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## Ministry in Ephesians

Reverend Professor Ernest Best

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Note the title: this is a discussion of ministry and not of the ministry in Ephesians, though naturally a good part of the discussion of this essay will be occupied with the latter aspect of the subject. There are at least two possible approaches to the study of ministry; the sociological treats how leadership arises and how it and officials function within the group to which they belong; the theological the place of ministry in the plan of God for his church. In fact these two approaches can never be wholly separated but attention will be focussed on the second, the theological aspect, because this at first sight appears to be the approach of the author of Ephesians. In this essay it is assumed that Ephesians was not written by Paul, but even if he was its author the argument would hardly alter. Attention will however be drawn to the few points where his authorship might make a difference to the conclusions. It is also assumed that the letter was written not to one congregation but to a number, probably lying in Asia Minor.

### *Fulfilled Ministries*

In Ephesians two forms of ministry are set out whose activity is regarded as already complete, though this does not mean their holders are dead. In 2.20 and 3.5 it is implied that the ministry of apostles and prophets is in certain important respects over. In 2.20 they are termed the foundation of the church, and a foundation can only be laid once; in 3.5 they are said to be the recipients of the revelation that the gospel is for Gentiles as well as Jews; once this truth has been made known and accepted there is no need for it to be revealed again. In those senses then the ministry of apostles and prophets belongs to the past.

The word apostle<sup>1</sup> has a wide range of meaning in the N.T. In the Gospels it is limited to the Twelve whom Jesus chose to be

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<sup>1</sup> Out of the vast literature on this word it is sufficient to point to W. Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church*, London, 1969; C.K. Barrett, *The Signs of an Apostle*, London 1970; R. Schnackenburg, 'Apostles Before and During Paul's Time', in *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (FS F.F. Bruce, ed W.W. Gasque and R.P. Martin), Exeter. 1970,

especially close to him. Elsewhere at the other extreme it is used of the messengers of the churches (2 Cor. 8.23; Phil. 2.25). In between these extremes it is applied to Paul (Eph 1.1) who was not one of the Twelve, and it should be noted that not all Christians were prepared to grant Paul an equivalence with the Twelve (2 Cor.12.11; Rev. 21.12-14 implies there are only twelve apostles), to some of his associates, Silvanus and Timothy (2 Thess. 2.6), Barnabas (Acts 14.4,14), and to Andronicus and Junia (Rom. 16.7) of whom we know relatively little except that Junia was a woman. In Eph. 3.5 the reference is clearly to the Twelve. The revelation that the gospel was intended for all peoples is given to them in varying forms as can be seen from the end of the Gospels and the beginning of Acts. Paul does not seem to be included in 3.5 for in 3.3 he speaks of a special revelation of the same truth granted to himself. The definition of apostle as meaning one of the Twelve probably also underlies 2.20; tradition accords to the Twelve a unique position in relation to Christ as his first followers; all later disciples depend on them; they can thus rightly be described as the foundation.

All this is straightforward, but the same cannot be said in relation to the prophets<sup>2</sup> who in both 2.20 and 3.5 are associated with the apostles. There are many references to prophets and prophecy as existing in the New Testament church (e.g. Acts 13.1; 21.9; 1 Cor. 14.1ff) and prophets were certainly honoured by the first Christians; yet a continuing group or a continuing activity can

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287-303; J.H. Schültz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (SNTS monograph series 26), Cambridge, 1975; H. Merklein, *Das kirchliche Amt nach dem Epheserbrief*, Munich, 1973, pp.288ff.

2 On prophets and prophecy see D. Hill, *New Testament Prophecy*, London, 1979; D.E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Grand Rapids, 1983; G. Dautzenberg, *Urchristliche Prophetie. Ihre Erforschung, ihre Voraussetzungen im Judentum und ihre Struktur im ersten Korintherbrief*, Stuttgart, 1975; U.B. Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt im Neuen Testament, Formgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur urchristlich Prophetie*, Gütersloh, 1975; Merklein, op.cit., pp.306ff.,

hardly be intended with the references in Ephesians; the foundation has been laid once-for-all and will not go on being laid. For this reason some commentators have identified the prophets here with those of the Old Testament. Of these, at least in Christian eyes, there can be no more; they are a past group; but of course what they said and wrote was influential in the church and might be regarded as foundational. If however the O.T. prophets were intended the order 'prophets and apostles' would have been expected. The books of the prophets are moreover not the only books of the O.T.; 'The Law and the Prophets' would have been the proper phrase to denote O.T. revelation. In any case the O.T. prophets were hardly the recipients of the revelation to evangelize the Gentiles.

