

The Holy Spirit and the Ordained Ministry

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There are three aspects to be considered in this chapter as suggested by the title itself: the Holy Spirit, the ministry, and ordination. The assumptions that can be deduced from the title, among other things, are (1) that there is a validity for an ordained ministry within the church; (2) that there is a vital relationship between this ordained ministry and the Holy Spirit; and (3) that there is a greater and wider ministry within the church, outside of and apart from the ordained.

In most of the churches today, the above are reflected in church order and in various rituals of ordination. But apart from the usual practices of the church, can the above assertions be maintained? Can their validity be proven historically, theologically, biblically?

It is our endeavor to discuss the church's ministry primarily from a biblical perspective. The choice of this particular approach can easily be justified. For one thing, the writer does not feel competent to discuss this subject from either the historical or the theological point of view. Moreover, it is the writer's conviction that the biblical record, primarily the New Testament, presents us with enough material for a serious and fruitful discussion of the ministry of the church, and for laying out principles with which to evaluate the whole question of ministry in our contemporary situation.

I. The Pauline Concept of the Ministry

Any discussion of the church's ministry of course has to start with the Apostle Paul. It is not simply that his letters are laden with insights on the ministry of the

church; it is also a recognition of the fact that the churches reflected in Paul's letter belong to a lower strata in history. A study of them, therefore, would give us some clues as to how the church in its inception understood its own ministry in relation to its own life.

Of course, we recognize that Paul's ideas of the ministry have been interpreted and reinterpreted in different and sometimes contradictory ways, depending on the ecclesiastical persuasions and theological presuppositions of the interpreters. This chapter by no means poses to be an objective statement of the Pauline position; hopefully, however, one more personal interpretation would not do a great deal of harm.

A. The concept of charisma

The Pauline concept of ministry starts with the doctrine of *charisma*. "A charisma," Ernest Käsemann writes, "is the specific part which the individual has in the lordship and glory of Christ; and this specific part which the individual has in the Lord shows itself in a specific service and a specific vocation." In short, *charisma* is a gift, a gift from God. Ministry, understood as *charisma*, simply means that it is not primarily an office, nor a function of a special group of people, but a gift from the Holy Spirit. That the Spirit is the source of *charisma* is clear from Paul's writing, particularly in his first letter to the Corinthians. In chapter twelve, he starts his first list of ministries with the words: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit . . ." His conclusion is even more positive: "All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills." This verse not only makes clear the source of *charisma*, but also that no Christian can choose one's own calling or one's own gifts; it is the Spirit who distributes *charismata* according to his will. And who are the recipients? Not a special group, not a select few, but the whole body of

believers. Every believer, by virtue of his or her baptism, is a recipient of the Holy Spirit's *charisma*, and thereby is empowered to become a significant member of the fellowship. It is in this sense that Paul could speak of believers as "saints," as the "holy ones," for to him at least there is no segment of the church that is set aside as holy and dedicated to God, and there is no part of the world which is not touched by the act of God in Christ.

The secular is no longer abandoned to demons and demonic energies. Grace pushes home its attack to the very heart of the world; it liberates it from the demons As nothing is *charisma* in itself, so nothing is secular in itself All things stand within the charismatic possibility and are holy to the extent to which the holy ones of God make use of them The field of the Church's operation must be the world in its totality, for nothing less can be the field of Christ the Cosmocreator.⁴

This means, further, that to Paul there is no division between the "clergy" and the "laity;" it is the total membership of the church who are recipients of *charisma*, and not a select few.

Charisma is no longer the distinguishing mark of elect individuals but that which is the common endowment of all who call upon the name of the Lord . . . a demonstration of the fact that the Spirit of God has been poured out on all flesh.⁴

B. The place of the specialized ministry

The question is raised, however, if Paul regarded everyone in the community of faith as recipients of *charisma*, then does he deny a place for specially selected people within the fellowship to occupy positions of leadership? To answer this question necessitates a closer look at the evidence which Paul has left us.

Paul presents three listings of the church's ministries: one in Romans 12, and two in 1 Corinthians 12. A cursory glance at these lists reveals three things. First of all, Paul is talking primarily of functions to be performed rather than of offices to be filled. It is true that he mentions apostles, teachers, and prophets, but

as John Knox has remarked: "For Paul there were teachers and prophets, but hardly the offices of teacher and prophet."⁵ Knox continues:

More obviously the healers, speakers in tongues, miracle workers were not "officials" of the church. Even the "bishops" and "deacons" of Philippians 1:1 are not to be thought of as officials.⁶

We can grant, of course, with J.K.S. Reid that ministry, even in Paul, partakes both of office and function.⁷ Nevertheless, it is almost universally held that what is primary in Paul is not the office, but the task; not the form of the ministry, but its function. Robertson and Plummer, commenting on Romans 12, write:

We are not dealing with classes of officials, each with definite functions; *munus* in the sense of *donum* has not yet passed into *munus* in the sense of *officium*, and the process of transition has scarcely begun. In correcting the errors into which the Corinthians had fallen, the apostle does not tell any officials to take action, but addresses the congregation as a whole. The inference is that there were no officials in the ecclesiastical sense, although, as in every society, there were leading men.⁸

Secondly, Paul does present a hierarchy of *charisma*.

In 1 Corinthians 12:28, he writes:

God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers of various kinds of tongues.

