

# Roles and Ministries in the Ekklēsia from the Perspective of the Pastoral Epistles

*Funciones y ministerios en la ekklēsia  
desde la perspectiva de las Cartas Pastorales*

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**ABSTRACT:** The Pastoral Epistles [PE] reclaim Paul's authority to define ministries and social and gender roles. The endeavour is linked to the comprehension of the *ekklēsia* as household (*oikos*) of God and to the distinction between the public sphere, open to men, and the private space, to which women are relegated. The emphasis on ministries reflects a developing process of institutionalisation, partly related to the delay of the Parousia. The threefold hierarchical structure of ordained ministry is not yet present, but the PE lay the foundations for this development. Teaching sound doctrine and tracing back the authority of recognised leaders to Paul are key concerns. The shift from a diversity of ministries and charisms to institutional order strengthens stability. Still, it entails losses regarding the personal commitment of all Christ-believers, in particular of women, to the transmission of the Gospel.

**KEYWORDS:** Household of God, Episkopos, Diakonos, Presbyteros, Widows, Institutionalisation.

**SUMARIO:** Las Cartas Pastorales [CP] reivindican la autoridad de Pablo para definir los ministerios, así como los roles sociales y de género. Este esfuerzo está vinculado a la comprensión de la *ekklēsia* como casa (*oikos*) de Dios y a la distinción entre la esfera pública, abierta a los hombres, y el espacio privado, al que se relega a las mujeres. El énfasis en los ministerios refleja un proceso de institucionalización en desarrollo, en parte relacionado con el retraso de la parusía. La estructura jerárquica triple del ministerio ordenado aún no está presente, pero las CP sientan las bases para este desarrollo. La enseñanza de la sana doctrina y la fundamentación de la autoridad de los líderes reconocidos por Pablo son cuestiones fundamentales. El paso de una diversidad de ministerios y carismas a un orden institucional refuerza la estabilidad, pero conlleva pérdidas en lo que respecta al compromiso personal de todos los creyentes en Cristo, en particular de las mujeres, en la transmisión del Evangelio.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Casa de Dios, *episkopos*, *diakonos*, *presbyteros*, viudas, institucionalización.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Pastoral Epistles [PE], pseudonymous writings<sup>1</sup> composed toward the end of the first century or early in the second century<sup>2</sup>, reclaim the apostolic authority of Paul to define ministries, the authority to teach, as well as social and gender roles. The definition of ecclesial roles and ministries is linked to the ecclesiology of the PE, notably to the understanding of the *ekklēsia* as household (*oikos*) of God. The emphasis on ministries reflects a developing process of institutionalisation, partly related to the delay of the parousia<sup>3</sup>.

This paper examines the ecclesiology of the PE and its implications for the construal of ministries. The discussion is limited to the public ministries and roles exercised in the *ekklēsia*. I will not address informal teaching activities performed by women in the household<sup>4</sup>.

1. M. Dibelius - H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles. A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Philadelphia 1972, 22-60; J. Roloff, *Der erste Brief an Timotheus*, Zürich - Neukirchen-Vluyn 1988, 23-39, 41-46; L. Oberlinner, *Die Pastoralbriefe. Kommentar zum ersten Timotheusbrief*, Freiburg 1994, XXXIII-XXXIX, XLII-XLVI; L. R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles*, Tübingen 1986, 22, 24, 55, 128, 151, *passim*; M. Wolter, *Die Pastoralbriefe als Paulustradition*, Göttingen 1988, 11-25; W. Thiessen, *Christen in Ephesus. Die historische und theologische Situation in vorpaulinischer und paulinischer Zeit und zur Zeit der Apostelgeschichte und der Pastoralbriefe*, Tübingen 1995, 248, 339-241; R. F. Collins, *I&II Timothy and Titus*, Louisville, KY 2002, 3-9; A. Weiser, *Der zweite Brief an Timotheus*, Düsseldorf - Zürich - Neukirchen-Vluyn 2003, 53-59, 63; A. Merz, *Die Fiktive Selbstausslegung des Paulus: Intertextuelle Studien zur Intention und Rezeption der Pastoralbriefe*, Göttingen 2004, 72-86, 221, 224, 383-384; P. Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, Tübingen 2004, 202-205; B. Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles. First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus*, Collegeville, MN 2007, 15-20; J. Schröter, «Kirche im Anschluss an Paulus. Aspekte der Paulusrezeption in der Apostelgeschichte und in den Pastoralbriefen», *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98 (2007) 77-104; J. D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus, A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, New York - London 1990, 117-121; J. D. Quinn - W. C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letter to Timothy*, Grand Rapids, MI 2000, 19; D. Marguerat, «Paul après Paul: une histoire de reception», *New Testament Studies* 54 (2008) 317-337; J. W. Marshall, «'I Left You in Crete': Narrative Deception and Social Hierarchy in the Letter to Titus», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008) 781-803; M. Tsuji, «Persönliche Korrespondenz des Paulus: Zur Strategie der Pastoralbriefe als Pseudepigrapha», *New Testament Studies* 56 (2010) 253-272; B. D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics*, Oxford 2013, 195-217. I. H. Marshall preferred the notion of allonymity: *The Pastoral Epistles*, London - New York 1999, 83-84, 92.

