Episcopacy and Reunion

By Geoffrey Lampe

Christ is gone up ; yet ere He passed
From earth, in heaven to reign,
He formed one holy Church to last
Till He should come again.

His twelve apostles first He made
His ministers of grace ;
And they their hands on others laid,
To fill in turn their place.

So age by age, and year by year,
His grace was handed on ;
And still the holy Church is here,
Although her Lord is gone.

THERE could be no clearer statement than J. M. Neale's hymn of what is commonly called the "pipe-line" theory of apostolic succession, or, more respectfully, the Tractarian doctrine of the ministry. It is now customary for all schools of thought in Anglicanism to repudiate that theory in the crude form in which it appealed so strongly to Keble and the other fathers of the Oxford Movement. The theology of an absent Christ for whom the Church (rather than the Holy Spirit) deputizes ; of a ministry derived from the Jesus of Galilee by historical continuity rather than from the glorified Christ, now and always present with His people through the Spirit ; and of the ministry thus constituted as the exclusive channel of supernatural grace—all such theology would, in varying measures and with differing emphasis, be either modified or rejected outright by present-day Anglicans. The history upon which the Tractarian theory was supposed to rest could not now be accepted. It was possible in the sixteenth century to assert that "it is evident unto all men diligently reading Holy Scripture and ancient Authors that from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church : Bishops, Priests, and Deacons". The past century has shown, not only that the existence of the threefold ministry in apostolic times is by no means evident to all students of the Bible and the Fathers, but that very few even among Anglicans believe in it. The long process of investigation into, and controversy about, the origins of the Christian ministry has demonstrated one certain fact : that there was no such clear-cut process of the transmission of the Lord's authority and grace from the apostles to the threefold ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons as the theory of J. M. Neale presupposed.

The essay of J. B. Lightfoot on *The Christian Ministry* rendered that theory in its simpler and cruder form untenable. K. E. Kirk's *The Apostolic Ministry* probably represents the failure of the last, and

perhaps the most desperate, attempt to salvage the essential historical basis of the Tractarian structure from the damage inflicted on it by Hatch, Streeter, and many others, and to reconstruct it in a more acceptable form. Unhappily, not only does the patently false opening sentence of the Preface to the Ordinal continue to appear, unchallenged and unquestioned, within the covers of the Book of Common Prayer, but, however vigorously Anglicans may disown the "pipe-line" theory of apostolic succession, their Church continues to act in its relations with non-episcopal communions as though that theory were true. Thus the main tradition of the pre-Tractarian Church of England has been effectively set aside, and the not inconsiderable number of Anglicans who adhere to that tradition find themselves continually committed to a false position.

A striking example of this is afforded by the statement of the Lambeth Committee on "Church Unity and the Church Universal" concerning the Anglican-Presbyterian conversations: "Anglicans conscientiously hold that the celebrant of the Eucharist should have been ordained by a bishop standing in the historic succession, and generally believe it to be their duty to bear witness to this principle by receiving Holy Communion only from those who have thus been ordained". If the first clause meant only that Anglicans believe that it is desirable that the celebrant of the Eucharist should be an episcopally ordained minister, that in a reunited Church all those who celebrate the Eucharist should be episcopally ordained, and that the Church of England acts rightly in requiring that its own regular ministry should be so ordained, there could be no quarrel with this statement. It is clear, however, from what follows that the statement commits "Anglicans" as a body to quite another view: that episcopal ordination is so necessary for the celebrant of the Eucharist that, if the Sacrament is celebrated by a non-episcopally ordained minister, no Anglican ought to receive Communion from him. Yet many Anglicans hold no such belief. They do not take the view that the historic episcopate is of the *esse* of the Church, for they hold that the Holy Spirit, through Word and Sacraments, constitutes the Church, and the Ministry is not constitutive of the Church but expressive of its order and unity. Neither the efficacy nor the validity of the sacraments depends upon the maintenance of a particular type of Church Order. Yet they find themselves committed against their own conscience to a position which they conceive to be illogical and indefensible.

