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WHERE HAVE ALL THE BISHOPS GONE?

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how the Greek term ἐπισκοπῆς and its related variants are translated in English Bible translations. From early translations to the middle of the 20th century, "bishop" was the preferred translation equivalent. However, translations done in the latter half of the 20th century prefer the more generic term "overseer" or a functional equivalent. This apparent neutrality in selecting a more general term has, however, theological implications and may actually violate the principle of *sola scriptura*. The paper shows that the New Testament ἐπισκοπῆς functions as a term with meanings similar to its secular use in ancient times as well as its use in the Septuagint. It is suggested that the term boldly declares the colonisation of the kingdoms of men by the kingdom of God. Therefore the translation equivalent also needs to be a term with equivalent semantic content.

1. INTRODUCTION

In English Bible translations, the words *bishop* or *overseer* are used as translation equivalents for the New Testament office of the *episkopos*. The term *bishop* is derived from the Old English *bisceop* derived from the late Latin *episcopus* which, in turn, is derived from the late Greek word *episkopos* [a composite of *epi* (over) and *skopos* (from *skeptestai*, "to look at")] (Houghton 2004:1; OED 2005; Webster 1828). The term *overseer* is derived from *epi* + *skopos* = over-seer or super-visor. Thus *bishop* is a transliteration, whereas *overseer* is a direct translation. Hence, from a linguistic perspective, both appear to be valid equivalents for the term *episkopos*.

This paper compares the use of these terms in English translations with that of *episkopos* in the Greek New Testament and the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), as well as its secular use in ancient Greece, in order to determine whether the English terms indeed function as equivalents. This is followed by an examination of intra-textual and contextual evidence regarding the term *episkopos*. The paper is based primarily on linguistic grounds, although theological considerations are also dealt with. The research model is derived from Descriptive Translation Studies.

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2. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The research framework is derived from the branch of translation studies initiated by Gideon Toury (1980), who argued that studies of translations essentially amounted to investigations and descriptions of the differences or *shifts* between source (ST) and target (TT) texts. He broke away from previous perspectives in that he did not prescriptively impose a norm of what should be considered a correct translation, but instead regarded all translations as valid. This comparison is usually done in terms of a *tertium comparationis* (TC) (Kruger & Wallmach 1997:120), i.e. a set of factors against which both ST and TT elements are compared. In this paper, the elements to be compared are restricted to semantic meaning and the TC comprises the following factors, represented as a set of questions:

- Who gives the authority?
- How is it vested?
- Over whom is the authority exercised?
- What is the nature of the authority?
- What is the extent of the authority?

Bible translation (as translation of sacred text) differs from secular translation in that greater adherence to the ST is required. Thus any theoretical model applied to Bible translation must necessarily incorporate what Nord (1991:93) terms *loyalty* to the ST, i.e. the translator is not at liberty to adapt the text as s/he pleases, but instead is obliged to represent the ST elements within the meanings and intentions of the original authors. This is highly significant in theological terms, since if the principle of *sola scriptura* is to be upheld, theology must be derived from, not woven into, the Scriptures, i.e. the translator should practice *exegesis*, not eisogesis. Therefore, in considering intra- and extra-textual evidence, this paper notes the extent to which the principle of *sola scriptura* is upheld.

The corpus consisted of 37 New Testament and 30 Old Testament translations, ranging from Wycliffe's translation in 1395 to recently published electronic versions (2006). They are listed in Appendix 1. Because of the nature of the work, most copies are in electronic format. Rick Meyer's concordance tool E-Sword proved an invaluable research aid.

3. *EPISKOPOS* IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The term *episkopos* (and related words) is used 10 times in the New Testament to designate a position of authority in the church, namely Acts 1:20, Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-2; 2 Tim 4:22; Tit 1:7; Tit 3:15; 1 Pet 2:25; 1 Pet 4:15; 1 Pet 5:2. The term used as translation equivalent was analysed for each refer-

ence. The most common translation equivalents were “bishop” and “overseer”, followed by “elder” or “leader”. The results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: New Testament translations of *episkopos*[1]

Ref.	Bishop	Overseer	Elder	Leader	Other	Alternate	Omit
Acts 1:20	6 (16%)	9 (24%)	0	2 (5%)	21 (57%)	job or office	0
Acts 20:28	7 (19%)	20 (54%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	7 (19%)	care	0
Phil 1:1	16 (43%)	13 (35%)	2 (5%)	5 (14%)	0		0
1 Tim 3:1	16 (43%)	14 (38%)	3 (8%)	8 (22%)	0		0
1 Tim 3:2	17 (46%)	11 (30%)	3 (8%)	6 (16%)	2 (5%)		0
2 Tim 4:22	2 (5%)	0	0	0	0		35 (95%)
Titus 1:7	17 (47%)	12 (33%)	2 (6%)	7 (19%)	0		0
Titus 3:15	2 (5%)	0	0	0	0		35 (95%)
1 Pet 2: 25	11 (30%)	11 (30%)	0	1 (3%)	14 (38%)	guardian	1 (3%)
1 Pet 5:2	0	20 (54%)	0	1 (3%)	12 (32%)	care	2 (5%)

(Percentages are based on the number of texts in the corpus. Since some translations use multiple terms for a particular verse, it means that these categories are not mutually exclusive and thus the sum of the percentages in this table will not necessarily add up to 100%.)

