INDICATIONS OF CHURCH RULE OR GOVERNMENT IN PAULINE PARENETIC MATERIAL

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It is generally agreed that the Pauline letters do not supply us with a fully worked out system of church rule or government. Two reasons may be given for this. In the first place it is conceivable that in the initial stages of the church's existence it was primarily engaged in the proclamation of the Gospel with the result that time was limited for reflection on the question of the organisation of the church. In the second place we must also keep in mind that Paul's letters were written to different churches in different places, each in their own peculiar situation with their own problems, and that this manner of contact does not lend itself to systematisation of church rule and order.\(^1\)

It is however agreed that the Pauline corpus, even though it only contains the rudiments of church rule which have to be gathered from different letters of Paul, possesses a wealth of material which is of basic and permanent significance for the government of the church of Christ. In this paper we are primarily investigating the parenetical material in the Pauline corpus although attention will also be given to the broader context of data on church order.\(^2\)

1. SPIRIT AND LAW

The subject of church rule in the letters of Paul cannot be discussed without a cursory reference to the controversy about church order which dominated this particular sector of New Testament teaching for quite a time and is specially associated with the names of Sohm and Harnack. It is well-known that Sohm was of opinion that the church and church order are incompatible entities which are foreign to one another. This he traced to Paul's teaching. According to Sohm the church is a spiritual entity and the invisible body of Christ, and that nothing institutional like law and order can be applied to it. Harnack on the other hand pointed out that this position of Sohm's was not backed by history and therefore untenable.

The church as a temporal sociological phenomenon requires an organisation and he maintained that this becomes church law and order when applied to the church. Any regulative or juridical aspect is however foreign to the real essence of the church and any church law or order, as well as anything in the church which has no charismatic
significance, does not belong to the internal essence of the church but is only of local and administrative importance. In Paul’s case the charismatic character of the church is still very much in evidence, and it was only later that the institutional and administrative aspects developed when the charismatic was superseded by the church office and the prophet by the elder.

This view of the church and of church order in particular was prevalent for a time until it was superseded by a new view of the church in a history of salvation context, in which the work of the Spirit in the church as the body of Christ was not only limited to the individual believer but extended to the building up of the church as a whole. What is to be found in the letters of Paul with reference to church law and order is not foreign to the essence of the church but is an integral part of it. Charisma and office no longer stand in antithesis to or against one another, since the latter is charisma as well. Investigation of Paul’s parenetic material bears this out.3)

2. CHURCH AND CHURCH ORDER

From a general survey of Paul’s letters it is abundantly clear that the apostle had order and the organisation of the church in mind. He does not always supply his readers with a set of rules or precepts, but invariably strives to make the church aware of its own privileged position as the body of Christ and the new humanity and of their duty to test their organisation and see whether it is in line with their exalted status and position.4) Very often he appeals to their own judgment and discriminatory powers as the people of God, Rm 15; Col 2:5; Phi 1:5,6, 9ff. He is furthermore careful to respect their prerogatives, I Cor 5:4; 2 Cor 8:18,23; I Cor 16:3.

But apart from this he stresses it that there should be order in the church because they are the people of God and the body of Christ. God is not a God of disorder but of peace, I Cor 14:33, and all should be done decently and in order, I Cor 14:40. The church should have rules for itself and Paul also supplies them with it. He demands this order, taxis, where it does not exist, and he gives praise where it is found, Co! 2:5. “I am with you in spirit, and rejoice to see your orderly array and the firm front which your faith in Christ presents (NEB).” Eph 5:21 He demands that the church should submit to it: “I wish you to give their due position to such persons, and indeed to everyone who labours hard at our common task.” I Cor 16:16. He makes this call for order very personal when he says: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (NEB). Any appeal to the freedom of the Spirit is misplaced, because the charismata bestowed by God are not to be associated with disorder, I Cor 14. Käsemann has pointed out that Paul’s struggle was all
the time directed against people who overaccentuated the charismatic to the detriment of the orderliness in the Church. The Spirit of God dwells in a well-ordered Church.  

