“From Elders to Bishops”
Early Church Governance
Randy Broberg
Protestant Local Church Governance

- Pastor
  - Congregation
  - Elders
    - Congregation
  - Deacons

- Elder Board
  - Pastor
    - Congregation
  - Elders
    - Teachers/Staff
  - Deacons
Episcopal Governance: Monarchical Hierarchy

Archbishop

Bishop/Diocese

Priest /Parish

Priest /Parish

Priest /Parish

Bishop/Diocese

Priest /Parish

Priest /Parish

Priest /Parish

Top Down Decision Making. Discipline from above (or no discipline!)
Congregational Governance: Confederacy of Locally Ruled Local Churches

Loose Confederations of Congregational Churches called “Conventions”, “Associations or Assemblies”. No church to church control or discipline. Each church is independent.
Presbyterian Governance: Representative Democracy

Each local church ruled by a “session” and a “teaching/ruling” elder (pastor). Each Pastor a member of the local presbytery. Local Presbytery can discipline local church or pastor.
Church Governance in the Apostolic Period
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Synagogue Governance

- Ruled by a president (archon), often an very young but wealthy person
- Had a body of elders (*gerusia*, not *presbyteri* of New Testament)
- “Father” or “Mother” of the Synagogue
- Secretary/Historian/Treasurer
Two offices are clearly noted: bishops (or overseers) and deacons. Phil. 1:1; I Tim 3:1,8.

Bishops are the same as elders.; I Tim 3:1/Titus 1:5/7; Acts 20:17/28; I Pet 5:1/2 where the terms are used interchangeably.
“Episkopos” = Bishop or Overseer

- The word bishop has today an ecclesiastical sound which the word *episkopos* did not have in New Testament times at all.

- *Episcopos* arises from two words, *epi* (over) and *skopeo* (to see), and it means literally "an overseer"---or a superintendent; the oversight may be with a view to discipline or it may be with a view to protection. He was the superintendent of the congregation.

- the word *elder* in the New Testament describes the church leader in his *person*, while the word *episkopos* describes him in his *function*. 
1 Corinthians 12:28-30
“And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? “

There is some uncertainty whether prophet, teacher, or evangelist were “offices” or just “gifts”. Acts 11:27, 13:1, 21:8; 1 Cor 12:28.
• The consistent pattern in the NT is that every church had several elders.
  – Acts 11:30--elders at the church of Antioch
  – Acts 14:23--Paul and Barnabas appoint "elders in every church"
  – Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4--elders at the church in Jerusalem
  – Acts 20:17, 28--elders/bishops at the church of Ephesus (v. 17--"elders of the church")
  – Acts 21:18--elders at the church in Jerusalem
  – Phil 1:1--the church at Philippi has bishops and deacons
  – 1 Tim 5:17--elders at the church of Ephesus
  – Titus 1:5--Titus is to appoint elders in every town
  – Jas 5:14--"the elders of the church"
  – 1 Pet 5:1-2--"the elders among you"

• In every one of these texts the plain implication is that each church had several elders.
JONAH
New Testament Record: Bishops Over Presbyters?

- According to Catholics, although men called *presbuteroi* ruled over individual congregations (parishes), the apostles ordained certain men as Bishops, giving them authority over multiple congregations (dioceses), each with its own presbyters.

- They believe these Bishops were endowed with the power to ordain additional presbyters as needed to shepherd the flock and carry on the work of the gospel.

- They say Titus and Timothy were two of those early *episcopoi* and clearly were above the office of *presbuteros*. They had the authority to select, ordain, and govern other presbyters, as is evidenced by Paul's instructions: "This is why I left you in Crete . . . that you might appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17-22).
New Testament Record: Apostolic Succession?

• Catholics point to Acts 1:21-26, where the apostles, replaced the position left vacant by Judas's suicide. They prayed for guidance, asking God to show them which candidate was chosen to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away. After choosing Matthias they laid hands on him to confer apostolic authority.

