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Apostolicity and Ministry

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CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Apostolicity and Ministry
REGINALD H. FULLER

Apostolicity and Ministry: A Lutheran View
CARL S. MEYER

The One Eucharist for the One World
ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

Homiletics

Book Review

Vol. XLIII

February

Number 2



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Apostolicity and Ministry

REGINALD H. FULLER

The author is Baldwin Professor of Sacred Literature at Union Theological Seminary, New York, N. Y.

THIS ARTICLE WAS DELIVERED IN SUBSTANTIALLY THIS FORM AT THE EPISCOPAL-LUTHERAN dialog on April 15, 1971, together with the one by Dr. Carl S. Meyer. Dr. Fuller surveys the evidence of the New Testament and concludes that the historic episcopate belongs to the essential marks of the church in the same way that the authoritative, historical canon of the Word does.

It would be possible to approach the subject of apostolicity and ministry from a systematic perspective, a church-historical perspective, or a New Testament point of view. In previous contributions to dialogs, on both the national and the international level, I have donned, as an amateur, the mantle of a church historian, chiefly because it enabled me to present a specifically Anglican account of the issues in question. Here, however, I have chosen to deal with the subject as a New Testament scholar. My reason for doing this is that this subject above all is burdened with a history of tendentious apologetic, especially on the Anglican side.

In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed we confess our belief in¹ one holy, catho-

¹ The Prayer Book version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed reads: "I believe one holy catholic and apostolic church." This followed the Latin. The Latin of the *Missale Romanum* has *et unam sanctum* The original Greek text is *eis mian* (See T. Bindley, *The Oecumenical Documents of the Faith* 4th ed. rev. by F. W. Green [London: Methuen and Co., 1950].) But in both the Latin and the Greek texts this statement is included under the single *pisteuomen* of the article on the Holy Spirit (*contra* the ICET text). Belief "in" the church is not a belief in the church itself, but of the church as the work of the Holy Spirit.

lic, and apostolic church. Apostolicity, along with unity, holiness, and catholicity (=universality and wholeness) is here acknowledged as one of the essential *notae ecclesiae*. What light does the New Testament throw on this confession?

Modern critical scholarship recognizes that the New Testament is a pluralistic book. The various authors do not speak with a single voice on any theological topic, save on their central witness to Jesus Christ as the saving act of God. Besides the variety of individual authors, there are also three main strata in the New Testament writings: the Jesus tradition, the apostolic church, and the subapostolic church. The Jesus period is represented by the authentic *logia* of the earthly Jesus (so far as these can be critically recovered) and the genuine factual memories of the apostolic church about the earthly Jesus (so far as these, too, can be critically disentangled from their post-Easter coloration). The apostolic age is represented by primitive kerygmatic materials in Acts and Paul, by the Pauline *homologoumena*² (Gala-

² For the distinction between the *homologoumena* and the *antilegomena* see, for example, my *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: Duckworth, 1966), p. 5.

tians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Romans, Philemon), by the Palestinian and Hellenistic modifications and additions to the Jesus tradition at the oral stage before the written gospels, and—right on the fringe of the apostolic age—by the Gospel of Mark. The subapostolic age (which I date from roughly 70 to 125) is represented in the New Testament by the Pauline *antilegomena* (Colossians, Ephesians, the pastorals, Hebrews, and the catholic epistles), by the evangelists' redaction in Matthew and Luke, and by the composition of the Johannine literature.³

It is this third stratum that is important for our inquiry into apostolicity. During the apostolic age the church was by definition apostolic. But as the apostles died, the church faced a problem: How would the church remain apostolic when the ranks of the apostles were being progressively depleted by death? This was a vital question if the church was to maintain its identity, which rested on its creation and fidelity to the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ,⁴ His life, death, and resurrection as the eschatological act of God. This testimony was the foundation of the *ecclesia*, the eschatological community. Only where the witness to this eschatological deed was heard

³ Although belonging to the subapostolic age chronologically, the Johannine literature represents in part a protest against and corrective of some of its questionable tendencies. See E. Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 70 f., 76; idem, "Ketzler und Zeuge, zum johanneischen Verfasserproblem," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 48 (1951), 292—311.