2. I have discussed the dating of the PE in «Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed: Dating the Pastoral Epistles», in W. Grünstäudl - K. M. Schmidt (eds.), *Die Datierung neutestamentlicher Pseudepigraphen. Herausforderungen und neuere Lösungsansätze*, Tübingen 2021, 313-353. M. Theobald pleads for a second-century date: «Zur Datierung der Pastoralbriefe. Parameter zur Ausmessung ihres Entstehungskorridors», in the same volume, 355-383.

3. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy*, 146-152; Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 6.

4. For women's teaching role in the family (esp. 2 Tim 1, 5) and on older women as *kalodidaskaloi* reinforcing traditional gender roles (Tit 2, 4-5): Annette Bourland Huizen-

## 2. THE CHURCH AS THE 'HOUSEHOLD OF GOD'

The ecclesiology of the PE is marked by a shift away from that of the genuine epistles of Paul. Paul's central ecclesiological metaphor is the 'body of Christ' (1 Cor 12, 12-30; Rom 12, 4-8), which underscores that all community members are indispensable in the diversity of their roles and ministries. This image is no longer found in the PE. These define the *ekklēsia* explicitly (1 Tim 3, 15) and implicitly (2 Tim 2, 20-21; Tit 1, 7) as the household of God (*oikos Theou*), with significant consequences for the understanding of ministries.

On the one hand, the *ekklēsia* as *oikos* evokes the structures and norms governing the fundamental entity of ancient society, the household, defined by patriarchal authority and hierarchical order. As a household of God, the *ekklēsia* is under the authority of God. However, in the earthly realm, with respect to ecclesial order, divine authority is represented by officially instituted ministers. The *episkopos* is the *oikonomos*, the manager or steward of [the household of] God (Tit 1, 7). Only recognised ministers are entitled to exercise leadership and teach. The hierarchical order of the community also comes to fore in the station codes. Women and slaves are formally or implicitly excluded from ministries involving authority, being demanded submission (Tit 2, 5.9; 1 Tim 2, 11; 6, 1-2).

On the other hand, the *oikos*-metaphor is closely related to the figurative use of 'oikos' in ancient literary, philosophical and epigraphic sources for larger political or social entities like the *polis*, the empire or the *collegium*, or even for the cosmos<sup>5</sup>. In consequence, the *ekklēsia* of Christ-believers as *oikos* of God is not only a community defined by the hierarchic structures of the *oikos*, but a public, sacred and cosmic space, an institution with offices and officials,

ga, *Moral Education for Women in the Pastoral and Pythagorean Letters. Philosophers of the Household*, Leiden - Boston 2013, 319-321, 350, 354-357, 361 (assuming that the instruction of younger women by older ones occurs in the community and replicates the mother-daughter relationship); Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities': A Study of the Vocabulary of 'Teaching' in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, Tübingen 2012, 340.

5. I have discussed in detail the metaphoric use of *oikos* in antiquity: K. Zamfir, «Is the *Ekklēsia* a Household (of God)? Reassessing the Notion of οἶκος θεοῦ in 1 Tim 3.15», *New Testament Studies* 60 (2014) 511-528. Political theories frequently parallel the constitution and government of the *polis* and of the *oikos*. The analogy between *polis* and *oikos* is a recurring topic in Stoics, Neopythagoreans and in *homonoia*-speeches. In Roman discourse, the empire is a large household, the *familia* of the emperor, the *pater patriae*. At a smaller scale, *oikos* is also used for collegia, including religious associations. *Oikos* does not denote only earthly societies or institutions. The cosmos itself may be described as a sacred community, as an *oikos* and *polis* of God, over which Zeus rules as father and king. This metaphoric use of *oikos* is also found in Hellenistic Judaism: Philo uses the term for the *polis*, as well as for the cosmos.

where laws and structures receive divine legitimation. The analogy between the *polis* and the *oikos* also explains why an officeholder has to be able to manage his own household as prerequisite for his successful ministry (1 Tim 3, 4-5.12; Tit 1, 6).