In Acts 1:20, the reference is to the office:

> γεγραπται γαρ εν βιβλω ψαλμων γενη ητω η επαυλις αυτου ερημος και μη εστω ο κατοικων εν αυτη και την επισκοπην αυτου λαβοι ετερος
>
> For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.

1 The Greek text is given together with the King James translation for clarity. The electronic text used on ESWORD is Pierpoint and Robinson’s Majority Text (1991). The only instances where differences between the various Greek texts affected the present study were the additions in the Majority text for 2 Tim 4:22 and Tit 3:15, which are omitted in the critical texts (cf. Aland 1983) and therefore in most translations.

Most English translations (57%) simply translated the term as “job” or “office”, thereby ignoring the term *episkopos*. Those who incorporated the term preferred *overseership* (24%) to *bishopric* (16%).

In Acts 20:28, the reference is to the person:

> προσέχετε οὖν ἑαυτοις καὶ παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ, ἐν ᾧ ὑμᾶς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ αγιον ἔθετο ἐπισκόπους, ποιμαίνειν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ, ἣ ν περιποιήσατο διὰ τοῦ ἰδιου αἵματος.
>
> Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Most translations (54%) preferred the term *overseer*, with only 19% using *bishop*. This is influenced by the fact that the men are also referred to as *presbyters* in Acts 20:17.[2]

In Philippians 1:1, the reference is again to the person, here contrasted with *diakonos*:

> Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος, δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ, ’Ιησοῦ πᾶσι τοῖς ἁγιοις ἐν Χριστῷ ’Ιησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις
>
> Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

The majority (43%) of translations preferred the term *bishop*, with 35% using the term *overseer*.

In 1 Timothy 3:1, the reference is to the office:

> Πιστὸς ὁ λόγος εἴ τις ἐπισκοπῆς ὀρέγεται, καλοῦ ἔργου ἐπιθυμεῖ.
>
> This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

The translators showed preference for *bishop* (43%) followed by *overseer* (38%).

In 1 Timothy 3:2, the reference is to the person:

> δεῖ οὖν τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνεπίλημπτον εἶναι, μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, νηφάλιον, σώφρονα, κόσμιον, φιλόξενον, διδακτικόν,
>
> A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

2 These verses serve to argue the equivalence of the two terms. An alternative argument is that a bishop is a particular rank of presbyter. After the first century, the latter perception predominated.

The translators again preferred *bishop* (46%) to *overseer* (30%).

Similarly in Titus 1:7:

> δεῖ γὰρ τὸν ἐπίσκοπον ἀνέγκλητον εἶναι ὡς θεοῦ οἰκονόμον, μὴ αὐ-
> θάδη, μὴ ὀργίλον, μὴ πάροινον, μὴ πλήκτην, μὴ αἰσχροκερδῆ,
>
> For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

The translators again preferred *bishop* (47%) to *overseer* (33%).

The following Scriptures only appeared in two older translations. In both cases, the term is translated as *bishop*.

2 Timothy 4:22:

> ο κυριος Ιησους Χριστος μετα του πνευματος σου η χαρις μεθυμων αμην [προσ τιμοθεον δευτερα της εφεσιων εκκλησιας πρωτον επισκοπον χειροτονητεντα εγραφη απο ρωμης οτε εκ δευτερου παρεστη Παυλος τω καισαρι νερωνι]
>
> The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen. [The second epistle unto Timotheus, ordained the first bishop of the church of the Ephesians, was written from Rome, when Paul was brought before Nero the second time].

Titus 3:15:

> ασπαζονται σε οι μετ εμου παντες ασπασαι τους φιλουντας ημας εν πιστει η χαρις μετα παντων υμων. αμην [προς τιτον της κρητων εκκλησιας πρωτον επισκοπον χειροτονηθεντα εγραφη απο νικοπολεως της μακεδονιας]
>
> All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen. [It was written to Titus, ordained the first bishop of the church of the Cretians, from Nicopolis of Macedonia.]

In 1 Peter 2:25, the reference is to Christ as our *episkopos*:

> ἦτε γὰρ ὡς πρόβατα πλανώμενα, ἀλλ' ἐπεστράφητε νῦν ἐπὶ τὸν ποιμένα καὶ ἐπίσκοπον τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν.
>
> For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

The translators showed no significant preference between *bishop* (30%), *overseer* (30%) or a more general word, namely “guardian” (38%).

