

a *Grace Notes* course

History of the Christian Church

By Philip Schaff

VOLUME 1. First Period – Apostolic Christianity¹

Chapter 10: Organization of the Apostolic Church

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Contents

VOL 1: Chapter 10. Organization of the Apostolic Church.....	3
1.58 Literature	3
1.59 The Christian Ministry, and its Relation to the Christian Community.....	5
1.60 Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists.....	7
1.61 Presbyters or Bishops	8
1.62 Deacons and Deaconesses.....	10
1.63 Church Discipline.....	11
1.64 The Council at Jerusalem.....	12
1.65 The Church and the Kingdom of Christ.....	14

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	3
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

VOL 1: Chapter 10. Organization of the Apostolic Church

1.58 Literature

I. SOURCES

The Acts represent the first, the Pastoral Epistles the second stage of the apostolic church polity. BAUR (Die sogenannten Pastoralbriefe des Ap. Paulus, 1835), HOLTZMANN (Die Pastoralbriefe, 1880, pp. 190 sqq.), and others, who deny the Pauline authorship of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, date the organization laid down there from the post-apostolic age, but it belongs to the period from A.D. 60–70. The Epistles to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 12:28) and to the Ephesians (4:11), and the Apocalyptic Epistles (Rev. 2 and 3) contain important hints on the church offices.

Comp. the Didache, and the Epp. of CLEMENT AND IGNATIUS.

II. GENERAL WORKS.

Comp. in part the works quoted in ch. IX. (especially VITRINGA), AND THE RESPECTIVE SECTIONS IN THE "HISTORIES OF THE APOSTOLIC AGE" BY NEANDER THIERSCH (PP. 73, 150, 281), LECHLER, LANGE, AND SCHAFF, (Amer. ed, pp. 495–545).

III. SEPARATE WORKS.

Episcopal and Presbyterian writers during the seventeenth century, and more recently, have paid most attention to this chapter, generally with a view of defending their theory of church polity.

RICHARD HOOKER (called "the Judicious," moderate Anglican, d. 1600): Ecclesiastical Polity, 1594, and often since, best edition by Keble, 1836, in 4 vols. A standard work for Episcopal churchmen,

JOS. BINGHAM (Anglican, d. 1668): Origines Ecclesiasticae; or, The Antiquities of the Christian Church, first published 1710–22, in 10 vols. 8vo, and often since, Books; II.-IV. Still an important work.

THOMAS CARTWRIGHT (the father of English Presbyterianism, d. 1603). Directory of Church Government anciently contended for, written in 1583, published by authority of the Long Parliament in 1644.

In the controversy during the Long Parliament and the Westminster Assembly, Bishop HALL AND ARCHBISHOP USSHER WERE THE MOST

LEARNED CHAMPIONS OF EPISCOPACY; WHILE THE FIVE SMECTYMNIAIANS (so called from their famous tract Smectymnuus, 1641, in reply to Hall), i.e., Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy, Thomas Young, Matthew Newcomen, and William Spurstow, were the most prominent Presbyterians trying to "demonstrate the parity of bishops and presbyters in Scripture, and the antiquity of ruling elders." See also A Vindication of the Presbyterian Government and Ministry, London, 1650, and Jus Divinum Ministerii Evangelici, or the Divine Right of the Gospel Ministry, London, 1654, both published by the Provincial Assembly of London. These books have only historical interest.

SAMUEL MILLER (Presbyterian d. 1850): Letters concerning the Constitution and Order of the Christian Ministry, 2d ed., Philadelphia, 1830.

JAMES P. WILSON (Presbyterian): The Primitive Government of Christian Churches. Philadelphia, 1833 (a learned and able work).

JOH. ADAM MÖHLER (Rom. Cath., d. 1848): Die Einheit der Kirche, oder das Princip des Katholicismus, dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenvater der drei ersten Jahrhunderte. Tübingen, 1825 (new ed. 1844). More important for the post-apostolic age.

RICH. ROTHE (d. 1866): Die Anfänge der christlichen Kirche u. ihrer Verfassung, vol. I. Wittenb., 1837, pp. 141 sqq. A Protestant counterpart of Möhler's treatise, exceedingly able, learned, and acute, but wrong on the question of church and state, and partly also on the origin of the episcopate, which he traces back to the apostolic age.

F. CHR. BAUR: Ueber den Ursprung des Episcopates in der christl. Kirche. Tübingen, 1838. Against Rothe.

WILLIAM PALMER (Anglo-Catholic): A Treatise on the Church of Christ. London, 1838, 2 vols., 3d ed., 1841. Amer. ed., with notes, by Bishop Whittingham, New York, 1841.

W. LÖHE (Luth.): Die N. T. lichen Aemter u. ihr Verhältniss zur Gemeinde. Nürnberg. 1848. Also: Drei Bücher von der Kirche, 1845.

FR. DELITZSCH (Luth.): Vier Bücher von der Kirche. Leipzig., 1847.

J. KÖSTLIN (Luth.): Das Wesen der Kirche nach Lehre und Geschichte des N. T., Gotha, 1854; 2d ed. 1872.

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	4
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

SAMUEL DAVIDSON (Independent): The Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament. London, 1848; 2d ed. 1854.

RALPH WARDLAW (Independent): Congregational Independency, in contradistinction to Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, the Church Polity of the New Testament. London, 1848.

ALBERT BARNES (Presbyterian, d. 1870): Organization and Government of the Apostolic Church. Philadelphia, 1855.

