts 21:9), and in the next verse we read of Agabus, also mentioned in 11:27, whose prophesying was of a near-term predictive nature.

In the Corinthian church also there were multiple prophets, including women, who are told to do their public prophesying with their heads covered (1 Cor 11:3-10). Paul told the Corinthian Christians to desire especially the gift of prophecy (14:1), and apparently several members had it, for they are admonished to speak one at a time:

¹¹ On this see my article, "Shapes of the Ministry in the New Testament and Early Church," 47-48; Richard S. Cervin, "A Note Regarding the Name 'Junia(s)' in Romans 16:7," *New Testament Studies* 40 (1994): 470; Stanley J. Grenz, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 93; Eldon Jay Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). The progress in the understanding of this verse can be seen by comparing the entry for *Ioulias* (and *Iounia*, which entry does not appear in the first and second editions) in the third edition of the BDAG with earlier editions.

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Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh (*diakrinō*) what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first one be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and be encouraged; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. (14:29-33.)

To us the idea may be startling, not only that one small house church may have several members who prophesy, but also that their utterances are to be evaluated. Furthermore, the prophets are to maintain enough control of themselves that they are capable of stopping and yielding the floor. Thus, Paul does not approve of some sort of ecstatic enthusiasm.

1 Peter 4:10,11 also suggests that the prophetic gift was common and expected. Such was not the case later, and we will examine the reasons for the change later in this paper.

Familial Leadership

The brothers of Jesus did not believe in him during his earthly ministry (Mark 3:21,31-35; John 7:5). Something apparently happened, however, to bring them to belief, and this was probably the special post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to his brother James (1 Cor 15:7).

As a result, at least James and perhaps other brothers not only came to be counted among the early believers, but became leaders in the church. Two New Testament epistles (James and Jude) are traditionally ascribed to them. James became the leader of the Jerusalem church when Peter fled (Acts 12:12-17), and thereafter he was the respected leader of Jewish Christianity. When Paul visited the church leaders in Jerusalem after his conversion he conferred only with Peter and “James the Lord’s brother,” whom he seems to count among the apostles (Gal 1:18,19). This James presided at the council that deliberated about what to require of Gentile converts to the gospel (Acts 15). In a later fateful visit to Jerusalem, Paul called upon James, who counseled him to make a gesture to placate the Jewish Christians (Acts 21:17-21). The incident portrays James as a mediator between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, forestalling a schism that later did take place.

It is not our purpose here to recount the biography and importance of James the Lord’s brother, who was sufficiently well known to merit a notice by Josephus.¹² What is of interest here is that Jewish Christianity,

¹² Josephus *Antiquities* 20.200. This passage is generally considered authentic, not a Christian interpolation.

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as was natural, continued to regard the blood relatives of Jesus with respect as leaders. Hegesippus (the second century Jewish Christian historian), cited by Eusebius, supplies the names of some. James was succeeded by his cousin Simon (Simeon) bar Clopas, under whose leadership the Christians of Jerusalem fled to Pella during the Jewish war. He was chosen by the surviving relatives of Jesus.¹³ He was crucified in AD 107. The relatives of Jesus were known as the *desposynoi*,¹⁴ which can perhaps be translated “the Master’s people.” The last in this line, counted by Eusebius as the last Jewish bishop of Jerusalem, was Judas surnamed Kuriakos, probably martyred in the time of the Bar Cochba rebellion.

We hear no more about the *desposynoi* after AD 135. If any survived, they would have been associated with the increasingly isolated Ebionites.

Appointive Leaders

Acts 6 reports that administrative questions threatened to distract the Twelve from their ministry of preaching and teaching (6:1,2). The Hellenistic Jewish Christians were complaining that their widows were not receiving what they should in the daily distribution of supplies to the needy. The apostles directed that the believers select¹⁵ seven men, “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” to perform this work (6:3). This was done, and judging from the Hellenistic names of the seven, they were chosen from among those who had complained; indeed, one was a proselyte (a Gentile who had become a Jew). They brought the Seven before the apostles, and having prayed they laid their hands upon them.¹⁶ This was the beginning of the appointive ministry, leaders selected by the people and given authority by the laying on of hands.

