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The Early Development of the Ministry

BY JAMES HICKINBOTHAM

WHY study the development of the ministry in the early Church? The Anglican Reformers, like Calvin, found in the early Church a splendid stick with which to beat the Papists, for the early Church certainly lacked some of the more glaring abuses of fifteenth century medievalism. This gave the Reformers a somewhat naïve admiration for "the godly and decent order of the ancient Fathers". But we can no longer put the primitive Church on a pedestal, or imagine it to have been Protestant or even wholly scriptural in its belief and practice. Its heresies and schisms and moral failures were many. Its doctrines of grace and of the atonement and justification were woefully deficient and lacking in understanding of the Gospel. Even in its doctrine of God and of Christ it was often fumbling; and some would hold that in the end it was more successful in ruling our errors than in expounding the truth.

Why, then, do we study the early development of the ministry? Not, I think, in the expectation of finding there a fully satisfactory practice or doctrine as a model for us to follow. If we do, we shall be disappointed. Rather, I fancy, because to study the history of any doctrine or institution should help us to understand its meaning. In this case the early Church is specially relevant to us as it evolved that form of the ministry which we in the Church of England still adhere to, and it did so in the centuries immediately following the New Testament period. If we can see what the early Church did and believed about the ministry, and how, in fact, their ministry grew out of the New Testament ministry, it should help us to understand our own ministry better, and enable us to judge better the degree to which it is consistent with Scripture.

In following this plan, we will take the whole early Church period and not follow the quirk of some recent writers who would be horrified if we went back to the pre-Nicene form of the creed or the canon of Scripture, yet who bid us look to the late second or early third century for the pure form of the ministry. And we shall remember that, though the early Church has a special relevance to this subject, the early Church is by no means the only period of Church history which has something to say to us about it—and that even the tradition of the whole Church is not ultimately decisive. We will, in fact, endeavour to follow the example of the good Archbishop Matthew Parker of whom Canon Charles Smyth writes that "with a prescience rare in his generation we could perceive that the appeal to antiquity is compromised by the appeal to history, and that at no point is it possible to draw a line across it and say that what comes before that line is pure and what

comes after it is corrupt. The weight of historic precedent is authoritative but it is not conclusive. The final criterion is the Word of God ". With this prolegomenon let us get to our patristic muttuns.

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One thing everyone agrees about. By A.D. 200 at latest, the monarchical episcopate was the ministry accepted throughout the Church. In each church there was a bishop who was the ordinary as well as the chief minister of the Word and Sacraments and the chief pastor of the flock. He baptized the converts and sealed them with unction and/or laying on of hands. He preached the sermon at the weekly eucharist and was the celebrant of that eucharist. He represented his church in dealings with other churches, and generally supervised its life. He, alone or with the help of the presbyters, ordained the rest of the ministers. He was consecrated to his office by bishops brought in from outside for the purpose. He was surrounded by a group of presbyters, who acted as his council, shared with him in the business of the church, in the pastoral care of the flock, and in the administration of discipline. In his absence or with his authorization they might fulfil his ministry of the Word and Sacraments, save that they never ordained men to the ministry and in the West they never confirmed, though in the East they eventually gave the confirmation anointing with the oil blessed by the bishop. The bishop was also surrounded by a group of deacons, who acted as his assistants both in the more lowly kinds of pastoral service and in the leadership of worship. Whereas the presbyters stood high in honour and the bishop was expected to take counsel with them, the deacons were in practice nearer to him as his personal assistants. Hence a senior deacon often became successor to the bishopric. On the other hand, though the deacon was more closely connected with the liturgical ministry of the Word and Sacraments because he regularly assisted the bishop, it was the presbyter, because of his seniority, who presided (with the limitations noted above) in the liturgical ministry in the absence of the bishop.

