

VIII. The Ministry.

We believe that God has appointed a Ministry in His Church for the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the pastoral care of the people.

We believe that the Church has authority to ordain to the Ministry by prayer and the laying on of hands those whom she finds, after due trial, to be called of God thereto.

We believe that, for the due ordering of her life as a society, God has appointed a government in His Church, to be exercised, under Christ the Head, by Ministers and representatives of the people.

So we acknowledge the Holy Ministry appointed by God for the spread of the Gospel and the edification of His Church.

CHAPTER VIII. THE MINISTRY

For the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the pastoral care of the people.

“And he goeth up into the mountain, and calleth unto him whom he himself would: and they went unto him. And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have authority to cast out devils” (Mark 3: 13-15 R.V.).

In these words the first Evangelist records the foreshadowing of the Church and, more intimately, of the Christian ministry. This was a step Jesus took when the hostility of the official religious leaders was hardening against Him. Luke insists that it was the sequel to a night spent in prayer with the Father, a decision based on the will of God. The actual choice was made by Jesus Himself: it was no popular election. Jesus had been taking stock of His followers and He had read their hearts and saw there the promise and the potency. The ministry is never a way of life into which any man may casually stumble: His servants are chosen (John 15: 16). The elect ones were first “to be with him.” (a) Jesus saw from the first that His own personal endeavours must be supplemented and completed by the labours of His fellowmen: He was but the first of the succession of fellow-workers with God in the service of the Kingdom. That is high privilege indeed. (b) And more: they were to form the society that on His human side He craved, His intimates to whom He would communicate His thoughts and with whom He would share the sometimes unbearable loneliness in a growingly hostile and misunderstanding world. (c) But still more significant was this: “They were to give up their lives to being with him—a thing which not every one could be asked to do.” The ministry calls for absolute dedication: it is a task so great and dominant that all earthly ties are cut; it is a life vocation: ordination is not for a few years like a garment to be lightly worn and cast aside when some lesser call or worldly attraction beckons. (d) Moreover, this being with Him is an enriching experience. From the beginning men, even enemies,

¹ Menzies, *The Earliest Gospel*, p. 97.

recognized the transforming and renewing power that came to men who had been with Jesus (Acts 4: 13). No one is ready for the work of the ministry who is not much and oft and long in communion with the great Master. Only when that intimacy has deepened into a real understanding and a warm affection is the servant prepared for the next stage. (e) The primary practical task is the preaching of the Word. As He was predominantly in the Galilean days the Sower, so is His minister first and foremost a disperser of the Gospel of God with all its germinating power, a Gospel that may encounter much disappointing soil, but the seed that alone can win the spiritual harvest to the hundred-fold. (f) Further, these ex-fishermen and tax-gatherers were, in spite of all their meekness and humility, to have authority, an authority that came from the knowledge that their words and their powers were not their own, but the manifestation of a God who breaks into human life to cast out demons and all forms of fear and folly. The preacher of the Gospel ought to know that his barque is borne on the wave of an incoming tide—a Kingdom that has never lost movement and is finally irresistible. Strange that Christ's ministers have often been paralyzed by timidities and hesitations, with all the futilities that mock the half-hearted, when all the time they are compassed about with the omnipotent forces of the unseen. Did not Jesus Himself bear testimony as He heard His seventy disciples report on their preaching and witnessing that He watched Satan fall from heaven like lightning? Is there any other authority that can cast the devil from his place of pride?

