

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

A Doctrine of the Baptist Ministry.

I.

IN the early chapters of *The Primitive Church*, Dr. Streeter says :

The Primitive Church had no New Testament, no thought-out theology, no stereotyped traditions. The men who took Christianity to the Gentile world had no special training, only a great experience—in which all maxims and philosophies were reduced to the simple task of walking in the light since the light had come.

If we desire a few sentences to describe the beginnings of the Baptist Churches, we could hardly find better words than these of Dr. Streeter. With the New Testament in their hands, early Baptists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England sought after the Church of the Primitive order, free from all sacerdotal claims; and greatly daring, they broke with established tradition, and without special training, but with a great experience, they entered upon the simple and great task of walking in the light, since the light had shined in their hearts.

The early Baptist Churches began without a paid ministry. They were served in all matters from among themselves. Dr. Whitley writes in his *History of British Baptists* :

In the country the typical minister was a thatcher, a farmer, a maltster, a cheese-factor; in the town, the preacher had been during the week making shoes, pins, buttons, collars, hats, clothes, had been dyeing, upholstering or selling wares; here and there might be found a scrivener, a writing-master, an apothecary, even a doctor. As the ministers rode to their Association meetings, like Canterbury pilgrims, the butcher and the baker were joined at least by a candle-maker and an ironmonger; they would change horses at a post kept by a Baptist postmaster, and would be entertained by a brother shipwright or carpenter. The score of ex-clergy were lost in the multitude of common men who ministered to their fellows, speaking out of an experience they shared with those they addressed. The priesthood of all believers was illustrated on a new scale.

The early Baptists had a clearly defined doctrine of Church membership. They taught that the Church was a separated society; existing in the world, but not of the world—that it consists only of those who have definitely turned to God in Jesus Christ, and who pledge themselves in Baptism to live the life He desires, and to win others for Him. The prophetic and priestly functions which have ever been supplementing each other and conflicting with each other in the great religions, are found similarly supplementing and similarly conflicting in the Christian religion; and with the Baptists the emphasis has been upon the prophetic function, so that the place of the priestly function is sometimes overlooked.

The early Baptists did not overlook this priestly ministry, nor did they surrender its great privileges and functions to any person; they made the Church, through the membership, the centre of priestly ministries, and practised the "priesthood of all believers." The "separated" Churches not only stood out, and stood forth, clothed in divine power, as the representatives of God to men, to win men to God; they also turned toward God, as the representatives of men to God, to present men to God.

The recovery of the priestly ministry of the Church will not hinder the working of the spiritual principle of the Christian religion upon which the Baptist Churches are founded, but will defend and conserve that principle. The Church exists, not only to extend its borders, but also to conserve its standards, and the preservation of those standards is the charge of the priestly heart. When Jesus sent out the twelve upon their first mission, He commissioned them to take what He had given them, and if their message was not received, to depart, shaking off the dust from their feet for a testimony against them. Dr. Lightfoot clearly shows, in his classic defence of the Episcopal ministry, in the "Dissertation on the Christian Ministry" in his Philipppians, that the members of the Church have no right to delegate their priestly functions to a personal priesthood. He says:

For communicating instruction and for preserving order, for conducting public worship and for dispensing social charities, it became necessary to appoint special officers. But the priestly functions and privileges of the Christian people are never regarded as transferred or delegated to those officers.

Thus the practice of all the members fulfilling priestly functions through the Church is in harmony with the workings of the early Church, and is the surest defence against the inroads of sacerdotalism. The best defence against a personal priesthood and the autocratic form of government is the priestly ministry of

the whole of the members enriched in all its fulness. This is well stated for us in the *Christian Ministry*, by Dean Lefroy :

Official sacerdotalism, in some form, is universal, is ancient, and is common alike to monotheism and polytheism. But popular sacerdotalism, or the priesthood of believers, is peculiar to Christianity; while the pastoral is the unique institution of Christ. In no other religion does it exist. No other master requires of his servants that personal, individual search for souls, which is at once the expression of His love and of their infinite value.

It is not for me to pursue the falling away of the members of the Church from the priestly responsibility of caring for souls, with all that follows of weakened witness and failing spiritual enterprise; but only to substantiate the statement that the early Baptists had a clearly defined doctrine of the duty of the members—a clearly defined doctrine of the Church in harmony with the practice of the first disciples of Christ.

II.

It is now worthy of particular notice that the Churches with such a definite doctrine of membership grew up without any explicit doctrine of the ministry. As the Churches grew in numbers and influence, the members "called" the most suitable of their number to be their leader. Preaching gifts were the outstanding evidence of fitness for the "call"; and the preacher became the minister.

The ministers were not at first supported by the Churches; then the practice grew up of part support, until the ministry entered upon the phase of the full-paid minister giving up all his time to the service of the Church.