⁴ The subapostolic church was especially conscious of this. See, for example, Matt. 16:17-19; Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14. But Paul's statements show that that was already part of his own apostolic self-understanding. See, for example, 1 Cor. 3:5-15.

and accepted was the church brought into being, and only where the ongoing community continued to be built upon that foundation was there a continuing presence of the church. The Jerusalem church came into being on the foundation of Peter and the Twelve; the church spread outside of Jerusalem prior to Paul through the witness of "all the *apostoloi*" (the group to which the fifth resurrection appearance took place, 1 Cor. 15:7). It was Paul's understanding of his apostolic task that he should found churches.⁵ Some communities no doubt came into being without direct apostolic foundation. This seems to have been the case with the communities established by the Hellenistic missionaries after Stephen, though some of the group may have been among the apostles of 1 Cor. 15:7, and with the Roman community, about whose foundation we know nothing. Such foundations, however, may be regarded as extensions of the missionary labors of the apostles. These churches were founded when the apostles were still alive, and the people who founded them were dependent on the apostles for their Gospel message, which focused on Jesus Christ as the eschatological act of God to which the Twelve and the apostles were the accredited witnesses. Later on apostles are present at churches that were not founded by apostles, such as Peter, Barnabas, and Paul at Antioch or Paul and (probably) Peter at Rome. Paul as an apostle continued to exercise oversight over the churches that he founded by visit-

⁵ Paul regards it as one of his primary apostolic tasks to found churches and to avoid preaching where others have already labored. For this aspect of apostleship see A. T. Hanson, *The Pioneer Ministry* (London: SCM Press, 1961).

ing them and by writing them letters—and on one occasion he even writes a letter to a church that he did not found, the community at Rome.

The government and ongoing ministry in these local churches during the apostolic age presents a complex and opaque picture. At Jerusalem James came to exercise a quasi-monarchical authority over the presbytery. How ministerial—as opposed to governmental—functions were performed in the Palestinian communities is unclear. But if the special Matthean material may be taken as evidence, it would appear that it was prophets and teachers who exercised the ministry of the Word in these communities. At Antioch, a mixed community that was partly Hellenistic Jewish and partly Gentile, prophets and teachers appear to have exercised both ministerial and governmental functions (Acts 13:1-3). In the Pauline churches charismatic ministries seem to have been the norm. The evidence for this is clearest in 1 Corinthians, in which we indeed read about a welter of charismatics. Aside from the apostles, whom Paul surprisingly includes among the charismatics, prophets and teachers were the chief ministers. They exercised the ministry of the Word, apparently on a more or less permanent basis, as the functions exercised have in their case given names to the functionaries. The governmental functions (helps, governments) are on a different level. At Corinth these functions did not create personal designations, a fact which suggests that governmental functions were exercised on a more or less ad hoc basis. At Philippi things were different. There Paul addresses the bishops and deacons. Evidently in this community governmental functions hard-

ened into quasi-permanent offices. In the other Pauline communities we also hear of people who exercise leadership of various kinds. Though arguing from silence, we could probably say that these, too, were charismatics.

The *homologoumena* never mention ordination. They presume that charismatic ministries would “well up” spontaneously in the community (cf. Stephanas in 1 Cor. 16:15). On the other hand it is reasonable to suppose that, in accordance with Jewish practice, the governing presbyters would have been ordained by the laying on of hands, though this again is an argument from silence. Thus, there is no evidence in the Palestinian, Hellenistic, or Pauline communities of ordination to *ministerial* functions during the apostolic age. Everything suggests that in all of them the ministry of the Word was performed by charismatics. Yet in a broad and general way the charismatics, at least in the Pauline communities, were under apostolic supervision, as 1 Corinthians 12—14 indicates.

How did the witness of the apostles and their supervision of the churches continue in the subapostolic age? One of the answers to this question lies in the production of pseudonymous literature. This seems to have been especially and quite early the response of the Pauline communities. It was felt that the apostle should be allowed to speak *viva voce* in the changed situation. Therefore letters were composed and attributed to the apostle, which were in varying degrees impregnated with the thought of the apostle himself, but adapted, modified, developed, and changed to meet new situations. Colossians and Ephesians are fairly close to the apostle's thoughts. The central Pauline doc-

trines of justification and of the *charismata* echo through them, and formulae from Pauline times are incorporated. Yet there is also a subtle change. Parenthesis now takes the form of household codes, presuming a community that is there to stay. They are very different from the *hōs mē* ethic of the homologoumena. In the pastorals Paul is represented providing for the continuance of a church order and for the handing on of the *parathēkē*, the "deposit" of apostolic teaching.

