THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN APOSTOLATE AND OFFICE IN THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL

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The theme of the apostolate covers many verses in the epistles of Paul. In some of the congregations, Paul’s apostolate was contested by his adversaries. Especially in his letters addressed to those congregations, Paul dealt with the question of the authority of his apostolate (Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians).

1. DID PAUL REGARD THE APOSTOLATE AS AN OFFICE?

Paul does not use the terms archē, time, telos to describe his apostolate as an office.

He uses the word apostolē, apostleship, the office of an apostle. In Gl 2:8 he says: For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the (apostleship of the) nations. In I Cor 9:2 he tells the Corinthians: for you yourselves, by virtue of your union with the Lord, are proof of my apostleship (hē gar sphyragis mou tês apostolēs humane estè, en kurio). In Rm 1:5 Paul says: By Jesus Christ we have received grace and apostleship.

Paul acknowledges himself to be an apostle. Rhetorically he asks the Corinthians: “Am I not an apostle?” He expects the answer: “Surely you are!” (ouk eimi apostolos? I Cor 9:1). He deems himself as the least of the apostles — “I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God’s church” (I Cor 15:9). With the exception of 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Philippians and Philemon, Paul’s letters are written under the “title” apostolos.

Paul also speaks of other apostles. After his conversion he did not go to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before him (Gl 1:17). Christ appeared to Peter, and then to all twelve apostles. Then he appeared to more than five hundred of his followers at once, most of whom were still alive, although some had died. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles (I Cor 15:5—7). He sends greetings to Andronicus and Junias, who were well known among the apostles (Rm 16:7).

He exposes the false apostles (Pseudapostoloi). They are insincere and pretend to be loyal apostles of Christ (2 Cor 11:13). He calls them “very special apostles” or “super apostles” (huperlian apostoloi 2 Cor 12:11). There is a slight possibility that he ascribes to them the
“office” of destruction (hôn to telos apôleia Phlp 3:19) or the “office” which answers to their deeds (hôn to telos, estai kata ta erga autôn 2 Cor 11:15). Usually to telos is translated with “end” and not “office”.

Paul regards the apostolate as an office. It is an oikonomia, a stewardship, a commission (1 Cor 9:17). God, in his grace, has given Paul this oikonomia, this task to accomplish for the good of the congregation (Eph 3:2 Col 1:25). He received his authority, his exousia from the Lord (2 Cor 13:10). Therefore he gives instructions by the authority of the Lord Jesus (dia tou kuriou Jesou 1 Th 4:2). He commands the congregation in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (en onomati tou kuriou Christou 2 Th 3:6). He and his assistants are entitled (exousia) to claim financial support and sustenance as remuneration for their services as apostles of Christ (2 Th 3:9 1 Cor 9:4 1 Th 2:7) as ambassadors of Christ (presbutês Phlm 1:9). On the other hand Paul prefers to speak of his office as a diakonia, a ministry, a service. God, in his mercy, has given us this service (2 Cor 4:1). God gave us the task (diakonia) of making others his friends also (2 Cor 5:18). As long as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I will take pride in my diakonia, my work (Rm 11:13). Christ himself became a diakonos, a servant of the Jews (Rm 15:8). The earthly rulers are called servants of God (Theou diakonos Rm 13:4). Likewise the apostles and their assistants are designated as diakonoi, ministers of God (2 Cor 6:4; 1 Th 3:2), ministers of Christ (2 Cor 11:23 Col 1:7 I Tm 4:6), ministers of the gospel (Eph 3:7 Col 1:23), ministers of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6), ministers of the church (Col 1:25), or plain ministers (Eph 6:21 Col 4:7). But it is to be noted that Satan can also have his ministers (2 Cor 11:15).

The humility of Christian service is emphasized even more strongly by the use of the word doulos or slave. It was the form of such a bond-servant that Christ assumed (Phlp 2:7), and, following his example, the apostles and their fellow-labourers are designated as the slaves of God or of Christ (Rm 1:1 Gl 1:10 Col 4:12 Tt 1:1). In 1 Cor 4:1 Paul and Apollos are called huperetas, Christ’s servants. They do not act on their own authority. They are executive officers of Christ. Huperetas was used of a person in a subordinate position, an inferior officer. Paul described himself as the leitourgos of Jesus Christ, to serve as a priest in preaching the Good News of God, in order that the Gentiles may be an offering acceptable to God ... (Rm 15:16). In Rm 1:9 Paul uses the word latreuo for this service of preaching the Good News.

These self-designations, apostolos, doulos, diakonos, huperetês, leitourgos are designations of office. God appointed Paul a herald and apostle, and teacher of the nations (etêthen egô kérux kai apostolos ... didaskalos ethnôn I Tm 2:7 2 Tm 1:11). The herald preaches the Good
News (kerusso Rm 10:15 I Cor 1:23 9:27), his message is the kerugma (I Cor 15:14). The teacher teaches the principles of the new life in Christ Jesus in every church (I Cor 4:17 Eph 4:21 Col 1:28). Paul teaches the traditions orally and by letter (2 Th 2:15).