In an admirably judicial article which appeared in the *Baptist Quarterly* of July, 1931, written by Mr. Seymour J. Price, on "Laymen and Reunion," the doctrine of the laity of the Baptist Churches is expressed in a manner entirely agreeable to the writer of this article. Then Mr. Price proceeds to consider "The Baptist Ministry," and asks :

What then is the position of the Baptist ministry? If the functions of the minister and the layman may be identical, is the minister no more than a full-time layman? In the writer's opinion such a deduction is far too bald and does not do justice to the Baptist conception of the ministry. Levelling up the laity to the spiritual level given them in the New Testament does not imply a levelling down of the ministry from the place of special honour in which Baptists hold

them. The reply to the Lambeth Appeal adopted by the Baptist Union Assembly in 1926, and therefore an official statement, declared "The ministry is for us a gift of the Spirit to the Church, and is an office involving both the inward call of God and the commission of the Church."

This is a just statement of the conception of the Baptist ministry, as conceived by the spiritually minded in the Churches; and enfolded in this thought, because of their calling and their labours, ministers have been held in high regard. But it has to be stated that such a high conception of the ministry is not binding upon any Church, and is entirely dependent upon the spiritual quality of the members. This is variable in the nature of things. One Church appoints a Trial Committee to select the minister, and the Committee recommends the candidate because, "having tried him for some time, we find him a very adaptable brother"; while another Church decides that "The Pastor should give himself up to the prayerful study of the Word of God, to the administration of the Divine Ordinances, watching over, and praying for and with the people of his charge."

It would not be kind to go into many other varieties of judgment that decide the "call" of a minister to the Church. The notable fact of all is the lack of any explicit doctrine of the ministry. Ministers of the Anglican, the Methodist, and the Presbyterian Churches have a doctrine of the ministry and are ministers of the whole Church; but ministers of the Independent Churches, are ministers only of the particular Church over which they officiate; and in passing from one Church to another are subject to the varying judgments of the ministry that may obtain in the different memberships. It may be so high as to give the minister the fullest freedom in the exercise of his spiritual gifts, with the continued spiritual and financial support that makes his ministry a joy; or it may be so low as to belong to the order of judgments where "he who pays the piper calls the tune."

A Commission of Enquiry of ministers themselves, set up to enquire into "Matters affecting the Efficiency of the Ministry," in 1928, gives no guidance as to what the ministry is. The Report of the Commission describes the Range of the Ministry, the Aim of the Ministry, what makes an Efficient Ministry, and concludes with the Glory of the Ministry; but it has nothing to say about the *doctrine* of the ministry.

The slight measure of doctrine given in the reply of the Baptist Union Assembly to the Lambeth Appeal, quoted above, is valueless for support in the actual working of the ministry. Can any such support be found in an explicit doctrine of the ministry that will help a minister to maintain the Church according to the spiritual level given in the New Testament? And can

authority sufficient be given to such a doctrine of the ministry that a minister may be able to turn to it for support in the maintenance of a spiritual ministry?

Dr. Forsyth gets nearer home, when he says, speaking for the Independent ministry :

The whole right of the people in relation to the ministry, turns on one hypothesis. The people are entitled to call their own minister, and to exercise judgment on his work (and on his preaching in particular) on one supposition. And that is not merely democratic liberty to express opinion. It is nothing so vulgar as that those who pay the piper should call the tune. It is all on the understanding that the members, equally with the minister, have and use their access to the Bible, and the aid therein of the Holy Spirit. It rests not on what they like, but what they judge (at that source) the Gospel does for the soul and requires from it. The people's right of judging the minister rests on the equal duty of both to be conversant with the New Testament in particular, and to measure each other by the standard of what is there, and not by each man's private judgment or taste apart from that, not by the mere light of religious or other nature.

While Dr. Forsyth does not formulate a doctrine of the ministry in the words quoted, he does state the theory that has governed the relation of the minister to the people; and the theory that is still supposed to govern.

But a change is taking place. The Bible does not now occupy the place it did in the devout reading of the members of the Church. There are many causes for it, but the fact needs to be faced, that many members and officers called upon to judge the ministry are without that knowledge of the Bible and that sense of the Holy Spirit's guidance which were once considered essential. An examination of the Church members according to the standard expressed by Dr. Forsyth would leave few in many of our Churches qualified to vote in judgment upon the minister. Formerly the minister was judged by his peers—members who really influenced the Church were spiritually minded; they might not have his gifts, or his education; but in access to the Holy Spirit and in spiritual understanding they took rank with him. But the sphere of influence is shifting, and it is being widened more and more to include those whose judgment is more efficient in organisation and business. This is not to reflect upon their value in their own department, but to point out that they may be ill-qualified to pass judgment upon the spiritual values of the minister and the Church.

Then the financial responsibilities of the Church make it expedient to win the sympathies of the members of the congregation, and sometimes an appeal is made for judgment upon the ministry to those who have made no confession of Jesus Christ; so that a minister acceptable to the spiritual members of the Church becomes unacceptable to the less spiritual or unspiritual members of the congregation, and may be put aside.

This is not an enquiry into the relations of the minister to the people, but it is pointing out a direction which Churches are taking, which if continued, would cut the ground from under the relation which has preserved the spiritual principle of the Baptist Church and Ministry.

III.

