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Patterns of Ministry in the Later Pauline Letters

B. C. WINTLE*

The 'later' Pauline letters divide up naturally into two categories: the Prison letters—Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon—and the Pastorals. The latter group is widely regarded as deutero-Pauline, although there is an impressive list of scholars who hold the minority view that they come from Paul himself.¹ In this paper, we shall attempt as far as possible to look at the evidence without pre-judging the authorship question. What is relevant to our purpose is that this group of letters, whether authentically Pauline or not, purportedly comes from the period immediately following that during which what are generally regarded as the 'early' letters of Paul were written.

Several words are used in these letters to describe the general qualifications that serve the upbuilding and equipment of the church: gifts (*charismata*, 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6), ministries (*diakonai*, Eph. 4:12; Col. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:5, 11), work or task (*ergon*, Eph. 4:12; 1 Tim. 3:1; 2 Tim. 4:5), stewardship (*oikonomia*, Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25; 1 Tim. 1:4), service (*leitourgia*, Phil. 2:17, 30). Of these, perhaps the most characteristic are 'gifts' and 'ministries'.

In the Prison letters, the most important passage for our consideration is Ephesians 4:1-16. In this passage instead of *charismata*, the term *domata* is used (v. 8) presumably because Paul is quoting from the LXX. However, the context shows that the word is used as synonymous with *charismata*, referring to the gifts which the risen Christ bestows on his church for his service and the service of men. In 1 Corinthians 12:4ff. the *charismata* of the Spirit are bestowed upon individual Christians which they are expected to exercise in the congregation. Here in Ephesians 4:

* Dr. Wintle teaches at Union Biblical Seminary Pune, (formerly at Yavatmal).

¹ Zahn (1906), Schlatter (1936), Michaelis (1946), Spicq (1947), Behm (1948), de Zwaan (1948), Jeremias (1953), Simpson (1954), Guthrie (1957), Ellis (1960), Kelly (1963) and Harrison (1964).

the gifts are the individual Christians who are thus endowed. But the content of the two passages is essentially the same.

Apostles and prophets : The listing of these gifts that follows is also closely parallel to the list in 1 Corinthians 12 : 28. The first two gifts are 'apostles' and 'prophets'. Both these terms must be understood in the sense which they bear in the two earlier references in this letter (2 : 20 and 3 : 5). In 2 : 20 the church is described as having been 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets'. The reference is probably to the apostles and prophets of the first Christian generation who formed the Lord's foundation-gifts to the Church². The term 'apostle' is used in two main senses : (i) of those who were immediately commissioned by Christ to preach the gospel ; (ii) of others who, though not commissioned by Christ as Paul and the Jerusalem apostles were, preached the gospel in close association with them (cf. 1 Thess. 2 : 6. Timothy and Silvanus).³

New Testament prophecy was principally a proclamation of revelation. 'New Testament prophesying was the power of seeing and making known in plain intelligible speech the nature, mind and will of God, a gift of insight into the truth of Scripture and of power in expounding and imparting it, and hence a capacity for building up men's characters, quickening their wills and encouraging their spirits.'⁴ In other words, the Christian prophet's ministry was essentially pastoral instruction : implanting the word of God into the life of a community, giving words or orders that are concrete and precise. Therefore, as in 1 Corinthians 12 : 28 along with the 'apostles', the 'prophets' occupy an important place in the list of gifts.⁵

Evangelists and pastor-teachers : The next pair are 'evangelists' and 'pastors and teachers.' Evangelists are mentioned only here in Ephesians 4, although in 2 Timothy 4 : 5 Timothy is exhorted to do the work of an evangelist. It is therefore unlikely that a specific office in the sense of a regular appointment is being referred to here. On the other hand, the Church will always be in need of men who have and exercise the gift of evangelism—men who preach the gospel and bring men and women to the knowledge of the truth. The two terms 'pastors' and 'teachers' share the same definite article in the Greek, thereby indicating that they

² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, London : Pickering & Inglis, 1961, p. 57.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ D. Foord, 'Prophecy in the New Testament' *Reformed Theological Review* 31 (1972), pp. 10-25 (20).