A study of Paul’s exhortations and injunctions which is also of relevance for church order, is rewarding. He does not limit himself to the giving of general advice to churches which they can accept or refuse, e.g. 1 Cor 7:6, but also orders, paraggelein, 1 Th 4:2; 1 Tm 1:18, cf. v 5; 1 Cor 7:10; 11:17, he decrees or commands, diatassein, 1 Cor 7:17; 11:34; 16:1, Tt 1:5. A word he often uses is parakalein, which is generally used with the pastoral accent of consolation, but is also used in the sense of giving instructions for Church order, 1 Tm 2:1, cf 6:2; Tt 2:15 etc.  

Rules and precepts for the ordered existence of the church are found throughout Paul’s letters, especially in 1 Cor, where decisions are given on different problems. All this must help the church to preserve its own character and live as the body of Christ in a responsible way.  

3. CHURCH DISCIPLINE  

An aspect of church order to which attention should be given in passing is that of discipline. To maintain order in the church as the body of Christ, discipline is required, and people who do not conform to the required standards, are to be subjected to disciplinary action.  

To begin with, the Christians have a mutual duty towards one another to exhort and reprimand the erring brother to bring him back to the fold, Rm 15:14; Col 3:16, 1 Th 4:18. But there is also an official way in which the church should act against trespassers. In 2 Th 3:6 Paul commands the Christians in the name of Christ to sever relations with any brother who leads an ungodly life and does not submit to the authoritative teaching of the apostle. In verse 14, probably with the same person in view, it is added that if anyone is disobedient to Paul’s letter, they should take note of him and have nothing to do with him. Apparently this is only a case of internal discipline which does not lead to excommunication, cf verse 15.  

A different procedure is prescribed in 1 Cor 5. Paul reprimands the church in Corinth that they have not removed from among them a person who has committed gross immorality, and he demands that they execute the punishment he himself has decided upon, 1 Cor 5:5.  

“You all being assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus over us, this man is to be consigned to Satan for the destruction of the body, so that his spirit may be saved on the Day of the Lord.” It is clear that excommunication is meant. The trespasser is to be delivered to Satan in the name of Jesus Christ, that means transferred from the glorious reign of Christ to
that of Satan, cf Gl 1:4; Col 1:13. His body is to be destroyed, which
does not mean that he is to be killed or delivered to death, since his
spirit must be saved by the punishment for the day of the Lord. One
should rather think of some bodily or temporary affliction which the
transgressor will have to bear or which he will be exposed to, cf. 2 Cor
12:7; Lk 13:16; Job 1, where suffering is also ascribed to Satan, cf.
1 Tm 1:20. In the rest of 1 Cor 5 the Christians are commanded to punish
guilty persons, even if they are brothers in the Church, so that the
holiness of the church can be preserved. The demand for excommuni­
cation is expressed with a quotation from Dt 17:7, cf. 19:19; 22:21,
24; 24:7, and has the holiness of the church in view.

A third instance of church discipline is to be found in Tt 3:10,
where Timothy is commanded by Paul to give at least two warnings to
the man who causes divisions, and then have nothing more to do with
him. It is clear that we here have something of Mt 18:15—17 as well as a
reference to disciplinary procedure in the synagogue, where expulsion
took place only after repeated warnings.7)

In the three examples above we have a clear indication that
discipline was practised in the church to maintain its sanctity and to keep
it untainted from the world. What separated Church and world was not
to be removed or erased.8)

4. OFFICES IN THE CHURCH

It is very clear that Paul wanted order in the church as the body
of Christ. The next step is to try and see what provision he made for
the establishment of it and which persons he invested with the necessary
authority to rule over the church.