If the O.T. prophets have to be ruled out of consideration who then were the prophets who could be regarded both as the foundation of the church and as the recipients of the revelation that the gospel was not for Jews alone but for all? Is there any way in which we can see prophets as associated with this revelation? We should first note that there was a recognized class of prophets (Acts 13.1; 1 Cor 12.28) and prophets were not necessarily just believers who from time to time were inspired by the Spirit. Since prophets were normally regarded as offering directions for the way in which the church should move (Acts 13.1-3 shows them as involved in the sending out of missionaries to preach to Gentiles, thus shaping its existence and future nature) they may have been more widely involved in the movement towards the Gentiles than is sometimes thought. Matt. 28.16-20; Luke 24.47-9; Acts 1.8; John 20.21b all offer the revelation but in verbally different forms. Since no heed seems to have been paid to this revelation until much later when the Gospel began to be preached to the Gentiles at Antioch (Acts 11.19f) the verbalisation of the commission may have been later than the end of the earthly life of the risen Jesus<sup>3</sup>; in this case prophets, receiving the word of the exalted Christ, spoke it to believers, and later the commission was associated with the earthly Christ. Prophets might then have been identified with the revelation in some strands of tradition and Eph. 3.5 may represent

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<sup>3</sup> See Best, 'The Revelation to Evangelize the Gentiles', *JTS* 35 (1984) 1-30.

such a strand. There is another way in which we may see how believers may have seen them as related to the beginning of the church. Revelation describes itself as a prophecy (Rev. 1.3; 22.7,10,18,19) suggesting that prophets have a role in relation to the forecasting of the nature of the End. That this is so is confirmed by the references to them in the Markan Apoclypse (13.22). If 1 Thess.4.15-16, or some part of it, comes not from the incarnate Christ but represents a prophetic saying, we have again a connection between prophets and the End. May it not be that a part of the foundation of the church is the certainty that it has an end in the purpose of God and that that end is carefully planned? A planned end for a group will always shape the course of its life from its beginning.

### *Continuing Ministries*

In 4.11 five different ministries or leadership roles are named, apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers. We have already looked at the first two of these and seen that they were not ministries designed to continue for all time, though there may be still those in the church who were termed apostles and those who prophesied. 2.20 and 3.5 imply strongly that those called apostles and prophets filled foundational roles and were not contemporary with the author and his readers. Even if Paul is the author the apostolic role in view is not that of a general government of the church but of something that happened at the beginning and only then. We do not need therefore to consider the apostles and prophets again but can turn our attention to the remaining three 'officials' (it is difficult to know what title to give them; it could be leaders, ministers, officials, office-bearers; we shall use all these from time to time) whose work was certainly a present reality for the author of Ephesians and his readers.

Before considering the remaining names in the list we need to set the list in its context. In 4.7 the author said that grace had been given to every church member by Christ; this is very similar to what is said about charismatic gifts in 1 Corinthians 12.1ff. 4.7 is then justified with a quotation in 4.8; the quotation depends in some way on Ps 68.18, though it does not use the exact words of the Psalm. Verses 9,10 then expand the quotation. Now at v.11 the author

appears to return to what he had said in 4.7 but with a significant variation. The gifts are no longer universal and intended for all believers; Christ instead is said to give certain people to the church; the gifts are not the ability to perform various functions as in 1 Corinthians 12 but are the people themselves (apostles, prophets, etc.); the church is not explicitly mentioned but the succeeding verses show that it is it which is the recipient of the gifts. There is another significant variation from 1 Corinthians; there it was God who was said to appoint the leaders of the church (12.28); here it is Christ. Although no mention is made of a grace being bestowed on those Christ has chosen it may be assumed that the charisma appropriate to the role which each is to play will have been given (cf Calvin). The change of emphasis from v.7 in relation to people as gifts rather than 'graces' was however already foreshadowed in 1 Cor 12.4-30 which began by enumerating the various charismata with which different members of the community might be endowed but ended in vv.28f by enumerating identifiable leaders, apostles, prophets, teachers; after listing these first three Paul apparently ran out of 'titles' and went on by listing functions. Since none of the 'titles' is explained we may assume that Paul's Corinthian readers were familiar with them. The same must be true of the leaders mentioned in our verse in respect of the readers of Ephesians.

There is no need then for our purpose to ask whether the author of Ephesians saw the leaders he identifies as present in the church from the beginning, or to attempt to trace out the origin of each title in its earlier history. The author is dealing with his current situation; it is sufficient to realise they were titles known to him and his readers. There is also no need for us to cross-identify his titles with those in other parts of the N.T. (e.g. with bishops, deacons and elders). In the first century the situation in respect of ministry was fluid; it was only after the time of Ephesians that titles and the functions attached to them began to harden. It is sufficient to note that the titles are not mutually exclusive; Paul is termed both apostle and teacher in 1 Tim. 2.7 (cf Acts 15.35). Indeed Ephesians does nothing to distinguish between the functions of those that are listed; they are considered as a group and not in respect of their

individual contributions.<sup>4</sup> Our author's list is limited to five names, three of which are those mentioned in 1 Cor 12.28, though there is no reason to suppose that he was directly dependent thereon; they appear in other parts of the NT.

