

Democratic elements in the early Church¹

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1 Introduction

To designate the Christian community, the first Christians chose the Greek word *ekklēsia*, the term used in classical Greece to refer to the officially gathered political assembly.

In choosing the term *ekklēsia* early Christians were very probably influenced by its use in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew *qāhāl* (the assembly of the people) of Yahweh or of Israel.² It has been argued that another available term, *synagōgē*, which was also used in the Septuagint to translate *qāhāl* and more frequently the almost synonymous *ʿēdhāh*, was too much distinctively associated with the Greek-speaking Jewish communities and was thus put aside by the Christians.³

1. This is the second in a series of articles on the Catholic Church and democracy. The first appeared in *Melita Theologica* (2004/1). Bible quotations are from the *New Jerusalem bible*. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from official Church documents are taken from the English translation available at the official Vatican website (www.vatican.va) and those from the Fathers of the Church are taken from the *New Advent Catholic website* (www.newadvent.org/fathers).
2. See RAYMOND E. BROWN – CAROLYN OSIEK – PHEME PERKINS, *Early Church*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond E. Brown – Joseph A. Fitzmyer – Roland E. Murphy, Englewood Cliffs/NJ 1990, 1340. It is this link with the Greek translation of the Old Testament that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* assumes as the core factor in the choice of the term *ekklēsia* by the first Christian community, which thus “recognised itself as heir to that assembly [the assembly of the people of God in the Old Testament].” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 751.
3. ERIC G. JAY, *The Church. Its changing image through twenty centuries*, (The first seventeen centuries, London 1977, 7; LOTHAR COENEN, *Church; synagogue*, in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, translated from German, with additions and revision, under general editor Colin Brown, Grand Rapids/MI 1986, 297. Note, however, that Edward Schillebeeckx rejects this as a factor influencing the choice of the term *ekklēsia*. Schillebeeckx argues that early Christians remained, to varying degrees, associated with Judaism until their definitive expulsion by the Jews, an expulsion enshrined in the blessing against heretics inserted in Jewish daily prayers probably towards the end of the first century AD. See 146–154. However, *synagōgē* is used in the New Testament with reference to Christians only once in Jm 2, 2.

Even though one should not overlook these and perhaps other influencing factors,⁴ one must not neglect, on the other hand, the democratic undertones of the chosen term.

Although after the subjugation of Macedonia and Greece by the Romans, completed about 150 BC, the *ekklēsiai* of the Greek cities retained little of their former political power,⁵ the term *ekklēsia* still connoted to some extent the freedom and equality promised to all the citizens of the classical democratic city-state.⁶ Besides, throughout the Hellenistic world, *ekklēsia* always retained its political reference and was never used to refer to the cultic assembly gathered for worship. For the latter, other terms were employed.⁷ It can therefore be confidently asserted that at least in the case of gentile Christians, most of whom were not so well, or not at all, acquainted with the Old Testament context, the term *ekklēsia* was most probably understood in the light of its immediate secular derivation.

It can even be said that the promise of freedom and equality implied in the secular understanding of the term was even further accentuated in the early Christian communities where, as Paul asserts, there was to be no difference between Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female (see Gal 3, 28; 1 Cor 12, 13). Unlike the Greek city-state where only adult males who were citizens by birth shared political freedom and equality, in the Christian *ekklēsia* all shared the same freedom and equality in virtue of their baptism, which could be received by all who had faith in Jesus Christ. As will be seen in the coming section, this is not to say that in the community anybody or everybody could play any or every role at will or that there were no particular members entrusted with leadership roles.

In this article, I will be attempting to investigate some aspects of New Testament theology and early Church history, particularly those concerning the Church's structures of authority, in order to understand better and examine the fate of the basic freedom and equality in the Spirit belonging to all the members of the Christian *ekklēsia*. The freedom and equality in the Spirit referred to here are not identi-

4. See JAY, 7.

5. See *ibid.*, 5.

6. See ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *A discipleship of equals: ekklesial democracy and patriarchy in biblical perspective*, in *A democratic Catholic Church. The reconstruction of Roman Catholicism*, edited by Eugene C. Bianchi – Rosemary Radford Ruether, New York 1993, 19.

7. See COENEN, 291–292.

cal to the political freedom and equality understood as the foundational elements of secular democracy. However, while these evangelical values surely transcend any strictly political ideals, they do have political implications with regard to the internal government of the Church. This article will seek to explore the presence of such implications in the first centuries of the Church's existence.

2 Authority in the *ekklēsia* according to the New Testament

Although Vatican Council II made a huge contribution towards the recognition of authority in the Church as residing in all her members in virtue of their baptism and confirmation, it has been and is still often held — if not in theory, surely in practice — that authority in the Church resides exclusively with the hierarchy and that this has been so from the very beginning.⁸ Besides, as Thomas P. Rausch observes, there is also “the tendency to translate this exclusivist understanding of authority into a concept of power.”⁹ Ordained ministers are seen as having a special teaching, sanctifying, and governing power that is not enjoyed by other Christians.¹⁰ In 1906, basing himself on a particular interpretation of New Testament texts, Pius X stated thus:

It follows that the Church is essentially an **unequal** society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.¹¹

8. Edmund Hill calls this the “magisterial papalist view”. See EDMUND HILL, *Ministry and authority in the Church*, London 1988, 3–6.

9. THOMAS P. RAUSCH, *Authority and leadership in the Church. Past directions and future possibilities*, Wilmington/DE 1989, 31.

10. Avery Dulles calls this vision “institutionalist ecclesiology” in which members of the hierarchy have “the power to impose their doctrine with juridical and spiritual sanctions”; the power to open and shut “the valves of grace”; and to “govern the flock with pastoral authority, and as Christ’s viceregents impose new laws and precepts under pain of sin,” AVERY DULLES, *Models of the Church*, expanded edition, New York 1987, 37–38.