It is illogical because it is constantly asserted, on the one hand, that the ministries of the English Free Churches and the Church of Scotland are real ministries within the Catholic Church of Christ, and that Anglicans do not for a moment wish to question their spiritual efficacy; yet at the same time Anglicans are told that they should not receive Holy Communion at the hands of those ministers, but should wait until the Church of England is reunited organically with the bodies to which they belong and they have been given episcopal ordination. Thus, what is asserted in word is denied in practice. The Tractarian doctrine of apostolic succession in its original rigidity would maintain that non-episcopal ministries are no true ministries at all; that the ministers of those bodies which have cut themselves off from the channel of

which Christ's grace is transmitted to his Church in every age are simply laymen ; and that the sacraments which they purport to administer are no sacraments at all, though, of course, the uncovenanted mercy of God can be relied on to ensure that those who receive them in good faith as sacraments will not fail to receive a blessing. On this view it would be fully understandable that Anglicans should abstain from Communion where the celebrant was not episcopally ordained ; but to acknowledge that the sacraments of non-episcopalian churches are real, and that their ministries are real and efficacious and within the one, internally divided, Church, and yet to refuse to communicate at the hands of their ministers is indefensible if the reason for refusal is the maintenance of the principle that only an episcopally ordained minister can celebrate the Eucharist. The words and actions of Anglicans in these circumstances are contradictory. Anglicans are thus committed to a belief in the historic episcopate as the " essential ministry ", which many of them repudiate as warmly as do their non-episcopal brethren.

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The area of controversy is not now the same as that in which Gore and Hatch contended with each other. It is no longer possible to establish the Tractarian doctrine of episcopal succession, derived in unbroken continuity from the Twelve and acting as the divinely ordained channel of sacramental grace, on the basis of the positive results of historical inquiry. The New Testament writers and the Apostolic Fathers afford excellent evidence that in every part of the primitive Church an ordered ministry existed from the beginning and was regarded as a most important expression and focus of the unity of the Christian congregation in its life, worship, and doctrine ; but they show equally clearly that the threefold ministry came into existence at varying times in different local churches, that it was not until much later times that the principle of succession from the apostles came to receive emphasis (Ignatius, who makes such high claims for the bishop as the *persona* of the local community and the embodiment of its unity in Christ, never connects the episcopate with the apostles or regards the bishop's office as a continuation of the apostolate), and that at no time in the early Church was the " tactual " succession of episcopal ordination considered to be of supreme importance as the guarantee of the validity of sacraments. If the controversy is now limited to the field of strict historical inquiry into ministerial origins, the verdict can only be Streeter's, that " all have won and all shall have prizes ". On this basis, all that can be said is that in the early Church, ministerial order (which all Christians agreed to be necessary) took different forms in different circumstances and that the precise nature of these forms was held to be within the competence of the Church to develop and modify—a position not dissimilar from that which was maintained by such Anglican champions as Hooker against the Genevan doctrine that the actual form which ministerial order should take in every age is laid down by the Word of God.

The attempt of *The Apostolic Ministry* to reconstruct the Tractarian doctrine (which agreed with Hooker's Puritan opponents that a particular form of ministry is divinely prescribed for the Church, but differed

in that it held that it is episcopal and not presbyterian) on the basis of the implications of the word *apostolos* in relation to the Hebraic notion of *shaliach* may fairly be said to have collapsed, as such works as A. Ehrhardt's *The Apostolic Succession* have demonstrated. The primary question now does not concern the precise way in which the threefold ministry that became universal about the middle of the second century actually developed ; it is rather the problem of what is meant by priesthood and how priesthood is expressed and becomes effective in the continuing life of the Church. Once a greater measure of agreement can be reached on that subject we may have a firmer way of approach to the question of the reality of our existing ministries, of the scanty and obscure records of the early Church's organization, left to us by men who were not chiefly interested in the questions which most concern us today.

