Confession and Reconciliation in the New Testament :
a summary paper
Michael J. Lakey

Introduction

It is apt to begin with a caveat: the issue of whether, and if so how, the Reconciliation of a Penitent might be effected intersects with a number of New Testament texts, raising various issues. These issues are themselves far too substantial to address in even a lengthy paper. That said, there are several principal ideas that Western penitential practice has historically drawn from and brought to Scripture. These ideas cluster around i) the question of the meaning of the apostolic prerogative of 'binding' and 'loosing' and ii) the question of the nature and ecclesiastical scope of apostolic delegation. These issues have shaped the way in which Western, including Anglican, penitential theology has emerged, being present in Lateran IV (21)[1] and tacit in the *modified*, yet derivative, Anglican practice enshrined in Canon B29.[2] It is not the purpose of this paper to explore this history. Rather, the present paper offers some comments and observations in two main areas. The first main section discusses the significance of the statements to do with 'binding' and 'loosing' in Matthew. The second briefly outlines some issues attached to the question of apostolic representation and binding/loosing.

i)   Binding and Loosing in the Gospel of Matthew

> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matt 16:19 NRSV)

> Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. (Matt 18:18-19 NRSV)

Context

It is apt briefly to situate the 'binding and loosing' statements in Matthew (16:19; 18:18), in the context of the broader scope of the gospel's approach to mercy and forgiveness. i) In the first instance, it is worth noting the association between the remission of *moral* and *commercial* obligation in Matthew, with the latter being a metaphor for the former. The Matthean version of the Lord's Prayer is a good example of this usage, in the phrase 'forgive us our *debts*' (τὰ ὀφειλήματα Matt 6:12; cf. 'sins' Luke 11:4).[3] One might also think of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:23-35). ii) These two passages are significant because they also illustrate the association between *Divine* and *human* forgiveness in Matthew, with the latter as a sign of and influence upon the former. As Ulrich Luz observes, this relationship is not unknown in Judaism (e.g. Sir 28:2-5), though he believes Matthew

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[1] Cf. Lateran IV in Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the ecumenical councils*, 2 vols. (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1990).

[2] Cf. *The Canons of the Church of England*, 7th Revised ed. (Church House Publishing, 2012).

[3] Some witnesses have τα παραπτωματα (='offences'), e.g. Origen.

6:12 to be a unique occurrence of this theology in the literary form of a prayer.[4] The Unmerciful Servant parable is also significant, since it demonstrates that the relationship can operate in either direction. If the prayer demonstrates that human forgiveness is an antecedent sign of the forgiveness one seeks in the present from God, the parable indicates the way in which Divine generosity and forgiveness, experienced in the present, might subsequently be stymied and undone by human hard-heartedness to 'our debtors' (Matt 6:12), whether moral or commercial. One sees an analogous relationship between human and Divine giving / *for*giving elsewhere in Matthew (e.g. 5:23-24): reconciliation at the horizontal level is inherent to peace with God.

iii) One way of making sense of these aspects of Matthew's approach to forgiveness is by analogy with the term 'mercy' (ἔλεος / ἐλεημοσύνη). It is widely known that the Hebrew term *ṣẚdīqa* (צְדָקָה = 'righteousness') has a range of meanings that include 'justice, piety, charity, alms',[5] and that in the Post-exilic, Second Temple and Rabbinic literature, its use to denote a quasi-redemptive almsgiving is attested (cf. Dan 4:27; Tobit 12:8-9).[6] It is also worth noting that the practice of the Septuagint (*LXX*) is frequently to render the Hebrew *ṣẚdīqa* using the Greek ἐλεημοσύνη ('mercy') rather than the more literal δικαιοσύνη ('righteousness'). Whether or not this redemptive understanding of almsgiving / mercy occurred through association with Hosea 6:6 ('I desire *mercy* not sacrifice') is unclear, but the similarity with Matthew is clear. As such, Matthew's basic intuition appears to be that mercy is at the centre of an indirect reciprocal gift-exchange between God and human beings, such that liberality or meanness towards others is understood in the final analysis as a move towards or against solidarity with God and the Kingdom.[7] This appears to hold whether Matthew is talking about almsgiving (cf. The Sheep and Goats, Matt 25:31-46), or the remission of moral or commercial obligations (Matt 6:12, 18:23-35), and indeed whether he has in mind temporal or eschatological matters.