In 1 Peter 5:2, the reference is to the verb:

> ποιμανατε το εν υμιν ποιμνιον του θεου επισκοπουντες μη αναγκαστως αλλ εκουσιως μηδε αισχροκερδως αλλα προθυμως ...
>
> Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind …

Translators made no attempt to match the verbal form to the term *bishop*, preferring instead "oversight" (54%) or a more general term, e.g. "care" (32%).

Applying the *tertium comparationis* to the above Scriptures, we deduce, firstly, that the *episkopos* derived his authority from God (a supreme ruler) through the apostles (Acts 20:28; Tit 1:7).

Secondly, this authority is vested in the sacrament of ordination. From intratextual evidence in the New Testament four levels of ordination are apparent. Firstly, those ordained by Christ Himself are termed apostles (John 15:16; 20:22-23; Acts 1:24-25; 9:15; 1 Tim 1:1). They in turn ordained *episkopoi* (cf. 1 Tim 1:6), *presbyteroi* (Acts 14:23) and *diakonoi* (Acts 6:6). The *episkopoi* in turn were also given authority to ordain *presbyteroi* (Tit 1:5) and *diakonoi* (1 Tim 3:8). The New Testament also outlines the process of ordination. Worthy individuals were chosen by the local congregation (Acts 1:23; 6:5) or volunteered themselves (1 Tim 3:1). They were then presented to the apostles who ordained them by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6; 14:23; 1 Tim 1:6).

Thirdly, it is evident that the *episkopoi* exercise their authority over the local church, i.e. Christian believers (1 Pet 5:2).

Fourthly, the nature of the authority is primarily pastoral: he is likened to a shepherd (1 Tim 3:5; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:2). He acts as guardian over the local believers' spiritual welfare as well as guardian and propagator of the truth (2 Tim 1:13-14; 2:2). He is also responsible for church discipline (cf. Tit 2:15).

Fifthly, the extent of his authority is spiritual only (cf. 1 Tim 3:5). He is to have no secular interest in money or power (1 Tim 3:3). Moreover, whereas disobedience to apostolic authority could result in death (cf. Acts 5), the authority of the *episkopos* is limited to rebuke and excommunication (cf. 1 Cor 5:5; Tit 2:15). It is also evident that the jurisdiction of the episcopate varied: an *episkopos* could be in charge of a region (e.g. Titus was first *episkopos* for the whole of Crete), a city (Timothy was first *episkopos* of Ephesus) or merely a local church (e.g. there was more than one *episkopos* in Phillipi) (cf. Eusebius *Hist. Eccl.* 3.4).

4. ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF *EPISKOPOS* IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the translations, it is evident that *overseer* competes with *bishop* as translation equivalent for *episkopos*. It is also evident that even though *bishop* was the most popular choice in the references in the epistles to Timothy and Titus, the majority of translations do not use the term consistently.

Moreover, when the translations were analysed chronologically, it was found that although *bishop* was the most popular translation equivalent in earlier years, since the latter half of the twentieth century it has been increasingly avoided. Between 1949 and 1995 only three translations preferred *bishop* to *overseer* as translation equivalent (namely *The Bible in Basic English*, the *21st Century King James Version* and *God's Word*). After 1995, no translation used *bishop* as translation equivalent, thereby prompting the title of this paper: where have the bishops gone?

Arguments against the use of *bishop* can be grouped according to linguistic, theological/inter-textual or historical grounds.

5. LINGUISTIC ARGUMENTS

The need for a specific term was attacked. It is claimed that:

- *episkopos* was a general term in ancient Greece meaning overseer and thus not unique to the New Testament (Barnes 1798; Orr 1939).
- *episkopos* was also merely a general term for overseer in the Septuagint (Barnes 1798; Orr 1939; PMI 2005:16).

Therefore, it is argued, the generic translation "overseer" is preferable to the specific term "bishop".

In order to investigate these arguments, it is necessary to investigate the use of the word *episkopos* in ancient Greek writings and the Septuagint, as well as the use of *overseer* as translation equivalent in the Old Testament.

5.1 *Episkopos* in Ancient Greece

An analysis of the occurrences of the term *episkopos* in ancient Greek writings provided a number of instances. The term was used by Homer to describe both Hector of Troy and the gods (Barclay 2001; *Iliad* 22.255). It was also used to designate certain guardian gods of treaties and agreements (Plutarch, *Cam*. 5 in Barclay 1969:281; Orr 1939), protectors of homes (e.g. Justice) and in Plato's laws to describe the Guardians of the State (Barclay 2001). Similarly, Plato's

market stewards (equivalent to our police force) who "supervise personal conduct, so as to punish him who needs punishment" are termed *episkopoi* (Barclay 2001). In ancient Athens, the term designated governors and administrators sent out to oversee colonies or subject states (Barclay 1969:281; Bakker 2007:7; Rapp 2000:379; Steiner 2001:625) and in Rhodes, the Chief magistrates (Rapp 2000:381). In Rome the term was used for magistrates who oversaw the revenues of pagan temples (Douglas & Hillyer 1962:146). Other uses of *episkopos* included special delegates who ensured that the king's law was carried out as well as city administrators and inspectors, especially over financial affairs (Rapp 2000:379; Steiner 2001:625).