CHARLES HODGE (Presbyterian, d. 1878) and others: Essays on the Primitive Church Offices, reprinted from the "Princeton Review," N. York, 1858. Also CH. HODGE: Discussions in Church Polity. Selected from the "Princeton Review," and arranged by W. Durant. New York, 1878.

Bishop KAYE (Episc.): Account of the External Discipline and Government of the Church of Christ in the First Three Centuries. London, 1855.

K. LECHLER (Luth.): Die N. Testamentliche Lehre vom heil. Amte. Stuttgart, 1857.

ALBRECHT RITSCHL: Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche, 2d ed., thoroughly revised, Bonn, 1857 (605 pp.). Purely historical and critical.

JAMES BANNERMAN (Presbyterian): The Church of Christ. A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church. Edinburgh, 1868, 2 vols.

JOHN J. MCELHINNEY (Episc.): The Doctrine of the Church. A Historical Monograph. Philadelphia, 1871. It begins after the apostolic age, but has a useful list of works on the doctrine of the Church from A.D. 100 to 1870.

G. A. JACOB (Low Church Episc.): Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament: Study for the Present Crisis in the Church of England. London, 1871; 5th Amer. ed., New York (Whittaker), 1879.

J. B. LIGHTFOOT (Evangelical Broad Church Episcop., Bishop of Durham, very learned, able, and fair): The Christian Ministry. Excursus to his Commentary on Philippians. London, 1868, 3d ed. London, 1873, pp. 179–267; also separately printed in New York (without notes), 1879.

CHARLES WORDSWORTH (High Church Episcop., Bishop of St. Andrews) The Outlines of the Christian Ministry. London, 1872.

HENRY COTHERILL (Bishop of Edinburgh): The Genesis of the Church. Edinburgh and London, 1872.

W. BEYSCHLAG: Die christliche Gemeindeverfassung im Zeitalter des N. Testaments (Crowned prize essay). Harlem, 1876.

C. WEIZSÄCKER: Die Versammlungen der ältesten Christengemeinden. In the "Jahrbücher für Deutsche Theologie," Gotha, 1876, pp. 474–530. His Apost. Zeitalter (1886), pp. 606–645.

HENRY M. DEXTER (Congregationalist): Congregationalism. 4th ed. Boston, 1876.

E. MELLOR: Priesthood in the Light of the New Testament. Lond., 1876.

J. B. PATON: The Origin of the Priesthood in the Christian Church. London, 1877.

H. WEINGARTEN: Die Umwandlung der urspranglichen christl. Gemeindeorganisation zur katholischen Kirche, in Sybel's "Histor. Zeitschrift" for 1881, pp. 441–467.

EDWIN HATCH (Broad Church Episcop.): The Organization of the Early Christian Churches. Bampton Lectures for 1880. Oxford and Cambridge, 1881. Discusses the post-apostolic organization (Bishops, Deacons, Presbyters, Clergy and Laity, Councils, etc.). A learned and independent work, which endeavors to show that the development of the organization of the church was gradual; that the elements of which it was composed were already existing in human society; that the form was originally a democracy and became by circumstances a monarchy; and that the Christian church has shown its vitality and its divinity by readjusting its form in successive ages. German translation by AD. HARNACK, Giessen, 1883.

P. STANLEY (Broad Church Episc., d. 1881): Christian Institutions, London and New York, 1881. Ch. X. on the Clergy.

CH. GORE: The Ministry of the Church, London, 1889 (Anglo-Catholic).

Articles on the Christian Ministry by SANDAY, HARNACK, MILLIGAN, GORE, SIMCOX, SALMON, and others, in "The Expositor," London, 1887 and 1888.

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	5
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

1.59 The Christian Ministry, and its Relation to the Christian Community.

Christianity exists not merely as a power or principle in this world, but also in an institutional and organized form which is intended to preserve and protect (not to obstruct) it. Christ established a visible church with apostles, as authorized teachers and rulers, and with two sacred rites, baptism and the holy communion, to be observed to the end of the world.

At the same time he laid down no minute arrangements, but only the simple and necessary elements of an organization, wisely leaving the details to be shaped by the growing and changing wants of the church in different ages and countries. In this respect Christianity, as a dispensation of the Spirit, differs widely from the Mosaic theocracy, as a dispensation of the letter.

The ministerial office was instituted by the Lord before his ascension, and solemnly inaugurated on the first Christian Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, to be the regular organ of the kingly power of Christ on earth in founding, maintaining, and extending the church. It appears in the New Testament under different names, descriptive of its various functions:—the "ministry of the word," "of the Spirit," "of righteousness," "of reconciliation." It includes the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and church discipline or the power of the keys, the power to open and shut the gates of the kingdom of heaven, in other words, to declare to the penitent the forgiveness of sins, and to the unworthy excommunication in the name and by the authority of Christ.

The ministers of the gospel are, in an eminent sense, servants of God, and, as such, servants of the churches in the noble spirit of self-denying love according to the example of Christ, for the eternal salvation of the souls entrusted to their charge. They are called—not exclusively, but emphatically—the light of the world, the salt of the earth, fellow-

workers with God, stewards of the mysteries of God, ambassadors for Christ. And this unspeakable dignity brings with it corresponding responsibility.

Even a Paul, contemplating the glory of an office, which is a savor of life unto life to believers and of death unto death to the impenitent, exclaims: "Who is sufficient for these things?" and ascribes all his sufficiency and success to the unmerited grace of God.