Paul avoids the technical conceptions of office which could have been expressed by such words as arche, time, telos. These words would imply a kind of authority and domination which Paul rejects in I Cor 3:5: After all, who is Apollos? And who is Paul? We are simply God’s servants (diakonoi), by whom you were led to believe. On the other hand, whoever rejects Paul’s teaching rejects, not man, but God, who imparts his Holy Spirit to the congregation (I Th 4:8).

Paul sees his apostleship as a privilege, a charis (Rm 1:5), God’s gracious gift to him (dia tês charitos tês dotheisês mou Rm 12:3 I Cor 3:10 Gl 2:9). In these texts charis explains the apostolic office entrusted to Paul, as an appointment by God’s grace.⁶ He coins the word charismata for the offices or ministries in the church (Rm 12:6 I Cor 12:4,9,28,30,31 I Tm 4:14 2 Tm 1:6). In Eph 4:8 the different offices of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are called domata, gifts. While diakonia stresses the way in which the office is to be executed in the church, charis, charisma and doma qualify the office as a free gift of Christ, through his Holy Spirit, to the church. In I Cor 12:4f diakoniai are interchangeable with charismata and energemata. In Rm 11:29 I Cor 7:7, 17ff charismata and klēsis tou Theou are connected or interchangeable.

Charismata comprise the diversity of gifts which the Holy Spirit uses for the equipment and edification of the congregation, be it for instruction or warning or mutual help or guidance or government.

I do not disembark into the traditional argument about visible and invisible church, charismatic authority or official authority, as put forward by Rudlof Sohm,⁶⁶ Adolf von Harnack,⁷ Karl Holl,⁸ Rudolf Bultmann,⁹ H.Fr. von Campenhausen¹⁰ and others. Paul knows that the Spirit is given to the church in this age as a guarantee that we shall receive what God has promised his people (arrabon 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5 Eph 1:14), as the first of God’s gifts (aparche Rm 8:23) in order that the congregation may live as the body of Christ, seen by everyone. The Spirit imparts different charismata and diakoniai and energemata to further the edification of his church (I Cor 12:4ff oikodome 14:26 Eph 4:12). According to Paul, the edification of the church is God’s purpose with all the offices in the church, including the apostleship.

2. HOW DID PAUL CONCEIVE HIS OFFICE AS AN APOSTLE?

2.1 The relationship between the apostle and God (Christ)

Paul calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ by God’s will (dia
thelematos Theou 2 Cor 1:1), chosen and called by God (kletos apostolos Rm 1:1), by order of God (kat' epitagen Theou I Tm 1:1). He thanks Christ for appointing him to serve him (themenas eis diakonian I Tm 1:12) and tells Timothy that God appointed him to proclaim the Good News as apostle and teacher (eis ho etethen ego kerux kai apostolos kai didaskalos 2 Tm 1:11). He tells the Galatians that by God’s power he was made an apostle to the Gentiles (energesen Gl 2:8). His call to be an apostle, did not come from man or by means of man, but from Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead (Gl 1:1). Paul is sure that he is called by God, that he is appointed as an apostle by Christ, and that he derives his authority from Christ. He is sent as a messenger of the risen Lord, his apostleship is not derived from the congregation.

Paul looks for God’s approval. Should he aspire to please men, he would fail to be a slave of Christ (Gl 1:10). The one thing required of the oikonomos is that he be faithful to his master ... the Lord (kurios) is the one who passes judgement on him (I Cor 4:2,4).

Paul knows himself to be the representative of God, of Christ. That is what apostolate means to him. His authority is that the word of Christ is spoken by his mouth. But God’s representative does not come with outward power and glory. He is a humble servant, a slave of Christ. Paul lays no claim to any capability of executing God’s commission, but Christ endows him with efficiency to accomplish his task (hikanotes 2 Cor 3:5). He was made a servant to the gospel by a special gift of God (kata ten dorean tis charitos tou Theou Eph 3:7). He exercises the power with which Christ endow him (Col 1:29 endunamosantos I Tm 1:12).

He knows his calling to be an anagke, a necessity. He is compelled to do so by order of his master, and a curse is on him, if he does not preach the gospel (I Cor 9:16). In his apostleship Paul has the same experience as the prophets of the Old Testament: a divine necessity is laid on him, because he is entrusted with God’s plan of salvation. (See Jr 20:9 Am 3:8).