11. POPE PIUS X, Encyclical Letter *Vehementer nos* (11 February 1906) 8.

These words of Pius x stand in sharp contrast to the view of the Church as primarily a **discipleship of equals**.¹² This section will be dedicated to the analysis of New Testament texts to see whether in effect the early Church was “essentially an unequal society” where some had authority and the others had only to follow and obey, or else a communion of persons endowed with a basic equality and thus all sharing in the authority of their community. But before that, it will be necessary to examine those texts that are needed to understand correctly the kind of authority Jesus conferred to his followers.

2.1 *Authority as service*

The Greek word for authority mainly used in the New Testament is *exousia*. However, by his words and deeds Jesus redefines the term for his followers by paradoxically associating it with *diakonia*, a term that in its original secular usage meant waiting at the table. Therefore, while authority ordinarily means “the power or right to enforce obedience,”¹³ in other words the power to give commands and demand their implementation, Jesus radically recasts the idea of authority by linking it inextricably to what is practically its opposite: waiting on others, serving others, carrying out commands put forth by others.¹⁴ This vision of authority Jesus taught to his disciples comes forth clearly in a number of gospel passages.

What are probably the most relevant passages originate from a collection of sayings of Jesus on Christian leadership,¹⁵ which both Mark (Mk 10, 42–45) and Matthew (Mt 20, 25–28) present as the reply given by Jesus to the indignant reaction of the rest of the Twelve when James and John (or, in Matthew, their mother), during the journey towards Jerusalem, made their request for the highest places in the coming kingdom. Diversely, Luke (Lk 22, 25–27) puts it in the context of an argument between the Twelve during the Last Supper about who should be reckoned the greatest. The following is the text found in Mark.

12. I have borrowed the phrase “discipleship of equals” from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In her works Schüssler Fiorenza has repeatedly shown the aptness of this phrase in describing early Christian communities. See especially ELISABETH SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins*, New York 1989.

13. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, edited by R.E. Allen, Oxford 1991, 72.

14. See HILL, *Ministry and Authority*, 11–12.

15. See BENEDICT T. VIVIANO, *The gospel according to Matthew*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 663.

You know that among the gentiles those they call their rulers lord it over them, and their great men make their authority felt. Among you this is not to happen. No; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant [*diakonos*], and anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of man himself came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

In these sayings Jesus puts into sharp contrast authority as raw power to the new kind of authority he was ushering, authority understood as service.¹⁶ Luke's redaction even presents Jesus in the context of the immediate enactment of this teaching by Jesus himself — "... here am I among you as one who serves" — not only, as depicted in John (13, 4–15), by washing the Twelve's feet, but primarily by offering his very body and blood in the Eucharist, anticipating his offering on the cross.

Authority among Jesus' disciples, therefore, was not to be like that of the centurion who, although answerable to those above him, still could "say to one man, 'Go,' and he goes; to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; to [his] servant, 'Do this,' and he does it" (Mt 8, 9). As Edmund Hill concludes, according to Jesus, the "model of hierarchical authority, as stated so accurately and lucidly by the centurion, is in no way at all a model for authority in his kingdom, in any community of his followers, in his Church."¹⁷ As a discipleship of equals, the Church was to be free from structures of domination; leadership in the Church was to be rooted in solidarity.¹⁸

16. See DANIEL J. HARRINGTON, *The gospel according to Mark*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 619.

17. EDMUND HILL, *What does the New Testament say? in Priests and people* 11 (1997) 312. With reference to the rest of the Lucan text which promises that in the kingdom the twelve apostles "will sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk 22, 30), Hill warns against an anachronistic understanding of the word 'throne' as exclusively associated with royalty and marks out 'to judge' as the key word of the passage. He suggests that this word associates the apostles with the judges of ancient Israel who were essentially charismatic leaders of an egalitarian Israel organised in fraternal clans, "an Israel to which the idea of monarchy, in effect of a 'hierarchical society', was abhorrent." As to Jesus' call to Peter to be the one to strengthen his brothers (Lk 22, 32), while not denying Petrine/papal primacy, Hill underlines the context of rebuke in which this call is made (therefore the need of the constant conversion of Peter and his successors) and the point that Peter is called to strengthen his brothers and not his subjects. Peter is (and similarly his successors), in Pope Gregory the Great's words, *servus servorum Dei*, the servant of the servants of God. See HILL, *Ministry and authority*, 14–15.

18. See SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *In memory of her*, 148.

2.2 *Authority of all the baptised*

Having considered the kind of authority envisaged by Jesus, we will now turn to examine various New Testament texts that show whether in the early Christian communities, this authority was perceived as primarily pertaining only to a few selected persons within the community or else to the whole community, to each and every individual member of it. The first texts considered are one from the prologue of John and another from Paul's letter to the Galatians.

But to those who did accept him he gave power [*exousia*] to become children of God, to those who believed in his name, who were born not from human stock or human desire or human will, but from God himself (Jn 1, 12–13).

But when the completion of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject to the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, so that we could receive adoption as sons. As you are sons, God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son crying '*Abba, Father*'; and so you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir, by God's own act (Gal 4, 4–7).

These texts express the basic belief of the first Christians that in baptism they were assimilated to Christ, made like him, made sharers in all that is his. All are given the freedom of the children of God — freedom from the bondage of sin and from all that ensues therefrom, and above that, freedom for love and service, freedom for true life.¹⁹ All become sharers in the divine sonship of Christ, sharers in his authority as the Son of God — an authority lived out in terms of service/love. Baptism enables believers to exercise the authority that is ultimately God's, an authority which is exercised inasmuch as, on the image of Christ, we embody in our lives God — God who is Love.²⁰

Additionally, in First Peter (2, 9) the faithful are called "a chosen race, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation," and in Revelation (Rv 1, 6; 5, 10) it is said that believers are "a kingdom of priests" and "a line of kings and priests for God." Both priesthood and kingship are authority roles. All Christians share in Christ's priesthood and kingship, so all share in his priestly and royal authority.²¹

19. For an extensive commentary on this point, see HÄRING, *Free and faithful in Christ*, 1, 104–163.

20. On authority as embodiment of God, see MONICA BROWN, *Embodying the God we proclaim. Ministering as Jesus did*, Thornleigh/NSW 1996, 45. 63–65.

