THE RULE OF CHRIST AND THE RULE IN THE CHURCH

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1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Our present world reveals definite anti-authoritarian trends. This inclination however, is not restricted to the field of politics, economics and secular society but is also to be found within the Church and theology. Our study therefore has theological as well as sociological, psychological and other consequences. Sociology plays an ever more important role in understanding the role of the Church today. It is our purpose, however, to search primarily for a scriptural reply on the issue of the real character of rule within the Church. Our point of departure is Christ as Head and Lord of his Church (= body) and as such He remains the criterion and determining factor of the life of his Church. We therefore wish to investigate the significance of Christ’s Lordship for the rule within the Church. We would obviously, therefore, have to study the character and raison d’être of Christ’s rule and relate it to the rule within the Church. The question naturally rises whether the Church is dependent on Christ for its understanding of rule within the Church. And this is of course strongly linked to the question whether ecclesiastical government is in line with secular government. Does the relation with Christ’s rule imply new demands to the Church?

2. RULE IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

It is not our intention to enter into details concerning concepts such as basileus, kurios and their cognitive forms — the ThW and other monographs deal with them sufficiently. We only wish to outline the concepts of governing and ruling so as to clarify the background.

2.1 Old Testament

In the O.T. kingship is already clearly defined. Commencing with the person of David, we find a transition to the belief in the Messiah in the typical court-style of the so-called royal Psalms. The expectation of a Messianic rule is therefore closely linked with the house of David. Parallel to this appears the tradition about a supramundane Kingship of Jahveh (cf. e.g. Is 6:5) Both appear in the O.T. but they seem to be amalgamated so that the Davidic dynasty is referred to as the generation who will rule in the Malkut of Jahveh. Initially, the kingship of Jahveh is restricted to Israel but in post-exilic times it reveals clear universalistic traits.
2.2 New Testament

In the N.T. then, the notion of the Kingdom of God which is approaching, appears on the foreground. This indicates that the rule of God has entered this world and is establishing itself in the coming of Jesus Christ. A Christian may share in this Kingdom through faith in and obedience towards Jesus Christ. Consequently, he can rule only together with Christ, and it implies to let God rule, to promote the honour of God!

In this connection Paul's notion of Jesus Christ as ruler in Philp 2:6—11 may shed valuable light on the whole issue. It is precisely from verse 5, where Christ's attitude is exemplified, that this Christological hymn arises. The KURIOS name (title) which He receives in this hymn is the clearly divine reply to his obedience unto death. His Lordship, which is the climax of these verses is attained exactly by his obedience unto death. As the Resurrected One He is the Lord — through humility and obedience unto death He attains glory and exaltation. This relation appears frequently in the N.T., e.g. in Rom 10:9.

If we turn to Acts we discover that there the rule of Christ is also closely associated with his death and resurrection. We may illustrate this by giving some examples from Acts 2 (Peter's speech on Pentecost). In v.24 it is God who has raised Christ from the dead. God is the subject of this act of freeing Christ from death — He is the one who conquers. Death as anti-power could not hold Christ. This passage is full of quotes and references from the Psalms to demonstrate their fulfilment in the Christ-event, especially his death and resurrection (e.g. Pss 17(18):6; 114(116):3; 16:8—11). In the rest of this passage the rule of Christ is also linked up with his resurrection and triumph over death and his ultimate exaltation to the righthand of God (v.30—33). Peter therefore also concludes his address (v.36) with the confession that God has made this Jesus the Kurios and Christ, this Jesus who was crucified and raised.6

2.3 Focussing on Ephesians and Colossians

Our next step is to investigate the two letters where Christ's Lordship receives special attention, to see whether it agrees with the previous indications. In Ephesians and Colossians Christ is presented as the Head (kefalé) of both the Universe (ta panta) and the Church which is represented as his body (sōma). Close investigation proves these two relations to be of a different character.6 In the one case it stresses Christ's function as Ruler and in the other case He is the One who incorporates his Church within himself. This last relation actually comprises two aspects viz. that He is the point of integration and at the same time the power behind the integration. It is however true that his
Rulership function — which is mostly applied to the world at large — is also applicable to his relationship with the Church. At the same time his function as Integrator can also apply to the world at large.

There is proof that the word Kefale had already been utilized in the Septuaginta and in Stoic metaphor to imply a leading and governing organism, even in a figurative way. When Paul therefore applies this metaphor to express the rule and priority of Christ, we can accept the fact that it had already become fairly common speech.\(^7\) This leaves little doubt as to what Paul meant when using it.