The earliest Christian mission when Jesus sent out His disciples two by two found its climax in the supper by the lakeside. It was the first ingathering from the work of His "ministers." In spite of the amazing message they had carried abroad and the tumultuous response they saw in that expectant five thousand, their faith burned strangely low. Five barley loaves and two fishes! What are these among so many (John 6: 9)? Their unbelieving hearts were rebuked, and by that mystic sacrament so uplifted that with the excited throng they wanted there and then to crown Him king. Jesus had to separate them from the crowd (Mark 6: 45), and sent them into the disillusioning storm-tossed lake before they came together again and knew each other in the real world. That first sacrament had tested and challenged His

"ministers." Then came that solemn hour under the deepening shadow of the Cross when the table was spread and He sat down with the Twelve. "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22: 15). The Master had willed this supper and His eyes were fixed on them with affectionate longing. One of their own number who dipped with Him and with them in the dish went out, "and it was night." Could they ever forget that lingering shadow on their table? Again the sacrament tested and challenged His ministers. But it did more: it sent a great shaft of light forward into the darkness: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new *with you* in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26: 29). He made these plain men realize that the hope of the new covenant focalized on them. They had made a tryst with Him in the eternal mansions. And they would not come there alone: He had set a rainbow of promise over their faith and labours: "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob" (Matt. 8: 11).

The Supper Discourses in John elaborate and confirm the inexhaustible legacy our Lord passed on to His ministers, too rich an inheritance for weak men to carry did we not have the assurance, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15: 16).

No marvel that the Supper has ever been an occasion when His believing folk are delivered from their sad communications and find their hearts begin to burn within them; for He tarries with us there, and it is in the breaking of bread that our eyes are opened and we come to know Him (Luke 24: 13ff.). His ministers must ever return to the Upper Room; for surely it was there, when the door of the world's hostility was shut, that He spoke Peace to their souls (John 20: 19ff.). There too first came to His ministers the Holy Spirit and authority to release men from the burden of sin: "whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." That is the place where a Thomas finds his doubts vanish away before the print of the nails and there breaks forth the full confession: "My Lord and my God." Surely above all His ministers have a charge and a responsibility in the perpetuation of the tradition of the Upper Room.

Jesus Himself had the pastoral heart. "When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9: 36). Again He assures us and exhorts us: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest" (37f.). His mission as defined at Nazareth was to bring release to the poor and the oppressed; His active ministry was an unrelenting concern for individual souls, a lingering often over those the world would count insignificant, and a peculiar care of the sinner and the outcast. He lived out day by day His own portrayal of the Good Shepherd. The Twelve He bore very close to His heart. He included them all in the words of Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you (plural), that he may sift you as wheat." For the one who needed most He prayed specially: "But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22: 31-32). Among the Resurrection scenes stands out that heart-searching encounter between the repentant Peter and his living Lord. Against the background of the miraculous draught of fishes, symbolic of that sea harvest of men that was to be, and beside the fire that had prepared the simple sacrament of bread and fish, there comes that probing of the soul that befits every minister of the Master: "Lovest thou me?" It is only when our Lord has pushed past lightly spoken first answers, past hesitations and comparisons and evasions, that there is found the essential ground of sincerity on which alone the work of the ministry can rest. Then and only then is the commission given: "Feed my sheep."

It is curiously interesting to pause for a moment over the metaphors that Jesus used in relation to the work of the minister. The fisherman's task is one to be carried on in difficult waters often and under fickle conditions: there are times and seasons when we cast in vain. Such too is the lot of the sower. The preacher's task of wooing and winning men is in the realm of the unpredictable. There is here something that counts more than the human factor: results depend on movements we do not initiate and control; but we can always cast out the nets, scatter wide the seed. But the other task of feeding the flock is a steady unceasing one. Here there is the call for all our human powers of foresight, constancy, unrelenting affectionate daily and hourly care. There is the

closest of ties between the Good Shepherd and His sheep: He knows the "blackface" and the "crooked horn"; utter dependence and affection and individual interest make a most intimate bond between pastor and people. But it has its perils like the fisherman's, and even the laying down of life (John 10: 15). Perhaps we read too much into these metaphors. But it is well to remember that, while it may not be in the preacher to win men, it is at least much more in his human field of duty and consecration to hold and cheer and tend those who have been won.