In non-Pauline communities the composition of gospels was another response to the need of perpetuating the apostolic voice in the subapostolic age. While the first witnesses were still alive, no one apparently felt the need for a continuous written narrative of the Jesus tradition as this had been kerygmaticized in the post-Easter church. Mark took this step right at the end of the apostolic period, and he was followed in the subapostolic age by Matthew, Luke, and John. In two cases, Matthew and John, the deutero-Pauline device of pseudonymity was also adopted, but probably later in the second century.

A third way in which the apostolic voice was kept alive emerges somewhat later in the subapostolic age, namely, the collection of apostolic writings. Evidence suggests that this process also started in the Pauline communities. The Corinthian community must have been active in this direction, for it collected together a whole body of correspondence addressed to it by its apostolic founder in early days and welded this material into two letters. The editing of these letters, particularly 2 Corinthians,⁶

⁶ See G. Bornkamm, *Die Vorgeschichte des zweiten Korintherbriefes*, Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften

merits study, for it is a clue to the theological thinking of the subapostolic age. 2 Peter, generally regarded as the latest of the writings of the New Testament, is the earliest unequivocal evidence for the existence of a Pauline corpus regarded as Scripture, though if we accept John Knox's theory about the composition of Ephesians, we have earlier indications of the existence of a Pauline corpus. The writing of pseudonymous documents, the collecting and editing of authentic apostolic documents, and the redaction of kerygmaticized Jesus traditions emanating from the apostolic age in written gospels all represented the beginnings of what eventually grew into the New Testament canon. The *principle* of canonicity is the basic and fundamental response of the subapostolic age to the question, How do we remain apostolic now that the apostles are dying out?

The pastorals laid stress on the *parathēkē*, a body of tradition. Apparently this *parathēkē* was handed over to the candidate at his ordination and supplied the material for a public confession of his faith.⁷ There is also some evidence for the existence of brief baptismal confessions in the subapostolic age.⁸ These confessions were eventually to develop into the bap-

(Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1961), pp. 24—32, for a theological interpretation of the editing of our present 2 Corinthians.

⁷ See E. Käsemann, "Das Formular einer Ordinationsparänese," in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. W. Eltester (Berlin: Topelmann, 1954), pp. 261—66.

⁸ See G. Bornkamm's treatment of *homologia* in Hebrews in "Das Bekenntnis im Hebräerbrief," *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum, Gesammelte Aufsätze*, II (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1959), 188—200. The text of Acts 8:37 is, of course, secondary.

tismal creeds. Though the subapostolic baptismal and ordination confessions were embryonic, they witness to the credal principle. In addition to a growing canon of Scripture, another of the ways in which the subapostolic church remained apostolic was by handing on and confessing ever anew the apostolic faith in summary form.

Occasional references to the sacraments⁹ and the preservation of liturgical fragments of various kinds¹⁰ make it clear that the subapostolic church continued the practices of the apostolic church in baptizing converts and in celebrating the Lord's Supper. The Johannine writings use the sacraments to counter the Christology of the Docetists.¹¹ There is little systematic discussion of the sacraments or of the liturgy in the subapostolic writings of the New Testament, but that which is available indicates that the church of that period regarded itself as bound to continue doing what the apostles did.

We turn finally to the question of the ministry in the subapostolic age. The pastoral epistles give evidence of the development of an ordained ministry of presbyters, bishops and deacons in the Pauline com-

⁹ For baptism see Titus 3:5. The eucharistic references found by some in 1 Peter 2:1-10 and Heb. 13:10, 15 are disputed. On 1 Peter 2:10 see J. H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966). But a good case can be made out for the eucharistic character of the Hebrews passage. See Bornkamm, "Bekenntnis" (note 8 above), p. 194, and F. Hahn, "Die alttestamentlichen Motive in der urchristlichen Abendmahlsüberlieferung," *Evangelische Theologie*, 27 (1967), 371 f., n. 131.

¹⁰ See R. Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967).

