

The Pastoral Ministry

TH**ERE** is only one foundational Ministry in the Church of God. It is that which belongs to Jesus Christ and which He will never hand over to another. He exercised it in the days of his flesh as He moved through Galilee and Judaea preaching, teaching, making whole. He carried it through to consummation and completion as He surrendered Himself outside a city wall. He continues to discharge it in the heavenly places and, through the Spirit, here on earth. It is His. It remains His. No one can claim it from Him. The arrogance of those who would remove it into the hands of the whole Church acting through its priestly class is matched only by the arrogance of those who would remove it into the hands of the local church acting through its church meeting.

Yet this does not mean that the Church stands outside the Ministry of her risen and ascended Lord, or that He operates in a vacuum. The Church is related to His continuing Ministry, and that by way of participation. She shares in it, as she surrenders her life to Him to be ordered by His Spirit in christological correspondence. She is vessel. She is agent. She ministers solely but really on the ground of her incorporation into Christ.

But though this Ministry is one it is not to be understood in terms of an undifferentiated uniformity. The unity manifests its richness in diversity. The whole Church shares in the continuing Ministry of her Head. Yet within the whole Church there arise many ministries, according to the gift and call of God. The New Testament writings bear eloquent testimony to this necessary diversification, and demonstrate with impressive force that in every changing situation gift and call will adequately be matched to the need. Nevertheless, it seems equally clear that amid all the diversity there are two essential "ministries" that abide. Ministry is given, in the end, in order that the Church may be built up intensively and extensively. The Gospel must be taken to the world that the world may be brought to Christ. The Gospel must be applied to the Church that she may be the Church in truth and very deed.

The first of these tasks is clear. The second demands some further understanding. How is the Church built up and edified? We are not left to find our own solutions. The answer is given to us, decided for us. The ascended Lord works in the Church by His Spirit through His Word and His Sacraments. These are the appointed means of His coming, the essential means of His Ministry. So it is that within the Church, whatever occasional ministries rise and fall, one indispensable ministry abides and must remain. It is the

ministry of Word and Sacrament. It is the ministry of Christ Himself to the whole Church through those commissioned to it by the whole Church.

If we may now attempt to translate the whole discussion into terms of the local church situation, using the conventional if not altogether happy distinction of minister and laity, certain things surely become clear. There is distinction between the minister and the congregation, and that in two directions. In the first place, the minister is the visible focus and representative of the whole Body of Christ. He ministers in Word and Sacrament, and these are the possessions of no local fellowship, nor can the ministration of them be imparted to any man at the purely local level. But in the second place, he has a ministry which differs radically from that of his congregation. Here we must refer once more to the two essential ministries of the Church of Christ. The one is for the bearing of Christ to the Church, the other is for the bearing of Christ to the world. The one is for the building up of the Church intensively, the other is for the building up of the Church extensively. The one is accomplished by Word (*kerygma*) and baptism. The other is accomplished by Word (*paraklesis*) and supper. Thus it is that there are but two ordinations. There is ordination to the laity, which is to the service of the world. There is ordination to the ministry, which is to serve the Church.

Now clearly the fact that a man is ordained to the ministry does not make him any less a layman. He remains a baptised member of the People of God (*laos*). Therefore the duty of carrying the Gospel to the world remains his privilege and his responsibility. But unless he also has the gift and call belonging to the "ministry" of evangelist, he bears the Gospel to the world as layman not as minister. There is more involved here than a quarrel over terms. The issue of the properly committed use of time and energies is at stake. The layman who practised "evangelism" or discharged "church" work to the detriment of his professional vocation would need to ask himself some serious questions about Christian obedience. Similarly, the minister who finds himself neglecting the vital duty of his professional calling because he is engaged overmuch in other enterprises, however "Christian" they may be, needs to search his soul and face afresh the realities of ordination and vocation.

If all this seems somewhat laboured and unnecessary introduction to speaking of the Pastoral Ministry, no excuse need be offered. The noun must be understood if the adjective is rightly to illumine. It might appear that we have already by definition excluded pastoral work from the ministerial calling; but the very reaching of this conclusion would be the clearest indication of how catastrophically the real understanding of pastoral ministration can be lost. To add to the word "ministry" the word "pastoral" is in fact to add

nothing at all. It is mere repetition. For pastoral work is not one side or one aspect of the minister's task. It is his ministry.

How can this be? Because pastoral work is never to be understood simply in terms of the giving of solace and help in time of sorrow and trouble. To say that the ministry is in Word and Sacrament is at once to define in what pastoral ministration consists. The minister does not possess two separate tasks, duties, responsibilities—the one to celebrate Word and Sacrament, the other to exercise pastoral care. He is pastor always and only as he bears Word and Sacrament to his people, bringing to them the means of God's recreative grace that will perfect them for their own lay work of ministry.

In so far as this comprehension has been lost or has ceased to inform practice in any living way, it is because pastoral theology no longer has any real existence among us. And once pastoral theology is lost, there are only two substitutes that remain. The one is psychology; the other is pastoral technique. Apart from native intelligence and Christian compassion, these are probably the only tools left to many a minister today.