In the third and fourth centuries the monarchical episcopate was further developed. The Church spread rapidly in the third century, still faster in the fourth after the Emperor's conversion to the Faith. Hitherto, so it seems, it was the custom for there to be one eucharist each Sunday, that presided over by the bishop himself, though in Rome and perhaps other cities, this had already broken down, and presbyters were sent to conduct the liturgy in the outlying districts. Now, however, the multiplication of congregations necessitated a multiplication of services, with celebrants and preachers. The institution of *chorepiscopi* (country bishops subject to the city bishop and without power to ordain) may have been one way in which the Church tried to meet the situation. But the way which eventually prevailed was to send presbyters to take charge of such congregations, and no doubt many more presbyters were ordained. Hence the presbyter, acting alone except for assistance by deacons, became increasingly the ordinary minister of the Word and Sacraments, preaching and celebrating on Sundays, exercising pastoral care of his congregation,

baptizing and even in the East confirming, though with oil blessed by the bishop.

Two other factors pushed the process forward. One was the growth of the custom of infant baptism and of belief in the great danger of dying unbaptized. This made it impossible to await the comparatively rare occasions when baptism had been traditionally administered and when the bishop might still be free to do it. The other was the growing absorption of the bishop in cases other than the ordinary ministry to the flock. After Constantine's conversion the imperial government increasingly looked to the bishop for help in civil affairs, and he became in many ways a responsible local government officer. More important to us is the fact that the Church was at last developing a method of acting together as a body. Hitherto each local church, presided over by its own bishop, had lived a pretty isolated life, as the scattered cells of an unlawful organization must needs do. Letters passed between bishops. Visits were sometimes exchanged. But there was no common organization, and each church was responsible for its own life and for representing the Universal Church in its own district. But from the third century onwards, the custom of holding episcopal councils for the bishops of an area grew rapidly. In this, Cyprian bishop of Carthage in North Africa, was a pioneer. After Constantine's conversion and under imperial patronage the Church's organization grew apace. Neighbouring bishoprics were grouped together in provinces corresponding to the civil boundaries, with regular episcopal synods and a presiding bishop. The patriarchates of the "great sees" began to make formal claims to supervisory jurisdiction. The Roman bishop became vividly aware that he was Peter. The coping stone of the organization was the ecumenical council, ideally consisting of all the bishops. All this took the bishop away from his multiplying congregations, and added to the independent status and responsibility of the presbyter in charge. But at the same time it added in another way to the status and responsibility of the bishop, who represented his church in the councils of the Church Catholic, and helped to form the mind and the pronouncements of the Universal Church.

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So much for the facts. What did the early Church believe about them? What significance, if any, did it attach to the ministry being of this kind?

First, everyone agreed that it was the right kind of ministry. Apart from the Montanist sect's attempt to set up an inspired prophetic order over against the institutional ministry of the Church, everyone took it for granted. Schismatic and heretical sects had the same ministerial institutions. It does not seem to have occurred to anyone to argue about it. This is for us a difficulty, for what no one challenges no one bothers systematically to defend or expound. But it is a very impressive fact. This was the ministry of the Church of Christ, and no one contemplated an alternative.

Secondly, it was generally believed to be in some sense apostolic. In the late second century the problem was, "Which is the true faith?" The Gnostics commended their new-fangled doctrines as the true