The heretical teachers in the congregations of Galatia did not scruple to cast suspicion upon Paul’s qualifications for the office and ministration of an apostle. In Gl 1:15,16 he discusses his calling by God to be an apostle: “But God in his grace, chose me even before I was born, and called me to reveal his Son to me, that I might preach Him among the nations ... (hote de eudokesen ho aphorisas me ek koilias metros mou kai kalesas dia tes charitos autou apokalupsai ton huion autou en emoi hina euangelizomai auton en tois ethnesin). With eudokesen he emphasizes the sovereignty of the divine grace manifested to him. At the same time, he stresses the fact that God had much earlier than his conversion — from his mother’s womb, (as a matter of fact) — appointed him
for the apostleship (aphorizó set aside for a special purpose). Paul knows himself to be called by God, like Jeremiah. In Jr 1:5 the Lord told Jeremiah: before I formed you in the womb (en koilia) I knew you for my own, before you were born (ek metras) I sanctified you, and appointed you a prophet to the nations (eis ethne). In Is 49:1—6 the Servant of the Lord knows himself to be called by the Lord from his mother’s womb (ek koilias metros mou ekalese) to be the Lord’s servant (doulos, pais), to glorify the Lord, to speak the words of the Lord, to bring Israel back to the Lord, and to be a light for the nations of the world to bring his salvation to them too (eis phos ethnôn, tou einai se eis sótērian heōs eschatou tês gês LXX). In Gl 1:15 Paul identifies himself and his calling with these words from Isaiah and Jeremiah. As God called prophets in the old covenant, likewise Paul sees himself to be called by God to be God’s diakonos in the new covenant. (2 Cor 3:6)

Rengstorf followed a suggestion from Lightfoot, and found the origin of the New Testament word apostolos in Rabbinic Judaism. "Here", he says, "the term shaliach has an assured place as a noun (while it is lacking in the LXX), and in such a way that we have it in the closest parallel to the New Testament apostolos. The legal institution of the sheluchim is old ... Yet it is only around the first century that it takes distinctive shape. What characterises the sheluchim of all periods is their commissioning with distinctive tasks which take them greater or lesser distances away from the residence of the one who gives them. Thus the point of the designation sheluchim is neither a description of the fact of sending nor an indication of the task involved, but simply an assertion of the form of sending, i.e. of authorization. This is the decisive factor. The task as such is of no significance for the quality as shaliach".

Although many scholars accepted Rengstorf’s theory, the majority of scholars today, however, reject the theory as lacking both in concrete evidence and in intrinsic probability. Schmithals, for instance, compared the apostolate according to Paul’s letters with the Jewish sheluchim after 70 A.D. He recorded the following differences: "The authorization of the shaliach is of a formal kind; he is the holder of an office, while the task as such is of no significance for the quality as shaliach. His message is to be accepted for the sake of his authorization. Precisely the opposite characterizes the apostolate; all authority lies in the message itself. The apostolate has a purely religious character. The meaning of the shaliach lies altogether within the realm of the juristic. The apostle is always a missionary, the shaliach never. The apostolate is an eschatological phenomenon all the way through. An eschatological character does not belong to the institution of the shaliach, not even by way of suggestion. The shaliach always has a commission that is limited in time. The apostle always has a life-long calling. There is nothing at all which
is common to the two figures; for even though the name still suggests it, the shaliach is no longer one sent. He is rather, whether sent or not, a commissioned one. The apostle on the other hand, is one sent forth, in the unabbreviated basic sense of the word”.

But after this scrutiny, Schmithals continues to search for the origin of the primitive Christian apostolate. He finds the origin in the gnostic apostles of the Syrian region, who were Paul’s adversaries. They were messengers of the heavenly emissary, with a revealing and saving function. But as there are distinct limits to the pure etymological explanation of the primitive apostleship from the shaliach-institute of Judaism, likewise there are distinct limits to a religious historical deduction from Gnosticism.

Paul regarded his own apostolate from his calling by Christ, not from the post-Pauline rabbinic shaliach-institute, nor from the even later gnostic writers, nor from conjectured gnostic communities. Paul’s experience of Jesus Christ determined his office and ministry as an apostle. He is Christ’s ambassador, representing the cause of his master (2 Cor 5:20). Andrew Kirk argues that the term apostolos was definitely used before Paul. He poses the possibility that the word apostolos is used to translate shaliach. Then the origin must be found in a Palestine setting, not in Antioch or in Paul’s gentile mission. He finds the origin of the word apostolos in the first mission of the twelve in the ministry of Christ, and bases his argument on G1 1 & 2 and 1 Cor 15. “It is not surprising, then, to learn that Jesus himself referred to a special group of his disciples as his ‘sent ones’, shuluchim? as Jesus himself was sent (Mk 6:30 9:37).

Paul considered his office as an apostle in the light of the fact of his sending, or being sent by God. Let us now investigate how the task involved influenced Paul’s conception of his office.

2.2 Apostolate and message of God
The main task of the apostle is to preach the message of God (logos tou Theou I Th 2:13 2 Th 3:1). Paul calls it the Good News. God entrusted this Good News to him. It is God’s Good News to the congregation (to euangelion tou Theou I Th 2:2,4). Yes, Christ did not send him to baptize. He sent Paul to tell the Good News (euangelizesthai I Cor 1:1:17). It is the Good News that belongs to God and which comes from God. Paul is chosen and set aside for this Good News (kletos apostolos aphorismenos eis euangelian Theou Rm 1:1). In the words of Paul, in his preaching, God himself is speaking, is being heard (I Th 2:13).