When the book of Acts unrolls the opening chapters in the story of the Church, the first Christian assembly hear the proclamation of the Word (2: 14). God had shaken all souls there, and Peter rose to declare the meaning thereof. The *Word* had its first triumphs then at the hands of the chosen apostles. And the secret of their sustained power in that life of witness was the house-gathering when they recalled their Lord in the *breaking of the bread* (2: 42). And how soon the *care of the flock* emerges as a responsibility outgrowing already the power of the Twelve: they have to enlarge the number of ministers and appoint seven men (Acts 6: 5).

The Epistles of the Apostle Paul mirror the early Church in operation. His most urgent care is always his Gospel with the exposition of doctrine that that involves: the *Word* is primary. But each letter moves on to practical exhortation where the missionary shows himself a shepherd of the flock: the *pastoral care* of the people is ever on his heart. Not as often as we might expect does he deal with the *Sacraments*. But that their proper administration weighs on his soul is clear from the solemn character of the charge he laid upon the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11: 23ff.). It is after the fashion he had received from the Lord that he gives direction. Clearly he feels a charge laid upon him here, an inescapable obligation towards the right and proper administration of the Holy Supper. One other indication of the immense concern he has for that act is hidden from the casual reader. But it lies beneath the historic rebuke that Paul delivered to Peter (Gal. 2: 11). When Peter withdrew from eating with Gentile Christians because of scruples born of the Jewish law, he was making it impossible for Jewish and Gentile Christians to meet at a common Lord's Table. As the celebration of the Supper was associated with a common meal, there could be no one-minded society where one half feared

to eat what the others might put on the table. Only because he sensed that this was dividing the Lord's body did the Apostle rebuke publicly his brother in the service. Clearly anything that brought division to the holy Sacrament was anathema to the sensitive minister of Christ. This then is a measure of his care for the right administration of the Supper.

A Ministry. Mark 10: 42-45.

The ministry has a stamp upon it that marks it off from all other vocations. Jesus by His own words and acts defines its unique character. He took a towel and girded Himself and washed His disciples' feet: "I have given you an example, that ye should also do as I have done to you" (John 13: 15). That incident probably crowns the contention of which Luke tells us (22: 24) as to which of the disciples was to be accounted the greatest. "The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them; and they that have authority over them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." The passion to govern has no place in the Christian minister: his is the will to serve. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The only pre-eminence His servants should covet is that in which the verse culminates: "to give his life a ransom for many." Place-hunting, the worldly scramble for office and distinction, are ruled out of the Christian circle. Yet that does not imply any dead level. In the company of the Twelve even Jesus had His peculiar intimates, those who came nearest to Him because they had the insight, and those who led because they had the talent to lead. But the characteristic type of pre-eminence is willingness to "spend and be spent" in the service of mankind.

Such willing service claims nevertheless its own homage and reward. There is no greater champion of the rights of that homage than the Apostle Paul. "We beseech you, brethren, to know (*i.e.* respect) them that labour among you . . . and to esteem them exceeding highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess. 5: 12). Members of the Church are to recognize the authority of those who have set themselves to the service of the saints and of everyone who shares in the work and in its toilsomeness (1 Cor. 16: 15). Gal. 6: 6 declares that there is an obligation to share life's

good gifts with the preacher of the Word. That is sowing to the Spirit and reaps eternal life. First Peter 5: 1ff., after defining the obligation of true shepherds of the flock of God (not to hold off till pressed into the service, not to allow mercenary motives to enter in, and not to be domineering), appeals to the younger members to reciprocate by due acceptance of the authority of the elders. Indeed all must put on "the apron of humility."

Called of God. Gal. 1: 1, 15-16; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4: 11-16.

