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The Fraternal

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Frankly Speaking

A 1984 Presidential eye-view of the Denomination

Explanation

In case you are wondering why I should have the temerity to write to such an august body of my peers, let me hurry to explain that the editor (who is bigger than I am and persuasive with it) asked me to write down some personal impressions of our denomination which I have gleaned by travelling the land as the Baptist boyo for one year.

“Share your feelings on where we are and where we might usefully go . . .” said the editor. Now notice that last bit – clever lad is Mike: – not ‘where we are going’ but “where we might usefully go”. To do this I’d better begin with where I went seven and a half years ago and to be brutally frank (no comment) I’m not sure just how useful the going was.

Wider Ministry

From the moment I settled as the Pastor at Purley in 1966 I had never been more fulfilled in my life. Sundays were bliss, the work exciting and I couldn’t get back from holidays soon enough – honestly! In 1976 the quiet alarm bells began to ring when I had that feeling that I was being loosened up by being offered several opportunities which came out of the blue, to become either one of the establishment people or some kind of “Southern Baptist – Y’all”. Well at that time quite another direction began to beckon and the reason I am going on about it now in such a personal way is because of the numbers of men who mentioned to me in polite conversation and just in passing, that they would love to do something similar themselves. Even those who had no intention of following my pattern were nevertheless pondering the pros and cons of putting the whole traditional concepts of Baptist ministry into the melting pot, stirring it up and pouring it out into newly-shaped moulds . . . and there’s the rub. The shape which I opted for was one which attempted to develop the Bible teaching ministry in a local Church so that the ministry became wider than one pulpit, one people and one pastorate. To implement this, those who believed in it began to form a charitable trust in conjunction with the enthusiasm of the Church so that another Minister could be appointed as pastor. The Trust would employ me and I would have the freedom to try and expand the teaching ministry while remaining part of the ministry of that local Church. The aim was to teach lay people especially those who would never go to College, to teach the Bible. We were offering no certificates nor diplomas and the courses were as flexible as people are different. I could go to them or they could come to us. We had a special burden for the non-readers, for as one who had never read a book until he was 23, I did understand that background. It was hoped to begin to develop ways of teaching essentially Biblical concepts and messages through all the channels possible, including perhaps radio and television, while still remaining earthed and rooted in the local Church where I was listed as Minister-at-large. This was one minute experimental attempt to break out of the traditional mould of ‘one-pastor-one-people’ mentality in the struggle to develop more effective shapes of ‘local’ ministry.

That was in September 1977 and here I am, seven and a half years later going back into the Pastorate . . . or rather ON INTO THE PASTORATE to try and re-develop the concept of wider ministry with some necessary changes to that original structure which proved to have some small but devastating flaws. The fresh structure should include the continuing use of any gifts of leadership I may have within the local Church and eventually trust the willingness and ability of Church members to grasp the difference between *wider* ministry rooted locally and *itinerant* ministry without roots. Church members and even ministers often find team ministries or multiple leadership structures too demanding to live with.

Misunderstandings which abound about such 'untraditional' ministries have ranged from Christians who have seen them as God-given dreams to help re-shape our ministry for the 21st century, to the brother minister who as we left Ernest Payne's Memorial Service at Westminster Abbey asked me how I could possibly justify my existence, having no pastoral responsibility . . . being such a lazy parasite! I was tempted to explode, then to explain but all I could say was, "Judge not, mate!" and have often had to resist the temptation to lie abed fantasising on what I felt like saying if I had had the wit to think of it at the time! If only that brother had known the wilderness of loneliness and depression through which we were trudging endlessly, he might have just said, "Hello, mate" which would have been a cup of water in the desert. Nevertheless, the number of brethren who have shared with me their desire to change the patterns of ministry and leadership in a Baptist Church has led me to raise this matter here. It is true that there is a crying need to re-shape our concepts of ministry but it is a task requiring more preparation, education, patience and time than many of us will give to it. Church members who do not see or will not see the need for full-time ministries in evangelism, pastoral counselling, administration, etc. will not only refuse to rise to their support but will resist the vision and the demanding processes which could lead their Church into wide, deep and far-reaching ministry. All ministers genuinely called into pastoral leadership should consider very carefully and prayerfully any idea of abandoning the pastoral ministry for some more specialized form of service. If it is the sheer weight of routine administration and pastoral responsibility which is frustratingly preventing a man from fully exercising his particular gifts, then the way forward might well be in remaining as pastor and at the same time discovering, appointing and training gifted lay people to discover and fulfil their ministries, thus allowing more freedom for the pastor to do, what the Church fully agrees, is his God-given thing and theirs! Sheer frustration with members who were 'steadfast but immovable' has led some of our brethren to shift their ground from wanting to be minister to be master, from being slave of all to dictator of all, from being under authority to being the authority, but then the lust for priestly power is no new temptation.

House and Church

Not only in matters of ministry but also in Church organisation is there a radical change taking place from purely congregational patterns, with its pale copies of Sunday services repeated ad nauseam all through the week, through endless women's meetings, men's meetings, youth meetings, children's meetings, deacons' meetings, committee meetings and meetings to plan more meetings, to

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the house prayer group or cell structure. The growth of the House Church (one in fourteen of all the Christians in Great Britain now belongs to a House Church) and the growth in popularity in other Churches of house and nurture groups has indicated that when developed with careful thought and loving care this method of fellowship is popular and fruitful. A well-led house group can become a school of prayer, a spiritual workshop where spiritual gifts are discovered and developed, it can be a pastorally-caring fellowship, and it can make available a Christian 'family life' for every Christian.

I long to see the house group principle carried further so that every member of Church and congregation be expected, even required, to belong to a *discipleship* group where people do not only have fellowship but *become* fellowship and learn together 'on-the-job'. In other words, the aim is not academic study but in practical Christian obedience to become spiritually equipped by being and doing together the word and work of the Lord Jesus. After all, His method of teaching the most unlikely lads was by making them His disciples in which they learned by being together with Him and then doing it on-the-job. (Mark 3 v. 13-19 is always worth careful study).

Having said this I worry about Churches which jump on the house group band-waggon as if meeting in a house were a cure-all, when all they are doing is attending matey meetings and informally discussing being Christians instead of being disciples. In my view, the key to the healthy growth of discipleship development in a local Church is in the *leadership* of the groups. The group leaders themselves naturally become the Pastors' or the Church's growth group which meets together regularly so that all the groups and cells develop in harmony and although different, in unity. No matter how few the number of leaders to begin with, when vision is transmitted through them groups deepen and grow. This means that the Sunday services are free to become real celebratory occasions different from all the other meetings and activities which brings us to the big issue facing so many of our Churches.

Arms up or eyes down?