The Good News is called God’s secret truth (musterion) which was hidden for long ages in the past (Rm 16:25). It is God’s secret plan (musterion) which he revealed and made known to Paul (Eph 3:3
The content of this message, of this secret truth, is Jesus Christ (2 Cor 2:14). We preach Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor 4:5). God's secret is Christ himself (Col 2:2). God's message is also called the secret of Christ (to mustērion tou Christou Col 4:3). Paul's work is to unite the congregation with Christ, that Christ's nature be formed in them (morphōthē Christos en humin GL 4:19). In his struggle with the congregations, he appeals to the Good News, he argues with the Good News, he reminds them of the Good News. The Good News is his authority. He rejects any other authority. He is not trying to dictate to the congregation what they must believe ... Instead, he is co-operating with them for their own happiness (ouch hoti kurieuomen ... alla sunergoi esmen 2 Cor 1:24). According to Paul's interpretation, the church lives by the Good News. Therefore the privileges of the apostle are of little significance, because he is a mere tool in God's hand (I Cor 3:5—7). Paul does not bind his congregations to himself, but to the Good News, to Jesus Christ himself (Gl 1:8,9 Phlp 1:18). Whosoever rejects his teaching rejects, not man, but God (I Th 4:8). Whosoever obeys Paul, obeys Christ (2 Cor 10:5,6).

There is no other gospel. This gospel which Paul preaches, was not made by man. He did not receive it from any man, nor did anyone teach it to him. Instead, it was Jesus Christ himself who revealed it to Paul (Gl 1:11,12). Therefore this gospel cannot be changed (Gl 1:6—9). The gospel of Paul is the yard stick for all preaching. His teaching, of divine truths (paradoseis) to the congregation, should be revered (2 Th 2:15), because Paul received it from the Lord (I Cor 11:23).

This message of faith and truth is that God wants all men (kosmos) to be saved by Christ (I Tm 2:6,7). Paul's teaching of the Good News knows no boundaries. After completing his work in the East, from Jerusalem to Illyricum, he planned to go to the West, to Rome and Spain (Rm 15:19,24). He had an obligation to all peoples, to the civilized and to the savage, to the educated and to the ignorant (Rm 1:14). This Good News is meant for all men. Language and cultural boundaries exist, but for Paul these boundaries are there to be crossed. Paul's itinerary is a sign, an indication of his interpretation of the gospel. The Good News is meant for the whole world. “Our message is that God was making friends of all men through Christ (Theos en en Christo kosmon katallasson heauto 2 Cor 5:19). The Good News is that Christ died on the cross (ho logos ho tou staurou I Cor 1:18). Paul decided to forget everything while he was in Corinth, except Jesus Christ, and especially his death on the cross (Jesoun Christon kai, touton estauromenon I Cor 2:2). When he describes his preaching in Galatia, Paul says: right before your eyes you had a plain description of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross (Gl 3:1). Paul boasts only of the cross of our
Lord Jesus Christ, while the false teachers force the Galatians to be circumcised, in order to obviate persecution for the cross of Christ (Gl 6:12,14). Paul's preaching about the cross of Christ is the reason for his persecution (Gl 5:11). The cross is a sign of true apostleship.

On the other hand, Paul's message is, that Christ has been raised from death (ek nekron eggeertai I Cor 15:12 2 Tm 2:8) and He will descend from heaven to save us from God's wrath that is to come (I Th 1:10). If Christ has not been raised from the dead, the apostles will have no message, and the congregation's faith will be vain (I Cor 15:14). The event of salvation, preaching, the office of apostle, and faith, are all linked to one another. For Jesus was delivered to die for our sins and was raised to life to put us right with God (Rm 4:25). In order to live a new life (Rm 6:4 Col 2:12), we no longer live for ourselves, but for God in union with Christ (2 Cor 5:15 Rm 6:11, 7:4), through the Spirit of God (Rm 8:11). To believe in Christ's resurrection means salvation (Rm 10:9) and the conviction that God will also raise us by his power (I Cor 6:14 2 Cor 4:14). Paul's call to be an apostle came from God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead (Gl 1:1). The power endowed to Paul is the same as the mighty power which God exercised when he raised Christ from the dead (Eph 1:20).

His is the message of God's grace, charis, of the free gift of God's grace to put all sinners right with God through Jesus Christ, who sets them free (dorean te autou chariti Rm 3:24). By his mercy (charis), God chooses Israelites and Gentiles (Rm 11:5,6 2 Cor 4:15 Col 1:6 Tt 2:11) to save them (Eph 2:5) and grant them eternal life (Tt 3:7). He saved us and called us to be his own people, not because of what we have done, but for his own purpose and by grace. He granted us grace in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but now it has been revealed to us by the coming of our saviour Jesus Christ (2 Tm 1:9,10). Paul, formerly a persecutor of the church, achieved more than anyone of the apostles by the grace of God, which legitimates him as an apostle.

