

The historic development of Church leadership

Additional study material

A discipleship training to equip Christians for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-16).

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THE HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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Today different Christian denominations have different kinds of leadership structures. How did this development take place? This study does not intend to change the leadership structure of your Christian fellowship. It only wants to give a summary description of the historical development of several leadership structures AFTER the New Testament period.

A. THE APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS (THE BIBLICAL TEACHING) (A.D. 30 – 97).

1. The New Testament teaches only the appointment of a body of elders.

Jesus Christ through his Spirit

The New Testament does not teach any kind of *hierarchical* leadership structure! There was *no umbrella organisation* above the congregations (churches). After the resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ in heaven, he continued the work he began on earth (Acts 1:1; John 7:37-39) and poured out his Spirit on his disciples (Acts chapter 2) (A.D. 30). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who has come to be with and in every Christian, representing Jesus Christ on earth (John 14:16-18; John 16:13-15; Romans 8:9-10). The congregations were governed by its Head, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:20-22), through the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:31).

The Spirit through the apostles

The Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) used the Eleven disciples (Acts 2:14) to plant the first congregations among the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-42) (A.D. 30) and in all Judea, Galilee and Samaria (Acts 8:1,4; Acts 9:31) (A.D. 30-40), among the Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts chapters 10 and 11) (A.D. 40) and among the Gentiles in Antioch (Acts 11:19-24) (A.D. 44). The apostles of Jesus Christ were unique, were the leaders that planted the churches and possessed a unique, but temporary authority (See Delta PLUS study 29, apostles).

And after Paul's conversion (Acts 9:1-30) (about A.D. 34) the Holy Spirit used him to plant congregations in Cilicia in Turkey (Galatians 1:21-23) (A.D. 36-44) and in Syria (Acts 11:25-26) (A.D. 44-46). The congregation of Antioch sent gifts to the elders of the congregation of Jerusalem (Acts 11:30). Later the Holy Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas for missionary journeys (Acts 13:1-4).

On the first missionary journey (A.D. 47-48) they planted congregations (churches) everywhere: in Cyprus (Acts 13:4-5) and especially in cities in Turkey (Acts chapter 13 and 14) and appointed a body of elders for each congregation (Acts 14:12-13). During the Jerusalem conference (about A.D. 50) between the congregations of Antioch and Jerusalem (elders and the apostles who still resided in Jerusalem), Peter, John and James acknowledged God's ministry through Paul (Acts 15:1-35; Galatians 2:1-10).

On the second missionary journey (A.D. 50-52) Paul and his co-workers planted congregations in the cities of Turkey, Macedonia and Greece (Acts 15:36 to 18:22).

On the third missionary journey (A.D. 52-57) they ministered in Turkey and Greece (Acts 18:23 to 21:16), for 1½ years in Corinth (Acts 18:11) and for about 3 years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10). At Miletus, Paul instructed the body of elders of the congregation of Ephesus, saying that the Holy Spirit had appointed the body of elders to be the overseers and shepherds of the congregation (Acts 20:17,28) (A.D. 57).

During his imprisonment in Rome (A.D. 60-61) Paul wrote his letters to the congregations of Ephesus and Philippi and mentions that there were overseers and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1,12; Philippians 1:1).

On his fourth missionary journey (A.D. 61-64) the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:16) to write his letters to Timothy and Titus and gave instructions how each congregation should be led (1 Timothy 3:14-15), namely, through a body of elders (1 Timothy 4:14), their prerequisites, tasks and authority (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Timothy 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9).

The Holy Spirit also inspired the apostle Peter (A.D. 63-65) (cf. 2 Peter 1:20-21; cf. 2 Peter 3:1-16) to write his letters to the congregations in the provinces of Turkey (1 Peter 1:1) and gave instructions how each congregation should be led, namely, through a body of elders ("elders" in the plural), their prerequisites, tasks and authority (1 Peter 5:1-7).

Thus, during the New Testament period the apostles and their co-workers established new congregations and appointed a body of elders for each congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). A body of elders was called a "presbyterion", "a council or board of elders" (1 Timothy 4:14). The person with the office was called "an elder"¹ (Acts 20:17; 1 Peter 5:1); and sometimes "an overseer"² (Titus 1:7, compare verse 5) or "a shepherd"³ (Acts 20:17,28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:21). Other words used for leaders in the congregations were: "leaders or guides"⁴ (Acts 15:22; Hebrews 13:7,17,24), "persons standing at the head"⁵ (rulers, directors, managers) (Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17) and "house stewards" (managers)⁶ (Titus 1:7).

During the New Testament period (A.D. 30-97), the terms: *elder*⁷, *overseer*⁸, *shepherd*⁹ and *those standing at your head*¹⁰ (1 Thessalonians 5:12) or *directors*¹¹ (1 Timothy 5:17) all refer to one and the same person without any distinction (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-2), because the New Testament only speaks of *the appointment* of elders and not of any other kind of leaders (above the elders)!

A congregation was led by *a body of elders* (a board or council of elders)¹² (1 Timothy 4:14). All the elders were equal, even though some elders had the task of preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17). The elders received no theological training at a Theological Seminary or Bible School. They were simply the most mature believers in the congregation and were chosen to lead on the basis of the biblical qualifications and biblical tasks for leadership.

Every individual congregation was organisationally independent from other individual congregations (See Delta PLUS study 21, the meaning of the word "church"¹³).

2. The New Testament does not teach the appointment of any umbrella organisation (Synod or Council).

After the great persecution of Christians at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4) (about A.D. 33), the believers spread to different countries and preached the gospel. A large number of people became believers in Jesus Christ in Antioch in Syria

¹ Greek: presbuteros, English: priest

² Greek: episkopos, English: bishop

³ Greek: poimèn, Latin and English: pastor

⁴ Greek: hêgoumenos

⁵ Greek: prohistamenos

⁶ Greek: oikonomos

⁷ Greek: presbuteros, English: priest

⁸ Greek: episkopos, English: bishop

⁹ Greek: poimèn; Latin and English: pastor

¹⁰ Greek: prohistamenous humòn

¹¹ Greek: prohestòtes presbuteroi

¹² Greek: presbuterion

¹³ Greek: ekklesia

(before A.D. 44). The congregation at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to help them. He fetched Paul from Tarsus in Turkey to help him (Acts 11:25-27) (A.D. 44-46). The congregation at Antioch was founded as the result of all this missionary work.

Later a number of Jewish Christians travelled from Jerusalem to Antioch and tried to persuade these Gentile Christians that they first had to become Jews before they could become Christians! They taught them that they first had to be physically circumcised before they could be saved (Acts 15:1). The congregation at Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul to meet the congregation at Jerusalem in order to solve this problem. This gathering of Christians from two different individual congregations was not a Synod or Council of all congregations, because the other individual congregations (local churches) in the region or in the whole world were not represented!

Moreover, Acts 15 only *relates* how a problem in Church History was resolved, but does *not teach* how a problem should be resolved. This good example of two individual Christian congregations meeting together to solve a problem MAY be followed, but the Bible does not teach that God appointed a Synod or Council to preside (rule) over all the existing individual congregations (local churches) in a country or in the world!

B. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF BISHOPS (A HIERARCHICAL LEADERSHIP) (97 - 323 A.D.).

1. Historical characteristics.

This period of Church History is marked by many struggles inside the Christian Church. This was due to the internal influences of the religion of the Jews and the heathen religions of the Gentiles and the external influences of the politics of the Roman Empire and its heathen philosophies. In the end, the “world-wide” Christian Church was victorious. The word “world-wide” (Greek: *katholikos*) means “general”, “universal” in contrast to an individual congregation (a single local church). The word “catholic” is derived from this Greek word for “world-wide”.

