

all church workers. It is also possible that future revisions of the Book of Offices may pay more regard to this unity.

More emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit should find a place in our office. It is surprising that Wesley's emphasis on the continuing work of the Spirit in assurance and sanctification has no significant place in the service.

The other point which seems to lack significant emphasis in our present orders of service for receiving people into the full membership of the Church is that the candidate is entering a *diakonia*. He is essentially taking his place in a priesthood, with a ministry to accept and fulfill according to his ability. While this is lacking in our orders of service, it would be well to emphasize it in supplementary homilies, until a revision of the office can make more adequate provision than at present.

There is no suggestion here that baptism is in itself incomplete. It is the beginning of the way and brings the candidate into the Church, claiming all the work of Christ for him. We can never claim that an additional rite is necessary to salvation. What we can claim is that the Church knows its *full* members among those who after baptism have been instructed, have made their promises and under the guidance and strengthening of the Holy Spirit have accepted responsibility for the ministry of the Church, by their own confession and communion joining themselves to Christ in the fellowship of his people.

We can conclude with the analogy with which we began. The initiative lies with God, who chooses his people. They were "baptized into the fellowship of Moses in the cloud and sea." In the beginning of their way they knew little or nothing; the *fact* of redemption and the *promises* for the future were enough to start with. They had a long way to go and much to learn. Even then, only some of them came into a definite realization of what it meant to be the People of God. It is that realization for increasing numbers of those who have been baptized that is our subject when we think of confirmation and the "lay membership" of the Church.

7

Ordination and the Ministry in the Church

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The Christian community, the Church, is described in scripture as the offspring of Abraham (Gal. 3:29), the spiritual kindred of Isaac (Gal. 4:28 ff.), and the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). (Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.) Ancient Israel was the People of God under the old covenant established through Moses, and the Church is the same people under the new covenant established by Christ. It is true that most of the Jewish descendants of Israel have rejected Christ, but this only shows that "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants" (Rom. 9:6-7). Instead, the true Israel are those who share the faith of Abraham. The People of God is like an olive tree, long ago planted by God (Rom. 11:17 ff.). From it many of the natural branches (the Jews) have been broken off, and wild olive branches (Gentiles) have been grafted in. Thus the Gentiles who have accepted Christ have become members of the common-

wealth of Israel, fellow citizens with the saints, and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:12, 19), while the Jews who have rejected Christ have forfeited these privileges—at least till they turn to Christ.

In the Church, the Israel of God, everything depends on Christ, and so close and entire is the dependence that the Church can be called the Body of Christ. Moreover, since Christ, its head, is the second Adam, it can also be called the New Man. It is a new humanity, a new creation of God, in which the old, deep wounds of mankind are healed, the divisions between Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, and the rest are overcome. In contrast to this Body of Christ there stands another, the body of the flesh, of sin and of death (Col. 2:11; Rom. 6:6; 7:24), which is the body of fallen, sinful humanity, the first Adam, the Old Man, of which we are all members by our natural birth. Out of this old humanity the new is being fashioned by the incorporation of the children of Adam into the Body of Christ, so that they may become children of God by sharing in the life of his Son. The ordinary means of incorporation is baptism, and central to the life of the Body is the Lord's Supper, the communion of Christ's body and blood. Both of these are inseparably bound up with the preaching of the gospel, the Word of God, whereby men are called to repentance and faith and invited to participation in the sacraments. In this way the life of the Head is imparted to the Body and all its members. The members are, of course, very diverse, and they must be so, for they have different functions to perform within the unity of the Body (I Cor. 12:14 ff.). Sharing in the common life, each has his own ministry to fulfill, according to the gifts and graces he possesses, for the building up of the Body.