Christ’s cosmic rule appears in Col 2:10 and Eph 1:22 where He rules over all powers as supreme Lord. Related to this is the fact that Christ is called the Firstborn of creation (Col 1:15) or the Integrator of the universe (Eph 1:10). As Agent in creation and its continuation everything is subordinated to and dependent on Christ. His Lordship and rule are accepted by the author as a self-evident fact.

In Eph 5:23—25 again, his rule is traced back to his role as Redeemer. Here his self-sacrifice is explained as reason for his position of power as Lord of his Church. Christ had proved his Lordship over his Church by sacrificing his life for her. His example is held up to every man to demonstrate the quality and character of a man’s dominion over his wife. Only that man who is prepared to sacrifice his life for his wife, may claim being her head (ruler). This condition restrains a husband from tyranny.

In I Cor 11:3, however, it seems as if Paul is reasoning from the natural, dominating position of a man over a woman. He simply argues from the customary, social and cultural pattern. It may seem as if Paul is operating with a piece of natural theology: the natural order of things is almost sacralized to serve as a metaphor for Christ’s dominating position. It would, however, be wrong to interpret both these relations, expressing rulership, in an identical way. It would be more correct to accept that Paul takes both relations as self-evident. Christ’s rule is understood and explained soteriologically while that of the man is explained sociologically and anthropologically. In spite of the numerous problems within I Cor 11:2—16 we do get the general impression that Paul was actually busy giving practical advice and guidance to the congregation and starts out with a specific, theological viewpoint. His reasoning does not always run smoothly but is frequently inclined to jump from one line of thought on to a different tangent. Certain words and concepts seem to call up associations which in turn cause a break in the logical reasoning — thus he goes from one issue to another.\(^8\) It may also be caused by the fact that his mind is sometimes so full of the abundance of God’s glories and the magnitude of everything that God represents, that his written reproduction cannot contain it or contend
with it. He does not hesitate to move from practical matters to theological ones and back.  

When we look at the relation between the Head and his Church, we discover that it represents dependence and concern. He is represented as the essential condition of his Church which receives her vital strength and growth from Him and is corporately embraced by Him. Christ is pictured as the First (and Firstborn) and precedes his Church in everything. In this capacity He also acts as her Representative. He is the Origin and the Purpose of his Church. The metaphor used here for the intimate relationship between Christ and his Church, underlines the Church's dependence on Christ for her life, growth and final aim. Only when this relationship is healthy, can she completely be a Church (cf. Eph 1:22—23; 4:15—16; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:9—10, 19).  

The relation between Christ as Head of his Church as his body is much more intimate than between Him and His Headship of the universe, as illustrated in Ephesians and Colossians. His act of reconciliation is, however, not only related to man but the whole of creation is involved. God's plan of salvation is clearly revealed in these two letters in cosmic dimensions. This is mainly due to the specific situation in the churches to whom these letters were addressed. The author's main purpose is to establish Christ at the very centre of attention — He occupies a unique position between God and man.  

It is remarkable that in Col 1:19 and 2:9 the author traces Christ's Headship back to the fact that the fulness of God abides in Him. He says that the glory of God lives in Christ as in a body (sōmatikos 2:9). In other words the Lordship of God takes on a visible form in Christ so that it becomes concretely representable like a body. Perhaps this notion is directed against a gnostic-docetic denial that God had fully been revealed in Christ.  

From these two letters we gather:  

1. That the author presents Christ as Head and Ruler because of a decision of God (cf. Col 1:19; 2:9). The author simply takes it for granted that Christ is the Ruler because He has been First of all right from the beginning. This priority He has confirmed in his triumph over death. We find that He plays here a less passive role in the resurrection than was the case in Acts. The reason lies perhaps in the fact that this author thinks more in ontological terms (pre-existential or supra-existential) about Christ.  

2. That the author uses the death and selfsacrifice of Christ as reason for his Headship when he speaks of Him in a more existential way.  

In Ephesians and Colossians the author accentuates the triumph
of Christ and stresses the resurrection rather than his death. Therefore his Headship is of a twofold character: LORDSHIP and COMMUNION.

3. THE RULE IN THE CHURCH

When we investigate the rule in the Church certain questions arise when we take our results attained so far into consideration. Most important is probably the following: Is the rule in the Church in line with the rule of Christ when we take Christ’s twofold rule into consideration? and, What kind of rule do we find within the Church?