The internal call to the sacred office and the moral qualification for it must come from the Holy Spirit, and be recognized and ratified by the church through her proper organs. The apostles were called, indeed, immediately by Christ to the work of founding the church; but so soon as a community of believers arose, the congregation took an active part also in all religious affairs. The persons thus inwardly and outwardly designated by the voice of Christ and his church, were solemnly set apart and inducted into their ministerial functions by the symbolical act of ordination; that is, by prayer and the laying on of the hands of the apostles or their representatives, conferring or authoritatively confirming and sealing the appropriate spiritual gifts.

Yet, high as the sacred office is in its divine origin and import, it was separated by no impassable chasm from the body of believers. The Jewish and later Catholic antithesis of clergy and laity has no place in the apostolic age. The ministers, on the one part, are as sinful and as dependent on redeeming grace as the members of the congregation; and those members, on the other, share equally with the ministers in the blessings of the gospel, enjoy equal freedom of access to the throne of grace, and are called to the same direct communion with Christ, the head of the whole body.

The very mission of the church is, to reconcile all men with God, and make them true followers of Christ. And though this glorious end can be attained only through a long process of history, yet regeneration itself

History of the Christian Church, Philip Schaff	6
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

contains the germ and the pledge of the final perfection.

The New Testament, looking at the principle of the new life and the high calling of the Christian, styles all believers "brethren," "saints," a "spiritual temple," a "peculiar people," a "holy and royal priesthood." It is remarkable, that Peter in particular should present the idea of the priesthood as the destiny of all, and apply the term *clerus* not to the ministerial order as distinct from the laity, but to the community; thus regarding every Christian congregation as a spiritual tribe of Levi, a peculiar people, holy to the Lord.

The temporal organization of the empirical church is to be a means (and not a hindrance, as it often is) for the actualization of the ideal republic of God when all Christians shall be prophets, priests, and kings, and fill all time and all space with his praise.

NOTES

Bishop Lightfoot begins his valuable discussion on the Christian ministry (p. 179) with this broad and liberal statement:

"The kingdom of Christ, not being a kingdom of this world, is not limited by the restrictions which fetter other societies, political or religious. It is in the fullest sense free, comprehensive, universal. It displays this character, not only in the acceptance of all comers who seek admission, irrespective of race or caste or sex, but also in the instruction and treatment of those who are already its members. It has no sacred days or seasons, no special sanctuaries, because every time and every place alike are holy. Above all it has no sacerdotal system. It interposes no sacrificial tribe or class between God and man, by whose intervention alone God is reconciled and man forgiven. Each individual member holds personal communion with the Divine Head. To Him immediately he is responsible, and from Him directly he obtains pardon and draws strength."

But he immediately proceeds to qualify this statement, and says that this is simply the ideal view—"a holy season extending the whole year round, a temple confined only by the limits of the habitable world, a priesthood co-extensive with the race"—and that the Church of Christ can no more hold together without officers, rules, and institutions than any other society of men. "As appointed days and set places are indispensable to her efficiency, so also the Church could not fulfill the purposes for which she exists without rulers and teachers, without a ministry of reconciliation, in short, without an order of men who may in some sense be designated a priesthood. In this respect the ethics of Christianity present an analogy to the politics. Here also the ideal conception and the actual realization are incommensurate and in a manner contradictory."

Nearly all denominations appeal for their church polity to the New Testament, with about equal right and equal wrong: the Romanists to the primacy of Peter; the Irvingites to the apostles and prophets and evangelists, and the miraculous gifts; the Episcopalians to the bishops, the angels, and James of Jerusalem; the Presbyterians to the presbyters and their identity with the bishops; the Congregationalists to the independence of the local congregations and the absence of centralization.

The most that can be said is, that the apostolic age contains fruitful germs for various ecclesiastical organizations subsequently developed, but none of them can claim divine authority except for the gospel ministry, which is common to all. Dean Stanley asserts that no existing church can find any pattern or platform of its government in the first century, and thus strongly contrasts the apostolic and post-apostolic organizations (l.c.):

"It is certain that the officers of the apostolic or of any subsequent church, were not part of the original institution of the Founder of our religion; that of

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	7
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon; of Metropolitan, Patriarch, and Pope, there is not the shadow of a trace in the four Gospels.

It is certain that they arose gradually out of the preexisting institutions either of the Jewish synagogue, or of the Roman empire, or of the Greek municipalities, or under the pressure of local emergencies.

It is certain that throughout the first century, and for the first years of the second, that is, through the later chapters of the Acts, the Apostolic Epistles, and the writings of Clement and Hermas, Bishop and Presbyter were convertible terms, and that the body of men so-called were the rulers—so far as any permanent rulers existed—of the early church.

It is certain that, as the necessities of the time demanded, first at Jerusalem, then in Asia Minor, the elevation of one Presbyter above the rest by the almost universal law, which even in republics engenders a monarchical element, the word 'Bishop' gradually changed its meaning, and by the middle of the second century became restricted to the chief Presbyter of the locality.

It is certain that in no instance were the apostles called 'Bishops' in any other sense than they were equally called 'Presbyters' and 'Deacons.'

It is certain that in no instance before the beginning of the third century the title or function of the Pagan or Jewish priesthood is applied to the Christian pastors

It is as sure that nothing like modern Episcopacy existed before the close of the first century as it is that nothing like modern Presbyterianism existed after the beginning of the second. That which was once the Gordian knot of theologians has at least in this instance been untied, not by the sword of persecution, but by the patient unraveling of scholarships."