2. The change of biblical terminology to form a hierarchical leadership structure.

During the second century A.D. “the Old Testament leadership of the ceremonial law of the nation-state of Israel” (consisting of “the high priest”, “the priests” and “the Levites”) was changed into a hierarchy and imposed on “the New Testament leadership of the Church” without warrant.

The origin of traditional bishops

During this period, the term *bishop* or *overseer* no longer described the *task of an elder, the office of leadership* in the congregation, but began to describe *a new office and position above the elders* in the Christian Church. The term “overseer” began to be used of a *single individual who became a kind of New Testament high priest* in the Church. *The bishop* became the district leader of the Church and the highest office in the Church. The apostles had died and so the bishops were regarded as “the successors of the apostles” without any biblical warrant! At this period of time the bishops were *not supervised by anyone*.

Gradually it was regarded that only bishops may perform the official ministries of the Christian Church (i.e. baptism, the Lord’s Supper, marriage and funeral services, ordaining elders). The bishops made themselves indispensable for the Church! The bishops of the second and third centuries A.D. made themselves the leaders of the Church without any biblical authority or justification!

The origin of traditional priests

During this period the term *elder* no longer described the original and only office of leadership in the Christian Church (which was a shared leadership in a Body of elders)(Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:2-4). The term “elder” began to be used of a *single individual who became a kind of New Testament priest* in an individual congregation. *The priest* became the only leader in a congregation, the only shepherd or pastor of *the parish* (an individual congregation or local church)¹⁴. Gradually it was regarded that only priests may perform certain ministries in the local congregation (preaching and later the sacraments). All priests of parishes were *supervised by a bishop*.

The origin of traditional deacons

During this period the term *deacon* or *servant* no longer described the original office of service in the Christian Church (which was shared with other deacons in the congregation)(Acts 6:3; Philippians 1:1). The term “deacon” began to be used for a *single individual who became a kind of New Testament Levite* in an individual congregation. He was a kind of assistant or servant of the priest (shepherd or pastor) of the individual congregation. Deacons were *supervised by a priest* (shepherd or pastor).

Thus AFTER the New Testament period, during the second and third centuries A.D., a historical development of the concept of leadership took place in the Christian Church. However, this historical development had no biblical basis or authority! Ignatius (110 A.D.) is the only Apostolic Father who insisted on monarchical episcopacy (the rule of one bishop). But even he never stated that this was a divine institution. It was only his personal opinion. Jerome (384 A.D.)

¹⁴ Greek: *paroikia*, English: *parish*
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in his comment on Titus 1:5 remarked that the supremacy of a single bishop arose “*by custom rather than by the Lord’s actual appointment*”, as a means of preventing schisms in the Christian Church.

However, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament teaches any hierarchy of offices in the Christian Church! And Church History teaches us that the appointment of bishops as a new church office *did not prevent schisms!* It rather led to the multiplication of schisms as bishops fought in a worldly way among themselves for power in the whole Church.

3. Bishops and bishoprics.

Everywhere in the Roman Empire and even beyond it, new Christian congregations came into existence. Although the Bible teaches that Christians have only one “mother” (namely, the Heavenly Jerusalem)(Galatians 4:26), many so called “mother congregations” did not want to let go of the so-called “daughter congregations” which they founded. So a new office was created in the Christian Church by changing the task of an elder of an independent congregation, namely, overseer, into a new office and position above all the elders of all the local congregations, called the bishop¹⁵. The bishop supervised the mother church and the daughter churches. They did not want to let go of their power, but wanted to rule and control.

In the New Testament the word *bishop* only described the TASK of the office of an elder. But during the second century the word *bishop* began to describe a new OFFICE or POSITION. In the New Testament *a body of elders*¹⁶ had the task to *oversee*¹⁷ an *independent* congregation. But during the second century A.D. a single bishop became the overseer or supervisor over all the *dependent* congregations in a particular region!

The New Testament Church only had a presbyterian¹⁸ leadership structure, that is, every independent congregation was led by a body of *presbyters or elders* (the word “elders” is plural). But during the second and third centuries A.D. the Church developed an episcopal¹⁹ leadership structure, that is, the *independent* congregations in a region were made *dependent* congregations and were *placed under a bishop* (the word “bishop” is singular). The exact historical development from a *presbyterian leadership structure* into an *episcopal leadership structure* is not quite clear. All the dependent congregations in a particular region formed a *bishopric*²⁰ led by a *bishop*.

In the New Testament there was only an independent body or council of elders²¹ elected to lead an independent congregation. But during the second and third centuries A.D. there was a (often independent) *bishop*²² leading a *whole region of dependent congregations*. This was the first step towards a hierarchical leadership structure of the Christian Church.

There is no biblical warrant for this historical development! The New Testament does not command, teach or even relate about a hierarchical leadership structure!

C. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SYNODS AND COUNCILS (A HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE) (AFTER A.D. 195).

Church history shows how the leaders in the Christian Church manoeuvred themselves into higher leadership positions!

1. The synods (gatherings) of congregations.

In Acts chapter 15 two individual congregations gathered together to discuss the problem of circumcision, but this was *not a meeting of representatives of congregations in a particular area!*

During the second century A.D. we first read about *representative gatherings* of the Christian Church in the province of Asia (modern Turkey). The representatives of neighbouring congregations were invited to participate in the appointment or dismissal of a bishop (!) and the excommunication of members of the congregations that held false doctrines (the Montanists).

In A.D. 195 there was also such a gathering of the Christian Church in Gaul (modern France) where Irenaeus was bishop. The representatives at these gatherings were elders, deacons and members of the congregations.

2. The synods (councils) of bishops.

During the third and fourth century A.D. *the monistic episcopate (a single bishop ruling over several individual congregations)* continued to develop. During this period the gatherings (synods or councils) of the representatives of individual congregations changed into synods or councils (gatherings) of bishops only.

¹⁵ Greek: episkopos; English: bishop

¹⁶ Greek: presbuterion, English: presbytery

¹⁷ Greek: episkopeō

¹⁸ The word “presbyterian” is derived from the word “presbyter”, which is the Greek word for “an elder”

¹⁹ The word “episcopal” is derived from the words “epi” and “skopeo”, which are the Greek words for “to over + see”

²⁰ A “bishopric” is a “see” or “a unit committed to a bishop or later an archbishop”

²¹ Greek: presbuterion

²² Greek: episkopos

The representatives at the synods of Rome (A.D. 254), Antioch (A.D. 264, A.D. 269) and Elvira (A.D. 305) were besides bishops, also elders, deacons and members of congregations. But representatives at the second synod of Alexandria and Iconium (A.D. 235) were only bishops. The synod of Nicea I (A.D. 325) was the first synod or council that consisted of *only bishops* (!) and decided that *only bishops* (!) are the official representatives of the congregations! That is why the Roman Catholic Church made the council of Nicea the first council! Although bishops were originally chosen by the members of congregations, by the fourth century A.D. the members of congregations were excluded from the synods (councils) and decision making became the exclusive prerogative of the bishops!

3. The provincial synods (under leadership of the metropolitans).

By the fourth century A.D. the bishops of *the large cities* (the metropolitans) became more important than bishops from smaller cities and towns. Also the synods (counsels), which were held in these cities, became provincial synods. First the bishop of a large city (the metropolitan) chaired these provincial synods as a privilege, but that soon changed into a legal right! In this way the most important metropolitan bishops became the head of all the bishops in a country.