The list is enumerated and distinguished by means of μέν ... δέ ... δέ ... δέ<sup>5</sup>... An article is associated with each title; it is probably not to be understood in the sense 'he gave some to be ...' but rather 'he gave those who are ...'. Does the initial μέν serve to contrast the apostles with the others in the list (so Schnackenburg<sup>6</sup>)? It does not do so in the enumerations of Matt. 13.4-7; 13.8; 16.14; 21.35. Had AE intended this contrast he would have chosen a stronger particle to distinguish the first name from the rest or a fresh μέν with following δέ ... δε ... to differentiate the other names from one another. Moreover in 2.20; 3.5 apostles and prophets are held together as a group.

Apostles and prophets in 2.20 and 3.5 are, as we have seen, figures of the past, though the aorist ἔδωκεν cannot be used to support this otherwise the evangelists, shepherds and teachers would also be confined to the past. As we have seen the term apostle was not limited to the twelve and there were still people so named at the beginning of the second century (cf *Didache* 11.3-12); prophets appear regularly as active in the N.T. period. May apostles and prophets in v.11 then unlike 2.20 and 3.5 not be seen as a continuing gift to the church? May the missionary who took the gospel to a fresh area not be regarded as its initiating or founding apostle (William Carey has been termed the apostle to India)? There is a possible ambiguity here. If Paul wrote the letter he is still alive and if another author wrote in Paul's name he has to sustain

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4 E. D. Roels, *God's Mission*, Franeker, 1962, p. 185.

5 Cf Blass, Debrunner, Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, Göttingen, 1976, §250; Moulton, Howard, Turner, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Edinburgh, 1963, pp.36f; A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, New York, 1919, pp.1152f.

6 So R. Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (E.T.), Edinburgh, 1991, ad loc.

the view that Paul is still alive. So no simple distinction can be drawn between apostles and the other ministers listed; the last three certainly still exist and if apostles still do they are not the apostles of 2.20 and 3.5.

In 1 Cor 12.28 others were named in addition to apostles and prophets; AE also extends the list beyond them. The first additional category is that of the evangelist.<sup>7</sup> If this term is understood to refer to the authors of the Gospels then certainly it would represent a ministry like that of apostle and prophet which belonged to the past. It was however apparently first used with this sense by Hippolytus, *De Antichristo* 56 and Tertullian *Adv Praxean* 23. It is hardly likely that Gospels were in existence in sufficient number by the time of Ephesians for this understanding of the word to have appeared. Today the word is regularly applied to those who conduct missions in existing Christian countries. It was previously used widely of those who travelled as missionaries taking the gospel into fresh areas, and in this sense many commentators regard the evangelists as successors to the apostles. If we were to accept this latter idea there is no reason to go further with Klauck<sup>8</sup> and suppose that shepherd and teachers have taken over the work of prophets. But to see the evangelist as missionary to unbelievers does not fit the context of Ephesians which continues in v.12 to signify the ministry of all those that it names as directed towards the saints. The term needs therefore some further investigation.

The word evangelist appears only twice in the NT. Acts 21.8 applies it to Philip whose work as a travelling missionary is recorded in Acts 8.4ff, yet at the time when he is termed evangelist in 21.8 he has an established home and his family are living with him in it; he is then no longer a travelling missionary. In 2 Tim. 4.5 Timothy is told to do the work of an evangelist and this appears to be equated with fulfilling his ministry and not be the title of an office.<sup>9</sup> When we look at 1 and 2 Timothy to see what roles

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<sup>7</sup> For the word see G., Friedrich, *TDNT* II, 736f.

<sup>8</sup> H.-J. Klauck, 'Das Amt in der Kirche nach Eph 4,1-16', *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 36 (1973) 81-110.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Merklein, *op.cit.*, 346



'Timothy was to fulfil we find he is expected to remain at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1.3), i.e. not to travel, to correct false doctrine (1 Tim. 1.3f; 4.1f; 2 Tim. 2.23; 3.1ff), to see to the appointment of suitable people as bishops and deacons (1 Tim. 3.1ff; 2 Tim. 2.2), which suggests the oversight of individual congregations in an area rather than travelling into new areas where the gospel was not yet known; he is also to set an example to others through his conduct (1 Tim. 4.12), to take charge of preaching and teaching and to be particularly diligent in respect of his own (1 Tim. 4.11-16); and he is to give moral teaching to various groups and to believers generally (1 Tim. 5.1ff; 2 Tim. 2.14ff). He is never instructed to seek the conversion of unbelievers. His ministry is accordingly related entirely to those who are already within the church (2 Tim. 4.2 offers a good summary) and it is within the church that he does the work of an evangelist.