This action was a far more momentous event than is commonly recognized because it inaugurated a completely new type of ministry and

¹³ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.11.1. See Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*, trans. Douglas R.A. Hare (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 32. This is interesting because Jesus had denied the importance of family ties in Mark 3:33-35 and parallels. Some might see the Synoptic reference as a deliberate put-down of the *desposynoi*, but this is unnecessary.

¹⁴ Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.20.6. They preserved a genealogical table that traced their ancestry back to David.

¹⁵ The term *episkeptomai* is used somewhat awkwardly here together with the preposition *ex*. The process of selection is not well described, but some kind of election is implied.

¹⁶ From the Greek it is not clear whether “they” were the apostles or the whole church community, but it is easier to read them as the former.

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church leadership. It was this type that was destined to prevail over the other two kinds and replace them. It is therefore worth pausing to examine it. First it should be noted that the laying on of hands did not bestow a spiritual gift; the Seven were already “full of the Spirit,” and that was one of the reasons why they were chosen (6:3). But the recognition of the gift by the community by the laying on of hands, as in the cases of Paul and Barnabas and of Timothy (Acts 13:2,3; 1 Timothy 1:18; 4:14), was continued. Second, they were chosen by their peers, apparently elected in some fashion. Third, their office was created for pragmatic reasons, to fill a need (*chreia*, 6:3). Fourth, they received the laying on of hands—whether from the apostles or the whole community—and this ceremony gave them some authority that they lacked before. Giles’s understanding of the act has some plausibility:

The people set apart in this way are explicitly depicted as Spirit-filled leaders, who have already had a significant ministry. The laying on of hands by those assembled therefore does not signify the bestowal of a ministry, or of the Spirit, but rather that from now on their ministry is no longer an individual one: they are from this point on representatives of their community. What they do, they do not undertake in their own name, but in the name of the community that has set them apart as its representatives.¹⁷

What was the office assigned to the seven men of Acts? The office is not named. It has been traditionally assumed that they were deacons, perhaps because the words *diakonia* and *diakonein* are used in 6:1,2. But the use of this word and its cognates is hardly decisive, for in 6:4 and 1:25 the same word *diakonia* is used for the ministry of the apostles. It is necessary to lay aside conceptions and distinctions that developed later. The words *diakonein*, *diakonia*, and *diakonos* mean, respectively, to serve, service, and servant; or to minister, ministry, and minister. But the fact is that the word *diakonos*, deacon, is never used in the book of Acts.

¹⁷ Kevin Giles, *What on Earth Is the Church? An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 95. The laying on of hands in these situations has been traditionally designated “ordination,” but that term is not used in the New Testament in such a sense. Rather we find the expressions “laying on hands” and “appoint.” The problem with “ordination” is that it carries some medieval baggage that gets retrojected anachronistically into the New Testament. Giles’s understanding comes close to the meaning of “credentialing,” which is probably the right concept.

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On the other hand, *presbyteros*, meaning “elder,” is frequent and used as a title for a church officer.

The first occurrence of *presbyteros* with the latter meaning is in Acts 11:30, where we are told that the famine relief for the Judean believers that Barnabas and Paul brought was delivered over to the elders. In other words, the kind of work for which the seven were appointed in Acts 6 is said to be done by the elders in Acts 11:30.¹⁸ Furthermore, the way elders were appointed in the churches as reported in Acts 14:23 resembles the way the Seven were chosen. The word used in this verse is *cheirotoneō*, which literally means to raise one’s hand in voting.¹⁹ Finally, in Acts 15 we hear of only two offices in Jerusalem, those of apostle and elder. We must conclude that the church at this early stage knew of only one appointive ministry, which Luke designated “elder.”²⁰