¹¹ E. Schweizer, "Das johanneische Zeugnis vom Herrenmahl," *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), pp. 341-66.

munities.¹² Acts gives evidence of the same ministerial setup in the churches known to the author of Luke-Acts.¹³ These ordained functionaries apparently replaced the purely charismatic ministries of the Pauline period, though it would be more correct to say that the *charismata* were now confined to the ordained ministry.¹⁴ The governmental title "presbyter" and the practice of ordination, which has been postulated for the Palestinian communities during the apostolic age, were taken up in the Pauline churches and there combined with the charismatic conception to produce an ordained *ministry* consisting of people who performed not only the governmental functions of the ordained Palestinian presbyters but also the ministerial functions previously performed by the charismatics. Since the idea of succession accompanied the practice of ordination in Judaism, it is not surprising that the same idea appears in the pastorals¹⁵ and seems implied in Acts.¹⁶

The ministerial functions spelled out in the pastorals and Acts concern what we would call the ministry of the Word. There is no clear evidence about who presided at the Eucharist at this period, just as there is none for the apostolic age. We might infer from 1 Cor. 14:16 that in the

¹² *Presbyteros*, 1 Tim. 5:15; 5:1, 2, 17, 19; Titus 1:5. *Episcopos*, 1 Tim. 3:1-2; Titus 1:7. Opinion is divided as to whether *episcopos* (always in the singular) and *presbyteroi* are still synonymous here as in Acts, or whether a distinction between them is beginning to emerge.

¹³ Acts 14:22; 20:17-18 (*presbyteroi*); 20:28 (*episcopoi*).

¹⁴ 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6.

¹⁵ 2 Tim. 2:2.

¹⁶ See G. Klein, *Die zwölf Apostel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), pp. 115-84.

Pauline communities the eucharistic president was a charismatic. At Corinth it was sometimes one who spoke in tongues, but Paul seemed to prefer that it be done by a prophet. Acts 13:3, probably a piece of historical information about the apostolic age rather than subapostolic composition, mentions prophets and teachers as "liturgizing." The *Didache* was written at a time when bishops were taking over from the prophets as eucharistic presidents. We should probably not be wrong in conjecturing that the same evolution had occurred in the Pauline churches by the time of the pastorals. It is to be noted, however, that the question of succession is not raised in the context of the eucharistic president. There is no question or suggestion that eucharistic presidency depends on succession. Succession is envisaged rather as an external means of handing on the apostolic tradition.

The real question is whether these subapostolic developments, incipient canon and creed, the careful preservation of the apostolic sacraments and liturgy and the development of an ordained ministry in succession from an earlier charismatic one, are legitimate developments or corruptions. Did they really enable the subapostolic church to remain apostolic? About the canon, creeds, sacraments, and liturgy there can be little question, and it is certainly not an issue between Anglicans and Lutherans. The development of the ordained ministry, however, is more of a problem.

Ernst Käsemann in particular has criticised this development:

What makes the whole process so questionable theologically (from a Pauline standpoint, at any rate) and indeed marks

the transition to early Catholicism, is that the change is associated with, and founded on, not need and historical necessity but a theoretical principle of tradition and legitimate succession; so that, in effect, the Spirit is made to appear as the organ and the rationale of a theory.¹⁷

The apocalyptic dream of primitive Jewish Christianity was shattered by the rising Gentile church, not least by Paul; but its ideas may well be thought to have continued their march via the Jewish Christian Diaspora in Hellenistic territory and to appear before us in a new guise in the early Catholic conception of the Church as an institution purveying salvation.¹⁸

A *theologia gloriae* is now in process of replacing the *theologia crucis*.¹⁹

His [sc. Paul's] conception of the essence and order of the Church cannot possibly be harmonized with that which comes to prevail in early Catholicism. It is the starkest contradiction to it.²⁰

"Early Catholicism" had long been used in German Protestant scholarship as a pejorative term, but between F. C. Baur and Käsemann it was confined to early Christian writings outside the New Testament. Now Käsemann, like Baur, finds this questionable phenomenon within the later writings of the New Testament canon. Consequently he is compelled at this point to resort to the idea of a canon within the canon. For him the true canon is the genuine Paul, the Paul of *sola fide, sola gratia*, and *theologia crucis*.

We do not quarrel with the principle

¹⁷ E. Käsemann, "Ministry and Community in the New Testament," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, No. 41 in *Studies in Biblical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 89.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

of a canon within the canon. A hermeneutical center is necessary in view of the varieties of Scripture. Though personally I would want to define that canon in somewhat different terms,²¹ for the moment we may accept Käsemann's canon within the canon and ask, Does the principle of ministerial succession contradict it?