The use of the word 'evangelist' in the N.T. provides then no direct evidence that it denotes travelling missionaries. The non-Christian evidence is too slender to provide any clue to its meaning. Apart from coming later to denote the writers of the Gospels the word almost disappears from the Christian vocabulary. Eusebius applies it to Pantaenus who in imitation of the apostles was a missionary in India (*EH* V 10.1ff; cf. III 37.1ff). If then we are to seek out what being an evangelist signifies we need to go to the root from which it is derived, gospel, εὐαγγέλιον. That this regularly denotes the content of what is proclaimed to unbelievers needs no proof; it is however also used in relation to what goes on within a believing community (Rom. 1.15; 1 Cor. 9.14; 2 Cor. 11.7; Gal. 2.14; Phil. 1.27); Mark uses the word to describe his Gospel (1.1) and that Gospel is addressed to believers; Mark also says that Jesus went about preaching the gospel (1.14) yet he continually refers to what Jesus does as teaching; he also uses the word in his appeal for more dedicated lives from believers (8.35). Paul is still preaching the cross to believers (1 Corinthians 1-4); in 2 Cor. 8.9 he proclaims the gospel to overcome a worsening financial situation within the church (it may not be the way we would state the gospel but it is a way of putting it relevant to the situation). Other statements of the gospel are used in exhorting in various ways those who are Christians (Phil. 2.6-11; 1 Cor. 15.3-5; 1 Tim. 3.16). On

the other hand as if to mock our careful differentiation between the roles fulfilled by different ministers Paul's evangelizing of Sergius Paulus is described as teaching (Acts 13.12). Any division between ministries to the world and to the church breaks down again in 2 Cor. 5.20 where Christians are assumed to stand in need of reconciliation.

The gospel then speaks as much to believers as to unbelievers; they continually need to be reminded of it as Kate Hankey's hymn 'Tell me the old old story ...' drives home. There is no point in their lives at which believers no longer need to go back to gospel fundamentals. Ephesians itself provides a good example of this for in 5.2 its readers are brought back to the gospel when God's claim on their lives is set before them. There is then no reason to suppose that evangelists are regarded in Ephesians as directing all their activity towards unbelievers, still less to suppose that they are mentioned because the communities to which the letter was written had come into being through their activity,<sup>10</sup> though that is not to say that this was not the way they came into being. It would of course be wrong to exclude evangelists from work directed towards unbelievers; as preachers they go both to the unconverted and the converted.<sup>11</sup> Paul the apostle exercised that same dual role and in that sense evangelists might be regarded as successors to the apostle.

There is moreover some confirmatory evidence from the early church that evangelists worked within the Christian community as well as outside it. The term is used in the *Apostolic Church Order* or *Apostolic Canons* 19 in relation to the office of reader in the early church; he is told to bear in mind that he takes the place of an evangelist, εἰδὼς ὅτι εὐαγγελιστοῦ τόπον ἐργάζεται. Harnack believes that the reference to the reader belongs to one of the second century sources of the *Church*

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<sup>10</sup> So H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, Düsseldorf, 1971, ad loc; A.T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary), Dallas, 1990, ad loc.

<sup>11</sup> So J.E. Belser, *Der Epheserbrief des Apostels Paulus*, Freiburg, 1908, ad loc.

*Order*.<sup>12</sup> In the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII 22 (cf 28) when the reader is set apart the prayer requests for him a prophetic spirit, which would hardly be necessary if all that was required from him was a clear voice (cf. Cyprian, *Ep.* 39.5; 29). When Origen expands Eph. 4.11 in his Johannine commentary (I.5; see *GCS* 10.7.8ff) he clearly regards the evangelist as operating within the church; in his commentary on Eph. 4.11 in relation to the evangelist he alludes to Isa. 52.7 where the good news is brought to Zion and not to non-Israelites.<sup>13</sup> We can thus conclude that at least part of the work of the evangelist lay within the congregation.

The remaining two names in the list, shepherds and teachers, are closely linked through a single article and καί. Have we then two groups of people each fulfilling a separate and distinct role or one group exercising two roles? This question must be left until we have identified the roles indicated by each word. Since the role of the teacher is easier to envisage we begin with it.

Teachers<sup>14</sup> follow apostles and prophets in the list of 1 Cor. 12.28 (cf 14.26) and their work appears among the charismata listed in Rom. 12.7. The existence of 'specialist' teachers is confirmed by Gal. 6.6; Jas. 3.1; Barnabas 1.8; 4.9; Hermas *Sim.* ix 15.4. The activity of teaching is referred to frequently in the Pastorals and is an important part of the work of Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. 2.12; 4.6,11,13,16; 5.17; 6.2; 2 Tim. 2.2; 4.3; Tit. 1.9; 2.1,7). The writer of our letter was presumably himself fulfilling the role of a teacher when he wrote.<sup>15</sup> Teachers will have passed on tradition which they deduced from the O.T. (2 Tim. 3.16) or received from earlier Christians (cf Rom. 6.17; 1 Cor. 4.17; Col. 2.7; 2 Thess. 2.15) and then related it to their contemporary situation; they will also have looked deeply into that tradition and drawn lessons from it for the

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<sup>12</sup> A. Harnack, 'Die Quellen der sogenannten apostolischen Kirchenordnung', *TU* II.2 (1886); cf A.J. Maclean, 'The Ancient Church Order' *JTS* 3 (1901) 61-73.

<sup>13</sup> See J. A. F. Gregg, *JTS* 3 (1902) 413f

<sup>14</sup> See A.F. Zimmermann, *Die urchristlichen Lehrer* (WUNT 2.Reihe 12), Tübingen, 1984, especially pp. 92-118.