This Body of Christ is further described as the Temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16-17). It is a building "not made with hands," which is being raised as "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit," a "spiritual house" into which Christians are being built as "living stones," and within which they serve as a holy and royal

priesthood (Eph. 2:19 ff.; I Pet. 2:4 ff.). In it Gentiles have equal rights with Jews, since both have access in one Spirit to the Father. The Spirit is imparted to the Church, today as at Pentecost, by Christ, its head, who is himself a "life-giving Spirit" (I Cor. 15:45), and the manifest signs and means of his spiritual presence and activity are the word and sacraments of the gospel. The word is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17); by one Spirit we were all baptized into the one Body (I Cor. 12:13); and the bread and wine of the Eucharist are spiritual food and drink (cf. I Cor. 10:3 ff.). Admittedly, not all who hear the word and partake of the sacraments actually receive the Spirit. They are in a sense "in the Spirit," as being in the sphere where the Spirit dwells, the Temple of Christ's Body. But the Spirit is not necessarily in them, and in that sense they are not "in the Spirit." The Spirit does not force himself on anyone; he is received only by faith; that is, by openness to his influence. To those who do receive him, however, he imparts a considerable variety of gifts and graces (I Cor. 12:4 ff.), which are intended, not for private use or enjoyment, but "for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12).

Now the Church, the Temple of Christ's Body and the Israel of God under the new covenant, is the heir to the promises God made to ancient Israel, and one of these promises in particular claims our attention here. When God established the old covenant at Sinai he promised his people that they should be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod. 19:6)—or as Isaiah put it generations later:

... you shall be called the priests of the Lord,
men shall speak of you as the ministers of our God." (Isa. 61:6.)

Under the old covenant, however, this promise was not to be fulfilled, but instead the Levitical priesthood was instituted as an example and reminder of what all Israel was meant to be.

Concerning this priesthood it is said in the book of Deuteronomy:

They shall teach Jacob thy ordinances,
and Israel thy law;
they shall put incense before thee,
and whole burnt offering upon thy altar. (Deut. 33:10.)

The task of the priesthood was thus twofold: The priests were to speak to men in the name of God, teaching them the divine will, and to approach God on behalf of men, presenting their offerings and sacrifices to him. Their role was mediatorial.

In earliest times, however, it seems that the primary function of the priest was to teach, to speak God's word to men. Naturally he also offered sacrifice, but this was not his exclusive prerogative—as probably teaching was not either. A man who was not a member of the official priesthood—especially if he were the head of a household—could very well perform the sacrificial rites, and he was certainly expected to teach at least his family what he knew of the will and way of God. In later times, however, for a variety of reasons, the offering of sacrifice became a virtual monopoly of the priesthood. What is more, as the priesthood became increasingly preoccupied with the sacrificial rites, the teaching aspect of the office came to be increasingly neglected. This is the chief burden of the prophetic complaint against the priests, that they no longer teach the people. At the same time, the sacrificial system itself became subject to abuse, against which the prophets had also vigorously to protest. In origin and in essence the offering of sacrifice is an occasion and a means of establishing, strengthening, or restoring communion between God and man. But it easily comes to be conceived as an instrument at the disposal of man, something he can manipulate in order to exert an influence on God and get his own way with him. It was just such a perversion of the idea of sacrifice that aroused the prophetic ire, but it was a perversion which need not have arisen had the priests done the job of teaching which the prophets, and after them the author of Deuteronomy, saw as their primary task.

The priesthood, however, was little amended by the prophetic rebukes. The priests continued to monopolize, and to be monop-

lized by, the sacrificial cultus. They let the teaching aspect of their office lapse into the hands of the scribes and Pharisees, who in their way were the successors of the prophets. In consequence, the fulfillment of God's promise that his people should be a kingdom of priests had to wait on the establishment of the new covenant through the priestly mediation and sacrifice of Christ.