1.60 Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists.

The ministry originally coincided with the apostolate; as the church was at first identical with the congregation of Jerusalem. No other officers are mentioned in the Gospels and the first five chapters of the Acts. But when the believers began to number thousands, the apostles could not possibly perform all the functions of teaching, conducting worship, and administering discipline; they were obliged to create new offices for the ordinary wants of the congregations, while they devoted themselves to the general supervision and the further extension of the gospel. Thus arose gradually, out of the needs of the Christian church, though partly at the suggestion of the existing organization of the Jewish synagogue, the various general and congregational offices in the church. As these all have their common root in the apostolate, so they partake also, in different degrees, of its divine origin, authority, privileges, and responsibilities.

We notice first, those offices which were not limited to any one congregation, but extended over the whole church, or at least over a great part of it. These are apostles, prophets, and evangelists. Paul mentions them together in this order.

The prophecy was a gift and function rather than an office, and the evangelists were temporary officers charged with a particular mission under the direction of the apostles. All three are usually regarded as extraordinary officers and confined to the apostolic age; but from time to time God raises extraordinary missionaries (as Patrick, Columba, Boniface, Ansgar), divines (as Augustin, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Melancthon, Calvin), and revival preachers (as Bernard, Knox, Baxter, Wesley, Whitefield), who may well be called apostles, prophets, and evangelists of their age and nation.

1. APOSTLES. These were originally twelve in number, answering to the twelve tribes of Israel. In place of the traitor, Judas, Matthias

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	8
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

was chosen by lot, between the ascension and Pentecost. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Paul was added as the thirteenth by the direct call of the exalted Saviour. He was the independent apostle of the Gentiles, and afterward gathered several subordinate helpers around him. Besides these there were apostolic men, like Barnabas, and James the brother of the Lord, whose standing and influence were almost equal to that of the proper apostles.

The Twelve (excepting Matthias, who, however, was an eye-witness of the resurrection) and Paul were called directly by Christ, without human intervention, to be his representatives on earth, the inspired organs of the Holy Spirit, the founders and pillars of the whole church. Their office was universal, and their writings are to this day the unerring rule of faith and practice for all Christendom. But they never exercised their divine authority in arbitrary and despotic style.

They always paid tender regard to the rights, freedom, and dignity of the immortal souls under their care. In every believer, even in a poor slave like Onesimus, they recognized a member of the same body with themselves, a partaker of their redemption, a beloved brother in Christ. Their government of the church was a labor of meekness and love, of self-denial and unreserved devotion to the eternal welfare of the people. Peter, the prince of the apostles, humbly calls himself a "fellow-presbyter," and raises his prophetic warning against the hierarchical spirit which so easily takes hold of church dignitaries and alienates them from the people.

2. PROPHETS. These were inspired and inspiring teachers and preachers of the mysteries of God. They appear to have had special influence on the choice of officers, designating the persons who were pointed out to them by the Spirit of God in their prayer and fasting, as peculiarly fitted for missionary labor or any other service in the church. Of the prophets the book of Acts names Agabus, Barnabas, Symeon, Lucius,

Manaen, and Saul of Tarsus, Judas and Silas. The gift of prophecy in the wider sense dwelt in all the apostles, pre-eminently in John, the seer of the new covenant and author of the Revelation. It was a function rather than an office.

3. EVANGELISTS, itinerant preachers, delegates, and fellow-laborers of the apostles—such men as Mark, Luke, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Epaphras, Trophimus, and Apollos. They may be compared to modern missionaries. They were apostolic commissioners for a special work. "It is the conception of a later age which represents Timothy as bishop of Ephesus, and Titus as bishop of Crete. St. Paul's own language implies that the position which they held was temporary. In both cases their term of office is drawing to a close when the apostle writes."

1.61 Presbyters or Bishops

THE ANGELS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES. JAMES OF JERUSALEM

We proceed to the officers of local congregations who were charged with carrying forward in particular places the work begun by the apostles and their delegates. These were of two kinds, Presbyters or Bishops, and Deacons or Helpers. They multiplied in proportion as Christianity extended, while the number of the apostles diminished by death, and could, in the nature of the case, not be filled up by witnesses of the life and resurrection of Christ. The extraordinary officers were necessary for the founding and being of the church, the ordinary officers for its preservation and well-being.

The terms **PRESBYTER** (or Elder) and **Bishop** (or Overseer, Superintendent) denote in the New Testament one and the same office, with this difference only, that the first is borrowed from the Synagogue, the second from the Greek communities; and that the one signifies the dignity, the other the duty.

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	9
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

1. The identity of these officers is very evident from the following facts:

- a. They appear always as a plurality or as a college in one and the same congregation, even in smaller cities) as Philippi.
- b. The same officers of the church of Ephesus are alternately called presbyters and bishops.
- c. Paul sends greetings to the "bishops" and "deacons" of Philippi, but omits the presbyters because they were included in the first term; as also the plural indicates.
- d. In the Pastoral Epistles, where Paul intends to give the qualifications for all church officers, he again mentions only two, bishops and deacons, but uses the term presbyter afterwards for bishop. Peter urges the "presbyters" to "tend the flock of God," and to "fulfill the office of bishops" with disinterested devotion and without "lording it over the charge allotted to them."
- e. The interchange of terms continued in use to the close of the first century, as is evident from the Epistle of Clement of Rome (about 95), and the Didache, and still lingered towards the close of the second.