In terms of the TC, the *episkopos*'s authority is delegated by a supreme power such as the emperor, king or god (cf. Bakker 2007:7). It is vested by appointment to a special office. The *episkopos* ruled in the name of the supreme authority over the latter's subjects, who were citizens of the mother city or inhabitants of subject colonies. This authority was used to protect the just, administer lands and finances, maintain law and order and punish offenders (cf. Barclay 1969:281). The nature of his authority was both positive and negative. Authority over humans extended to exile and even capital punishment (cf. Plato's *The Apology of Socrates* in Eliot 1969:27).

It is evident that the *episkopos* was a specific office, not just a general term for overseer. He ruled as delegate of a supreme authority, primarily directing the affairs of men.

We then examine the occurrences of the term in the Septuagint.

5.2 *Episkopos* in the Old Testament

The following nine references were found for *episkopos* in the LXX: Numbers 4:16; Judges 9:28; 2 Chronicles 34:12, 17; Nehemiah 11:9, 14, 22; 12:42; Isaiah 60:17. The results are summarised in Table 2. For each reference, the percentage of translations (of the 30 translations in the corpus) that translated *episkopos* as "overseer" is also given. (Their relevance is discussed in paragraph 5.3.)

It is evident from these references that the word *episkopos* in the LXX translation was restricted to priests, Levites (a priestly clan) and city governors. In only one case it is used figuratively (Isa 60: 17), in which case St Ireneaus (*episkopos* of Lyons, AD 188) reinterpreted it in a Christian context to designate Christian *episkopoi*.

Table 2: References to *episkopos* in the LXX

Reference	Person(s) signified	Overseer (%)
Num 4:16	Priest	37
Judges 9:28	City Governor	3
2 Ch 34:12	Levites	57
2 Ch 34:17	Levites	60
Neh 11:9	City Governor	63
Neh 11:14	Priest	67
Neh 11:22	Levites	70
Neh 12:42	Levites	47
Isa 60:17b	Righteousness	10
	Bishop (Ireneaus *Adv. Haereses* 4.5)	

Therefore, the writers of the LXX used the word exclusively for those who governed the conquered territory of Israel (in accordance with its secular use) or the house of God. In terms of the *TC*, the authority is delegated by God in the case of priests and Levites or by a conquering ruler in the case of the governors. The authority is vested by appointment to a specific office, and in terms of the priests and Levites, by appointment and birth lineage. Whereas the governors ruled the inhabitants of the subject colony of Israel, the priests and Levites exercised oversight over God's people (the Jews) and His Temple. In both cases, the *episkopos* had legal jurisdiction over men as well as administrative rights. This authority in both cases was both positive and negative in nature. The governors upheld law and order, but could also execute offenders. Similarly, the priests and Levites ensured God's commandments were obeyed and cared for the spiritual needs of God's people. According to Jewish Law, the priestly clans also had the right to punish offenders by excommunication (cf. Lev 18:29).[3]

The LXX either echoed Greek secular usage or used the term to designate the administrators of God's House. In both cases they therefore indicate a specific term.

The above results were then compared to references to overseers in the Old Testament.

3 The Israelite community also had the right to execute offenders (cf. Lev 20); however, they lost this right when conquered (cf. John 18:31).

5.3 Old Testament overseers

The corpus of 30 translations of the Old Testament was searched for all possible references to *overseers*. In all, 43 verses were found that used *overseer* as translation equivalent. From the investigation, it was evident that *overseer* was used for a multitude of responsibilities, including: herders of livestock; sellers of pancakes; property stewards; agricultural ministers; herdsmen; slave-drivers; priests and levites; temple guards; those carrying out temple duties; temple officials; those in charge of division of land; foremen; palace officials; city governors; those involved in temple reconstruction; army commanders; treasurers; tribal chiefs; choir directors; harem managers; the abstract concepts of peace and justice; eunuch court officials; palace stewards; guards. It is evident that while some of these functions corresponded to the LXX concepts of *episkopos*, *overseer* is used in a far broader sense to mean anyone with delegated authority, however menial the task, and not necessarily over humans. Thus it is generic rather than a specific term.