One notes right away that for Paul the primary functions or "offices," if we can call them that, are those of apostles, prophets, and teachers. One thing which all these have in common is that they all deal in one way or another with the proclamation and interpretation of the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostles were witnesses to the Resurrection, and were concerned primarily with the proclamation of the message in a wide area; they were the itinerant, or traveling ministers. The prophets, on the other hand, were those endowed with ecstatic character, and enabled to interpret the meaning of sacred mysteries.⁹ Finally, the teachers were concerned with defining for any local

congregation the implications of the good news for its life and mission.¹⁰

As a final observation, the very fact that these lists do not correspond to one another reveals that, at that time, there was no definite church order, no well-defined offices. But there were functions to be performed, and these functions were carried on by members of the congregations who were all recipients of varied *charismata* appropriate for particular tasks. One seems to look in vain for any ceremony of setting aside any person or group for special tasks; one cannot discover any rite of ordination corresponding to that which we will discover later in the Pastoral Epistles or in the Book of Acts. Schweizer, commenting on 1 Corinthians 11:14, writes:

Paul knows no one in Corinth to whom he could apply as a leader, to achieve an ordered observance of the Lord's Supper, for instance, or of worship; he can appeal only to the Church as a whole. Probably, however, the most important observation about this is that for Paul, an ordination, any explicit appointment on undertaking a form of service, is impossible.¹¹

C. Summary

To sum up then, Paul pictures for us a church in which the Spirit plays a very active role. It is the Spirit who chooses ministers. It is he who equips men and women with *charisma*, it is he who enables them to become prophets and teachers, it is he who as the giver of *charisma* to every believer enables the church to be itself *charisma* for the world. Again, to quote Schweizer:

The Spirit's authority is obeyed as it actually comes to be; this leads to an order that conforms itself afterwards to the "event" of the Spirit; and its only purpose is to make room for the Spirit to carry out his work of edifying the church with as little hindrance as possible . . . All order is an "afterwards," an attempt to follow what God has already designed. It is not because a person has been chosen as prophet or presbyter that he may exercise this or that ministry, but on the contrary, because God

has given him the *charisma*, the possibility is given to him, through the Church order, of exercising it.¹²

II. The Pastorals

When one leaves Paul and goes into the Pastoral Epistles, one senses immediately that something new and different has happened to the church. Instead of the spontaneity and freedom that characterize the Pauline churches, there seem to be rigid rules and regulations governing church order. In place of the primacy of function in the ministry there is now an overarching emphasis on the importance of certain offices. Paul talks of *charisma* as an endowment for all Christians, the act of the Spirit to every believer at the time of baptism. The Pastorals talk of certain specific offices, the bearers of which are specially endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. The implication, of course, is that the whole church does not now receive *charisma*; only a few people within the fellowship are recipients of it. Käsemann writes:

An office which stands over against the rest of the community is now the real bearer of the Spirit; and the primitive Christian view, that every Christian receives the Spirit in his baptism, recedes into the background and indeed, for all practical purposes, disappears.¹³

The Spirit now becomes, not the Spirit for the church, but the "ministerial Spirit."¹⁴ And so is born within the church an idea and a movement which could accurately be labeled as "clerical pentecostalism."

A. A new world view

A new world view undergirds all these developments. The Pauline world view is centered on the action of Christ for the whole world, and for all humanity, Christ reconciling everything and everyone to himself, Christ being all in all. Every Christian is a sanctified being, a holy one, a saint. There are no special groups within the church who are recipients of blessings they alone can receive, and for which they can claim greater

glory and blessedness. There are no persons set aside for special, holy purposes. Everyone is holy and sanctified in the sight of God.

The development of the Pastorals is a reversion both to the Jewish idea of sanctity and to the Gentile idea of holiness. For Judaism and the mystery cults of the Gentile world both participate in a common understanding of the world, namely, that part of it is mundane and part of it is divine and sacred. Both systems had their priests and priestesses who were guardians of that which was holy. Both systems had their rites and their sacrifices. The Christian faith, at its inception, and as it was proclaimed by the apostle Paul, had finally removed the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, between the divine and the human, between heaven and earth. The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is the answer, the cue, the solution to the malady of a split world.

But the Pastorals represent a return to a system which the Incarnation already defeated. For within their pages one can find once again the distinction between clergy and laity.¹⁶ And that distinction is symptomatic of even a bigger rift, that of the church and the world. Käsemann writes:

The community of which the Pastorals are the mouth-piece is being heavily pressed back onto the defensive and its order represents something in the nature of a stockade erected against its assailants in a last despairing effort for survival. This order is chiefly designed simply to mark the frontiers which separate the Church and the world. For the Church is no longer . . . the world-wide body of Christ, the dominion of that grace which has invaded the world in its total being. Rather, it is the house of God, *familia Dei*, and as such exposed to attack from outside and in need of protection.¹⁶

Thus, instead of the Spirit of God being poured on all flesh, it is now the Spirit of God being imparted to a privileged few.

B. The threefold ministry

But there are other implications. A cursory look at the ministerial terms reveals that the Pauline functions of prophet, apostle, teacher, etc., have now been supplanted by a threefold ministry of bishop, elder, and deacon. To be sure, Paul already mentions "bishops" and "deacons" in his letters, (e.g., Philippians 1:1) but even here, as John Knox clearly points out, we are dealing not with formal offices, but with functions.¹⁷ In the Pastorals, however, these terms are definitely technical designations, not simply of functions, but of clerical offices with definite functions and special qualifications of the office-bearers. How are these three offices related to each other? It seems that the elders were those entrusted with administering the affairs of the local church, taking upon themselves teaching and pastoral responsibilities, in much the same way that the elders of Judaism exercised supervision and responsibility over the Synagogue. (See 1 Timothy 5:17-22.) They ruled, they taught, preached, conducted worship, shepherded the flock. The deacons, on the other hand, were of a lower rank, assisting the elders in their work of supervision and administration.¹⁸

But what about the bishops? In many passages in the New Testament, it is made clear that the terms "bishop" and "elder" were two names for the same office-bearers.¹⁹ In the Pastorals, however, the question has to be asked regarding the intended relationship between the officers mentioned and that of the recipients themselves. Take the case of Timothy. He was ordained by an elder by the laying on of hands. (1 Timothy 4:14) But he also is expected to ordain others through the laying on of hands,²⁰ and to have supervision over bishops and deacons. What then is his role and his office? And what of the writer of the epistles, using the pseudonym "Paul"? Price offers an answer:

