

CHAPTER II

PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS IN ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY

Influence and Authority

Definitions of Influence and Authority

Physical force, legal authority, and personal influence are three means of controlling persons. The distinctness, compatibility, and relationship of the latter two are especially important in a study of church organization. Authority is the legal right to compel the behavior only of status inferiors. Influence is the personal ability to impel the behavior even of status superiors. A study of organizational structure concerns itself with the pattern of authority flow.

Natural Leadership and Formal Leadership

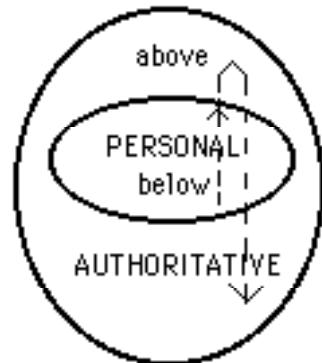
Distinctions. Influence and authority are related respectively to the concepts of natural and formal leadership, distinguished as follows: without authoritative direction from above, natural leadership earns prestige as it rises spontaneously from the bottom in a freely responding homogeneous group. Authoritative direction originating from above, formal leadership has an ascribed prestige that settles from the top over the general membership. The process of natural leadership is carried out through example in the medium of personal influence. The process of formal leadership is carried out under law in the medium of impersonal authority. The two approaches differ in the level of origination and in the medium and process of operation.

Compatibility. While formal leadership is distinguished by authority initiated from above, it is not comprehended thereby. In many instances authority reinforces a more basic manner of proceeding. An official leads others most effectively when he is sensitive to their needs and open to their suggestions so that frequently he may only be initiating authoritatively what others have initiated personally through suggestion. Even appointment to office may involve a selection process by general membership, a procedure which merely makes overt, or “form-alized,” the simple consensus of recognition in natural generation of leaders. Leaders may be equally charismatic under either system.¹

Relationship. The relationship between natural and formal leadership is illustrated in this comparison of “above” vs. “below” in origination and personal vs. authoritative in procedure. At least theoretically the whole leadership system may be included in formal leadership so that the latter adds to without necessarily detracting from. In practice the two approaches work together, as in the home where the husband has authority over the wife and children (Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Colossians 3:18, 20), but does not ignore the

needs and desires of these, who are his personal equals (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 7:1-5; Colossians 3:19, 21). Interestingly, the divine pattern for the home is the model for the church as exemplified by Christ himself who both loves the church (Ephesians 5:25) and rules the church (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Fig. 9. Natural and Formal Leadership



Unlike the inherited offices of priest and king in the Old Testament period, all positions in the church require charismatic leaders, who first possess qualifications germane to their tasks, rather than official leaders, who may hold office by birthright, purchase, and the like.² In the church, formal leadership always includes natural leadership and is never given until after service and personal maturity. Authority derives ultimately from ability in the person of God and is delegated to worthies in government, church, and home. In the church, authority is always for the edification of the saints, not their destruction (2 Corinthians 10:8 = 13:10). It is for the edification of others, not the aggrandizement of self (2 Corinthians 12:14). Because this thesis deals primarily with organizational pattern, it will trace the lines of authority from Christ downward. The authority aspect should not, however, be mistaken for the whole so as to give the false impression of a rigid, formal institution led by authority-conscious men. Authority is always "added," and "after," and is for others.

Identifying Formal Leadership. The peculiar extra-personal origin of formal leadership establishes a method for identifying the leadership of the New Testament as formal leadership: the fact that it is given from "outside the person" shows that it is more than natural leadership, which arises from "within the person"—from the power of his personality or the degree of his ability.