For example, in the West the bishop or metropolitan of Rome became the head of all the bishops in Italy; the bishop or metropolitan of Alexandria the head of all the bishops in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis; the bishop or metropolitan of Carthago the head of all the bishops in West Africa; and the bishop or metropolitan of Lyon the head of all the bishops in Gaul (France). Likewise in the East the bishop or metropolitan of Jerusalem became the head of all the bishops in Palestine; the bishop or metropolitan of Antioch the head of all the bishops in Syria; and the bishop or metropolitan of Corinth the head of all the bishops in Greece.

The synod (council) of Nicea I (A.D. 325) decided that these large provincial synods should meet twice a year under the leadership of the metropolitan (the bishop of the large city) and that only bishops had the right to vote!

4. The ecumenical (world-wide) synods.

Ecumenical synods (councils) developed parallel to the provincial synods. Up to the 21st century there have been 8 eastern and 13 western councils, together 21 councils²³. The first 8 (eastern councils) were called together by the (political) emperor of Rome: Nicea I (A.D. 325), Constantinople I (A.D. 381), Ephesus (A.D. 431), Chalcedon (A.D. 451), Constantinople II (A.D. 553), Constantinople III (A.D. 680-681), Nicea II (A.D. 787) and Constantinople IV (A.D. 869-870).

D. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF METROPOLITANS, PATRIARCHS AND POPES (A HIERARCHICAL TOP) (A.D. 325-600).

The power struggle among bishops within the councils was about which bishop was the highest and most important. The political struggle for power among the Caesars *in the world* became the spiritual struggle for power among the bishops *in the Church!*

1. Historical characteristics.

During the first two centuries A.D. Christians were persecuted by the Roman Caesars. But because Christianity was growing and the heathen religions were losing ground, Caesar Constantine promised protection for Christians in A.D. 311. He and his co-Caesars issued the edict of Milan in A.D. 313 and accorded equal status of Christianity to the other religions in the Roman Empire. After Constantine became victorious over his co-Caesars he accorded his victory to the God of the Christians and became 'a Christian' in A.D. 323. However, he never attended a church service and his coins showed Christ and the invincible Sun-god on its two sides. From A.D. 323 Christianity became the state religion and Constantine called himself "the bishop for external affairs of the Church". In A.D. 326 he made Byzantium the capital of *the Christian World Empire* and changed its name to Constantinople (which later became Istanbul). In A.D. 330 he also moved the political throne from Rome in the west to Constantinople in the east, probably due to the pressure of the powerful heathen families in Rome.

Since the world was marching into the Church, monastic orders emerged between the laity and the clergy during the third and fourth centuries. While ordinary Christians had to obey the moral rules of God, the monks voluntarily bound themselves to recommended things like fasting and celibacy.

By A.D. 450 few people in the west could read Greek and by A.D. 600 few people in the east spoke Latin. In the political arena two mighty empires emerged: the Eastern Roman Empire with Constantinople as capital (until A.D. 1453) and the Western Roman Empire with Rome as the capital (until A.D. 476). In these centuries, the Greek speaking Church in the east and the Latin speaking Church in the west drifted apart from one another.

²³ See www.catholicism.org/the ecumenical councils of the Roman Catholic Church summarising all the "dogmas" they formulated and all the "heresies" they condemned.

Within the Christian Church three developments took place:

- The development of Christian doctrine in teaching.
- The externalising of Christian ceremonies in worship.
- The development of Christian hierarchy in the leadership.

2. Metropolitans.

The bishops in the larger cities were called *metropolitans*. Then the metropolitans in the congregations that were founded by the apostles of Jesus Christ received an even higher status. These metropolitans were in the cities of Jerusalem in Palestine, Antioch in Syria, Ephesus in Turkey, Corinth in Greece, Rome in Italy and Alexandria in Egypt.

3. Patriarchs.

There were five patriarchs: in Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem. The Council of Nicea I (A.D. 325) placed the metropolitans of Rome (in the west), Alexandria (in the south) and Antioch (in the east) above the other metropolitans and gave them the title *patriarchs*.

The Council of Constantinople I (A.D. 381) added the metropolitan of Constantinople and the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) added the metropolitan of Jerusalem to the list of patriarchs, the five highest offices in the Church.

4. Popes.

The pope

Gradually there were two patriarchs competing for pre-eminence: the patriarch of Rome in the west and the patriarch of Constantinople in the east. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in A.D. 476, the bishops of Rome were not satisfied with the title “patriarch”. They made a bid for the absolute highest and most important office in the Christian Church by appealing to the following three arguments:

- They appealed to *Matthew 16:18-19*, which they interpreted as Jesus giving to Peter the highest position among the apostles.
- They appealed to *the historical fact* that both the apostles Peter and Paul had lived and worked in Rome.
- And they appealed to *the tradition* that the apostle Peter was the first bishop of Rome.

In Constantinople the patriarchs were seldom anything more than an appointment and play ball of the Roman Caesars. They were merely a tool in the hands of the political leaders. Thus, Rome as one of the five seats of a patriarch not only received the most honorary position (Latin: *primatus honoris*) among the patriarchs, but finally also the absolute highest position (Latin: *primatus ordinis*) among the patriarchs by a so-called divine right, because they referred to Matthew 16:18-19.

The monarchical episcopate

Pope Innocent I (A.D. 401-417) as bishop of Rome arrogantly claimed for himself a higher authority than all the other bishops in the world. Thus the Roman Catholic Church became *a monarchical episcopate – a one-headed leadership of a college of bishops*, in which the highest authority in the Church rests with the bishop (metropolitan) of Rome.

The bishops of Rome called themselves with the title *papa (pope)*, which means *father* (cf. Matthew 23:9). Originally all the bishops were addressed as *papa*, but now this title was claimed by Rome alone.

The pontificate

Pope Gregory I (A.D. 590-615) is called the founder of *the worldly power of the papacy* (pontificate). The pope was not only regarded as the highest power in spiritual matters, but also as the highest power in worldly matters!

However, this claim only belongs to Jesus Christ! “God seated Jesus Christ at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be *head over everything for the church*” (Ephesians 1:20-22)!

E. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF DENOMINATIONS (THE SPLIT BETWEEN THE EASTERN ORTHODOX AND WESTERN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCHES) (A.D. 600-1517).

1. Estrangement between the Eastern and Western Church.

The Middle Ages lasted from A.D. 600-1517. During the first centuries of this period estrangement between the Western Latin Church and the Eastern Greek Church developed. This estrangement finally led to a permanent schism in A.D.1204.

Apostolic See in east and west.

In the first century the apostles of Jesus Christ had founded many independent congregations. However from the second to the fourth centuries the hierarchical system of leadership with bishops and councils of bishops developed. In the Eastern Roman Empire there was a strong sense of equality of all the bishops, but not in the Western Roman Empire. Particularly Rome claimed apostolic foundation and came to be regarded as *THE Apostolic See*²⁴ *in the west*. While the Western Church accepted the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, it did not play a very active part in the Councils themselves. The Western Church was seen less as a college (an organised body of leaders) and more as a monarchy – the monarchy of the pope.

The monarchy of the emperor in the east.

The monarchy of the Roman emperor at Byzantium (Constantinople or Istanbul) *on earth* was regarded as an image or icon (the Greek word for “image”) of the monarchy of God *in heaven*. In the east the emperor was regarded to be *God’s representative on earth*. In the Eastern Church people prostrated themselves before the icon of Christ and in the palace they prostrated themselves before the living icon – the Roman emperor. In the east there was no rigid line of separation between the Eastern Church and the Roman State. They were seen as one organism. The Eastern Church (through its bishops or patriarchs) cared for *the souls* of people and the Roman Emperor in Byzantium (as God’s representative on earth) cared for *the bodies* of people. The Roman Emperor summoned councils, the bishops decided what was the true faith and the Roman Emperor carried out the decrees of the council!

