

the possibility in love of hatred—that is, of the hatred of what he takes God to hate—is impossible to the Methodist made perfect in love, for the Methodist responds, as did Christ, to what it is possible through grace for all men to become. Consequently the concern in America and elsewhere with the so-called social gospel need not be mere human activism unaided by God. It may be, and in many cases is, the honest exemplification of redemption, for the good man cannot stay good for long unless he is perpetually busy about the welfare, spiritual as well as material, of his fellows. Perfect love means a restless, passionate, heart-breaking, consuming concern for other people. Its corollary of necessity is the Kingdom of God, 'Kingdom' meaning reign or rule, not territory or institution, and that reign starting in the heart and life of an individual and reaching out through all social expressions to the far ends of the earth.

Karl Barth is not unmethodistic when he paraphrases the Apostle Paul in the words, 'Having nothing of himself, the more he received the more he gave, and the more he gave the more he received'. That is Christian perfection when what we've got is the love of God as our only motive, and the love of others in service as God loves and serves us as our only concern, and humble gratitude for all we are and have as the free, undeserved gift of God.

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## THE RELATION OF FAITH AND ORDER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

**O**UR PRIMARY source of knowledge of God's redemptive act in Jesus Christ is the New Testament. In it we see God calling forth man's response in penitence and trust to His visiting, redeeming, saving act in Christ. This response of faith is accompanied by God's creation of a partnership or fellowship, a uniting in an experience of Christ, a faith in Christ, that was common to every member of the fellowship. These people of God, newly covenanted, had experienced a new life, a new way of life in Christ. They were enthralled by a hope that included not only this life but that of the world to come. They were charged in solemn commission with declaring, proclaiming and witnessing to this best of good news of Christ and His salvation. They were heralds of the gospel and envoys of the faith.

Thus the act of God in Christ, responded to by men of faith, begets the Church. It is the *ecclesia*, as the New Testament calls it. It is the Body of Christ, to use Paul's favourite figure of speech with reference to it. The *ecclesia* has many members in many places with disparate gifts of the Spirit for the varied tasks needful for its life, work and witness. As the whole household of faith responds to the Holy Spirit, it gradually works out ways and means through organization and order, to celebrate and to clarify the Good News for purposes of witnessing effectively to the faith.

Thus faith and order in the New Testament are inseparable. Their relation is one of dynamic dialectic tension. The *ecclesia* is the called-forth-faith and the created-community yoked together for their Master. The same God in Christ who calls forth the faith creates the community of faith as the living form of the living faith in the living Christ.

The New Testament shows us that the members of the *ecclesia* have an essential and inescapable dimension of common partaking, sharing and communion both with Christ and with each other. This fellowship is intent on expressing the different ways in which the men of faith participate in the love of God and love of their fellow men. The *koinonia* witnesses to the faith. The Word of God in Christ calls together a diverse company to a life of service which is sacramental in its mood and round of celebration. The celebration by the community of its community in Christ is its evidenced *koinonia* in action.

The perception by Christians of the common character of their oneness, through the various dimensions of the fellowship, is further evidence of the *koinonia*. But the *koinonia*, like all other aspects of the Church, is an aspect of the commission of Christ and the empowerment by His Holy Spirit for the imperious task of bearing witness to their faith in God's saving action in Jesus Christ. We turn, then, to look at the dimensions of the witness of the community of Christ whose faith is manifest in its order, and whose order and organization are modes of its faith.

The New Testament suggests four principal dimensions of the inter-dependent and inseparable dual witness of faith and order by the *ecclesia*. As the witness continued and spread there came about the evolving clarification of faith into later doctrines and creeds, and the growth of community into organization and institution with designated leaders and offices. These four dimensions we are designating as: Word, Life, Organization, and Worship. The New Testament terms are *Kerygma*, *Didache*, *Diakonia*, and *Leiturgia*. In each and in all of these we find faith and order inseparably fused in a God-given unity.

#### WORD—KERYGMA

First, or in the beginning, is Word or *Kerygma*, for as Paul says to the Corinthians: 'It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe' (1 Cor. 1<sub>21</sub>). What the apostles proclaimed was God's Word made flesh in Jesus, in 'Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor. 1<sub>13</sub>). The Gospel or 'the word of faith which we preach', as Paul wrote to the Romans, is 'that Jesus is Lord and . . . that God raised him from the dead' (Rom. 10<sub>8-9</sub>). The central word in the Christian proclamation was the Lordship of Christ (Rom. 14<sub>9</sub>).