With the beginning of the second century, from Ignatius onward, the two terms are distinguished and designate two offices; the bishop being regarded first as the head of a congregation surrounded by a council of presbyters, and afterwards as the head of a diocese and successor of the apostles. The episcopate grew out of the presidency of the presbytery, or, as Bishop Lightfoot well expresses it: "The episcopate was formed, not out of the apostolic order by localization, but out of the presbytery by elevation; and the title, which originally was common to all, came at length to be appropriated to the chief among them."

Nevertheless, a recollection of the original identity was preserved by the best biblical scholars among the fathers, such as Jerome (who taught that the episcopate rose from the

presbytery as a safeguard against schism), Chrysostom, and Theodoret.

The reason why the title bishop (and not presbyter) was given afterwards to the superior officer, may be explained from the fact that it signified, according to monumental inscriptions recently discovered, financial officers of the temples, and that the bishops had the charge of all the funds of the churches, which were largely charitable institutions for the support of widows and orphans, strangers and travelers, aged and infirm people in an age of extreme riches and extreme poverty.

The origin of the presbytero-episcopal office is not recorded in the New Testament, but when it is first mentioned in the congregation at Jerusalem, A.D. 44, it appears already as a settled institution. As every Jewish synagogue was ruled by elders, it was very natural that every Jewish Christian congregation should at once adopt this form of government; this may be the reason why the writer of the Acts finds it unnecessary to give an account of the origin; while he reports the origin of the deaconate which arose from a special emergency and had no precise analogy in the organization of the synagogue.

The Gentile churches followed the example, choosing the already familiar term bishop. The first thing which Paul and Barnabas did after preaching the gospel in Asia Minor was to organize churches by the appointment of elders.

3. The office of the presbyter-bishops was to teach and to rule the particular congregation committed to their charge. They were the regular "pastors and teachers." To them belonged the direction of public worship, the administration of discipline, the care of souls, and the management of church property. They were usually chosen from the first converts, and appointed by the apostles or their delegates, with the approval of the congregation, or by the congregation itself, which supported them by voluntary contributions. They were solemnly

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	10
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

introduced into their office by the apostles or by their fellow presbyters through prayers and the laying on of hands.

The presbyters always formed a college or corporation, a presbytery; as at Jerusalem, at Ephesus, at Philippi, and at the ordination of Timothy. They no doubt maintained a relation of fraternal equality.

The New Testament gives us no information about the division of labor among them, or the nature and term of a presidency. It is quite probable that the members of the presbytery college distributed the various duties of their office among themselves according to their respective talents, tastes, experience, and convenience. Possibly, too, the president, whether temporary or permanent, was styled distinctively the bishop; and from this the subsequent separation of the episcopate from the presbytery may easily have arisen.

So long as the general government of the church was in the hands of the apostles and their delegates, the bishops were limited in their jurisdiction either to one congregation or to a small circle of congregations.

The distinction of "teaching presbyters" or ministers proper, and "ruling presbyters" or lay-elders, is a convenient arrangement of Reformed churches, but can hardly claim apostolic sanction, since the one passage on which it rests only speaks of two functions in the same office.

Whatever may have been the distribution and rotation of duties, Paul expressly mentions ability to teach among the regular requisites for the episcopal or presbytery office.

4. The **ANGELS** of the Seven Churches in Asia Minor must be regarded as identical with the presbyter-bishops or local pastors. They represent the presiding presbyters, or the corps of regular officers, as the responsible messengers of God to the congregation. At the death of Paul and Peter, under Nero, the congregations were ruled by a college of elders, and if the Apocalypse, as the majority of critical commentators now hold, was

written before the year 70, there was too little time for a radical change of the organization from a republican to a monarchical form.

Even if we regard the "angels" as single persons, they were evidently confined to a single church, and subject to St. John; hence, not successors of the apostles, as the latter diocesan bishops claim to be. The most that can be said is that the angels were congregational, as distinct from diocesan bishops, and mark one step from the primitive presbyters to the Ignatian bishops, who were likewise congregational officers, but in a monarchical sense as the heads of the presbytery, bearing a patriarchal relation to the congregation and being eminently responsible for its spiritual condition.

The nearest approach to the idea of the ancient catholic episcopate may be found in the unique position of James, the Brother of the Lord. Unlike the apostles, he confined his labors to the mother church of Jerusalem. In the Jewish Christian traditions of the second century he appears both as bishop and pope of the church universal. But in fact he was only *primus inter pares*. In his last visit to Jerusalem, Paul was received by the body of the presbyters, and to them he gave an account of his missionary labors. Moreover, this authority of James, who was not an apostle, was exceptional and due chiefly to his close relationship with the Lord, and his personal sanctity, which won the respect even of the unconverted Jews.

The institution of episcopacy proper cannot be traced to the apostolic age, so far as documentary evidence goes, but is very apparent and well-nigh universal about the middle of the second century. Its origin and growth will claim our attention in the next period.

1.62 Deacons and Deaconesses.

DEACONS, or helpers, appear first in the church of Jerusalem, seven in number. The author of the Acts 6 gives us an account of the

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	11
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

origin of this office, which is mentioned before that of the presbyters. It had a precedent in the officers of the synagogue who had charge of the collection and distribution of alms.