Autocratic functions of the pope in the west.

The barbarian invasions in the west had broken down the Western Roman Empire and this only served to strengthen the autocratic structure of the Western Church. The pope (as the highest bishop) assumed authority in the political realm and issued orders in both religious and secular matters.

During the Middle Ages many Germanic tribes were added to the Western Church. On the one hand, the population desired a State Church - that is, one Church within one State. On the other hand, the popes desired a Church State – that is, one State in the world ruled by the one Church of Rome. The popes wanted to rule over the Church and the State (but in the west the pope was not yet regarded as God’s representative on earth)! So there was a continual struggle between the royals of the political states on the one hand and the popes of the Western Church on the other hand.

The clergy and laity in the west.

Many lay Christians in the east were *educated* men as well as lay theologians. They read, wrote and taught theology. But the barbarian invasions in the west resulted in the fact that most lay people in the west were *not educated*: they could not read, let alone comprehend theological issues. Education and theology in the west became the preserve of only the priests in the Western Church. A sharp division between *the clergy and the laity* developed in the Western Church.

Theological development in the east and the west.

The Eastern Greek Church became more *speculative*, while the Western Latin Church became more *practical*. The Eastern Greek Church understood theology in terms of worship and liturgy, while the Western Latin Church was influenced by juridical ideas, by the concepts of Roman law.

When thinking about the Trinity, the Eastern Greek Church began with *the three-ness* of the divine being or divine nature²⁵, while the Western Roman Church began with *the unity* of the Godhead. When reflecting on the crucifixion, the Eastern Greek Church thought primarily of Christ as *the Victor (the Resurrected)*, while the Western Roman Church thought primarily of Christ as *the Victim (the Crucified)*. The Eastern Greek Church talked more of *deification (Christ as the Almighty God)*, while the Western Roman Church talked more of *redemption (Christ as the Saviour)*.

The western pope claimed universal power.

The centralised and monarchical structure of the Western Church first led to the pope claiming absolute power only in the west. But when the pope began to believe that his immediate power of jurisdiction extended besides the west also to the east, trouble was bound to arise.

Some claims of the western popes.

Pope Innocent I (401-417) claimed for himself a higher authority than all the other bishops in the world and he claimed the title “papa” (pope) only for himself.

Pope Gregory I (590-615) claimed all worldly power for the pope.

Pope Nicolas I (858-867) *elevated the power of the patriarch of Rome* above the power of all other metropolitans inside the Church in the whole world and above the power of all Caesars outside the Church.

Pope Nicolas II (1059) delegated the authority to elect a new pope to *the cardinals*, which consisted of a college of 6 bishops, 50 priests and 14 deacons, all residing in the city of Rome!

²⁴ A “See” is a bishopric or an episcopal unit overseen by a bishop or archbishop

²⁵ Greek: hupostasis

Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) enforced the disassociation of Church with the world; enforced the ideals of monasticism onto the Church; enforced the existing celibate of the bishops and higher offices onto all the offices of the Church. Married priests were fired. Priests could no longer be invested by worldly people. He tried to establish a world-wide theocracy via the Church-State, in which the pope (symbolised by the sun) took the place of Christ on earth and ruled over all kings (symbolised by the moon).

Pope Innocent III (1215) defined “*ex cathedra*” and ratified the statement, “There is but one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved.”

Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) placed *the (Roman) cardinals above all the bishops in the world* and as honorary token they wore a red cap.

Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303) issued the papal bull called *Unam sanctam* (1302). It stated that the worldly sword is subject to the spiritual sword and the worldly power is subject to the spiritual power. He even declared that faith in *the absolute power of the pope* was necessary for salvation!

The councils fail to limit the power of the pope.

The influence of the pope of the Western Church became greater and greater until the split between the Eastern and the Western Church became final with the military sacking of Constantinople in A.D. 1204 by western crusaders.

The western councils were no longer “ecumenical” (world-wide), because since the 14th council of Lyons II (A.D. 1274) the Western Roman Catholic Church failed to involve the Eastern Orthodox Churches in the councils.

The so-called reformed councils: the unrecognised council of Pisa (A.D. 1409), the 16th council of Constance (Vienne)(A.D. 1414-1418) and the 17th council of Florence (Basel) (A.D. 1431-1443) tried to break the power of the pope and *set the council of bishops above the pope* (the bishop of Rome). However the hierarchical principle gained the upper hand.

The absolute power of the pope.

The Reformation that resulted in the Protestant congregations began in A.D. 1517 with Martin Luther in Germany. Protestants hold that only the Bible correctly interpreted is infallible.

The 19th council of Trent (A.D. 1545-1549) was *an anti-Reformation council*. It condemned the heresies of Luther, Calvin, and others. It issued decrees on the Eucharist, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Sacraments (notably Baptism and Holy Orders) and teachings on marriage, purgatory, indulgences and the use of images.

The 20th council of Vatican I in Rome (A.D. 1869-1870) declared on the 18th July 1870 under great influence of the Jesuit Order “the infallibility of the pope” and subjected the decisions at all the councils to the approval of the pope! The infallibility of the pope was a dogma in which all members of the Roman Catholic Church must believe!

While the pope (the supreme bishop) in the Western Church viewed infallibility as his own prerogative, the patriarchs (the supreme bishops) in the Eastern Church held that in matters of the faith (the Christian doctrine and life) the final decision rested not with the pope alone, but with a council representing all the bishops of the Christian Church.

Since the First Vatican Council (A.D. 1870) of the members of the Roman Catholic Church regard the pope as “the shepherd and the universal bishop of the whole Christian Church”, a declaration in opposition to what the apostle Peter teaches in the Bible, namely, that Jesus Christ is “the Shepherd (Pastor) and Overseer (Bishop)” of the Church (1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4)! Thus, the pope took the place of Jesus Christ!

The members of the Roman Catholic Church also regard the pope to be “Christ’s representative on earth”. Thus, the pope also took the place of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17,26; John 16:7-15)!

For these reasons the Roman Catholic Church teaches that “there is no salvation possible outside the Roman Catholic Church”. Thus, the Roman Catholic Church took the place of Jesus Christ as the Only Saviour. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12; cf. John 14:6)!

That is why the Roman Catholic Church does not and cannot formally recognize the other Christian churches in the world! They try hard to get all Christian churches under the control of the Roman Catholic Church.

Matthew 16:18-19

However, Jesus never gave to Peter the highest *position*. Interpreting Matthew 16:18-19 as the highest *position* would violate the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 20:25-28!

Jesus made use of Peter and the other apostles to establish the first historic congregation among the Jews (Acts 2:14-42), the first historic congregation among the half-Jews (Samaritans, Acts 8:4-17) and the first historic congregation among the non-Jews (Gentiles, Acts 10:9-48), thus fulfilling his statement in Matthew 16:18-19; Matthew 18:18 and Acts 1:8. The apostles were *the foundational leaders of the historic Christian Church*, but their office had no successors, because no one would qualify according to the Bible (Acts 1:21-22; Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14)!

The true Christian Church confesses only Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church

All true Christian congregations confess Jesus Christ as *the Shepherd or Pastor*²⁶ and as *the Overseer or Bishop*²⁷ of the whole Christian Church on earth (John 10:16; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4) and they confess the Holy Spirit as *the Representative*²⁸ of Jesus Christ on earth (John 14:16-17,26; John 16:7-15)! No pope and no human being (e.g. apostle, prophet, bishop, priest, pastor, etc. whatever titles some church leaders claim today) can ever take that position!