The present condition of the Denomination is interesting; it is also critical. There are more than 2,000 ministers in the Home Ministry, and there are students continually being prepared to enter into the ministry. The Denomination has departed from the strict independency which marked it for more than three centuries. We now have a Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme set up which has been working for nearly twenty years. The Superintendents engaged under the Scheme have the care of Churches aided by the Scheme, and they are assisted in their labours by Area Committees and by the Central Executive. The Superintendents also may assist Churches financially independent, in such ways as may be open to them, and particularly in the direction of the settlement of ministers. This is a framework of mutual helpfulness that has much promise of future benefit to all the Churches. It is a framework also which is being severely tested; and while some think that it has been tried and is found wanting, others think that it is but the beginning of a development into a larger Scheme toward the Connexional or the Presbyterian models.

From the point of view of this article the Scheme is of value, inasmuch as it is an approach to a common responsibility, and is a considered effort toward a vision of the Denomination no longer consisting of many unconnected Churches, but becoming one Church. Would not the majority of ministers prefer to consider themselves ministers of the whole Baptist Church, ministering to the local Church where for the time being their ministry is being exercised?

Whence comes the sense of "divine vocation" that makes the difference between the layman and the minister? Does it not come from the Head of the Church? Would not every minister desire first of all to be acknowledged as a minister of Christ?

And does he not derive what spiritual authority he possesses from the Holy Spirit? The seat of real authority is not that the minister is the leader of the Church, but that he is a minister of Christ. The recognition of this "election" to the calling of the ministry is the foundation fact that causes the Denomination to be willing to educate the student worthily in preparation for his ministry. And it is to safeguard this vocation that there is jealous care that only such men as are divinely called shall be prepared.

It follows then that when in the ministry, suitable support should be provided for the minister to do his work unhindered by financial anxiety. The Ministerial Settlement and Sustentation Scheme was not imposed on the Denomination by the will of men, it grew out of the truly Christian consciousness that the ministry is a common responsibility to be shared by all; and because there were such painful conditions of poverty that the larger-hearted could not endure them. The Colleges do not exist to prepare a form of extended layman; nor does the Settlement and Sustentation Scheme exist to sustain him. They exist to prepare and to sustain the minister of Christ in the discharge of his ministry for Christ.

This is certainly in harmony with the mind of Christ, and follows Apostolic practice. The early Churches were very concerned for one another, and assisted one another. The Apostles passed from Church to Church as ministers of Christ, serving the Churches as they were able; with St. John settled and serving a long ministry in the Church at Ephesus.

We are passing through a critical time, and spiritual life is at a low ebb. Some are looking to "The Ways and Means Committee" to bring the new glory to the Churches. There is another way, and that is a recovery of the Scriptural truth that the Christian ministry "originates in a supernatural vocation and election that call a man out from his fellows that he may be divinely and specially endowed with grace and ability to serve them in Christ's name." As Mr. Price so well says, "Levelling up the laity to the spiritual level given them in the New Testament does not imply a levelling down of the ministry from the place of special honour in which Baptists hold them."

Doctrine can only come out of experience; and it seems to the writer that the larger service of the Denomination is to be fulfilled only in a richer experience of the Head of the Church in all the Churches. And this will be reached, not by a ministry reduced to a practical working laymanism, but by a higher level of laymanism and ministry founded on their common relation to the Head of the Church.

This will bring minister and layman closer together; and out of the closer bond may grow a doctrine of the ministry as

explicit and as authoritative as the present doctrine of Church Fellowship. This also will bring Church and Church closer together; and out of the closer bond may grow a Oneness of Church consciousness throughout the Denomination which may bring us into the fuller life where we shall have all things in common.

The fear of man always tells him to hold tight to what he has, and in saving he loses. The divine voice ever calls to give up in order to receive; and never more insistent and more universal than now. So great is the need, so urgent is the call to the Church, of which our Denomination is a part, that to stand where we are is to fall. Can we, in our Churches, leave behind what is little, and enter right fully upon what is great?

W. H. HADEN.

ROGER WILLIAMS was educated at Charterhouse under the patronage of Sir Edward Coke. He entered Pembroke College at Cambridge, and took the degree of B.A. in January 1627, as the university records show. Under the guidance of Coke, he studied law. But he took orders, and became chaplain to Sir William Masham at Otes in Essex—rather too early to minister to John Locke. About April 1629, a marriage was being mooted, and he wrote to the lady's aunt for her consent (MS. Egerton, 2643, 1). Interesting light is shed on his recent history, quite explicable as Laud was now bishop of London:—"It is well known, though I would gladly conceal myself, how a gracious God and a tender conscience (as Balak said to Balaam) hath kept me back from honour and preferment. Besides my former offers and the late New England call, I have since two several livings proffered me, each of over £100 per annum." That marriage did not take place; he married a High Laver girl in December, and soon went to New England. There, it is well known, he was not wanted either at Boston or Salem or Plymouth; both Puritans and Pilgrims asked him to move on; he became Baptist for a few months, began Indian missions, founded Rhode Island, and signalled himself as champion of religious liberty.