teaching of the apostles. The orthodox replied that the teaching of the apostles could be surely known. Some, at least, of the greatest churches had been founded by them; they had taught there; and their teaching had been received and continued by the bishop who presided there after their death, and by each of his successors in the see. Their teaching was public; if they had altered the tradition their innovations would at once have been detected. Nothing of the kind had happened; and the agreement in the tradition of the different churches of apostolic foundation further guaranteed their faithfulness. The first meaning of the phrase "apostolic succession" was the succession of bishops in their sees as a guarantee of the succession of apostolic teaching; and these episcopal successions were held to run right back to the apostolic age. This succession of teachers in office is different from the idea of succession by consecration—that is, of a bishop receiving grace and authority through the laying on of the hands of his consecrator. But the one idea soon led to the other; the bishop was thought of as in succession to his consecrator as well as in succession to his predecessor. For the bishop did not teach the true doctrine by his natural unaided gifts; he received (so Irenæus taught) the *charisma veritatis*, the gift of grace to be a true teacher of the flock, as an essential part of the grace of Orders, the divine gift of the Spirit promised in his consecration by God to the man called to the office of a bishop. This grace (the gift of the Holy Spirit for the office and work of a bishop) comes indeed direct from God at the consecration service; in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, the consecrating bishop directly calls upon God to bestow the Spirit. But it is the same gift of the Spirit as the consecrating bishop, and his consecrator, and all previous bishops have received; and so the service can be thought of as one in which by prayer and laying on of hands the existing bishops share the charism with others. Further, just as the successions of bishops are thought to go back to the apostolic age, and they are thought of as succeeding to the guardianship of the apostolic teaching, so the grace-gift they need is that which the apostles needed for the proclamation of the same teaching; and the Hippolytean bishop prays for the bishop-elect that he may receive the same gifts of the Spirit as did the apostles.

In the third century, the question was no longer "Which is the true faith?" That battle had been won. Now the question was "Which is the true Church?" Schisms between bodies of Christians all of whom were substantially orthodox arose in Italy and Africa. Rival church organizations vied with one another, each with its bishop, presbyters, and congregation; each using the same liturgy and teaching the same faith, each claiming to be the true Church, and denouncing the other as an impostor because of differences on points of discipline and order aggravated often by personal rivalries. It was in this context that Cyprian expounded his doctrine of episcopacy. The apostolate was a single institution which was to be the focus of the Church's unity; the Church was one because it was centred round the apostolate, which was why the Lord began the apostolate with one man, Peter, though later extending it to include others. The bishops succeeded to the apostles both in office and grace; the episcopate is

virtually an extension of the apostolate, the same single institution which is the focus of the Church's unity. The Church is one because it is centred round the episcopate, and the episcopate is the cement of the Church. The episcopate is conceived of as a single indivisible inheritance in which each individual bishop has a share, rather as a modern company is a single institution, though it has many individual shareholders each of whom has a stake in it. A way of discerning which is the true Church and which is the impostor can easily be deduced from this kind of theory. Bodies of Christians which separate from the world-wide communion of bishops, and of churches through their bishops, are breaking away from the unity of the Church. They may set up officers and call them bishops; but they cannot have true bishops, just as they cannot have true sacraments, because they are not part of the true Church. They, the bishops, succeed not only to the chief guardianship of the faith, but to the function of the apostles as chief pastors and rulers of the Church and the focus of its unity.

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Thirdly, however, the threefold ministry was believed to be in some sense the continuation of the settled local ministry of New Testament times, as distinct from the roving apostolate. This ministry consisted of a group of presbyters who might also be called bishops, assisted in some places, at least, by a group with the title of deacons. The second and third orders of the third century church plainly were the successors of these, and their functions, so far as we know them, were similar. This was obvious. Everyone knew it, and no one argued about it. But there was this significant change. The presbyters as a group were no longer called bishops. But they had among them a permanent single president to whom the title bishop was now given. Though he was successor to some of the apostolic functions, he was localized and not roving; and he drew his name from the local ministry of New Testament times, not from the apostolate. It was inevitable that he should be regarded as standing also in the local succession, and as being in a real sense one of the presbyters, and one with them. This is so. Irenæus and others refer frequently to the bishops of the past, through whose succession in office the true teaching had been handed down, as "the presbyters". Though it was the title of the second order of the ministry, it was a title of honour which the greatest bishop might be proud to share—and which appears to have been felt to be a particularly suitable appellation for bishops.