2. The issue of the Filioque.

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325 and 381) originally read, “I believe ... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, *who proceeds from the Father*, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and together glorified.” This seems to have originated in Spain as a safeguard against Arianism (who attacked the divine nature of Christ)(cf. Romans 8:9-10; 1 Peter 1:11).

The Western Latin Church during the Council of Toledo in Spain (589), added the words “and from the Son” (in Latin: filioque) to the Creed so that it now read, “I believe ... in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, *who proceeds from the Father and from the Son*”. This addition spread to France and Germany, was welcomed by Charlemagne and adopted at the semi-iconoclast Council of Frankfurt (794). Writers at Charlemagne’s court made the Filioque into an issue of controversy, accusing the Eastern Greek Church of *heresy*.

In 1054 the western cardinal Humbert placed a Bull of *excommunication* upon the altar of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, but it was rejected. This marked the beginning of the schism between the Eastern Greek Church and the Western Latin (Roman) Church.

In 1109 the eastern patriarch Sergius of Constantinople *excluded* the name of the western pope Sergius IV from the Diptychs, which are lists, kept by each patriarch and which contain the names of all the patriarchs, living and departed, who are recognised as orthodox. Technically, the Western Church of Rome and the Eastern Church of Constantinople were *out of communion*.

3. The Crusades.

The Crusades (1096-1270) as “holy wars” were a response to the suppression and persecution of Christians and pilgrims in Palestine by the Fatimids and Seljuks on the one hand and a response to the call of pope Urban II at the meeting in Piacenza and Clermont (1095) to free Jerusalem on the other hand. Christians must remember that *holy wars are absolutely against the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible* (Matthew 5:38-48)!

The Crusaders from the Western Latin Church *captured* Antioch from the Turks in 1098, Jerusalem in 1099 and set up Western Latin patriarchs. By 1187 there was a Western Latin patriarch at Acre and an Eastern Greek patriarch at Jerusalem. The two rival bishops claimed the same throne and the two hostile congregations (western and eastern) introduced a spirit of *hatred and bitterness*. The Eastern Byzantine residents *massacred* many Western Latin residents at Constantinople in 1182. The Western Crusaders responded and *sacked* Constantinople in 1204 and this made the *split or schism* between the Orthodox Church in the east and the Roman Church in the west definite.

4. The eastern and western denominations.

Patriarchs

The rivalry between the patriarchs of Rome and Constantinople finally led to the first great split in the *worldwide*²⁹ Christian Church. The Christian Church in the east consisted of several independent Orthodox Churches (denominations), each with its patriarch. The Christian Church in the west was called the Roman Catholic Church and had the pope of Rome as its head. The patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches and the pope of Rome now presided over all bishops under them.

Archbishops

Later there were so many bishops in the West that another layer of leaders was created between the bishops and the pope, namely, the archbishops. An *archbishop* presides over all the bishops in his country. The hierarchical leadership systems in the West and in the East had finally reached their present form.

Sinful Church History

Remember: this was all *sinful Church History* that was created by human leaders and had no biblical authority or justification at all! Christians who “do not go beyond what is written” in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6) reject this historical development of leadership in the Western and in the Eastern churches.

²⁶ Greek: poimèn

²⁷ Greek: episkopos

²⁸ Greek: paraklètōs

²⁹ Greek: katholikos

F. THE CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT OF DENOMINATIONS (THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION) (A.D. 1517).

1. Forerunners of the Reformation.

John Wiclif (Wycliffe)(1324-1384)

He lived in Oxford and Lutterworth in England. He was a doctor in theology. He openly opposed the misuse of power of the pope, translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate to English in about 1381 and fought against the use of relics, images, letters of indulgence, and against the mass and especially the doctrine of transubstantiation, against the confession, the priesthood, the monastery life and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. He died before he could be condemned at the council of Constance. In 1417 his bones were dug up and burned.

Johannes Hus (1369-1415)

He lived in Bohemia (Poland) and was influenced by the theses of Wiclif against the Roman Catholic Church. He fought against the abuses within the Roman Catholic Church, his theses were condemned in Praag and he was condemned and burned in 1415 during the council of Constance.

2. The second great split in the Christian Church.

The Reformation

During the sixteenth century, the corruption of several leaders inside the Roman Catholic Church was so great that numerous people started a reformation inside the Roman Catholic Church. People like Luther (31st October 1517), Zwingli (1522), Calvin (1536), Knox and others wanted to reform the Roman Catholic Church from the inside, but the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church at that time resisted the reformation and held on to its power.

The council of Trent (1545-1549) condemned Luther, Calvin and others as “heretics” and they were excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. Excommunication from the denomination of the Roman Catholic Church does not result in excommunication from the one Body of Christ! However, it did lead to the second great split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the Reformation in 1517.

The emphasis of the Reformation

The Church of the Reformation wanted to return to the New Testament Church of the first century A.D. While the Roman Catholic Church had sought and found their power in outward things, the Church of the Reformation called people to inward things. The Roman Catholic Church emphasised the power of the church offices (priest, bishop, archbishop, pope), the sacraments and good works. The Church of the Reformation emphasised the Word of God as recorded in the Bible, justification by faith and a transformed life.

3. The ongoing split in the Christian Church.

The evangelical movement

Already in the sixteenth century, several evangelical movements started in Europe, England and America. The enormous increase of *individualism* led to the founding of many church denominations. Because these church denominations are human organisations, they split again into other church denominations. Each church denomination developed its own form of church leadership.

Sinful Church History

Remember: this was all sinful Church History that was created by human leaders and had no biblical authority or justification at all! Christians who “do not go beyond what is written” in the Bible (1 Corinthians 4:6) reject this historical development of leadership in the Reformed and Evangelical Western churches.

G. THE MAIN DENOMINATIONS (THE MODERN PERIOD).

1. The episcopal churches.

The episcopal churches generally believe that there is only one Church and that it is *catholic* (spread throughout the world). The individual local congregations have no independence. The Church must remain a visible unity within the world. The visible unified Church is a reflection of the ancient Roman Empire.

The emphasis is on the office of the bishop, who embraces all the other church offices.

Christ is regarded as governing the worldwide Church by means of the Council of bishops (or in the case of the Roman Catholic Church: by the bishop of Rome - the pope) and as governing the individual local congregations by means of *a bishop*.

2. The congregational churches.

The congregational churches generally believe that every individual local congregation is completely and fully a church and completely independent. The independent congregations are a reflection of the independent people in the age of enlightenment and individualism.

Wherever the gospel is preached, people come to faith. The believers gather themselves into a *congregation* (an individual local church) in which Christ is present (Matthew 18:20). They freely bind themselves to carry out the biblical calling. The congregations are deliberately kept small in order to emphasise *the office of the believer*. New independent congregations split off from the larger independent congregations. Several independent churches often form a loose federation of churches in which each congregation remains completely independent.

The emphasis is on *the office of the believer*, who is a priest, prophet and king within his own circle of acquaintances.

Christ is regarded as governing every independent congregation of believers directly by means of the Holy Spirit, the Bible and *the meetings of the whole congregation*, in which the believers make all the important decisions according to democratic principles. Under influence of modern individualism and democracy, an independent congregation meets as a whole congregation to elect a church committee, which has the task to execute the decisions made during the meetings of the whole congregation.