A third element of the *oikos*-ecclesiology is the association of the image of the household with that of a building. The latter may hint to Paul's metaphor of building the community and to the notion of temple of God (1 Cor 3, 10.16), but in 1 Timothy the image evokes a stronghold: the *ekklēsia* is the pillar and bulwark (or foundation) of the truth. The emphasis is not on the dynamic process of building the community nor on the sanctity of the temple that would set apart believers as the people of God, as in Paul. A biblical hapax, ἐδράωμα, from ἐδράζω, to firmly establish<sup>6</sup>, suggests that the *ekklēsia* secures the solid foundation of the truth. The image suggests stability and points to the role of the church in establishing and defending orthodoxy.

### 3. MINISTRIES IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

#### a) *Towards the crystallisation of ministries*

With an increasing institutionalisation and due to the understanding of the *ekklēsia* as a public space with hierarchical structures, teaching and leadership become the prerogative of the officials (the *episkopoi/presbyteroi*)<sup>7</sup>. The plurality of ministries known from the genuine epistles of Paul (prophets, apostles, teachers), the charismatic ministries, or the role of personal commitment in teaching the Gospel<sup>8</sup> are no longer envisaged.

The precise attributions of the offices and their relationship to one another are difficult to establish. Tit 1, 5.7 uses *presbyteros* and *episkopos* interchangeably. 1 Timothy details the qualifications required from candidates to two offices –those of *episkopos* and *diakonos*, without mentioning *presbyteroi* (3, 1-13). 1 Tim 5, 17-22, conversely, discusses the appropriate attitude towards *presbyteroi*, without mentioning their required qualifications, as one would expect if this would be a distinct office. One may infer therefore that in Titus and 1 Timothy *episkopos* and *presbyteros* do not designate two entirely distinct offices in a hierarchical relationship, as attested later, in Ignatius of Antioch. The PE probably reflect the tendency to integrate and harmonise two originally different,

6. BDAG, s.v. ἐδράζω.

7. Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 170, 177-179.

8. M. Tiwald, «Die vielfältigen Entwicklungslinien kirchlichen Amtes im Corpus Paulinum und ihre Relevanz für heutige Theologie», in T. Schmeller - M. Ebner - R. Hoppe (eds.), *Neutestamentliche Ämtermodelle im Kontext*, Freiburg 2010, 101-128.

yet analogous office designations: the *presbyteroi*, common in Jewish contexts, and the *episkopoi* known in Hellenistic communities<sup>9</sup>. A pairing of the offices of *episkopos* and *diakonos* comparable to 1 Tim 3, 2-13 is found earlier in Phil 1, 1, a letter addressed to a Hellenistic community; the difference consists in the use of the plural for both terms in Philippians. Rendering *episkopos* as ‘bishop’ is therefore misleading; the specific prerogatives of the bishop, developed over the next centuries, cannot be read back into the situation of the communities at the turn of the first century. The PE do not attest yet a monarchic episcopate. The significance of the singular *episkopos* (Tit 1, 7; 1 Tim 3, 2) is also debated. It may have a generic sense, or it may highlight the role of oversight of the *episkopos*. Yet, 1 Tim 5, 17 refers to *kalōs proestōtes presbyteroi*, elders who rule well, not to the *episkopos* who rules well. It seems probable therefore that the qualification list in 1 Timothy 3 is traditional, and it originally reflected a model that included the offices of *episkopos* and *diakonos*, further developed to include *presbyteroi*.

The attributions of these offices are not entirely clear. The qualification lists do not define attributions; they name the moral criteria which the candidates to office have to fulfil. The only specific qualification refers to teaching (*didaktikos*: 1 Tim 3, 2; 2 Tim 2, 24; also 1 Tim 5, 17: the *presbyteroi* who toil in the word and teaching). Teaching involves preserving and transmitting the sound doctrine against heterodox teachers (Tit 1, 9; 2, 1; 1 Tim 1, 10; 6, 3; 2 Tim 1, 13; 4, 3).

Liturgical attributions are not mentioned. The PE are concerned with preserving and transmitting doctrinal contents and with regulating behaviour. Ritual attributions are not emphatic. A priesthood properly speaking, that would involve performing a liturgical-sacrificial role, is not envisioned at all. Eucharistic celebration is not mentioned. The only reference to a rite regards the introduction to ministry by the laying on of hands by the presbyters (1 Tim 4, 14; cf. the ministerial charisma received by Timothy through Paul, 2 Tim 1, 6). The imposition of hands accompanied by prophetic speech confers the charisma pertaining to the office; the ritual stands at the origin of the rite of ordination. 2 Tim 1, 6 seems to contradict 1 Tim 4, 14, as it envisions the imposition of hands by Paul not the presbyters, but it probably intends to emphasise the apostolic origin of the ministries existing by the time the PE are

9. On the integration of two terms of different origins (*episkopos* and *presbyteros*) in the PE and in Acts 20: Oberlinner, *1 Timotheus*, 248-250; R. A. Wild, «The Pastoral Letters», in R. E. Brown - J. A. Fitzmyer - R. E. Murphy (eds.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Englewood Cliffs 1990, 891-902 (894); R. E. Brown, [C. Osiek, Ph. Perkins], «Early Church», in the same volume, 1338-1353 (1345); G. Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte II*, Freiburg 1982, 294-296.

written. 2 Timothy focuses of the continuity between Paul, Timothy and the faithful men (2, 2) he appoints, while 1 Timothy reflects the actual practice of instituting ministers<sup>10</sup>.