<sup>15</sup> Merklein, *op.cit.*, p. 350

new areas of life with their new problems which believers were constantly facing. The task of teachers cannot however be confined to imparting information or opening up new ways of thought but will always have included exhortation that their hearers should live by what they taught (Eph. 4.20f). In that sense they will have been leaders in their congregations. Gentiles will necessarily have had much to learn when they became Christians; in 4.20 they are depicted as 'learning' Christ. Apart from designated teachers every Christian was expected to be a teacher (Heb. 5.12; Col. 3.16).

This seems relatively clear but clarity disappears once we turn to the term linked with teachers, ποιμένες. It is better to translate this as 'shepherds' rather than the normal rendering 'pastors'; in this way we retain the original underlying image and avoid all the overtones surrounding the modern use of 'pastor'. However in using 'shepherd' we need to recognize that the image which it evokes in a modern Westerner differs in one important respect from the original: in the West shepherds generally drive their sheep, in the East they lead them. The shepherd image appears to have entered Jewish thought from its use in the Near East of rulers who led their people.<sup>16</sup> It was also used in this way in Greco-Roman culture though not as widely; it is in fact so obvious a metaphor that the readers of the letter would have had no difficulty in picking up its nuance, especially in the light of its frequent appearance in the O.T. which was now their main religious book. There the image was applied to God (Gen. 49.24; Ps. 23.1; 80.1; Isa. 40.11), though the word shepherd itself was not always used (Jer. 50.19; Isa. 49.10). It denoted the way he cared for and protected his people (cf 1 Sam. 17.34ff). In the N.T. the image was transferred and applied to Christ rather than God (1 Pet. 2.25; Heb. 13.20; John 10.1-10; Mark 6.34; 14.27; Matt. 25.32). Either in parallel to its non-Jewish

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<sup>16</sup> Cf J. Jeremias, *TDNT* VI 485-502; R. Schnackenburg, 'Episcopos und Hirtenamt: Zu Apg 20.28' in his *Schriften zum Neuen Testament*, München, 1971, pp. 247-67; K. Kertelge, 'Offene Fragen zum Thema "Geistliches Amt" und das neutestamentliche Verständnis von der "Repraesentatio Christi"' in *Die Kirche des Anfangs* (FS Heinz Schürmann ed R. Schnackenburg, J. Ernst, J. Wanke), Freiberg, Basel, Wien, 1978, pp.583-605.

use in the Near East or as a result of its application to God it was also applied in the O.T. to the activity of leaders in Israel (2 Sam. 5.2; Ps. 78.71; Jer. 2.8; 3.15; Ezek. 34.2), and then in the N.T. applied to church leaders (John 21.16; Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.2); the church itself is described as a flock of sheep (John 10.2ff; 21.16; Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.2; cf Jer. 23.2f; 50.6,17). Eph. 4.11 is however the only place in the N.T. where the noun is used of church officials. The image is vague; its O.T. and pre-O.T. usage would suggest that primary emphasis would lie on shepherds as those who led, provided for and protected those in their care. Yet when carrying out these duties shepherds in the church would have had to preach and teach, that is fulfil the functions of evangelists and teachers. In order to differentiate them in some way from the latter it is probably right to stress either the element of leadership or that of general oversight (Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.2; yet John 21.16 hardly relates to leadership or oversight). Perhaps it is wrong to attempt to draw rigid distinctions between the three groups, evangelists, shepherds, teachers; in the modern church most priests and ministers exercise all these roles from time to time. This suggests we see evangelising, shepherding and teaching as three essential ministerial functions. Some distinction exists between evangelising on the one hand and shepherding and teaching on the other in that the second and third functions are exercised entirely within the community but the first both inside and outside it.

This perhaps offers a clue to a question raised earlier but left aside, Are shepherds and teachers one group or two (the idea that only one group is described goes back as far as Jerome)? Shepherding and teaching are different functions yet the same people could exercise both from time to time. Leadership involves truth, i.e. correct teaching, for the leader has to say in what direction he wishes to lead, and teaching involves leadership for the teacher must be seen to be leading others in the way he or she advocates; teachers are more than academics providing information! Such an explanation is preferable to that which regards pastors and teachers as local officials whereas evangelists operate in a wider area (the latter explanation goes back to Chrysostom and Theodoret; see their commentaries on Ephesians). It is true that one article governs both teachers and shepherds; of itself this does not prove

they are one group for one article also governs apostles and prophets in 2.20 and there we have two groups. If then we accept the idea that two groups are envisaged we should not think of a rigid separation between them. In new movements leadership in its various aspects, and teaching and exhortation must be included among these, is flexible and only hardens into fixed categories with the passage of time. The later church certainly shows the development of more specialised ministerial roles, but for our purposes there is no need to trace out their appearance. It is sufficient to say that Ephesians offers no template for today's ministry.

There is then in v.11 a list involving both the names of officials and describing their functions. Does this mean that our author believes he has set out an exclusive list of officials and functions? He does not mention presbyters, deacons and bishops. When he wishes to he can make clear that his lists are non-exclusive (see 1.21 and 6.12 where we have two lists each ending with a generalising term). He probably intends then that the list should be taken as exclusive. Yet it would be wrong to accept the conclusion of Fischer,<sup>17</sup> that our author's omission of bishops was a deliberate attempt to preserve the Pauline conception of ministry, for there is little else in the letter to support such an idea.