All Christian priesthood is derived from the unique priesthood of Christ Himself ; or rather, as one ought more properly to express it, all Christian priesthood is to be understood as modes of the operation, within the order of space and time, of the eternal and universal priesthood of Christ. The priesthood of the Church is not a different priesthood from that of Christ, nor is it a secondary priesthood. It is His own priesthood, exercised through the Spirit in the conditions of time and space in the community which is His Body. In the life, ministry (to the world), and worship of the Church the ascended Lord, through the Spirit, renews the effects of His finished work and applies them to successive generations of His people, bringing mankind as a whole within its scope. The Church, as the people of the new Covenant, inherits the vocation of the old Israel to be a " kingdom of priests " ; but its priesthood is more complete and more profoundly understood, being the priesthood of Christ exercised in the fellowship of His Body. Those who are incorporated into Him, so as to be " in Christ ", are necessarily participants, individually and collectively, in His priesthood ; for they are the covenant people who were representatively embodied in the solitary figure of the Son of man when He wrought out His saving work in death and resurrection. As His Body, the Church shares in the character of the Servant, and is the organ by which His own *diakonia* to the world at large is continually maintained and enlarged in its scope. As being " in Christ " it enters, through the operation of His Spirit, into His own self-dedication and obedience to the Father, and is brought within the scope of His perfect self-offering.

This is the priesthood of the Body ; the " priesthood of all believers ", not in a narrowly anti-clerical sense, or in a sense which virtually denies priesthood of any kind, but in the sense in which the whole Church is elected by God to the vocation of active priesthood. It is the priesthood of Christ, for the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the Church are one and the same and belong to Christ alone. It is true, of course, that the exercise of the one priesthood differs as between Christ in His earthly ministry and in His heavenly intercession, on the one hand, and Christ acting through the Spirit in the Body of His Church, on the other. Within the Church the priestly operation of Christ is inevitably affected by the fact that in the present order of things the Church is a sinful body. This necessarily differen-

tiates the mode of the operation of Christ's priesthood within the sinful (though justified) Church from its perfect exercise in the heavenly sanctuary and in the sinless body of Christ's earthly life.

With this important qualification, the Church's priesthood is one with the priesthood which Christ Himself exercises. The Church cannot, like Him, be the incarnation of God's Word to man ; in it the Word is not made flesh ; but it is the bearer to the rest of the world of God's Word which is Christ Himself. Its task is to make known God's self-revelation in Christ, and to express to man in general, in every department of His nature and life, the Gospel of the reconciliation of the universe to God in Christ. Through the Church as the priestly Body, God communicates His living and personal Word to men. Its first priestly task is thus the ministry of the word.

As the reconciling Word is spoken and heard, men are brought within the Body which participates by grace in Christ's self-offering of obedience to the Father. Christ exercises His priesthood in the Church by incorporating it into His own sacrifice and enabling it to share in His perfect offering which He made representatively for all men. In so far as it is constituted by Christ to be His Body, the Church is enabled by grace to offer the sacrifice of itself in Christ to God. Its life, ministry, and worship are therefore essentially priestly and sacrificial.

The Church is the sphere in which God's Word encounters man and where man's response to God's Word is given back in the Spirit. There is here the double priestly movement from God to man through the Church as the bearer of God's Word, and from man to God through the Church as the sacrificing Body, offering itself to God in life and worship by virtue of its incorporation into Christ the eternal priest. This double movement finds its most explicit and obvious expression in liturgical worship, and particularly in the Eucharist, where Christ renews the Church as His Body by communicating to it Himself to be its spiritual food, and where, by virtue of its reception of Christ's Body and Blood and the renewal of its incorporation into Him, it is enabled to offer, " in Christ ", the sacrifice of itself to the Father. This is the effective sacramental sign of a movement which is by no means confined to its liturgical expression but which pervades, and constitutes the essence of, the whole of, the Church's life and work. The priestly ministry of the Church, exercised in its life as a whole, is the focal point where God meets man and enables man, in his turn, to offer himself to God in the community which is " in Christ ".

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The Church thus exercises representatively a priesthood which properly belongs to all men as creatures of God. It represents the world as a whole, and its ministry is to the whole world, upon which it is its task to bring to bear the reconciliation effected by God in Christ. In the fulfilment of this representative priesthood it shares in Christ's own ministry of intercession. In prayer and action it brings the rest of the world before God. It is also entrusted with the exercise of Christ's ministry of healing and forgiveness. Within the Body of His Church Christ operates the same work of healing which He performed in His

earthly life. In part, this aspect of the whole Church's priesthood is focussed upon its special exercise by Christian doctors and psychiatrists. In a wider sense, however, it is the work of the community itself to minister healing through that deep fellowship which involves a real sharing of burdens, a genuine responsibility of the members of the Body for one another, and a participation in each other's suffering.