• Catholics point to 2 Timothy 1:6 and 4:14, where they say that Paul reminds Timothy that “the office of bishop had been conferred on him through the laying on of hands” and in 1 Timothy 5:22 where Paul advises Timothy not to be hasty in “handing on this authority to others.” But actually the first two verses refer to a “gift” not “the office of bishop” and the last verse says “laying on of hands” not “handing on this authority.”

• Catholics argue from Titus where Paul describes the “apostolic authority” Titus had received, though no specific verse in Titus makes this statement.
New Testament Record:
Women Hosts of House Churches

- Apphia in Philemon 2
- Prisca in I Corinthians 16:19
- Lydia of Thyatira Acts 16:15
- Nympha of Laodicea Colossians 4:15

Roman women wore jewelry and makeup, including lipstick, eye shadow. They learned these arts of beautification from the Egyptians.
Some Evidence of Deaconesses:

- Rom 16:1 1 Tim 3:11.
- The 'Didascalia' and the 'Apostolic Constitutions' describe their functions as assistants to the clergy in the baptizing of women, ministers to the poor and sick among women, instructors of women catechumens, and in general intermediaries between the clergy and women of the congregation.
- The Letter of Pliny to Trajan says, "I thought it the more necessary, therefore, to find out what truth there was in this by applying torture to two maidservants, who were called deaconesses."
- John Crysostom testifies to presence of women deacons in 5th Century.

What Do You Notice About The Picture Above?
What Was Absent from New Testament Era Leadership

- No “Priests”
- No “Monks” or “Nuns”
- No single “Pastors”
- No Titles like “Father” or “Reverend”
CHURCH GOVERNANCE FROM THE APOSTLES TO CONSTANTINE
New Concepts Arising During This Period

- Emergence of professional clergy
- Monarchical (king-like) Bishops
- Apostolic Succession
- Sacerdotalism:
  - The notion that God’s grace comes only through the administration of sacraments by an ordained clergy, controlled by a single Church.
Second Century
Evolution of “The” Bishop

• First Century

Bishops/Overseers
Elders/Presbyters

Second Century

Third Century
Bishop

Elders/Presbyters
Those, therefore, who present their offerings at the appointed times, are accepted and blessed; for inasmuch as they follow the laws of the Lord, they sin not. For his own peculiar services are assigned to the high priest, and their own proper place is prescribed to the priests, and their own special ministrations devolve on the Levites. The layman is bound by the laws that pertain to laymen.

— First letter to the Corinthians, approx 90 AD
90 AD, Clement of Rome: Plurality of Bishops/Presbyters:

• And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits [of their labors], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who should afterwards believe. … For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place, “I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith…. the flock of Christ is to be at peace with its duly appointed presbyters … For it will be no light sin for us, if we thrust out those who have offered the gifts of the bishop’s office unblemishably and holily. Blessed are those presbyters who have gone before, seeing that their departure was fruitful and ripe…. 

• Letter to the Corinthians approx 90 AD
90 AD, Clement of Rome on Apostolic Succession???

- Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and there would be strife on account of the office of the episcopate. For this reason, therefore, inasmuch as they had obtained a perfect foreknowledge of this, they appointed those already mentioned, 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, … cannot be justly dismissed from the ministry. For our sin will not be small, if we eject from the episcopate those who have blamelessly and holily fulfilled its duties.

- *First letter to the Corinthians, approx. 90 AD*
Didache: Plurality of Presbyters/Bishops

- "Appoint for yourselves therefore bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not lovers of money, and true and approved; for unto you they also perform the service of the prophets and teachers. Therefore despise them not, for they are your honorable men along with the prophets and teachers."