21. See HILL, *Ministry and authority*, 19–20.

The passage that perhaps best demonstrates how the first Christians exerted their share in the authority of Christ given to them in baptism is found in First Corinthians (12, 4–29). Here Paul writes about the many different gifts among the baptised, all gifts coming from the same Spirit and each and every gift to be used to serve the community as a whole, for the general good. Each gift, be it that of uttering words of wisdom or knowledge, that of healing or performing miracles, that of prophecy or speaking in tongues, and so on, brings with it the authority of Christ through the Spirit, an authority, but, which can only be exercised, Paul admonishes, as service for the good of the other members of the community.²² To emphasise his point, Paul presents the analogy of the human body where each part does its particular function in the body for the good of the whole.²³

It is practically an undisputable fact among biblical scholars that early Christian communities differed from each other very widely indeed and adopted very different kinds of community organisation.²⁴ Moreover, certain New Testament communities — especially so the Johannine communities — seemed to have very little interest in structures or institutional authority.²⁵ The various communities were initially much less structured than is sometimes thought and they too went through, like most other human societies that are in the initial phase of their existence, a period of what David J. Stagaman calls “liminality” — a stage where the community is a communion of equals, where the stress is on personal relationships and spontaneity, and any organisation that emerges is of a transitory nature.²⁶

The importance — in Paul’s view, an inordinate importance — some Christians

22. Paul is reacting to an egocentric competitiveness among Corinthian Christians endowed with different gifts that was detrimental to Church unity. Paul undermines any spiritual elitism by reminding the Corinthians that all had made the same baptismal confession “Jesus is Lord.” Any exercise of the share in the authority of Christ coming forth through the Spirit should follow the lessons of the life of the historical Jesus. See JEROME MURPHY-O’CONNOR, *The first letter to the Corinthians*, in *The New Jerome biblical commentary*, 810.

23. While Murphy-O’Connor interprets Paul’s analogy as referring literally to the human body, Schüssler Fiorenza interprets it politically as referring to the *polis*, the ‘body politic’ in which all members were interdependent. She concludes that no one in the *polis* of Christ “can claim to have a superior function because all functions are necessary and must be equally honoured for the building up of the ‘corporation.’ Solidarity and collaboration are the ‘civic’ virtues in the *politeuma* of Christ, which is best characterised as a pneumatic or charismatic democracy.” See MURPHY-O’CONNOR, 810; SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA, *A discipleship of equals*, 20.

24. See HILL, *Ministry and Authority*, 26–27.

25. See RAYMOND E. BROWN, *The Churches the Apostles left behind*, New York – Ramsey/NJ 1984, 84–109.

at Corinth were attaching to certain gifts (especially the gift of tongues) may show a natural movement in this particular community towards a more structured organisation, albeit one still very fluid and perhaps too much unreliably pneumatic. In ranking “first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers,” followed by the other gifts/ministries (1 Cor 12, 28), Paul attempts to give this development a more rational and durable direction to ensure faithfulness to the traditions received from the past as well as the furtherance of the community into the future. Later, in a scenario where the apostles were no more, and the danger of corruption by false teachers loomed large, the remedy applied would be a more regularised structuration as is evident in the post-Pauline Pastoral letters, which provide us with what is probably our fullest picture of structure in some of the early Christian communities.²⁷

The fact that the need arose to attach clearly identifiable leadership roles to certain gifts/ministries in the Church rather than others, is not in itself contradictory to what has been said above about the equal share of all the baptised in Christ’s authority/service. It can even be envisaged as a development that could enable the faithful to exercise freely their authority/service in a context of trust and confidence, which trust and confidence are easily lost when there is no authority to provide unity of action in community.²⁸ Nevertheless, as Church history amply demonstrates, the more structure (or institution) was allowed to prevail in its dialectical interrelationship with liminality (or charism),²⁹ the greater has been the danger of understanding authority as “lording it over” rather than service, and to concentrate this kind of authority in the hands of a small elite of hierarchs. A warning against this fault, and therefore probably an indirect allusion to its occurrence in early Christian communities, can be found in Matthew (Mt 23, 5–10) as well as in First Peter (1 P 5, 1–4).³⁰ While the role of structure in the Church should be recognised, it must repeatedly be questioned according to how much it is allowing the faithful grow in what is really essential: their *koinōnia* (communion) with God as well as with fellow men and women of which Paul’s human body analogy is a brilliant exemplification.³¹

26. See DAVID J. STAGAMAN, *Authority in the Church*, Collegeville/MN 1999, 9.

27. See BROWN – OSIEK – PERKINS, 1344–45; STAGAMAN, 71.

28. On the relationship between authority and freedom for, see STAGAMAN, 35–38.

29. See *ibid.*, 11.

30. See RAUSCH, 55.

31. As Avery Dulles states, “the structures of the Church must be seen as subordinate to its communal life and mission,” and “of their very nature ... institutions are subordinate to persons,” DULLES, *Models of the Church*, 194–195. 198.

2.3 *The authority of Peter and the Twelve*

Biblical scholars hold that when, during his earthly ministry, Jesus chose the Twelve his intention was not to structure hierarchically the future Church but to symbolically show that he intended to renew Israel (which already had an organised religion) by choosing twelve men to represent the twelve patriarchs, thus symbolising the eschatological reconstitution of the twelve tribes of Israel.³² Most exegetes and ecclesialogists would basically agree with Hans Küng that while the Church “stands or falls by its links with its origins in Jesus Christ, ... in the pre-Easter period, during his lifetime, Jesus did not found a Church ... [but] by his preaching and ministry, [he] laid the foundations for the emergence of a post-resurrection Church.”³³ The question whether the various texts traditionally quoted to support the contrary view — that is, that Jesus did intentionally found a hierarchically-structured Church during his earthly ministry — go back to the historical Jesus or else result from the retrojection of post-Easter Church life, need not be tackled here. What concerns us here is the historically undisputed fact that the Twelve, and Peter in particular, did enjoy a central role in the Church from very early on, irrespectively of whether the historical Jesus explicitly and intentionally prepared them for it or not. It is the exercise of the Twelve’s authority, and particularly Peter’s, in the context of what has been said above about the authority of all the baptised, that will be discussed. This discussion will be primarily based on what is attested to in Acts.