Function and Office

Office Distinguished by

Supervisory Authority. In the following analysis authority and influence are related to a distinction between authoritative offices and non-authoritative functions. The former inherently involve supervision of other people's activities while the latter do not,

although there may be special cases where supervisory authority is delegated from above through such functions. Any responsibility includes the “right” to fulfill it, but many responsibilities are such that they are individually fulfilled. Functions, then, are positions of individual service only. Offices add to service the authority of oversight.³

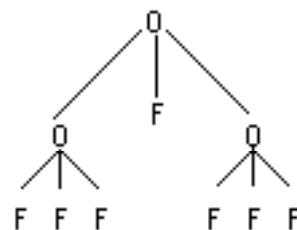
Any community is potential for as many as three classifications of its citizenry: general members possessing basic life status in the community, ministers responsible to the group for certain functions, and leaders holding offices with supervisory authority over the general constituency. Marks of each status are as follows:

Fig. 10. Life, Function, and Office

<u>Life</u> life qualities	<u>Function</u> life qualities qualifications selection process appointment ± support service	<u>Office</u> life qualities + qualifications selection process appointment ± support service supervisory authority
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Ideally the status marks accumulate from left to right. Characteristic “life qualities” carry into “function” and “office,” sometimes forming part of their respective qualification requirements. A selection process and an appointment procedure combine with the possibility of financial support to distinguish functions and offices from general membership. “Office” differs from “function” only in its peculiar qualifications and the added responsibility for supervising the common task of the community to the good of all. Authority passes through an Office; it ends in a Function as in Fig. 11.

Fig. 11. Office and Function



Church organization deals with authority flow. More exactly it deals with supervisory authority flow. The following brief treatment of church polity, therefore, is organized in terms of office vs. function.⁴

Method of identifying office. The supervision peculiarity of offices establishes a methodology for identifying them among the ministries of the church. One first seeks out all those statuses that involve authority and then leaves the rest as functions only. The “givenness” of New Testament leadership establishes it as formal leadership. Within that

formal leadership the supervisory- authority element differentiates formal office from formal function.

New Testament De-Emphasis on Organization *per se*

Emphasis on Natural Leadership. From the standpoint of the nature of the church, the de-emphasis on organization arises from (1) the emphasis on natural leadership, individual responsibility, and the church as a voluntary society. Christ himself was made head of the church because of ability and service (Philippians 2:5-8 + 9-11), and he laid down that same principle for all leaders in the kingdom (Luke 22:24-34; Matthew 19:23-20:16). The apostles, being charismatic leaders, led by ability more than by authority.⁵ Elders also were to lead on the basis of character (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Many problems among early Christians were therefore solved without a “showdown” in which authority was finally invoked⁶ so that there is not a continuous display of where the authority lies. Emphasis on personal purity of life, personal initiative in service, and interpersonal trust rather than motivation by fear, make authority less prominent in the functioning of a community with voluntary membership.

Abbreviated Records. From the standpoint of information about the church, de-emphasis on organization comes from (2) the abbreviated records. The New Testament does not preserve a detailed history of “all the acts of all the apostles,”⁷ but selects prominent persons and major events to stand for the total pattern of expansion and formation. The brevity, orderly arrangement, and scope⁸ of Luke’s summary imply that it epitomizes the whole process of establishing the church in the world. His omission of any word about ordering the churches of the second missionary journey, for instance, does not suggest that they were not organized or were organized differently from the previous churches (Acts 11:23), as the presence of bishops in Philippi shows (Acts 16:11-40; Philippians 1:1-2).⁹ Rather, the omission derives from a selective manner of narrative style that expects the reader in recurring situations to supply repetitious elements on the principle of generalization. The amount of historical material on organization results partly from Luke’s terse manner of presentation.

Simplicity of the Pattern. Finally, from the standpoint of the modern expectations about the church, the amount of material on organization results from (3) the relative simplicity of the pattern. Focusing at the wrong level of magnitude sometimes makes it hard to find a city on a road map because the letters of the name are smaller than anticipated. In much the same way modern ecclesiastical systems may unconsciously influence a person to set his mind at the wrong level of complexity as he searches for the New Testament system; consequently, he may find less than expected and construe it as none.

