Ministry in the Body of Christ.

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THE evidence about the precise organisation of the Ministry in New Testament times is so fragmentary and ambiguous that champions of all systems of Church order, from The Quakers to the Roman Catholics, have claimed scriptural authority for their views. Two principal methods have been pursued in the effort to elucidate the truth. The one starts, with as few presuppositions as possible, from the New Testament itself, and endeavours to piece together the historical development as best it may, and from that to draw general conclusions. "The lesson-book of the Ecclesia," says Hort, "is not a law but a history." The difficulty here is that the evidence is insufficient to reach sure conclusions. The other method starts with a theory of the Ministry established on general theological grounds, and then works back to see whether the New Testament evidence can be squared with it. The difficulty here is that every investigator reaches the conclusions to which he is predisposed. Seeing the weakness inherent in both methods, some scholars have concluded that there was no one system of Ministry in the New Testament Church. Rather did each community evolve its own type, so that Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist may each find the prototype of his own kind of ministry existing in Apostolic days. Canon Streeter sums it up by quoting the verdict of the Dodo at the end of the Caucus-Race in *Alice in Wonderland*: "Everyone has won and all shall have prizes." But this radical cutting of the knot in fact raises more questions than it solves: the New Testament itself insists strongly on the necessity of "decency and order," and emphatically asserts the unity of the Church. If St. Paul checks congregational individualism by insisting on uniformity over wearing hats in church, it seems unlikely that he would have allowed, still less fostered, a condition of "happy chaos" in regard to the far more important matter of church organisation and ministry. Such a theory leaves out of account the general control which the apostles exercised over the churches, and makes well-nigh inexplicable the insistence on uniformity and order in the sub-apostolic Church, an insistence which resulted in the universal establishment of monarchical episcopacy by, at latest, the early part of the second century. We should not expect to find a detailed and exact organisation of offices of the Ministry in the infant Church; no doubt we must leave room for creative development under the Spirit's guidance, and for variety of nomenclature and overlapping of functions; and no doubt the early Church thought in terms of function rather than office. But it does seem at least probable that there were basic *principles* of Ministry which were generally recognised and which governed the development in such a way that unity was preserved and the later uniformity emerged as a natural growth. It is therefore suggested that it might be a fruitful line of research to leave aside for the present the disputed questions of organisation and to try to discover passages in the New Testament which approach the

subject of Ministry from a *theological* angle. From this it might be possible to deduce principles which would decide some of the points of organisation on which the direct evidence is insufficient or ambiguous.

The present article is an experiment in this method; space forbids the treatment of more than one inter-related series of passages, and the conclusions must of necessity be extremely tentative. The passages chosen are Romans xii., 1 Corinthians xii., Ephesians iv.; the three passages where St. Paul expounds at length the conception of the Church as a body, the Body of Christ. They are particularly relevant for two reasons. First, in all of them St. Paul is dealing with the problem of combining specialisation of function with the unity of the Church. The Ministry has always, in the history of the Church, been both based upon the necessity of such specialisation and the outstanding example of it. Therefore what St. Paul has to say about specialisation in general will rightly apply to the Ministry in particular. Secondly, an examination of the passages suggests that though St. Paul is dealing with specialisation of function in general, he has particularly in mind those functions which the New Testament regards as the essential functions of the Ministry; functions which in some, though not all, cases had already become crystallised in particular offices. If so, St. Paul is writing about the Ministry in particular, as the obvious illustration of the principle of specialisation of function, and his words have a direct as well as a general application to the Ministry.