The truth and convincing power of his message is the legitimation of his office. He has no office apart from his message, no authority in himself. The risen Christ appeared to Paul, as he appeared to the other apostles (ophthē I Cor 15:8). In I Cor 9:1 he uses his vision of Christ as an argument for his apostleship. In Gl 1:16 he depicts this vision as his commissioning to preach the Good News to the nations. His authority, however, is not vested in the moment of commissioning, but in the message which he must proclaim. Therefore he tells the Galatians, that even if he himself and his co-workers, or an angel from heaven, should preach to them a gospel that differs from the one he preaches to them, may he be condemned to hell (anathema esto Gl 1:8). Even though he received the gospel first-hand, the authority rests only in the
word itself. Christ is his only authority.

Paul considers his office as an apostle in the light of his calling by God. It is wholly determined by the message he proclaims. But for Paul there is no separation between his office and his life, no distinction between official behaviour and private life. Let us investigate the meaning of the life of the apostle for his office.

2.3 The relationship between the life of the apostle and his message

Suffering is an integral factor of the apostolate. Paul was maltreated and insulted in Philippi and persecuted by the Jews (I Th 2:2, 15). Paul experienced that God had given the apostles the most humiliating treatment, like men condemned to die in public, as a spectacle for the whole world of angels and of men. For Christ’s sake they are fools. They are weak and despised. They go hungry and thirsty, they are clothed in rags, they are beaten, they wander from place to place, they work hard to support themselves. They are cursed, they are no more than this world’s garbage, they are the scum of the earth (I Cor 4:9—13).

Paul boasts of his impuissance, because the Lord told him: My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is strongest when you are weak. Therefore Paul is content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties for Christ’s sake. For when he is weak, then he is strong (I Cor 12:9,10). The apostle’s suffering and weakness are signs of the cross of Christ whom he preaches. The scars he has on his body show that he is a slave of Jesus (Gl 6:17). If Paul has to suffer, it is for the benefit and salvation of the congregation (2 Cor 1:6). Yes, he glories in his sufferings for the congregation. Through his physical suffering he fulfils what still remains of Christ’s sufferings on behalf of his body, which is the church (Col 1:23). What happened to Christ, should be shared by his apostles. These are the signs of an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Reluctantly Paul reminds the Corinthians of the things that prove that he is an apostle (ta sêmeia tou apostolou): signs, wonders and miracles which were done with all patience. This he does to prove that he is in no way inferior to those very special apostles (2 Cor 12:11,12). The real sêmeia of his apostleship are his words and deeds, his diakonia.

The life of the apostle is an example to the congregation (tupos). In Thessalonica he worked hard for his own sustenance, and he did it to be an example for them to follow (2 Th 3:9). He described the humble service he and Apollos rendered as an example to teach the Corinthians humility (metaschêmatizô I Cor 4:6). He urges the Philippians: Imitate Christ with me ... we have set the right example for you (summimëtai ... tupos Phlp 3:17). Paul begs the Galatians: my brothers, be like me
He asks the Corinthians to imitate him, just as he imitates Christ (I Cor 11:1). Christ died to save the worst of sinners like Paul. But it was for this very reason that God was merciful to Paul, in order that Christ might show his full patience with him, as an example for all those who would later believe in him and receive eternal life (I Tm 1:16). The way in which Paul embraced the truth, is an example to Timothy to follow and stay in faith and love (2 Tm 1:13). Paul regards his message and his life as an apostle as revealing God's revelation. Like a sweet smell that permeates everything, God uses him to make Christ known to all men (phaneroo) for he is like the sweet smell of incense that Christ burns to God (2 Cor 2:14,15). “For all times we carry in our mortal bodies the death of Jesus so that his life also may be seen in our bodies” (en to somati heman phanerothe 2 Cor 4:10) “...in order that his life may be seen in this mortal body of ours” (en té thnētē sarki hēmōn 2 Cor 4:11). Perhaps there is more to the en emoi of Gl 1:16 than a mere “me” or “to me”.17 It could also imply that Christ is being revealed through his life and message.18

He tells the Thessalonians: because of our love for you (homeirome- mai, hapax legomenon in the New Testament, expresses a cordial and affectionate bond), we were ready to share with you, not only the Good News from God, but even our own lives (psuchas I Th 2:8). Paul did not bring the Good News in a matter-of-fact official way, he poured his whole life into his work. He rejoices in the possibility that his life is to be poured forth as a libation (Phlp 2:17 2 Tm 4:6). To him life is Christ, worth-while work for the sake of the congregations (Phlp 1:21,24). With his whole being he bestows honor on Christ (Phlp 1:20). He makes himself everybody's slave, in order to win as many as possible. While working with the Jews, he lives like a Jew in order to win them. In the same way he lives like a Gentile, in order to win the Gentiles. Among the weak in faith he becomes weak like one of them in order to win them. So he becomes all things to all men, that he may save some of them by any means possible. All this he does for the gospel's sake, in order to share in its blessings. He hardens his body with blows and brings it under complete control, to keep himself from being rejected after having called others to the contest (I Cor 9:19—27). He tries to please everyone in all that he does, with no thought of his own benefit, but for the good of all, so they might be saved (I Cor 10:33). Therefore he can say: “All I want, is to know Christ and feel the power of his resurrection; to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life (Phlp 3:10,11).
3. HOW DID PAUL CONCEIVE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OFFICE OF APOSTLE AND THE CONGREGATION?