The words *overseer* and *oversight* were then tabulated for each Bible, firstly as a percentage of the total 43 readings, then as a percentage over the readings for *episkopos*, and finally as a percentage of coincidences when *overseer* was used as translation equivalent where the LXX used *episkopos*. (For this survey, the figurative use of *episkopos* in Isa 60:17 was left out.) It was found that translations that showed high coincidences with *episkopos* also showed a tendency to use *overseer* far more frequently than the LXX used *episkopos*, and hence as a general word, not specifically as an equivalent for *episkopos*. (Since most translators use the Hebrew text as ST, it is not surprising that the translators exhibit little sensitivity towards the frequency of a term in the LXX.)

Texts using Simplified English tended to avoid the use of *overseer* in both Testaments, thereby not employing it as a translation equivalent of *episkopos*. The New International Version appears to reserve the word to its New Testament usage. Only the Geneva Bible and the Amplified Bible used *overseer* as translation equivalent to *episkopos* consistently in both Testaments.

In conclusion, it is evident that *overseer* is used by most Bible translators in a general sense to denote any person with delegated responsibility, whether over pancakes, buildings or men. In contrast, the term *episkopos* in the LXX is restricted to those having authority over God's house or city governors.

6. INTRA-TEXTUAL ARGUMENTS

From the literature, a number of objections based on interpretations of the New Testament were found against the use of a specific office of authority. Although the objections were theological in nature, from a linguistic perspective the investigation of inter-textual agreement amounts to the examination of the immediate

linguistic context of the ST word, or, in other words, contextual factors (cf. Baker 1992:228).

Firstly, it is argued that the New Testament does not really provide teaching on church government (Douglas & Hillyer 1962: 207; Erickson 1985:1084). However, this ignores the teachings found in the books of Titus, Timothy, Peter and Acts (as outlined above), as well as the writings of early Church Fathers and the oral and practical traditions of the early Church (e.g. as outlined in the *Didache* (cf. Bettenson 1963:66).

Secondly, according to Erickson (1985:1085), the apostles never instituted such a formalised, highly developed structure of government. Yet we see Paul encouraging Titus and Timothy to appoint leaders in order to propagate what has become termed the *apostolic succession* (cf. 2 Tim 2:2; Tit 1:5). Moreover, as discussed above, it is evident that the apostles appointed three different sets of clergy, namely *episkopoi* (cf. 1 Tim 1:6), *presbyteroi* (Acts 14:23) and *diakonoi* (Acts 6:6).

Thirdly, according to Pratt (in Orr 1939), the New Testament Church did not distinguish between laity and clergy. This argument ignores the three ranks above and their details on ordination. Moreover, in Acts 20:28, St Paul convened a special meeting with clergy only.

Fourthly, according to Erickson (1985:1079), "the apostles made recommendations and gave advice, but exercised no real rulership or control". In contrast, we read of the man handed over to Satan (1 Cor 5:5) and the deaths of Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:5), as well as the assurances of apostolic power in 1 Tim 3:2 and Tit 1:7. The apostles therefore exercised a very real authority over the churches.

Fifthly, according to Erickson (1985:1081), Jesus denounced rank in favour of democracy in Matt 23:8. However, this ignores the fact that Christ established a kingdom, not a democracy (cf. John 18:36). He therefore denounced the abuses of rank, not the structure.

Sixthly, according to Erickson (1985:1081), the early church decided matters through consensus, not through a single person. This statement is based on the council of Acts 15:22. However, this council was a council of Apostles only, thus this consensus in Acts 15 was a consensus of apostles only! A similar argument is that authority to discipline belongs to the group as a whole, not just one man (cf. Erickson 1985:1078). What is being objected to here is autocratic rule, not the actual validation of the office. In fact, in 1 Cor 5:5 we read that the church together with the apostle/bishop is involved in discipline. However, the highly individual nature of John 20:23 ("whose sins you remit") cannot be ignored.

Seventhly, according to Erickson (1985:1084), the type of church government depended on the type of community, thus it differed from place to place. However, Acts 14:23 states that the apostles appointed elders in every town. Moreover, Paul emphatically underlines unity of practice in 1 Cor 3:4; 4:17 ("what I teach in every church"). This is further disproved in the next section.

Moreover, according to Erickson (1985:1074), the episcopate denies the direct lordship of Christ over His Church. This argument does not distinguish between those whom Christ called (termed apostles) and those trustworthy men entrusted with guarding the truth of the faith (i.e. *episkopoi*). In contrast, the office of the episcopate ensures the purity of Christ's teachings and guards against the dangers of false apostles. A similar claim is that bishops deny the "priesthood of all believers" (Erickson 1985:1085 cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Again, this arises from the failure to distinguish between the general priesthood of all believers and the special priesthood (clergy) ordained after the patterns recorded in the book of Acts. Making "every man an apostle" simply leads to arrogance, heresy and the consequent multiplication of sects as each expounds his own subjective version of the truth, as St Irenaeus warned in 188 AD (*Adv. Haereses* 4.2-8).