It was the first relief of the heavy burden that rested on the shoulders of the apostles, who wished to devote themselves exclusively to prayer and the ministry of the word. It was occasioned by a complaint of the Hellenistic Christians against the Hebrew or Palestinian brethren, that their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food (and perhaps money). In the exercise of a truly fraternal spirit the congregation elected seven Hellenists instead of Hebrews, if we are to judge from their Greek names, although they were not uncommon among the Jews in that age. After the popular election they were ordained by the apostles.

The example of the mother church was followed in all other congregations, though without particular regard to the number. The church of Rome, however, perpetuated even the number seven for several generations. In Philippi the deacons took their rank after the presbyters, and are addressed with them in Paul's Epistle.

The office of these deacons, according to the narrative in Acts, was to minister at the table in the daily love-feasts, and to attend to the wants of the poor and the sick. The primitive churches were charitable societies, taking care of the widows and orphans, dispensing hospitality to strangers, and relieving the needs of the poor. The presbyters were the custodians, the deacons the collectors and distributors, of the charitable funds. To this work a kind of pastoral care of souls very naturally attached itself, since poverty and sickness afford the best occasions and the most urgent demand for edifying instruction and consolation. Hence, living faith and exemplary conduct were necessary qualifications for the office of deacon.

Two of the Jerusalem deacons, Stephen and Philip, labored also as preachers and

evangelists, but in the exercise of a personal gift rather than of official duty.

In post-apostolic times, when the bishop was raised above the presbyter and the presbyter became priest, the deacon was regarded as Levite, and his primary function of care of the poor was lost in the function of assisting the priest in the subordinate parts of public worship and the administration of the sacraments. The diaconate became the first of the three orders of the ministry and a stepping-stone to the priesthood. At the same time the deacon, by his intimacy with the bishop as his agent and messenger, acquired an advantage over the priest.

DEACONESSES, or female helpers, had a similar charge of the poor and sick in the female portion of the church. This office was the more needful on account of the rigid separation of the sexes at that day, especially among the Greeks and Orientals. It opened to pious women and virgins, and chiefly to widows, a most suitable field for the regular official exercise of their peculiar gifts of self-denying charity and devotion to the welfare of the church. Through it they could carry the light and comfort of the gospel into the most private and delicate relations of domestic life, without at all overstepping their natural sphere. Paul mentions Phoebe as a deaconess of the church of Cenchreae, the port of Corinth, and it is more than probable that Prisca (Priscilla), Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis, whom he commends for their labor in the Lord, served in the same capacity at Rome.

The deaconesses were usually chosen from elderly widows. In the Eastern churches the office continued to the end of the twelfth century.

1.63 Church Discipline.

Holiness, like unity and catholicity or universality, is an essential mark of the Church of Christ, who is himself the one, holy Saviour of all men; but it has never yet been perfectly actualized in her membership on

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	12
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

earth, and is subject to gradual growth with many obstructions and lapses. The church militant, as a body, like every individual Christian, has to pass through a long process of sanctification, which cannot be complete till the second coming of the Lord.

Even the apostles, far as they tower above ordinary Christians, and infallible as they are in giving all the instruction necessary to salvation, never during their earthly life claimed sinless perfection of character, but felt themselves oppressed with manifold infirmities, and in constant need of forgiveness and purification.

Still less can we expect perfect moral purity in their churches. In fact, all the Epistles of the New Testament contain exhortations to progress in virtue and piety, warnings against unfaithfulness and apostasy, and reproofs respecting corrupt practices among the believers. The old leaven of Judaism and heathenism could not be purged away at once, and to many of the blackest sins the converts were for the first time fully exposed after their regeneration by water and the Spirit. In the churches of Galatia many fell back from grace and from the freedom of the gospel to the legal bondage of Judaism and the "rudiments of the world." In the church of Corinth, Paul had to rebuke the carnal spirit of sect, the morbid desire for wisdom, participation in the idolatrous feasts of the heathen, the tendency to uncleanness, and a scandalous profanation of the holy Supper or the love-feasts connected with it. Most of the churches of Asia Minor, according to the Epistles of Paul and the Apocalypse, were so infected with theoretical errors or practical abuses, as to call for the earnest warnings and reproofs of the Holy Spirit through the apostles.

These facts show how needful discipline is, both for the church herself and for the offenders. For the church it is a process of self-purification, and the assertion of the holiness and moral dignity which essentially belong to her. To the offender it is at once a

merited punishment and a means of repentance and reform. For the ultimate end of the agency of Christ and his church is the salvation of souls; and Paul styles the severest form of church discipline the delivering of the backslider "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

The means of discipline are of various degrees of severity; first, private admonition, then public correction, and, finally, when these prove fruitless, excommunication, or temporary exclusion from all the means of grace and from Christian intercourse. Upon sincere repentance, the fallen one is restored to the communion of the church. The act of discipline is that of the whole congregation in the name of Christ; and Paul himself, though personally absent, excommunicated the fornicator at Corinth with the concurrence of the congregation, and as being, in spirit united with it. In one of the only two passages where our Lord uses the term *ecclesia*, he speaks of it as a court which, like the Jewish synagogue, has authority to decide disputes and to exercise discipline. In the synagogue, the college of presbyters formed the local court for judicial as well as administrative purposes, but acted in the name of the whole congregation.

The two severest cases of discipline in the apostolic church were the fearful punishment of Ananias and Sapphira by Peter for falsehood and hypocrisy in the church of Jerusalem in the days of her first love, and the excommunication of a member of the Corinthian congregation by Paul for adultery and incest. The latter case affords also an instance of restoration.