Ordination, as the later New Testament writings understand it, does not necessarily mean that the *charismata* are an exclusive monopoly of the ordained. 2 Peter for instance appeals to the *consensus fidelium*. It must, of course, be confessed that such a monopoly has often been the case in Christian history, both Catholic and Protestant. But in the writings of which we are speaking the intention is that the most important *charismata*, namely, those which concern the ministry of the Word (and probably, though the evidence is silent, the sacraments) should be exercised in the context and under the control of the apostolic witness. Thus ordination and succession are ultimately a question of Christology, of *theologia crucis*, and of *sola fide, sola gratia*.

For Paul the work of the Spirit, who creates the *charismata* in the church, must not become a free-wheeling enthusiasm, but it must be subject to christological control (1 Cor. 12:3). This means, in turn, control by the apostle as the witness to Christology. In writing 1 Corinthians

²¹ In "Early Catholicism in the New Testament" (in preparation) I define it as "Jesus of Nazareth, the one in whose earthly ministry God was beginning to act eschatologically, through the proclamation of whom in the post-Easter community God continues to act eschatologically, and in whom God will at the end consummate his eschatological action."

12—14 Paul is concerned precisely to exercise that control.

For the same reason self-appointed charismatics became highly questionable in the apostolic age. All too often, as experience had taught, they would veer off in a gnostic direction. The pastoral epistles are clear indications of this. Hence, for the author of the pastorals the reception of the charisma of ministry had to take place henceforth in the context of the transmission of the *parathēkē*, whose transmission would achieve a similar goal to that which Paul had in writing 1 Corinthians 12—14. The author of the pastorals, like Paul, was concerned with the proper relation of Word and Spirit. What Edmund Schlink has written in a systematic context may properly be applied to the exegesis both of 1 Corinthians 12—14 and of the pastoral epistles:

The relationship between Word and Spirit, between the historical uniqueness of God's salvation and the continuity of the saving Word of the Spirit (which is at the very basis of church life), finds its proper expression in the insistence on special commission. For the work of the Spirit is to stir the believer's memory; by this we mean that he is always referring back to the unique and historical saving act of Jesus Christ, and in doing this, he points back to the apostolic word, and actualizes this same salvation. Thus Spirit and Word are not contradictory, far from it, they belong together.²²

In the apostolic age the Word is present through the *viva vox* of the apostles. In the subapostolic age and in every age since it can only be present in the form of the

²² E. Schlink, *The Coming Christ and the Coming Church* (Edinburgh/London: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), p. 207.

tradition of that *viva vox*. Hence tradition (*paradosis*; in the pastorals, *parathēkē*) is increasingly important. This looks at first sight like a deformation and corruption. The Word becomes codified, ossified, and frozen in the form of tradition. Yet it must be noted that already in the time of the apostles the principle of tradition was present. Though, as an apostle who had seen the risen Lord, Paul was a firsthand witness of the eschatological event, he was by force of circumstances in a peculiar position. He had not had firsthand contact with the events prior to his call. As one born out of due time, he had to depend for his knowledge of these earlier events on tradition (so with the Last Supper,²³ the death, burial and resurrection "on the third day," the appearance to those who preceded him²⁴). He was therefore in the peculiar position of being both an apostle and one who stood in apostolic succession.²⁵ Moreover, he, like the other apostles, presumably passed on this tradition to the churches.²⁶ The charismatic officers in these churches then stood within that tradition and were formed by it. Thus the idea of tradition and succession already operated in the apostolic age, though (except for Paul himself) it operated horizontally rather than vertically.

It is true that the concept of tradition may lead to a frozen, ossified conception

²³ 1 Cor. 11:23 (*parelabon*).

²⁴ 1 Cor. 15:3 (*parelabon*); cf. Gal. 1:18.

²⁵ Acts represents a one-sided presentation of the historical Paul in this regard, not, as Klein and Schmithals suppose, a novel and completely unhistorical reinterpretation of the historical Paul.