A final objection is that clergy was chosen by the laity, not from above. However, as discussed above, it was a joint procedure in which the laity chose candidates and presented them to the apostles who ordained them (Acts 6:6; 14:23). Moreover (as discussed above), St Paul in his epistles instructs both Timothy and Titus to ordain other worthy men.

We see that the New Testament church in fact had clergy or *presbuteroi* (literally, *elders*, from which is derived the transliteration, *priests*). Moreover, a distinction is made between *episkopoi* or senior elders (to whom were delegated apostolic authority) and *diakonoi* (cf. Phil 1:1). Thus inter-textual evidence does not refute a hierarchical structure.

We turn now to an examination of the historical context of the early church.

7. HISTORICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST "BISHOP"

The following arguments have been put forward based on early church history. Erickson (1985:1074, 1081-1084) raises three objections: firstly, that the early church decided matters through consensus (Acts 15:22), not through a hierarchical structure; secondly, that apostolic succession is just a theory without any real evidence; thirdly, that the type of church government depended on the type of community; it differed from place to place.

In order to investigate these objections, we need to examine church government in the first four centuries. This period can be divided into three eras, namely the apostolic missionary church, the persecuted church and the State church.

The missionary church (AD 33-100) was characterised by the apostles and apostolic delegation of authority through ordination (cf. Walker 1985:34). Its primary documentary evidence is the New Testament itself (discussed above). However the letters of St Clement, Bishop of Rome (AD 68-97) are also primary sources of this era. According to St Clement:

> The apostles have preached the Gospel to us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ [has done so] from God. Christ therefore was sent forth by God, and the apostles by Christ. Both these appointments, then, were made in an orderly way, according to the will of God. Having therefore received their orders … they went forth proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, *they appointed the first-fruits [of their labours], having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons* of those who should afterwards believe. Nor was this any new thing, since indeed many ages before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place, "I will appoint their bishops in righteousness, and their deacons in faith" … 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 … they appointed those already mentioned, and afterwards gave instructions, that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry (1 *Ep. ad Corinth.* 42, 45).

St Clement confirms the two-fold New Testament offices of bishops and deacons (cf. Walker 1985:47; Webster 1828).

The second stage of the church (AD 100-300) was characterised by fierce persecution and the rise of the *episkopoi* as the successors of the apostles. One of the earlier manuscripts of this time, the Didache, which is ascribed to be of Syrian origin from the beginning of the second century, also confirms the above two-fold hierarchy of *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* (Chapter XV, Bettenson 1963:66; Walker 1985:42, 48). However, St Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (AD 107) indicates a three-tiered hierarchy of the local church, with supreme authority vested in the *episkopos*:

> I exhort you to study to do all things with a divine harmony, while your *bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons*, who are most dear to me ... As therefore the Lord did nothing without the Father, being united to Him, neither by Himself nor by the apostles, so *neither do ye anything without the bishop and presbyters* (Ep. ad Magnes. 6,7).
>
> ... *Let no one do any of the things which concern the Church without the Bishop* (*Ep. ad Smyrn.* 8).

Moreover, according to St Ignatius, each local community, gathered round its Bishop, is the Church in its fullness. The presence of the *episkopos* validated all sacraments and activities:

> *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* (*Ep. ad. Phil* 8).

By the time of St Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (AD 188), apostolic succession was a dogma of the church (cf. Walker 1985:49; Bettenson 1963:68). St Irenaeus confirms the three tiered hierarchy as a mark of the true Church:

> 2. Wherefore it is incumbent to *obey the presbyters who are in the Church, those who, as I have shown, possess the succession from the apostles; those who, together with the succession of the episcopate*, have received the certain gift of truth, according to the good pleasure of the Father. But [it is also incumbent] to *hold in suspicion others who depart from the primitive succession, and assemble themselves together in any place whatsoever*, [looking upon them] either as heretics of perverse minds, or as schismatics puffed up and self-pleasing, or again as hypocrites, acting thus for the sake of lucre and vainglory … True knowledge is [that which consists in] the doctrine of the apostles, and the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ *according to the successions of the bishops*, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place, and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved without any forging of Scriptures (*Adv. Haereses* 4.2-8).

(It is interesting to note that already in AD 188 there were those who rejected the hierarchical structure.)

By the time of St Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (AD 258), Christianity had spread over the entire Roman Empire. The episcopate, like the Christian Church, was viewed as a single body composed of many members (cf. Walker 1985:83). There were many *episcopoi* but one *episcopate*; many churches, but only one Church:

> *The episcopate is a single whole, in which each bishop enjoys full possession*. So is the Church a single whole, though it spreads far and wide into a multitude of churches as its fertility increases (*De catholicae ecclesiae unitate* 5).