But what of the traditional designation of the Seven as deacons? The Gordian knot can be cut if we recognize that to begin with there was only one appointive ministry. The book of Acts records no other. Since there was only one, we could call the officer either *diakonos* (suggested by *diakonein* in Acts 6:2), a word describing function, or *presbyteros*, a word describing dignity. Only later did this one appointive ministry bifurcate into two levels or ranks, and the two terms came to be used to designate the two levels of ministry.²¹ A similar branching into two ranks

¹⁸ In considering the role and function of the Seven, it is also necessary to remember that Acts goes to some length in reporting the activities of two of them—Stephen and Philip—and their ministry in chapters 6-8 is the preaching of the word, the very work that the apostles assigned to themselves while shifting the administration of relief to the Seven!

¹⁹ It has also been argued that the word is a synonym for the laying on of hands by the apostles. See the BDAG *ad loc.*

²⁰ There was a somewhat analogous office and term in Judaism. The New Testament reports elders of local synagogues and elders who were dignitaries of national stature (e.g., Acts 4:5).

²¹ Gordon Fee approaches my conclusion when he says, “It is altogether likely that both ‘overseers’ and ‘deacons’ come under the larger category *presbyteroi* (‘elders’)” (G.D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Bible Commentary [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988], 22). Schreiner argues against this that “the New Testament nowhere identifies ‘elders’ and ‘deacons’ so that the latter could be construed as a subcategory of the former” (Thomas R. Schreiner, in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* [Wheaton: Crossway, 1991], 505, n. 15). Here Schreiner at best makes an overstatement, for we have shown that the book of Acts makes such an identification when the only title it uses for those who did the work of the Seven was elder (Acts 11:30) and never uses the term “deacon.”

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took place still later, making a distinction between bishop²² and elder, terms that earlier had been interchangeable. The final result, in the time of Ignatius, was a three-tiered ministry of bishops, elders, and deacons. When the appointive ministry was first begun, when it was only one without any ranks in it, we would not go far wrong to refer to the office by a hyphenated term, “elder-deacon.”

The first indication of a distinction between elder and deacon is in the salutation of Phil 1:1, mentioning “bishops and deacons.”²³ This is now a two-tiered ministry, indicating that “bishop” was still synonymous with “elder.” That “elder” and “bishop” were synonymous terms can be demonstrated from several New Testament passages. In Acts 20 the same people are called elders (*presbyteroi*) in verse 17 and *episkopoi* in verse 28. See also Titus 1:5-7, where Paul speaks of appointing elders and then immediately lists the qualifications of “bishops,” and 1 Tim 3:1; 4:14; 5:17,19.²⁴ The distinction between deacon and elder/bishop is hardened in the pastoral epistles, especially in 1 Tim 3:1-13.²⁵

As in many young religious movements, the shape of the leadership was fluid and evolving. We should not be surprised to see local variations, as well as change over time. While Paul is able to address a church in Philippi that has a twofold formal leadership, at Corinth it is another matter. We find there no mention of any officers. No elder presides at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:21), and no treasurer receives the contribution for the saints (2 Cor 16:2). Apparently Paul finds no one there trustworthy to lead. Rather Paul himself is their pastor, by remote control. He

²² “Bishop” comes from the Greek *episkopos*, which means literally overseer or supervisor. Thus originally “bishop” described function and “elder” described dignity. In secular usage *episkopos* meant a financial officer. Some have seen a precedent for the Christian bishop in the office of the *mebaqqer* at Qumran. See Bo Reicke, “The Constitution of the Primitive Church in the Light of Jewish Documents,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. Krister Stendahl with James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 150.

²³ It has been pointed out that there is no definite article in the Greek of this verse, so that while two classes of people are referred to, they are not exactly clear-cut groups.