Under the new covenant the old Levitical priesthood was done away, and the People of God became truly a royal priesthood and a holy nation (I Pet. 2:9). Then there was no special priesthood any longer because all Christians were priests. There was a special ministry of pastors and teachers charged with the responsibility of leading and guiding the whole priestly life of the Church, but there was no class of persons within the Church who were specially called priests. Instead, the whole Church as the Body of Christ, and every individual member of it, shared in the priestly dignity and calling of Christ, its head. So it was at any rate in the New Testament Church, and so it must always be if the Church is to be truly the Church.

This means that the Church, like the old Levitical priesthood, has a dual role to fulfill. It is called, on the one hand, to "offer spiritual sacrifices" to God, and on the other, to "declare the wonderful deeds" of God to men (I Pet. 2:5, 9). Its function, in other words, is mediatorial—as we might expect, seeing it is the Body of Christ, the one mediator between God and man. Moreover, every member of the Church shares in this priestly task, inasmuch as he shares in the priestly character of the Body. By his baptism, the act of his incorporation into the Body, he has been consecrated to this priesthood. Therefore, according to his ability and opportunity, it is his business to bear witness both by word and deed to the truth of God in Christ and to intercede with both prayer and self-sacrificing service for the world. This is the calling of the whole Church, in which every member has his part to play. The part of the "ministers and clergy," as we call them, is to lead and guide the laity in the fulfillment of its priestly service.

The Church's priestly vocation is epitomized in the central act

of Christian worship, the Lord's Supper. Here we proclaim the Lord's death till he come (I Cor. 11:26), setting forth the gospel in dramatic rite and declaring the most wonderful of all the wonderful deeds of God. Here also we offer spiritual sacrifices to God—our prayers and praises, our alms and oblations, our souls and bodies—to be used in his service, as our grateful response to the grace he has shown to us. The priestly service of the Church, however, while it centers in the Lord's Supper, does not end there. It goes out into all the world, where Christians in every walk of life have the duty and privilege of witnessing, not only with their lips, but with their lives, to the truth of God in Christ, and just in this way offering their spiritual sacrifices to God. Not everyone is able, however, nor should everyone desire, to play the same part; for while all share alike in the one, common priesthood of the Body of Christ, yet precisely as members of the Body they are and must be diverse in function and service. There is only one priesthood, but there are many ministries or forms of service.

The different forms of ministry, however, are not all of equal importance, and there is one form in particular on which it must be said that all the rest depend; namely, the ministry of the Word. This means, in the first instance of course, the ministry of Christ himself, the Incarnate Word, without which there would never have been any Church or Christian priestly community with its manifold arms of ministry. Christ is the first and supreme minister in the Church. He is the Son of man, who "came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He is the Son of God, "who . . . did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant . . . and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:6-8). He is the good shepherd, the *bonus pastor*, who gives his life for the sheep (John 10:14-15). To this end he has come from God, has been sent by God, and it is his meat to do the will of him that sent him.

Christ is thus the source and pattern of all ministry in the Church, as he ministers to mankind at the cost of his life. We

should notice, however, that he serves men not by submitting himself to them as if they were his masters, but by being the Suffering Servant of the Lord. His service of men consists, not in doing their will, but his heavenly Father's. Consequently, in all his ministering and serving he speaks and acts with authority. He is "a prophet mighty in deed and word" (Luke 24:19), at whose authority men exclaim with astonishment, and when they ask him where he gets it, he makes it plain that they must understand his authority to come from God (Mark 11:27-33).

But our Lord does not exercise this ministerial authority alone, by himself. Even in the days of his flesh he conferred similar authority on others, the disciples he chose out of the crowds that followed him, and sent them forth to share in the same ministry. These were his messengers, his representatives, as he was God's, and therefore he could tell them, "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me" (Matt. 10:40). The commission he gave them, however, was limited to the territory of Israel, and when they had fulfilled it they returned to him. Then after his resurrection the authorization and sending out of his representatives is resumed, and on a vastly wider scale. Now he is able to declare, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . ." (Matt. 28:18-19). Consequently, when the apostles are asked by what authority they act, they can reply that it is by his authority (Acts 9:15). They are servants (*douloi*) of Jesus Christ and ministers (*diakonoi*) of the new covenant (Phil. 1:1; II Cor. 3:6). They speak and act on behalf of Christ and are, as it were, the mouthpieces of God (II Cor. 5:20-21). They have been chosen and sent for service (*diakonia*—ministry), but for the service of the Word, not the serving of tables (Acts 6:1-7).