1.64 The Council at Jerusalem.

The most complete outward representation of the apostolic church as a teaching and legislative body was the council convened at Jerusalem in the year 50, to decide as to the authority of the law of Moses, and adjust the difference between Jewish and Gentile Christianity.

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	13
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

We notice it here simply in its connection with the organization of the church.

It consisted not of the apostles alone, but of apostles, elders, and brethren. We know that Peter, Paul, John, Barnabas, and Titus were present, perhaps all the other apostles. James—not one of the Twelve—presided as the local bishop, and proposed the compromise which was adopted. The transactions were public, before the congregation; the brethren took part in the deliberations; there was a sharp discussion, but the spirit of love prevailed over the pride of opinion; the apostles passed and framed the decree not without, but with the elders and with the whole church and sent the circular letter not in their own name only, but also in the name of "the brother elders" or "elder brethren" to "the brethren" of the congregations disturbed by the question of circumcision.

All of which plainly proves the right of Christian people to take part in some way in the government of the church, as they do in the acts of worship. The spirit and practice of the apostles favored a certain kind of popular self-government, and the harmonious, fraternal co-operation of the different elements of the church. It countenanced no abstract distinction of clergy and laity. All believers are called to the prophetic, priestly, and kingly offices in Christ. The bearers of authority and discipline should therefore never forget that their great work is to train the governed to freedom and independence, and by the various spiritual offices to build them up unto the unity of faith and knowledge, and to the perfect manhood of Christ.

The Greek and Roman churches gradually departed from the apostolic polity and excluded not only the laity, but also the lower clergy from all participation in the legislative councils.

The conference of Jerusalem, though not a binding precedent, is a significant example, giving the apostolic sanction to the synodical

form of government, in which all classes of the Christian community are represented in the management of public affairs and in settling controversies respecting faith and discipline. The decree which it passed and the pastoral letter which it sent, are the first in the long line of decrees and canons and encyclicals which issued from ecclesiastical authorities. But it is significant that this first decree, though adopted undoubtedly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and wisely adapted to the times and circumstances of the mixed churches of Jewish and Gentile converts, was after all merely "a temporary expedient for a temporary emergency," and cannot be quoted as a precedent for infallible decrees of permanent force. The spirit of fraternal concession and harmony which dictated the Jerusalem compromise, is more important than the letter of the decree itself. The kingdom of Christ is not a dispensation of law, but of spirit and of life.

I. There is an interesting difference of reading in Acts 15:23 (see the critical editions), but it does not affect the composition of the conference, at least as far as the elders are concerned. The textus receptus reads: "The apostles, and the elders, and the brethren send greeting unto the brethren," etc. So the E. V., except that it omits the article twice. The Revised V., following the better attested reading: "The apostles, and the elders, brethren," and in the margin: "The apostles and the elder brethren" (omitting the comma). But it may also be translated: "The apostles, and brother-elders," considering that Peter addresses the elders as "fellow-elder" (1 Pet. 5:1). The textus receptus agrees better with Acts 15:22, and the omission of kai; oij may possibly have arisen from a desire to conform the text to the later practice which excluded the laity from synods, but it is strongly supported by Bellarmin and other Roman Catholic and certain Episcopal divines get over the fact of the participation of the elders and brethren in a legislative council by allowing the elders and brethren simply a silent consent. So Becker (as quoted by

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	14
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

Bishop Jacobson, in Speaker's Commentary on Acts 15:22); "The apostles join the elders and brethren with themselves ... not to allow them equal authority, but merely to express their concurrence."

Very different is the view of Dr. Plumptre on Acts 15:22: "The latter words ['with the whole church'] are important as showing the position occupied by the laity. If they concurred in the latter, it must have been submitted to their approval, and the right to approve involves the power to reject and probably to modify." Bishop Cotterill (Genesis of the Church, p. 379) expresses the same view. "It was manifestly," he says, "a free council, and not a mere private meeting of some office-bearers. It was in fact much what the Agora was in archaic times, as described in Homer: in which the council of the nobles governed the decisions, but the people were present and freely expressed their opinion. And it must be remembered that the power of free speech in the councils of the church is the true test of the character of these assemblies. Free discussion, and arbitrary government, either by one person or by a privileged class, have been found, in all ages and under all polities, to be incompatible with each other. Again, not only were the multitude present, but we are expressly told that the whole church concurred in the decision and in the action taken upon it."

II. The authority of the Jerusalem conference as a precedent for regular legislative councils and synods has been often overrated. On the other hand, Canon Farrar (Life and Work of St. Paul, I. 431) greatly underrates it when he says: "It is only by an unwarrantable extension of terms that the meeting of the church of Jerusalem can be called a 'council,' and the word connotes a totally different order of conceptions to those that were prevalent at that early time. The so-called Council of Jerusalem in no way resembled the General Councils of the Church, either in its history, its constitution, or its object. It was not a convention of ordained delegates, but a meeting of the entire church of Jerusalem to

receive a deputation from the church of Antioch. Even Paul and Barnabas seem to have had no vote in the decision, though the votes of a promiscuous body could certainly not be more enlightened than theirs, nor was their allegiance due in any way to James. The church of Jerusalem might out of respect be consulted, but it had no claim to superiority, no abstract prerogative to bind its decisions on the free church of God.