The functions which St. Paul selects as typical illustrations (not an exhaustive list and not all given technical names) are 20 in number; but some of them overlap and are given different names in the five different lists, Rom. xii. 6-8, 1 Cor. xii. 7-10, 27-8, 29-31, Eph. iv. 11-12. They may, however, be classified under three heads. First, ministries of the Word: prophecy, teaching, apostles, divers kinds of tongues, interpretation of tongues, exhorting, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, discernment of spirits, evangelists, pastors. Secondly, ministries of Mighty Works: healings, miracles, faith. Thirdly, ministries of practical care for the community: helps, ruling, governments, ministry, giving, showing mercy, apostles, pastors. Discernment of spirits probably means judging whether an alleged prophet is truly inspired; faith cannot mean saving faith which is common to all Christians, and therefore probably refers to the special quality of faith required for doing miracles; "ministries" (διακουιαι) probably means those menial offices to which the title διακονος became specially applied; apostles according to Paul were primarily preachers of the Gospel (see *e.g.*, Rom. i. 1, 1 Cor. i. 17), but also included disciplinary and pastoral functions (see 1 and 2 Cor. *passim*), and must therefore be included under both the first and third headings. So must "pastors," who are closely associated with teachers in Ephesians; the pastoral office is certainly one of teaching, at least in part, in Acts xx.; but it probably includes also the thought of the shepherd's government of his flock. "Giving" and "showing mercy," at first sight odd examples of functions limited to certain people only, probably refer to the practical work of relieving the poor and caring for the sick which fell to officials such as the Seven in Acts vi. and the Widows in 1 Timothy v. St. Paul therefore thinks of a ministry of the word (in

various forms), a ministry of mighty works, and a ministry of care for the community, as the typical examples of specialisation of function, the typical limbs or organs through which the Body of Christ does its work. Among these the ministry of the word is the most important : it is much the most frequently mentioned ; it heads the lists ; and its predominance increases as St. Paul's thought develops as may be seen by its supremacy in the latest (Ephesian) list.

We might fairly suggest that if these are to St. Paul the typical specialised functions of the Church, they were the typical functions of the Ministry in St. Paul's day : for the Ministry is the official recognition and organisation of specialised functions within the Church. There is abundant evidence to confirm this. Several of the functions St. Paul refers to by the names of what were certainly recognised ministerial offices ; *e.g.*, apostles, prophets, and less certainly evangelists and διακονος. Here, then, he is thinking directly of the Ministry. And if we examine the functions elsewhere in the New Testament clearly attributed to official ministers, we shall find that they are *these* functions of the Word, Mighty Works, and Practical Care, and no others. The Ministry of the Word is committed to the Apostles (Mark iii. 14), to prophets (Acts xiii. 2), to presbyters (1 Tim. v. 17), to bishops (1 Tim. iii. 2) ; a ministry of mighty works to the Apostles (Mark iii. 15), and to presbyters (James v. 14, 15) ; a ministry of care for the community to the Apostles and presbyters (Acts xv. 23, *seq.*), the Apostles (2 Cor. xi. 28), presbyters (1 Peter v. 2), bishops (1 Tim. iii. 5), deacons (Acts vi.). Three apparent exceptions to this rule are more apparent than real. The duty of baptising is attributed to the Eleven in Matt. xxviii. ; but in view of St. Paul's assertion in 1 Cor. i., and the mention of baptism by others (*e.g.*, Philip, Ananias), this must be taken to apply to them as *disciples* (Matthew's word in the context), not *apostles* ; *i.e.*, this is the function of the Church, which they here represent, not of any particular organ of it. St. Paul once refers to his ministry as priestly (Rom. xv. 16) ; but it is his preaching which is the priestly act, and he is probably thinking of it as comparable to the declaration of the Torah by the Old Testament priests. In any case, it can have no suggestion of offering sacrifice, unless preaching itself is thought of metaphorically as a sacrificial act. The power to remit sins (John xx. 23), is probably to be taken as conferred on the Church, not the Apostles ; and in any case is to be interpreted as referring to the responsibility of making known the Gospel, without which forgiveness cannot be received, rather than as conferring an independent judicial power. We may therefore rightly conclude that when St. Paul speaks of ministries of the Word, of mighty works, and of care for the community as typical of specialised functions in the Church, he has the official ministry of the Church directly (though not necessarily exclusively) in view. With this established, we may now examine further what these passages imply about the Ministry, under three headings : the functions of the Ministry ; its relation to Christ ; and its relation to the Church.

The functions of the Ministry are striking both in what is included and what is omitted ; particularly is the inclusion of mighty works strange to modern ears, and the omission of the ministry of the sacraments. The predominance of the Word and the omission of reference to priesthood and sacrifice will come less strangely to Protestants.