'Binding and Loosing' and the 'Keys'

The preceding discussion is germane to the 'binding and loosing' passages in Matthew (16:19; 18:18), because it helps to situate the specific cases of apostolic authorisation and the gift of the Keys (16:19) within a broader context. Turning to the binding and loosing passages, we note that this generalised teaching about mercy within the community is given singular force when applied to those with delegated responsibility. Note the topical arrangement at play in Matthew 18, in which the power of binding and loosing (18:15-20) is framed by the Parable of the Lost Sheep (18:10-14) and by the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (18:23-35). This strongly suggests a theme of delegated responsibility, since both the faithful shepherd and the unmerciful servant are accountable to a master for their

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[4] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia, a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). 322.
[5] Cf. the relevant entry in Ludwig Kœhler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
[6] See the discussion of the various Rabbinic sources in Roman Garrison, *Redemptive almsgiving in early Christianity*, Journal for the study of the New Testament Supplement series (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). 56-60.
[7] On reciprocal giving in Antiquity see Marcel Mauss, *The gift : forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969).

actions. Indeed, the series of pericopae could arguably be seen as an extended reflection on the Shepherds of Ezekiel 34.

Returning to the 'binding' statement, we note that it occurs twice in Matthew: the first occurrence in Matthew 16:19 and then in Matthew 18:18. In both instances, the immediate addressees are apostolic figures. Unsurprisingly in 16:19, given that it is *Peter* who confesses Jesus' Messianic identity, it is *Peter*[8] who as a consequence receives the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, together with the authority to bind and loose. But how are binding/loosing and the Keys connected? Proximity and sequence might suggest that the 'binding' statement is epexegetical or explanatory of the Keys: 'I will give you the Keys . . . *i.e.* what you might bind . . .'. Logically, this would mean that receiving the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven is involved in receiving the authority to bind and loose and, since the latter 'binding' pericope is spoken to the disciples *en masse*, the Keys would therefore only *initially* be an exclusively Petrine prerogative. However, whilst this is a possible reading, it is not certain. The conjunction that connects the Keys statement with binding and loosing is καί ('and'), and this usually has a coordinating rather than subordinating effect. It can indicate an epexegetical relationship,[9] but it is not really certain whether it does so in Matthew 16:19. The view here is that the binding/loosing statement has the closest possible relationship to the Keys statement, such that the one implies the other.

'It shall be / shall have been bound'

In addition to this, there is also the question of *how* Heaven might be understood to be implicated or associated in acts of earthly binding/loosing. This is an extremely difficult topic, not only because of the Greek but also because of the dogmatic and polemical debates that attach to the verse. Put simply, the Reformed tradition, against both Roman Catholics and Arminians, has tended to emphasise the reading 'shall have [*i.e. already*] been bound'. If correct, this would render the earthly agency of the apostles as announcing or declaring rather than initiating or enacting the heavenly binding/loosing.[10] The context for these interpretative assertions have been the controversies around the claims of the Papacy and of deterministic versus compatibilist accounts of the relationship between human and Divine agency (i.e. ecclesiology and soteriology).

It is not the intention to rehearse these arguments here, since the literature is well-known. Rather, the aim is to make a few salient observations about the text.

i) The difficulty attaches to the Greek expression ἔσται δεδεμένον (Lit: 'will be a have-been-bound thing' Matt 16:19).[11] This form is known as a Periphrastic Future Perfect. In this construction, the principal verb 'to be' is future (ἔσται), but the accompanying participle 'a [have been] bound thing' is perfect (δεδεμένον). The meaning of the entire expression is taken from combining the sense of its two principal parts.