We would be flattering ourselves far too much to claim that the differences were mainly theological. I do not minimise the different emphases many Baptists make when expounding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit but I see the real division in a much less respectable area. To me, the problem is in the sin of divisiveness which increasingly polarizes sincere Christian people. This sin uses even the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as fuel for its fire. The charismatic movement could claim to be the great unifier having crossed all denominational barriers and brought into an experiential oneness Christians who for centuries have been poles apart; for example, Roman Catholics and Protestants, evangelicals and liberals, high Churchmen and low. For many ordinary people it has come as a GALE of fresh air from God, blowing away the graveclothes of formal religion and shaking the foundations of deadening institutional rigmarole. That attraction will grow stronger not weaker in the next decade. Nevertheless, all reactionists tend to react too far in the other direction and in this case do not only blow through the house but blow the house down leaving some timid, homeless and hurt believers now hostile to any movement which might cause them further damage. Let's be clear about this, it is not the Holy Spirit who is divisive. He is not the spirit of timidity

and fear but of power and love and self-discipline (according to 2 Timothy I v. 7). I know that does not mean keeping the peace at any price for all true Church growth involves pruning and pain. Yet from our personal experience, driving back to London on Sunday nights from all points of the British compass, we have reflected on those services where, for example, the congregation seemed to us to have been too cold even to sit together, too afraid even to say 'Amen', too withdrawn to greet each other warmly, and apparently hostile to any idea that they were there to do any more than listen for an hour. We've often thought, if we lived in that town we wouldn't want to belong to that Church even if it were the only Baptist Church in town. We have also driven back – much later – from freewheeling, foot-stamping, hand-clapping, aisle-dancing, chorus-repeating, miracle-expecting gatherings which has often left us warmed and grateful but uneasily concerned about so many other things of the Spirit which were not included and the fear that spontaneity had become the test of orthodoxy.

In case that sounds unkind let me add that the movement to greater informality in Christian worship appears to have affected all denominations throughout our land, and I for one am delighted whenever people discover that it is not a sin to enjoy God and that real worship is dynamic encounter and never boring. This should not blind us to the fact that even the most unstructured worship nevertheless has a shape or 'running order' which is stimulated by subconscious 'triggers' which, those sensitive to that ethos, recognise and to which they respond as if 'out of the blue'. Such group activities are well known to the students of group dynamics and even to jazz musicians. Neither is it a hostile gesture to acknowledge that like some hymns, some choruses are musically rubbish and linguistic disaster areas and sung as mood music to create atmosphere or in showbiz terms, "It's warmup time, folks!"

We have sometimes driven back home disturbed by the cliques which looking over their shoulders have said goodnight to us whispering their prejudices about the dead traditionalists resisting all spiritual progress in their Church or "we have a group of charis-maniacs here who are ruining our Church". What we longed to do was to love both sets enough to bang their hard heads together about the sin of divisiveness and then bang our own heads together for mistaking our uninvolvedness for spiritual balance.

I am happy to say that sometimes we have driven home rejoicing in the glow of having worshipped in God's family in the spirit of reverence, reality and love, and knowing that miracles had happened and would continue to happen. All this may look as if we were guilty of judging others but the brief was to look at "where we might usefully go". So, in worship I would say we should pray for the desire to grasp something of what Jesus meant by His only two guidelines for worshipping, namely, in spirit and in truth. This surely must include unfettered praise and adoration, full opportunities for response to God's giving of Himself, opportunity to repent, confess and be assured of God's forgiveness, time to listen and learn from the Word and also to express our love for each other, time to minister to each other's needs in His strength . . . Alright, who said it could all be done in one hour flat? Speaking of things taking time to develop, all too often the brittle resistance to change amongst Church Members is because we have not taken the time to explain clearly nor allowed enough time for them to come to terms with innovations. Leadership must be ahead but never out of sight. Incidentally, when

are our Churches going to take the ministry of music seriously enough to provide training and opportunities for our musically gifted people, to expand the vistas of our worship? No, I do not mean occasionally using the guitar instead of the organ. I mean exploring the vistas which open up when music is seen as a ministry involving possibly full-time responsibility for those with the gift-mixture of music and leadership. The vistas include the stimulating of congregational singing 'with full heart and voice', so that praise might become a rapture and not a routine. Intermittent enthusiasts can be invited to become a festival choir for each special celebration; small specialized ensembles to bring their offerings of song, word and movement; training of specialist interest groups be they male voices, children, young people, 'folk-praise' or whatever. The only limit to the vision is the role of music itself, as an expression and channel of worship and not the object of worship. Now I have a confession to make. I was tempted to say at the start that where we might usefully go was *into the world* as God's working model of the just, loving and serving community. Although that is where the Church is called to go I realised that I would be immediately wading into the angry ocean of social and political turmoil where the need is so vast and deep and the waves so mountainous that I fear for all but the strongest swimmers. In any case, perhaps we should be building ships which can not only survive but chart that sea.

The reason why I have referred only to some of the domestic Church items is quite deliberate. It arises from the ever-growing conviction that it is not that God's people have withdrawn from the world because they are 'too holy'. The world has withdrawn from us because we are not holy enough! We need to be in the world but 'if the salt has lost its savour . . .'

I know it sounds pious but the primary place, no, the only place, where we all might usefully go is God! 'To know Him better', as St. Paul says, or even to know Him slightly might be the most revolutionary trip for so many of us activists. Unless we go there we have nothing to offer a world wounded to death save a 'form of godliness but denying the power . . .' The Lord might well be saying to us, 'I've seen your ministry and your work, now let me show you mine.' The going out must be preceded by our giving in.

The place of repentance, confession, renewal and resurrection is the place where we must go if we are to go anywhere else except into the wilderness of busyness. It is there that we see, even before the needs of a hungry, bleeding world, the symptoms of our own paralysis. We can analyse the problems but we cannot work our way out of them. We can't stage-manage what really needs to be done. In our blindness we do not see fellow Christians except as different shaped labels which we then use as our tribal 'cheer' and 'boo' words. It is from that perspective that we need to re-examine our entire denominational life, not to justify the soundness of our defences but to 'hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches'. Perhaps He is saying things to us about our crying need for leadership in our local Churches. By leadership I mean the God-given charisma or gift which can create flexible structures of confidence in which the other body gifts are discovered, developed and deployed in co-ordination at the command of the brains – or head – who is Jesus!

By leadership I do not mean a lust for power, still less a thirst for authority which seems to dominate by demanding unstinted obedience from 'the flock' under the misuse of the word submission without the corresponding submission to their

fellow-members. The Bible always demonstrates mutual submission in love in which the gift of leadership is never confused with authority. After all no Christian has authority although it can have him! Time has failed me to tell of 'Church Meetings' when what is meant by that term describes anything from an obligatory session in which elders tell the Church members what they have decided is good for them to the "Question Time" debate to be settled by a show of hands – (admittedly it was an unlearned cynic who said that democracy is two Greek words meaning mob rule!) The Church Meeting is not a papal audience nor is it a "Parliamentary" party battle ground. It is the family of God rejoicing in its response to visionary and loving leadership, in worship, in prayer and in mutual submission to each other under God. A strong Biblical case can be made out for a plurality of leadership and different levels of leadership for both structured and less obviously structured worship but no case can be made for a Church whose members will accept membership but only on their own terms and who see the Church as theirs and not His!