As C. H. Dodd tells us, the *kerygma* was concerned 'with the data of the Christian faith' which were the foundational parts of the common Gospel. Dr

Dodd summarizes what he calls 'a comprehensive view of the content of the early *kerygma*', the word or proclamation witness by the early Jerusalem Church by means of which God converted or saved many. The line of thought runs thus: (1) 'The age of fulfilment has dawned', that is, 'the expected time when God, after long centuries of waiting, should visit His people with judgement and blessing, bringing to a climax His dealings with them in history', thus, 'the apostles declared that the Messianic age has dawned'. (2) 'This has taken place through the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus', according to the Scriptures. (3) 'By virtue of the resurrection, Jesus has been exalted at the right hand of God, a Messianic head of the new Israel.' (4) 'The Holy Spirit in the Church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory' (Acts 2<sub>33</sub> and 5<sub>32</sub>). (5) 'The Messianic Age will shortly reach its consummation in the return of Christ.' And finally (6) 'The *kerygma* always closes with an appeal for repentance, the offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of 'salvation', that is, of 'the life of the Age to Come', to those who enter the elect community. The *kerygma* is proclaimed at Pentecost by Peter, who answers the hearers' heart-searching question, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' with his forthright word: 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him' (Acts 2<sub>38-9</sub>). This summary by Dr Dodd is one responsible way of articulating what is meant by *kerygma* (see *The Apostolic Preaching*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1936)

The *kerygma* is the substance of the proclamation, it is what is preached; but proclamation and preaching mean the actual announcing by the messenger of the good news of God's redemptive action in Christ. It is action by man's living words witnessing to God's revealed love for men, to the fact that in Christ there is a new and reconciled relationship, a new quality of being through His judgement and mercy, His compassion, forgiveness, unmerited favour and help. It is really God's proclamation, announcement, call, offer, promise through His Word to the individual hearer, but employing the instrumentality of one who speaks for the community of the convinced witnesses who have been born again through God's redemptive action in Christ. In Him they have been given new life by the Holy Spirit and men can see and hear what the Gospel has done. God preaches His Gospel through the preacher's witness to the Gospel. The Word uses the preacher's words as the immediate form of its continuing power to save. The witness of the apostles was crystallized in the oral and written traditions of the *ecclesia* and made accessible to us eventually through the canon of the New Testament.

Among the men of faith, certain ones were acknowledged as possessing the gift of proclamation. Chief among these were the apostles and the evangelists. The choice of successors to the first apostles and evangelists in the *ecclesia* occasioned the problems coincident with a specified and duly designated or set apart ministry of the Word. The Church was where the Word was preached and the power of God was present to work the miracle of grace so that humanity was reconstituted into the community of Christ's love and life. The preaching of the faith called for order and organization among the preachers.

## LIFE—DIDACHE

The Apostles not only proclaimed the Christian facts; they were concerned for the Christian-life-in-action, for a faith that was active in love. They asked themselves the significant question: 'What do men who are men "in faith" do and not do?' How does this new life in Christ look and feel? If the *kerygma* was concerned about how man stands before God, then the dimension of life before one's fellows may be called the *didache*. In Paul's Epistles we can see how the doctrinal sections develop a practical wisdom concerning inter-personal relations and responsibilities.

Often this took the form of instruction or teaching for the edification of the saints. The constituted community needed Christian guidance in moral matters and in fellowship-relations generally. The teaching of converts before baptism, especially those who came from outside Judaism, was a real concern for the *ecclesia*. The end or goal of such teaching was 'The Way', the Christian life, the common life (*koinonia*) in the Body of Christ.

The New Testament specifies teaching as a dimension of the total Christian witness through more reflective forms of traditions. The Spirit had given the 'gift of teaching' to some for this specific ministry.

The lives of the Christians were surrounded by a sea of paganism which meant that the 'spirit' must be strengthened against the things of the 'flesh'. Immediately after Pentecost it is noted that the believers 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship . . .' (Acts 2<sub>42</sub>). As Jesus had taught concerning the Kingdom of God, so the Apostles taught concerning the implications of the full good news about Christ and His Kingdom, for they now knew that in Christ God had brought to fulfilment His ancient promises and purposes. The new life must take recognizable form in manifestations that were conformable to the faith. The pattern of life, the training for it and the actualization of it, required teaching. Teaching required teachers, and the charismatic gifts appeared in certain members of the community who were called teachers. Through their teaching they fashioned the Christian-life-in-action for the living community of faith. It was faith that ordered the life of the community.

## ORGANIZATION—DIAKONIA

Love-in-communal-action, as a reflection of God's love in Christ which created the community, is an obvious and appealing aspect of the Christian witness. Paul speaks of love as the greatest functional mode of faith that abides within the Christian community. This is the shepherding of the flock that passes on life to the sheep, an 'abundant life' that is found only in the Good Shepherd's love and care, that is, in the mercy and love of God Himself.

The *diakonia* is that dimension of witness whereby the expressions of love were organized and made concrete. Organization was necessary as the community of faith grew and the activities of the *ecclesia* multiplied in place and in variety to facilitate the domestic exercises of brotherly love.