The 'decree' of the 'council' was little more than the wise recommendation of a single synod, addressed to a particular district, and possessing only a temporary validity. It was, in fact, a local concordat. Little or no attention has been paid by the universal church to two of its restrictions; a third, not many years after, was twice discussed and settled by Paul, on the same general principles, but with a by no means identical conclusion. The concession which it made to the Gentiles, in not insisting on the necessity of circumcision, was equally treated as a dead letter by the Judaizing party, and cost Paul the severest battle of his lifetime to maintain. If this circular letter is to be regarded as a binding and final decree, and if the meeting of a single church, not by delegates, but in the person of all its members, is to be regarded as a council, never was the decision of a council less appealed to, and never was a decree regarded as so entire inoperative alike by those who repudiated the validity of its concessions, and by those who discussed, as though they were still an open question, no less than three of its four restrictions."

1.65 The Church and the Kingdom of Christ.

Thus the apostolic church appears as a free, independent, and complete organism, a system of supernatural, divine life in a human body. It contains in itself all the offices and energies required for its purposes. It produces the supply of its outward wants from its own free spirit. It is a self-supporting and self-governing institution, within the state, but not of the state. Of a union with the

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	15
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

state, either in the way of hierarchical supremacy or of Erastian subordination, the first three centuries afford no trace. The apostles honor the civil authority as a divine institution for the protection of life and property, for the reward of the good and the punishment of the evil-doer; and they enjoin, even under the reign of a Claudius and a Nero, strict obedience to it in all civil concerns; as, indeed, their heavenly Master himself submitted in temporal matters to Herod and to Pilate, and rendered unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's. But in their spiritual calling they allowed nothing to be prescribed or forbidden to them by the authorities of the state. Their principle was, to "obey God rather than men." For this principle, for their allegiance to the King of kings, they were always ready to suffer imprisonment, insult, persecution, and death, but never to resort to carnal weapons, or stir up rebellion and revolution. "The weapons of our warfare," says Paul, "are not carnal, but mighty through God." Martyrdom is a far nobler heroism than resistance with fire and sword, and leads with greater certainty at last to a thorough and permanent victory.

The apostolic church, as to its membership, was not free from impurities, the after-workings of Judaism and heathenism and the natural man. But in virtue of an inherent authority it exercised rigid discipline, and thus steadily asserted its dignity and holiness. It was not perfect; but it earnestly strove after the perfection of manhood in Christ, and longed and hoped for the reappearance of the Lord in glory, to the exaltation of his people. It was as yet not actually universal, but a little flock compared with the hostile hosts of the heathen and Jewish world; yet it carried in itself the principle of true catholicity, the power and pledge of its victory over all other religions, and its final prevalence among all nations of the earth and in all classes of society.

Paul defines the church as the body of Jesus Christ. He thus represents it as an organic living system of various members, powers,

and functions, and at the same time as the abode of Christ and the organ of his redeeming and sanctifying influence upon the world. Christ is, in one view, the ruling head, in another the all-pervading soul, of this body. Christ without the church were a head without a body, a fountain without a stream, a king without subjects, a captain without soldiers, a bridegroom without a bride. The church without Christ were a body without soul or spirit—a lifeless corpse. The church lives only as Christ lives and moves and works in her. At every moment of her existence she is dependent on him, as the body on the soul, or the branches on the vine. But on his part he perpetually bestows upon her his heavenly gifts and supernatural powers, continually reveals himself in her, and uses her as his organ for the spread of his kingdom and the christianizing of the world, till all principalities and powers shall yield free obedience to him, and adore him as the eternal Prophet, Priest, and King of the regenerate race. This work must be a gradual process of history. The idea of a body, and of all organic life, includes that of development, of expansion and consolidation. And hence the same Paul speaks also of the growth and edification of the body of Christ, "till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

This sublime idea of the church, as developed in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and especially in the Epistle to the Ephesians, when Paul was a prisoner chained to a heathen soldier, soars high above the actual condition of the little flocks of peasants, freedmen, slaves, and lowly, uncultured people that composed the apostolic congregations. It has no parallel in the social ideals of ancient philosophers and statesmen. It can only be traced to divine inspiration.

We must not confound this lofty conception of the church as the body of Christ with any particular ecclesiastical organization, which at best is only a part of the whole, and an

History of the Christian Church , Philip Schaff	16
Volume 1, Chapter 10	a Grace Notes course

imperfect approach to the ideal. Nor must we identify it with the still higher idea of the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. A vast amount of presumption, bigotry, and intolerance has grown out of such confusion. It is remarkable that Christ speaks only once of the church in the organic or universal sense. But he very often speaks of the kingdom, and nearly all his parables illustrate this grand idea. The two conceptions are closely related, yet distinct. In many passages we could not possibly substitute the one for the other without manifest impropriety. The church is external, visible, manifold, temporal; the kingdom of heaven is internal, spiritual, one, and everlasting. The kingdom is older and more comprehensive; it embraces all the true children of God on earth and in heaven, before Christ and after Christ, inside and outside of the churches and sects. The historical church with its various ramifications is a pedagogic institution or training-school for the kingdom of heaven, and will pass away as to its outward form when its mission is fulfilled. The kingdom has come in Christ, is continually coming, and will finally come in its full grown strength and beauty when the King will visibly appear in his glory.

The coming of this kingdom in and through the visible churches, with varying conflicts and victories, is the proper object of church history. It is a slow, but sure and steady progress, with many obstructions, delays, circuitous turns and windings, but constant manifestations of the presence of him who sits at the helm of the ship and directs it through rain, storm, and sunshine to the harbor of the other and better world.