⁵ In the Pastorals there are references to prophetic activity in the church in 1 Tim. 1.18 and 4.14. In both passages the primary role of the prophets is to single out future leaders of the community (cf. Acts 13 : 1-3).

denote one and the same class of men. The 'pastors' are those who shepherd the flock of God and care for its well-being. As we shall see below, in the Pastorals this is the responsibility of the 'elders' or 'overseers.' But here the reference is probably to an activity rather than an office. We do not read elsewhere of a distinct office of teacher either. In the Pastorals it is required of church leaders that they have an aptitude for teaching (1 Tim. 3 : 2 ; cf 2 Tim. 2 : 2 ; Tit. 1 : 9). Also there is reference to elders who are to be held in highest honour because they 'labour in preaching and teaching' (1 Tim. 5 : 17). Nevertheless, it is likely that as in the case of prophets there were some known as teachers because they exercised the gift of teaching regularly. In Colossians 2 : 6f. tradition and teaching are closely associated ; this suggests that teaching consisted in instruction and transmitting the apostolic tradition, both as concerns its redemptive-historical context and the paraenesis arising from it.⁶ However, here in Ephesians 4 : 11, the close juxtaposition with 'pastors' means that the scope of ministry of the 'teacher' was wider than merely catechetical instruction.

Ephesians 4 : 12 'for the equipment of the saints for the work of ministry' (cf. NEB) indicates clearly that the gifts enumerated in the previous verse do not monopolize the Church's ministry, 'their function rather is so to help and direct the Church that all the members may perform their several ministries for the good of the whole.'⁷

Bishops and deacons : We turn now to a consideration of references to official(?) ministries in these letters. In his opening greeting in his letter to the Philippians, Paul includes the 'bishops' and 'deacons' (1 : 1). This is only the second reference to 'deacons' in the Pauline corpus outside the Pastorals, the first being a reference to Phoebe, a deaconess of the church' in Romans 16 : 1. There are two points that must be noted regarding this reference. Firstly, in the light of the fact that the feminine form of the term *diakonos* is never used in the New Testament, it is very likely that the translation here ought to be 'deacon' rather than 'deaconess.' Secondly, several commentators have observed that the formulation in the Greek suggests that the reference here must not be interpreted as a general reference to mere service of the congregation, but rather as referring to a definite office. In other words, this occurrence of *diakonos* is to be classified with its occurrence in Philippians 1 : 1⁸. Like the term 'deacon' the term 'bishop' or 'overseer'

⁶ H. Ridderbos, *Paul : An Outline of his Theology*, ET, London : SPCK, 1977, p. 453.

⁷ Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁸ So, for example, C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* Vol. II, Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1979, p. 781.

(RSV mg) is very rare in the Pauline corpus, the occurrence in Philippians 1 : 1 being the only one outside the Pastorals. Therefore, there has been much debate regarding the precise status and functions of these church leaders in Philippi. The main issue is whether these titles describe their work or determine their ecclesiastical office.

Some support for the functional meaning of the title 'bishop' may be derived from 1 Thessalonians 5 : 12f. where Paul makes reference to 'those who are over you.' Accordingly, it is suggested that Paul makes specific mention of these men right at the beginning of Philippians because they had been responsible in some way for the collecting of the gift of money sent to Paul by the congregation.⁹ It must be noted, however, that there is no allusion to them in 4 : 10ff where Paul thanks the Philippian church for the gift. Moreover, as some commentators observe, unless the terms refer to church officials, the specific addition of the phrase 'bishops and deacons' in Philippians 1 : 1 has no meaning.¹⁰ If this is so, we have here some advance in official church organization compared to that which we see in the earlier Pauline letters.