3. The synodical churches.

The synodical churches generally believe that every individual local congregation is completely and fully a church of Christ, but that it is not completely independent from the other local congregations and should be *organised under an umbrella organisation* within a nation or state. The umbrella organisation is called a *synod* (which means “a coming together”). The synod is a gathering of elders that have been chosen as representatives of the individual congregations within a nation or state. The synodical churches are a reflection of the nation or national state.

The emphasis is on the biblical appointed *office of elders* who are nationally represented by *a synod*.

Christ is regarded as governing the national church or state church individually (locally) by means of the appointed church offices such as pastors, elders and deacons and nationally by means of *regional synods and one national synod*.

4. The presbyterian churches.

The presbyterian churches³⁰ believe that every individual local congregation is a complete, full and visible revelation of the worldwide Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), in organisation completely independent from other congregations, but in consultation and cooperation wholeheartedly inter-dependent.

The emphasis is on the biblical appointed *office of elders*³¹. The individual local congregation is governed by *the body or council of elders*³². The emphasis is also on *the office of every believer* as being a priest, prophet and king within his own circle of acquaintances.

Christ is regarded as the only and highest leader in the Church (Ephesians 1:20-23) and as governing every individual local congregation by means of his Holy Spirit (John 16:1-15), the Bible (Ephesians 6:17) and the body of elders (1 Timothy 3:1-7,14-15). Each individual congregation chooses its own body or council of elders only on the basis of the teaching of the Bible and during a meeting of the whole congregation. Thus, the body of elders and the meetings of the whole congregation hold one another in check. Above all the body of elders represent Christ and the teachings of the Bible and only in the second place the goals (objectives) of the meetings of the whole congregation. The body of elders wholeheartedly consults and cooperates with other bodies of elders in the one worldwide Body of Christ.

5. The independent churches.

The independent churches generally believe that their church (denomination) is the (only) right church (denomination) and should be completely independent from all other churches (denominations). The independent churches are a reflection of the worldly spirit of immaturity, partisanship and independence (1 Corinthians 3:1-4) usually under a charismatic or authoritarian leader, who is often also the founder of the independent church. Such leaders often claim super titles for themselves, like: apostle-, prophet-, bishop-, priest- or pastor so-and-so.

The emphasis is on *the charismatic or authoritarian leader*, who is THE priest, THE prophet and THE king³³ within his independent denomination.

Christ is regarded as governing the independent church by means of *the charismatic or authoritarian leader*. If he has a governing body of deacons, they usually ratify the decisions of this authoritarian leader.

³⁰ The term “presbyterian” must not be confused with the Presbyterian denomination, just as the term “catholic” must not be confused with the Roman Catholic denomination.

³¹ Greek: presbuteros

³² Greek: presbuterion

³³ Often calls himself “the apostle”, “the bishop”, “the prophet” or “the priest” of the church!

H. THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING (ELDERS).

1. The body of elders.

The New Testament teaches that every individual local congregation had its own *body of elders* (1 Timothy 4:14) as its leaders.

All the elders (Acts 20:17) are called *bishops* (overseers) and *pastors* (shepherds)(Acts 20:28)!

All the elders (Titus 1:5) are called bishops (overseers)(Titus 1:7).

All the elders (1 Peter 5:1) are called pastors (shepherds) and bishops (overseers)(1 Peter 5:2) under the Chief Pastor, who is Jesus Christ.

This clearly shows that with regard to the terminology Luke, Paul and Peter use the three words *elders*, *overseers* (bishops) and *shepherds* (pastors) interchangeably in the New Testament! In spite of what these terms have come to mean in Church History and may mean today in different denominations, the New Testament makes no distinction between *elders*, *overseers* and *shepherds*! There was no hierarchy of leaders in the Old Testament or in the New Testament Church! There was *never only one elder* in charge of a congregation, but *always a group* of instituted leaders in the Church, called *a body of elders*³⁴ (1 Timothy 4:14) for each individual congregation (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). All the elders in this body of elders shared the leadership responsibility of their independent congregation.

Leadership in the Bible is always “shared leadership” and “servant leadership” (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:2-4)!

2. The meaning of these different terms.

The three terms elders, shepherds and overseers do not describe three different church offices and also not three different church positions. They all refer to the one church office, namely, that of the elder. They describe the one group of church leaders from two points of view.

- The term *elders*³⁵ is the name of their office and expresses the spiritual maturity, experience and greater respect these leaders command.
- The terms *shepherds*³⁶ and *overseers*³⁷ describe the nature of the tasks of the elders. The elders lead the people as shepherds do and they manage the activities as overseers do. The terms *leaders or guides*³⁸ (Hebrews 13:7,17,24), *persons standing at the head (rulers, directors, managers)*³⁹ (Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17) and *house stewards* (managers)⁴⁰ (Titus 1:7) also describe the nature of their tasks.

The New Testament teaches that all the elders of an individual congregation are shepherds and overseers of that congregation. All the elders of an individual congregation share the *official* pastoral, teaching and managerial functions in that congregation.

3. The temporary leadership team.

When new congregations are planted, the leadership consists of a missionary, an elder of another congregation and several Christians with skills needed to establish the new congregation. This team may be called “a church planting team”, “a leadership team” or simply “the team”. They should not be called “deacons”, because deacons should only be appointed when there is already “a council of elders”.

The tasks of the leadership team are: evangelism, discipleship training, pastoral care, equipping believer with skills and developing some men to become possible future elders.

The leadership team should be dissolved when the first council of elders is appointed (cf. Acts 14:21-23).

4. Conclusion.

The leadership in the Christian Church has gone through a long and turbulent period of development.

This summary of history does NOT intend to change the leadership structure in your particular church (denomination)!

But this study may help you and your congregation to become more biblical in your leadership and to foster the biblical attitudes of biblical leaders, namely that “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:25-28).

³⁴ Greek: presbuterion

³⁵ Greek: presbuteros, English: priest

³⁶ Greek: poimèn, Latin and English: pastor

³⁷ Greek: episkopos, English: bishop (meaning: overseer)

³⁸ Greek: hēgoumenos

³⁹ Greek: pro-istamenos

⁴⁰ Greek: oikonomos

Supplement 1. THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON DEACONS

In this supplement we consistently translate the Greek word “diakonos” (singular) and “diakonoi” (plural) with the English words “deacon” and “deacons”. Who are the deacons?

In the New Testament we read of only three congregations that had deacons and in all three contexts, they are *associated with the elders*. However, they were chosen and appointed, *not* to lead the individual congregation (local church), but only to serve (possibly by leading certain specific tasks within the congregation).

1. The limitations of deacons.

Deacons were limited with respect to their appointment.

Biblical teaching. The New Testament teaches several limitations with regard to deacons. While the Bible teaches that a congregation should appoint elders, it does not teach that a congregation should appoint deacons.

Biblical history. Besides the congregation at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7), only two other congregations mentioned in the Bible had deacons, namely, the congregation at Philippi (Philippians 1:1) and the congregation at Ephesus (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Thus, according to the New Testament, not every congregation needs to have deacons. The deacons in the congregation at Jerusalem were appointed for a specific task and also for a limited time. For example, Philip was a deacon only for a limited period of time (Acts 6:5; 8:4-5).

Deacons were limited with respect to their leadership.

The deacons may not take the place of the elders. The tasks of the deacons are different than the tasks of the elders. The office of deacon is never a leadership office over the whole congregation! A *board of deacons* may not replace *the body of elders*⁴¹ (1 Timothy 4:14) as the leadership of the congregation. It is better not to have a board of deacons at all. Let every deacon function under the supervision of an elder. The task of the deacons is to serve, and not to direct the affairs of the congregation.

The elders may delegate the leadership of particular services or activities to deacons. Whenever the elders delegate certain activities to deacons, the elders still remain the responsible leaders of the congregation and of all the services or activities of the congregation.