I often wonder where the Spirit is directing us as a Union of Churches. Perhaps as a denomination we need to re-examine our annual Assembly which is neither as deliberative as most would like nor as inspirational as those nation-wide gatherings which draw all ages by the thousands to such places as the Dales, Greenbelt or Spring Harvest. Yes, I know the official explanation and I have used all the defensive reasons myself but what I am asking now is what is the Spirit saying to us as a denomination? The same question could be asked by Associations, districts and Ministers' Fraternals which are written off by some of our men as a waste of time, but as brethren we need to share with each other (also across the denominational lines) dropping all pretence and admitting our common needs and sharing our deepest given insights. That kind of brotherhood can never be a waste of time. Question: Where might we usefully go? Answer: Into "honest, penitent, expectant quest for more of God" (as he who once was known as grim Jim and now sparkling Packer puts it – Page 228, 'Keep in step with the Spirit') "which is always the taproot of all spiritual renewal".

All this and I have not mentioned our B.U. Council, our management structures, our overworked Headquarters staff which once appointed is all too often treated as 'them' and not 'us and ours', all this and not a word about our system of communications designed for and by the Victorians which does not fit our age very well.

All this and not a word about baptism, the Biblical doctrine of which scares most Baptists to death. The Bible is somewhere else we might usefully go to re-examine baptism there but that could be quite a painful journey. I suppose that where we might usefully go is forward together towards the 21st century, illuminated not with the romantic optimism of a mindless tribalism, nor the worldly wise pessimism that 'we've seen it all before', but with every one of us who is called by Jesus to serve, to prepare for and pray for a more profound spiritual awakening than anything God has ever given. Now you say, 'But you are asking for a miracle of enormous magnitude'. Precisely!

F. COOKE.

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Ministry and Ordination

Consider the following incidents, which are not altogether uncommon in our Baptist churches today. A Minister re-names himself as an 'elder' and affirms that he is simply one among a group of elders set apart by the congregation. A person who has recently received theological training invites a group of elders from his home church to ordain him as Minister in his first pastoral charge. Yet another person, who believes himself called to the ministry, declares that he has received the gift of an evangelist, and so this is the gift he will exercise in the local church; he explains that his elders will exercise other gifts such as teaching. A local church has among its members a deacon who has shown qualities of spiritual leadership and pastoral care; so the church meeting decides to set him apart, without wider recognition and further training, as the associate Minister of the church. All these cases, different as they are, seem to challenge the notion of 'ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament' in the way it has come to be held in our churches of the Baptist faith and order.

Now, we must certainly expect the Holy Spirit of God to disturb our established structures and to inspire new patterns of ministry for new times. It is clear from a study of the life of the early church in the New Testament that there was no single fixed pattern of ministry. For example, it appears that in the Corinthian church no leaders were appointed at all for some time, but instead the whole congregation exercised gifts (charismata) as they were needed; in Jerusalem, by contrast, from the beginning there seems to have been a group of elders on the pattern of the Jewish synagogue. Between these two extremes, in other churches there were people who exercised charismatic gifts in such a regular way that they were recognised as "prophets and teachers". However, by the end of the first century a two-fold appointment to leadership had gradually appeared in most places, consisting of "bishops" (**episkopoi**) or "elders" (**presbuteroi**) on the one hand, assisted by "deacons" (**diakonoi**) on the other; there was still no tidy system as the more spontaneous leadership of "prophets" and "teachers" remained active as well. ¹ The fact that forms of spiritual leadership varied from place to place in New Testament times ought to make us wary of simply claiming that any pattern, however much sanctioned by tradition, must bind us today.

It is, of course, ironic that much of the protest nowadays against the traditional idea of 'ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament' is made on the basis that there **is** a single New Testament pattern which must be recovered; this is often conceived to be a team ministry of elders. However, if we are alert to the defects of this simple account of the matter, we should be the more ready to accept change where change is needed. We should also not forget that the experience of the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God by Christian communities, in the earliest times and through the ages since, has resulted in some important principles about the shape of ministry. Being aware of diversity does not mean that there is mere chaos, or that there is nothing which scripture and tradition can teach us about the ordering of the ministry. With all this in mind we ought to look again at the idea of 'ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament', to see what validity it has for us today.

1. The Call to a Way of Being

'Ordination' carries the meaning of being appointed to an 'order' or an 'office' of spiritual leadership. It is here that Baptist alarm bells may begin to start ringing. Some Baptists have always been uncomfortable about 'ordination', and have preferred a word like 'commissioning' which lays stress upon the task. One often hears it said that Ministry is not an office, but a function. Quite rightly, Baptists have preserved the New Testament vision of the ministry of the whole Christian community, each member having his own function according to the gifts bestowed upon him by the Spirit of God. In the 'priesthood of all believers', every member shares in the ministry of reconciliation which God has granted to the whole Body of Christ on earth. God calls each believer to share in the winning back of a rebellious world to the purpose which its Creator has for it, and to take part in the healing of personalities both inside and outside the Christian community. In recent years this picture of 'every member ministry' has been increasingly accepted in all the Christian denominations, and there has been a proper concern to discover and release the gifts (**charismata**) of all Christian disciples.

But I venture to suggest that the absolute separation often made between 'function' and 'office' is a mistaken one. It is true that during church history the idea of 'order' or 'office' has been taken in the sense of privileged status or rank. It has also been understood as denoting a kind of instant and irreversible transformation of the being of a person. Ordination has sometimes been presented as a kind of spiritual injection by which the ordinand becomes a new species called 'clergy'. In reaction against this there has been a swing towards stressing the functions which an ordained Minister performs, a move which fits in with our modern concern with the learning of 'skills' and 'techniques'. So a Minister may nowadays be defined as someone who has been set aside from other occupation to practise skills such as pastoral counselling and even man-management. Now, while the learning of skills is important, we make a bad mistake if we think that 'doing' can be separated from 'being'; we become the kind of person we are through what we do, and conversely the kind of person we are shapes our doing. The idea of 'office' alerts us to the dimension of sheer 'being'. While there can be no instant and indelible change of being, there is a formation of a certain kind of personality or character to which some in the church are called by Christ. They are summoned to be the sort of person to whom others can relate as, for instance, their pastor and teacher. Ordination points to a place of leadership within the church where some are called to be, a manner of life which some are called to take up. The position of leadership is there; we do not have to strive for it by exerting our personalities or winning acclaim. We have been summoned into it, and we can learn humbly what it means to live and work within it. It is as if Christ says to us, "Take this role upon you and learn from me".