The first episode that depicts Peter taking a leadership role in Acts is when he stood up to call for the replacement of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1, 15–26). Peter’s primacy stands out: he is the one earmarked by Jesus “to strengthen [his] brothers” (Lk 22, 32) and so he is the one who takes the initiative and gives direction to the community, but Peter, faithful to his commission, regards the members of the community not as his subjects but as his brothers. He thus involves the community in the choice and it is the community (about a hundred and twenty, including women)³⁴ that selected the two candidates. It seems that both candidates were equally worthy of the post and thus, praying for the Lord’s intervention, the

32. See BROWN – OSIEK – PERKINS, 1340; LEONARDO BOFF, *Ecclesiology. The Base Communities reinvent the Church*, New York 1997, 51–52; see also note 17 *supra*.

33. HANS KÜNG, *The Church*, London 1968, 15. 72. 74.

34. RUDOLF SCHNACKENBURG, *Community co-operation in the New Testament*, in *Election — consensus — reception*, edited by Giuseppe Alberigo – Anton Weiler (= *Concilium* 7/8), London 1972, 10–11.

community left the final choice to lots — a fair, non-discriminatory method of election.³⁵

A similar event, but one in which it is the Twelve, rather than Peter on his own, that act as leaders is the institution of the Seven (Acts 6, 1–6). Luke reports that the Twelve called a full meeting of the community and proposed that the brothers select seven men from among themselves. The Twelve did not impose their position: it was the community that approved the proposal and then acted thereupon. The Twelve, through the laying of hands, then confirmed the choice of the community.³⁶

After baptising the first gentiles in the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius, Peter had to justify his conduct in front of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who protested against what he had done (Acts 11, 1–18). What one should note in this episode is that Peter does not dispute the right of the members of the community to call him to account for an important decision he had made on his own authority.

He acknowledges, implicitly, that as a man, as one of the brethren, he is responsible or answerable to the brotherhood for his exercise of the authority, which he has indeed received from Christ and not from the brotherhood, but which he has received for the sake of the brotherhood and exercises within the brotherhood. This is because the brotherhood has also received authority from Christ — and not from Peter.³⁷

35. Incidentally, the casting of lots was preferred in classical democracy for its provision of equal chances to all. However, I am not claiming here that the Christian community consciously opted for the casting of lots inspired by the principles of classical democracy. Rather, it is clear that the community was influenced by what was a customary Jewish practice in the temple cult.
36. Richard J. Dillon says that this passage is the product of later reflection. It seems that the Seven were already regarded as leaders by a segment of the Church in Jerusalem and Luke's redaction is an attempt to show the Seven as subordinate to the Twelve, obtaining the lesser ministry of table service by the imposition of the Twelve's hands. Indeed, the imposition of hands is an ecclesiastical practice of Luke's own time. See RICHARD J. DILLON, *Acts of the Apostles*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 739–740. See also RAYMOND E. BROWN, *Priest and bishop. Biblical reflections*, London – Dublin – Melbourne 1971, 56–57. Nevertheless, these exegetical conclusions do not affect the argument made: in the early Church — here in Luke's community, if not in the Jerusalem Church — the authority of leaders was to be exercised in a way fully consonant with the authority belonging to all the members of the community in virtue of their baptism.
37. HILL, *Ministry and authority*, 30.

In the so-called Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15, 1–35), Peter is the one depicted as of decisive influence in settling down the conflict between the pro-circumcision Jewish Christians and the Hellenistic Christians represented by Paul and Barnabas. Confrontation with Paul's account of the Jerusalem meeting (Gal 2, 1–10) indicates that the intervention of James, not one of the Twelve but a close relative of Jesus and the leader of the Jewish community, was probably the response to a later historical incident, which has been inserted here by Luke for redactional purposes.³⁸ Nevertheless, for our purposes, what's important to note in this passage is Luke's reference to the involvement of the whole community in the proceedings, or at least in their approval, when he tells us that "the apostles and elders, **with the whole Church**, decided to choose delegates from among themselves to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 15, 22).

From the chosen passages, it is clear that the kind of authority Acts depicts as pertaining to Church leaders is in accordance with the understanding of authority as service found in the Gospels and with the vision of authority as belonging not exclusively to Church leaders, but to all the members of the community in virtue of their baptism. The authority of leaders is seen "in horizontal terms, as an adjunct of mutual service among brethren."³⁹ We have evidence that important decisions in the early Church were never to be taken in an authoritarian fashion. Rather, the whole community was to be somehow involved in such decisions, an involvement that supports the claim that the early Church was much more democratic than our hierarchical vision of it permits us to perceive. While it would be too much to claim that the Church was in the strict (classical or modern) sense a democracy, it is also extravagant to claim that she was from the beginning a centralised hierarchical structure, and as Schillebeeckx concludes in his survey of ministry in the New Testament, "the essential apostolic structure of the community and therefore of the ministry of its leaders has nothing to do with what ... is called the 'hierarchical' structure of the Church ... except in a very inauthentic sense."⁴⁰ Rather than a democracy or a hierarchical structure, the Church was more "something in between."⁴¹ The primitive Church was "a community of brothers [and sisters] subject to the same Lord and [committed] to mutual service of each other."⁴²

38. See DILLON, 751.

39. ROBERT MARKUS, *Recovering the Ancient Tradition*, in *Priests and people* 11 (1997) 317.

40. EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX, *Church. The human story of God*, London 1990, 121.

41. SIGMUND, 218.

42. SCHNACKENBURG, 17.

3 *Sub-apostolic structuration*⁴³

As already referred to above, the New Testament itself attests to the fact that, in order to preserve the apostolic tradition amidst the dangers of false teachings, there was a move towards the institutionalisation of what had been initially an essentially charismatic leadership. The leadership roles that were becoming institution-alised are referred to by three different words: *presbyteros* (elder, presbyter), *episkopos* (supervisor, overseer, bishop),⁴⁴ and *diakonos* (servant, deacon). There is no mention of these specific terms in Paul's authentic letters except for a passing reference made to the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* of the Church in Philippi (Phil 1, 1) and the use of the term *diakonos* in reference to a certain Phoebe, a woman from Cenchreae (Rom 16, 1). In all probability, Paul's use of these terms is still quite remote from their use in the later Church.⁴⁵ The term *presbyteros* is employed (with reference to its use in the Christian community and often in the plural form *presbyteroi*) on various occasions in Acts, as well as in Second and Third John, First Peter, and James, albeit with different nuances.⁴⁶ Of the Pastoral Letters, First Timothy mentions all three terms, while in Titus we find *episkopos* and *presbyteros*.