Deacons were limited with respect to their tasks.

The tasks of deacons are also different than the tasks of the ordinary members of the congregation. The word *deacon* means *servant*. According to Acts 6:1-7 the deacons were chosen for *a very specific service* in the congregation.

However, according to 1 Peter 4:10-11 all the members in the congregation should have an active service in the congregation by making use of their abilities and spiritual gifts. The deacons may therefore not replace the service of the other members of the congregation.

2. The biblical qualifications of deacons.

The biblical requirements or qualifications of deacons are clearly taught in the Bible (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). Deacons may never be chosen because of their position, power or wealth in society, but they should be chosen on the basis of their personal behaviour, their family life and their ministry abilities.

3. The tasks of deacons.

The tasks of deacons are different from the tasks of the elders.

The deacons may not take the place of the elders. A board of deacons may not replace the body of elders. The task of deacons is to serve, and not to direct (lead) the affairs of the congregation.

The tasks of deacons are also different from the tasks of the ordinary members of the congregation.

The deacons may not take the place of the ordinary Christians and do all the tasks that need to be done in the congregation.

The specific task of the deacons is to take care of the new conditions that arise as a result of the preaching of the Word and of the growth of the congregation.

Acts 6:1-7 relates how in the first historic congregation at Jerusalem, deacons were chosen because of a very specific reason. When the number of disciples increased to over 5 000, a specific problem or need arose - certain people were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. The apostles together with the members of this congregation chose some men from among them to take care of *this specific service*. The deacons were chosen because the elders did not have the time or energy to take care of all the needy members in addition to performing their own tasks (the proclamation of the Word and prayer).

⁴¹ Greek: presbuterion

Therefore, deacons should be limited to specific services, which require special skills or which are still neglected by the body of believers. Therefore deacons are often *the leaders of specific tasks* that are assigned by the body of elders. The deacons may be the leaders or teachers of specific groups within the congregation: youth leaders, co-ordinators of evangelism and mercy projects, administrator of finances, etc. While the elders are leaders in executing the leadership tasks, the deacons are leaders in executing the service tasks.

The traditional task of the deacons is to take care of the needy members of the congregation.

The deacons in the New Testament were chosen because the elders did not have the ability, time or energy to take care of the needy in addition to performing their own tasks (Acts 6:1-7; James 1:27; James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:16-18). One special task of the deacons is to gather the offerings, which Christians make to God, and then to distribute these gifts in the proper spirit to the needy people within their own congregation (1 Corinthians 16:2-3). According to 2 Corinthians 8:4,20 and 2 Corinthians 9:1,12,13 they also administrate gifts that are intended for helping other congregations in need.

Summarise. If deacons are chosen, they are not chosen to lead the congregation, but are only chosen to serve in *special tasks* in the congregation. They may not replace the services of the other members of the congregation, but serve in tasks that require special skills or are otherwise neglected by the members of the congregation. The Bible determines their qualifications and tasks. They serve until their special task has been completed.

Supplement 2. THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

When a congregation chooses women workers for the congregation, then they must choose women that fulfil the biblical requirements and are able to fulfil the biblical tasks for women workers.

Woman in leadership is a very controversial matter among Christians and Christian congregations. The purpose of this supplement is to shed some light on the controversy. The leaders of your congregation should make the final decision in this matter.

What does the New Testament teach about women in leadership?

1. Women in the historical and cultural context of the Bible.

Some Christian congregations regard the instructions of the apostle Paul as limited to the relationship between married women and their own husbands. Other Christian congregations regard his instructions as directed to the behaviour of women in general in the official meetings of the congregation (the worship services on the Lord's Day).

Were there women in the office of elders?

The Bible teaches that the appointed leaders of the congregation, namely "the elders", were all male. They were required to be "men of one woman" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)⁴². The Bible does not justify or warrant the appointment of women in any official office of the congregation.

Were there women in the office of deacons?

The Bible also teaches that the deacons were all male. 1 Timothy 3:11 literally says, "women likewise"⁴³.

- This cannot refer to an official office of deaconesses, because then the sentence would have to read "the deaconesses likewise"⁴⁴.
- This also does not refer to "the wives of the deacons", because then the sentence would have to read "their wives"⁴⁵ or "having wives"⁴⁶. If "the wives of the deacons" were an official office, it would mean that "the wives of the elders" were excluded. The wives of the elders and the deacons are mentioned in verse 2 and 12.
- The translation "women likewise" refers to special women, *women assistants or women workers*, because the word "likewise" points to a category of people that are similar to the group of male deacons, without being deacons.
- Therefore we must regard these women as a special group of women in the congregation at Ephesus that performed a special service in the congregation (cf. 1 Timothy 5:3-16).

Was Phoebe a deaconess?

Romans 16:1-2 is the only time in the Bible that a woman was called a "diakonos", the same word that is used for "a deacon". The Greek verb "diakoneo" is never used in the sense of serving as a deacon or *serving in the office of a deacon*. It always means *serving in the sense of taking care of the needs of people*. The primary meaning of the Greek

⁴² Not "women of one man". It also does not mean that the man must be married. It simply means that whether he is married or not, he must have an impeccable conduct towards women. Never flirt.

⁴³ Greek: gunaikas hōsautōs

⁴⁴ Greek: tas de diakonous

⁴⁵ Greek: gunaikas auton

⁴⁶ Greek: gunaikas echontes

noun “diakonos” is therefore also *servant* and *not deacon*. Romans 16:1 does not refer to Phoebe as a *deaconess* in the sense of Acts 6:1-7, but to Phoebe being a *servant*!

Cenchrea was one of the harbours of Corinth. There was a Christian congregation and Phoebe was a servant within that congregation. However, her service had similarities to the service of the deacons in Acts 6, because she was a “protector”, “assistant” or “helper”⁴⁷ of many people, including Paul. She probably showed hospitality to many people who travelled between the East and the West. She could have been a woman like Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:15) or the women who served Jesus and his disciples (Luke 8:1-3) or like the women in Ephesus who performed special services in the congregation (1 Timothy 5:9-10). Nevertheless, the performance of such services does not mean that these women were appointed to *the office* of deacon in the congregation.

2. Women in the teaching context of the Bible.

Two Bible passages in the Bible, 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-38 are authoritative instructions and not merely historical descriptions. Titus 2:3-5 shows that the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul does give women *authority to teach and train* other women in their homes. And 1 Corinthians 11:3-5 shows that the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul does give woman *authority to prophesy* (i.e. proclaim God’s Word) outside the official meetings of the congregation.

However, in 1 Timothy 3:15-16 the apostle Paul gives instructions “how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the Church of the living God”. Here he is speaking about the official meetings of the congregation usually held on “the Lord’s Day”⁴⁸. He gives instructions that certain men are to be appointed to the office of elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7) and (if needed) other men are to be appointed to the office of deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-13). He also gives instructions how men and women ought to conduct themselves “in every place” where Christians pray and teach (1 Timothy 2:8-15). The apostle Paul says, “I do not permit a woman⁴⁹ to teach or to have authority over a man⁵⁰. She must be silent” and instead “should learn in quietness and full submission” (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

According to “A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament” by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, the Greek word “anèr” in these passages refers to “every adult male” and not simply to “married men”, and the Greek word “gunè” in these passages refers to “every adult woman” and not simply to “married women”! Thus the apostle Paul is not limiting this instruction to married women. It is an authoritative instruction with respect to all women.