The New Testament lays moderate emphasis on church organization, interweaving its presentation with other, dynamic factors. As a result, a person must take care lest he confuse the writers’ de-emphasis with disinterest, and conclude either that there was no form or that form was non-germane, hence variable, in Christianity. The uniqueness of the church is not in the accomplishing of its purposes purely on the basis of

interpersonal power, but in the ordering of personal influence before impersonal authority in the accomplishment of those purposes.

Local and General

Definitions of Local and General

A local office is one filled by persons from within the church where they exercise authority. A general office has at least potential responsibility over a number of churches. A more precise definition of “local” is difficult and at the same time helpful to establishing positively a normative pattern for church unity. “Local” is used here to mean the perceived basic unit of composition as distinguished from the smallest discernible unit. The task is to determine which level of grouping in the New Testament is to be viewed as the basic unity of organizational composition: the local church.

The household church is the smallest scope of reference in the word ἐκκλησία. Paul alone uses it in this sense: (1) in Ephesus the household church of Aquila and Prisca (1 Corinthians 16:19); (2) in Rome another one sponsored later by the same couple (Romans 16:5; note also 16:14, 15); (3) in Laodicea the household church of a woman named “Nympha” (Colossians 4:15);¹⁰ (4) in Colossae the church in the house of Philemon (Philemon 2).¹¹

Although the household church is the smallest unit denominated ἐκκλησία, the next larger scope of its reference, the city, seems to be the basic unit. The first reason lies in the usage of ἐκκλησία itself: “church” is uniformly singular with reference to cities¹² despite the fact that (a) a plurality of household churches existed in some cities.¹³ (b) In certain places where no household churches are specifically mentioned, the Christian community was obviously larger than what could have congregated in one house even if it had a spacious inner courtyard.¹⁴ The big cities Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth are among those that have the singular “church” used of them. (c) Wherever examinable, “church” is distributive (“every church,” “no church,” “churches”) at the city level rather than above, or below, that level.¹⁵ The usage of words shows that the New Testament writers perceived “local” to be at the city order of magnitude.

The second reason city seems to be the perceived basic unit is that it is the lowest level with organization. What lacks organization cannot by definition be the basic unit of organization. Elders are uniformly mentioned with cities¹⁶ rather than with a subunit household church or a higher territorial section. Ephesus is important at this juncture, for Paul calls to Miletus “the elders of the church in Ephesus” (Acts 20:17). The text does not say “the elders of the churches in Ephesus” (distributive); neither does it mean “church elders in Ephesus” (generic), for Paul proceeds to address the overseers of a unit called “the flock” (specific; 20:28-29).¹⁷ Luke speaks of “appointing elders in every church” (Acts 14:23) whereas Paul speaks of “appointing elders in every city” (Titus 1:5).

In the New Testament, church seems to have been coextensive with community. Local churches, defined as the basic units of composition and operation, must have varied greatly in size according to the size of the population cluster they pervaded. In more populous centers a sense of the church’s city-wide solidarity could have been provided

for by occasional or regular meetings in public facilities like the stadium, amphitheater, or the temple area in the case of Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; 5:12, 42). The household churches served as functional equivalents of modern cell groups, cottage prayer meetings, encounter groups, Sunday School classes, *etc.*, where close associations in worship, fellowship, and service could give the personal attention necessary in edification, exhortation, and evangelism. Smaller cities may not have had subunits. That the city was perceived as local is seen (1) in the constant usage of “church” with city and (2) in the placement of the lowest organizational position (elder) at the city level. In confirmation of these two arguments, (3) all New Testament correspondence addressed to a church was addressed to a city.¹⁸ Though varying greatly in size, these local units were universally parallel to one another in that they were uniformly the basic units of composition and operation.

General Ministry and General Organization

Since “organization” is being used to mean the pattern of authority flow, it follows that non-authoritative functions involved in general ministry are not parts of a general organization exercising control over local leaders. General ministry is a functioning from place to place serially, rather than a presiding over many places simultaneously. One might labor in several congregations at one time, but he would still be operating in a cycle, rather than over a circle. General ministry does not require general authority since general ministry may be exercised under local authority as one moves from place to place in educating and exhorting the established churches.