The status which is held by "Timothy" and "Titus" is superior to the "elders" whom they appoint, supervise, and discipline. If "Timothy" and "Titus" were (Monarchical) bishops, then it follows that the Pastor himself assumed prerogatives later held by archbishops or the metropolitans²¹

If Price is correct in his analysis, then we see in the Pastorals the beginnings of the system which came down to us as moniscopacy. Kee and Young describe the development thus:

In some of the communities, one of the presbyters began to emerge as head of the college of presbyters, and as head of the local church itself. The leader came to be known as *episcopos*, or bishop, to distinguish his office from that of presbyter.²²

C. Ordination

A further development is the rite of ordination whereby the Holy Spirit is imparted to the office-bearers. As we have already seen, this was not present in Paul, since there was no rite whereby persons were set apart for some special task within the church. But in the Pastorals, there are several passages which speak of ordination through the laying on of hands. In 1 Timothy 4:14, Timothy is said to have been ordained by a presbytery, and at the time of his ordination, received a form of *charisma*. In 2 Timothy 1:6, it was Paul who laid his hands on Timothy, and again, as a result, Timothy was the recipient of *charisma*. And in 1 Timothy 5:22, Timothy is himself urged not to be hasty in ordaining anyone.²³

Perhaps a fuller discussion of the practice of the laying on of hands will reveal how far the developments within the church represented in the Pastorals have gone, when compared with the practices of the apostolic church. Judaism, of course, had its own practice of ordination through the laying on of hands.

Any rabbi could ordain one of his disciples and thus confer his own authority upon him; the laying on of hands is here a leaning, not a mere placing of the hands, on the head of the ordained, and "its object is the pour-

ing of the ordaining scholar's personality into the scholar to be ordained."²⁴

The Old Testament knows of the practice of laying on of hands; it was a

ritual gesture by which a man transmits his own characteristics, his personality, to an animal (cf. Leviticus 1:3-4; Exodus 29:10, etc.) or to certain men (the Levites, Numbers 8:10), so as to bring about a substitution of persons, i.e., to be validly represented in the cultus by such an animal sacrificed, or by the Levites in the service of the Temple.²⁵

In the New Testament itself, the laying on of hands is used in healing²⁶ and baptizing.²⁷ In the Book of Acts, two passages stand out as paralleling those of the Pastorals, namely Acts 6:6 and 13:3. However, many scholars take these to be not ordination, but commissioning and consecration for a task.²⁸ It is most likely then that the passages in the book of Acts are not at all referring to an ordination, but to an installation service. If our contention is correct, then the only remaining references to the rite of ordination are those in the Pastorals which we have already mentioned.

Apart from the deductions at which we have arrived, namely, that there was ordination by a council of presbyters, that ordination was through the laying on of hands, and that the gift of the Spirit was received through ordination—what else does the presence of ordination in the Pastorals mean?

The issue here seems to be twofold; first, the relationship of the gift of the Spirit to the rite of ordination, and second, the doctrine of apostolic succession as having its basis in the Pastorals. Space does not allow us to discuss these at any length. It is enough to observe that the interpretations of these passages from the Pastorals have been very much influenced by the interpreters' own theological positions. For example, free church interpreters have tried to explain away the imparting of the gift through ordination by various ingenious ways.²⁹ It would be much more profitable to

interpret the Pastorals in the light of their own situation, and to recognize that these passages do mean that there was a laying on of hands, and by this act, gifts were imparted. Ordination was a means of receiving the Spirit and his gifts. This ordination was believed to have originated from the apostles, in this particular instance, the apostle Paul, and the authority to ordain is handed down to the apostle's designated delegate.

D. Historical justification for the developments within the Pastorals

How does one regard these developments in the church as depicted in the Pastorals? The fact of the matter is, viewed from the historical situation, these developments could be understood as being expedient, or even necessary for the life and mission of the church at that time. What was the historical situation? Insofar as it can be ascertained, the church was faced with the problems of schism and heresy. Price notes that whereas unity was an assumed fact during the time of Paul, it was something to be striven for during the post-apostolic age.⁸⁰ One of the greatest sources of schism was the Pauline concept of *charisma*, where possession or the lack of it started to be definitive of Christian character and where, logically, the gifts in which the Spirit's enthusiasm is more outwardly displayed were preferred.⁸¹ A form of this over-emphasis of enthusiasm is of course Gnosticism, with its appeal to Christian insight, to the working of the Spirit, and to Christian baptism. Gnosticism and similar movements, of course, disrupted the unity of the church which was assumed during the Pauline era, and challenged the spontaneity and looseness of church order and the ministries.

All the developments then can be traced as responses of the church to the crisis which it met. Richardson puts it clearly and accurately:

The historical truth is that monepiscopacy was an urgent practical necessity. . . . The setting up of one representa-

tive man, an archpoimen of the flock who should be the visible, personal guarantee of the unity and continuity of the apostolic fellowship and doctrine, could meet the need of the Church in an age in which schismatics and heretics of every kind threatened the very continuance of the church and the church's Gospel. The bishop became in his person . . . the embodiment of the Gospel of God, by which the church itself was called into being. The existence of the church is bound up with the church's unity and cannot be separated from it; this is the truth which brought the episcopate into being . . . and which monepiscopacy enshrines and defends.⁸²

One can even go so far as to see the hand of God, or the movement of the Holy Spirit, in these developments.⁸³ For indeed, a case could be made for the relevance of these developments for the post-apostolic period, because of the problems that the church had to face, and because of the very nature of the organizations, both secular and sacred, which influenced it at that time. The difficulty, however, arises, and indeed has arisen, when these developments are viewed as normative, not only for the post-apostolic church, but for the church from post-apostolic times to the present; and when it is thought, therefore, that for the church to be the church it must reflect within its government and organization the same church order present in the post-apostolic church. A more profitable line of argument, in our opinion, is to take seriously the situation of the post-apostolic church, and evaluate the developments in the light of the specific historical situation. It is the genius of the early church that it understood the working of the Spirit as leading it to be effective in any situation, and that church order must be an instrument whereby the church's mission to the world can best be carried out. To draw out the developments of the post-apostolic period as permanent and as normative for church order for centuries to come is, of course, to ignore the historical context and therefore to misunderstand the reasons for these developments. The principle that must be reasserted is the primacy of the mission

of the church, and the function of church order as that of organizing the church in order to fulfill its appointed task faithfully in every generation and in every historical situation.