Again, it was common for a bishop to refer to his presbyters as his "fellow-presbyters". He was their president, but he was emphatically one of them. This explains the emphasis laid on the importance of the bishop consulting his presbyters and acting only with their advice. He and they form a corporate whole. The need to combat heresy and schism had called out reflection on the relation of the episcopate to the apostolate. In the second and third centuries there was no such spur to reflection on the relation of the episcopate to the presbyter-bishops of the New Testament. It is all the more impressive that Christians still instinctively called bishops whom they revered by the now more lowly title presbyter, and that bishops regarded themselves

as fellow-presbyters of those over whom they presided. As soon, however, as a spur to reflection arose, explicit teaching about the succession of the episcopate from the New Testament presbyter-bishops was forthcoming. In the fourth century the rapid spread of the Church resulted, as we have seen, in the presbyters taking over from the bishop the ordinary ministry of the Word and Sacraments in many congregations. This did not happen without questioning and arguments; and it was justified on the ground that in New Testament times there was no difference between bishops and presbyters. A single presidency had, after a time, been instituted in each church for the sake of good order, and to this president the name of bishop was restricted and the right to ordain to the ministry (save that the presbyters still joined in laying hands on those to be admitted to their office) was confined. But he was still of the same order as the rest of the presbyters; the difference was one made by church authority and was not inherent. There was, said Jerome, no difference between the bishop and the presbyters save in the matter of giving ordination. This account of the presbyteral succession of bishops was most fully expounded by Jerome. But he was widely followed; and indeed, as Dr. Jalland ruefully admits in *The Apostolic Ministry*, his teaching underlies the tradition of the medieval Church and the refusal of the Council of Trent to recognize the episcopate as an order distinct from that of the presbyterate.

Another facet of the early Church's belief about the ministry incidentally provides another illustration of the close connection between bishops and presbyters. It was common form to speak of the ministry in terms of priesthood. A parallel between the Old Testament priesthood and the Church's ministry was repeatedly drawn. At first this arose from regarding the Church's worship, led by the clergy, as being, in a general sense, "a pure offering", sacrificial in a metaphorical sense. But the central act of worship, the eucharist, became increasingly invested with sacrificial character, and "to offer the gifts" became the standard phrase to describe leading in worship. At first the offering was specially connected with the offertory: the idea of the Church in some sense offering the sacrifice of Christ easily followed. Hence the leader in worship was essentially a priest, *hiericus*. The title was first ascribed usually to the bishop, the normal celebrant of the eucharist; it then became attached to the presbyters as also qualified to "offer the gifts", and the bishop was called the high priest, the Epistle to the Hebrews being blandly and respectfully ignored. But the Jewish high priest in no sense belonged to a different order from that of the rest of the sons of Aaron. He had presidency; but he was no more than *primus inter pares*; and the frequent application of the analogy of the Old Testament high priest and priests to the bishop and the presbyters clearly indicates the essential oneness of the episcopate and the presbyterate.

One other aspect of the early Church's belief about the threefold ministry requires mention before we pass to another topic. It regarded the ministry as functioning in the Church in closely articulated unity with the whole membership of the Body of Christ. The bishops were elected by their flock; consecration might be by existing bishops

but the Church chose its own chief pastor ; the choice of presbyters and deacons likewise required at least the acquiescence of the faithful. Cyprian laid it down as the apostolic—that is, traditional—custom that the bishop should act only with the advice of the clergy and the consent of the laity ; and he expressed a generally held ideal even though the ideal might not always be achieved in practice. Laity sometimes were present at early councils ; and until Montanism brought suspicion on prophecy gifts of a charismatic character were highly revered though increasingly rare. The conversion of the Empire allowed imperial habits of autocracy to infiltrate into the Church, and too often the election of bishops was interfered with by the state. But in an indirect way the voice of the laity remained potent. The Christian Emperor was recognized as “ bishop of the externals ” and as a ruler entrusted with government by God ; he therefore had a responsibility for protecting the Church and upholding the true faith. He or his commissioner habitually presided at ecumenical councils from Nicea on ; in him the laity found a voice. Likewise, though the councils were episcopal their decisions were not regarded as ratified until they had been generally accepted by the Church, and it was indeed the passive refusal of the great body of the laity to accept Arianism that did quite as much as general councils to preserve the orthodox faith in Jesus Christ. As we have noted earlier, Cyprian taught that outside the Church there could be no sacraments, no orders. Augustine, in the interests of reunion with the Donatists, contradicted this : sacraments including that of Holy Order could be validly administered outside the Church ; hence the Donatist clergy did not need re-ordination if they were reconciled to the Church. But what Augustine gave with one hand he took away with the other. Sacraments could be valid outside the Church, but the Holy Spirit and grace were found only in the Church. Therefore the benefit and efficacy of the sacraments were denied to those outside, and only became available when they were reconciled to the Church. Augustine was right thus to preserve the dependence of ministry and sacraments for grace and efficacy upon the Church : he was wrong in treating the Donatist body as wholly outside the Church.