If the list is exclusive we need to go further and ask if preaching, ruling and teaching were the only ministries within the church of that time in the group of congregations to which the letter is addressed? Certainly these three appear to be ministries, or functions, whichever we term them, which the church has always retained; their nature is permanent if the titles identifying them are not. All three appear at first sight to be ministries possessing a primary verbal orientation, yet there are other verbal ministries, e.g. prophecy. Prophets continued in the church at least to the end of the first century (*Didache* 13.1f; 15.1f). Perhaps our author having mentioned prophets as part of the foundation of the church did not wish to mention them again lest there would be confusion. But

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<sup>17</sup> K.M. Fischer, *Tendenz und Absicht des Epheserbriefes* (FRLANT 111), Göttingen, 1973, pp. 15f, 21f. 38f.

were there not also important non-verbal ministries? Before we turn to examine this question it is interesting to observe that none of those listed in v.11 is specifically described as a leader, though in other letters words are used indicating leadership (1 Thess. 5.12; 1 Cor. 12.28; Rom. 12.8; Heb. 13.7,17). Leadership in the narrow sense of what is required to hold a community together and direct it in the way it should go may then have belonged to all three of evangelists, teachers and shepherds; we can exclude apostles and prophets as no longer active; if they had been they too would have shared in leadership. The same would have been true of 'rulers' if they had been explicitly mentioned. Interestingly the letter does not suggest that ruling lay within the ambit of apostles; they are 'foundations' and receive revelations (2.20; 3.5). Perhaps the writer of the letter was not worried about the exercise of authority by some Christians over others.

1 Pet. 4.11 distinguishes between charismata relating to speech and to practical service. The latter area of activity also appears in Rom. 12.7f; 1 Cor. 12.9f,28. It may be summed up in the phrase 'loving service' for which the key word is often taken to be *διακονία*. Loving service is advocated for all believers in the paraenetic section of Ephesians (e.g. in 4.28,32; 6.18) and is of course what should be taking place in the various areas which the *Haustafel* (5.22-6.9) treats; but it is apparently not seen as belonging to the duty of particular officials as it was in Acts 6.1-6. Grotius in his commentary noting the omission of workers of miracles justified this on the grounds that their work did nothing to equip or prepare the saints. Yet even if we allow this in respect of those who heal or speak in tongues (and not all would allow this) it cannot be extended to cover all forms of loving care. Schnackenburg,<sup>18</sup> suggests that the teaching and shepherding ministries are mentioned because of the danger of false belief (cf v.14), yet 'caring' ministries by their love can also preserve others from straying into false ways, especially if those false ways relate to matters of conduct rather than doctrine; it is indeed probable that the disturbance which appears to threaten the church (4.14) comes from false ethical teaching rather than erroneous doctrine; the danger from false doctrine never looms large in this letter. Verses

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18 *Ephesians*, 190f.

12-16 suggest that one reason for the existence of ministers is the need to build up the community and draw the members together in unity; loving service will do this as effectively as teaching and shepherding. Worship may do the same; its conduct is not however linked to a limited number of 'officials'; 5.19 is the only place where it is mentioned and there appears to be something for all believers. Prayer is also a ministry open to all (6.18f).

The Eucharist which many modern theologians would regard as the principal means of expressing and sustaining church unity is nowhere mentioned in the letter, least of all in connection with the officials, but this may possibly be because the list primarily denotes functions rather than people. We do not know enough about who presided over the eucharist in this period to say whether this lay within the sphere of teacher or shepherd, or even if it was held to be important that some particular person should officiate. In his instructions on the conduct of the Eucharist Paul does not say who should preside (1 Cor. 11.22ff); it may well have been the householder in whose house the church met. In the *Didache* (9.1-10.7) while instructions are given about the conduct of the Eucharist nothing is said that would suggest there was an appointed official to preside, except that there is an implication in 10.7 that a prophet if present should do this. The way also in which the prayers to be used at the Eucharist are presented as if it was open to all readers to pray suggests that anyone might preside. This also applies to baptism. Ignatius seems to accept bishops, whether as individuals or as pre-eminent among a group of elders, as important and it may be that they would have presided at the Eucharist. Certainly by the time of Justin Martyr there was a definite president (*Apol* 1.67). The centralisation of power is a common phenomenon in groups as they grow and develop. So far as baptism goes Paul does not appear to have been concerned about who should officiate for in Corinth after his initial baptism of the first few believers he left the administration of the rite to others without laying down rules about who should do it (1 Cor. 1.14-16). All this implies the impossibility of drawing up guide lines for the modern ministry from Ephesians. In keeping with this is the absence of any reference to the choice and appointment of shepherds, evangelists and teachers; there is no reason to doubt that



some method or methods did exist (cf Acts 13.1-3; 1 Tim. 4.14) but the writer's failure to refer to these matters suggests that he did not think methods of choice and appointment were important.