Yet neither do the apostles, any more than our Lord, exercise their ministerial authority alone. Where they come and are received others are raised up to assist them in their work and to carry it on after them—prophets, evangelists, teachers, administrators, pastors. And when other forms of ministry change and pass

away, the pastoral office remains, to which men are ordained and charged with the ministry of the Word and sacraments (as we commonly call it). That is not, of course, a New Testament phrase, and it is in some ways an unfortunate one. For the moment, however, we may let it stand while we take note of several important developments in connection with this ministry during the early centuries of the Church.

First, the pastoral office quickly developed a threefold structure—bishop, presbyter, and deacon—of which the beginnings are discernible already in the New Testament. It is true that in the New Testament the distinction between bishop and presbyter is by no means sharp; in fact, the terms are virtually interchangeable. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that one and the same person can very well have both the status of a presbyter, or elder, and the function of an *episcopus*, a superintendent or bishop. Before long, however, a distinction came to be drawn between bishops as superintending elders and presbyters as elders under their superintendency; an arrangement which was natural enough, no doubt, as the Church increased in numbers and had to meet the needs of changing circumstances. Nor was it unreasonable that bishops were regarded as successors of the apostles, and in some sense inheritors of their apostolic authority, while the presbyters were assistants and representatives of the bishops. After all, the apostles themselves had appointed superintending elders—or presbyter-bishops—in the churches they had personally founded, and it was natural that these should have the responsibility of appointing others as need arose to work with them or to carry on the work after them. Quite understandably, therefore, the right to administer ordination came to be ordinarily reserved to the superintending elder, the bishop.

A second important development was the practice that arose very early in the Church of describing the ordained ministers as priests and distinguishing them as such from the laity. This was chiefly due, no doubt, to the fact that the Old Testament, with its account of the Levitical priesthood, was for long the only scripture the Church possessed, and since neither Jewish nor Gentile Christians were at

all accustomed to the idea of a religion without a special priesthood, they were predisposed to follow the Old Testament pattern. In consequence, from the time of Clement of Rome onward the thought of the priesthood of all Christians—the “universal priesthood”—fell more and more into the background, while the clergy gradually gained what amounted to a monopoly of priestly functions.

A third development, which had even more serious consequences, was a change that took place in the understanding of the priestly functions themselves. Owing once more, no doubt, to both Jewish and Gentile preconceptions, for which the primary business of priesthood was the offering of sacrifice, the Eucharist, over which the bishop or superintending elder naturally presided, came to be interpreted as an atoning or propitiatory sacrifice offered to God on behalf of the living and the dead. That is to say, the priestly self-offering of the Church in gratitude to God and for his service in the world gave place to an offering by the ordained priest of the consecrated bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ, on behalf of the Church. Moreover, the offering of this sacrifice came to be the primary function of the ordained priest. This change, which had already taken place by the time of Cyprian in the third century, marks a distinct departure from the second-century position of Irenaeus and Tertullian, for whom the clergy—and especially the bishops, as successors of the apostles—were chiefly the guardians and guarantors of the purity of the apostolic teaching.

A fourth development, first clearly seen in Augustine, was the understanding of ordination to the priesthood as a sacramental act whereby the person ordained receives a *character indelebilis*, an indelible mark, which sets him permanently apart from the laity. Once a priest he is always a priest and can never revert to the status of a layman. This idea stems no doubt in part from the conviction, which has almost certainly existed from the beginning, that the work of the ministry demands total commitment, and that ordination to it implies acceptance of a life-long vocation. More than this is implied, however, when the ministry is understood as an exclusive

priesthood, for by virtue of the *sacramentum ordinis*, or sacrament of order, administered by a bishop, the priest is empowered to administer the other sacraments as a layman is not—except that in emergency situations a layman may administer baptism. With that exception, the validity of the other sacraments is made to depend on the priestly *character* of the celebrant.