One can reply to this last question by saying that Christ’s rule over his Church is executed by means of the Word and the Spirit. This is exactly the uniqueness of Christ’s reign in comparison with the political, military and other forms of rule in the world. This distinction and uniqueness can also be traced to the rule in the Church. This difference, however, does not make it less real. There may be aspects of ecclesiastical rule which show similarities with the secular world but it is essentially different! We will test this at the hand of some relevant passages in the Pauline writings.

3.1 We commence with I Cor 12 where we find the variety of charismata which were given to serve the one body of Christ. When Paul enumerates the different gifts/offices in v.28 he also includes the antilempseis (helpers) and the kubernēseis (rulers = leaders). This does not necessarily mean that these were all different groups of people mentioned in v.28. The first three (apostles, prophets, teachers) all deal with preaching but this does not mean that the gifts mentioned later were not to be found in these three also. It is, however, remarkable that these two (helpers and leaders) are not repeated in vv.29—30. This may indicate that the task of diakonia and order (leading) in the Church could be entrusted to any member. Perhaps it points to the fact that this task was actually committed to the apostles, prophets and teachers.

The question may be put whether this depends on some natural ability or a service which may be expected from each believer for the sake of Christ and his Church? Paul includes the ability to take a lead and to render service as gifts from God. The context also shows that these gifts were given to render a service of love to the Church of Christ. It shows in any case that the gift to lead and to rule was given to the Church within the framework of charity. Therefore it finds its climax in the chapter on charity in I Cor 13! Although it is not directly mentioned it is very much in line with Christ’s act of love which permits his rule over his Church.

The use of antilempseis and kubernēseis in conjunction may be
instructive for the fact that in Phil 1:1 *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* are also used together.¹⁴ In Phil 1:1 the two offices are introduced without any further qualification which gives reason to accept that they had already assumed a fixed position in that Church.¹⁵ It is known that *episkopos* was a well known office in the Greek world for someone who was responsible for something in a community. The same can be said of the *diakovos* as helper at a meal. It is therefore understandable that these offices had been instituted in the Church especially to take care of the order and management within the Church.

The fact that *kubernēseis*¹⁶ is a hapax legomenon and that the use of this title was not continued, does not mean that the function had disappeared from the Church. It should rather be seen as one of the tasks within the Church which, in due course, became a fixed office with a specific name¹⁷ especially in the office of bishop or elder.

From the *Didache* interesting light is shed on the relation between "prophet and teacher" on the one hand and "ruler and helper" on the other hand. In Didache 15 we read: "Elect for yourselves overseers and deacons, worthy of the Lord, men who are gentle and not lovers of money, men true and trusty. Because they are serving you as prophets and teachers. Do not overlook them because they are honoured among you together with the prophets and teachers." The "prophets" and "teachers" mentioned in the Didache were probably wandering preachers, while our Scripture passage under discussion is probably referring to local members who fulfilled these tasks. This, however, supports the notion that the prophets and teachers in I Cor 12:28 had also acted as leaders within the Church.

3.2 In Rom 12:8 we find the ruling office again mentioned among the *charismata*. Again it follows a reference to the unity and diversity of the body of Christ. Here the term "leader" (*proistamenos*) is used, which is the more common one to indicate the ruling power in the Church. And again it occurs between two gifts¹⁸ which stand in direct relationship to charity. It is striking to notice that here also — as in I Cor 12:28 — it is succeeded by the call to display charity. Another interesting feature of this passage is the qualification of leadership viz, that it should be exercised *en spoude*. Paul frequently uses this expression in various fashions in connection with the collection held for Jerusalem (cf. 2 Cor 8 and Gal 2:10). In this way he wishes to stress the fact that their charity be shown by the zeal with which they give for this collection. Similarly the leader will prove himself a genuine leader when he shows his zeal in his service of leadership within the Church and thus demonstrates his love and care for the body of Christ. This is still very much in line with Christ's proof of his Lordship by means of his zealous love.
and service for the Church.

3.3 In I Thess 5:12 and 14 which stems rather from the earlier period of the Church, we find further interesting features as well as concepts which we have already met. Again the leaders are called proistamenoi as in Rom 12:8. But this time they are qualified with en kuriō — they have been appointed by the Lord and execute their duties in his name and to his glory! Their leadership is therefore determined by the Lord. And when Paul exhorts the Church about her attitude towards her leaders he uses the words “beg” (erōtomen) (v.12) and “urge” (parakalomen) (v.14). He urges them to show respect but it must occur voluntarily.

It is also said of these leaders that they work hard (kopiōntas) for the Church. In I Cor 16:15—16 we also find that kopiōntas is linked with the leadership of the Church. There again the Church is exhorted to obey (hupotassesthai) those who work among them. Those who serve (diakonia) and work hard for the Church must be obeyed and acknowledged as leaders. Obedience and leadership are awarded to those who have proved that they serve and work hard for the Church.