The New Testament record shows us that ministerial office like this gradually emerged, in addition to the exercise of spiritual gifts by the whole community. Though many members could exercise gifts such as prophecy,

teaching and healing, the community also began to appoint spiritual leaders called 'elders' (**presbuteroi** — a Jewish title) or 'overseers' (**episkopoi** — a Gentile title); they also appointed 'deacons' (**diakonoi**) to help them. From the human point of view we could say that the community found the need for a stable leadership; but it is also clear that they believed Christ was actually calling people to this **episkope** and **diakonia** through his Spirit. These offices of leadership were established by the call of Christ and recognition of the call by the community. They focused and summed up the ministry of the community and so must be set aside by it, but at the same time they had been raised up by an act of divine grace to challenge the community with the Word of the risen Lord. Using a modern jargon, they received their appointment both "from above" and "from below". Though these leaders, like all the other members, obviously exercised certain gifts, they could not take leadership upon themselves by virtue of their gifts, but had to be appointed by Christ and their fellow members.

We are going on to ask what functions the **episkopoi** or **presbuteroi** exercised in New Testament times and what they should be doing now, but we must not miss the point that there was something open-ended about their activity. They were not appointed merely on the basis of certain gifts, but because they had also been called to pastoral oversight, and the form of that task must obviously vary from age to age. In the terms in which have just been discussing it, they had been called into a way of being. We ought not then to be embarrassed about the idea of an 'order' of ministers, to which ordination points. The simple distinction between 'clergy' and 'laity' is, however, probably unfortunate, since it contracts the 'ways of being' within the church into two basic classes, which is bound to result in ideas of rank; here the church was perhaps unduly influenced by the distinction in Roman society between the **Ordo** and the **plebs**, which Tertullian first popularised within church life. We must surely affirm that all are the people ("plebs") of God, but within the people there are different functions which are bound up with ways of life and being.

2. The Apostolic Succession

The New Testament shows us that a powerful impetus towards the development of the offices of leadership in the local church was the dying out of the generation of Apostles. The 'Apostles', who became a much wider group than the original 'Twelve', seemed to have exercised oversight in the churches which they had founded through their own missionary work. In several places in the New Testament, the local church leaders (called either elders or bishops) are presented as inheriting the ministry of the Apostles, not in the strict sense of being directly appointed by them, but in terms of function.² What the early Apostles had done in bearing witness to the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus, they were now to do for their churches. Of course, the whole community stood in the Apostolic succession because it carried on the Apostolic faith. But the leaders were to take special responsibility for passing on and guarding the faith, and for guiding the church into **being** the Apostolic community.

This witness to the Apostolic faith carried by the leaders had two basic dimensions, reflecting the ministry of the Apostles themselves: it had, we might say, **length** and **breadth**. Its length was in going back to the earliest days of witness to Christ, and its breadth was in being in contact with the universal church as the whole Body of Christ. The Apostles witnessed to the appearances of the risen Christ who had been crucified, and they were in contact with the wider church beyond the local scene; they could guide their own local communities out of this wider perspective, admonishing them as did Paul that 'we recognise no other practice, nor do the churches of God'. (1 Cor. 11:16). Surely there is a basic principle here which underlies all the different forms which **episkope** (oversight) might take from age to age: the local church needs someone to stand in the succession of the Apostle as a guardian of the faith and as a representative of the universal church which holds the faith.

It is in this context that we speak of ordination to the ministry of word and sacrament. It is fitting and necessary that the leader who is called to have **episkope** (oversight) should normally exercise the ministry of word and sacrament, because these are the means by which he represents the faith of the universal church in all its length and breadth to the local scene. Through his study of the bible, the story of the church through the ages, and the situation of the world-wide church today, he has come to know the faith of the people of God in all the length and breadth of time and space through which God has led it and in which God has spoken his word to it. From that perspective he can proclaim the word of God into the local situation in which he and the community find themselves, and he can call that community to take its place in the wider mission of the church in the world today. All that he does, in teaching or pastoral care, is from the perspective of the universal church as the whole Body of Christ, and so it widens the vision of those in the local scene. He normally presides at the Lord's table and offers the great prayer of thanksgiving, because the table is not simply that of the local church, but is a table of fellowship with the church universal and triumphant. Quite early on in the life of the church we find that the local **episkopos** offered the prayer on behalf of all: the prayer was actually that of the whole community, and they asked for the help of the Holy Spirit for their minister to sum up the prayer of all. The Minister is also the one who administers baptism because the candidate is being received into the One Body of Christ which takes form in the Church throughout the world. Furthermore, in both sacraments he is handing on the tradition of the faith (1 Cor. 11:23), just as he does in the word of proclamation.

It is essential that we grasp the context of the idea of 'ministry of word and sacrament', because it allows for some flexibility and openness in understanding these functions of the local minister or **episkopos**. The call is to the office of **episkope**, which is a call to **be** as well as to **do**, but we can identify a basic part of the 'doing' as representing on the local scene the faith of the universal Church of Christ in its length and breadth. The Minister thus guides and equips all the members of the local community in their ministry of reconciliation in the world. All this means that there is some open-endedness about the way the **episkopos** fulfills his functions; teaching the faith and



WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

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Dear Fellow Ministers,

Throughout the 25-and-a-bit years of my ministry, I have always been what is sometimes called "a fraternal man". I have enjoyed attending fraternals, reunions, retreats and assemblies and, usually, delighted in the company of my fellow ministers! Seriously though, I am sure that I have gained more than I can say from the fellowship of the ministry, and I dare to hope that in some small way I have been able to contribute to it.

I am particularly grateful for three things that have come to me through the fellowship of my brethren and sisters. *First*, a sense of *perspective*. It is all too easy in the ministry to think that the world begins and ends with one's own church. Perhaps it is because we like being big fish in little ponds, and we find it threatening to admit that we are very small fry in the vast ocean of the church of God. There is, of course, just such a temptation in the work I now do. The Superintendency of the West Ham Central Mission makes very considerable demands upon one's energy, ingenuity and faith, and sometimes one almost forgets the hundreds of churches and the thousands of believers who are with us in our desire to serve our fellow man and to glorify God. Without you and your churches we could not continue to exist, nor should we want to!

Second, I have valued tremendously the *understanding* that I have received from my fellow ministers. We all need to know that we are not alone in the service of Christ, and that there are those who, because of their calling and their insight, understand the temptations and the demands as well as the opportunities that come to us in our ministry. We at the Mission have had the privilege of lending a sympathetic ear and such counsel as we can offer to ministers and their families in difficulty or crisis; but this is a two-way process. Time and time again we have been encouraged as friends have assured us that they stand with us in the gospel, and support us in the work that we are trying to do for Christ and the Church. I am confident that you will continue to take an imaginative and sympathetic interest in the work and ministry of the West Ham Central Mission.

The *third* thing that has meant more to me than I can say is the *assurance of the prayers* of my fellow ministers. Almost every day there is new evidence that Christian folk are faithfully remembering the work of the Mission in their prayers. The Mission Calendar hangs in many a Vestry and many a Manse, and I feel sure that this reminder of the ministry of the Mission stimulates the prayerful support of thousands of people all over the world. We need money to run the Mission, we need wisdom in our decision making, we need compassion and skill in our serving, but more important than all these are the prayers which are offered on our behalf. Without these, all our work is likely to be in vain. With them, nothing that is in the will of God is beyond our reach.