The fifth and final development we must notice is found in the late fifth-century writings on the heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchies that go under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite. What we have to observe here is a very considerable enhancement of the position of the bishop, who already had special importance in the Church as alone having the right to ordain. According to Dionysius the bishop holds the highest rank in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and is inferior only to the angels, who are the lowest in the heavenly hierarchy. Therefore, the bishop forms the indispensable link between earth and heaven. Through the bishop the divine powers of salvation that stream down through the various orders of the heavenly hierarchy are mediated sacramentally to the lower orders of the ecclesiastical—the priests, deacons, monks, baptized Christians, and catechumens in turn. Consequently, where there is no properly consecrated bishop or where the bishop fails to fulfill his sacramental functions, there can be no mediation of sacramental, saving grace—an idea which has not infrequently been echoed in modern ecumenical discussions.

Now such a doctrine of the ministry as this, for which there is no vestige of support in the New Testament, we cannot but reject, as the Reformers did. By their time a situation had arisen in the New Israel comparable with that which existed in the Old Israel in the time of the prophets and of our Lord. The priests were preoccupied with the cultus, which centered in the sacrifice of the mass; their teaching office was practically forgotten, or at best was fulfilled in terms of a scholastic theology only too reminiscent of the spirit of the scribes and Pharisees. The thought of the priestly vocation of the whole Church and of every Christian scarcely entered into anyone's head. Against all this the Reformers raised

their protest like the prophets of old, seeking to recall the clergy to their true ministry as servants of the Word of God, and to restore the true nature of the Church as a priestly community ordered and governed by that Word. For the most part the churches that have followed them have ceased to call their ministers or clergy "priests," though they have never very fully grasped the meaning of the universal priesthood of the Church, and in consequence, it has often seemed among them that neither clergy nor laity were priests.

As we have already seen, the function of priesthood is mediatorial and involves a movement in two directions, from God to man and from man to God. We have also seen that under both the old covenant and the new those who were specially called priests came to be almost exclusively concerned with the second movement, so that prophets and reformers had to be raised up to redress the balance. The resulting conflicts, however, between the priests and the prophets and reformers unhappily gave rise to the idea that the prophetic and the priestly ministries are, if not mutually exclusive, at least quite distinct and separate. This idea was maintained by John Wesley, for example, in his sermon on "The Ministerial Office," when he told his lay preachers that they were of the order of prophets, not priests, and that, therefore, they had no right to administer the sacraments. That right belonged only to the regularly ordained clergy, the priests of the Church of England. It was true that the clergy ought also to have been fulfilling the prophetic ministry which had devolved upon the Methodist preachers, and the latter must herefore be regarded as "*extraordinary messengers*, raised up to provoke the *ordinary* ones to jealousy." Yet even when exercised by one and the same person the two ministries, prophetic and priestly, remained in Wesley's view totally distinct. It seems odd that Wesley could not conceive of the "extraordinary" call of his preachers as including also the administration of the sacraments, seeing that this was hardly more effectively done in eighteenth-century Anglicanism than the preaching of the Word. There appears to be something of an unreformed hangover in the Anglican Wesley here.