Except for Acts — where *episkopoi* is used once and then merely to refer to the *presbyteroi* of Ephesus themselves (Acts 20, 28) — only Titus and First Timothy use both *episkopos* and *presbyteros* together. Most exegetes agree that in the post-Pauline communities of these letters the terms are practically interchangeable and

43. Following Raymond E. Brown's position, "sub-apostolic" here refers to the last one-third of the first century, that is to the period following the death of Peter, Paul, and James, the three apostles (apostles here is used in a wider sense than that limiting the term to the Twelve) about whom we have detailed New Testament knowledge. It is the period during which, apart from the authentic Pauline letters, most of the New Testament was written. See BROWN, *The Churches the apostles left behind*, 13–16.

44. I will intentionally keep using the Greek term *episkopos* (and for consistency *presbyteros* and *diakonos* too) and avoid its English translation "bishop" until *episkopos* starts to mean something closer to our understanding of bishop — the supreme leader of the Christian community of a particular area — than it originally did.

45. See BRENDAN BYRNE, *The letter to the Philippians*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 793; JOSEPH A. FITZMYER, *The letter to the Romans*, in *The new Jerome biblical commentary*, 867. Luke's reference to presbyters in Pauline communities (see Acts 14, 23; 20, 17) seems to be a reading back of the contemporary Church structure familiar to Luke. See DILLON, 750.

46. While, for example, in the Johannine letters the presbyter authoring the letters claims no authority of himself, First Peter and James acknowledge that presbyters have what may be called disciplinary (1 Pt 5, 5) and sacramental authority (Jm 5, 14).

refer to persons who as a group — as already noted, reference to them is generally in the plural — were responsible for the pastoral care of their communities.⁴⁷ Probably the title *presbyteros*, which may have found its way into Christianity through its use in the Jewish synagogues, denoted the status of these leaders, while *episkopos*, a term widely used among the Greeks,⁴⁸ denoted their function (or at least the function of some of them)⁴⁹ in the community:⁵⁰ they had to oversee the religious and moral behaviour of the members of their community, care for the needy, and ensure sound doctrine. As regards the *diakonoï*, it is not clear, from the Pastoral Letters, what they did as distinct from the *presbyteroi/episkopoi*.⁵¹ It is very probable, however, that unlike in the case of the *presbyteroi/episkopoi*, and as some take the reference in Romans to Phoebe of Cenchreae to suggest, there were also women deacons.⁵²

Raymond E. Brown has noted that the authority of the *presbyteroi/episkopoi* to control teaching went against the democratic sense of freedom of thought and expression that prevailed in the earlier pneumatic communities. Brown explains that this kind of authority was and still is admissible in difficult moments “when theological freedom threatens to become anarchy,” but as the same author points out, such moments are rare.⁵³ The doctrinal crisis situation caused by Gnostic teachers demanded, so to speak, the suspension in the communities of the Pastoral Letters of earlier more democratic customs. What is unfortunate is that this suspension was to

47. See BROWN, *Priest and bishop*, 35, 65.

48. Note, however, Raymond E. Brown’s observation that comparison with Qumran evidence suggests that the overseeing function of the *presbyteroi/episkopoi* may have its origins in sectarian Judaism. See *ibid.*, 67–69. On the other hand, Schillebeeckx remarks that the term *presbyteros* was well known for civic functions in Hellenistic cities and maintains that the Christian use of this title was based on its civic use in the Roman-Hellenistic empire. See SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Church with a human face*, 126.

49. See BROWN, *The Church the Apostles left behind*, 33.

50. See HILL, *Ministry and authority*, 32. Luke’s single use of the term *episkopoi* in Acts 20, 28 employed for the *presbyteroi* of Ephesus seems to confirm this suggestion.

51. See BROWN – OSIEK – PERKINS, 1345.

52. See ROBERT A. WILD, *The pastoral letters*, in *The new Jerome biblical commentary*, 897. Like most exegetes, here I take *presbyteras* in 1 Tm 5, 2 not to refer to women presbyters; like *presbytero* in the previous verse, it has to do only with difference in age. See, for example, *Le Epistole Pastorali di San Paolo a Timoteo e a Tito* (= La Sacra Bibbia), with exegetical notes by Pietro di Ambroggi, Torino – Roma ²1964, 152–153. However, note that Raymond E. Brown does not rule out completely the possibility that the text refers to women presbyters. See RAYMOND E. BROWN, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible*, New York – Ramsey/NJ 1981, 141–142.

53. See BROWN, *The Church the apostles left behind*, 39.

become practically permanent, often leading to the suffocation of much needed new constructive insights into the deposit of faith received from the apostles.⁵⁴

The more egalitarian Christian communities of the Johannine tradition maintained their emphasis on the basic equality of all the baptised well into the sub-apostolic period. For these Christians what mattered was one's own loving relationship to Jesus; what counted was not charisms or offices, but discipleship, a status that all Christians enjoy.⁵⁵ When a certain Diotrephes probably sought to introduce among Johannine Christians a type of leadership similar to that of the *presbyteroi/episkopoi* of other churches, the author of Third John shows contempt for the love of power of he "who enjoys being in charge" (3 Jn 9).⁵⁶ However, eventually, those Johannine Christians who wanted to avoid the fate of their former brothers and sisters who ended drifting off into Gnosticism, had to accept the structuration of the Pastoral Letters, which by then had become representative of mainstream Christianity. Chapter 21 of John, a later addition to the original Gospel text, attests to this accommodation on the part of Johannine Christians to the kind of authority exercised by *presbyteroi/episkopoi* in the other churches. Yet, even then, this authority is limited by Johannine qualifications — eminent love of Jesus and readiness to lay down one's life for him and the community are necessary pre-conditions.⁵⁷

4 *Post-apostolic developments*⁵⁸

Evidence of the transition from the less-structured charismatic ministries to the institution of the *presbyteroi/episkopoi* is found also in extra-canonical documents. In the *Didache*, probably a composite work written in the late first or early second century,⁵⁹ the authority of charismatic apostles, prophets, and teachers is still attested to, but so is the need to verify their authenticity amidst the dangers of false

54. See *ibid.*, 40–41.

55. See *ibid.*, 90–95.

56. See *ibid.*, 99; PHEME PERKINS, *The Johannine epistles*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 995.

57. See BROWN, *The Church the apostles left behind*, 93. 123; SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Church with a human face*, 99.