III. The Book of Acts

But before we get carried away with drawing out the implications of our study for our own situation, let us first turn to one more biblical writing in order to discover another facet of the ministry which is relevant for our discussion.

A. The Book of Acts in relation to the Pastorals and Paul

The book of Acts bears some similarities with the Pastorals. In fact, at some points it represents a further development of the trends that are reflected in the Pastoral Epistles. Käsemann, for instance, goes through the Book of Acts, examining the activities of the apostles in Jerusalem, and comes to the conclusion that in the Book of Acts, "The *charisma* concept has now completely disappeared."⁸⁴ Furthermore, the Apostle now appears as the guarantor of the gospel tradition. For instance, Peter has to inspect the missionary movement in Judea and Samaria before the converts in these regions are incorporated into the Christian church.⁸⁵ Still further, despite all the gains of the Seven in Judea and Samaria, the Gentile mission has to be inaugurated by the conversion of Cornelius through Peter. (chapter 11) Finally, one should mention that it was perhaps the apostles who bestowed the office or commission to the Seven.⁸⁶ How does one explain these developments? Käsemann offers an answer:

The only possible interested party is a church which is under the necessity (in the context of its conflict with heresy) of demonstrating the legitimacy of its own position; and which does so by maintaining that this position is based on continuity with the original apostolate. Outside the boundaries of this church which has become a

sacred area within the world and which bases itself on the sacred office and the sacred tradition of the original apostolate, there is no salvation and no possession of the Spirit. So far as we can see, then, it was Luke who was the first to propagate the theories of tradition and legitimate succession which mark the advent of early Catholicism.⁸⁷

In another sense, however, the Book of Acts is very similar to Paul. The Holy Spirit is not understood as a ministerial Spirit, but as the Spirit which empowers all believers. It is true that the Spirit is promised only to the apostles on Ascension day, (Acts 1:6ff) but it is also true that on the day of the Pentecost, the Spirit falls not only on the apostles, but on all the believers.⁸⁸ The gift of the Spirit is promised to anyone who repents and receives baptism. (Acts 2:38) With some exception, the Spirit is imparted to those who believe, primarily through preaching, and not by the laying on of hands.⁸⁹

B. The development of the ministry

But the unique contribution of the Book of Acts, at least for the topic under discussion, is the way the development of the ministry is presented.

The first group of ministers mentioned in the Book of Acts is, of course, the apostles, corresponding to the Twelve. There are various questions regarding the nature of the Twelve and of the office of an apostle, but these are not relevant to this study.⁹⁰ What concerns us here is that in the Book of Acts, the Twelve are the first ministers; they are called upon to perform a special task, namely, to proclaim the event of Christ as eyewitnesses of what actually happened. At the start of the church, they were the only ministers, the sole administrators: they taught, they witnessed, they baptized, they supervised. But this was only as the church remained a Jewish church. It is now an accepted fact that early in its history the Christian church did not dissociate itself from Judaism; in fact, in organization,

it followed the same patterns as the Judaic religion. Its mission was to win Jews to faith in Jesus as Messiah and still remain within Judaism. Rightly understood, therefore, the church at its inception was a Jewish sect and nothing more. In this situation, the Twelve, who were all Jews, were the natural and logical ministers. They knew Aramaic, they were well versed in Jewish law, they were sensitive to Jewish culture. Therefore, they were suited by language, training, and disposition to be effective ministers to the Jews in Palestine. Luke profoundly informs us that not for one moment did the Twelve minister to Gentiles, the one exception being in chapter ten when Peter, through a vision, was led to visit the Roman, Cornelius, but even Cornelius was a God-fearing man, and therefore was not far from Judaism.

When, however, the witness of the church expanded beyond the sphere of Palestinian Judaism, and the gospel was proclaimed to the Jewish Diaspora, to Jews who were influenced by both Greek language and culture, then the role of the Twelve started to be minimized. Can one imagine Peter, the Galilean fisherman, with his Galilean accent, becoming a minister to an educated and sophisticated Greek congregation? Of course not. Therefore a new understanding of mission demanded a new office and a new kind of minister, one who by disposition, training, and language, can be an effective witness to people other than Palestinian or Orthodox Jews. And thus, as we read in the sixth chapter of Acts, the office of the Seven was created.

Who were these Seven? One notices that they all bear Greek names. It is as if the community decided that since the aggrieved party were the Grecian Jews, they should elect from them those who were to supervise the distribution of food. The passage further mentions that these men were full of wisdom and of the Spirit. In short, the picture which is given to us by

Luke is that of a group who by training, dedication, and disposition were fully adequate to be ministers to a different group of people. Surely, the Galilean fisherman who spoke broken Greek would not be sufficient for an effective ministry to Greek-speaking Jews.