We have already pointed out that two tendencies can be detected
in Paul’s letters as regards the maintenance of the required order. On
the one hand the church itself is responsible for order and discipline
among themselves, while they on the other hand have to submit to this
order and obey those to whom God has given authority. It is noticeable
that the apostle in his letters to the churches always addresses the
churches themselves with the exception of the letter to the Philippians,
1:1, where the episkopoi and diakonoi are also mentioned in the
address. In no instance whatsoever he addresses the officebearers
apart from the church members. Even in the disciplinary action in
1 Cor 5 he reprimands the congregation that they did not act, and he
wants them to act and apply discipline as they come together. From
this passage, which is a little bit difficult to translate, the following
emerges: that the congregation itself is the executor of the judgement
on which Paul had decided, verse 3, and that this judgement and its
execution take place in the presence of Christ which gives authority to
the action of the church. The church itself has the authority and the maturity to build itself up. Where the church does not realise this and is imperfect and immature in Christ as evidenced by the internal conflicts in Corinth, it is severely reprimanded by Paul. The church is God’s building, a temple in which God dwells, I Cor 3:9, 16, and no one should boast about what man can do, for everything belongs to them: Paul, Apollos, Peter ... and they belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God, I Cor 3:23. 91

On the other hand the church should submit to authority and order which exists within itself and be obedient to it. This authority comes from Christ and persons are invested with it. That Paul is conscious of having this authority and consequently claims obedience to his commands and injunctions, is abundantly clear as we have shown. But he does not limit his authority to himself; he extends it to others who, because of their charisma or initial position of leadership in the church, act as its leaders.

This is where we come to the parenetic material. Although we have only a vague picture of office in the early letters of Paul, we have passages like I Th 5:12, 13, written immediately after the establishment of the church in Thessalonica: “We beg you brothers, to acknowledge those who are working so hard among you, and in the Lord’s fellowship are your leaders and counsellors. Hold them in the highest possible esteem and affection for the work they do”. Who these leading persons were and in what capacity they served the church in Thessalonica is a much debated problem. Harnack sees in them officebearers, although nothing is said of an act of consecration or ordination by the laying on of hands. 101 Rigaux thinks that they were elders who governed the church and he tends to connect them with some form of hierarchy. He says that no one can deny that there were two classes of Christians in the church at Thessalonica. 111 Many exegetes however see no officebearers here. H. Greeven sees in them a well-defined group of people, but finds it impossible to think of an office which could become vacant and be filled again. No mention is made of election. 121 E. von Dobschütz and M. Dibelius mention “freiwillige Sonderleistungen” which were done by these people. 131 F. Hauck is not so sure and says that one can think of officebearers, while the thought of voluntary workers cannot be excluded. 141 Käsemann thinks of organising work like the establishment of house churches and the making of peace when differences arose among Christians. 151

When we take a look at 5:12—22 we find that we have here a series of largely unrelated exhortations; on the whole they deal with the internal life of the community. It is difficult to know how far they refer specifically to the Thessalonian community and not to every Christian
community. Certainly the latter part, vv 14(15)—22, is very general and is probably derived from traditional material, and this may be so of the first portion also. There is a distinct resemblance to Rm 12 both in the rapid succession of brief exhortations and in the overall structure, where 5:12—14 deals with relationships between church members with reference to their responsibility for the whole as Rm 12:3—8, and 5:14(15)—22 deals with Christian behaviour generally as Rm 12:9—21.\(^\text{10}\)

The first question to be answered about this passage is whether three different groups of people are meant: those who work hard, those who lead the church, and the third group who counsel the church. From the Greek it is however clear that only one group of people is meant, because Paul uses three participles but only one article and that with the first participle, working hard. These people are therefore persons who work hard for the church, act as its leaders and give pastoral care to the members. In the first place he says that they work hard, kopian, a word which literally means: to do real manual labour, cf. 1:3, but is also used by Paul for his toil and that of his co-workers in the service of the Gospel, I Cor 15:10; Gl 4:11; Col 1:29; Rm 10:12; Phlp 2:16. In I Cor 16:16 Paul also asks the Corinthians to obey those who work so hard among them. In both places the word functions almost as a technical term for those with some kind of responsible position in the community, but probably at this stage of ecclesiastical development it possessed no more exact sense than the modern term church workers; these are normally voluntary workers lacking any carefully prescribed official position, says Best.\(^\text{17}\)