The *episkopos* may have an oversight role, analogous to that of the head of the household (1 Tim 3, 4-5.12 envisions officeholders as heads of households) or of *episkopoi* in the civic sphere and in some voluntary associations. It is difficult to determine to what extent the *episkopos* exercised financial oversight, like officials with the same name is certain *collegia*<sup>11</sup>.

In addition to *episkopos*, the mirror of officeholders in 1 Tim 3 mentions *diakonoi*. The term is variously translated in commentaries as deacons, ministers, helpers or servants. Their tasks are not discussed. Their moral qualities are rather similar to those of the *episkopos*. In fact, little can be known about the attributions of *diakonoi* in the first century. A charitable role is commonly inferred from Acts 6, 2-6, which does not use the noun *diakonos*, but refers to ministering at the table (to widows in need). But as the narrative unfolds in Acts 7–8, the seven men assigned to such ministry preach, proclaim the faith in Christ (7; 8, 5.35) and baptise (8, 12.38). It appears thus that at early stages, ministers designated by different terms performed a variety of tasks.

The aspiration to offices is described as a noble, worthy endeavour (1 Tim 3, 1.13)<sup>12</sup>. The PE reflect the ancient view that public service is an honourable task<sup>13</sup> that should benefit the less fortunate<sup>14</sup>. The requirements to be fulfilled by candidates for office (Tit 1, 6-7; Tim 3, 2-13) comprise values and virtues mirroring

10. Oberlinner, *Kommentar zum ersten Timotheusbrief*, 208-211; Id., *Die Pastoralbriefe. Kommentar zum zweiten Timotheusbrief*, Freiburg 1995, 28-30; K. L. Bulundwe, *2 Timothée dans le corpus paulinien. Analyse mémorielle*, Tübingen 2023, 162.

11. *Episkopoi* were known as public officials; further, *episkopoi* (and *diakonoi*) are also found in private associations. H. W. Beyer, «ἐπίσκοπος», *ThWNT* 2 (1935) 604-617, pp. 607-610; F. Poland, *Geschichte des griechischen Vereinswesens*, Leipzig 1909, 373, 377, 381 (*episkopoi*; see also 42-43, 71, 165, 391-392 for *diakonoi*); R. S. Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations*, Tübingen 2003, 80-81 (*episkopoi*), 82-83 (*diakonoi*). Hellenistic examples of *presbyteroi* also exist. For Egypt: D. J. Thompson, «The Ptolemaic Ethnos», in V. Gabrielsen - C. A. Thomsen (eds.), *Private Associations and the Public Sphere. Proceedings of a Symposium Held at the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 9-11 September 2010*, Copenhagen 2015, 301-313.

12. The *episkopē* is both a noble undertaking and a good work specific to the *episkopos*, performed through teaching (1 Tim 4, 16). Merz, *Selbstausslegung*, 289-291. On the *diakonoi*: C. Spicq, *Les Épitres Pastorales* I, Paris 1969, 461-463; D. C. Verner, *The Household of God. The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, Chico, CA 1983, 155-156; Dibelius - Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 58-59; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 496.

13. Spicq, *Épitres* I, 428-429.

14. Verner, *Household*, 151, 155-156, 160; R. M. Kidd, *Wealth and Beneficence in the Pastoral Epistles: A 'Bourgeois' Form of Early Christianity?*, Atlanta, GA 1990, 84-85; U. Wagener, *Die Ordnung des Hauses Gottes: der Ort von Frauen in der Ekklesiologie und Ethik der Pastoralbriefe*, Tübingen 1994, 177-178.

those demanded from officials in the Greco-Roman world: integrity, rejection of greed, piety, self-restraint, respectability, justice and generosity<sup>15</sup>.