Yours in the fellowship of the Ministry,
Trevor W. Davis,
Superintendent Minister.

administering the gospel sacraments carries other implications with it. For example, in order to lead the community in this way he will have to serve it in pastoral care, following the example of Jesus himself; someone can only guide a ministry of healing and reconciliation in a community from inside, by sharing in it, not by standing above it.

As teacher of the faith he will discover more of what the faith actually means in the world today by sharing the lives of his congregation in his pastoral care for them. Moreover, in a community which is aware of its own gifts he must cultivate the gift of enabling and coordinating theirs. But all these functions, which will vary from place to place, flow from the basic call to **be an episkopos**, and to represent the whole Body of Christ.

If there is some openness about the Minister's functions, there is also a flexibility in reserving to him the ministry of word and sacrament. We have seen that as Minister of the Church Universal, it is right that he should **normally** proclaim the word of God and administer the sacraments. But there can be no legalistic exclusiveness about this. If other members are gifted in teaching in the congregation, then he should enable them to exercise this gift; but his call to **episkope** means that he remains finally responsible for handing on the faith, so that he must take the responsibility of training those who share this task with him and of overseeing whatever teaching and proclamation goes on. Though the Minister normally presides at the Lord's table, in some circumstances a community can assign the function to someone else; Christian tradition, both from the earliest years of the church and from our own Baptist heritage, warns us however that this is an assignment by the church and not something assumed by an individual himself. It is the community which calls the representative, thereby recognising the call of Christ.

3. Ordination and new patterns of local ministry

There has been a remarkable recovery of the ancient patterns of 'team ministry' within our churches in recent years — a phenomenon which the Roman and Anglican communions tend to call 'collegiality'. Among us this partnership in ministry has taken the form not only of fostering the gifts of each member, but of creating multiple spiritual leadership in the local church; one sign of this has been the emergence of 'elders' who have been exercising a stronger pastoral and teaching ministry than our traditional diaconate has often done in the past. Inevitably, these elders have been set apart by the local church acting alone, which has also sometimes called some of these home-grown leaders 'associate ministers', and has often been hard put to see the theological difference between them and the ministers on the Baptist Union list. Now, in the last resort, names are not really important. We have seen that the titles of 'elders' (**presbuteroi**) and 'bishops' (**episkopoi**) seem to have been interchangeable in the early church. The real question we must ask is whether a local church has one or more leaders who have the characteristics we have described above as carrying on the Apostolic functions. Does the local church have leaders, whom we may for convenience call 'Ministers', who are able to proclaim and teach the faith in all its length and breadth, who represent the wider church to the local one, and whose ministry is recognised by the wider church of Christ? Every local church needs one or more spiritual leaders like

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The number of people who carry out voluntary work in a very broad sense for their churches is considerable. Activities range from minor maintenance and decorating, flower arranging to Sunday School teaching, youth work and a host of other tasks. If a member meets with an accident whilst working for the church, it may be due to a defect in the premises or some other cause which would support a legal liability claim against the deacons for negligence. Such a claim would be dealt with under a Liability Policy.

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Yours sincerely,

M. E. PURVER
General Manager

this in order to equip it for its own work of ministry, whatever other spiritual leaders it must also have, and whatever it calls these others, whether elders, deacons, church workers, or shepherds. Both for its own spiritual health, and for the sake of mission to the world, the local church needs leaders of two kinds: those it has simply set apart by itself from among its own members, and those who are (in the words of an 18th. Century Particular Baptist) 'Ministers of the Church universal'.³

It surely follows that the kind of 'minister' in the local church who represents the universal church should have his call recognised by as wide a segment of the universal church as is possible. In the present tragic situation of a divided Christendom, this will, admittedly, tend to be limited to recognition by one denomination. We should not then miss the significance of ministerial recognition committees and a ministerial list; they are the necessary forms through which the wider Christian community recognises that a call has come to a person from Christ. This whole process comes to a point of climax with the act of ordination itself, in which representatives of the wider church, beyond the local scene, must likewise participate. Though in our present Baptist practice this tends to be a little haphazard, we should surely be working towards the point where the area Superintendent is always one of those who lays hands on the candidate.

It may nevertheless be asked why Ministers, as we have defined them, should have to undergo the rather stringent conditions for wider recognition, such as careful theological training, which the major Christian denominations — including the Baptist Union — require. Some churches, who have people offering ministry on a full-time basis at little cost to the church, or who have members whom they very much want to appoint as associate Ministers and whom they are willing to support with generous gifts, may become impatient with the lengthy and searching process which leads up to ordination. They may also point to the New Testament evidence that the early local churches had multiple elders and bishops, and it is certainly difficult for any local church now to have several ordained Ministers such as are on the Baptist Union list. In this situation we all perhaps need to exercise an openness and imagination without losing the basic principles which have emerged through many years of experience in the Christian church since New Testament times (an experience of the Spirit which may often be too quickly dismissed as 'mere tradition').

In the first place, we ought to realise that the leadership which the local church sets apart from among itself, acting on its own authority under Christ, can just as well be full-time. There is good basis in tradition for calling this ministry the 'diaconate', and there is no reason why we should not call appointment to it 'ordination'. It would be a gain in clarity to distinguish between ordination to the **episkope** and the **diakonia** in the local church, with the former being the appointment by the **wider** church to the office of ministry of word and sacrament, as I have described it. The **diakonia** would then mostly consist, as is usual now, of church members with a secular job, but could include one or more called to be deacon as a full-time vocation. But names are not really important, and it might be difficult to re-establish the ancient word 'Deacon' in all its dignity and significance; whether called Deacon or Elder ('Presbyter), the local church can certainly set apart and support people for

this ministerial order — as long as it also has the 'episcopal' ministry. In the second place, we need to be more imaginative about the ways in which people called to the ministry of **episkope** can be trained for their calling. Perhaps more local churches will be able to have more Ministers as our colleges continue to develop patterns of training **in** the local scene, rather than only as residential courses.

But however theological training is acquired, I firmly believe that it is essential for preparation as Minister of word and sacrament today. We are not in the days of the early church as a small, minority community living in the immediate aftermath of the cross and resurrection. If some are to stand within the church in the apostolic succession, guarding the faith and proclaiming the word of God anew for today, and if we are to offer our best to God for this task, then it will take time in preparation of mind, character and spirituality. We now have the written scriptures of the New Testament as well as the Old, as a resource for hearing the word of God. We have had two thousand years of Christian life within the Church, as a rich treasure-house of experience upon which to draw. We live in a highly complex modern world in which people are encouraged to ask critical questions about the nature of human life and indeed the whole universe. We live in the community of the world-wide church, facing challenges to faith and opportunities for building up humanity in many societies, in cultures which are very different and yet becoming increasingly inter-related. It is in the light of all this that some are called to the ministry of proclaiming the word of God in the here and now, and to opening the vision of each local Christian community to the mission of the church universal.