Paul uses metaphors to describe his relationship as apostle to the congregations. In 1 Cor 3:6—9 he describes the congregation as God’s field (Theou georgion) and himself and Apollos as co-workers for God. He planted the seed (ho phuteuon), Apollos watered the plant, but it was God who made the plant grow. The relationship is further explained in the next metaphor of the congregation as God’s building (Theou oikodome). Paul did the work of an expert builder and laid the foundation (themelion tithenai). He saw it as a fulfilment of his apostolate to establish congregations, to lay foundations (kata tēn charin tou Theou tēn dotheisan moi). This foundation is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:10,11). He laid this foundation by preaching Jesus Christ as Lord (2 Cor 4:5). The apostles were the *founders of the church*, therefore Paul tells the Ephesians “You, too, are built upon the foundation ‘laid by’ or, better, “of” the apostles and prophets,” the cornerstone being Christ Jesus himself” (akrogoniaios Eph 2:20). The appearances of the risen Christ has a profound meaning for the founding of the church, otherwise they would have nothing to believe, and their faith would be a delusion, and they would be lost in their sins. The calling of the apostles by the risen Christ, is closely connected to this founding of the church (1 Cor 15:5—17). Although Paul takes part in the edification of the congregation, and although he views the apostolate as established in the church, by God, for the edification of the church (1 Cor 12:28), Eph 4:11,12 Rm 1:11), his ambition has always been to proclaim the Good News in places where Christ has not been known, so as not to build on the foundation laid by someone else (Rm 15:20).

The apostles never aimed at personal gain, but they exerted themselves solely for the sake of the church of Christ. While Paul finds his legitimacy to be an apostle in his vision of the Lord, he immediately looks for the proof (sphragis), the authenticity of his apostleship, in the congregation; not in the existence of the congregation as such, but in their life in the Lord (en kurio). To the extent that they accepted the apostle’s message in faith, they are the external proof of his apostolate (1 Cor 9:1, 2). They are Paul’s letter of recommendation to all men (2 Cor 3:2). The measure of Paul’s authority and apostolate is on the one hand his utter dependence on the Lord, and on the other hand the life of the congregation in the Lord. If they fall, his proof also fails. If they reject his apostolate and his message, they are no longer christians (Gl 4:11,19). If they do not progress in faith, Paul cannot extend his work in other fields (2 Cor 10:13,15,16). The apostle and the congregation are bound together until the day of Christ. When the congregation shines as stars lighting up the sky, he will have reason to rejoice in the day of Christ.
He calls the congregation his joy and his crown (chara kai stephanos Phlp 4:1), that is his glory on the Day of the Lord. Jesus Christ founds his church through the apostles, not for the apostles, but for the people and their calling by God. The apostles are not without the church, but always together with the church, in the church, for the church (I Cor 3:22).

Although Paul says that he has finished his work in the East (nuni de mēketi topon echōn en tois klimasi toutois Rm 15:23), the congregations he had founded were but islands in the vast Roman Empire. Deissmann pointed out that the focus of Paul’s missionary work lies in the great cities and on the main traffic arteries. He held the congregations he founded, accountable for founding other congregations in their vicinity. The young church in Corinth represented the whole Achaia. Paul addresses 2 Corinthians to the church of God in Corinth, and to all God’s people in all Greece (2 Cor 1:2, see 11:10). The congregation of Thessalonica became imitators of Paul and the Lord in suffering and in preaching the message of the Lord (aph’ humōn gar exēchētai ho logos tou kuriou I Th 1:8). This is the mission, the apostolate of the congregation. Paul did not found the congregation in Rome (Rm 1:13). He laboured for the congregations in Colossae and in Laodicea and for all those who do not know him personally (Col 2:1). The members of the congregation should fight together, with only one aim, viz. for the faith of the gospel (Phlp 1:27). The readiness to announce the Good News of peace should be the shoes for the congregation’s feet (Eph 6:15). The apostolic task of spreading the gospel, is entrusted to the congregation.