The second participle, proistamenos, has two possible meanings in our context: i) preside, lead, direct; ii) protect, care for. In the New Testament the root of this participle appears only in the Pauline corpus, most frequently in the Pastorals, cf. I Tm 3:4 f 12; 5:17. It is very difficult to make a decision for the exact meaning of the word in this context, namely leadership or pastoral care, or a combination of both. Bolkestein feels for leadership and sees in these people individuals who became prominent in the church because of the gift of leadership they possessed. Paul mentions a charisma which has to do with leadership or management. It is not clear where they had to act as leaders or what responsibilities they possessed. Possibly they had to lead when the church assembled in meetings, had to make peace when trouble started, and had to do some pastoral work. Best however prefers the meaning “caring for” since it fits the context better, just as in Rm 12:8, where proistamenos appears among a list of charismata in which the meaning of caring for others is to be preferred to the idea of leadership.\(^\text{18}\)

It is in any case very difficult to decide what authority these people exactly had. It is clear that they were a group of Christians
who were singled out from the rest and entrusted with responsibility towards others. At the same time they are described with three particles indicating activities which would have enabled them to be picked out from the rest of the community. And yet the distinction cannot be made too rigid since admonishing, the third participle, is used in verse 14 of the duty of every Christian, as is kopos in I Cor 15:58 and I Th 1:3. The line between clergy and laity is still fluid in Thessalonica (Best). That they are identified by their activities rather than by a name might possibly suggest that at that time they did not have a name; later we find that the neighbouring community in Philippi had episkopoi and diakonoi, Phlp 1:1. Acts 14:23 is often taken to indicate that Paul appointed presbyters in all his churches, but according to some commentators Luke is reading back into Paul’s time the procedure of a later period. Another possibility is that if Paul had to leave Thessalonica as hurriedly as Acts relates, then he may in any case not have had the opportunity to appoint presbyters.

It is indeed very difficult to identify this group with any named group or office, e.g. presbyters, but it cannot be ruled out that they had what we might call an incipient office. Elsewhere, I Cor 12—14; Rm 11:3—8, Paul views these leaders as equipped for their tasks by charismata of the Holy Spirit. It is wholly in line with this that they are described in terms of their function and not of their office, though office and charisma do not indicate two different forms of ministry.191 Ridderbos speaks of the stabilising and institutional tendency of the charismata, especially in the concept of diakonia which is used for the concept of office in the New Testament.201 We therefore come to the conclusion that these people were in a position of leadership which, although it did not have the fully developed official character as in the Pastoral letters, did have something of an official stamp. Why Paul should choose to refer to such leaders at this point in the letter is not clear; Timothy may have reported trouble between the leaders and some of the members of the community. Frame suggests that the leaders may have dealt tactlessly with those who neglected their daily occupations, 4:11 f.; 2 Th 3:6—13. But it may only be that Paul knows that friction will always arise between those in some responsible position and those among whom they work, cf. I Cor 16:21.

Attention should also be given to Rm 12:8 where the following is read: "If you give to charity, give with all your heart; if you are a leader, exert yourself to lead; if you are helping others in distress, do it cheerfully (NEB)". The TEV translates proistamenos with: "whoever has authority, must work hard", while Moffat renders it: "the superintendent must be in earnest". J.B. Phillips translates: "Let the man who wields authority think of his responsibility", and C.K. Barrett: "let the president
act with zeal". Barret goes on to say that it is uncertain whether this clause refers to an office. According to him it is certain that in Romans (and in Thessalonians) it does not describe any office with precision; it rather refers to a function which may have been exercised by several groups, perhaps jointly or in turn. There is no indication whether the president presided at a service (like the Synagogue service) of preaching and teaching, at the eucharist, or in a church meeting convened for deliberative or disciplinary purposes. Murray uses the American Revised Version (1910) and translates: "He that ruleth, with diligence." According to him there can be no question that those referred to are those who exercised government and oversight in the church, and he refers to 1 Th 5:12 and 1 Tm 5:17. In the latter passage they are called elders (proestôtes presbuteroi). He connects the proistamenos with the governments, the kubernēses, of 1 Cor 12:28. Beyer thinks that the combination of the antilempseis and kubernēses in 1 Cor 12:28 is the equivalent of the people who are for the first time called episkopoi and diakonoi in Phlp 1:1 and of the proistamenos in Rm 12:8. 