The Seven opened up the church from a Jewish sect into what it really ought to be: a faith for all humanity. The message of Stephen in chapter seven is a poignant attack on the Jews for their rejection of the gospel, rooting their rebellion in their very history; the golden calf at the foot of Mt. Sinai is the beginning of a history of idolatry and infidelity to God. And this infidelity, Stephen asserts, finds its climax in the erection of the Temple in Jerusalem. Here we find the key to Stephen's polemic against the Jews. While they considered the Temple as the center of their life and worship, Stephen characterized it as a symbol of Jewish idolatry. For Stephen, it was never God's will that the Jews should build a Temple, for indeed it is a symbol of stagnation and immobility. And while Stephen's preaching led to his stoning and death, it also led the church away from Jerusalem into other areas of Palestine and of the Greek and Roman worlds.

The church in Antioch is a case in point. Luke makes it very clear that the believers were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:26) But Luke also specially mentions the fact that the church in Antioch started as a result of the death of Stephen and the persecution which ensued. (Acts 11:19)

The success of the mission to Greeks started at Antioch necessitated a rethinking of the ministry, and a further development of church order. For now the church saw before itself the enormous possibilities and challenges of witness before vast numbers of people in centers of civilization, in the important cities of the Roman empire. And so there arose the office of the church missionary, and appropriately enough, it was

the church at Antioch that started the whole development. In chapter thirteen, we get a picture of the church at worship, during which time it received a command from the Holy Spirit: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." (Acts 13:2) Saul, or Paul, is no stranger to us. A Pharisee, a Hebrew, a learned Jewish scholar, and yet a Roman citizen, born in Tarsus, one of the thriving Greek cities: this man who is very Jew, and very Greek, and very Roman, is now set aside for mission to the great world of the Roman empire, preaching to both Jews and Greeks, using both the Hebrew and Greek languages, and quoting as freely from Greek literature as he does from the Hebrew scriptures.

IV. Implications

In the light of the above discussion, what implications can we draw for our present understanding of the ministry and its relationship to the Spirit?

A. Ministry and servanthood

A valid implication of the Pauline concept of *charisma* is the understanding of the ministry as servanthood. The New Testament word for ministry is *diakonia*, the verb form of which means "to serve at table," and the noun form meaning "service," in a generic sense. In the midst of modern day circumstances where ministers are understood (or misunderstood) as leaders and rulers, as those who demand and expect service, rather than as servants, it is well to be reminded that for the New Testament church, the ministry was primarily understood as service to others. For the ministry should be understood in the light of the very nature and mission of the church. As Simpson puts it, church order is dependent on ecclesiology.⁴¹

When one asks seriously the question, "What really is the church for?" or, "What is the call of the church?", I think the answer which comes closest to the truth

is that the church is called to be faithful and obedient to its head, Jesus Christ. Our concept of the church's mission is therefore totally dependent on our concept of Jesus. In much the same way that church order is dependent on ecclesiology, so ecclesiology is dependent on Christology.

A second question would of course arise: "Who is this Jesus?" Or, putting it another way, what aspect of Jesus would one emphasize as a model for the church's obedience? How indeed did the early church understand the life of Jesus? What to them is the core, the basic aspect of Jesus' earthly life? These questions, of course, can only be answered by a serious study not only of the Gospels but of the whole New Testament. I venture an answer: A primary aspect of Jesus' life and ministry which the early church emphasized and which it adopted as a model for its own life and mission is that of servanthood. It is now debated whether Jesus identified himself with the suffering servant of Deutero-Isaiah; what cannot be denied, however, is that the Gospels are full of allusions to the fact that the early church understood Jesus as being profoundly influenced by the servant songs of Deutero-Isaiah and as fulfilling the servant's destiny. Paul himself preserves for us an early Christian hymn on the servanthood of Jesus.

New Testament faith is centered on this guiltless, sinless man who dies on a cross, this innocent one who suffers for the guilty, this sinless man who dies for the sinful. But because this is so, then the church as his body, must do likewise. The church therefore performs a role in the fulfillment of the servant motif in Deutero-Isaiah. The Servant Lord has committed his vocation to his servant people, the church. It is this Christ, now risen, who commissions his church to be like he is, namely, a servant for the world. Elmer Homrighausen writes:

The very essence of the church, the body of Christ, is the spirit of the servant As the individual is saved by losing himself for the sake of Christ, so the Church is saved by losing itself in the service which Jesus Christ started and which is continuing through the power of the Holy Spirit Conscious of its mission, it (the church) lays aside its outer garments, pours water into a basin, girds itself with a towel, and washes the dirty accumulations which men pick up on life's pilgrim way.⁴²

One of the main expressions of the servant-role of the church is of course its ministry. When Paul uses the term *doulos* to describe himself, it could be that he was referring to the idea of a slave in the Roman system; it is more likely, however, that what he has in mind is the servant concept as found in Deutero-Isaiah; for him, *doulos* is a translation of *ebed*. And if one takes into account the fact that three more letters start with the same formula, (James, 2 Peter, Jude) then one can safely conclude that the ministry was indeed identified as a fulfillment of the servant concept of the Old Testament. Even Peter's commission in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew is misinterpreted if it is understood as a passage bestowing authority on the disciples apart from their roles as servants. Whatever interpretation one gives to the binding and loosing functions, it is wrong to take the passage and separate it from its immediate context, which is Jesus' first saying regarding his suffering in Jerusalem.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, Lord. This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God but of men." (Matthew 16:21ff)

The roles of binding and loosing, whatever they imply, are in the context of suffering, and cannot be understood apart from the disciples' role as followers of the suffering Lord.

Suffering in the biblical sense is the selfless giving

of oneself in joyful and unselfish service to others. Paul reminds us that *charisma* is given primarily for this purpose: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:7) The epistle to the Ephesians also echoes the same spirit when it affirms that the gifts of ministry are "for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:12) As John Knox very well puts it:

Diakonos denotes not primarily a status . . . but a function of a useful service. A minister of Christ is useful to Christ, assisting in the fulfillment of Christ's purposes in the world. A minister of the church is useful to the church, serving its members in all possible ways and contributing to the gospel, making known the good news of what God has done in Christ so that the gospel may reach those for whom it is intended and may have its true fruits.⁴³

B. Ministry and the mission of the church

A second point, which is related to and is an expansion of the first, is that not only the ministry but all church order is dependent on the mission of the church.