In pioneering new work, the general minister can lead on the dynamic basis of ability under the jurisdiction of the word, depending on the inherent power of the gospel he demonstrates and proclaims to bear fruit in the lives of those who hear God’s word and see his example. He can stand as a natural leader among God’s increase, carrying a personal ascendancy rather than an official authority. His moving new converts on to develop their own leadership is through the same means by which he was God’s instrument for converting them in the first place: the authority of the word, to which they have already committed themselves; and his ability as a minister to lead equals by personal influence. As conversion does not involve a minister’s authority over the hearer, so also growth in Christ does not necessitate it, especially when he can appeal to the written authority.

Since the functions of general ministry may be fulfilled without invoking the principle of authority, the biblical interpreter must determine whether a given general function has the authority dimension added so as to make it part of church organization in the strict sense.

Organization of the Church and Organization of the Churches

How many churches existed in the first century is not known, and how even the known churches were patterned is not mentioned in many cases. This lack of information

about congregations does not preclude an inquiry into the form of the universal church for two reasons: (1) The essential point in the section on “Basic Structure” is the absence of any general authoritative office between the twelve apostles and the groups of local elders; hence, the local leaders functioned under the apostles directly.

(2) Organization is by nature a deductive matter, rather than an inductive one, because authority flows down rather than up. Coming to a conclusion about the form of the church requires sufficient evidence, but not exhaustive evidence about all the local units in the organization.

Summary

With respect to leadership, influence and authority are the means of which natural and formal leadership are the modes; “function” and “office” label positions characterized by them. While the influence-natural-function set differs from the authority-formal-office set, the two systems are made compatible in Christian leadership by placing the former before the latter. Since the church is a voluntary society, the New Testament emphasizes natural leadership by requiring that a man first be able to influence before he is given the authority to direct. Church offices are therefore distinguished from functions by the added feature of supervisory authority.

Local church means the perceived basic unit of composition as distinguished from the smallest one. In the first century the local church was coextensive with population cluster as is evident from three observations: (1) “church” is uniformly singular with cities; (2) eldership, the lowest office, was uniformly at the city level; (3) all correspondence addressed to a church was addressed to a city. Larger cities had a series of household units that collectively comprised the city-wide local church.

ENDNOTES

¹Note in this context the applicability of Lawrence Richard’s insights on “Motivating the Learner,” in *Creative Bible Teaching*, pp. 128-36. Paul’s forbearance of rights may be observed in 1 Corinthians 9:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:9; Philemon 8, where he would rather exhort and beseech as an equal than command as a superior.

²In the following passages one can see leadership selected on the basis of germane qualifications: Philippians 2:5-11 (Lord); Acts 1:21-22 (apostle); 6:3 (the seven); 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9 (elders); 1 Timothy 3:8-13 (deacons). Examples of non-germane bases for leadership may be gleaned from Paul’s opposition to false leaders in Corinth: bodily appearance (2 Corinthians 10:9-10); speech (1 Corinthians 1:17; 10:6; 2 Corinthians 11:6); “riding in on someone else’s shirt tail” (2 Corinthians 10:14-16; cp. Romans 15:20); “bossiness” (2 Corinthians 11:20); ancestry (2 Corinthians 11:18 + 22; cp. Luke 3:8); letters of commendation (2 Corinthians 3:1).

³In common parlance “office” frequently covers both “function” and “office” as used above. Since the following analysis attaches particular significance to this distinctive feature, it seems advisable in these preliminary remarks to establish a

consistent use of separate terms that point up the presence or absence of supervisory authority.

⁴Offices: Lord, apostle, elder; functions: evangelist, prophet, deacon(ess). Other classifications include supernaturally endowed (Lord, apostle, prophet) vs. ordinary (evangelist, elder, deacon); general (Lord, apostle, evangelist, prophet) vs. local (elder, deacon); outreach (Lord, apostle, prophet, evangelist, elder) vs. internal (deacon), the first category in each pair being inclusive of the later category.