We do not know what the deacons in the Philippian church did ; however, we know that they were there, and that shows that there was a need for some kind of special ministry and service that was met by them as deacons. In the Pastorals, in 1 Timothy 3 : 8-13, we have a list of the qualifications needed in a deacon, that follows a similar list pertaining to a bishop. The term *diakonos* appears to be used in more than one sense. In 1 Timothy 3 : 8-13 it is used to describe an office but in 1 Timothy 4 : 6 it is used in a non-technical sense (cf. 1 Tim. 1 : 12 ; 2 Tim. 4 : 5). This suggests that at the time of writing, the term was not as yet a technical term used exclusively for a church officer.

The emphasis in the list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 : 8ff is on behaviour appropriate to the office. The qualifications show that it was primarily a spiritual ministry. Generally speaking, the deacon is called to fulfil a task that is delegated to him by the church leaders.¹¹

In the Pastorals, the term *episkopos* occurs in 1 Timothy 3 : 1-7 and Titus 1 : 5-9. In 1 Timothy 3 : 1 the reference is to an office (*episkopēs*), whereas in Titus 1 : 7 it probably refers to the function of overseeing. In the listing of the qualifications required of an

⁹ For example, R. P. Martin, *Philippians*, London : Tyndale Press, 1959, p. 61.

¹⁰ So e.g. H. Beyer, art. 'episkopos' *TDNT* II pp. 652 ff (617).

¹¹ B. W. Powers, 'Patterns of New Testament Ministry II. Deacons', *The Churchman* 88 (1974), pp. 245 ff (252).

episkopos in both these passages, the overriding concern is for their moral behaviour.

Bishop/Elder : In Titus 1 : 7 the connecting particle 'for' makes it clear that 'bishop' here takes up the term 'elders' in v. 5. Further, the demands made of a good 'elder' in this passage are very similar to what is said of the bishop in 1 Timothy 3 : 2ff. There is therefore, quite clearly a close relationship between these two terms. There are three possibilities regarding the nature of this relationship :

(i) 'Elder' and 'bishop' could be completely synonymous, overseeing being understood as a function of all elders.

(ii) Since 'elders' is always in the plural, but 'bishop' always in the singular (cf 1 Tim. 3 : 2), perhaps we have here evidence of a monarchical episcopate situation, wherein there are many elders but one bishop. 'One may affirm that already in the Pastorals there is a plain tendency for monarchical episcopate to merge with the presbyterate.'¹²

(iii) The singular is to be understood generically—that is, the two terms refer to the same office and the same people, but "bishop" singles out those who had special duties and responsibilities. The reference is to the bishop as a type and not to the number of bishops in a given place. There is no reference to monarchical episcopate.'¹³

Of these three alternatives, the last is to be preferred. S. G. Wilson sums up the situation thus : 'The situation seems to be that while there is no formal hierarchy within the group of elders, some are emerging naturally as the more active and capable leaders.'¹⁴

The main function of the elders/bishops was that implied by the name *episkopoi* : that of oversight. This responsibility was apparently shared by all the elders. In 1 Timothy 3 : 4-5 their duties are described in terms of managing, keeping in submission and caring for God's church. Therefore, their task consisted especially in giving leadership and seeing to it that things go well in the church. Another important function of the elders was that of preaching and teaching. A necessary qualification was the ability to advocate and defend Christian doctrine (1 Tim. 3 : 2 ; Tit. 1 : 9) and 1 Timothy 5 : 17 indicates that they were leaders of the congregation not only in terms of administration and church order but also in a spiritual sense : defending the apostolic faith in its pure and original meaning. But this verse also indicates

¹² G. Bornkamm, art. '*presbyteros*' TDNT VI, pp. 662 ff (667).

¹³ Beyer, art. cit., p. 611.

