



From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities

James Tunstead Burtchaell

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This important work engages with a long historical debate: were the earliest Christians under the direction of ordained ministers, or under the influence of inspired laypeople? Who was in charge: bishops, elders and deacons, or apostles, prophets and teachers? Rather than trace Church offices backwards, Burtchaell examines the contemporary Jewish communities and finds evidence that Christians simply continued the offices of the synagogue. Thus, he asserts that from the very first they were presided over by officers. The author then advances the provocative view that in the first century it was not the officers who spoke with the most authority. They presided, but did not lead, and deferred to more charismatic laypeople. Burtchaell sees the evidence in favor of the Catholic/Orthodox/Anglican view that bishops have always presided in the Christian Church. At the same time he argues alongside the Protestants that in its formative era the Church deferred most to the judgment of those who were inspired, yet never ordained.

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