²⁴ The term “elder” (*presbyteros*) probably came from the synagogue, while “bishop” (*episkopos*) was borrowed from secular Greek usage. Hermann Beyer notes, “There is no closely defined office bearing the title *episkopos* in the LXX,” and the term was not used technically in Judaism (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2:608-622). The Christian usage of *episkopos*, at first as a synonym for elder or pastor, was apparently unique.

²⁵ The qualifications of a deacon here are quite different from the qualifications of the ministers in Acts 6. Cf. Giles, 263, n. 51.

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sends representatives to check up on them, and he sends letters to guide them.

For better or for worse, further development occurred. Soon after New Testament times the office of elder/bishop bifurcates into elder and bishop, just as elder/deacon had bifurcated earlier. Ignatius of Antioch, writing about AD 108, promoted the threefold ministry of deacon, elder, and bishop with such vehemence that we must infer that it was a relatively recent innovation. Typical statements from his seven authentic epistles are *Smyrnians* 8:1, “See that you all follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ follows the Father, and the presbytery [board of elders] as if it were the apostles. And reverence the deacons as the command of God”; *Trallians* 3:1, “Likewise let all respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, even as the bishop is also a type of the Father, and the elders as the council of God and the college of the Apostles”; and *Magnesians* 6:1, “Be zealous to do all things in harmony with God, with the bishop presiding in the place of God and the elders in the place of the Council of the Apostles, and the deacons, who are most dear to me, entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ.”

The twofold ministry was still the pattern when Clement of Rome wrote to the church of Corinth about AD 95 (1 Clement 42:4), as it was for the communities represented by the early church manual called the *Didache* (15:1, 2), which in its present form I would date about AD 135. But hardly had another generation passed before the threefold hierarchical ministry with the supremacy of the bishop had prevailed and become the norm. Not only that, but the other types of leadership had disappeared or were disappearing, at least in the mainstream church that became catholic orthodoxy. The *desposynoi* apparently had simply become extinct. The apostles and prophets had been replaced by the bishops, the gifts of the Spirit by elected officers.²⁶ We must now investigate why that happened.

The Disappearance of Apostles and Prophets

In 1936, Elder A. G. Daniells, past president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and colleague of Ellen White, published a book in which he sought to show that the gift of prophecy “was to

²⁶ Eusebius mentions a few persons whom he regarded as having the genuine gift of prophecy, especially one Quadratus, whom he mentions together with Philip’s daughters. If this Quadratus is to be identified with Quadratus the early apologist, we would have to date him about AD 124, but this identification is doubtful. See Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.38.1.

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abide with the church from Adam to the second advent of our Lord It did not cease with the apostles, but is traceable through the centuries to the last days of human history, just before the return of our Lord.”²⁷ We must look for the gift, however, in minority, dissident, “remnant” movements. The book’s burden was to recount, through Scripture and history, instances to prove this, including such examples as the Montanist movement in the second century and the Camisards among the Huguenots, and culminating with the ministry of Ellen White, whom Daniells had known personally. One senses that Daniells would have been deeply distressed had he foreseen that Adventist history would continue more than ninety years without an acknowledged living prophet. But it is a situation with ample precedent.

Pharisaic Judaism and its successor, Rabbinic Judaism, believed that the prophetic gift had died out after Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi, and hence closed the canon. Already in Psalm 94:9 we find the lament, “There is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long.” First Maccabees 9:27 says, “Thus there was great distress in all Israel, such as had not been since the time that the prophets ceased to appear among them” (cf. 4:46; 14:41).²⁸ The apocryphal Prayer of Azariah declares, “At this time there is no prince, or prophet, or leader. . .” (verse 15). Second Baruch (“Syriac Baruch”) 85:3, written in the first century AD, laments, “But now the righteous have been gathered to their fathers, and the prophets have fallen asleep.” The Rabbis declared, “When Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the last of the prophets died, the Holy Spirit disappeared from Israel.”²⁹

What this meant to the Rabbis was that the prophets are replaced by the scribes, and instead of new revelation there is exegesis of old revelation. There is no more torah left in heaven to be revealed, for it is all given into the hands of the Sages to interpret and apply it.