58. "Post-apostolic" refers to the period beginning at the end of the first century when we start having Christian writings put forth on their own authority, rather than claiming the direct mantle of the apostles. BROWN, *The Churches the apostles left behind*, 16.

59. See BROWN – OSIEK – PERKINS, 1348.

teachings.⁶⁰ The suggestion is thus that the community appoints *episkopoi* and *diakonoi*, for these “also render to [the community] the service of prophets and teachers,”⁶¹ but, compared to the latter represented a more stable point of reference, given their residential status within the community. The author’s appeal that *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* be honoured together with the prophets and teachers may denote a certain resistance in the addressed communities to the introduction of these formal ministries.⁶²

In the letter sent by the Church of Rome to the Church of Corinth, generally dated to the last decade of the first century, the words *presbyteros* and *episkopos* still refer to the same order of ministry.⁶³ Though there is no reference in the text to the author, it has been traditionally attributed to Clement, a key-figure in the Roman Church.⁶⁴ It speaks against the overthrow of the *presbyteroi/episkopoi* of the Corinthian Church and defends the ousted leaders by setting forth the idea of apostolic succession:

[The apostles] appointed those already mentioned [*episkopoi* and *diakonoi*], and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry. We are of opinion, therefore, that those appointed by them, or afterwards by other eminent men, with the consent of the whole Church, and who have blamelessly served the flock of Christ in a humble, peaceable, and disinterested spirit, and have for a long time possessed the good opinion of all, cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry.⁶⁵

60. *The Didache. The Lord’s teaching through the twelve apostles to the nations*, xi.

61. *Ibid.*, xv.

62. See SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Church with a human face*, 91.

63. See JAY, 32. 219.

64. See BROWN – OSIEK – PERKINS, 1347. Although Clement has been considered from early on (for example by Irenaeus in the late second century) as the bishop of Rome (in the monarchical sense), this is highly improbable both from the internal evidence of this document as well as from that of Ignatius’ *Letter to the Romans*. In fact, as said above, in Clement’s *Letter to the Corinthians* the terms *presbyteroi* and *episkopoi* are still used interchangeably. In Ignatius’ *Letter to the Romans*, while exceptional respect is shown to the Church of Rome, no mention is made of its bishop. When one considers that in all of his other letters Ignatius gives great importance to the single bishop at the head of all the community (see *infra*), one must conclude that in all probability Rome was still governed by a college of *presbyteroi/episkopoi*.

65. CLEMENT OF ROME, *Letter to the Corinthians*, XLIV.

Thus, as clearly seen in the passage above, while Clement's letter unequivocally attacks the action of the Corinthian usurpers, it also upholds the democratic element of the community's participation in the choice of their leaders: one of the marks distinguishing a rightful bearer of office was his appointment "with the consent of the whole Church."

About twenty years later, when Ignatius of Antioch wrote his letters to various Churches on his way to martyrdom in Rome (which took place before 117 AD), the institutionalisation of leadership roles had developed, at least in certain communities, into what may be termed monarchical episcopacy. In six of his seven extant authentic letters, Ignatius emphasises the role of the *episkopos* (in the singular) as the supreme leader of the community and distinct from both the *presbyteroi* and the *diakonoi*.⁶⁶ The only exception is his letter to the Romans. The Church of Rome was still, almost certainly, governed in the old way by a college of *presbyteroi/episkopoi*.⁶⁷

In Ignatius, *episkopos* no longer describes the overseeing function of the presbyters, but refers to a ministry in its own right, in effect it is used to refer to what we may term in the modern sense the bishop, the undisputed leader of the community who is clearly above the presbyters and the deacons. Ignatius' constant insistence on submission to the bishop has been seen as evidence that mono-episcopacy was a recent development, which Ignatius wanted to reinforce.⁶⁸ Throughout the second century there was a progressive universalisation of mono-episcopacy until by the end of the second century it prevailed throughout the whole Church.

The struggle against Montanism,⁶⁹ with its emphasis on ecstatic prophecy, and against other sectarians like the Gnostic Valentinians,⁷⁰ who rejected all ecclesiastical authority to promote what can be termed an elitist egalitarianism, served to strengthen even more the authority of the bishops in the mainstream Church.⁷¹ This can be easily seen when one looks at Irenaeus' *Adversus haereses* in which he attributed great weight to the episcopal office and episcopal succession in his defence of the

66. See IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Letter to the Ephesians*, IV–VI; ID., *Letter to the Magnesians*, III–VIII; ID., *Letter to the Trallians*, II, VIII; ID., *Letter to the Philadelphians*, II–IV, VII–VIII; ID., *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, VIII–IX; ID., *Letter to Polycarp*, V–VI.

67. See HILL, *Ministry and authority*, 10, 35.

68. See JAY, 37.

69. The emergence of Montanism goes back to around 156 AD.

70. Valentinus, the founder of this sect died around 160/161 AD.

71. See RAUSCH, 56–57, 60.

rule of faith.⁷² Nevertheless, notwithstanding their growing authority, given that during the second and third centuries communities continued to be comparatively small, bishops remained by and large representative of the faith of their congregations. As will be seen in the following section, the faithful played an effective role in the election of their bishop. Besides, in the context of small, closely-knit communities, a bishop depended a lot on the confidence and support of his congregation to keep on in his office.⁷³

5 *The election of bishops in the Church*

As already referred to above, the *Didache* and Clement's *Letter to the Corinthians* both give witness to the fact that at the end of the first century, the *presbyteroi/episkopoi* who formed the presbyteral college which governed the local community, were appointed by the faithful, or at least with their involvement. Even as authority became concentrated more and more in the hands of individual bishops, the practice of election by the community was maintained.