So we must begin again, this time from a theological perspective. For once the substance of the ministerial task has been lost sight of and its unity has been fragmented, pastoral work inevitably becomes narrowed in meaning. But the reality of the matter is surely this. The minister has but one task, yet it is carried out in two ways. From first to last he bears the Word and the Sacrament. To the corporate gathering he ministers in Word and Sacrament week by week. To the individual he ministers in Word and Sacrament day-by-day. The first of these we call worship. The second of them we call pastoral ministration. But it is a double expression of one and the same task, a double application of one and the same reality.

Pastoral work is then to be understood and defined as the application and extension to the individual of Word and Sacrament. How is this carried out? Does it really hold? Not, of course, in a wooden literalistic sense. We are not to imagine the ministerial task as the carrying from house to house of bread and wine and sermon. Yet curiously enough it is in the lingering practice of taking the sacrament to the sick that part of the essential truth about pastoral ministry is still visibly portrayed. Still it is clear that it is in the taking of the Word to individuals or to families that the major part of this task will consist. Does the minister still know what he is about? And do his people?

If we allow that this sense is still in the heart of many a minister, we may yet have to add that it is likely to be crippled and impaired whenever and wherever the intuition of the unity of worship and visitation has been lost. Sunder this unity theologically and soon it is sundered practically. Sunder it practically, and before long men

will be found casting around for some means of tying visitation and worship together once more. Then characteristically the first emphasis is likely to be on making the weekly sermon reflect the visitation. We shall be exhorted to let our pastoral calls influence, perhaps provide material for, our sermons. No heresy in that! But profoundly dangerous if the matter rests there. For this is to start at the wrong end. Certainly there must be interplay. Certainly the minister who spends time in his people's homes and his people's hearts is most likely to speak on Sunday to their condition. Yet still it must be insisted that the prior movement is not from visitation to worship but from worship to visitation. To understand the nature of the ministerial task is to understand that pastoral care is the Word made individual. Visitation is the point at which the sermon becomes particularised. To apprehend this is to grasp the only true answer to the complaint that sermons are not specific enough and do not spell out the concrete path and situation.

In this light pastoral visitation becomes an inescapably positive task. The minister comes to his people as a Father in God bearing a Word that is not his own. The dimension of spiritual direction becomes present, though never in a falsely assertive sense that would do despite to the true freedom of the Christian man. Because his task is guiding, building, shepherding, he cannot interpret his pastoral ministry in terms of sickness, sadness, and crisis. These terms indeed register situations where he may become pivotal, but he will see them rather as bold strokes on a page whose content would be relatively meaningless apart from the unobtrusive writing ever preceding and following. So it is that the minister will see continuing pastoral care as ever more fundamental, and may come to estimate the urgent need for the recreation of a viable lay pattern of devotion.

To say all this is to say nothing less than that everything depends upon a firm base in pastoral theology being available. This is the heart of the contemporary dilemma. Not only do the Free Churches lack a pastoral theology, but it may be adjudged doubtful as to whether they have yet even awakened to the fact of its absence. There are signs and stirrings, isolated expressions of unease, but no indication whatever of a widespread recognition of the lack or girding to the task. Yet this is one of the crucial keys to ministerial frustration.

Commonsense and techniques will take us part of the way. To demand a theological rooting is not to assert that we are to move within a close and rarefied theological circle. We need psychology, and we need it desperately, though perhaps for rather different reasons than we are accustomed to imagine. All the resources of modern knowledge and understanding relative to the human personality, its wholeness and its impairment, must be pressed into ser-

vice. We cannot expect to do the work of the twentieth century with the tools of the eighteenth. But neither can we rest content with confusing disease with sin, and counselling with confession. The minister has his own unique ministry to discharge to humanity. Unless both he and his people are clearly aware of wherein it finally consists, he should not be surprised if they take their needs elsewhere (or fail to recognise them) while he remains perplexed as to what he was really commissioned to do.

It may fairly be objected that we have to deal with the situation as it is not as we would like it to be. It may reasonably be argued that even if the theory be sound it is virtually impossible to put it into practice, given things as they are. The climate of opinion and expectation among the laity has changed radically since the days of our forefathers. Pastoral visitation is inevitably a quite different thing from what it used to be. We cannot turn the clock back—or the television set off. New ways must be found, new methods practised, new approaches enjoined. It may be so. All this may be true. In that event it is another pointer to the immensity of the task that lies ahead. But we must still get our priorities right. If we adjust, then it must be from a controlling perspective, and that perspective must be a theological one. The alternative is to drift aimlessly, completely at the mercy of the times. The minister has first to recapture the clear sense and understanding of that in which his ministry consists. Then he must be given a meaningful and contemporary pastoral theology with which to operate. The theology itself will not be worked out in the air. In its formation the new knowledge and the new situation will alike play a necessary part. But the control will and must remain the one unchanging Gospel and the one unvarying ministerial commission. We have learned to say: Let the Church be the Church. Perhaps it is time we began to say with relentless seriousness: Let the Minister be the Minister.

N. CLARK

* * *

BRITISH BAPTISTS IN IRELAND, 19th CENTURY

Does any reader know if the Minutes of the Baptist Irish Society are still extant? They are needed for enquiries regarding the educational interests and efforts of British Baptists in Ireland during the 19th century. Any information on this subject or on the whereabouts of the Minutes will be gratefully received by the editor.