— Didache, 128, approx 100 AD
110 AD, Ignatius:

A pastor in Antioch or Syria. Said he had gift of prophecy

- Around 110, wrote seven epistles to Asian churches as he traveled to Rome to suffer martyrdom after a persecution in Antioch. He also writes ahead to Rome, and writes to Polycarp

- He is the first person of whom we have record of espousing the doctrine that there is one bishop in each church, who rules the church.

- Wanted the martyrdom. Exhorted the church of Rome in one of his epistles that when he arrived, they do nothing to prevent his being received into this glorious suffering.

- Martyred in Rome by beasts, ca 117.

“Now I begin to be a disciple…Let fire and cross, flocks of beasts, broken bones, dismemberment, …come upon me, so long as I attain Jesus Christ.”
Ignatius:
Advocate of Monarchical Bishop

- “We should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself.” *Letter to the Ephesians*

- “Neither do ye anything without the bishop and presbyters.” *Letter to the Magnesians*

- “For, since ye are subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, …without the bishop ye should do nothing, but should also be subject to the presbytery, as to the apostle of Jesus Christ.” *Letter to the Trallians*

- In like manner, let all reverence the deacons as an appointment of Jesus Christ, and the bishop as Jesus Christ, who is the Son of the Father, and the presbyters as the sanhedrim of God, and assembly of the apostles. *Letter to the Trallians*
See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God. **Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop.** Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. **It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast;** but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid.

- **Letter to the Smyrnaeans**
"Polycarp and the presbyters that are with him unto..." (95). "Wherefore it is right to abstain from all these things, submitting yourselves to the presbyters and deacons as to God and Christ" (97). "And the presbyters also must be compassionate, merciful towards all men . . . If then we entreat the Lord that He would forgive us, we also ought to forgive" (97).

(c.69 - 155 AD), Epistle to the Philippians
Hermas: Plurality of Presbyters/Bishops

• For Hermas, "the elders . . . preside over the Church"
  – The Shepherd of Hermas 169

• In referring to the various officers in the church, Hermas makes reference to two, namely, the deacon and the bishop.
  – The Shepherd of Hermas 236f
175 AD Irenaeus:
Apostolic Succession

But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, \[and\] which is preserved by means of the *successions of presbyters* in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth . . . It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted *bishops* in the Churches, and \[to demonstrate\] the *succession of these men to our own times* . . . For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their *successors*, delivering up their own place of government to these men.

*Against Heresies* (c.130 - c.202 AD) .
200 AD, Clement of Alexandria: Distinctions between Bishops and Presbyters

- "A multitude of other pieces of advice to particular persons is written in the holy books: some for presbyters, some for bishops and deacons; and others for widows, of whom we shall have opportunity to speak elsewhere"
  — The Instructor of Children 3:12:97:2 [A.D. 191].

- "Even here in the Church the gradations of bishops, presbyters, and deacons happen to be imitations, in my opinion, of the angelic glory and of that arrangement which, the Scriptures say, awaits those who have followed in the footsteps of the apostles and who have lived in complete righteousness according to the gospel"
234 AD, Origen: Distinctions between Bishops and Presbyters

• "Not fornication only, but even marriages make us unfit for ecclesiastical honors; for neither a bishop, nor a presbyter, nor a deacon, nor a widow is able to be twice married".

• Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, number 17 [A.D. 234]).
5 MINUTE BREAK
Church Discipline: Easy Believism vs. Lordship Salvation?

- The large number of "lapsed" (those who had denied the faith by sacrificing) caused great upheaval and turmoil in the church.
- Should the church re-admit apostates? Unconditionally? Or should some act of repentance or “penance” be required for readmission?
- What about those who claimed to be believers but who had committed a serious sin, like adultery or murder? Were those sins unforgivable? Can they be readmitted to church membership?

“We do not forgive apostates, and shall we forgive adulteresses?”

Tertullian
“He can no longer have God for his father who has not the Church as his mother..there is no salvation outside the church.”