The primal form of ministry in the early Church did not spring from human contriving, but from divine inspiration. Christ was manifestly alive in the Church: His body was vibrant with His quickening spirit. Each individual life was open to the inflow of the divine, and each had his gift, or *charisma*. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit," as Paul expressed it (1 Cor. 12: 4). Some had practical gifts and some had spiritual, and all had their function in the living organism as our members have in the human body. It had been foretold that in the age of the Messiah there would be an outpouring of the Spirit: as Joel had it and Peter affirmed it, "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams" (Acts 2: 15ff.). It was not surprising that in Palestine with its noble prophetic tradition there should be such a rebirth. But in Hellenic and Roman lands as well, wherever the Christian message took root, the wonder of the good news broke down the barriers of reserve, and lives became athrob with a creative power. The Living Christ seemed to have an immediacy of touch with His own, and personalities overflowed with a richness of life not explicable in human terms.

The prophetic power marked three different classes—apostles, prophets, and teachers (1 Cor. 12: 4ff.). Their gift was the supreme one, that of the Word, the direct product of the Spirit, never dependent on any ecclesiastical form. The Word was the revelation of the mind of God, its interpretation and application in the concrete situations of experience. It was a return to that directness of divine guidance which the prophets of the Old Testament had known in "Thus saith the Lord." Only now it was the living spirit of the Risen Christ that was the interpreter of the mind of God.

The *apostles* were first those disciples Jesus Himself chose and sent out; then Matthias, substitute for Judas; Paul, called by the Risen Christ; others such as Barnabas and Silas, the name being more loosely used as time went on. The kernel idea was that they were "sent out," "under commission," lifted from the common ties and set apart for a lifetime, "not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1: 1), for the preaching of the Word. Their field was the world, wherever the Spirit might call them to preach and persuade men to hear. Typical was Paul, the one who recognized no frontiers, who never intruded on the sphere of another man, but was ever pressing on that every human being should hear the Word that saved. Inevitably he was organizer and teacher as well as the inspired prophet declaring the mind of God and the preacher of the Gospel. But primarily he was the bearer of the Word. He ever kept first things first. His example in setting the ministry of the Word in the chief place can be ignored by no living Church. But there were consequences of his activity: he was, *e.g.*, the unifying force behind all the churches he created. In fact he showed by his collection scheme that churches needed to be linked together in practical ways as in spiritual. The Apostle was thus the creative and pioneer force *par excellence*.

But there were also the *prophets*, men who had the gift of the Word and yet were called not so often to missionary activity, but rather to the edification of the local community. The powerhouse of the Church is its worship service, and there for the praise and the reading of the Word was needed the man with the gift of exposition and unction, one who could so utter the divine mind as to build up and enrich and encourage his brethren in the faith and by prayer lead into the divine presence. The acts of God in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus had not only to be told, but to be brought to bear meaningfully on the tragic human situation. The words of Jesus had to be pondered and interpreted in new phases of our manifold experience. The prophet was a man who must have reflected much. But also he had his visions and revelations. Such a man naturally led in worship and in the supreme act of the Eucharist, where he could be trusted to transcend the normal forms and lead in inspired prayer (*Didache*, 10: 7). The Spirit is no respecter of persons, and, in spite of the conservatism of tradition, the Church learned to welcome women as

well as men among the prophets (Acts 21: 9). The prophet need hold no office: his prestige rested on his gift. In fact, so great homage was paid to this spiritual quality that there was the danger of the prophet turning autocrat and unduly affecting discipline, administration, and election to office. Wandering prophets became a problem later in the Church, and tests had to be applied by local leaders to distinguish the genuine from the spurious: "Not every one that speaketh in the spirit is a prophet, but only if he have the ways of the Lord" (*Didache*, 11: 8). If a prophet uses his gift to order a meal at will or to demand money, he is a charlatan. "No man speaking in the Spirit of God saith Jesus is anathema" (1 Cor. 12: 3 R.V.)—so counsels Paul, wise as he is spiritual.

A third order were the *teachers*, men who excelled in knowledge, as of the words of Jesus and the truths of God, and had the gift of teaching catechumens. Their opportunity lay in the local church, where new members who came in would need instruction. There never has been a time in the Christian Church when we could leave everything to the inspired ecstatic. Always there is a body of sifted knowledge and experience that has to be passed on. Doctrine has to be taught and explained. The rites of the Church have to be interpreted. The story of Revelation in Israel, as in the life and death of the Master, has to be re-taught to each generation, not merely recited, but set forth in its meaning and power.