Evangelists, teachers, shepherds are clearly distinct from those, all believers, who receive charismata to be used for the good of the community (v.7), and the groups are therefore in the nature of permanent 'officials'. By its introduction of 'officials' Ephesians may be said to have hastened the division between clergy and laity, begun the sacralisation of the ministry and at the same time to have supported the idea that ministry of a non-spontaneous nature was necessary for the good estate of the church. It should also be noted that the existence of ministry is assumed without positive argument in its favour which suggests that its existence was not an issue within the communities to which the letter was written. This is in accordance with sociological theory that groups as they grow produce their own leadership and can have no long-term existence without permanent leaders.

Since no mention is made either of the manner of choice of leaders or of a ceremony of appointment all the stress lies on their selection by Christ. It was important for their own encouragement that evangelists, shepherds and teachers should know that they had been selected and given to the church by Christ. Dependence on Christ would enable them to hold steady when things were difficult. Knowledge that Christ had selected them would also help their communities to accept and respect them even if their words and actions were at times disliked.

It is impossible to tell whether the author thinks only of men as holding these appointments. διδάσκαλος<sup>19</sup> is of common gender; there is apparently no regular separate feminine noun denoting shepherdesses<sup>20</sup> and yet there must have been shepherdesses in the rural economy of the ancient world; εὐαγγελιστής is too rare a word for any deduction to be drawn. The communities certainly contained women as the instruction on

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19 See Liddell, Scott, Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v.

20 *ibid.* s.v.

marriage shows (5.22-33), yet the community can be addressed as if all were males (6.23). The author may not have been worried about the sexual orientation of the officials he mentions.

Granted the existence of these officials what does the writer of Ephesians envisage as their function? Since he does not distinguish between their roles we can only ask after their function as a group. His answer comes in v.12 where there are three prepositional phrases each indicating purpose; the first is introduced with πρὸς and the other two with εἰς. Controversy has centered round the relation of these phrases to one another as may be seen from the renderings of KJV and NRSV; the former regards them as parallel and thus makes all three relate to the function of the leaders; the latter, in accordance with the variation in preposition, makes only the first relate to the 'ministers' and the second and third to the saints who are mentioned in the first. Verse 13 certainly refers to the life of the whole community. Somewhere therefore within v.12 or at its conclusion there must be a movement from 'ministers' to 'saints'. Even if we assume that all three phrases relate to the role of the officials there is however no reason to distinguish between the phrases and attach each one to a different official. For our purposes it is unnecessary to follow out the controversy as to the place where the change takes place; it is sufficient to note that the role of the leaders relates to the saints and to see what the first clause means; indeed even if the other phrases also relate to the officials little is added to what the first phrase tells us. Its meaning centres on καταρτισμός. This is the noun's only occurrence in the N.T. though the cognate verb is found fairly regularly. Noun and verb have several related meanings:<sup>21</sup> 'repairing' (Matt. 4.19; Mark 1.19), 'setting broken bones', 'equipping, preparing', 'training, disciplining'. Only the last two groups of senses are appropriate to 4.12. Of these the final sense would apply strictly only to the teachers of v.11; it is therefore best to choose the sense of equipping or preparing which can be associated with any of the roles of the leaders. Their function is then to enable the saints to carry out their ministry. The ministry of

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<sup>21</sup> See Liddell, Scott and Jones, s.v.

the officials does not find its fulfilment in their own existence but only in the activity of preparing others to minister.

*The ministry of the saints*

In very general terms this may be described as a building up of the whole body of the church in love (4.12,16). Its purpose is presented both positively (v.13) and negatively (v.14) and the source of strength to achieve this end comes in vv.15f. The strength is from Christ who supplies both grace to the members of his body for their various activities (v.7) and everything they require so that all may grow in love (vv.15f). No description is however given here of the way the saints are to exercise their ministry; this needs to be gleaned from other parts of the letter.

In 5.19 they are instructed to address one another with psalms, hymns and various other spiritual songs. It should be noted that their singing is described here as addressed to one another and not, as we might expect, to God and although antiphonal singing was well known<sup>22</sup> in the ancient world this is not what is envisaged here; had our author intended it he would have made himself clearer. It is probably impossible to distinguish satisfactorily between the three song types which he names; they are probably intended to cover all the singing in public worship which was addressed to other believers. Fixed forms may have been used (5.14 is part of a Christian hymn) and there may have also been spontaneous or charismatic singing. The songs will have been directed at others to encourage them in their contests with evil and to instruct them in the gospel; in a sense those who used them will have been fulfilling the roles of the leaders of v.11. As well however as addressing one another believers in some of their songs will have praised God (v.20). Nothing is said about the role of the leaders in the directing of such thanksgiving or worship in general. What is described is a ministry of the laity. In their thanksgiving believers would remember among other things, their election by God, their redemption through the blood of Christ, their

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<sup>22</sup> Cf Ezra 3.11; Philo, *De Vita Contempletiva* 84; Pliny, *Epistles* X 96.

resurrection with Christ into the heavenly places, indeed all the themes of salvation that are mentioned in the first three chapters.