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[8] The recipient, and the subject of the two following verbs (bind/loose) is singular (=Peter).
[9] Cf. the entry in William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
[10] It is this that leads many Reformed Anglicans to prefer the 'may' form of the Absolution and Blessing.
[11] My translation. Cf. ἔσται δεδεμένα 'will be have-been-bound things' in Matt 18:18.

ii) The most usual reading of a Greek Future Perfect[12] is to focus upon its *completed* (i.e. perfected) aspect, bearing in mind that, unlike the Past Perfect, its completion will occur at some point in the Future. For example, the expression 'I will put my trust in him' (Hebrews 2:13 NRSV) is a Future Perfect (ἔσομαι πεποιθὼς), which translators correctly understand as emphasising the completedness of a future action. One might gloss it as 'I will *continue* to trust' (Cf. Aristophanes, *Lys.* 1071).[13] So whilst 'shall have been bound' is not an impossible reading of Matthew 16:19 and 18:18, it is not the only possible reading. Its usage must be determined by context.

iii) However, the difficulty with the binding/loosing statements is that the Future Perfect ἔσται δεδεμένον occurs in a conditional expression. The first clause of the expression ὃ ἐὰν δήσῃς ('if you should bind something . . .' Matt 16:19) denotes the earthly precondition. This particular construction (ἐάν + subjunctive) usually indicates that the subsequent clause denotes the expected outcome.[14] This suggests that the heavenly binding is causally dependent upon earthly binding, which makes the temporal gymnastics of the Reformed reading really quite difficult—especially, as there is a viable alternative. It is quite possible, and arguably more natural, to read the binding and loosing logion, in context, as saying: 'if you should bind something on earth, then it will be bound in heaven.'[15]

iv) It is also worth noting the following parallel with a text from the Dead Sea collection. In *CD* 13:10, the 'overseer' of the camp is entrusted with the pastoral authority to restore community members who have wandered and to initiate new members.[16] This restoration and initiation is described as 'loosing', with the implication being that those outside are 'bound'. Without suggesting that the ordering of the Jesus movement was identical to that of other sectarian communities, this terminology together with the focus on earthly and heavenly ordering in much of the liturgical literature of the Qumran community, suggests a plausible analogy with the Matthean binding statements, and a likely reference to 'loosing' as restoration and initiation. The most logical way of understanding this analogy would be that Peter (Matt 16:19) and the disciples (18:18) are given authority to initiate, excommunicate and restore individuals to the community, and that because the ecclesial community is the locus of the operation of the renewed covenant, a corollary of this earthly binding and loosing is heavenly exclusion or inclusion.

The Provenance of 'binding and loosing'

This leads to the question of the likely provenance of the expression 'binding and loosing', as this may help clarify matters further. We note that there is evidence of a parallel with Rabbinic interpretative jurisdiction: e.g. "the House of Shammai permit [= loose] levirate marriage . . . but the House of Hillel forbid [= bind] it" (*m. 'Eduyyot* 4:8).[17] Other Rabbinic

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[12] This holds for periphrastic and non-periphrasic forms.

[13] E.g. ἡ θύρα κεκλήσεται ('the door will have shut' = 'will be kept shut').

[14] See the relevant entry in Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *BDAG*.

[15] My translation.

[16] See Geza Vermes, ed. *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls In English* (London: Penguin, 1997).

[17] In Craig A. Evans, *Matthew*, New Cambridge Bible commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 315.

texts, notably *b. Mo'ed* 16a, use the terms to refer to the actions of excommunication from and restoration to the congregation. Still other materials link the terms to exorcistic authority in sectarian and pseudepigraphical literature (*CD* 6:13, *1 En* 10:4).[18]

In terms of sifting this data: we note that the Rabbinic texts postdate the period of Jesus and his earliest followers, though the traditions they mediate no doubt predate their final written forms. Anachronism is less of a problem in the case of sectarian and pseudepigraphical parallels, though it is difficult to see how exorcistic power was in view in either Matthew 16 or 18.[19] We have already noted that binding/loosing in Matthew 16:19 is related consequentially to the Keys, but what this means is unclear. It could denote either interpretative authority (Peter's confession is *revealed*) or perhaps authority of a more juridicial/stewardship sort (cf. the 'keys' in Ancient household management).