There is a permanent value for the Church of today in this free untrammelled movement of the Spirit of God. We *all* may see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man. There stands open before each man an unobstructed path to the Throne of Grace. The Divine Presence is not the prerogative of the few. There is a sense in which all true believers are prophets and priests. Certainly that Church is strangely untrue to the Apostolic Church in which channels of communication with the divine are reserved for the officials and accredited clergy. The Reformation Church set great store by the priesthood of all believers, and so must any living Church today.

After Due Trial.

This dependence on the movement of the Spirit was all the more complete in the early Church because there was a vivid expectation that any day a supernatural order would descend upon

men with the second advent of their Lord. It was only as that lively hope faded into the further distance that thought settled down to a long term organization. Yet even throughout this ardent first period there were steadying influences—the conservatism in human nature and the testing process of actual experience. Jews passing into the Christian ecclesia carried with them a liking for the familiar moulds into which their lives had been cast under the law. That life was patriarchal in type, society finding its centre in the head of the household, or in such a pillar man as a king or high priest, and all authority was derived from him. Thus primacy in authority fell to the disciples who had been chosen by the Master Himself. And when they sought to fill the blank caused by the desertion of Judas, they looked for one “of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was received up from among us, of these must one become a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1: 21-22). In this way the revelation of the Spirit was balanced always by practical knowledge of the tradition and that discipline that Jesus had recognized in those “who continued with me in my temptations” (Luke 22: 28). Before they depended on the Spirit in the casting of lots they had made a realistic sifting out of men, *e.g.*, Joseph and Matthias. So, as Jewish practice in the synagogue set high value on the testing of the years that makes a man an elder, or presbyter, so the Christian society looked up to its seniors, the elders (*i.e.* presbyters). Thus emerged perhaps the first officials in the local group.

By Prayer and the Laying on of Hands.

When the original disciples found themselves no longer able to give adequate care to the interests of the growing community, they chose the seven men, usually called deacons, though that name is not given in Acts 6. Here appears the prototype for ordination to the Christian ministry: “when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (6: 6). This laying on of hands was a case of Jewish procedure (*e.g.*, at the setting apart of a Rabbi) adopted in the New Israel; but it was a ritual found in many ages and countries. Perpetuating the ancient conception of power or responsibility passing from person to person by contact, it was conjoined with prayer, showing that faith really rested in the unseen trans-

mission of spiritual potency from on high. This became the recognized form in the life of the Church, accompanied often by fasting as well as by prayer (*cf.* Acts 13: 3). Society needs a mode of making visible to its membership the delegation to office or responsibility. The supreme gift of the Word was not regarded as passed on in this rite.² A man could discern the Word: it was self-authenticating. But other forms of service, like the practical duties of the seven, were conferred by ordination. Thus the ordination of a minister today carries us back in imagination to the first days of high adventure when the Mother Church at Antioch was sending out Paul and Barnabas to their historic missionary journey.

For the Due Ordering of Her Life. 1 Tim. 3-5; 2 Tim. 2: 14-26; 2 Tim. 4: 1-6; Titus; 3 John.

No society can long sustain its existence without developing some forms of organization. Even the Spirit-filled Church had need of the guidance of grave and experienced men; for inspiration sometimes burns low, and some means must be provided for bridging periods of dullness and apathy. The Jerusalem Church had in the circle of the apostles a governing body which drew its prestige from their direct association with Jesus. Peter was at first the natural leader and, later on, we find James the Lord's brother the accepted head of the Church, perhaps because he had more obvious administrative gifts than the impetuous Peter, perhaps because in ancient society blood-relationship to the Master gave him an undisputed priority. As Paul passes back through South Galatia on his first missionary journey “confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith” (Acts 14: 22ff.), he does not leave before “they had appointed for them *elders* in every church.” By the time he is writing from prison to his beloved Philippians he names specially *bishops* and *deacons* (1: 1). The difficulties that arose in a church like Corinth when emissaries came along claiming to be super-apostles (2 Cor. 11) showed the need for strong local leadership: the missionary founder could not always be at hand to bring order out of a chaos of parties (1 Cor. 1: 10). A great Church movement like the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem needed officers to arrange