The third period saw the consolidation of Christianity as state religion after St Constantine's conversion (Walker 1985:125). This time of peace saw the rise of *metropolitans* (presiding bishops of regional councils) of Rome, Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch and the institution of ecumenical councils (conventions to which all *episkopoi* were invited) to solve issues that arose (Ware 1963:26-38; cf. Walker 1985:101). In AD 325, the Council of Nicea (First Ecumenical Council), apart from condemning the heresy of Arianism and formulating the Nicene Creed, also accorded the metropolitans of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem special honour (Canon VI) (cf. Walker 1985:134-136; Ware 1963:30). At the Council of Chalcedon (Second Ecumenical Council) in AD 451, the bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem were termed *patriarchs* (Ware 1963:34). Although the hierarchical system of ecclesiastical organisation was now complete, disputes of doctrine were not solved by a council of patriarchs or metropolitans, but by a council of all bishops. During this period, Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea Palestine, wrote his *History of the Christian Church* (Crusé 1892) (ca AD 330). It details the succession of bishops from apostolic times, especially in the above five sees (e.g. *Hist. Eccl.* 3.4; 4.1, 4, 5, 10, 19, 20; 5.7; 7.2, etc.). It is Eusebius, for example, who confirms the Majority Text readings:

> Timothy, indeed, is recorded as having first received the episcopate at Ephesus, as Titus also was appointed over the churches in Crete (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.4).

In the first four centuries of Christianity there was a single universal Church[4] governed by the same pattern of a three-tiered hierarchy (cf. Walker 1985: 47, 98), namely *episkopoi*, *presbyteroi* and *diakonoi* (cf. St Paul's claim in Acts 14:23; 1 Cor 3:4; 4:17). From apostolic times, issues of the church were solved by a consensus of bishops at regional and supranational councils. Finally, the above quotes and Eusebius' detailed history refute the objection that there is no real evidence of apostolic succession. Moreover, both the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches keep well-documented updated records of apostolic succession dating from the apostles to the present (cf. Patriarchate of Alexandria 2006).

It must be noted that the reluctance to accept an episcopal structure lies in the fear of the abuse of power, which was indelibly printed onto later Church history though medieval Catholic excesses such as the Pope's insistence on infallibility, the Crusades and the Inquisition (cf. Ware 1963:51-81). Indeed, one of the main differences between the Christian *episkopos* and his secular Greek counterpart was the extent of his authority. The Christian *episkopos* is denied secular power

4 The above quotes represent churches in Rome, Middle East, Gaul and Africa, i.e. over the whole Roman Empire.

as well as the right to exercise capital punishment. In contrast, he has to be truly holy, humble and altruistic. According to Ware (1963:35), "Rome's mistake … has been to turn this primacy or 'presidency of love' into a supremacy of external power and jurisdiction." As a result, communion was broken between Rome and the other four Patriarchates, which became known as the (Eastern) Orthodox Church (cf. Ware 1963:69). Similarly, the later rise of Protestantism and the rejection of episcopalean structures of government can be understood as reactions to the Catholic Church's abuse of power. However, the abuse of authority does not negate the Scriptural pattern of church government.

In the light of the above, it is of value to consider present forms of church government and the ways they may impact on translation choices.

8. PRESENT FORMS OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

At present, three main forms of church government are practiced in Christian churches, namely Episcopalian, Presbyterian and congregational government (Erickson 1985:1069-1082).

In an Episcopalian structure, authority is vested in the bishop or *episkopos* (Erickson 1985:1070). Authority is received from Christ through the apostles and transmitted throughout generations through the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14) (i.e. apostolic succession). Three different levels of ordination are recognised, namely bishop, priest and deacon (Acts 6:6; 14:23). The bishop supervises a group of churches or a region. He is the presbyter of the presbyters and ordains other priests through the laying on of hands. He is charged with safeguarding the Church against heresy from within and without; exercising discipline and administering the sacraments (which he can also delegate). He is regarded as the representative (icon) of Christ. Different levels of bishop may also be recognised, e.g. bishop, archbishop, cardinal/metropolitan and patriarch/pope. Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican (Church of England) and Methodist churches have an Episcopalian form of government. (Not all, however, can claim both apostolic succession and disinterest in secular power.)

The Presbyterian structure is based on the Jewish synogogal system, in which authority is vested in a group of elders (*presbyters*) (cf. Erickson 1985:1074). The terms *bishop* (*episkopos*) and *elder* (*presbyter*) are regarded as synonymous. Nor do they claim apostolic succession. The elders are chosen by the local congregation (i.e. elected from below). Those affirmed by the local church represent God's own choice. There is a deliberate coordination of clergy and laity in that Christ's authority is regarded as resting on the individual, who in turn delegates it to the elder. Distinctions are made between ruling elders (laity) and teaching elders (clergy), who together make up the session or consistory which governs the local church. Regions are governed by a presbytery or *classis*

composed of lay and clergy representatives from each local church. The presbyteries in turn chose equal numbers of laity and clergy to make up the Synod and General Assembly. Administrative posts (e.g. stated clerk of the presbytery) are filled by laity. Churches having a Presbyterian form of church government include the Presbyterian and Reformed denominations.