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So much for what the early Church did and thought about its ministry from the late second century onwards. But what about the century which lies between that date and the apostolic age of the New Testament ? This is the “ tunnel ” period about which we have very little information, and what information there is is puzzling and apparently contradictory. But there is some light at each end of the tunnel. We have some clues to what the New Testament Christians did and believed about the ministry. We know a lot about what Christians from the latter part of the second century did and believed about the same subject. Can we, by using the light at each end and the few dim torches we may find in the tunnel itself, find our way from one end to the other, and see how the ministry of the early Church as we have described it grew out of that of the New Testament ? In the New Testament you have apostles, exercising a roving commission with special authority in

the churches they founded, and you have the settled local ministry of presbyter-bishops, with deacons at least in some places. In the second century you have only a settled local ministry: the monarchical bishop, who, however, is specially linked with the wider church by his consecration, together with the presbyters and deacons. How did the change-over happen?

There are two classical answers. According to presbyterianism the apostolate was temporary: personally commissioned by Jesus to act as His witnesses giving first-hand testimony to His resurrection, the apostles were the foundation of the Church, and could not be continued. The foundation is not repeated in the upper storeys of the building. Therefore, only the local ministry survived; and the monarchical episcopate was the result of a process of differentiation within the local ministry, whereby one of the presbyter-bishops became permanent president, with sole right to ordain and to use the title bishop. According to Catholicism, at least in its Anglican form (some Roman Catholics would probably be more cautious, though they would have additional things to say about St. Peter), the apostles commissioned others to succeed them in their apostolic functions of chief pastorage, ordination, guardianship of the faith and sacraments. Those "apostolic men", of whom Timothy and Titus, James the Lord's brother, and later on Clement of Rome, are examples, settled in a particular church and presided over it exercising apostolic functions; some of the original apostles, especially St. John of Asia, may have done likewise. They then commissioned someone else to succeed them when they died; these were the first monarchical bishops. Thus the episcopate derives from the apostolate not the local ministry. From each of these theories strong theological deductions are made. The strict Presbyterian concludes for the doctrine of the parity of ministers. In the New Testament pattern, if the apostolate is eliminated, there is a single ministry, presbyterian and episcopal, which administers the Word and Sacraments, including the admission of men to the ordained ministry. This is the essential ministry; and the breaking of it up into a superior order of bishops and an inferior one of presbyters accords but ill with the New Testament pattern to which we should try to adhere. The strict Anglo-Catholic (let us take the late Dom Gregory Dix's brilliant essay in *The Apostolic Ministry* as presenting his outlook) concludes for the doctrine of apostolic succession. The apostolate was instituted by Jesus to be His "*shaliach*"—an Aramaic word meaning emissary which may be the original underlying *apostolos* in the New Testament. The *shaliach* is a man's plenipotentiary, with full power to act for him; indeed the man acts in and through his *shaliach*: "a man's *shaliach* is as his own person" is a Rabbinic saying. So Jesus is present in His Church by His apostles. Only they can commission successors in the *shaliach* office for only in them is Jesus present to give the commission to represent Him—so the apostles hand on the commission to the bishops, and the bishops are the plenipotentiaries of Christ, the primary means of Christ's presence and action in the Church. The local ministry, on the other hand, was merely a church foundation, useful in many ways but not representative of Christ. Thus the episcopate is the essential ministry without which you cannot have the Church. The

presbyterate is a mere ecclesiastical device thought up for convenience. It is very much a dependent ministry.