Paul Fiddes

1. I give a more detailed account of these developments in my study **A Leading Question**, Baptist Union Publications, 1984
2. See, for example, Phil. 2:19-24, Eph. 2:20 cf. 4:11, 2 Tim. 2:2, Titus 1:5, Acts 20:17-38, 1 Pet. 5:1-4. For a discussion of these texts, see Edward Schillebeeckx. **Ministry: A Case for Change**, SCM Press, 1981, pp. 10-20.
3. Daniel Turner, cit. E. A. Payne, **The Fellowship of Believers**, Carey Kingsgate Press, 1952.

“Five Personal Statements on Ordination”

Hugh Bishop, Minister of Ruislip Baptist Church ...

For me the starting point of any aspect of ministry must always be the repudiation of the modern distinction between clergy and laity. As good Baptists who acknowledge the supreme authority of the Scriptures, can we please all agree that every Christian, by virtue of his implantation into the body of Christ, is a minister, and that the 'laity', as the New Testament would understand it, is the spiritually dead non-Christian world outside the church?

I believe with all my heart in the doctrine of the priesthood (and prophethood!) of all believers. Therefore, although I am a minister of a Baptist church (and so in some sense 'set apart' for special ministry), I must always see my church as one part of the local expression of the one Body of Christ, with all my members occupying the same relation to Jesus, whatever spiritual gifts God has given them and whatever offices they may or may not hold within the church. In no way, therefore, can I ever see my ordination as something which has set me apart as a 'priest', totally distinct from my 'people'.

The idea of an exclusive class of mortals "in holy orders" admitting lesser mortals to the presence of Christ, claiming supreme authority from standing in an alleged apostolic succession, jealously guarding exclusive control of the sacraments and guaranteeing salvation in return for unquestioning obedience, may have a strong appeal to my brethren in other traditions of the Christian church, but I'm afraid it does nothing to excite me! Never do I feel more fulfilled as a minister than when people accept me as their 'brother' in Christ, one with them in facing the problems and grasping the opportunities presented by the challenge of an authentic Christian discipleship. So please don't ask me to accept a view of ordination which places an awesome and almost unbridgeable gap between 'priestly' me and 'ordinary' them.

It follows from this that I would take my stand not with those who see ordination as a sacrament whereby something (though just what I'm not quite sure) is conveyed but with those who see ordination as an act of authorisation. I would love to think that some unique aspect of the Holy Spirit's ministry was made available to me through the laying on of hands and prayer at my ordination, but I cannot escape from my simple conviction as a Christian that the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to me in my conversion experience and in Him, and in the gifts He has given me, I find everything I need for the exercise of my subsequent ministry.

On the other hand I have no problem in saying a loud 'Amen' to the words of the Baptist reply to Lambeth: "For us there is no more exalted office than a ministry charged with preaching the Word of God and the care of souls", and I am encouraged by the recognition that "those called to devote their whole lives to such tasks are held in special honour", even though I fail miserably so much of the time and feel unworthy of the office all of the time.

So what **does** my ordination mean to me when it comes to the crunch? In a word I do see it as an act of authorisation which gives me personal strength and confidence as well as objective authority in a clearly defined area. I see my ordination now as the climax of the process whereby my subjective sense of “call” from God had been objectively endorsed by the believing community, as particularly represented by my home church, my Ministerial Recognition Committee and my Theological College. Having submitted myself to this preparation procedure I also arrive at a reasonable confidence that what I am being ordained to do is not to express personal opinions on miscellaneous subjects but to declare the Church's message on behalf of the Church with the support of the Church (albeit with my own emphasis!). And I see my ordination as providing me with ‘credentials’ for authentic ministry within my own denomination. Beyond the parameters of my own denomination, some will recognise my ordination and some will not, although that, as I see it, is their problem and not mine. It certainly isn't God's problem for, of course, at the end of the day, I would want to say that ordination to the ministry is **His** gift to me, and in that ultimate confidence I am glad to be able to offer myself to Him for the work of the ministry.

W. Edward Fraser, Minister of Hillhead Baptist Church, Glasgow ...

It was a little over twenty-five years ago that I stood in my home church in Aberdeen and answered some very serious and searching questions concerning my call to the ministry. What precisely were my thoughts that evening I cannot now recall, but I clearly remember it as an occasion of immense solemnity and sublime joy. My ordination to the Christian ministry was almost on a par with my baptism.

Twenty-five years ago. That meant that I entered the ministry at a time of relative calm and stability in the ecclesiastical scene. It was before the days of **Honest to God** and all the radical questionings about the relevance of the church and the professional ministry that characterised the later sixties. Not that I was totally unaffected by the debate that raged at that time: I was, and like many (most?) other ministers I know what it is to go through a severe role crisis. But I would want to say that I have found in my ordination, as in my baptism, an anchor for the soul, something that held me when I was being hurled this way and that by the conflicting thoughts and emotions created by the to and fro of theological debate.

I think that what has mattered most to me about my ordination, and which explains why it has been an anchor for my soul, is that in it the call to the ministry, which I sincerely believe had come to me from God, was recognised and confirmed by others. The trust and commission and promised prayers of God's people given to me at my ordination are still today, as they were then, a source of strength and encouragement to me. I think that the dimension of the Christian community is crucial to all that we may want to say about ordination and ministry. The very nature of the ministry is such that it cannot properly be engaged in without the known and declared acceptance and confidence of those whom one may seek to serve in Christ's name. And so in those moments

when I have doubted my calling, which doubt I see as quite human, and wondered if I might not perhaps be better employed following another career, and even wondered if I am not just a hypocrite and a sham, I have remembered that night in Aberdeen and have seen in my ordination the church's confidence in me and its recognition, with a wisdom greater than my own, that my call was a true one.

I realise that this sounds like a doctrine of the infallibility of the fellowship of Baptists and their structures. Whilst accepting that the church can make its mistakes I find this to be a more tolerable situation than the one where any Tom, Dick, Mary and Lucy can usurp to themselves the office of the ministry without reference to the rest of the body.

Finally, I believe that it is the trust and commission and prayers given to me at my ordination, and renewed through the years, that give me status and authority as a minister. As I see it, the dynamics of the situation are that, having heard from me a confession of my faith and the undertaking I have given that I will perform the functions expected of me as a preacher, teacher, leader of worship, pastor and evangelist, the people then accord to me a position of privilege and authority among them. In doing so their hope is that I will prove worthy of the trust they have placed in me and the honour they have conferred upon me. I, for my part, must seek to justify the faith they have expressed in me; and this I do by my adherence to my ordination vows and by my request for their understanding and forgiveness when I fail to live up to them. And although people are by and large accepting and forgiving I must be careful not to abuse the trust they have placed in me nor take for granted the status and authority I enjoy among them. That trust and status are not conferred on me automatically but have to be won again and again by the way I function, and I must be very sensitive to the fact that I can easily lose them through pride, complacency and slackness in my ministry.