The focus on teaching, which requires recognised authority, leads to the exclusion of certain groups. Women are explicitly prohibited to teach and exercise authority. Men who do not belong to the ranks of recognised officeholders are not entitled to teach either. No charismatic authority is allowed. Slaves are not explicitly silenced, but their full submission towards their masters implicitly denies them the authority required for teaching in the *ekklēsia*.

b) *Orthodoxy and continuity with the apostolic age*

The PE show a strong interest in establishing and preserving ‘orthodoxy’. The faithful have to reach the knowledge of the truth (desired by God as means of salvation); Paul and his coworkers play a major part in this (Tit 1, 1; 2 Tim 2, 25); the disciples of the false teachers cannot reach it (2 Tim 3, 7)<sup>16</sup>. Sound doctrine is a major concern<sup>17</sup>. Timothy and Titus and the ministers they appoint have to preserve it and to warn against false teachers (Tit 1, 9; 2, 1; 1 Tim 1, 10; 6, 3; 2 Tim 4, 3).

Orthodoxy and doctrinal continuity require the preservation of the apostolic deposit (1 Tim 6, 20; 2 Tim 1, 12.14). The succession of ministers to Paul is instrumental to this purpose. Having been ordained by God as an apostle of Christ, Paul appoints Timothy and Titus as his legitimate representatives; they in their turn appoint faithful ministers (Tit 1, 5, 7; 2 Tim 2, 2)<sup>18</sup>. 2 Timothy, purporting to be the spiritual testament of the apostle, concludes the Pastoral Corpus with Paul’s final instructions to Timothy<sup>19</sup>. This image of the departing apostle, who

15. Dibelius - Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 50-51, 158-160; L. Oberlinner, «Gemeindeordnung und rechte Lehre. Zur Fortschreibung der paulinischen Ekklesiologie in den Pastoralbriefen», *Theological Quarterly* 187 (2007) 295-308, p. 306. On the language of the qualification lists and the qualities expected from officials: R. A. Kearsley, «A Civic Benefactor of the First Century in Asia Minor», in S. R. Llewelyn - R. A. Kearsley (eds.), *New Docs 7* (1994) 233-241; M. Karrer, «Das urchristliche Ältestenam», *Novum Testamentum* 32 (1990) 152-188 (184).

16. On the meaning of ἐπίγνωσις ἀληθείας: J. D. Quinn, *The Letter to Titus*, New York 1990, 276-282.

17. The language of soundness correlates with the disease-terminology that discredits the opponents. A. J. Malherbe, «Medical Imagery in the Pastoral Epistles», in W. E. March (ed.), *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Christian Fathers. A Volume in Honor of Stuart Dickson Currie*, San Antonio, TX 1980, 19-35, p. 23; A. M. Langford, *Diagnosing Deviance: Pathology and Polemic in the Pastoral Epistles*, Tübingen 2023, 188-203.

18. Von Lips, *Glaube*, 265-278; Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy*, 164-167, 188.

19. On the genre of 2 Timothy: N. Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe*, Regensburg 1969, 262-263; Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 25, 44-45; Weiser, *2 Timotheus*, 38-40; Wolter, *Pastoralbriefe*, 222-241; Collins, *I&II Timothy and Titus*, 7, 181-185; Fiore, *Pastoral Epistles*, 8-9; Schröter, «Kirche», 81, 88. On the significance of 2 Timothy concluding the Pastoral Epistles and the

prepares for martyrdom, shifts the focus from the apostolic times to the succession of Paul, and underpins thereby the idea of apostolic continuity. Although the doctrine of apostolic succession is not fully crystallised, the PE lay the foundation for this idea<sup>20</sup>.

The categories of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heterodoxy’ and the polemic against ‘heterodox’ teachers are not unproblematic. There is insufficient evidence to argue that the opponents taught heresy properly speaking. Those usually understood as false teachers or opponents probably embraced an ascetic lifestyle (1 Tim 4, 3-4) inspired by Paul, and/or adhered to Jewish beliefs and customs (Tit 1, 10.14), and perhaps some promoted a realised eschatology (2 Tim 2, 18-19)<sup>21</sup>. In fact, the PE construct ‘orthodoxy’. Furthermore, the focus is not that much on doctrine, but on believers’ social behaviour and adherence to the norms of conventional morality. As a practical consequence of this polemic, those who are not recognised as belonging to the institution are labelled as heterodox teachers.

#### 4. MINISTRIES OF WOMEN IN THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

##### a) *Excluding women from public teaching and authority*

Women’s involvement in various ministries, teaching included, both formal and informal, is known from the genuine epistles of Paul, as shown by 1 Cor 11, 5; Phil 4, 2-3; Rom 16, 1-7.<sup>12</sup><sup>22</sup> The PE seek to question this engagement. By excluding women from teaching in the *ekklēsia*, from exerting public religious

Pauline corpus, and functioning as the lens through which Paul should be interpreted: Wolter, *Pastoralbriefe*, 240-241; Merz, *Selbstausslegung*, 232-239.