Within the Body, too, Christ acts in forgiveness, both as the word of reconciliation to God is proclaimed by the Church, collectively and individually, and as forgiveness is practised by its members towards one another and towards the rest of the world. Over and above the ministry of healing and forgiveness there remains the *diakonia* of Christ the Servant in its wider and more varied aspects. Here the priesthood of the Church is called upon to find expression in the many forms of service which together combine to abolish the distinction between the " secular " and the " sacred ", and, in ways which are often very far from being " ecclesiastical ", to extend the reconciliation wrought by Christ to the whole world.

The Church is constituted as the priestly Body of Christ through the operation of the Spirit acting by the medium of the Word and the Sacraments by which its life is initiated and sustained. By the Word and the Sacraments the Church is established as the people of the Covenant and the Body of Christ, and is consequently made to participate in His priesthood and to become the organ of that priesthood. Priesthood is conferred upon the Church's members in Baptism, and it is sustained in the Eucharist in which, by virtue of their Communion with their Lord, they exercise their priesthood in the liturgical self-offering of the Body " in Christ ". The priesthood of Christ is mediated through the entire Body and not through any one part of it in isolation from the rest. One cannot be a member of Christ and not a participant, through grace, in His priesthood.

So far as the individual members of the Church are concerned, this common priesthood is exercised and expressed in various modes. The numerous *charismata* mentioned in the New Testament are multiplied and become more complex in modern society. They are all alike, however, in being the means by which, according to the abilities and circumstances of each Christian, the work of ministry is carried on and so the priestly task of the Church towards the world in general is discharged. The call to share in the reconciling ministry of Christ is mediated in and through each Christian's " calling ". Each man's particular business, family responsibilities, and private and social relationships form the sphere in which he must work out and obey his Christian vocation to be a minister to the world of the reconciliation which was once and for all effected by Christ.

Ministry, then, in the broad sense, is the task of the Church as a whole in pursuance of its vocation to be the priestly people of the new Covenant. It is, as we are reminded in Eph. iv. 16, the " saints " collectively and in general who are called to perform the " work of ministry " by which the world is brought within the sphere of reconciliation. Within this common vocation and within the corporate priesthood of the Body as a whole, there is the special calling of the ordained Ministry.

This is one of the many particular callings through which the priesthood of the whole Church is exercised. Like all the others, it is a mode of the operation of the priesthood of Christ Himself. It priesthood, therefore, is no more a different or a secondary priesthood than is that of the Church collectively. It, too, is identical with the priesthood of Christ; hence it is identical with the Church's priesthood ; for they are one and the same thing, and there is no distinction between them. It is, however, a special mode of the operation of Christ's priesthood, different in the manner of its exercise from the various expressions of the same priesthood in what we commonly, but wrongly, call the " secular " callings.