In the *Traditio Apostolica* of Hippolytus of Rome, written around 215, we find ample evidence of the growing tendency to refer to bishops and presbyters in sacerdotal terminology, a tendency that easily lent itself to a new ecclesiology in which the Church is seen as essentially a hierarchical body, with a sharp distinction between the clergy and the laity.⁷⁴ In what constitutes our earliest information about the consecration of bishops, only bishops have the right to consecrate another bishop (or ordain presbyters and deacons). In episcopal consecration, while one of the bishops present lays his hands on the ordinand,⁷⁵ all the others, including the presbyters, keep silent. Nevertheless, at the same time, it is made clear that a new bishop is "chosen by all the people."⁷⁶ The proposed person has to be "pleasing to all," and all present must give their assent.⁷⁷

Cyprian of Carthage highly exalts the priestly role of bishops and presbyters in

72. See IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Adversus haereses*, III, 3, 1–4.

73. See HILL, *Ministry and authority*, 37.

74. See JAY, 58.

75. The presence of bishops from neighbouring communities marks the sense of universal communion in the early Church.

76. HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME, *The Apostolic Tradition II: The faith of the Early Fathers*, *IA* source-book of theological and historical passages from the Christian writings of the Pre-Nicene and Nicene eras, edited by William A. Jurgens, Collegeville/MN 1970, 166.

77. See *ibid.*

the Church and vehemently defends the power of the bishop in his own community, incontestable from within and without the community.⁷⁸ In the context of the Novatianist schism, Cyprian even asserted that “the bishop is in the Church, and the Church in the bishop; and if any one be not with the bishop, ... he is not in the Church.”⁷⁹ However, he too attests to the role of the people in the choice of their ecclesiastical leaders. He declares it is by divine ordinance that the priest (*sacerdos*) “should be chosen in the presence of the people under the eyes of all, and should be approved worthy and suitable by public judgment and testimony.”⁸⁰ The people even have the authority to depose unworthy priests.⁸¹ Here Cyprian’s “priest/s” refers to the bishop/s: he is writing in 256, together with thirty-six other bishops, to support the people and clergy in Spain who deposed and replaced two lapsed bishops.

Cyprian explains that the participation of the people in the choice of their bishop is important because they are the ones “who have most fully known the life of each one, and have looked into the doings of each one as respects his habitual conduct.”⁸² As in Hippolytus, it is therefore the whole Church that decides on the worthiness of a person to enter episcopal ministry. The apostolicity of the Church was believed to reside primarily in the community. So, because the bishop’s role implied responsibility for the community and its apostolicity, the community had to first examine the apostolic foundation of his faith.⁸³ The authority attached to this ministry is thus, in a way, though not exclusively so, an expression of the authority given by the Spirit to the whole Church.

The question remains as to how did the people actually participate in the election of their bishop. Cyprian’s indication in this regard is that, at least in some cases, the people participated actively by voting (as the Roman faithful did in the appointment of their bishop, Pope Cornelius).⁸⁴ Even if there were also cases where the role of the people may have been restricted to acclaiming the bishop-elect, it seems that in the first centuries congregational franchise was usually an essential feature in the appointment of bishops.⁸⁵ It must be mentioned here that the fourth canon of the

78. See, for example, CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, *Epistles* LXIV, LXXI.

79. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, *Epistles* LXVIII, 8.

80. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, *Epistles* LXVII, 4.

81. See *ibid.*, 3.

82. *Ibid.*, 5.

83. See SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Church with a human face*, 134.

84. PETER STOCKMEIER, *Election of bishops by clergy and people*, in *Electing our own bishops*, edited by Peter Huizing – Knut Walf (= Concilium 1980/7), Edinburgh – New York 1980, 6.

85. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

Council of Nicaea (325) makes no mention of public participation in the election of bishops and instead assigns the right to choose a bishop to the other bishops of the province and the final confirmation of the choice to the metropolitan.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, in practice the people continued to have a say in the choice of their bishops well into the Post-Constantinian era, even though in various areas, as David Stagaman points out, the elective power of the people was becoming more and more negative: “they could reject a candidate deemed unsuitable or settle disputes among the clergy when they offered more than one potential bishop.”⁸⁷

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, compiled towards the end of the fourth century, ascribe apostolic authority to the precept that a bishop must be chosen by the people.⁸⁸ Furthermore, in about 446, we find Pope Leo the Great (440–461) writing:

The election of a bishop must proceed by the wishes of the clergy and people. When therefore the choice of the chief priest is taken in hand, let him be preferred before all whom the unanimous consent of clergy and people demands, but if the votes chance to be divided between two persons, the judgment of the metropolitan should prefer him who is supported by the preponderance of votes and merits: only let no one be ordained against the express wishes of the place: lest a city should either despise or hate a bishop whom they did not choose, and lamentably fall away from religion because they have not been allowed to have when they wished.⁸⁹

When one considers that, by the time Pope Leo I was writing, the Church’s hierarchical structure had become very much more pronounced, and that Leo himself promoted strongly the notion of papal primacy, it is very significant that this pope defends the principle that “he who is to govern all, should be chosen by all,” and considers it as pertaining to the rules of the Fathers.⁹⁰

86. See COUNCIL OF NICAEA I, *Canons* IV.

87. STAGAMAN, 80.

88. *Apostolic Constitutions*, VIII, 4. While this work deliberately sought to deceive by pretending to be of apostolic origin and was condemned by the Quinisext Council of Constantinople in 692 as “falsified by heretics,” it is nevertheless the largest extant collection of legislative and liturgical material of so early a date. See *The faith of the Early Fathers*, II/A source-book of theological and historical passages from the Christian writings of the Post-Nicene and Constantinopolitan eras through St Jerome, edited by William A. Jurgens, Collegeville/MN 1979, 127–128.