² Bartlet and Carlyle, *Christianity in History*, p. 294.

it and guarantee its financial soundness (1 Cor. 16). The Pastoral Epistles are evidence of the growing importance of leaders of competence and probity.

It is impossible to pronounce definitely on the forms of government that arose in the Church. Local circumstances probably called for different organizations. But the Jewish synagogue was an obvious model to follow, and the earliest local government was probably through a council or synod of *elders*, otherwise called presbyters. These evidently were chosen and set apart by the whole Christian community: in the choice the influence of a missionary like Paul, if present, or of an outstanding prophet would count. "Let those elders who preside well be deemed worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in word and teaching" (1 Tim. 5: 17). Thus elders might vary in the function they discharged in the Church: some would excel in the leading of worship, some in the conduct of business.

No clear distinction emerges between the elder and the *bishop* (*episcopos*) of earliest times. "In the New Testament," wrote Dr. Hort,⁴ "the word *episcopos* mainly, if not always, is *not* a title, but a description of the Elder's function." Paul, addressing the elders of the Church of Ephesus (Acts 20: 17), calls them bishops (v. 28): "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops, to feed the church of God." These bishops were to be true teachers. At other times they might be leaders of worship and generally take a position such as was held by the priests of the Old Testament Church (1 *Clement* 44, 4). The government of a whole area by one supreme bishop was a gradual development. The dominant position of James at Jerusalem did not influence the Church at large as immediately as we might expect. Quite clearly local churches enjoyed a real measure of freedom to develop according to the situation and necessities of the case. Distance and circumstances divided them from one another, and the practice of an Ephesus in the Asiatic sphere might differ widely from the Roman. The living spirit and no dead hand of conservatism held control. From a letter of Polycarp to the Philippians we learn that as late as A.D. 120 a college of presbyters and deacons still functioned there in Macedonia, and even in Rome apparently the same

⁴ *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 228ff.

system held.⁴ The rule of the one bishop really came about in the Church generally to meet the need for the control of heresy. In the cities where Greek culture flourished and Greek thought coursed freely there was a danger of losing the Gospel in a flood of speculation. In the interests of order and uniformity the Church had to make clear its essential truth. A canon of scriptures was evolved and the outlines of a creed began to be formulated. As part of this same process the authority of one over-ruling bishop was found the most effective means of securing unity of discipline, practice, and belief. His prestige was derived from no theory of an unbroken and exclusive succession from the apostles. The theory of apostolic succession is a later idea barely supported by the facts. Rather the bishop was the visible symbol and organ of the unity of the Church and as such the chosen of God.⁵

Thus no modern church can claim by appeal to the apostolic age that it has any greater authority for its orders than any other. Dr. B. H. Streeter summed up his investigation into the facts in these words:⁶ "Among these, the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, and the Independent can each discover the prototype of the system to which he himself adheres. . . . Indeed, if my hypothesis is correct, then, in the classic words of *Alice in Wonderland*, 'Everyone has won, and all shall have prizes'."

What becomes clear from the history of the first Christian centuries is that God has guided His Church to many forms and blessed each one as it met the peculiar need which called it into being. The marvel lies in the diversity and adaptability of the organ of the Spirit. The Church declares her vitality in the way she has chosen her instruments in each crisis, and today by seeking spirituality as well as unity in her manifold diversity she will best declare her faithfulness to her one Lord and Master.

⁴ Johannes Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity*, p. 818ff.

⁵ Bartlet and Carlyle, *Christianity in History*, p. 306.

⁶ *The Primitive Church*, p. ix.