This is not because the priesthood of the ordained minister involves the conferment upon him of special powers or quasi-magical authority. He is not empowered to act as a priestly individual, apart from the priesthood of the whole Church which is representatively exercised by him and, as it were, focussed upon him. He does not preach the Word as an individual apart from the Church—though too few, either among the clergy or the laity, really treat the ministry of the Word as a corporate act in which the whole congregation takes part along with the preacher : the laity more often takes up a purely passive role. Nor does he celebrate the Eucharist as a priestly individual, but as the representative upon whom, in this action, the priesthood of the whole Body is centred—though, all too often, the celebration is treated as though it were a private action of the priest at which the laity " assist " only by their presence : hence we have the obtrusion of the celebrant's private devotions into the corporate liturgy of the Church (whether in the form of the *praeparatio missae*, said by priest and server, or of " secret " material interpolated into the Canon, or of things done and said by the priest while the congregation are engaged in something else, or of other features of the " Anglo-Catholic " Eucharist which go so far to impoverish it as a corporate act of the Church). Nor does he administer Baptism as an individual, but as the representative agent and spokesman of the Church into which a new member is being incorporated. He does not even, ideally, act in his pastoral capacity as an isolated individual ; he is not, or ought not to be, merely a shepherd of sheep, but rather a leader of an active congregation of those who together with him and with each other exercise the love and care of Christ for their neighbours. When he declares the forgiveness of sinners, whether in public or private ministry, he does so, not by virtue of a mysterious power of absolution conferred on him as an ordained priest, but as the representative spokesman of the Church to which has been committed the saving Gospel of forgiveness. Absolution is one aspect of the total ministry of the word of reconciliation. It should be observed here that a misunderstanding of John xx. 23 has contributed powerfully to the emergence of a false doctrine of apostolic succession : the apostles were not given a special power of absolution to transmit to successors in their office, but were sent by the risen Christ to continue His own ministry of reconciliation, so that in their public and private proclamation of the Gospel they would bring to bear upon mankind the word of God's mercy and, where that is rejected, of God's judgment. It is, according to the Anglican Ordinal, in being a " faithful dispenser

of the Word of God and of His Holy Sacraments " that the priest exercises the divine authority to forgive and to retain sins.

It is not because he is singled out to be the recipient of special powers transmitted from the ministry of the lay members of the priestly Body. It is a peculiar ministry in that it stands in a special relationship towards the Body as a whole and towards its common priesthood. It is part of that common priesthood, on the one hand : a ministry *within* the Church ; on the other hand, it is also a ministry *towards* the whole Church, the organ by which the ascended Christ, through the Spirit, constitutes and sustains the life and priesthood of the whole Body. It is constitutive of the Church and at the same time it is included within the Church as a special form of the Church's exercise of its collective priesthood.

Just as the apostles were both the founders and the nucleus of the community which was to come into existence, so the regular ministry of the Church is at all times and in all its forms representative. The Ministry does not act as a substitute for the Church as a whole in its priestly work. It cannot function instead of the Church or in independence of the Church. It is representative of the whole Church, and it is the nucleus round which, through its specialized ministry of bringing the Church into being, the wider Body is built up. Just as the Church exists as a representative nucleus which is destined to bring the whole world within its scope, representing mankind in microcosm, yet not a substitute for the rest of the world, but rather its first-fruits, so the Ministry exists, not in an exactly parallel relationship to the Church as a whole, but at least as the core round which the Church is built up and the particular agency by which the impact of the whole Church upon the world is primarily effected. The Ministry is not different in its essential character from the rest of the priestly Body ; hence there is nothing holier or more intrinsically pleasing to God in the life of the ordained minister as compared with that of any other member of the Body. It does not do what the rest of the Church as such cannot do ; it is rather the representative agency by which the Church as a whole does what pertains to its corporate vocation as a priestly community. It is the representative organ of the whole Church's priestly ministry.

Since the Ministry is directed towards the whole Church as well as from within it towards the world, it follows that the ordained ministry is not merely the delegate of the community : that, in the language of the old controversy, it is appointed " from above " by Christ Himself, not " from below " by simple delegation from the congregation. It does not consist of a body of men to whom the rest of the community decides to delegate certain functions. It is appointed by the glorified Christ through the Spirit in His Body, and is given by Him to be the agency ordained by Himself, through which the special and constitutive ministration of the Word and Sacraments may be carried our representatively on behalf of the Church as a whole. The ministry of the ordained priesthood is not performed in isolation from the rest of the Body. It is a priesthood entrusted with the sole exercise of what belongs to the entire Body of which it forms a part, and which, in the discharge of its functions, it represents. All other ministries in the Body depend upon this, and could not exist without it ; but it is

exercised within a society that is itself priestly in its whole structure.