²⁶ 1 Cor. 11:23 (*paredōka*); 1 Cor. 15:3 (*paredōka*); Rom. 6:17 (*paredothēte* with *typon didachēs*).

of the Word. There are indications that this is just what was happening in the churches of Jude and 2 Peter.²⁷ Here the Johannine writings serve as corrective to the general institutionalization of the sub-apostolic age. In John it is the function of the paraclete to take the tradition of the words and works of Jesus and give them relevant exposition in the present.²⁸ Through the work of the paraclete the Word is taken out of the cold storage of tradition, unfrozen, and made once again *viva vox*.

In the light of these arguments, therefore, we need not conclude that the sub-apostolic concepts of ministerial succession and the transmission of tradition are necessarily inimical to the Pauline gospel of justification *sola fide, sola gratia*, which Käsemann regards as the canon within the canon.

The incipient canon, the *parathēkē*, the continuation of the apostolic sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper with the liturgical patterns of prayer and action which accompanied them, the development of an ordained ministry in succession as a means of preserving, continuing, and (in the Johannine writings) relevantly expounding this tradition are all attested by the latest stratum of New Testament writings. They show how the subapostolic church endeavored to continue to be apostolic.

It is to be noted, however, that all these elements as we see them in the latest stratum of the New Testament were still in the process of development. The canon of

²⁷ "The faith . . . once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3); "the truth that you have" (2 Peter 1:12).

²⁸ John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13.

New Testament writings was in embryonic form. Its basic shape did not emerge until the end of the second century. The concept of a confession or creed was present, but creeds likewise did not emerge clearly until the end of the second century.²⁹ The liturgy was beginning to take shape, but it is not until the second century writings that its pattern is clearly discerned.³⁰ Finally, an institutional ministry was beginning to emerge in Acts and the pastorals, replacing the charismatics on the one hand and the purely governmental presbyteries on the other. But this institutional ministry did not achieve its classical form until the second century, with the threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters, and deacons.

The report of the Lambeth conference of 1930 states:

The Episcopate occupies a position which is, in point of historical development, analogous to that of the Canon of Scripture and the creeds. In the first days there was no Canon of New Testament Scripture, for the books afterwards included in it were still being written. For a time, different churches had different writings which they regarded as authoritative. The Canon was slowly formed, and the acceptance of a single Canon throughout the Church took several generations. So, too, the Apostles' Creed is the result of a process of growth which we can in large measure trace. If the Episcopate, as we find it universally by the end of the second century, was the result of a like process of adaptation and growth

²⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longmans, Green, 1950).

³⁰ The earliest descriptions of the developed liturgy are in Justin Martyr, *Apology*, I, 65—67. The earliest written liturgy is found in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. This is dated in the early third century, but probably the evidence carries us back into the mid-second century.

[at this point the Lambeth Fathers cease to be historical and become apologetic] that would be no evidence that it lacked divine authority, but rather that the life of the Spirit within the Church had found it to be the most appropriate organ for the functions it discharged.³¹

The historic episcopate has therefore a relative historical justification. The New Testament points beyond itself to a continuing development. That justification was set out in the Preface to the Ordinal in the Book of Common Prayer at the time of the Reformation. In the light of early post-New Testament documents discovered since then and in the light of Biblical criticism, that Preface has to be reinterpreted. "From the apostles' time" does mean either that Christ Himself or the apostles created the threefold ministry. It was the outcome of a historical development that was still going on when the New Testament closed, and did not reach its term until the second century. The New Testament offers a number of lines which project beyond it and converge in the second century. It is, however, still relevant to point out that the Preface bases the Anglican maintenance of episcopacy on historical grounds, not on systematic ones. We adhere to it, the Preface says, because that is what we have received from antiquity, and we see no reason to depart from antiquity. Systematically, the only defensible claim for episcopacy would seem to be that it is a means of preserving the primary elements of the church's apostolicity: the canon, the creed and the sacraments, the liturgy, and the apostolic faith and life that go with these things. It does

³¹ *The Lambeth Conference 1930* (London: SPCK, 1930), p. 115.

not entitle us to exalt episcopacy into the status of the sole sign of apostolicity, so that the apostolicity of those churches without it is denied. The historic episcopate is the historic way of signaling the present church's continuity with the church of the apostles. But it is no more

than a sign. The *substance* of apostolicity lies in the Scriptures, the creed, and the sacraments, with their liturgical celebration, as these are through the preaching unpackaged and rekindled into *viva vox evangelii*.

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