On the other hand the apostle himself is the yard stick. The apostolic tradition handed over to the congregation, is the standard of teaching (eis hon paraqōmē toupon didaches Rm 6:17). Paul praises the Corinthians because they follow the teachings (paradoseis) he has handed on to them (I Cor 11:2), remembering the apostle as their model. He instructs the Philippians to be his faithful and loyal followers, because he has set the right example for them (tupos Phil 3:17). The apostle commands the congregations (parangelia) to live a life pleasing to God (I Th 4:1,2). According to I Cor 7,8,12,16 we read that the congregation of Corinth requested Paul’s decision and directives on marriage questions, heathen sacrifices, church order, collection for the poor, etc. Paul distinguishes between orders (epitagē), a permission (sungnomē), a command of the Lord (parangellō), what Paul himself says (legō), his own opinion (gnōmē), what he thinks (dokekō) and what he means (phēmi). He interprets the admonition of the Lord, and deducts norms from the principles of Jesus’ teaching. The congregation must follow the apostle’s teaching, even though they are not words of the Lord. He even counsels Timothy on the attire of women in the church (I Tm 2:9)
and claims their obedience on these issues (hupakouo Phlp 2:12). Paul sends Titus to Corinth. The main reason for his visit is not the one who did wrong or the one who was wronged, it is the congregation that matters. When they obey the apostle they will have salvation. Disobedience to the apostle's teaching leads to disaster. Therefore Paul is comforted by their metanoia (that they changed their ways); because his words are accepted in good trust, their change of heart leads to their salvation (2 Cor 7:4—10). Obedience to the words of the apostle, written or spoken, is the test for the life of the congregation, canon. Therefore his letters should be read in the congregations and even exchanged among the congregations (Col 4:16). The congregations should hold on to those truths (paradoseis) which Paul taught them both in his preaching and in his letter (2 Th 2:15). In this sense the apostles and prophets are called the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20).

The congregation itself receives the power of government. The whole congregation is responsible for instruction and the exercise of church government (Gl 6:1,2 Rm 15:14 Col 3:16 2 Th 3:15), church discipline (1 Cor 5:9—11 epitimia 2 Cor 2:6), and even for handing a member of the congregation over to Satan by the power of the Lord Jesus while the spirit of the apostle, i.e. his teachings and example, is their standard (1 Cor 5:4,5). It is their duty to put all things to the test (dokimazō 1 Th 5:21), their authority to judge the preaching (diakrino 1 Cor 14:29), and to select and appoint approved delegates (dokimazō 1 Cor 16:3, cheiritoneō 2 Cor 8:19). Every believer takes part in building up the body of Christ, the church, through love (Eph 4:12,16). There is a variety of charismata in the congregation, entrusted to the members of the church by the Holy Spirit, for the edification of the church. When they meet for worship, one man has a hymn, another a teaching, another a revelation from God, another a message with strange sounds, and still another the explanation of what it means. The edification of the church is the sole aim (oikodome 1 Cor 14:26). In the same way there are different ways of serving and different abilities to render service for the good of all (1 Cor 12:5—7 pros to sumpheron). There is but one body of Christ, one building of God, though there are different congregations (Eph 4:4—6). The congregations are not free, everyone to go his own way. Therefore it will be presumptuous for the Corinthians to suppose that only they were right and the rest of the Christian world wrong, on the question of women speaking in the assembly. Therefore Paul advises them to have regard for general christian practice. No congregation has the monopoly of the Gospel or of its interpretation (1 Cor 14:36). About women’s attire, Paul refers to the habits of the churches of God (1 Cor 11:16). Christ reigns as the head of his church (Col 1:18), through the word of the apostles as a measure (2 Cor 5:20), and
through his Spirit given to his church as an entity (one body, one Spirit Eph 4:4). Therefore, in their decisions, the congregations should also take note of the decisions of other congregations and aim at preserving the unity of the Spirit (Eph 4:3). The apostles consulted (Gl 2:9, 10) and even rebuked one another (Gl 2:11—14). This is part and parcel of the apostolate of the church.

4. **HOW DID PAUL INTERPRET THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE OFFICE OF THE APOSTLE AND OTHER OFFICES IN THE CHURCH?**

Paul considers himself as the last of the apostles, because Christ appeared to him last of all (οþπηθὲ I Cor 15:8). His own vision is the termination of the appearances of the risen Christ. This vision must be distinguished from the visions and revelations Paul spoke of in 2 Cor 12:1—6 (optasias kai apokalupseis kuriou). He does not call his co-workers “apostles”. Epaphroditus and the representatives of the churches, are called “apostles of the congregations” (apostoloi ekklēsiōn) but not in the same sense as the apostles of Christ (Christou apostoloi I Th 2:6). The apostles could not continue themselves as apostles of Christ. In the history of God’s plan of salvation there was but one apostolate to whom the risen Christ appeared. Throughout their lives, though, they were transferring their work to the congregations and to the offices in the church.