20. A. Merkt, «Das Problem der apostolischen Sukzession im Lichte der Patristik», in Th. Schneider - G. Wenz (eds.), *Das kirchliche Amt in apostolischer Nachfolge I*, Göttingen 2004, 264-287, pp. 266-267.

21. I have discussed these issues in detail: «Elusive Opponents in the Pastoral Epistles», in J. Verheyden - T. Nicklas, with E. Hernitscheck (eds.), *Shadowy Characters and Fragmentary Evidence. The Search for Early Christian Groups and Movements*, Tübingen 2017, 2-48; K. Zamfir, «Shipwrecked, Enemies and Deserters? The Opponents and their Function in the Pastoral Epistles and the Acts of Paul and Thecla», in M. Tilly - U. Mel (eds.), *Gegenspieler. Zur Auseinandersetzung mit dem Gegner in frühjüdischer und urchristlicher Literatur*, Tübingen 2019, 281-310.

22. G. Dautzenberg, «Zur Stellung der Frauen in den paulinischen Gemeinden», in G. Dautzenberg - H. Merklein - K. Müller (eds.), *Die Frau im Urchristentum Urchristentum*, Freiburg 1983, 182-224; E. J. Epp, *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, Minneapolis, MN 2005; R. Bieringer, «Women and Leadership in Romans 16. The Leading Roles of Phoebe, Prisca, and Junia in Early Christianity» *East Asian Pastoral Review* 44 (2007) 221-237; 44 (2007) 316-336; A. Hartmann, «Junia - A Woman Lost in Translation: The Name IOYNIAN in Romans 16:7 and its History of Interpretation», *Open Theology* 6 (2020) 646-660; D. Kurek-Chomycyz, «Toiling Together, Leading Together? Women Apostles, Coworkers, and Hosts of Domestic *Ekklēsiai* as Attested in the Pauline Letters», in K. Zamfir - U. Poplutz (eds.), *Reading Women in the New Testament Letters*, Atlanta, GA 2025, 217-242.

attributions, the PE also go against Greco-Roman practice that assigned women certain public roles, notably in the sphere of religion<sup>23</sup>.

This decision is largely motivated by contemporary cultural views. In the ancient worldview, the public sphere belonged to men, who were entitled to hold offices entailing authority and public speech, whereas women were relegated to the private space; they were required to submit to male authority and to keep silent. The PE reflect the same views regarding the division of spaces and roles. They assign men to the public sphere and women to the private one. Since the *ekklēsia* is a public space, offices that require public speech (teaching) and involve leadership are assigned exclusively to men. The author considers teaching in the *ekklēsia* and authority incompatible with traditional norms of female behaviour, with conventions barring women from public speech<sup>24</sup>.

These cultural views explain why 1 Tim 2, 11-12 prohibits women to teach in the *ekklēsia* and relegates them to the private sphere<sup>25</sup>. They are expected to embrace instead traditional female roles, to be submissive wives and dedicated mothers (Tit 2, 3-5; 1 Tim 2, 11-15; 5, 14; in a sense 2 Tim 1, 5 also envisions women as fulfilling their traditional roles, even when it allows the transmission of faith within the family). However, 1 Timothy attests with some reluctance the enduring existence of two female ministries, the *diakonoi* and the dedicated widows.

#### b) *Deacons and dedicated widows*

In all probability the ‘women’ in 1 Tim 3, 11 are female deacons<sup>26</sup>. This is sustained by the context and by internal and external evidence. The women are

23. In the East, elite women acted as benefactors and held certain magistracies (prestigious, but without political power). Several priesthoods were filled in by women, and a number of sanctuaries had women prophets. On the implications of these roles for the public presence of women: K. Zamfir, *Men and Women in the Household of God. A Contextual Approach to Roles and Ministries in the Pastoral Epistles*, Göttingen 2013, 289-337.

24. Wagener, *Ordnung*, 75-76; Merz, *Selbstausslegung*, 294. I have discussed in detail the cultural background of women’s exclusion from teaching and from the exercise of authority: Zamfir, *Men and Women*, 195-231.

25. B. Fiore, «Household Rules at Ephesus: Good News, Bad News, No News», in J. T. Fitzgerald - T. H. Olbricht - L. M. White (ed.), *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, Leiden 2005, 589-607, pp. 601-602.