⁵For an example of how closely Paul associated apostleship and ability displayed in service, note that in his second epistle he defends to the Corinthians his apostleship by appealing to his service for Christ (**11:16-12:13**), knowledge (**6:6**; cf. **11:6**), experience with Christ (**12:1-6**), suffering for Christ (**11:23-27**), concern for the saints (**11:28-29**), trust-worthiness (**4:2**) and other basic Christian virtues (**6:1-10**).

⁶Certain exceptions include 2 Corinthians **13:1-10**; 1 Timothy **1:18-20**.

⁷J. W. McGarvey in *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles* suggests that the anarthrous title *Πράξεις Ἀποστόλων* is meant to indicate this fact (pp. vii-viii). The lack of articles may simply indicate qualitative reference, however.

⁸Gamaliel argues that the Jews should be careful about what they did to the apostles because, unlike previous Messianic claimants, Jesus of Nazareth did not begin a movement that died with him: Christianity was not another “fly-by-night,” Zealot uprising (Acts **5:33-42**). God gave the Jewish nation forty years to recognize this fact before he allowed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, which stood for the whole Mosaic system (Hebrews **8**). Luke seems to have published his Acts only some three years before the Roman armies began making their way up from the coast to Jerusalem in A.D. 66. The scope of Acts corresponds, then, to the period of time for establishing the church to the extent that Jerusalem could be cut off. For a treatment of the dates proposed for the writing of Acts, see Donald Guthrie, *The Pauline Epistles*, Vol. I: *New Testament Introduction*, pp. 307-15. An account of the Jewish war appears in Josephus *Wars* **3:1:1-7:10:1**.

The publication of Acts also corresponds with the time when Christianity was no longer considered by the Romans as a branch of Judaism, as the imminent Neronian persecutions imply.

⁹On the equation of bishop and elder see Chapter III.

¹⁰See *in loco* the critical apparatus in the Kurt Aland Greek text for manuscript support of various readings on the name *Nympha*.

¹¹Other examples of the household church seem to occur where “church” is not used to designate the group: (5) Mary the mother of John (Acts **12:5-17**). Peter naturally went there after his release from prison; many were gathered for prayer on his behalf. He then sent word of the deliverance to “James and the brethren,” who were elsewhere, while he himself “went to another place”—all this in connection with the fact that “fervent prayer was made by the church to God for him.”

(6) A person wonders whether the house of Stephanas in Corinth maintained a church as part of their ministry (1 Corinthians **16:15-16**), and whether Gaius of 3 John 1 had one in his home since he was in a position to house itinerant Christians like John. Paul may have household units in mind when he expresses a deep concern for false teachers “who overthrow whole houses” (Titus **1:11**).

¹²The singular *church* refers to Jerusalem (Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:22; 12:5; 15:4, 22), Caesarea (Acts 18:22; one might follow the Textus Receptus, which adds in 18:21 the statement about Paul’s intention to go to Jerusalem so as to imply that the church to which he “went up” was Jerusalem rather than Caesarea; “down from” could substantiate the TR since it might not be an appropriate expression for travel from Caesarea to Antioch as shown in Acts 14:25; 15:2), Antioch (Acts 11:26; 13:1; 14:27; 15:3), Laodicea (Colossians 4:15, 16), Ephesus (Acts 20:17), Philippi (Philippians 4:15), Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1), Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2; 14:4, 5, 12, 19, 23, 28, 35; 2 Corinthians 1:1), Cenchrea (Romans 16:1). The list could be enlarged by inference: Colossae and Hierapolis are compared with Laodicea (Colossians 4:13-16; note 1:2). Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe might be added on the comparison of Titus 1:5 (“in every city”) and Acts 14:23 (“in every church”; Acts 16:5; Galatians 1:22).