¹⁴ S. G. Wilson, *Luke and the Pastoral Epistles*, London : SPCK, 1979, p. 53.

that not all elders were equally directly involved in preaching and teaching. For some the emphasis was on more general leadership; for others it was more proclamation and teaching.¹⁵

There are several other points made in the Pastorals that need to be considered, but they are somewhat obscure. For one, the term 'elder' seems to be used in more than one sense. In 1 Timothy 5 : 1 and Titus 2 : 2 the term clearly refers to 'an older man' and therefore some have argued that all the references to 'elders' must be understood in this sense.¹⁶ The main objection to this interpretation is Titus 1 : 5 which reads : 'appoint elders in every town' and seems quite inappropriate as a reference to older men. Harvey's suggestion that this is to be translated : 'appoint (to positions of responsibility) those of your older members (i.e. elders)' is to be rejected because this translation requires a different Greek construction. However, it is very likely that in the choice of leaders, an important consideration was whether the person concerned was a senior Christian—a veteran in the faith and acquainted with its earliest beginnings. In other words, it is likely that even in passages where the reference is to a church official, the sense 'older man' is not entirely absent.¹⁷

A further point of contention among scholars is the significance of the emphasis laid on the central role of the apostolic tradition (e.g. 2 Tim. 2 : 1ff.). W. G. Kümmel comments regarding this : 'The presupposition behind this central role of the tradition is a church, which, in contrast to Paul's imminent expectation is already making provision for the time after the death of the tradition-bearers installed by the Apostle's pupils.'¹⁸ But is this a necessary conclusion? Why must we rule out the possibility that the Apostle Paul had thought for the future and saw the need for such authorized transmission? For the continuity of doctrine to be maintained, it would have been imperative that the church leaders who transmitted the tradition be reliable men with the aptitude to teach. And this is precisely the concern in the Pastorals. Moreover, since Paul himself had received the early apostolic traditions, why should it be supposed that he could never have conceived of any form of fixation of doctrine?

The role of Timothy and Titus in the churches in Ephesus and Crete is also debated. It is clear that they ranked above the other church leaders and exercised authority over them. However, it

¹⁵ On this see B. W. Powers, 'Patterns of New Testament Ministry I. Elders', *The Churchman* 87 (1973), pp. 166ff.; Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 456-458.

¹⁶ E.g. A. E. Harvey, 'Elders', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 25 (1974), pp. 318-332.

¹⁷ So e.g. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

¹⁸ W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, ET, London : SCM Press, 1966, p. 269.

is very doubtful that they are intended to represent monarchical bishops of the type of Ignatius and his time. Rather they are the Apostle's personal emissaries with an *ad hoc*, temporary mandate. If it was intended that they be represented as bishops, it is certain that the title would have been avoided in dealing with the other officials.¹⁹

Another point that is debated is the precise significance of the ceremony of the laying on of hands that is referred to in 1 Timothy 4 : 14 ; 5 : 22 ; 2 Timothy 1 : 6. It is argued by some that we have here the (late) idea of the imparting of the Holy Spirit by this ceremonial act and parallels are adduced from the Book of Acts (8 : 17 ; 9 : 17 ; 19 : 6). But on closer examination it is found that the situations described in these passages in Acts are quite different from that in the Pastorals. If there are parallels, they are to be found in Acts 6 : 6 and 13 : 3f where the ceremony relates to the setting apart of men for divine service. What we have in 1 Timothy 4 : 14 and 2 Timothy 1 : 6 are references to Timothy's ordination, signifying his being set apart for ministry ; in 1 Timothy 5 : 22 we have reference to Timothy setting apart others for ministry. Moreover, it is important to note that in 1 Timothy 4 : 14 we also have reference to the role of the prophet in Timothy's being set apart for ministry. This is closely paralleled in Acts 13 : 1ff where the Holy Spirit guided the church in Antioch, presumably through a prophet in the congregation, to set apart Paul and Barnabas for the task of evangelising Asia Minor. In other words, there is no contradiction between the concept of office here and the Pauline concept of ministry as charismatic. By the laying on of hands, the church leaders recognize that an individual has a given gift and set him apart for service.