Cyprian, 200-258

- From Carthage, North Africa
- Taught Lord’s Supper was a re-sacrifice of Christ
- Urged celibacy.
- Infant Baptist
- Asserted the power of the bishops at a council in 251.
- Wrote *On The Unity of the Catholic Church*, which emphasized the authority of Rome's bishops.
Adulterers and Apostates Readmitted

- The first to accept repentant sinners as a matter of policy was the bishop of Rome, Callistus (217-222), who readmitted penitent members who had committed adultery.
- He argued that the church was like Noah’s ark, containing unclean as well as clean animals.
- He defended his action by claiming that the keys of Peter. This was the first time this authority was claimed by a bishop of Rome.

Callistus

the bishop of Rome is the heir of Peter, who held the keys to bind and to loose the sins of men.
251 AD, Novationist Schism: Conservatives vs. Liberals?

- Novatian, in 251, had himself made Bishop of Rome in opposition to another bishop, Cornelius. It was a time of persecution, and Novatian's key role was to deny readmittance to the "lapsed. He broke the church of Rome in two, with the support of many of the "confessors,“
- Novation argued that only God could forgive sins!! The “official” response was that such a notion was heresy!!
- Cornelius, Bishop of Rome, opposes Novation and sets up a system of “penance” that if followed would allow the lapsed to rejoin the church
- Novatian's schism was not resolved until much later in 325. The Council of Nicaea gave guidelines for the reconciliation and re-admittance of Novatianist clergy.

“Only God can forgive sinners.”
Donatism

- Donatus, bishop of Carthage from 318-347 --in every major city in Africa for 300 yrs.

- Issue: readmittance of bishops who committed “traditio” (surrender, betrayal), of Scripture under persecution. In 311, Caecilian, Bishop of Carthage favored readmission of traditio on easy terms. Constantine asked to intervene, deferred question to Synod of Arles (314), agreed with Synod that Caecilian was right

- Grew in strength, but persecuted
Donatists Form Separate Denomination
What Donatists “Heretics” Believed

Donatists Were Anti-Sacramentalists and Anti-Sacerdotalists.
So who were their chief opponents?
First Cyprian, then Augustine!

• Congregational Church Governance—
independence of each church
• Separation of church and state
• Regenerate church membership
  (invisible church)
• Strong church discipline – purity of
  church
• Baptism – rebaptize all that they had
  reason to doubt
Constantine Builds Churches, Makes Church Wealthy

- 321: Constantine built and enlarged churches and encouraged bishops likewise to call on the help of civil officials.
- Wills in favor of the Church were permitted.
Roman Basilica with Idol of Emperor

Note Shape and Location of Imperial Throne in Roman Basilica.

Note statues of pagan deities in little niches around the basilicas.

Temple of Zeus at Olympia
Churches Become Basilicas
Imperial Church Architecture

[Images of various church buildings and architectural drawings]
Church Takes On Pagan Powers and Privileges

- Episcopal jurisdiction and Church courts, which had already existed, were now officially recognized by the empire.
- Bishops gained the power, formerly held by pagan priests and vestal virgins, of interceding with the secular authority for "criminals, prisoners, and unfortunates of every kind." This often resulted in more merciful treatment for prisoners, widows, orphans, etc.
- Asylum in churches, another custom lifted from heathenism, became attached to the Christian churches. This was made law by Theodosius II in 431
- Hence the term “sanctuary”
Constantine Establishes Ecclesiastical Courts

- The manumission of slaves in churches in the presence of the bishop and clergy were legalized.

- Litigants might bring suit in a bishop’s court and the decision rendered was to be respected by the civil authorities.
Fourth Century: Distinctions between Bishops and Presbyters

• "Bishops, presbyters, and deacons may not leave their own places for the sake of commerce, nor are they to be traveling about the provinces, frequenting the markets for their own profit."