The plural “churches” appears within territorial reference: Judaea (Galatians 1:22; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; cf. Acts 9:31), Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41); Asia (1 Corinthians 16:19; the seven churches in Revelation 1:4, 11, 20²; 2:7, 11, 17, 23, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:16), Galatia (Acts 14:23 “every church”; 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:22), Macedonia (2 Corinthians 8:1). It appears once within ethnic reference: Gentiles (Romans 16:4). The other plurals are without limiting reference: Romans 16:16 (“churches of Christ”); 1 Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 11:16 (“churches of God”); 14:33, 34; 2 Corinthians 8:1, 18, 19, 23, 24; 11:8, 28; 12:13; Philippians 4:15 (“no church”).

¹³Rome had at least three such churches (Romans 16:5, 14, 15). That Paul does not use the singular “church” in the salutation of Romans seems insignificant since he does so in the cyclical letter of “Ephesians” (1:1) and in Philippians (1:1) and Colossians (1:2). “Ephesus” and “Philippi” elsewhere have “the church of” used with them (Acts 20:17; Philippians 4:15). If the church of Nympha was in Colossae (Colossians 4:15-16) rather than in Laodicea, then two household churches met there. Philemon, who had a church in his home (Philippians 2), was a resident of Colossae as shown by the fact that his slave Onesimus was from that city (Colossians 4:9).

¹⁴Already by Acts 4:4 the number of believers in Jerusalem was nearly ten thousand—more than could gather in the house of Mary, for instance (Acts 12:1-19). At an early date Antioch contained a large concentration of Christians (Acts 11:19-26; 15:30-35). The response to the gospel in Ephesus was so tremendous during the twenty-seven months Paul ministered there that \$8,000 worth of books on magic (the occult?) were burned publicly and the silversmiths feared for the reputation of heathen artwork (Acts 19). Because the Lord had “much people” in Corinth, Paul stayed for a relatively long ministry of eighteen months.

One wonders whether the presence of a number of household churches in big population centers is behind expressions like *the whole church* on certain occasions of general assembly: Acts 6:2; 14:27; 15:22; 20:28; Romans 16:23; 1 Corinthians 14:23. Such gatherings may have taken place in the stadium or amphitheater, or in the temple area in Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; 5:12, 42).

^{15(a)} The “seven churches of Asia” (Revelation 1:11, 20²; 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:16) were specifically Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicia (Revelation 1:11; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). (b) As respects organizing the churches in Galatia, Luke says Paul and Barnabas “appointed elders in every church” (Acts 14:23), whereas Paul tells Titus in a comparable situation in Crete to

“appoint elders in every city” (Titus 1:5). This equal scope of reference in city and church may also be the point in another episode: (c) after the Jerusalem conference Paul took Silas and “went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41); “*as they went through the cities, they delivered the decrees . . . So the churches were strengthened*” (Acts 16:4-5).

¹⁶Elements of organization are associated with Jerusalem in Acts 15:2, 4, 5, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18 (+ 15); with Lystra, Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, etc., in Acts 14:23 (+21); with Ephesus in Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17, 19 (+ 1:3); with Philippi in Philippians 1:1; with cities of Crete in Titus 1:5, 7. For evidence that eldership was the lowest office, see Chapter III.

¹⁷In 1 Peter 5:1-4 the apostle addresses the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Pontus, and says “*the elders that are among you . . . tend the flock.*” *The letter being general by multiple or cyclical distribution, Peter does not mean the flock that equals the whole territory of Asia Minor, but “the elders that are among you tend the flock [in the place where the letter is now being read].”* This understanding distributively rather than corporately, telling the sick to “call the elders of the church” (5:14-15) and the members generally not to show respect of persons in their assembly (2:1ff.).

¹⁸Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippi in Philippians 1:1 + 4:15; Colossae in Colossians 4:16; Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Ephesus in Revelation 2:1; Smyrna in Revelation 2:8; Pergamum in Revelation 2:12; Thyatira in Revelation 2:18; Sardis in Revelation 3:1; Philadelphia in Revelation 3:7; Laodecia in Revelation 3:14; Colossians 4:16; Ephesians 1:1 (but see p⁴⁶, ‡*, B* *in loco*). Philemon is addressed secondarily to a household church meeting in the home of its primary recipient.