The men of faith had seen or had known of their Lord's ministry in mercy to the outcasts, the poor, the sick, the needy. 'Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life . . .' and this was exactly what the Lord had done. So the Body of Christ must be knit together and built up in disinterested love. First

'the Seven' and later many others were asked to be 'deacons' or servants through this witness of love. They cared for the widows and took up offerings for the poor. They were the stewards of the material possessions of the community of faith who held things in common until the Lord should come. They saw after the care and support of the apostles and prophets in their midst and of those who came among them to witness to their faith.

To them fell also the tasks of disciplining the wrong-doer in the *ecclesia* and of restoring such an offender to a right mind or spirit, and to a reconciled relationship with the Fellowship and its Centre, the Lord Jesus.

Usually the term *diakonia* refers simply to administering something—or, as a servant of the community of faith, 'ministering to the saints', as Paul calls it in Romans 15<sub>25</sub>. The choice or designation of these deacons or servants for these duties was a problem of order and organization, as was the performance of the duties themselves.

#### WORSHIP—LEITURGIA

In this dimension of the witness we are centring upon the *ecclesia's* celebration of the drama of salvation, as acted out in ritual performances of various sorts. Obviously this is not the whole of worship, but it is a central function of worship to signify and symbolize the *present* meaning of the Christ-Event and its import of life here and now. Not only did Christians pray in their worship, they made gestures of prayer; and if they knelt or clasped their hands, this was a dimension of their witness.

Not only did they read from the Scriptures, they probably stood in gratitude and recognition that God was present and speaking. Rite and ritual, word and action, sign and symbol blended in the worship as witness. The rite that man performs is a preparing of himself in prayerful hope that the grace of God will actually encounter him.

The sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are the highest examples of this dimension of witness-through-structured-action.

The Lord's Supper is our Holy Communion with the Risen Christ, to whom and with whom we give loving thanks for the acts of God in the Incarnate Lord, especially the events of His passion as symbolized in the breaking of bread and the receiving of wine.

Some form of Baptism is the accepted entrance rite into the *ecclesia*, just as circumcision was the required rite of the covenanted community of the Old Testament. This baptismal rite is a worshipful recognition and appropriation of the redemptive act of God in Christ in the life of the one baptized. As he is received into the fellowship of the Church, baptism seals and symbolizes the new life in Christ. With its washing by water, baptism witnesses that God washes away sins and grants newness of life.

It seems to have been usual in New Testament times for baptism to have been administered by the apostles and evangelists, but it was soon accepted that the rite could be performed by any member of the *ecclesia*. The administration of the Lord's Supper involved the relationship of apostle to presbyter-bishop and the relation of this elder or overseer to the deacon.

There were other acts, such as the laying on of hands, the anointing with oil, the holy kiss symbolizing mutual fellowship in love, which all witnessed to the

new life in Christ which both characterized and fashioned the *ecclesia*. Even the sequence or order of these actions and words was a part of this dimension or witness through worship. The heart of liturgy, then, is celebration.

#### CONCLUSION

The common life in Christ as witnessed to by the *ecclesia* in distinct, isolated groups of worshippers found its institutional forms under the personal influence and authority of the apostles as envoys of the faith, and their 'deputies'. Differing circumstances and experiences led to varied forms of local organization and order among the men and women whom God chose through His charismatic gifts for ministry to and on behalf of the community of faith. To the Corinthians Paul wrote: 'God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then helpers, healers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues' (1 Cor. 12<sub>28</sub>). To the Church at Ephesus was written: 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men. . . . And his gifts were that some should be apostles; some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ . . .' (Eph. 4<sub>8, 11-12</sub>). In all forms and through all purposes of the organization of the Church there is seen a reflection of God's relationship with men in Christ. The witness of faith and order was a witness to God's saving grace in Christ offered to men.

God's self-manifestation in Jesus Christ for the salvation of man called forth faith and the community of faith. That community was the New Israel, the people of God, called by Christ into new life through the Spirit. It was, therefore, the *ecclesia*. It was a living organism, the Body of Christ, of which Christ is the head and His Spirit is the life.

We close this brief book at the relation of faith and order in the New Testament with a figure of speech which our Lord gave us: 'I am the vine, you are the branches' (John 15<sub>5</sub>). As we think of the Church we recognize that truly Christ is the Vine, rooted and grounded in creation and one with the Creator. The *ecclesia* is the branches which spring from the Vine. These branches are formed only by the flow of life and power, which is the Holy Spirit, through the Vine, first to form and then to sustain the branches. Upon these branches, and indeed as the purposive part of them, is the fruit which is both faith and order, or life and form. Within the fruit is seed, which represents the future and the harvest. God in Christ called forth the Church with its faith and its order that there might be spiritual fruit to the glory of the One who both plants and reaps.

Let us then be faithful and zealous workers in the Lord's Vineyard as husbandmen of the fruit, remembering in gratitude that the Vineyard is His, He gives the increase, and He is Lord of the harvest. We seek only to abide in Him that He may abide in us until the day of harvest is come and the fruit is gathered home.

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