This last point is of significance especially since Käsemann wrote a very influential article²⁰ in which he contended that the imparting of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands at ordination as depicted in the Pastorals was quite incompatible with Paul's concept of ministry as charismatic. We have just seen that this interpretation of the ceremonial laying on of hands at ordination is erroneous. But the wider issue is : Is the Pauline concept of spiritual *charismata* incompatible with the concept of organised ministry that is characteristic of the Pastorals?²¹

¹⁹ See J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, London : A. & C. Black, 1963, p. 14.

²⁰ E. Käsemann, 'Ministry and Community in the New Testament', *Essays on New Testament Themes*, ET, London : SCM Press 1964, pp. 63-94.

²¹ For what follows I am indebted to the article by R. Y. K. Fung, 'Charismatic Versus Organized Ministry? An examination of an alleged antithesis', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 52 (1980), pp. 195-214.

We saw earlier in this paper that the reference to bishops and deacons in Philippians 1 : 1 and Romans 16 : 1 must be interpreted as references to offices, albeit in their rudimentary form. In Colossians 4 : 17, we have reference to Archippus being given a special ministry in the Colossian congregation by the Lord and in Galatians 6 : 6 there is reference to 'him who teaches'. Moreover, in 1 Thessalonians 5 : 12 the construction in Greek suggests that 'those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you' refer to one group of persons—thus clearly distinguishing between these leaders and the other members of the congregation. All this suggests that for all his emphasis on ministry as being charismatic, Paul was not averse to some kind of specialized ministry with a basic form of official organization. 'In the Paulines there are clear signs of stability, institutionality and orderedness of specific ministries and *charismata* in the church.'²²

Moreover, there are several counterparts in the Pastorals to *charismata* listed in the early Paulines :

<i>diakonia</i> (Rom. 12 : 7)	<i>diakoneitōsan</i> (1 Tim. 3 : 10)
<i>didaskalia</i> (Rom. 12 : 7)	<i>didaktikos</i> (1 Tim. 3 : 2 cf Tit. 1 : 9)
<i>paraklēsis</i> (Rom. 12 : 8)	<i>parakalein</i> (Tit. 1 : 9)

In other words, it is not necessary to assume that the concept of ministerial office is opposed to the concept of ministry as 'Spirit endowed.'²³ A further pointer in the same direction is the observation by some that the charismatic gifts of 'helping' and 'administration'¹ listed in 1 Corinthians 12 : 28 may correspond to the offices of deacon and bishop respectively.²⁴ In other words, gift and office must not be severed. Therefore, 'the true relationship between function, gift and office appears to be this : office and function are two aspects of a person in ministry (i.e. in the case of someone who holds office) for which he must have the appropriate gift.'²⁵

In conclusion, the question ought to be posed : Are the administrative arrangements depicted in the Pastorals as established in the congregations in Ephesus and Crete more advanced than anything Paul could have known ? This is not easy to answer because our picture is incomplete. On the one hand, the emphasis on the apostolic tradition and on church offices clearly indicates

²² Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, p. 445.

²³ This is conceded even by H. von Campenhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power*, London : A. & C. Black, 1969, p. 90.

²⁴ So e.g. C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London : A. & C. Black, 1972, *loc. cit.*

²⁵ Fung, art. *cit.*, p. 205 ; see also Ridderbos, *op. cit.*, pp. 444ff.

an advance in church organization to that presented in the major Pauline letters. On the other hand, the ambiguity in the meaning of the terms 'elder' and 'deacon', the lack of precision in regard to the duties of elders and deacons, references to prophets being active in the churches all point to an early date. Therefore, perhaps all we could say is that any argument that the Pastorals must be later than Paul's time that is based solely on the supposed advance in ecclesiastical organization must be regarded as suspect.