I do not think either of these theories will do. As against the strict Presbyterianism, it is to be remembered that the apostles were not *only* the foundation of the Church, the original and unrepeatable witnesses. They were also chief pastors, giving to the churches they were responsible for a measure of individual presidency and leadership and a contact with the wider life of the Church Catholic. It is hard to see why this should not continue. There is evidence in the New Testament itself for the beginnings of settlement by apostolic men in the presidency of local churches. The evidence that St. John himself settled in Ephesus was strong enough to convince Bishop Lightfoot that he inaugurated the monarchical episcopate in Asia. And, in the tunnel period, it is apparent that this system was widely established in Syria and Asia by about A.D. 100—very early indeed if it is a declension from apostolic standards. And it was not only established but was passionately believed by Ignatius of Antioch to be a Divine ordinance, and the key to the Church's unity and health—so much so that in his letters of farewell to the churches on his way to martyrdom the burden of his message is "do nothing apart from the bishop". He is not concerned with the historical origin of episcopacy, or its connection with the apostolate; his advocacy of it is on a higher ground still—that the threefold ministry is the divinely ordained pattern of Church life, a belief at least not inconsistent with belief in its apostolic origin. The second century succession lists, though their dating is confused, probably do preserve an historical memory of a succession in some cases going back into the apostolic age, as do those who like Irenæus appeal to the episcopal succession as the guarantee of apostolic doctrine.

To sum up, first, there was a differentiation in the ministry in New Testament times, other than the temporary one caused by the unrepeatable functions of the apostles as eye-witnesses and foundations; the apostles also acted as chief pastors, giving single presidency and catholic connection to the churches they founded; and in this they were distinct from the presbyter-bishops. This differentiation could go on. Secondly, there is good evidence that such a differentiation within the local ministry, by which the single bishop became chief pastor, single president, and catholic link, came into effect either within the apostolic period or so soon after it that it is impossible to think of it as a later falling away from apostolic parity. The threefold ministry is legitimate and edifying. It is the way by which the Church preserved in the ministry those aspects of the apostles' ministry which were capable of being continued and which were not adequately fulfilled by the settled ministry of presbyter-bishops and assistant deacons in its original form.

But as against the strict Anglo-Catholic it is to be said that you cannot drive a wedge between the apostolate and the settled ministry, and say one is commissioned by Christ and therefore is essential, the other by the Church and therefore is expendable. The New Testament does not oppose Christ to His Church. The Church is His Body; He works in it. Therefore, theologically, appointment by the Church is as much appointment by Christ as is a direct commission from Him in the days of His flesh. All ministries are set by God in the Church, given

by the Lord to His Body; and this is precisely what is taught in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 where the apostles are lumped in with "helps and governments", "pastors and teachers", and other functions descriptive of the presbyter-bishops and deacons, as all alike being organs of the one Body.

This really destroys the "*shaliach*" argument. Christ's presence and activity in the Church is through the Church itself more than through any one organ in it; it is the Church which is His Body, the place where He is and the instrument by which He acts. If He has a *shaliach* that *shaliach* is the Church which is His Body. Further, Dix overlooked the fact that the one thing the Jewish *shaliach* was never authorized to do was to transfer his commission to another—a *shaliach* could not create another *shaliach*. The *shaliach* comparison, so far from supporting the idea of apostolic succession, thus turns out to be fatal to it and must, as Ehrhardt and others have pointed out, be dropped if the idea of apostolic succession is to be maintained. No, the New Testament picture is rather that Christ raises up through the mission of the apostles the settled ministry to share in the apostles' own ministry, except for their unique and temporary functions, and with the further temporary exception of such parts of their functions as the apostles could conveniently still fulfil locally. When the apostles disappeared these too would be taken over.