What I have to remember, as a servant of Christ and of His Gospel, is that the only authority that the people will recognise in me is not the authority that I claim for myself but the authority of Christ-like words and attitudes and actions. In the end, therefore, the trust and commission and prayers of the church, concentrated and crystallised in my ordination, constitute a continuing challenge to me as well as a strength and an encouragement.

Julie Hopkins, Minister of Llandaff Road Baptist Church, Cardiff ...

Like most Baptist Ministers I hold two views of my ordination which appear on the surface to be somewhat contradictory.

On the one hand I believe in the Ministry of all Believers. Any pastoral authority I hold is derived from my congregation, I am only a representative of their corporate life and faith, a constitutional leader. This is the democratic model and it is no coincidence that the whole idea of constitutional monarchy in English politics emerged from the same ferment which led to the formation of the Baptist congregations in the Seventeenth Century. The power of the people and the rights and freedoms of the individual vis-a-vis the State and Church hierarchies are the bedrock of congregational practice. So, woe betide



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| Northern Baptist
College, Rusholme, | — Manchester, where, in
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any Minister who ignores or seeks to undermine this basic vision of equality in the body of Christ!

On the other hand I hold a sacramental view of the ordained Ministry. That is, I believe that the God who called me to serve His Son in the full-time Ministry of His Church has set me apart with a specific commission and equipped me with spiritual as well as natural gifts for the task. The laying on of hands and the prayer of ordination were for me a means of Grace, an outward and visible sign of the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the New Testament pattern and if the Roman Catholics want to call it Apostolic Succession I will not argue as long as it is understood in the way Hans Kung interprets it for them i.e. the continuity and dynamic of the Holy Spirit down through the prophetic and pastoral leadership of the Church from the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

In the Ministry of Jesus we see this "low" and "high" view of Ministry fused. His commission and consecration took place during a general baptism of the people. It was a public event and Jesus insisted on showing His solidarity with His people sharing their baptism (which was in token of repentance of sins!) From the very start of His Ministry, Jesus identified with the people He had been born to lead. His model was leadership through example and service and this was the pattern He taught His disciples. The Gospel account repeatedly points out that the people acknowledged His authority because what He said and did rang true in their own experience (in contrast to the dictates of the scribes and Pharisees). So Jesus had two sources for His authority, God His Father and the people who responded to His message. Of course when the people withdrew their support His authority as God's Word still remained as it does for ordained Ministers who find themselves unpopular for speaking and acting prophetically. But the model Jesus instituted is one which clearly demonstrates that Ministry is for the people, it is world-orientated, if it is genuine it will provoke a radical response from humanity, (although not always a response of approval!)

Given the tensions inherent in this view of ordination our denomination has developed a somewhat eccentric procedure for selecting and settling ordinands. I well remember being told by my college interviewers, "we have no reason to doubt your calling and we are happy to train you but, given that you are a woman, there is no guarantee that when you leave here you will be able to get a job in the full-time Ministry". That pragmatic advice proved to be prophetic for a while, which makes me wonder if there could be room for improvement! Somehow we have to find a procedure which takes both the democratic and apostolic dimension of Ministry into a better harmony. My view is that the selection and probationary period should be much longer and tougher but once the Ministerial Recognition Committee has finally accepted a candidate's vocation the denomination should sponsor that person and ordain him or her whether or not a local congregation chooses to make a call. The Mission and Kingdom of God stretches far beyond our chapel walls and it may well be that God intends some Ministers to reach His people by living and working on the frontiers of our society. For these reasons I believe that every ordinand who wants to be ordained should be, before settlement, which clouds the issue. I also believe the time has come to end the scandal of some of our best students finding themselves homeless and penniless at the end of their course.

David B. Milner, Minister of Cottingham Road Baptist Church, Hull ...

The comments of three people at my own ordination 22 years ago help me to realise what ordination means to me.

One remark was from a relative, an older Minister, who resided at the service. Afterwards he quietly remarked "Of course I wasn't ordained, you know!" After my initial surprise and wondering if the apostolic succession had been broken, I realised that he began at a period when Baptist Ministers were "recognised" and "welcomed", not "ordained".

Uncle was "recognised", I was "ordained", what difference does it make? At this point it might be dangerous, or offensive, to liken ordination to the marriage service! However, just as the memory of a wonderful day when love and commitment were expressed in words and action in worship with family and friends and legally recognised by society is such a strengthening thing in marriage, so, I think, the memory of the ordination service ought to be in the ministry. In both cases what really matters is the loving, committed relationship and how it is worked out over the years but the initial service should be the best expression of the intention and purpose that we can possibly make it. It has always been a strength and joy to remember that day when my church, my wife's church, Rawdon College and representatives of the Baptist family and other Christian families met with the church that had called me to set me apart for the work of Ministry in Christ's Name. I am glad that we have come through that period of reluctance to use the word "Ordination" and practice the laying on of hands. I am glad that I was ordained in the way that is customary among us now but I do not really believe that any difference there may be in the authority and effectiveness of my uncle's Ministry and mine is due to any difference in the form of that service. In ordination and marriage you don't really know what you are letting yourself in for and the romantic ideal is not fully achieved, but through sharing and working together in the grace of God we are able, in part at least, to fulfil His purpose for us and on some days it may seem even better than we ever dreamed. In the case of the ordained ministry of word and sacrament if we have enabled some to know God in a more real way and by pastoral care some have known comfort and healing grace and churches have been given leadership and helped to see the vision of God's Kingdom, then God's ordaining is being fulfilled.

Another memorable comment came from the vicar who told me, and told his congregation the following day, that he had been moved and impressed by the service and although his own ordination had been a much grander setting, in intention and content it was essentially the same. This, and subsequent experience, strengthened the belief that first and foremost I had been ordained as a minister of the Gospel, for Christ and His Church, not just a Baptist Minister. One of the enriching aspects of that first sphere of Ministry was the sharing in prayer, study and planning with other Ministers in the town, preaching in the various churches and doing new work together in a growing community by organising our people for community care and planning ahead for growth. When our first child arrived the vicar led our morning service and dedication and when we moved he came to share in the induction service. In

subsequent experience in local churches, university chaplaincies and a hospital chaplaincy I have also found an essential unity in worship, work and witness with ordained Ministers be they Salvation Army Officers or Bishops. It seems to me that the difference of opinion on apostolic succession is becoming less and less relevant and any feelings of inferiority, or superiority, I have in the presence of other Ministers have nothing to do with differing views of ordination.