The church in every age and generation is called upon to fulfill a mission which in some way is unique to that period of history. The mission remains the same. It is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, drawing out its implications and living according to its precepts. But the ways of proclamation and of living the good news vary from one age to another, and from one cultural setting to another. It is perhaps a theological truism to affirm that the Spirit empowers the church in any setting to be sufficient for any task. He does this precisely through *charisma*, the gifts he bestows on the church, generally to the total membership, and in a more specialized manner to its ministry. Nonetheless, if the church is sensitive and obedient to the bidding of the Spirit, it must ask seriously what its mission is in light of its own unique historical and cul-

tural situation. For the mission of the church dictates its structure. It determines which offices are necessary and which are not. The varied responses to mission in the New Testament, as we have seen, all point to one principle: Obedience demands spontaneity and sensitivity to what is going on. If the New Testament church is any model at all, it is not in its structures to be followed, nor in its indispensable offices to be maintained regardless of the historical situation. In the midst of changing situations, conflicts, and confusion, the guidance of the Spirit must be sought after and realized. The Lordship of the risen Christ, which is not only over the church but over the world as well, must be proclaimed, recognized, and reaffirmed. Perhaps Ernst Käsemann has a valid point in these words:

No romantic postulate, however enveloped it may be in the cloak of salvation history, can be permitted to weaken the sober observation that the historian is unable to speak of an unbroken unity in New Testament ecclesiology. In that field he becomes aware of our own situation in microcosm—difference, difficulties, contradictions, at best an ancient ecumenical federation without an ecumenical council. The tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christian churches, between Paul and the Corinthian enthusiasts, between John and early catholicism, are as great as those of our own day. One-sided emphases, fossilized attitudes, fabrications, and contradictory opposites in doctrine, organization and devotional practice are to be found in the ecclesiology of the New Testament no less than among ourselves. To recognize this is even a great comfort and, so far as ecumenical work today is concerned, a theological gain. For, in so doing, we come to see that our own history is one with that of primitive Christianity. Today, too, God's Spirit hovers over the waters of chaos out of which divine creation is to take shape. So it is right to emphasize yet again at this point that Jesus' proclamation of the dawning of God's kingly rule may have conjured up many ecclesiologies, but it remains strangely transcendent over them all and is by them all at best brokenly reflected and not seldom totally distorted.⁴⁴

Is it not imperative then for the church to ask once again what its main task is, and then allow its structures to be instruments in such a task? What can we

say about the world as we know it, and the mission of the church in this kind of a world? To put it another way, in what areas should the church recognize the bidding of the Holy Spirit particularly with regard to the church's ministry? The challenges of the modern world demand a widening of our concepts of ministry, recognizing not simply the traditional ministry for the parish or for the organized church, but a ministry for a non-church society. To effect relevance, the Pauline model of flexibility, spontaneity, and freedom must once again become indispensable standards for ministerial office and education, and for all other aspects of church order.

What about ministry to women? It is unfortunate that the creation story which predominated in the church (and in the whole of the New Testament) is that of the second and third chapters of Genesis. Those chapters depict woman as a creation from man. All the sins of the world are portrayed as stemming from the disobedience of that first woman who could not have known about the forbidden fruit since the command not to touch it was given before she was created. A more realistic story, and theologically more pregnant with possibilities, is that of the first chapter of Genesis where God does not create one but two: a man and a woman together, at the same time, and both in God's image.

It is to the credit of Paul, however, that despite his adherence to the second chapter of Genesis and his belief in the inferiority of women, he could still come out with a doctrine of redemption in Christ which would restore woman, as it were, into her rightful place in creation and in the church. One can only rejoice at the fact that there were no female leaders in the church of Galatia who could be blamed for foolishness and apostasy. Paul was free to include in his Galatian letter a comprehensive statement on Christ's work of

redemption in overcoming the rift effected by the fall. Henceforth, in Christ, men and women have equal status in the sight of God. There is, therefore, no impediment to the full participation of women in the ministry of the church in the light of Galatians 3.

Be that as it may, we return to our main contention, and that is, mission is primary and structures secondary. For me at least, there are no indispensable offices. Where any office or any structure no longer makes the church effective in fulfilling its mission, then such structures, no matter how historically rooted they are, no matter how indispensable they seem to be, should go, and quickly. Where offices and structures are found to be effective instruments for the fulfillment of the mission of the church, then by all means they should be introduced, strengthened, and maintained. But they should not be regarded as the final answers to the church's needs. Structures are at their best when they are temporary rather than permanent, when they are regarded as functional rather than as sacrosanct.

C. Varied understandings of the ministry

This brings us to a third point at which we have already hinted: There is no New Testament model for one exclusive concept of the ordained ministry. This means, then, there is no one ministry that is acceptable to God and through which the Holy Spirit carries out his task in the church and the world. To claim, even in a single instance, that the ministry of any church is *the* valid ministry, sanctioned by the Holy Spirit, is to claim that the Spirit blesses and sanctifies a certain system which creates disorder and disunity within the body of Christ. We do not have to be reminded that one of the greatest, if not the greatest, deterrent to Christian unity in this supra-ecumenical age is the doctrine of the ministry. Can we assert with a clear conscience that the Spirit has sanctioned this situation?

Is the Spirit the Spirit of disunity? Is the ministry of the church still a ministry resting on the Holy Spirit when it becomes an instrument for fragmentation of the body of Christ? Do we still have the courage to claim the Spirit's presence in the rite of ordination when in that rite itself we put ourselves over against other Christians?