While Paul sees himself as the last of the apostles, he regards the apostles of Christ as the first office in the church, put in place by God (etheto ho Theos en tē ekklēsia protōn apostolous I Cor 12:28). Although God apparently placed the apostles on the lowest rung of the lader (eschatous apedeixen 1 Cor 4:9), they are to top the list of God’s gifts to the church (domata Eph 4:11). He virtually exalted them to occupy the primary office in the process of building the church of Christ. Being the first, their office sheds light on the other offices because they are the founders, laying the foundation for the congregation and for the office.

All servants of the Gospel (diakonoi) do one and the same work for God as partners working together (sunergoi I Cor 3:9). Their work depends totally on God’s grace. There is a difference of gifts, also earlier or later work, like building upon an already laid foundation (epoikodomeō I Cor 3:10). Each one will be responsible to God for what he did. The Good News remains the same, i.e. Jesus Christ.

Right from the beginning Paul delegated his authority and commitments to co-workers. In I Th 5:12,13 he exhorts the congregation to hold in esteem those whom the Lord has chosen to guide and instruct the congregation, to treat them with the greatest esteem and love,
because of the work they do. This earliest letter of Paul proves that no congregation was left without leadership. He appeals to the congregation to build each other up (oikodomeite heis ton hena 5:11), in order to further the mission of the apostle who laid the foundation. Their leaders are described as "working" (kopiao, the same word used for the elders exerting themselves at preaching and teaching in 1 Tm 5:17, and also used to describe Paul’s task 1 Cor 15:10 Philp 2:6 1 Tm 4:10 Col 1:29, and for the work of Paul’s co-workers Rm 16:6,12), “guiding” (proista­menoi, the same word is used to describe the elders who do good work as leaders in 1 Tm 5:17. It is used as a qualification for elders in 1 Tm 3:4, 5,12, and is also mentioned as one of the gifts, charismata of God for service in the congregation Rm 12:8), and “instructing” (noutheteO, also used of Paul, 1 Cor 4:14 and also as an apostolic task of the congregation Rm 15:14 Col 3:16 1 Th 5:14 2 Th 3:15). The extensive instructions which Paul gives in the pastoral epistles, written at the end of his life, show that Paul knew that the work he commenced, should be continued by church offices. The appointment of officers is an essential part of the building up of the congregation. After Paul had left Crete, Titus was commissioned to complete his task by appointing elders in every town (Tt 1:5).

The Holy Spirit equips the apostles, the officers and the congregation to build the congregation up. All the offices are Christ’s gifts to his congregation, consequently they are not primarily dependent on the apostle. Timothy received his gift, his office from God, when Paul laid his hands on him (2 Tm 1:6). This was done by Paul, and the elders, the presbytery (presbuterion 1 Tm 4:14). He told Timothy to take the words he heard from Paul, and commit them to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (2 Tm 2:2). Therefore he should not indiscriminately lay hands on anyone for the Lord’s service (1 Tm 5:22). The office is not founded in the apostolate, but in Christ (en Christo 1 Th 5:12). The apostles laid the foundation for the office in the church, but the foundation is Christ himself. Christ calls them, though Paul and his co-workers, the presbytery and the congregation are called upon to appoint, approve and install. Christ gives the offices to the church and equips the officers for their services.

All the different offices in the church are but ministries, called by God to serve the Good News, that is Jesus Christ, crucified and raised from the dead. There is no authority in the office itself, only in the message. Following Paul’s example every officer should devote his whole life to his task. He should serve the Word according to the canon of the apostles. All officers are given to the church, by Christ, for the up-building of his body in this world.
REFERENCES

1) The problems concerning Paul's authorship are not treated in this paper. 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles are accepted as written by Paul.

2) He uses arche in the Attic sense of a magistracy or an office, for earthly governors, appointed by God Rm 8:38 I Cor 15:24 Eph 1:21 3:10 6:12 Col 1:16 2:10, 15 Tt3:1.

3) Timē as a dignity or an office could perhaps be used in this sense of the earthly governor in Rom 13:7. The honour due to a presbuteros in I Tm 5:17 is the nearest to the idea of an office.

4) Telos in the sense of “the highest station”, “the possession of full power”, “an office”, is used in Rm 13:7 of the earthly governors. It is not clear whether Moses’ office is meant in 2 Cor 3:13. There is a slight possibility that Paul describes the office of the false apostles in 2 Cor 11:15 Phlp 3:19 and not their end.


6) R Sohm, Kirchenrecht I, 1892.


8) K. Holl, Der Kirchenbegriff des Paulus im Verhältnis zu dem der Urgemeinde, 1921.

9) R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament II.


12) J.B. Lightfoot, St Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, 1890, p.92ff.

13) See list in K. Kartelje, Gemeinde und Amt im Neuen Testament, München, 1972, p.79.

14) See list in NTS, 21,2, p.251.


17) So H.N. Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia, Eerdmans 1972, p.64, following Blass-Debrunner, e.a. The argument of Blass Debrunner 220,1 does not consider the possibility of the life of the apostle as part of his euangelizesthai.


Besides the books mentioned above, the following were consulted for orientation:


27) T.E.V. Translation used copiously.