In I Thess 5:12 it is also said of the leaders that they are nouthetountas — exhort/instruct the Church. In v.14 however this is attributed to the whole Church (adelphiai). This stresses in turn the fact that the distinction drawn between the office of the believer and that of the ruler was not so great. The whole Church (or at least the adelphoi) are involved in this work of exhortation/instruction. This is probably because the duty of leadership has been linked to specific people but in the execution of some of their duties the Church as a whole was called upon to share.

3.4 Before we pass on to the Pastoral epistles we linger briefly with Eph 4:1ff. because Ephesians pays such special attention to Christ’s Headship of the Church. In this passage various gifts are enumerated which were given for the sake of building up the Church. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers have been given to the Church to prepare the Church for service and to build up the Church.

We have already indicated that the apostles, prophets and teachers are mentioned together in connection with leadership, and therefore it is fitting to assume that they acted as leaders. But always with the purpose of building the Body of Christ and to promote his honour. What is at stake here is not so much the ruling power in the Church as the growth of the Church. Christ’s Lordship over his Church is highlighted in this passage but with the aim in mind of promoting the growth of his body, the Church.
3.5 Now we can turn to the Pastoral letters as the final New Testament stage. I Tim 3:4—5 qualifies a leader (episkopos) as one who can manage or rule (proistomai) his own house. If he can manage his own household he can also take care of the Church (epimeleomai). The conditions for being a leader were, that he must be able to maintain order and obedience. These conditions are being put to the test within the family circle. It presents a person who can maintain authority with dignity and friendliness — not with violence and dictatorship. Rule and authority within the Church therefore imply that the person must take care of something which had been committed to his care and control. It is of course assumed that order, authority and control is a necessity for the advancement of the Church. The issue is therefore not domination but a loving and yet responsible care for and management of the Church — for the welfare of the Church and the glory of God.

Although the office of deacon is not linked with ruling power it is nevertheless of importance to look at what is said of this office in this passage. The same condition applies to the deacon (I Tim 3:12) as to the overseer (episkopos) viz. that he must be able to manage his own household.21 In the case of the deacon, however, this ability is not an integral part of his office. The potential deacon's ability to rule his own house only serves as qualification to determine his ability for service as deacon. It seems as if it deals in both instances with a "natural" or inherent competence present in a person who wishes to fill a special office. It looks as if such competence was also looked upon as a gift of God. It also underlines the assumption that Paul (or the early Church) did not make a very fine distinction between charisma and office, not even at the stage when the offices took on a more fixed form.

In Titus 3:8 and 14 proistomai is linked with good works with which the believers should occupy themselves. In this context the relation of the word with the notion of leadership can at the most be found in the sense of setting an example. It can, however, not be associated with the power to rule. The context of good works, where it appears, confirms the motif of service and charity. It does not however, refer to a fixed office but is used of the believer in general.

3.6 Before we draw any conclusion, we wish to take a brief look at the term presbuteros. The most remarkable feature concerning our issue at stake is, that Paul (outside the Pastorals) does not allude in his letters to presbuteroi, although Acts is full of references to them during Paul's missionary activities.22 It is clear that this office is to be brought into relation with the Old Testament and Jewish office of elder. The absence of this term in Paul's letters can, however, not be explained
by the argument that Paul considered it to belong to the old dispensation\textsuperscript{23} because Paul never hesitated to make use of Old Testament and Jewish concepts and metaphors. In our opinion this absence can rather be explained by the fact that Acts was written later than the main Pauline corpus and that Luke was writing at a time when the office of elder had already found a fixed name while the main Pauline letters still represent a fluid stage before the office had found a more permanent name.

Acts 20:17 and 28 deserve attention. A few aspects strike us. In v.17 the elders of Ephesus are called \textit{presbuteroi}. When Paul addresses them in v.28 he calls them \textit{episkopoi}. Luke, thus, uses both names. When Paul, however, describes their duty, he does this in line with his usual understanding of this office/service. Here is mention of the Church as the \textit{flock} for whom the overseers (\textit{episkopoi}) as the \textit{shepherds} have to \textit{take charge} (\textit{poimainein}) because they have been won through the \textit{blood} of Christ. What is at stake here is the task of the overseer to \textit{care for} the flock because Christ had \textit{died} for them.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The overseers — though called by different names — were the men who constituted the ruling power in the Church. This ruling actually constituted the \textit{leadership and management} of the Church to the glory of God. The office grew from the gift to manage and lead and was facilitated by the existence of similar offices in the Jewish and Greek world. We may further assume that various duties in the Church were performed from which specific offices appeared eventually. The specific name for the office probably took on a more fixed and permanent appellation in course of time.