A further item in the ministry of all believers is presented in v.21. This verse is difficult to set in its context; it leads on to the *Haustafel* of 5.22-6.9 but is also governed by the same principal verb as vv.19f. It must in part at least be taken with vv.19f and indicate a mutual relationship which is wider than that found within the household; the latter is treated in the *Haustafel*. The concept of mutuality between believers is a common N.T. theme; its best known expression is the Johannine form of the love commandment (John 13.34f). Ephesians shows it as involving mutual forbearance, meekness and lowliness (4.2) and the willingness to forgive one another (4.32). In 5.21 a strong verb, ὑποτάσσω, signifying subordination, is used to denote it. Subordination implies a sense of order in society and in our context will of course be voluntary. Its best illustration is provided by the way Jesus washed the feet of his disciples (John 13.1ff). It is not an easy attitude to attain and it is important therefore to note that our verse is still controlled by the reference to the Holy Spirit in v.18; it is impossible without the assistance of the Spirit.

The ministry of believers is not however restricted to mutual forbearance; it has a more active side. Believers should not slander one another nor titillate each other with smutty talk (4.29,31); they should not lose their tempers with one another and should speak the truth at all times to one another (4.25-27); they should contribute in practical ways to the physical needs of one another (4.28).<sup>23</sup> All this covers a wide range of activity which was not even glanced at in the discussion of the roles of their leaders.

### *The ministry of Paul*

Paul fulfilled all the five functions or ministries listed in 4.11. He was an apostle (1.1); he prophesied (1 Corinthians 14); he was an evangelist, preaching the gospel as a missionary to unbelievers (see Acts) and to believers (in all his letters he bases what he has to

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<sup>23</sup> See Best, 'Thieves in the Church, Ephesians 4:28', *IBS* 14 (1992) 2-9.

say on the essentials of the gospel); he wrote letters and visited the communities which he had founded to shepherd and teach their members. This is seen particularly in this letter in 4.1 where he encourages them to Christian behaviour and where he prays for them in 1.15ff; 3.14ff. He was also the recipient of divine revelation (3.3) and had a special place in the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles (3.7-9). He thus appears to allocate to himself a unique place in salvation history. This is not out of accord with some of what he says about his ministry elsewhere. He identifies himself as the last in the line of those to whom the risen Jesus appeared (1 Cor. 15.8); he says the gospel came to him through revelation (Gal. 1.12); unlike other preachers he calls on his converts to imitate him (1 Cor. 4.16; 11.1; Phil. 3.17).

If the author of Ephesians was not Paul then he certainly conceived of Paul's ministry in the way we have just seen the letter depicts it. But how then did our author conceive his own ministry? He would probably not have described himself as an apostle if that term is taken to imply someone of a rank equal to that of the Twelve, though he might have thought of himself as an apostle on a lower scale. There is nothing 'prophetic' about his writing in the sense of the way he uses the term in 2.20 or the way many envisage prophecy as a foretelling of the future. But he does proclaim the essentials of the gospel to his readers, teaches them about the O.T., and expounds and re-applies earlier tradition. We do not know enough about what he meant by shepherd to decide whether he thought he was shepherding his readers, but probably he did. He would then have fulfilled in his own way the three continuing ministries of 4.11.

### *Clergy and laity*

We have suggested that Ephesians contains the beginnings of the distinction between 'officials' and ordinary believers, yet it is not easy to determine precisely how that distinction is envisaged. There does not appear to be any area of ministry carefully marked out (e.g. presiding at the Eucharist) into which non-ministerial believers might not enter. When they address one another in song they are presumably doing much the same as leaders who teach and shepherd and who drive home the meaning of the Gospel. They

have a prayer ministry just as much as had Paul (6.18-20). They are joined with their leaders in the building up of the body of Christ (note the 'we all' at the beginning of v.13). Nothing is ever said about the need for them to approach those outside the church but then that part of the activity of evangelists is not featured in the letter. It may be that if we knew more about the roles of teachers, shepherds and evangelists we would see a distinction between them and all believers. But the author of Ephesians has not spelt out the roles of these ministers; he may not have needed to because everyone was aware what these roles were or because he was writing a letter to a number of churches and roles would have varied from congregation to congregation or because they just did what everyone else did but devoted more time and energy to it. Teachers and shepherds were terms drawn from the secular world where they had already been applied to leaders. If leaders were just those who devoted more time and energy to teaching and shepherding than others in the church then it may be that our initial assertion that the author conceived of ministry primarily in a theological manner and not in a sociological may not be wholly correct. He may have thought he was making theological statements in 2.20; 3.5; 4.11 but in fact have been responding to the pressures which appear in every new and growing group and these pressures include a veneration of founders. Leaders then were not people who had special tasks within the whole but people who exercised the roles which were open to all but in a special way. It should be noted finally that in Ephesians ministerial roles are not directly linked to varying functions in the body as in Rom.3.3ff; 1 Cor.12.12ff.

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