The occurrence in Matthew 18:18 is clearly associated with one of the above contexts, namely community discipline. The statement follows immediately from the command to exclude a recalcitrant offender and, though there is no grammatical signal of a causal association, proximity and sequence make this the likeliest explanation. It is worth noting that the Matthean material on community discipline resembles other *halakhah* (or legal rulings) of this general period in attempting to actualise the Torah commands of Leviticus 19:17 and Deuteronomy 19:15 (cf. *1QS* 5:24-6:1). As such, a juridical reference involving either the adjudication of disputes or the excommunication and readmission of offenders seems the likeliest reference. This fits well with the example of the pastoral, disciplinary and initiatory role of the 'overseer' of the camp in *CD* 13:10, which has been mentioned.[20]

Summary

The action of binding/loosing something 'on earth', with the implication that it is also bound/loosed 'in heaven', ought, in the first instance, to be situated in the context of Matthew's theology of mercy, in which mercy towards other human beings characterises one's stance, and standing, before God. The statement of Matthew 16:19, in which Peter is given the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven is *probably* analytic to the authority to bind/loose, but this is not certain. Similarly, the ambiguity of the phrase 'It shall be / shall have been bound' (Matt 16:19; 18:18) is not easily resolved on lexical or grammatical grounds, though the context suggests that 'shall be bound' is the better reading. As for the provenance and significance of the phrase, there are various Rabbinic and Second Temple Jewish parallels, which cluster around interpretative, *halakhic*, communitarian and exorcistic authority. Given the contexts of Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18, the clearest association is with ideas of the pastoral, disciplinary and initiatory role of the apostolate. Other elements may be present, since the apostles are portrayed as having aspects of interpretative, *halakhic*,

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[18] For summaries of the various options, see Z.W. Falk, "Binding and Loosing," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 25(1974); Richard H. Hiers, "'Binding' and 'Loosing': The Matthean Authorizations," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 2 (1985); Dennis C. Duling, "Binding and Loosing (Matt 16-19; 18:18; John 20:23)," *Forum* 3, no. 4 (1987).

[19] *Pace* Hiers.

[20] Note the way that pastoral, initiatory and disciplinary agency characterises the office and work of Bishop in the Church of England Ordinal. So, https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/ordinal/bishops.aspx [accessed: 27/08/2016].

communitarian and exorcistic authority elsewhere. We have not addressed John 20:23, in which the delegated authority of absolution is given by the resurrected Jesus to the apostles—though without mention of binding/loosing. Given the similarity of ideas and context, it is sufficient to say (as the tradition of the Church does) that ideas in this verse are redolent of the ideas of binding and loosing as they appear in Matthew.

ii) Apostolic Representation and Delegation in Paul

Context

Having addressed the significance and provenance of the binding and loosing statements in Matthew, we turn to the topic of apostolic representation and delegation. This is as central a plank of developed penitential practice as the ideas of binding and the Keys, since without some notion of i) what constitutes the representative authority of the apostolate and ii) to what degree its functions may be delegated or handed on, any ongoing application is moot. The present section of this paper briefly raises some of the salient issues by means of a consideration of some issues in the writings and ministry of the Apostle Paul. This is apt because the geographical footprint of the Pauline communities was such that, within his lifetime, questions of representation naturally emerged.