89. POPE LEO THE GREAT, *Letters* XIV, 6.

90. See POPE LEO THE GREAT, *Letters* X, 6. 4.

The gradual abandonment of public participation in the election of bishops was mainly the result of the growing number of malpractices and political intrigues involved in the process as the episcopal office grew in prestige and political importance. Opposing factions sometimes resorted to extremely unchristian measures: in 366, for instance, the election of Damasus as bishop of Rome (and thereby pope) was marred by violence and bloodshed.⁹¹ In *The priesthood*, John Chrysostom gives ample evidence of the existence of factious machinations in the election of bishops towards the end of the fourth century.

For all who have the privilege of conferring the honour are then split into many parties... they do not all look to one thing, which ought to be the only object kept in view, the excellence of the character; but other qualifications are alleged as recommending to this honour; for instance, of one it is said, "let him be elected because he belongs to an illustrious family," of another "because he is possessed of great wealth, and would not need to be supported out of the revenues of the Church," of a third "because he has come over from the camp of the adversary;" one is eager to give the preference to a man who is on terms of intimacy with himself, another to the man who is related to him by birth, a third to the flatterer, but no one will look to the man who is really qualified, or make some test of his character.⁹²

In 426, Augustine of Hippo, apprehensive of the disturbances that might be caused in his Church by ambitious groups after his own demise, sought to prevent problems by nominating his successor. He, however, still strongly believed that his proposal required the approval of the people.⁹³

With time, as episcopal appointments became ever more closely linked to the hierarchy, only nominal vestiges of popular participation were left.⁹⁴ According to Edward Schillebeeckx, the change in the way bishops were elected also followed the general trend in the civil sphere where participation of the people in decisions

91. See THOMAS J. SHAHAN, *Pope St Damasus I*, in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* (on-line) : <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04613a.htm> [16 June 2003]; EAMON DUFFY, *Saints and Sinners. A History of the Popes*, New Haven/CT – London 1997, 25.

92. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *The priesthood* III, 15.

93. See AUGUSTINE, *Letters* CCXIII, 1.

94. See STOCKMEIER, 8.

about city government saw a gradual suppression in favour of a more centralised administration.⁹⁵ Later, in the Middle Ages, the widespread interference of secular rulers in the choice of bishops and other ecclesiastical office bearers would lead to a frontal attack by the papacy against any lay interference in spiritual matters. Although secular leaders never claimed to choose bishops in the name of the people, the abuses and corruption associated with such appointments definitely undermined the cause of lay participation in the election of bishops.

By the time Gratian wrote his *Decretum* (around the year 1140) bishops were to be elected by the clergy, the people had only to consent.⁹⁶ In the 1917 *Code of Canon Law*, full discretion in the nomination of bishops was attributed to the Roman pontiff, and if a chapter or any moral person retained the right of election this was only by virtue of a concession.⁹⁷ Of course, the history that led to the developments we find in the *Decretum* and the history of what we find in the 1917 *Code of Canon Law* are both long. There is, however, a common factor in both: developments are the result not of theological growth, but they rather can always be explained by reference to the intricate relationship between the Church and political authorities.⁹⁸

Some commentators when dealing with the popular election of bishops in the early centuries of the Church tend to refrain from imputing democratic terminology to this ancient Church practice — a self-imposed restraint that usually betrays an improper understanding of what democracy really stands for.⁹⁹ Of course, nobody contemporary to this practice would have called it democratic: besides the fact that the term “democracy” had long fallen into disrepute, in classical democracy elections were not even considered a democratic procedure — they were regarded as

95. See SCHILLEBEECKX, *The Church with a human face*, 147–149.

96. See JEAN GAUDEMET, *Bishops: from election to nomination*, in *Electing our own bishops*, 10.

97. See *Codex iuris canonici* (1917), canon 329, 2–3.

98. See HERVÉ-MARIE LEGRAND, *Theology and the election of bishops in the early Church*, in *Election – consensus – reception*, 34.

99. Peter Stockmeier, for example, is of the opinion that the question about the election of bishops should not be bound up with the debate about the democratisation of the Church. His understanding of democracy is based on the assumption that democracy implies that the people are the source of all authority. See STOCKMEIER, 3. Hervé-Marie Legrand too says that the election of bishops should not be conceived as a democratic election. Legrand understands the latter to be simply an election in which everyone votes according to his interest or free choice. Nevertheless, it is significant that Legrand feels it important to clarify that his refusal to associate the election of bishops with liberal democracy “is not to prejudice the meaning to be given to the ‘democratisation of the Church’.” See LEGRAND, 38. 40–41.

essentially aristocratic in their nature because it was held that those who, due to their wealth, family links, and so on, were influential in the community, were always at an advantage above the rest. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that, keeping in mind the understanding of democracy as a vision based on freedom and equality of the members of a community, popular participation in the election of bishops in the early Church was indeed a feature that can be regarded as a basic democratic element, of course within the boundaries of the theological understanding of the Church as the people of God. The practice shows that in the early Church it was believed that the Spirit could work through all the faithful alike, without distinction, even when it came to the choice of ecclesiastical leaders. The Spirit could and did choose the community's leaders through the participation of each and every member of the same community. Public participation in the election of bishops was an expression of the basic equality of the baptised and of the authority endowed by God to the Church as a whole. When writing in this regard, Giuseppe Alberigo observes that what had been the case for a long time, can be the case again.¹⁰⁰

6 Conclusion

The vision of authority held and taught by Jesus, the New Testament evidence of the freedom and equality enjoyed by all the baptised in the primitive Church, and the centuries-long custom of the participation of the faithful in the selection of their Church leaders are among the important indicators that should make us consider seriously various essential questions about the nature of the Church and her government. It is my belief that the theological and practical (pastoral and canonical) import of freedom and equality of all the members of the Church, as well as its practical implications for Church leadership, should be analysed deeply.

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100. See GIUSEPPE ALBERIGO, *Ecclesiology and democracy: convergences and divergences*, in *The tabu of democracy within the Church*, edited by James Provost – Knut Walf (= Concilium 1992/5), London 1992, 16–17.