Ridderbos also chooses the meaning of leadership in the church by people chosen for this specific work; in any case he finds it the more probable meaning and sees in this charisma the equivalent of an office. His view is that in the summaries of the charismata in Rm 12, 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4 the institutional character of the offices is not mentioned but their qualitative character. In them presbyters, episkopoi and diakonoi are not mentioned, but the charismata of leadership and helpful service, Rm 12:7,8; 1 Cor 12:28. Some of these charismata are therefore the services of the elders and the deacons, and the official character of their office is not accentuated but the quality and the content of it. There is no antithesis between office and charisma and we can safely see in the proistamenos a person who did official work. Ridderbos is however careful not to equate it completely with the office as we know it when we read what he says in another context about the status of ministers in the early church. In his exposition of Gl 6:6: "When anyone is under instruction in the faith, he should give his teacher a share of all good things he has (NEB)’, he says that this points to the fixed status of ministers in the church and presumes that hereby reference is made to the didaskaloi of 1 Cor 1 2:28 and Eph 4:11. He goes on to say that the circumstance is most remarkable because the letter to the Galatians has an early date, cf. also 1 Th 5:12. We do not know precisely of course, he says, whether this is a reference to the office of minister in the sense of an ordained service, cf, Acts 14:23, or to a voluntary function on the part of those who had received special gifts. In any event, the situation approximates the office.

Ridderbos has to my mind given us a probable solution for the
meaning and status of the proistamenos, namely the charisma of leadership which approximates the office, a kind of incipient office.

1 Cor 16:15—17 is also of importance to us: "I have a request to make of you, my brothers. You know that the Stephanas family were the first converts in Achaia, and have laid themselves out to serve God's people. I wish you to give their due position to such persons, and indeed to everyone who labours hard at our common task (NEB)."

Paul is very fond of the word aparchē, first fruits, which he uses in Rm 8:23; 11:16; 16:5; I Cor 15:20; 16:15; and especially of first converts, Rm 16:15 and I Cor 16:15. The church in Corinth must honour the family of Stephanas because they were the first converts in Achaia. Clemens Romanus wrongly thought that Stephanas was elevated to a high office by Paul, I Clem. 42. Stephanas and his house served God's people. What their diakonia was, is difficult to say. It could have been catechism, poor-aid, organisation and leadership. An interesting phrase is used for the work they did: etaxan heautous, the technical word used for order and office. Paul says that his readers should put themselves under such persons, hupotassein, and under everyone who works for the common task, which means that they must allow them to do to them what they wanted to do, but practically it can also mean that they should submit to their spiritual leadership and obey their authority. This must be done to everyone who works for the building up of the church, kopian.

It is however improbable that we have to think of office in this passage. About their diakonia Weiss quotes Lietzmann as saying that we here have the roots of the office of the deacons, but he immediately goes on to say that they did not have a fixed office. They did works of mercy because of which they enjoyed the esteem of the rest of the church. This is the natural way of things: the person who does something for the community eventually enjoys authority and position, cf. Phlp 2:29.

5. OFFICE FOR THE PASTORAL LETTERS

When we come to the Pastoral letters we are again confronted with the much debated problem of the relationship between charisma and office in the Pauline corpus. According to some Paul's conception of charisma is irreconcilable with an institutional structure of offices and services in the church. Paul's view of order in the church differs from that of the old church in Jerusalem which was institutionally organised, and on the other hand from the development we have in the Pastoral letters. Kasemann for example denies that Paul did know of a presbyterium and says that the development of the church and church order in the Pastorals was enforced by circumstances, with the result that the
Pauline conception of church organisation was abandoned.\textsuperscript{311}

I think it has been sufficiently pointed out that the people who speak so disparagingly of office in the Pauline corpus do not give due credit to the tendency towards the official in the early letters of Paul and separate charisma and office in an illegitimate way. As regards the Pastorals we must always remember that at the time of their being written a greater consolidation had come to pass as regards church order and government. What we have in the Pastorals is not a deviation of Pauline practice but is another step in the development in church order and organisation. While Paul in the early letters addresses the church, he in the Pastorals charges his co-workers to appoint elders where they were lacking, 2 Tm 2:2, Tt 1:5; and to bring order where disorder was threatening I Tm 5:5 f. It is conceivable that the threatening heresy was a contributing factor to the strengthening of the institutional organisation of the church.