Be that as it may, this kind of distinction between the prophetic

and the priestly office is, to say the least, very misleading. It not only improperly limits the meaning of priesthood, but it also encourages a separation between the Word and the sacraments of the gospel which is thoroughly false. We have already suggested that the phrase "the Word and sacraments" is an unfortunate one, and it is so not least because it too easily leads to the equation of the Word of God simply with words. The Word of God is, of course, expressed in words—the written words of scripture and the spoken words of Christian preaching and teaching—but it is also expressed in the dramatic actions of baptism and the Lord's Supper—those sacraments of the gospel which, in Augustine's vivid phrase, can be called "visible words." Or to put it another way, both the Word and the sacraments, as we ordinarily speak of them, are signs and means of the presence and activity of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, who alone is the Word in the full and proper sense of the term. Therefore they belong inseparably together. What is more, they both belong to the prophetic rather than the priestly office—if those two are distinguished in the way we have just described as wrong—for both represent the manward movement of God rather than the Godward movement of man. They do not exclude the Godward movement of course, but they rather furnish the ground and motivation of it.

Now the ordained ministry exists in order precisely that the Word of God may be brought to men by the Word and sacraments of the gospel and that men may be brought to God through Christ and made living members of the holy and royal priesthood which is Christ's Body, the Church. For that reason, the office of the ministry has from the beginning been characterized by the same notes of authority and service that we have seen in the ministry of our Lord and his apostles (cf. I Cor. 16:15-16; I Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:7, 17; I Pet. 5:2-3). It is true that all Christians have the duty and privilege of bearing witness to Christ in all the ways they can, and it is also true that the Church can authorize, in case of need, unordained laymen to preach or administer the sacraments. Indeed, as Luther says in his "Address to the German Nobility," if a group

of Christians were cut off from the rest of the Church without an ordained minister among them they would have the right to authorize one of their own number to be their minister in holy things, and they would have this right because they are all already priests and, therefore, in principle qualified to deal with holy things. Ordinarily, however, this authority belongs to the ministerial office and is conferred by ordination at the hands of those already ordained to the office.

Ordination is the commission of Christ, the head of the Body, conferred on certain members of his Body, to ensure the perpetuation of his own ministry, the ministry of the Word. Although this ministry is the general responsibility of the whole Church, it is necessary that there should be such special commissioning, partly in order to avoid the risk of everybody's business becoming nobody's business, and partly to prevent the confusion and disorder that could result from lack of duly authorized leadership. Ordination does not confer any special priestly powers on the minister, who is neither more nor less a priest than any other Christian, but inasmuch as it implies total commitment and a life-long vocation, the thought of it as unrepeatable and even as imparting a *character indelebilis* may not be too wide of the mark. It does, moreover, confer upon the minister an authority which, although it is conferred through his fellow members in the Church, is not derived from them, but is given him by Christ. The minister is not the elected representative or delegate of an ecclesiastical democracy, and thus a servant of the people's will. He is a servant of Jesus Christ, and he serves his people best when both he and they remember that if he is also their servant it is "for Jesus' sake" (II Cor. 4:5).

In none of this does ordination give the minister any monopoly or exclusive rights. It is probably quite wrong to ask, as people so often do, what there is that an ordained minister can do which a layman cannot or ought not do. The purpose of having an ordained ministry is not to establish any monopoly of ministering, but to ensure that the ministry shall be carried on. The minister, therefore, has the responsibility of seeing that it is carried on. He is,

we might well say, a leading layman; he is a member of the *laos* or People of God, appointed to lead and guide that people in the priestly service of God and man to which they are one and all called. Hence the minister's authority is not given him in order that he may lord it over his people, but in order that he may more effectively serve. His authority does not belong to him personally, but to his office, and he has no claim to it except as he duly and faithfully fulfills the functions of that office. Here we must bear in mind the scriptural warnings against "false apostles" and "false teachers," who pervert the gospel and have therefore no authority to which the people ought to submit (II Cor. 11:1-6, 12-15), and we may recall that even a true apostle like Peter is not infallible and may, therefore, sometimes have to be resisted, as Paul resisted him at Antioch (Gal. 2:11 ff.). In a similar way the leaders of the Reformation and the Evangelical Revival had in their day to resist the clergy—and especially the bishops, the lordly successors of the apostles, who no longer understood the nature of the apostolic ministry to which they were called.