In close coherence with the aspect of leading and management, we find the aspect of \textit{taking care} of the Church as illustrated in various passages. This confirms the fact that the so called ruling power in the Church was given for the sake of the welfare and building up of the Church.

Both aspects (leadership and care) are intimately bound up with \textit{charity}, \textit{hard work} and \textit{sacrifice} for the sake of the Church. And this is clearly in line with the rule of Christ which is both expression of his Lordship as a divine essence but which is especially motivated by his \textit{willingness to sacrifice} his life and the resultant resurrection and triumph over all powers to be confirmed as Head of his Church (and the world).

The respect, obedience and love which were required from the members of the Church, are always for those overseers who zealously exert themselves for the Church and the office they occupy, exactly because of their love and sacrifice for the Church and for God.
What, then, is meant in concreto when we speak of the rule in the Church? Is it correct to speak of "rule" when referring to the office of elder or bishop? We have defined their function as one of (1) "management" and (2) "care". And it functions within the reference of hard work, sacrifice, service and love. It is, furthermore, not a rule in the secular sense where it can be enforced by violent means. It does, however, deal with discipline and order which are exercised for the sake of God's glory. We can thus state that this "rule" deals with the order required within the Church for the sake of a healthy and prosperous church life (and thus to God's glory), and to attain this an institution is required which can act with authority to promote and benefit the life of the Church. But this authority is always subjected to the conditions and demands as laid down by Paul and the early Church.

What then, is the relation between the rule of Christ and the rule in the Church? We have to put it categorically that the first motivation of Christ as Head and Ruler which is based on his Divine origin, finds no parallel in the ruling office. All that can be said of this office, is that any person appointed in this office must already have given proof of good management and discipline on the ordinary human level. These qualities were also considered gifts from God. The second motivation of Christ's claim as Head and Ruler, is based on his sacrifice in death and his triumph over death. It was also required of any person who wished to fill a ruling office to show his preparedness to serve and to sacrifice. Through this he would earn and deserve the trust and honour of the Church.

The rule in the Church therefore deals with the authority to act for the sake of order in the Church so that the Church may be built up for its final aim: the glory of God!

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FOOTNOTES

1) Cf. the questioning of the pope's authority. This is not only theologicaally inspired but can also be traced to the process of "democratizing" of the Church and its thinking.

2) Cf. the latest attempt by Dennis Nineham to utilize Sociology for the interpretation of Theology, as Philosophy and History were used in earlier stages, A Partner for Cinderella in What about the New Testament? Ed. M. Hooker and C. Hickling, London 1975, 143—154.


4) Cf. also Micha 5:1ff. and Jeremiah 23:5f.

5) Cf. ThW I 565.

6) Cf. also Acts 5:30—31. It is interesting that it occurs often together with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

7) Philo also uses it in this way. E.G. *Spec Leg* III, 184; *Praem Poen* 114 and 125 etc. For further examples I refer to my dissertation, *Christus as Hoof van Kerk en Kosmos*, 30—32.

8) A structural-analysis of this passage may shed more light on this matter.

9) An example of this can be found in his use of the christological hymn in Phil 2:6—11; cf. also Col 1:15—20.

10) *Dependence on Christ* means for the daily life of the Church that she will discover her spiritual and moral support in the promises of God’s Word. This, of course, presupposes certain conditions in God’s Word to which the Church has to comply.

11) A similar metaphor is employed in Col 1:15 where He is presented as the Image of God — He represents God in his act of creation and new creation. For this reason He can be presented as First of all and Firstborn from the dead. He fulfils what man as image of God could not do. The notion of the first and second Adam is present right throughout this metaphor.


13) This is not the place to determine which were the authentic letters of Paul. We reason from the standpoint that they are “Pauline” in character.

14) It must be kept in mind that this is the only place in Paul’s writings (outside the Pastoral Epistles) where *episkopos* is employed.

15) This is an indication of how early this appellation has taken on a more permanent and fixed form.

16) The plural indicates the frequent occurrence of this charisma.


18) Namely the gift to show *charity* and the gift to *help in distress*.

19) Not as an office but actively as rendering a service.

20) Here again *parakaloumen* is used as a summons for obedience towards the leaders.

21) In a similar way as with the leaders, this is also only one of the conditions.


23) Against H. Greeven, op. cit. 41.