The clue to the mention of these functions, and no others, is to be found in the phrase "Body of Christ." Christ's Body, and the organs which make it up, presumably exist to do Christ's work. This is indicated by the description of Christ as the Head in Ephesians, and of the Holy Spirit as the indwelling energising spirit in Corinthians. The Church, Paul means, is the community indwelt by Christ by His Spirit in order to do His work on earth, as the body does that which is dictated to it by its head or by the invisible spirit ("personality," as we should say) which possesses it. What is this work? The Synoptic Gospels portray Christ as the Messiah come to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, God's rule over all life victorious over evil. This He does in four ways. (1) By preaching and teaching. The Word is the means whereby God's rule is brought to bear upon the thinking and choosing spheres of personality; so it mediates forgiveness (Mark xxv.), comes with Divine authority and power (Mark i. 27, Matt. vii. 28, 29), and is the seed which, when it takes root, produces the Kingdom in men's hearts (Mark iv. 3-20). (2) By mighty works. God's redemptive rule applies to the physical as well as the spiritual and mental life, though our Lord clearly attached greater importance to the latter. The Kingdom, therefore, means healing of the sick, casting out of devils, raising the dead, and protecting God's people from physical needs (*e.g.*, the stilling of the storm). The fact that He does these works is thus confirmation of the Kingdom's presence (Matt. xi. 2-5, Matt. xii. 28). (3) By creating and caring for a community which recognises the presence of the Kingdom and lives within it. The disciples are the "little flock" who possess the Kingdom (Luke xii. 32), and He is the Shepherd (Mark xiv. 27). This is clearly the fulfilment of the Old Testament description of the Messianic Kingdom in terms of shepherd and flock; and it is on the "rock" of Peter's confession of Jesus as Messiah that Jesus will build his "Ecclesia." (4) By sacrifice. Only by His Death can the New Covenant which ushers in the Kingdom among men be fully inaugurated: so "the Son of Man *must* suffer." This is made clear in the Last Supper, and the reason why His Death is effective is that it is the vicarious bearing of sin by the Servant of the Lord, whose functions are united with those of the Son of Man and both fulfilled by Jesus. Now this last function is clearly unique: if it be true that "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all," there is (as Hebrews puts it) "no more offering for sin." The New Covenant has been inaugurated; forgiveness and the Spirit are available freely for all. But the life of the Kingdom has still to be made known and applied to men. Hence the three other functions remain: spiritually men must be redeemed through the Word preached; physically they must be redeemed through mighty works wrought in the Spirit's power; and there must be a Community in which the Kingdom is accepted, and which, as sharing in the Kingdom's power, must propagate it as Jesus Himself had propagated it. This Community will need practical shepherding and care even as Jesus Himself had cared for it. Thus we see that the Body of Christ, the Community of the Kingdom, is committed to continue Christ's own work in His earthly life, with the single exception that His Atoning Death was a unique event which could not be, and did not need to be, repeated. This remaining work is therefore the proclamation of the Word, the

performance of mighty works, and the care of the community. We see, further, that it is in the performance of these central functions that St. Paul and the early Church alike recognised specialisation to be necessary; and that therefore it was for the fulfilment of these functions that the primitive Ministry existed. Priesthood and Sacrifice (in the sense of "offering for sin") are excluded because the New Covenant has been established by Christ's Death once for all. The absence of any reference, in Paul's lists or outside them, to a specialised ministry of the Sacraments might be explained in three ways: it may have been regarded as a function of the Church which did not need specialisation; or as part of the ministry of the Word; or as part of the care for the community, the work of the "helps" and "διακονιαι." Whatever the explanation, the fact that it is nowhere mentioned, even in the sub-divisions of Paul's lists, makes it evident that it was not regarded as being one of the obvious and essential functions of the specialised Ministry. All this confirms the Protestant emphasis on the ministry of the Word and its denial of the Roman doctrine of priesthood. It confirms the Anglican retention of emphasis on the Sacraments only if the Sacraments be interpreted as part of, and one with, the Word. But why has the office of "exorcist" fallen into disuse? Ought it to be replaced by ordained doctors? And ought not the deacon to care for the relief of the sick and poor, in fact as well as name, instead of being primarily a junior minister of the Word?