This accords best with both the biblical evidence and that of the tunnel period. There is no evidence for a body of "apostolic men" who were appointed by the apostles to succeed them. When you have listed Timothy and Titus, James, Clement, and perhaps one or two others, you have scraped the barrel. A regular order of ministry cannot be deduced from these few and disparate individuals; and even in their case they do not really fit the argument. Timothy and Titus were not Paul's successors but his temporary messengers. James presided at Jerusalem as the Lord's brother rather than as a deputy of the apostles. The epistle of Clement likewise makes it clear that at Corinth the old system of presbyter-bishops was in full operation in the nineties, and that Clement fully accepted it. He writes simply in order to prevent the rightful presbyter-bishops being unconstitutionally thrown out; and he emphasizes that the apostles made arrangements for orderly succession in the ministry through ordination by fit and proper persons. There is no more to it than this; and Dix's attempt to find "apostles" in the "*ellogimoi andres*", the men of repute, is a piece of exegesis so fantastic that perhaps he did not intend it to be taken very seriously. Clement's epistle is important, because it is inconceivable that the important Corinthian church should, at so late a date, lack an apostolic delegate or monarchical bishop as its president if this had really been arranged by the apostles as the means of their own continuance; and also because it shows the early Church's awareness that orderly succession from the apostles in the ministry can come through the local presbyter-bishop, instituted originally by the apostles.

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To sum up, the ministry is essentially one: it is the body of men commissioned by Christ in His Church to fulfil the functions of evan-

gelization and pastoral care which we group together as the ministry of Word and Sacraments ; starting with the apostles it is enlarged by the institution of the settled local ministry, which shares all the apostles' functions other than those which are temporary, and takes them over fully when the apostles disappear, making the necessary adjustment in its own internal arrangement in order to give effective expression to those aspects of the ministry which had been specially emphasized in the individual roving commissions of the apostles. Thus the essential ministry is the ministry exercised first by the apostles and then by the settled local ministry, for through it Christ ministers His Word and Sacraments. The Church may rightly restrict some aspects of it to a particular class within this ministry ; but it is the whole ministry, the simple presbyters as well as the monarchical bishops, who are the essential ministry. Indeed, if any distinction were to be drawn, it would be the presbyterate which would be the more essential, for it is the presbyterate which ministers the regular and normal preaching and teaching, baptism and eucharist and pastoral care to the flock. The bishop's work of presiding and ordaining is necessary if this is to be done ; but it is a *praeparatio evangelii* only ; it is in the evangelism and pastoral building up of Christian congregations by the ministry of Word and Sacraments that Christ continued His redeeming work and gives His living presence to His people.

The strict Presbyterian is wrong in denying that the ministry may not be differentiated ; the strict Anglo-Catholic in affirming that it must be differentiated and that there are, in fact, two kinds of ministry always distinct and parallel in the Church—the apostolic episcopate and the local ecclesiastically-formed presbyterate. We cannot be sure of the details of the historical process ; but the early Church was surely on sound historical ground in treating its ministry as essentially one, deriving it both from the apostolate and from the presbyter-bishops ; and regarding its internal differentiation as something conformable to the mind of Christ for the more effective fulfilment of the total role of the ministry in the Church. In other words, Luther was right after all. The ministry of the Word and Sacraments is, as he taught, essential to the Church ; but its outward form is theologically indifferent. It is to be ordered for the edifying of the Church, and while this may mean drastic change if the truth and purity of the Gospel is at stake, it also means that tradition is to be greatly revered, and the Church's customs not contrary to Scripture are to be maintained as expressive of the Holy Spirit's guidance of the Church in history. We may justly believe that the episcopal form of the ministry, with its historical succession, are to be esteemed and reverently continued because of the witness it bears to the unity of the Church both across the world and down the centuries of Christian history.