Apostolic succession, assert the free churches, has no basis in the New Testament. The ministries in the free churches, assert the apostolic successionists, have no basis either from the New Testament or from tradition. What are we to believe?

One has to awaken to the fact that ordination as an act of the Holy Spirit is still an act of faith, whether one believes in apostolic succession or not. The problem then is not in these systems, but in people's attitudes toward them. The absolutizing of these systems is the root of endless, futile, and destructive debates within the church. For here system, and not the Lordship of Christ, has become primary! The mission of the church has been relegated to the background in favor of church order and polity. In fact, church order and polity now are determinative of the nature of the church itself! In the midst of all these comes the New Testament verdict that, indeed, there are no set structures and no set offices. Apostolic succession can be proven from the New Testament by those who so choose; it can, likewise, be easily disproven. The three-fold ministry of bishops, elders, and deacons is well documented from the Pastorals. The free church idea of a non-ordained ministry is equally well documented by Paul's letters, especially by his doctrine of the *charisma*, as we have seen.

Where do we go from here? It is simply to recognize that the New Testament presents different church orders, each one as valid as the other. The validity of any church order depends on the historical and cul-

tural situation of the church, for in the end, as we have already asserted, the mission of the church dictates the order of the church! For me, therefore, it is not a matter of proving the validity either of apostolic succession or of non-apostolic succession. It is recognizing that the insistence of those who belong to apostolic succession, on the sole validity of their order, and the intolerant attitude toward other systems as portrayed by the sects and others belonging to the free church tradition, are doing great damage to the life of the church, dividing members in their worship, in their ministry, and even in the training of ministers! Perhaps we can and should affirm that the Holy Spirit is leading us to accept varied theological understandings of the ministry, and to recognize that all these systems rest on faith and not on sight.

D. The ministry and the Holy Spirit

And finally, we do well to affirm that in all of this, the ministry still belongs to the Holy Spirit. He can and still does initiate new offices. It is still within his power to bestow *charisma* to all the faithful, or to a special part of the church, according to his will and purpose.

There must be no church order—even in obedience to the apostle himself—through which a meeting with the living Lord is avoided An obedience that conforms to the law, to the regulations laid down by some authority—whether a bishop or the majority of the voters—is no obedience without a perception that the required action is a necessity derived from the gospel. What was shown in Jesus' own life is also true here: faith is genuine only where the distress, difficulty, and tribulation of a direct meeting with God himself, as he comes to us in Jesus Christ, are not avoided. No law and no legally interpreted authority must excuse the believer from asking what is God's will and from subordinating himself to the Holy Spirit and the risen Lord.⁴⁶

We should not, therefore, in any way, either by legislation or scriptural validation, impair the freedom of the Holy Spirit to act within the church. The ministry's effectiveness, in the long run, will depend on its dedi-

cation and obedience to the Holy Spirit in order to effect changes in its order and in its ministry.⁴⁶

The words of Käsemann seem to be a good quotation with which to end.

The direct legacy of all past time to us can only be the questions and the needs of bygone ages and the various ways in which men have attempted to deal with them. But perhaps that sharpens not only our insight but also our conscience and tells us that no age is exempt from the necessity of beginning all over again, of testing, critically and yet humbly, the spirits of the ages that have gone before, because we, too, are called to decision. Perhaps, as we learn this, we are brought to acknowledge that the church can only exist as the community of Christ insofar as grace repeatedly lays hold on us and re-creates us as instruments of his service; and that we must leave him to care for the continuity of the church, who alone is able to ensure the continuance of grace.⁴⁷

Notes

1. Ernst Käsemann, "Ministry and Community in the New Testament," *Essays in New Testament Themes* (London: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 63-94; p. 65.
2. 1 Corinthians 12:4. If verses 4 through 6 are quoted, they show how Paul attributes *charisma* not only to the Holy Spirit, but to the Trinity. The passage uses Trinitarian language: Spirit, Lord, God.
3. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 73ff.
5. "The Ministry in the Primitive Church," in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, ed. Richard H. Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 18.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 18ff.
7. "The Biblical Doctrine of the Ministry," as referred to in Harry G. Goodykoontz, *The Minister in the Reformation Tradition* (National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1952), pp. 22ff. Goodykoontz is able to find in Paul a much greater emphasis on the office of the minister, simply by accepting Ephesians as a genuine Pauline letter.
8. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1914), p. 284. See further C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), pp. 238ff.
9. It will do well, in the light of this definition of the prophet in Paul, to take heed to Richardson's warning against justifying the prophetic ministry of the church by

- means of the New Testament concept of the prophetic office; see Alan Richardson, *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), p. 336.
10. John Knox, *op. cit.*, p. 14: "The word 'teacher' suggests instruction in the more ordinary sense, a setting forth, perhaps in somewhat objective fashion, of the facts of the tradition and the truth of the gospel, the inculcation of true beliefs, the encouraging of appropriate ethical impulses and conduct." Knox further warns against drawing too rigid a line between the prophet and the teacher in the primitive church: "Both were inspired by the same Spirit and both were concerned only with the truth and relevance of the gospel."
 11. Eduard Schweizer, *Church Order in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1961), p. 101.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
 13. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. Robert A. Spivey and D. Moody Smith, Jr., *Anatomy of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 368; also Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 88: "The distinction between clerics and laymen is now in being, in practice if not in theory."
 16. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
 17. Knox, *op. cit.*, pp. 10ff. Knox continues: "Indeed the 'deacons' and 'bishops' of Philippians are almost certainly to be identified with the 'helpers' and 'administrators' of 1 Corinthians 12:28 and with the helpers of several kinds and the 'presidents' who are mentioned in Romans 12:6-8."
 18. 1 Timothy 3:8-13. It is doubtful whether one should regard Acts 6:1-6 as the establishment of the office of deacon, for the simple reason that the noun, *diakonos*, is not used by Luke in that passage, but simply the verb, *diakoneo*, which implies much more of a function than an office. For further discussion of this point, see Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles, A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), pp. 260ff.
 19. See Acts 20:17 and 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2; Titus 1:5 and 1:7-9.
 20. 1 Timothy 5:22. Note, however, that this verse is sometimes taken to refer not to ordination, but to the act of readmitting a sinner into the fellowship; see Schweizer, *op. cit.*, p. 207.
 21. James L. Price, *Interpreting the New Testament* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), pp. 474ff. See also Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 87: "The apostolic delegate is regarded in the Pastorals as the connecting link between apostle and monarchical bishop who under the guise of the apostolic delegate, is being addressed and reminded of his duties."