26. For *gynaikeis* standing for female *diakonoi*: Spicq, *Épîtres I*, 456, 460-461; Thiessen, *Christen*, 310-311; Brox, *Pastoralbriefe*, 154-155; Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 263; Oberlinner, *1 Timotheus*, XXXIX, 113, 139-143; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 493; Collins, *I&II Timothy and Titus*, 86, 90-91; G. Lohfink, «Weibliche Diakone im Neuen Testament», in G. Dautzenberg - H. Merklein (eds.), *Die Frau im Urchristentum*, Freiburg 1993), 320-338 (332-334); J. H. Stiefel, «Women Deacons in 1 Timothy: A Linguistic and Literary Look at ‘Women Likewise...’ (1 Tim 3.11)», *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995) 442-457; Wild, «Pastoral Letters», 897; Brown, «Early Church», 1345; M. Gourgues, *Les deux lettres à Timothée. La lettre à Tite*, Paris 2009, 129-131.

mentioned in the list of qualifications which names the qualities expected from the *episkopos* and from the *diakonoi*. Since there are no requirements regarding the wife of the *episkopos* (a married man), there is no reason to assume that these should be named for the wives of deacons, in a mirror of officeholders. There is no possessive pronoun to relate the women to the *diakonoi* (no reference to ‘their women’, i.e. ‘wives’). The qualifications demanded from the *diakonoi* and the ‘women’ are closely paralleled (vv. 8, 11) and very similar. The external evidence confirms this interpretation. Women deacons are well-known, from Romans (16, 1: Phoebe)<sup>27</sup> to 3–4<sup>th</sup> century church orders<sup>28</sup>, patristic witness and a large epigraphic and canonical evidence up to the Middle Ages<sup>29</sup>.

The attributions of female *diakonoi* are not mentioned, but neither are those of male *diakonoi*. 1 Timothy refers in both cases to moral integrity and holding fast to the mystery of faith / being faithful.

A close look at the discussion of the widows (1 Tim 5, 3-16) shows that these are not merely a destitute category entitled to receive charity. The strict requirements of their admission or enrolment (vv. 9-10)<sup>30</sup>, including a high age limit, and the implied reference to a vow in which they devoted themselves to Christ in a kind of spiritual marriage (vv. 11-12)<sup>31</sup>, point to a community of widows dedicated to Christ<sup>32</sup>. Based on the requirements, they must have been commit-

27. On Phoebe: Dautzenberg, «Stellung», 175-176; Lohfink, «Weibliche Diakone», 326-327; U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer. Röm 12–16*, Zürich - Neukirchen-Vluyn 1989, 131-132; Merklein - Gielen, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 43; J. G. Cook, «1 Cor 9, 5: The Women of the Apostles», *Biblica* 89 (2008) 352-368, p 361; Bieringer, «Women» I, 229-232; A. Merz, «Phöbe: Diakon(in) der Gemeinde von Kenchreä – eine wichtige Mitstreiterin des Paulus neuentdeckt», in A. M. von Hauff (ed.), *Frauen gestalten Diakonie I. Von der biblischen Zeit bis zum Pietismus*, Stuttgart 2007, 125-140 (130-140). Origen and Chrysostom also understood Rom 16, 1 to refer to a female deacon. See K. Madigan - C. Osiek, *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*, Baltimore - London 2003, 13-15.

28. *Didasc.* 2.26.6; 3.12.2-4; 8.19.1-2; 8.28.6-8; *Ap. Const.* 2.26.3; 3.11.3, 3.16.2, 4; 8.13.14; 8, 19.1-2; 8.28.6-8 (ed. von Funk). These texts use either a feminine form (*diakonissa*) or a male form with a feminine article. For the wide evidence of women deacons in the early church: Madigan - Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 11-162.

29. U. E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, Collegeville, MN 2000, 158-185; Madigan - Osiek, *Ordained Women*, 67-149.

30. For a shift at vv. 9-10, defining the qualifications of widows to be enrolled: Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 284-285, 293; Fiore, *Pastoral Epistles*, 104-105.

31. G. Stählin, «χήρω», *ThDNT* 9 (1974, repr. 1976) 440-465 (454); Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 296-297; Oberlinner, *1 Timotheus*, 237-238; Fiore, *Pastoral Epistles*, 106. This was also the understanding of the early church (e.g. *Ap. Const.* 3.1.1-2).

32. Spicq, *Épîtres I*, 532-533; Dibelius, Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 74, 76; Brox, *Pastoralbriefe*, 185; Wagener, *Ordnung*, 148-149; Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 292-293; Oberlinner, *1 Timotheus*, 221-222, 231, 233-234; Quinn, Wacker, *1–2 Timothy*, 418-419; Verner, *Household*, 163-165; Kidd, *Wealth*, 104-105; Trebilco, *Early Christians*, 523-527; Fiore, *Pastoral Epistles*, 102, 104-107; M. Bjelland Kartzow, *Gossip and Gender. Othering of Speech in*

ted to service to those in need. The derogatory discussion of their activities and their talk (v. 13)<sup>33</sup> shows, beyond the author's disregard for women, that widows were involved in house calls and informal teaching<sup>34</sup>. Later prohibitions against teaching indicate that widows were still engaged in instruction<sup>35</sup>.