Also in 1 Corinthians 14:26-38 the apostle Paul gives instructions with regard to the orderly conduct within the official meetings of the congregation where Christians come together for preaching (prophesying). At such meetings several men and prophets spoke: “a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation”. With apostolic authority he sets limits to how these official meetings in the congregation must be conducted so that “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way”. He limits the speaking in tongues, prophesying and women speaking in these official meetings. He writes, “As in all the congregations of the saints, women⁵¹ should remain silent in the churches (congregations). They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission”. Apparently, *the women in Corinth* did not behave submissively during the official meetings of the congregation and wanted to be and do exactly like the men. They wanted to teach and preach the Word with authority or to speak in tongues and prophesy just like the men in these official meetings of the congregation. The Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul does not allow this. He says that what he is writing was “the Lord’s command”! He warns that the Lord would ignore the person who ignores this command (1 Corinthians 14:37-38)! It is clear that this matter does not refer to the relationship between a married man and his wife at home, but rather to the relationship between men and women in general in the official meetings of the congregation. And because this is a biblical command it is normative in all cultures in the world and for all times! Paul writes, “As in all the congregations of the saints (Christians)” (1 Corinthians 14:33). Thus, Christian women exercise a beautiful restraint within the official meetings of the congregation (cf. 1 Peter 3:1-4).

3. Women in the Bible are equal, but different.

Women and men are equally costly, valuable, important, able and useful in God’s eyes!

Women and men are equally a part of the Body of Christ (Galatians 3:28). Both women and men need to serve equally with their spiritual gifts within the congregation (1 Peter 4:10).

The assigned functions and tasks of women are different.

Nevertheless, the functions and tasks that God in a sovereign way gives to women and men are not the same! God has given women different functions and tasks: *physically* in bearing children (Genesis 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:15), *socially* in the marriage relationship (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6) and *spiritually* in the congregation. God has assigned the function of leadership within marriage (Ephesians 5:22-24) as well as leadership with in the

⁴⁷ Greek: prostatis

⁴⁸ Revelation 1:10; Acts 20:7

⁴⁹ Greek: gunè

⁵⁰ Greek: anèr

⁵¹ Greek: gunè in plural

congregation (1 Timothy 3:2b)⁵² to men and not to women. God has also assigned the task of preaching and teaching the Bible authoritatively within the official meetings of the congregation to men and not to women (Acts 6:4; 1 Timothy 3:2b; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:9).

Women are indispensable in the Church.

The Bible has recorded the names and deeds of many women, who have performed important and valuable services in the Church (Luke 7:44-47; Luke 8:1-3; John 4:39; John 20:17-18; Acts 9:36; Acts 16:15; Romans 16:1-6; Romans 16:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:1-16; Titus 2:3-5).

The following two extreme positions must be avoided.

The one extreme position is when Christian congregations *appoint women to offices* within the congregation when they have no biblical warrant to do so.

The other extreme position is when Christian congregations *neglect to make use of* the important and valuable services of their female members.

4. GOD determines who has authority in which relationships.

The question of authority is not resolved by one's culture (traditional customs and values) or by democracy (voting). The Christian Church is not a democracy, but a theocracy or Christocracy! "All authority on earth has been established by God" and he determines to whom it is given (Romans 13:1-2)! All authority on earth has also been given to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18).

There are seven *authority-submission relationships* in the Bible:

- (1) God in Christ has authority over all people (Psalm 145:13; Psalm 146:10; Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18)
- (2) Men and women have authority over God's creation (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:4-8)
- (3) The husband has leadership authority over the wife in the marriage relationship (Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6) and in the official meetings of the congregation (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:5-6).
- (4) The parents have authority over their children that are still under age (Luke 2:51; Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20; but note Mark 3:31-35).
- (5) The government of a country has authority over its citizens (Romans 13:3-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17);
- (6) The employer has authority over his employees (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Peter 2:18-23).
- (7) The elders have authority over the members of the congregation (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7,17).

5. The traditional culture of people and the culture of the kingdom of God.

Some Christians regard the instructions of the apostle Paul not as *instructions of the Holy Spirit* through the apostle Paul⁵³, but only as *instructions determined by the culture* of Paul's lifetime and therefore no longer valid today. This is a dangerous way of thinking!

Definition of culture.

The culture of any group of people is their world-view, truths, beliefs, superstitions and values that are expressed in their convictions, experiences, behaviour, relationships and institutions (customs and traditions).

The historical context of the Bible.

The historic and traditional culture of every group of people contains good as well as bad aspects. *The historic parts of the Bible* describe the good as well as the bad aspects that existed in the human cultures at the time a particular Bible book was written. But none of these descriptions of human culture in any age is normative!

The cultural context of the Bible.

God wants *the culture of the kingdom of God* to become the only culture in every country and town and language in the world! On the one hand, *the instructive parts of the Bible* teach and command which aspects of the culture of the kingdom of God should become the culture in all places in the world and in all ages in world history (cf. Matthew 5 to 7 and all the parables about the kingdom of God)! On the other hand, *the instructive parts of the Bible* forbid the bad aspects of every human culture in all places in the world and in all ages in world history. God's people must not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the godless nations (cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-13)!

The instructive parts of the Bible institutes the Christian marriage relationship, the relationship between parents and children, between employers and employees, between government and citizens, etc. (Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9; Colossians

⁵² "The husband of one wife", not "the wife of one husband".

⁵³ Matthew 22:43; John 14:26; John 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21

3:18 – 4:1; 1 Peter 2:13 – 3:7). The Bible commands clear sexual moral standards and standards of justice (Matthew 5:21-48). Likewise, it commands the relationships between men and women in the congregation (1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 1 Corinthians 14:36-38; 1 Timothy 2:11-14). All these are normative everywhere in the world and at all times!

The correct principle of Bible interpretation.

The culture of people may not determine the interpretation of the Bible! Rather, the culture of the kingdom of God in the Bible must determine what the human cultures should become in every place and in all times!

God has determined, not only to change the heart of people, but also to transform the life and the culture of every people-group in the world!

Christians must make a distinction between *the historic parts of the Bible* and *the instructive parts of the Bible*. The historic parts of the Bible describe *what actually happened* within the lives and cultures of people, whether good or bad. These descriptions are not normative for Christian behaviour. But the instructive parts of the Bible teach and command *what actually must happen* in the lives and cultures of people. These teachings and commands are normative for Christian behaviour everywhere and always!

6. The qualifications of women workers

When a congregation chooses women workers, they must choose women that fulfil *the biblical requirements* and are able to fulfil *the biblical tasks* for women workers.

1 Timothy 3:11 teaches that the women workers must be worthy of respect. They may not be malicious talkers. They must be temperate, that is, modest with regard to their taste and behaviour. They must be trustworthy in everything. Thus, also the women workers (assistants, helpers), like the deacons, must be chosen on the basis of their character, behaviour and abilities.

7. The tasks of the women workers

Women *helped to support* Jesus Christ and his disciples in their ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Phoebe was *a helper or assistant* of the apostle Paul (Romans 16:1-2). Priscilla was *a fellow worker* of the apostle Paul (Romans 16:3-4). The women workers should be *assistants or helpers* of the deacons, especially in their task towards the poor and the needy (1 Timothy 3:11). The older women in the congregation set an example and trained the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, busy at home, kind and to be subject to their husbands (Titus 2:3-5).

A group of older widows in the congregation of Ephesus had special functions (1 Timothy 5:9-16). The early Church History relates that these women had the following functions: they gave advice and instruction to younger women, prayed with other women, visited the sick, prepared women for baptism and took them along to the Lord's Supper. They also cared for the widows and orphans that were supported by the congregation. Women generally perform these tasks, because they are much better equipped for these tasks than men!