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If this view of priesthood is correct, the apostolic succession will be seen primarily as the continuing existence, in its priestly character, of the whole Body of the Church. This does, indeed, depend upon the ordained ministry which calls the Church into being, in every age, as the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments. But the Ministry does this as the organ of Christ, through the Spirit, not in an external relationship towards the Church as a whole, but from within it. Though the Church depends upon the Ministry, the continuance of the Ministry itself is dependent upon, and consequent upon, the continuity of the whole Church; and this continuity is maintained by the hearing and receiving of Christ in Word and Sacraments. The Church is not linked historically with an earthly "founder of Christianity" through the succession of ordained ministers. It is linked rather with its glorified Head here and now, in so far as the Head continually creates and renews His Body through the Spirit.

The Church must always have its ministers who declare the Word of the Gospel and administer the Sacraments; but there is no reason to suppose that any one particular form of ministerial order is constitutive of the Church. It is the Word and Sacraments that are constitutive of the Church, and to imagine that there is no Word or Sacrament except where the structure of the ordained ministry is of a certain kind is to exalt ministerial order as a sacrament above the Gospel Sacraments; it is to make the historic episcopate the primary element in the Gospel, without which there can be no contact between man and God through Christ.

Incidentally, it is odd to observe how the theology of the Word has been illegitimately separated from that of the Sacraments in this matter; no one seriously contends that the Word is null and void where it is preached by a non-episcopally ordained person, yet it is maintained that this is the case in respect of the Sacraments (though even here Baptism is excepted).

The function of the ancient form of ministerial order is to express and embody the unity and harmony of the Christian community rather than to constitute it. Anglicans of all schools of thought value the historic threefold ministry, and particularly episcopacy, as a means by which the unity of the Church in our land today with Christians in distant countries may potentially be expressed and demonstrated. It is also to be highly prized as a visible means by which the unity and continuity of the Church today with the Church in past centuries, up to its early years, may be tangibly shown forth. But to subordinate the Word and Sacraments to ministerial order is to put the cart before the horse. Today we are generally asked to treat the historic episcopate as the means by which the divided parts of Christendom are to be brought into unity. The reunited Church is to be constituted by the acceptance of the ancient ministerial order. When that has been done, and only then, we may hope to seal our unity in the Holy Communion.

The truth seems to be the opposite. The Sacrament of Holy Communion, with the proclamation of the Word, is the means of the grace of

unity, as of all other grace. When we have come together in faith and penitence at the Lord's Table we may hope to realize such a unity as can most fittingly and effectively be expressed in the unification of the ministry in terms of the historic episcopate.

In the meantime, a true doctrine of priesthood will enable us to acknowledge that the ministers of non-episcopal bodies are, no less than their episcopally ordained brethren, priests in the priestly Church of God, commissioned by Christ to exercise His own priesthood representatively within the community of the priestly people. We shall recognize that the doctrine of the ministry need not be a barrier to intercommunion; and we shall be increasingly reluctant to be committed, as Anglicans, to a position in which our Church too often seems to the rest of the world to be concerned with a gospel which is no gospel, a gospel of the grace of God in bishops.

The Church of England and Apostolic Succession

By Colin Buchanan

In his posthumously published work, Archbishop Benson wrote of the sacerdotal doctrine of episcopacy which Cyprian developed: "Was it then but an unconscious straining first of language, then of feeling, lastly of thought, which gradually warped with a hieratic distinction an office originally politic . . . or, was the belief a legitimate development of principles of the apostolic church . . . ? The alternative is an important one."[1] The alternative may be a simplification, and the choices more than two—but these two sketch the limit. Did the apostolic church contain within it the principles of episcopacy which have formed the platform of so many post-Tractarian Anglicans? The question is not a simple one and much clearing of the ground must precede the actual discussion of principles.

We must ask ourselves first, whether what *The Apostolic Ministry* calls the "Essential (as opposed to the 'Dependent') Ministry"[2] can be historically traced to the apostles. The book says it can, but Bishop Stephen Neill's comment is interesting: "Throughout, the reader has the disturbing feeling that the conclusions were reached before the evidence was considered, that a certain structure of thought has been imposed upon the facts . . . "[3] Awful gaps and changes occur in our first century evidence. We may well allow, however, that a ministry has existed since the apostles' time—that there were those "*quibus Apostoli tradiderunt ecclesiam*".[4] But does a fact imply a dominical or apostolic commandment? Bishop Headlam said that this apostolical