As a result of this resistance, of course, most of the churches that sprang from the Reformation and the Revival lost, whether by accident or design, the traditional threefold structure of the ministry. This fact presents us with one of the chief and most intractable problems today with regard to the unity of the Church. In this connection two things must be said. First, those who regard the threefold—or indeed any other—structure as essential so that there cannot be any true ministry without it would do well to consider our Lord's rebuke to his disciples when they forbade a man to cast out demons "because he does not follow with us" (Luke 9:49-50). This incident, we may recall, furnished the text for John Wesley's sermon "A Caution Against Bigotry," in which among other things he refused to unchurch those Christian communions which did not possess the same structure of ministry as his own—and incidentally, pleaded for a recognition of the ministry being carried out by his own irregular troops of preachers. As he insisted in his "Letter to a Clergyman" (May, 1748), "a doctor is one who

heals" and "one who does not heal is not a doctor"; therefore, if a man without professional medical status fulfills the true function of a doctor his right to do so can hardly be questioned by professionals who are failing in their duty. So neither could the professional clergy complain if the Methodist preachers, unordained as they were, and out of the historical succession as they still are, fulfill the true function of the clergy.

This argument, however, cuts both ways, and therefore the second thing to be said is that those who no longer possess the traditional structure of the ministry might well ask themselves whether their own alternative to it really serves the function of the ministry any more effectively. This is a particularly important question at a time like the present, when the divisions of the Church obscure and distort the gospel which a divided world so sorely needs. In view of the fundamental importance of the ministry for the Church, the unity of the Church is unlikely to be achieved without the unification of the ministry, and seeing that the threefold structure—in the historic succession—is the oldest and most widespread in the Church, it has at least a strong claim to be considered as a basis for unification. Admittedly, we must maintain, as John Wesley did, that the uninterrupted succession of bishops is a fable, that an ordained presbyter is as much a scriptural *episcopos* as any bishop, and that, though the bishop may be ordinarily responsible for ordinations, he has no absolute and exclusive right in the matter. Ordination is a matter of order, not orders. But seeing there is disorder in the Church owing to our divided ministries must we not seek somehow to bring them into "full connexion" with one another, so that without denying the reality of any of them we may move toward a reform of all, with a view to their more effective functioning? If to this end we are asked to include a mutual laying on of hands with prayer for one another, need we be fearful of that? Provided it was clearly neither an act of ordination nor a prerequisite for our meeting together at the Lord's table, would it not be a fitting way of sealing the union of our different but equally valid ministries? After all, the laying on of hands is used in the New

Testament Church for other purposes than ordination, and even the Apostle Paul had hands laid on him more than once.

More important than all this, however, is to be clear about the nature of the minister's task, the service he is commissioned by his ordination to perform. Here we may well begin by recalling Paul's description of himself and his fellow workers as "ambassadors for Christ" (II Cor. 5:20). An ambassador, as we commonly use the term, is one sent to represent the government of his own country to a foreign power. It is his business to interpret the mind of his own government in terms the foreigners can understand. He has no right to any independent initiative or mind of his own in the matter; he has nothing to do but represent the mind of another as intelligently, efficiently, courteously, and loyally as he can. Just so every minister of the gospel is sent. He is sent on a mission of reconciliation, bearing a message of reconciliation from God to man, and as he carries out his duties as Christ's ambassador to a world estranged it is God himself who makes his appeal through him, beseeching men to be reconciled to God. When God's message of reconciliation is brought to men it is God's Word that men hear, even though the voice and the words are those of a man—and even if the hearers do not recognize it as God's Word.