The third word came from the chairman of the Urban District Council who welcomed me on behalf of the whole community. Referring to the sermon of my Principal, which was on 1 Cor.2.2, he said that he had not heard such good evangelical preaching since his youthful connection with the Brethren. He clearly felt the importance of the occasion and was reminded of the heart of the Christian message. It seemed to me that the involvement of this leader of the community was a mutually beneficial reminder of the importance and setting of the Church's Ministry. In a small town one soon became known as the new Baptist Minister and opportunities for a ministry much wider than the congregation were immediately available in personal ministry and involvement in the life of the community — I hope it was in a distinctive way as a Christian Minister. In subsequent pastorates in cities the community's recognition of the Ministry was not so immediate and has to be worked for, but there have been opportunities for involvement, varying from organising a resident's association for co-operation in one of the first "General Improvement Areas" to being an official guest at a University Senate Dinner. I have heard sermons about the Kingdom at ordinations and inductions and I have read that the Baptist understanding of the meaning of ordination is that it is **public** recognition, setting apart and commissioning, but the involvement of the chairman of the Urban District Council at my own service made this most real for me.

These three emphases are of great significance as I think of the meaning of ordination: appointed by God, through His Church, to preach and serve with a local church; being part of the whole people of God; for witness and service in His world.

Lewis Rushbrook, Minister of Elm Road Baptist Church, Beckenham ...

The Report entitled **The meaning and practice of ordination among Baptists** (submitted to the Baptist Union Council in 1957) defined ordination as "the act, wherein the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, publicly recognises and confirms that a Christian believer has been gifted, called and set apart by God for the work of the ministry and in the name of Christ commissions him for this work" (p.22).

"Ministry" was understood as "the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments", further amplified as "leadership of the Church's worship, the administration of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the proclamation of the Gospel and the teaching of the faith, the work of pastoral care and Christian service" (p.24). The report added that this work may or may not be the Minister's sole activity, "but it will be his primary activity to which he devotes most of his time" (p.24).

In practice, however, most Ministers in sole charge of a local church spend much time on a variety of matters outside such ministry of Word and Sacrament. The nature of these “secondary” activities varies between Ministers and within a ministry, but few Ministers would deny their presence. Burdened by them, a Minister might shrug them off cheerily with a “nothing’s too trivial” or “I’m only a servant”, or by some special pleading (“helping my neighbour fix his car in church time is really pastoral work”). Nonetheless, a sneaking suspicion remains that one was not ordained —“gifted, called, and set apart by God” for **this**. “Ordination for what?” is a valid question. Individual self-discipline will be necessary, and perhaps a periodic evaluation of the broad outlines of one’s ministry, lest over-entanglement in such diffuse “ministry” lead to frustration, false guilt and even disillusionment with ministry itself.

That ministry has become more diffuse and more complex is something that has been recognised in various ways in the denomination. Colleges, for example, have responded by expanding their curricula for basic ministerial training. To the traditional bulwarks of biblical and doctrinal studies and preaching classes, have been buttressed better pastoral studies, and more preparation for the practical management of ministry (leading church meetings, holding baptismal classes, etc.). Recently too there have been calls to upgrade the student’s own self-awareness, as a means of anticipating and reducing future stress points in ministry. Add to this burgeoning curricula continuing pressures on Ministers to get results, become more specialised in each department of ministry, be more authoritative, and to lead a church where things “happen” (a solid preaching, teaching and pastoral ministry can be abandoned these days because “there’s nothing happening”), and ordination opens the door to a very blurred and uncertain landscape.

My concern is that ordination is into a ministry so diffuse that we need to be reminded of its essentials. Writing in 1956 about ministry in North America, H. R. Niebuhr said “the contemporary Church is confused about the nature of the ministry. Neither Ministers nor the schools that nurture them are guided today by a clear-cut, generally accepted conception of the office of the ministry”. (**The purpose of the Church and its ministry**, 1956, p.50). Examining periods in Christian history when there was a clear conception of what ministry entailed, he concludes: “As these examples of typical ideas of the ministry all indicate, a clear-cut conception always includes not only an understanding of what the most important work of the ministry is but also the recognition that it must perform other functions. Unity is given to such a conception not only by ordering functions in a scale of importance but by directing each function to a chief, though still proximate, end” (p.63).

Niebuhr’s words could be applied to ministry today. Can we forge a clearer conception of ministry, affirming some tasks so essential that resources must be found for them, even at the expense of other (secondary) work going undone? Of course, there will always be a sense in which ordination is like entering the army (where one never knows where one will serve or what specific work will be performed), but too much diffuseness will weaken the church and imperil Ministers. What is needed is some restatement of the fundamental tasks of ministry. What (to borrow a notion from industry) are

those three or four tasks that should occupy about 80% of our time? Having identified and affirmed them, how can Ministers be helped to say "No" without guilt to those many other requests that would bite vigorously into that 80%

And such reaffirmation should be both modern and mutual. Patterns of ministry need to take account of the telephone, the motor car, the photocopier and now the computer. Nor should individual Ministers have to forge new outlines of ministry alone. If today's ministry has been mutually acknowledged to be more complex and demanding, then mutually too we ought to re-clarify and affirm ministry's primary work. The individual Minister can too easily become like an isolated transformer on whom converge today's numerous high-level expectations about ministry, yet with sole charge for converting these into "on the ground" ministry.

May I suggest three ways in which the spiritual care of the ministry could be enhanced?

1. Colleges could re-affirm the fundamentals

As College courses expand to include more elements of "real" ministry, each additional segment or emphasis tends to diminish the relative significance of existing segments (and incidentally, reduce time for reflection, that traditional "excellence" of a good theological course, and instrument for distinguishing the wood from the trees). Might not the ministry of the Word and sacraments end up as just one among a score of "important", "necessary" aspects of ministry? Some strong affirmation by the College of the primary work of ministry (and how to resist the seduction into the secondary) would no doubt help put things in focus here. Perhaps a leaner curriculum concentrating on the fundamentals could serve the churches at least as well by providing Ministers who are sure of their primary work.

2. Diaconates could upgrade their spiritual care of Ministers

The 1970 Report of the Commission on Ministry entitled **Ministry Tomorrow** stated (p.18), "We believe, moreover, that the spiritual care of the ministry is basically the responsibility of the local church and particularly of the diaconate. As the church receives from him pastoral care and concern, so also this must be reciprocated by the church, each ministering to the other's needs". A deeper appreciation of ministry might therefore be fostered in deacons' meetings (a line item on "ministry" at every meeting?).

3. Some guidelines could be issued by the Baptist Union

In our Baptist tradition churches are rarely taught, independent of the man of the moment, what to expect from their Ministers: for example, that to be men of prayer, they need time to pray; to preach God's Word, time to study; etc. Consequently the departure of one Minister and the arrival of another usually signals considerable shift in the configuration of ministry. Churches, and Ministers, might therefore welcome and benefit from some independent affirmation of primary ministerial tasks, to which mutual, prayerful recourse could helpfully be made from time to time in a ministry.

Just as circumstances encouraged the early Jerusalem church into re-defining the central tasks of the twelve ("we will devote ourselves to prayer and

to the ministry of the word", Acts 6.4), so our understanding of ministry needs re-definition to enable individual Ministers to be those gifted, called, ordained people God has given the Church.