We now turn to the relation of the Ministry to our Lord. In all three Epistles Paul has emphasised that relationship to Christ, and therefore to His People, is the sheer grace-gift of God received through faith. Therefore the Church, His Body, is *God's* building, an olive tree into which *God* grafts men, a community into which men are reconciled *through the Cross*. If the Body is a Divine creation, its various organs must equally be so. So the Ministry is something which God "hath set in the Church" (Corinthians); it is the gift of the Ascended Christ (Ephesians). So the various functions are χαρισματα, spiritual gifts from God, not natural abilities. And this applies to *all* the ministries, the practical ones of helps and ruling, of διακονιαι and governments, as well as to the ministries of the Word and of mighty works. The ministry can only operate because "it is the same Lord that worketh all and in all" (Corinthians), and in so far as it is nourished by the Head which is Christ (Ephesians). This means two things: first the ministry is not a matter of human choice or ability; it depends entirely upon the grace-gift of God in Christ by His Spirit, both for the original endowment and for its daily working. No man can make himself a minister; he must be called by Christ; no man, when called, can fulfil the ministry by his own powers; he must depend upon the gift of Christ and remain in union with Him. We knew it in the ministry of the Word; has Augustine's teaching obscured it in the ministry of the sacraments? The application of this principle to *all* ministries alike rules out of court Harnack's theory that there existed in the early Church a "charismatic" ministry depending on spiritual gift alongside an "official" ministry owing its authority simply to appointment by the Church. Secondly, it means that the ministry has

the direct authority of Christ. Each organ acts on behalf of, and through contact with, the Head or the Spirit. Therefore it represents that Head or Spirit. The organs are Christ's gifts to the Church, set there by God. Therefore their position is decided by God, not by the Church. The Church, as part of its obedience, must accept and recognise God's gifts and God's disposition of its economy. So the ministry is a ministry of Christ rather than of the Church : its authority is the authority of Christ in so far as it takes the place and performs the functions given by Christ ; and the Church must recognise and accept that authority. Its authority is, of course, commensurate with its subjection : it is only as it acts under the Head, taking the place, in which it is set by God, that it represents Christ and God to the Church. But while it does so, the Church cannot question it ; nor can the Church create a ministry of its own choice ; the Church's task is limited to recognising, and giving scope to, the ministry given by Christ. This condemns the theory that the ministry is just a convenient mode of operation invented and used by the Church, owing its authority to the Church's commission. Likewise it condemns the idea that the specialisation of function is a later development. True, the forms of ministry developed, as limbs develop and grow. But differentiation of function is inherent in the Church from the start, if the Church is truly a Body : as there cannot be a body without limbs, so the Church has never been an amorphous uniformity ; Church and Ministry are inherent in each other.

This leads on to the relation of the Ministry to the Church. As we have seen, in so far as the Ministry is the setting of limbs within the Body by God, the gift of Christ to the Church, the Ministry is authoritative over the Church, and inherently indispensable to it. But to each of these positions there is a converse equally true. If there cannot be a body without limbs, so neither can there be limbs without a body. This rules out the theory that our Lord created a Ministry first (the Apostolate), and that the Church developed out of this. It is not true to say, with Ignatius, " Where the bishop is there is the Catholic Church," though it would be true to say, " Where the Church is there are divers kinds of ministry." This strengthens the Cyprianic view as against the prevalent Augustinian theory : ministry must mean ministry within the Church ; and a ministry outside the Church is as meaningless as a limb which has no body. It, incidentally, also rules out the view that our Lord gave to the Church one undifferentiated form of ministry, the Apostolate, and that the Apostolic functions were later delegated to a number of different officials. The Apostolate is listed on an equality with the other forms of ministry, as one among many, all equally the gift of Christ, all equally set by God in the Church. A body does not start life with one limb only ; all are present even if only in embryo. If, then, the Ministry, in all its forms, is inherently necessary to the Church, so also the Church is inherently necessary to the Ministry, and there can be no real Ministry apart from it. Moreover, if the Ministry, as representing Christ, is authoritative over the Church, the Church, in an equally real sense, is authoritative over the Ministry. For each organ is only set in the body in order to enable the body to function ; every limb performs all its subordinate functions only in order to contribute to the greater