Paul as Delegated and as Delegating

Perhaps the first point to note in relation to Paul is the representational nature of his ministry generally; he understands himself to be a herald of the Messiah taking the imperial acclamation to the nations that Jesus has been raised to rule as κύριος ('Lord' cf. Phil 2:9-11). There is, construed thusly, a ready parallel with Roman imperial delegated discourse, and especially with the periodic acclamation of the reigning Caesar. It is around a century since Adolf Deissmann's seminal work *Light from the Ancient East*, in which he notes the specifically-Imperial connotations of much of Paul's vocabulary—words such as κύριος ('Lord'), εὐαγγέλιον ('gospel'), παρουσία ('coming/advent').[21] Recent work by N.T. Wright, Richard Horsley and others has revitalised this thesis after some considerable gap.[22] The point, though, is that the bulk of this attention has been given (rightly) to questions of what this might mean for Early Christology, but there is just as much at stake for the nature of Pauline apostleship. Perhaps key to understanding this is the phrase 'we are *ambassadors*' (πρεσβεύομεν) on behalf of Christ (2 Cor 5:20). We note the term is frequently employed of Roman Imperial legates,[23] and also that though the scope of Imperial ambassadorial agency varied by role and situation from some degree of autonomy through to straightforward proclamation, the ambassador (or the herald-plus-proclamation) constituted the mediated presence of the Imperial sender. There are echoes of this in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

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[21] Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the ancient East : the New Testament illustrated by recently discovered texts of the Graeco-Roman world*, New and completely rev. ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1927). esp. 346.

[22] See e.g. contributions to Krister Stendahl and Richard A. Horsley, eds., *Paul and politics : Ekklesia, Israel, imperium, interpretation : essays in honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000).

[23] Deissmann, *Light from the ancient East*: 378.

A second aspect of personal representation in the writings of Paul relates not to his sense of himself as herald or even Legate of Christ, but to the way in which he represents and deploys this proclamatory, pastoral and juridical identity by means of letter-writing and sub-delegation. It is worth noting that, in general, Ancients regarded textuality as a proxy for personal presence, which may explain some of the chagrin and confusion over the contrast between Paul's apparently uninspiring personal presence and his epistolary style (2 Cor 10:10). But this point is essentially practical: the Pauline epistles as we have them cover communities spanning Asia Minor, the Greek Peninsula and non-Pauline Christians in Rome. This scale of correspondence and coverage presumes that the letters are a way of maintaining and initiating Pauline apostolic presence in churches spread across substantial distances. Of course, this further highlights both the role of Pauline emissaries and the delegates of the churches, who conveyed much of this communication to and fro. The flurry of Corinthian correspondence, both from Paul, and from the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 7:1) is an example of this. It may also explain why Paul elects to share the epigraph with various other figures—was this a way of authorising them as representative bearers / interpreters of the text?[24]

Delegated Binding and Loosing in 1 Corinthians 5

One case in particular highlights what could be described as an act of delegated epistolary binding, namely the case of severe πορνεία ('illicit sexual intercourse' 1 Cor 5:1)—in this case, a man taking his father's wife. By way of brief explanation, the situation *is* concerned with prohibited biological degrees, even though there is no hint that the father's wife is the offender's mother. Rather, the prohibited degree for Paul is most likely rooted in the Levitical prohibition of 'uncovering the nakedness' (NRSV) of close kin (Lev 18:6-18). In this case, the close kin is the father, whose 'nakedness' is closely identified with his wife's 'nakedness' (v.8, cf. 1 Cor 7:4). As such, Paul's response, though not explicitly *halakhic*, is entirely in keeping with fairly standard Jewish purity codes.[25] It is interesting that he does not explicitly refer to the commandment, though unsurprising, given that in this section of the epistle (chs 5-7) he repeatedly grounds Jewish norms using non-nomistic (non-Torah-based) arguments (e.g. 1 Cor 6:12ff). Here, he uses an argument from contempt—'not even among the nations' (οὐδὲ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν 1 Cor 5:1).

Paul's response to this offence is significant, probably constituting one of the earliest Jesus-movement binding texts, even though the term 'bind' is not used *and* he writes at a distance.

> Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you? For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and *as if present I have already pronounced judgment* in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. *When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are*

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[24] See also John Paul Heil, *The letters of Paul as rituals of worship*, 1 vols. (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012).

[25] See the relevant sections of William R. G. Loader, *The New Testament on sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); and on the Levitical materials and their parallels Johnson M. Kimuhu, *Leviticus : the priestly laws and prohibitions from the perspective of ancient Near East and Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

> *to hand this man over to Satan* for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Cor 5:2-5 NRSV my emphasis)

Three points bear raising in relation to this:

i) It is possible, but not certain, that Paul presupposes that the gathered Corinthian Church *already* has the authority to remove the offender. The observation that the Corinthians should have 'mourned, so that' (ἵνα) the offender might have been removed is not a statement to the effect that "had you been upset about this, *he* would have left". More likely Paul is implying "had you been upset about this, *you* would have done something about it."[26] This would indicate a degree of congregational authorisation, though whether this relates to the congregation *per se* or its leaders remains to be seen.

ii) In the absence of action from the Corinthians, Paul's response is formally to exclude the offender. However, though this has 'already' (ἤδη v. 3) been pronounced by Paul in his absence from the community, it takes effect when the community is gathered in the Spirit, and when this directive is pronounced publicly in the community. The 'handing over' of the offender to Satan is at least reminiscent of the binding and loosing activity of the Overseer in *CD* 13:10.[27]

iii) The process as Paul describes it, at least superficially, resembles that of Matthew 18:15-18 and other community regulatory materials (cf. *1QS* 5:24-6:1). Evidently, there has been an offence (cf. Matt 18:15), which remains either unchallenged or unresolved. Sufficient controversy has been generated for multiple witnesses ('Chloe's people' 1 Cor 1:11)[28] to have reported this to Paul (cf. Matt 18:16). The Church as a whole having failed to act (cf. Matt 18:17), the apostolic binding and loosing is invoked (Matt 18:18). Of course, a key difference here is that the apostolic action is textually mediated and ritually delegated.

Paul and Ecclesiastical Ordering

Though the preceding discussion demonstrates that apostolic actions in binding / loosing are indeed delegated and mediated, it is difficult to draw too sharp a set of conclusions from this for the underpinning of developed Western penitential theology. In part, this is because the key text examined here gives little indication of the ordered nature of the community in the Apostolic Era. Indeed, references to the *title* of 'bishop' (ἐπίσκοπος) or deacon (διάκονος) are relatively infrequent in the New Testament, occurring unambiguously in the undisputed Paulines only in Romans 16:1 ('Phoebe the deacon') and in Philippians 1:1 ('bishops and deacons'). As such, it is difficult to infer exactly how apostolic delegation worked: was it a function of the community at large or a function of designated individuals within it? This is uncertain, and beyond the scope of this paper, though the stance taken

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[26] *Pace* Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). 387-88.
[27] Mentioned above.
[28] This passage lies in the section of the epistle devoted to oral reports.

here is that the contours of the various ministries are beginning to emerge in the time of Paul.[29]

In the final analysis, it is difficult to address this broader topic without i) making some sort of assumption regarding the earliest forms of Christian organisation, and ii) coming to some sort of judgement regarding the licitness, or otherwise, of the various interpretative and theological developments these forms have subsequently undergone. It is *possible* to understand, say, Ignatius' development of the office of bishop as a hoovering-up of prerogatives previously held by the apostles. But there again, to assume that such a move is illicit is to neglect the way in which not only the ministries of the Church but also Scripture itself are faced with the problem of mediating apostolic presence in the period in which their absence is most immediately, keenly and obviously felt. Richard Bauckham has recently explored this in relation to the literary purpose of the Gospels—the thesis bears examining in relation to the development of the threefold ministry.[30] Effectively, this is to identify the issue as one of the development of doctrine.