22. Howard Clark Kee and Franklin W. Young, *Understanding the New Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), p. 362. They further write: "It has been said in jest that at the end of the apostolic age the church was like a locomotive going into a dark tunnel and that it emerged in the post-apostolic period with bishops on its cow-catcher." *Ibid.*, p. 363. Richardson observes that the monepiscopacy remained the universal form of church government until the time of the Reformation, *op. cit.*, p. 326.
23. To be sure, there are some who interpret the passages as referring to baptism, e.g., Schweizer, *op. cit.*, pp. 210ff.
24. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 330.
25. Goodykoontz, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
26. Mark 5:23, 6:5; 7:32, 8:23, 24; 16:18; (Acts 1:12, 17), 28:8.
27. Mark 10:16, Acts 8:17-19; 19:5ff.; Hebrews 6:2.
28. E.g., Schweizer, *op. cit.*, p. 280, where he describes the rite as an installation, "a placing in a particular sphere of service which differs in some respects from that previously occupied." One should also note that in Acts 13, Paul is already included under the designation of "prophets and teachers," and therefore is already a recognized leader in the church. A further note on Acts 6; there is a great deal of uncertainty as to who did the laying on of hands—the apostles or the members of the congregation. Most translations leave the rendering ambiguous; some, however, have made it definite that it was the apostles who did the action, e.g., TEV, NEB, etc. Here is one place where the interpreter can do anything he wants with the text, without any fear of being unfaithful to it.
29. E.g., Ervin Peter Yount Simpson, *Ordination and Christian Unity* (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1966), p. 119: "we must not imagine that the laying on of hands, in itself, was significant. It was merely a physical part of a solemn prayer that divine equipping might be conferred upon the young men. It was not the means of conferring this divine gift, but rather the moment when God answered the solemn prayers which were being offered."
30. Price, *op. cit.*, p. 458: "Ideally the Church is one, but instead of a conviction of its reality writers of this time yearned for unity." Price mentions the Gospel of John, Ephesians, and of course the Pastorals, as included in the writings where this lack of unity is displayed.
31. One already sees this development even during Paul's time, among the Corinthians, e.g., in 1 Corinthians 14.
32. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
33. This position is apparent in Kee and Young, *op. cit.*, p. 365, and Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 328. A rather negative evaluation of these developments is found in Käsemann, *op. cit.*, pp. 87ff. and Simpson, *op. cit.*, pp. 101ff.
34. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

35. See esp., Acts 8:14-16. It is rather unusual that here the Holy Spirit can only be bestowed by Peter and John, and not by Philip, a member of the Seven, when in fact Philip would of course be full of the Holy Spirit. See Acts 6:3.
36. Acts 6:6, but see previous note 18.
37. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
38. Acts 2:1. The "they" here most probably refers to the one hundred and twenty in 1:15. How all of them could be accommodated in one room is of course a problem, but was no concern to Luke.
39. *E.g.*, Acts 10:44ff. The exceptions are Acts 9:17-18, where Paul receives the Holy Spirit through Ananias, and Acts 8:14ff., esp., 17. For a recent discussion on this subject, see F.F. Bruce, "The Holy Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles," *Interpretation* 27 (April 1973), pp. 166-183.
40. Briefly, the questions include the relation of the apostle to the *shaliach* in Judaism, the place of the Twelve in the Book of Acts, and the election of Matthias. For all these, one is referred to T.W. Manson, *The Churches' Ministry*, 1948; A. Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession*, 1953; Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, 1973; Haenchen, *op. cit.*, pp. 163ff, and Simpson, *op. cit.*, pp. 67ff.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 116. "Until there is a common understanding of the nature of the church there can hardly be a common agreement on the nature and function of the ministry."
42. Elmer Homrighausen, "Lord-Servant," *Theology Today*, p. 7.
43. John Knox, *op. cit.*, pp. 1ff.
44. Quoted from "Unity and Multiplicity in the New Testament Doctrine of the Church," *New Testament Questions of Today*, 1961, pp. 256ff., by C.F. Evans in "Is the New Testament Church a Model?" *Is Holy Scripture Christian?* (London: SCM Press, 1971), pp. 86ff.
45. Schweizer, *op. cit.*, pp. 212ff.
46. Schweizer, *op. cit.*, p. 205: "There are three ways in which Church order can . . . remain open to God's active intervention. First, it can be broken through by God's giving an instruction to an otherwise uncommissioned church member. (1 Corinthians 14:30; cf. Acts 11:27-30) Secondly, God's initiative creates new ministries not hitherto foreseen. (Acts 13:1-3) This, of course, is true not merely in direct revelations by the Spirit, but equally so when the church listens to God as it confronts a new situation, (Acts 6:1ff) or when a new ministry is at first simply carried out on someone's own initiative and is recognized afterwards by the church. (1 Corinthians 16:16) Thirdly, however, it is also possible that certain ministries have proved their worth and are being continued, but that the church tries seriously later on to find out who has received from God the gifts of grace that are necessary for them. (1 Timothy 3:1ff)"
47. Käsemann, *op. cit.*, p. 94.