The qualifications for enrolment reflect moral qualities comparable to those expected from the *episkopos* and the *diakonos* (exemplary marital life, hospitality),<sup>36</sup> as well as gender-specific ones (having raised children). The expectations concerning widows, notably abstaining from remarriage<sup>37</sup>, reflect traditions about biblical widows dedicating themselves to God after a faithful marriage to their only husband<sup>38</sup>. They also match the Roman ideal of the *univira*, embodying chastity, faithfulness, and piety<sup>39</sup>.

1 Timothy regulates an already established institution<sup>40</sup> restricting access to it, through the very high age limit and the provision that widows younger than sixty remarry and bear children. (Remarriage contradicts 1 Cor 7, 8.40<sup>41</sup>.) The author attempts to curtail thereby the influence of a respected group<sup>42</sup>.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

While at early stages the Gospel spread in multiple ways, through commissioning as well as personal initiative, and numerous charismas and local ministries emerged, by the turn of the century, with the delay of the Parousia, a

*the Pastoral Epistles*, Berlin 2009, 143-144. The reception history of this text points in that direction: Pol. 4.3; Ign., *Smyrn.* 13.1; *Didasc.* 3.1.1-2; *Ap. Const.* 3.1.1-2. On epigraphic and literary evidence: Eisen, *Women Officeholders*, 143-157. On single women as patrons and their influence: H. O. Maier, «The Entrepreneurial Widows of 1 Timothy», in I. Ramelli - J. Taylor (eds.), *Patterns of Women's Leadership in Early Christianity*, Oxford 2021, 59-73.

33. Oberlinner, *1 Timotheus*, 241.

34. *Ibid.*, 239, 245-246.

35. *Didasc.* 3.6.1-2, *Ap. Const.* 3.6.1-2.

36. Fiore, *Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

37. Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 294; Verner, *Household*, 130-131.

38. Judith and Hanna Wagener, *Ordnung*, 132-135, 141-143; Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 286.

39. J.-B. Frey, «La Signification des termes *Monandros* et *univira*», *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 20 (1930) 48-60; M. Lightman, W. Zeisel, «Univira: An Example of Continuity and Change in Roman Society», *Church History* 46 (1977) 19-32; B. Kötting, *Die Bewertung der Wiederverheiratung (der zweiten Ehe) in der Antike und in der frühen Kirche*, Opladen 1988; P. Walcot, «On Widows and their Reputation in Antiquity», *Symbolae Osloenses* 66 (1991) 5-26.

40. Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 283-285; J. M. Bassler, «The Widows' Tale: A Fresh Look at 1 Tim 5:3-16», *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984) 23-41 (34).

41. Roloff, *1 Timotheus*, 299.

42. J. A. Glancy, «Protocols of Masculinity in the Pastoral Epistles», in S. D. Moore - J. Capel Anderson (eds.), *New Testament Masculinities*, Atlanta, GA 2003, 235-264 (254).

growing institutionalisation occurs. The PE strive to (re)define roles and ministries in the *ekklēsia*, invoking the authority of Paul. They conceive teaching and leadership as the task of recognised officeholders, and define social and gender roles, as well as the rules of an orderly community life based on contemporary cultural views.

The conception of the *ekklēsia* as the ‘body of Christ’, in which all members fulfil various roles and may receive different charismas, disappears. The *ekklēsia* is envisioned as the ‘household of God’, defined by hierarchical order, understood as a public, sacred institution, legitimised by divine authority, and as a stronghold of orthodoxy. The authority of God is mediated by ordained ministers.

The emphasis on the absence of the apostle, on the end of his life and mission, indicates that the *ekklēsia* has entered a new age. Paul’s legacy is now preserved by appointed leaders. The PE do not yet reflect the threefold, hierarchical structure of ordained ministry or a crystallised concept of apostolic succession, but they point in that direction.

The distinction between the office of *episkopos* and *presbyteros* is blurred. Ordained ministry focuses on teaching and the defence of a (vaguely defined) sound doctrine. The attributions of male and female *diakonois* are not discussed. In general, qualifications for offices comprise mainly moral qualities (integrity, self-control, hospitality), far less professional competences.

Overall, the PE mark a decisive step in the development of ordained ministry and institutional continuity. This endeavour is a natural part of institutionalisation, but at the same time involves the marginalisation of personal initiative and commitment. The author excludes women from public teaching and ecclesial authority and restricts their role to the domestic sphere, although the ministries of deacons and widows are tacitly acknowledged. Slaves do not hold the authority needed for teaching and leadership. Nor do free men who do not belong to the rank of recognised ministers. Order comes with losses.

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