• Council of Elvira, canon 18 [A.D. 300].
"It has come to the knowledge of the holy and great Synod that, in some districts and cities, the deacons administer the Eucharist to the presbyters [i.e., priests], whereas neither canon nor custom permits that they who have no right to offer [the Eucharistic sacrifice] should give the Body of Christ to them that do offer [it]. And this also has been made known, that certain deacons now touch the Eucharist even before the bishops. Let all such practices be utterly done away, and let the deacons remain within their own bounds, knowing that they are the ministers of the bishop and the inferiors of the presbyters. Let them receive the Eucharist according to their order, after the presbyters, and let either the bishop or the presbyter administer to them."

— Council of Nicea (canon 18 [A.D. 325]).
Presiding Bishops (Popes) vie for Supremacy

- Rome
- Constantinople
- Antioch
- Jerusalem
- Alexandria
Constantine Takes Position as God’s Regent

- Constantine took an active part in the affairs of the Church and sponsored and presided over Church councils.
- Constantine quickly became embroiled in theological controversy, and he called the Council of Nicaea together in 325 to settle questions about the deity of Christ.
- He may have even suggested some of the wording for the creed.

► The Arch of Constantine
• Entire empire divided into “dioceses” exactly matching the secular, governmental regions also called “dioceses”.

• Each diocese had its bishop, who ruled the surrounding countryside. His imperial government counterpart was called the “Vicar”
PAGAN PRIESTS WITH MITER HATS
Constantine Makes it Financially Advantageous to be a Christian Priest

- 313: Constantine granted to members of the Christian clergy the freedom from all contributions to the state which had been the privilege of the priests of other religions which were accorded official recognition.
- However, this soon led to so great an influx into the Christian priesthood that another edict followed which limited ordination to those whose exemption would mean little tax loss to the government.
John Chrysostom: Distinguishes Bishops and Presbyters

- "[In Philippians 1:1 Paul says,] 'To the co-bishops and deacons.' What does this mean? Were there plural bishops of some city? Certainly not! It is the presbyters that [Paul] calls by this title; for these titles were then interchangeable, and the bishop is even called a deacon. That is why, when writing to Timothy, he says, 'Fulfill your diaconate' [2 Tim. 4:5], although Timothy was then a bishop. That he was in fact a bishop is clear when Paul says to him, 'Lay hands on no man lightly' [1 Tim. 5:22], and again, 'Which was given you with the laying on of hands of the presbytery' [1 Tim. 4:14], and presbyters would not have ordained a bishop"

- *Homilies on Philippians 1:1 A.D. 402.*
Summary of Development of Church Governance

• **1\textsuperscript{st} Century**: first treatment of “presbyters” as priests due to assoc. with OT priests

• **2\textsuperscript{nd} Century**: Creation of additional office of bishop, taking place of apostles

• **3\textsuperscript{rd} Century**: Several bishops (Clement, Irenaeus, Cyprian) had early ideas of authority and apostolic succession.

• **4\textsuperscript{th} Century**: Emperor Constantine controlled church and Metropolitan Bishops (archbishops) gained ascendancy over country bishops.
Orthodox Episcopal Church
Governance

An Orthodox Bishop surrounded by his Presbyters (priests)

Bishops may not marry but priests can (but only once)

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholemew of Constantinople

ArchBishop Demetrius of North America
Sacrament: Divine Orders
(Ordination of Priests and Bishops)

• By making ordination an official sacrament of the “one true church” the RCC was able to prevent (arrest) lay preachers and others who attempted to read and/or explain the Bible on their own.

• In addition, the control over these appointments led to widespread nepotism and simony.

• Denies that every believer is a priest; affirms the clergy/laity distinction
The Clergy in the Middle Ages

- Bishops were often feudal vassals of and owed their jobs to laymen
- Clergy Appointments not on merit
- Nepotism
- Simony: purchase of church offices
- Nicolaitism: clergy sometimes married or had concubines
Next week:
How We Got Our Bible