purposes of the body as a whole. No limb can properly have any aim except to contribute to the action of the body, and if it is to do so it must always subordinate itself to the body, and act in harmony with all other limbs and with the body as a whole. So the Ministry is given to the Church, not to fulfil any aims of its own, but simply to undertake those particular functions which may enable the Church to fulfil its greater function with the greatest efficiency. This means that it must always act in harmony with the Church and all its members, and seek to promote the welfare and effectiveness of the Church as a whole; its functions are merely particular parts of the Church's function. In this sense, the Ministry is truly representative of the Church. True, the Church must act through the organs given it by Christ; but its actions remain the actions of the Church, the Body of Christ, and it can never undertake actions other than those of the Body. Therefore the Ministry must not only act in harmony with, and for the well-being of, the Church and all its members; it also requires the commission of the Church to act on its behalf. These points are brought out by the stress in Corinthians on the mutual dependence of the members, and the statement that all gifts are given "to profit withal," *i.e.*, for the common good; and in Ephesians by the statement that all gifts are given "for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering"; *i.e.*, all have a ministry to perform, and the task of the specialised ministry is not to exclude the other members of the community, but to equip them the better for their work of ministering. This rules out any attempt to infringe upon the ministerial functions of the laity by giving a monopoly of ministry to the clergy. Christ acts through His whole Body. Finally, it may be noted that all ministries are equally given to or set in the Church, the Body of Christ; *i.e.*, they are ministries not of a local congregation (still less of a denomination), but ministries of the whole universal Church. This rules out Harnack's theory of sharply differentiated general ministries of the whole Church and local ministries of particular churches. While the exercise of some ministries may be for convenience located in one area, nevertheless all alike are organs of the whole Body; so that the local minister not only represents the local Church to the larger Body, but also represents the Universal Church to the local congregation.

The conclusion that Church and Ministry are necessary to each other, and that neither can dispense with the other, is fairly clear; though it should be added that we have not inquired whether any particular *form* of ministry is necessary, provided the ministerial functions are exercised. The second conclusion, that the Ministry is both authoritative over the Church as directly given by Christ and that it is subject to the Church, as existing only in the Church and to do the work of the Body, may (at first sight) appear a contradiction. It is resolved when we remember that Church and Ministry, Body and Limbs, exist only to do the work of Christ the Head and of His Spirit, the indwelling personality. For Christ came in love to serve: He Himself came "not to be ministered unto but to minister"—διακονεω, which means to do menial service. His Ministry was *ministry*, menial service. Therefore so is the work of His Body and of His limbs: to do menial service in love. Every χαρισμα is therefore a διακονια (1 Cor. xii. 4); and the Body and its members seek nothing for themselves, but only

to serve each other, and in serving each other to serve Christ the Head. Therefore each recognises the authority of the other, seeks the welfare of the other, and so Christ is He " from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself *in love* " (Eph. iv. 16). We make a grave error if we expect to find in the New Testament an elaborate Church constitution, with checks and balances to prevent any member, or the Body as a whole, claiming undue power. For the Body is the Body of Christ, and it exists to serve in love ; the organs are the organs of Christ, and they exist to serve in love. The only thing we shall find is opportunities of service ; the only honour is the privilege of doing more menial service (1 Cor. xii. 22-24) ; and the only organisation is such as is needed to give scope for service. That is why framers of Church constitutions often find little to help them in the New Testament, and would perhaps regard these views as unpractical. But perhaps the fact that controversy about the Ministry is now centred in the question of who should rule rather than who should serve, is only a sign that the Church is inclined to forget its fundamental theology, that Christ and His Body came alike to minister, not to be ministered unto ; if it does so, it may produce a water-tight ecclesiastical scheme ; but the organisation it labels Church will no longer be the Body of Christ, and the organisation it labels Ministry will no longer be the Ministry of Members of that Body ; for unless love be the governing principle, Christ cannot be the Head nor can His Spirit dwell in it ; and if Christ and His Spirit be absent, neither the Body nor the Members can be His, and His work cannot be done.