Summary

The Apostle Paul has a developed sense of both his own ministry as a delegate or herald of the risen Christ and also the way in which his own pastoral and juridical presence has to be mediated and extended by means of both emissaries and correspondence. That this can operate in relation to binding / loosing is apparent from 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, in which he rules on the case of the man who has his father's wife. However, without some sense of the way in which doctrine might be understood to develop, it is difficult to deploy these examples straightforwardly without interpretative naïveté.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion illustrates some of the ways in which precursors of elements of developed penitential theologies may be sought, and found, within the New Testament. Of course, this is not a surprise; nearly all Christian traditions confessionally embody, usually explicitly, some commitment to articulating a coherent relationship between Scripture and the theological proposals one might licitly articulate.[31] This is what is meant by Scripture as *authority*. Within the Western tradition, this has usually also involved some account of the relative weight of secondary but *necessary* inferences from Scripture (=Reason) and the attention given to the history of *received* interpretations (=Tradition) (e.g. Augustine, *Doctr. Chr.* 2.9.14, Hooker, *Laws* 5.8.2). Most traditions hold these different-yet-related elements together by means of the notions of the rule and analogy of faith. In the historic formularies of the Church of England, these ideas are most clearly expressed, though with obvious polemical intent, in Article XX.[32] The point is that analytic to this type of confessional

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[29] See the essay by L.T. Johnson in James D. G. Dunn, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. 207-08.

[30] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

[31] This is usefully explored in David Kelsey, *The Uses Of Scripture In Recent Theology* (London: SCM, 1975).

[32] See Article XX in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

commitment is the claim that theological proposals warranted by appeals to scripture ought to be congruent with the Faith both in its developed and also in its formative phases. This this attests to a properly-basic hermeneutical commitment to maintaining the continuity between ideas and practices one might happen to bring to the scriptures and the ideas and practices attested by the scriptures themselves. This is not to eschew the development of doctrine and practice, only to note that, at least formally, the idea of development here is not untethered from the apostolic deposit. Anglicans are hardly alone in this commitment.

In terms of the continuity of the penitential tradition, we note that the broader history of penitential theology and practice is somewhat variegated. Whatever the practices of the second millennium, the practices of earlier periods are open to the question of whether serious post-baptismal sin is capable of remission, and indeed the question of who might be responsible for doing the remitting. The *Shepherd of Hermas*, in particular, attests simultaneously to both the practice of post-baptismal repentance and also to anxieties about its limits, and whilst the *Didache* advises confession prior to the sacrifice of the Eucharist, it treats this as public confession to the body of the Church, which has already gathered (cf. *Hermas* Vis. 5.7, also *Did.* 14.1-2).[33] The development of something resembling the practices of auricular confession to a priest, who exercises the episcopally-delegated apostolic function of binding and loosing is later, and development appears to have been gradual, incorporating elements of Lenten practice, monastic practice, and the restoration of the lapsed.[34] This ought to affect how one reads the biblical materials. For example, the activity of the 'elders' (πρεσβύτεροι) of James 5:13, who pray the 'prayer of faith' (v. 14), ought not to be *straightforwardly* equated with the delegated action performed by priests in later penitential theology. Conversely, the activities are not *straightforwardly* discontinuous either!

This point is not to suggest that the use of the Bible in developed penitential theologies is unwarranted. Rather, it is to suggest that the uses to which Scripture is put in these different periods must be weighed both against the text in its original context and the historical contingencies of both antecedent and present uses of the text. It is the view taken here that, thusly understood, considerable elements of continuity may be discerned at various key moments in the development of this aspect of the tradition. It is for the Church to weigh the significance of this and it is to that end that I offer this brief paper.

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[33] See also Maxwell E. Johnson, *The rites of Christian initiation : their evolution and interpretation*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007). 65, also 89.

[34] For a good discussion of some of the issues (including liturgical space) attached to this, see Dominique Iogna-Pratt, "Topographies of penance in the Latin West (c.800-c.1200)," in *A new history of penance*, ed. Abigail Firey, *Brill's companions to the Christian tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).