It has been said that in the persons of Timothy and Titus we have to do with an intermediate state between the apostolate and the monarchical episcopate and that this pleads for the legitimacy of the apostolic succession. This, however, is not in line with the real and historical situation in the Pastorals. It is obvious that Timothy and Titus served in the churches at Ephesus and on Crete only as temporary leaders, cf. I Tm 1:3; 3:15; 2 Tm 4:9 f.? Tt 1:5; 3:12 f. The letters Paul wrote to them and the injunctions he gave them were to help the churches and the developing office to come to greater independence because of the imminence of Paul’s death and the departure of Timothy and Titus. The letters written to Timothy and Titus had to be read in the meetings of the churches as is apparent from the greetings and benedictions in them. Timothy and Titus had to appoint elders, I Tm 5:28; Tt 1:5, but this does not mean that this happened without the churches taking part in their appointment. Timothy is reminded of his own ordination which he received not only from the apostle but also from the church, I Tm 5:14; 6:12; 2 Tm 1:6.

The structure of church order is much clearer than in the earlier letters of Paul, but there is no essential change which can be called a change to “early catholicism” or one from the freedom of the spirit to a tradition and “legitimation’s principle” as Käsemann puts it.\textsuperscript{321} In the older letters the apostolic tradition is also the basis for all authority, and from the little information we have about the elders and the deacons in the Pastorals it is not clear in what respect they basically differed from the proistamenoi in the earlier letters. The precepts given to them are so general and in a certain sense so “primitively put”, that they do not point to an elaborate instruction for office; a difference between clergy and laity is in any case not to be found.\textsuperscript{331}
The ordination mentioned in I Tm 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tm 1:6 cannot serve as an argument for hierarchy. In the laying on of hands and ordination, cf. Acts 13:3, official grace is not bestowed and succession created via ordination. The laying on of hands appoints to a task and grants the necessary authority for it. It does not create an office that stands above the community, but installs someone in the service of the church with the co-operation of the church itself, I Tm 1—28; 4:14; 5:22, to possess the authority that has been given to the church. This laying on of hands, although not expressly mentioned in the earlier letters, does not represent a basically different element in the development of authority and office in the church. What is important, as in the case in all the letters of Paul, is that office is from Christ and through the church.

6. CONCLUSIONS
Our conclusions are briefly the following:

i) To say that Paul was averse to any institutional order in the church is not in keeping with what his letters teach about the necessity of order in the church.

ii) That the organisation of the church was only of a charismatic character, does not do justice to the place his letters indirectly give to office. Office and charisma in any case stand in no antithetical relationship.

iii) Although we do not have a very clear picture of office in the earlier letters, we definitely think that there are indications of incipient office, and that the proistamenoi of the early letters are not basically different from the elders in the later letters.

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REFERENCES
6) Cf. H.N. Ridderbos, Kerkelijke orde, 197; W. Schrage, Die konkreten Einzelgebote


12) H. Greeven, Prophet, Lehrer, Vorsteher bei Paulus, *ZNW* 44 (1952/53)35. Greeven places them among the prophets and teachers, although not all the prophets and teachers possessed the function of leadership.


17) E. Best, op. cit., 224.

18) Idem, op. cit., 225.


21) E. Best, op. cit., 227.


24) *ThW* 111, 1036.


26) Idem, Kerkelijke orde, 207.


29) Idem, op. cit., 421.


31) E. Käsemann, *Exeg. Versuche etc* 1, 206.

32) Idem, op. cit., 130.

33) H.N. Ridderbos, Kerkelijke orde, 211.