The minister, then, is a preacher of God's Word, and in this connection there is another word of Paul that is peculiarly relevant. "What we preach," he said, "is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake (II Cor. 4:5). Everyone of course knows that it is not the business of the Christian preacher to preach "himself"; yet how often it seems to pass unnoticed by both the pulpit and the pew when preachers do just that—when they preach their own ideas, experiences, philosophies, or even their doubts! Such preachers may be interesting and even inspiring, but they are not preaching the Word of God. To preach the Word means to preach Jesus Christ as Lord. That is the unvarying theme of all Christian preaching, even though it is not always expressed in just those words. In the New Testament men preach many things—the gospel, the kingdom of God, the forgive-

ness of sins, the word of the cross, and so forth—but all these concepts are inseparably bound up with Jesus Christ and his Lordship. It is the business of the Christian preacher to "offer Christ" (Wesley) or to "portray Christ" (Luther), not to portray or offer himself in any shape or form; for it is Christ who is the Word of God. The texts of his sermons will of course vary, as do the situations to which he has to relate the message of Christ, but Christ will be his constant theme.

The preaching of the Word of God is not, of course, to be equated simply with the delivery of sermons. The Word is proclaimed also, as we have already said, when the sacraments are administered, which belong together with preaching. Furthermore, just as the ministry of the Word is not limited to sermons, so neither is it limited to occasions of public worship. It involves more particular pastoral care in which what is done publicly in church is applied more privately and intimately to individuals or groups. This brings us, finally, to the work of the minister as a pastor or shepherd of Christ's flock.

In the Old Testament Israel as the People of God is often likened to a flock of sheep. It is God's flock,

. . . the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand. (Ps. 95:7.)

God, who has led this people like a shepherd out of Egypt (Ps. 77:20), is himself called the "Shepherd of Israel" (Ps. 80:1). But the human leaders of Israel, the rulers in Church and state, are also likened to shepherds, though they are not owners of the flock as God is. They are undershepherds in the service of the Owner. It is a wayward and unruly flock, and its shepherds are themselves often wayward too. They fail to recognize their responsibility; they exploit their position; they serve their own interests at the expense of the flock; they fleece and butcher the sheep; they destroy or scatter the flock. Therefore God promises that he will himself take action; he will punish the bad shepherds, restore the flock, and

appoint other, good and faithful, shepherds for them (Ezek. 36:1-24). He will indeed himself shepherd his flock (Isa. 40:10-11; Ezek. 34:11-12).

This promise of God is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who can say, "I am the good shepherd," the *bonus pastor* (John 10:11). Jesus more than once speaks of the relation between God and man as that between a shepherd and his sheep, and he says that he is himself sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). He has compassion on the multitudes because they are "like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). He calls his disciples his "little flock" (Luke 12:32) and is himself called "the great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20) and "the chief Shepherd" (I Pet. 5:4). But there are also in the New Testament undershepherds. Peter is commissioned, "Feed my lambs. . . . Tend my sheep" (John 21:15 ff.). He in turn bade his fellow presbyters, "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge" (I Pet. 5:2), just as Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders, "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians [*episcopous*—bishops]" (Acts 20:28); and among the gifts of Christ to the Church there are numbered "pastors" (Eph. 4:11).

From passages like these we can sketch the character and aims of the pastoral ministry, the work of the minister as a shepherd of Christ's flock, and the spirit in which that work must be done. The shepherd here spoken of is one who leads, not drives, his flock, which it is his task both to feed and to guard. He knows his sheep and calls them by name. He strengthens the weak, cares for the injured, and carries the lambs in his arms. He watches over those who are well and strong to see that they keep well and strong, and to prevent their growing headstrong! He seeks out the lost, even the one lost sheep, having a care for each individual member of the flock, and teaching each of them to say, "The Lord is *my* shepherd." He has also other sheep besides those already within the fold, and these too must be gathered in. He has authority over the sheep, as being in charge of them. It is not his business to leave them to their own devices or to let them go as they please. At the same time, his

authority is exercised in service. He carries out his duties in the spirit of Peter's words, "not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock" (I Pet. 5:23). He has heard the words of the chief Shepherd himself: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21)—to be good shepherds, good pastors. He remembers that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.