A congregational structure of church government is based on the concept of "the priesthood of all believers" (cf. Lk 22:25-27; Matt 23:8). Authority is vested in the individual. Congregational structures emphasise autonomy and democracy (cf. Erickson 1985:1078): each local church is self-governing through democratic vote. All believers are regarded as equal, thus no distinction between special and general priesthood is made. Hence the concept of apostolic succession and thereby the episcopate is rejected. Inter-church issues are decided democratically by representatives from each church through voluntary associations (e.g. the Baptist Union) and assemblies. There is only one level of clergy, the minister, who is elected by the local church and whose authority is restricted to an advisory role only. Local churches may also elect lay elders and deacons. These distinctions are primarily functional, although some denominations regard deacons as ranked lower than elders. Denominations having congregationalist structures include Baptists, Congregationalists and certain Lutheran churches.

9. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is evident from the TC that the New Testament *episkopos* was similar to his secular Greek counterpart in that his authority was delegated by a supreme ruler (God) and vested through ordination (i.e. appointment to a special office). Similarly, his authority extended over the subjects of the supreme ruler (in this case, Christians) and was, like his secular counterpart, primarily a guardianship of law and truth, for the protection and care of obedient subjects and for the punishment of the disobedient. However, contrary to his secular counterpart, the disciplinary power of the Christian *episkopos* was restricted to excommunication and he was divorced from secular power. Therefore its use in the New Testament is a logical extension of its secular use.

An even greater similarity can be seen between the LXX designation of the Jewish priests and Levites as *episkopoi* and the New Testament usage. In both cases, they governed God's house and people, protected His laws and ordinances and provided primarily spiritual care and guardianship to believers. The New Testament term is a logical extension of its LXX usage. A weakness in almost every translation is the lack of linkage between Old and New Testament occurrences of episkopos (most likely due to the reliance on the Hebrew Masoretic Text.)

It can be concluded that the New Testament writers imported a specific term with related connotations of delegated authority. The New Testament *episkopos* can be regarded as God's regent. (In fact, the New Testament writers restrict the term to its ecclesiastical use only: although Israel was then a Roman colony, the local governors mentioned in the gospels and the Book of Acts are not termed *episkopoi*, thereby breaking with the LXX practice.) It is suggested that the application of the term to the leaders of the church can be viewed as a bold declaration of the colonisation of the kingdoms of men by the Kingdom of God and of the victory and reality of God's Kingdom.

It is concluded that the New Testament references should be translated by a specific term. Although *bishop* and *overseer* are both valid equivalents from a linguistic perspective, it is clear from the above investigations that *overseer* is used as a generic word by most Bible translators and thereby does not have the status of a specific term. In contrast (apart from Wycliffe's overly zealous translation), *bishop* is a term restricted entirely to the New Testament use of *episkopos*.

Furthermore, the need for a specific term is supported by both inter-textual and historical evidence (i.e. translation in context). In this sense, *bishop* is more appropriate, not only since it is the term chosen in the earliest English translations, but because it has entered and remained in the English language as the term designating an ordained official of the Christian Church with apostolically derived authority. It is understandable that for many it has negative connotations. However, any alternative equivalent must be able to maintain the status of a term. In this sense, some translations have opted to translate both *episkopos* and *presbyter* as "elder". However, apart from losing the connotations between the New Testament, secular and LXX usages of *episkopos*, this also masks ST distinctions between the two terms. Other translations use the term "church leader", which again not only loses the link of *episkopos* with its secular and LXX usages, but also masks almost the entire semantic content of *episkopos* as evident in the TC, namely the source, means and nature of his authority, as well as the concept of apostolic succession.

Finally, it must be concluded that the primary objection to the use of *bishop* as translation equivalent is based more on theological grounds than on translation principles, i.e. that translators object in principle to a hierarchical structure of church government and thereby reinterpret the ST in terms of their own presbyterian or congregational viewpoints, rather than in terms of cotextual and contextual factors. This can be viewed as a type of cultural substitution. However, in doing so, Bible translators violate the principle of *sola scriptura*, namely that it is the biblical text that should provide the theology, not *vice versa*. It is therefore ironic that in seeking to distance themselves from pre-Reformation church government structures, the translators violate the very principle that defined the Protestant Reformation.

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APPENDIX 1: CORPUS OF BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

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Keywords:

Bible translation

Corpus translation studies

Septuagint

Episkopos/Bishop

Trefwoorde:

Bybelvertaling

Korpusvertaalkunde

Septuagint

Episkopos/biskop