Indeed, they may have seen this development as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Zech 13:2b-6,

²⁷ Arthur Grosvenor Daniells, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1936), 6.

²⁸ 1 Macc 4:46 also suggests that in the intertestamental period a hope was still entertained that prophets would again arise: After the defiled altar was torn down, they “stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until there should come a prophet to tell what to do with them.”

²⁹ Tosefta *Sotah* 13:2. For all these references I am indebted to Werner Foerster, *From the Exile to Christ: A Historical Introduction to Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 4.

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I will remove from the land the prophets and the unclean spirit. And if any one again appears as a prophet, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, "You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the Lord"; and his father and mother who bore him shall pierce him through when he prophesies. On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; he will not put on a hairy mantle in order to deceive, but he will say, "I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth." And if one asks him, "What are these wounds on your back?" he will say, "The wounds I received in the house of my friends."

These words reveal the reason for the disappearance of prophecy in Israel: false prophets had brought the claim of having the prophetic gift into disrepute. Though this belief was not universal, for among common people there remained a lively willingness to accept prophetic manifestations,³⁰ it was well enough established to influence attitudes toward John the Baptist and Jesus. For the need of leaders was to maintain control, and the possibility that some charismatically inspired popular enthusiasm might get out of control was a danger ever to be feared.

This feeling also explains the phenomenon of pseudepigrapha, especially popular in the Qumran community. Since new prophets were out of the question, the composition of prophetic writings, whether true or false, had to be done in the name of dead prophets.

Now we move from Judaism to Christianity. Already in the Apocalypse, itself written by a prophet, there is a concern about the false: the church in Ephesus is commended because they "have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false" (Rev 2:2).³¹ In the little church manual known as the Didache, which I date about AD 135, a major concern is false apostles and prophets—the two are lumped together. Chapter 11 lists some six tests to apply to them, for example: "When an Apostle goes forth let him accept nothing but bread till he reach his night's lodging; but if he ask for money, he is a false prophet" (verse 6). Clearly the worry is about false apostles/prophets, who were bringing the gift of prophecy into disrepute by "making traffic of Christ" (12:5). True prophets, however, were still to be welcomed (13:1). We see in 15:1,2 an intimation of another reason for uneasiness about prophets: "Appoint therefore for yourselves bishops and deacons

³⁰ Note, for example, Luke 1:67; 2:25,26,36, and especially Matt 21:26.

³¹ Jesus's warning in the Olivet discourse against false christ and false prophets (Mark 13:22 and parallels) probably has primary reference to a phenomenon in Judaism preceding the catastrophe of AD 70, well reported by Josephus, but Christians would have had no difficulty in reapplying it to Christian claimants.

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worthy of the Lord, meek men, and not lovers of money, and truthful and approved, for they also minister to you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. Therefore do not despise them, for they are your honorable men together with the prophets and teachers.” Why would the bishops and deacons be despised? Because the charismatic prophets and teachers were more exciting and constituted an uncontrollable locus of power in the church.

One reason why the bishops were able to take over from the apostles and prophets was that some of them claimed divine inspiration. Thus Clement of Rome (in the name of the Roman congregation) writes: “You will give us joy and gladness, if you are obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit” (1 Clement 63:2). Ignatius wrote:

For even if some desired to deceive me after the flesh, the spirit is not deceived, for it is from God. For it “knoweth whence it comes and whether it goes” and tests secret things. I cried out while I was with you, I spoke with a great voice,—with God’s own voice,—“Give heed to the bishop, and to the presbytery and deacons.” But some suspected me of saying this because I had previous knowledge of the division of some persons: but He in whom I am bound is my witness that I had no knowledge of this from any human being, but the Spirit was preaching, and saying this, “Do nothing without the bishop, keep your flesh as the temple of God, love unity, flee from divisions, be imitators of Jesus Christ, as was He also of his Father.”³²

Thus the transition from apostles/prophets to bishops could be a relatively smooth one. As the Didache said, “they also minister to you the ministry of the prophets and teachers.”

So the prophetic gift faded out because it fell into disrepute. It happened in Israel and in the early church. But about the year AD 156 there was an attempt to revive it by a man named Montanus, who also reinvigorated the expectation of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. Associated with him were also two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla. Eventually the “new prophecy” failed.³³ Perhaps it deserved to, but our

³² Ignatius *Philadelphians* 7.1,2.

³³ The story of Montanism is succinctly and disturbingly told by Kurt Aland, *Saints and Sinners: Men and Ideas in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 62-66. The following paragraph is poignant:

“Montanism had come into being as a reaction against the historical development of the church. Yet the same thing took place within Montanism as had taken place in the

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only sources of knowledge about it may be biased, being from those who opposed it.

The gift of prophecy disappears because it is not wanted. It is not wanted for two reasons. First, there is very real danger of false prophets, who are legion and wreak great damage upon the church. Second, true prophets are even more dangerous. They constitute another center of power that is independent from and potentially rival to the officially constituted authority. A prophet is not elected by anyone or accountable to anyone except God. Prophets may rebuke a king, an apostle, a bishop, or a General Conference president. They provide a check and balance to all these and even to officially chosen councils. They are by definition inconvenient persons, and we try to get them out of the way by whatever method is available and appropriate: kill them, reject them, ignore them, marginalize them, co-opt them, or dispatch them to Australia.

So repeatedly in history prophets have been suppressed and replaced by scholars and administrators. The writings of dead prophets can be dealt with and domesticated—they hold no more surprises. But a living prophet is a loose cannon that cannot be controlled. Jesus said: “Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and consent to the deeds of your fathers; for they killed them, and you build their tombs” (Luke 11:47, 48). We honor dead prophets but fear live ones. There have always been well-meaning leaders who want to restrict the exercise of the gift, such as Joshua, to whom Moses said, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!” (Num 11:29). All this is probably inevitable and to be expected, but nonetheless to be lamented.

church on a greater scale. At the beginning of the movement the prophetic element had been most prominent, but it eventually died out, and the sayings of the prophets were collected in holy books which became a substitute for new oracles. In its first period Montanism claimed that it was led by the Spirit himself, who guided true believers through Montanus and his associates; later, definite offices were established in the movement. At first the belief was that the end of the world was imminent; gradually the idea of the Lord’s return was pushed into the more general future. The same thing had happened within the church earlier, as, as a parallel development took place in Montanism, the church’s opposition to Montanism was justified all the more” [65-66].

Aland adds: “Finally all that remained of original Montanism were the rigorous moral demands, far stricter than those of the church as a whole. . . . All that remained was a moral reform movement whose original presuppositions had faded away” [66].

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Epilogue

Adventism has classically listed the gift of prophecy as one of the marks of the Remnant Church. But we have not had an acknowledged living prophet for more than ninety years, and we suffer because of it. (1) We search Ellen White's writings, published and unpublished, and even the Adventist *hadith*, for answers to many pressing questions of our time, but we search in vain. Either the answers are not to be found, or they are equivocal. We have issues that were unknown and, as far as we can tell, unforeseen in her time. (2) The mere possession of inspired writings is not a distinguishing mark, for any denomination that has the Bible can claim that it has such a mark. So there is no substitute for a living prophetic voice or voices.

We are faced, then, with a serious dilemma. On the one hand, false prophets are a very great danger. On the other hand, having no prophet is an equally great danger. (It is like driving down the highway with eyes blindfolded.) Can we flee from one danger without falling into the arms of the other?

The solution to this problem awaits another paper.

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