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The Nature of the Ministry
according to Paul

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This is the third of a series of articles by Dr. Fung, who teaches at the China Graduate School of Theology in Hong Kong. Together with a fourth article to be published in the future they embody the substance of his Th.M. thesis submitted to Fuller Theological Seminary on 'Ministry, Community and Spiritual Gifts'. The earlier articles appeared in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY 52 (1980), 195-214 and 53 (1981), 89-107.

Both the nature of the Church and the organization of the Church are subjects which have received a great deal of attention from scholars. On the former subject, R. R. Williams, writing twenty-five years ago, was already able to say: "There has been more discussion about the nature of the Church during the last twenty-five years than in any similar period during the whole course of Church history."¹ A somewhat comparable statement on the latter subject was made by the president of the Catholic Biblical Association of America in 1968. "The literature on church order is extensive," he remarked, "so extensive, in fact, that one might think that the subject had been wrung dry and an impasse reached, with little possibility of further fruitful discussion between the episcopal and non-episcopal churches."²

129

But inasmuch as the nature of the Church and the organization of the Church (which may basically be equated with the outward form of the ministry) seem to have largely dominated modern discussions on the Church, there has correspondingly been a comparative lack of emphasis on an adequate doctrine of the inner nature of the ministry, particularly as related to the nature of the Church. In the literature available in English, two names which spring to mind as outstanding exceptions in this respect are A. T. Hanson and E. Käsemann. In his book *The Pioneer Ministry*, Hanson explicitly denies that there is any NT doctrine of the *form* of the ministry and sets himself the task of discovering the NT doctrine of the *nature* of the ministry, which, he holds, is to be found alone in the letters of Paul.³ Yet Hanson's presentation of the Pauline doctrine of the ministry is concerned to demonstrate only one main point, namely, as the title of his book indicates, the pioneering nature of the ministry; and even here one might feel unable to go all the way with him in his conclusions. This doctrine of the ministry, moreover, is linked by Hanson to Paul's idea of the remnant rather than to

¹ R. R. Williams, 'The Doctrine of the Church', *The Churchman* 66 (1952), 133-140 (133). Cf. E. Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, E.T. (London, 1971), 102.

² M. M. Bourke, 'Reflections on Church Order in the New Testament', *CBQ* 30 (1968), 493-511 (493).

³ A. T. Hanson, *The Pioneer Ministry* (London, 1961), 12, 58.

Paul's doctrine of the Church⁴ (though, to be sure, the remnant idea has a place in Paul's doctrine of the Church). Käsemann, on the other hand, does link ministry and community together as he expounds the nature of both in terms of the one Pauline doctrine of charisma, but his treatment of these themes leads him to rather extravagant conclusions regarding the outward form of the ministry.⁵

In the following pages an attempt is made (a) to present a reasonably adequate and accurate picture of the nature of the Christian ministry as Paul conceived it, and (b) to bring this Pauline doctrine into specific relation with his conception of the Church. Three passages, where Paul's ideas about the ministry seem more clearly spelled out than elsewhere, fall to be considered: 1 Corinthians 3-4, 2 Corinthians 3:1-6:10 and Ephesians 4:7-16

1 CORINTHIANS 3-4

130

In these two chapters Paul is dealing with a wrong conception of the Christian ministry (3:1-4:13) which, together with a false conception of wisdom (1:18-2:16), lay at the root of the Corinthians' divisiveness, and he is appealing for an end to the divisions (4:14-21). As he corrects the Corinthians' erroneous views, he at the same time reveals his own view of the ministry.⁶ The main points that may be gathered from this section are as follows.

(1) Christian ministers, like Paul and Apollos, are servants whom the Lord uses as his instruments for the salvation and blessing of his Church (3:5). The very designation *διάκονοι*, which is the most inclusive term in the NT for Christian workers, indicates the nature of the Christian ministry — it is a *διακονία*, a service rendered in humility and love. It was in terms of the rendering of such service, which reached its climax in the giving of his life as a ransom for many, that Jesus, who was the *διάκονος par excellence* (Rom. 15:8), conceived of the very purpose of his incarnation (Mk. 10:45). Thus, the Christian ministry is a rendering of service in imitation of Christ by his disciples (*cf.* Mk. 10:43f.).⁷

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-45.

⁵ E. Käsemann, 'Ministry and Community in the New Testament', *Essays on New Testament Themes*, E.T. (London, 1964), 63-94. For a critique, *cf.* R. Y. K. Fung, 'Charismatic versus Organized Ministry? An examination of an Alleged Antithesis', *EQ* 52 (1980), 195-214.

⁶ This takes for granted the two assumptions accepted as valid by A. T. Hanson, *op. cit.*, 64: (a) 'when Paul speaks about the relation of himself and his colleagues to the Corinthians, his arguments are valid for the whole Church and not for the Corinthians only'; (b) 'in Paul's mind the relation of himself and his colleagues to the Corinthians adequately represents the relation of the ministry as a whole to the Church as a whole'.

⁷ *Cf.* H. Küng, *The Church*, E.T. (New York, 1967), 388-391.

(2) Christian ministers are 'servants (*ὑπηρέται*) of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God' (4:1): charged with the task of propagating and preserving the purity of the revealed truth of God, they are subordinate and answerable to Christ. Faithfulness to this commission is their supreme requirement (4:2). In a different figure of speech, they are 'fellow-workers in God's service' (3:9, NEB mg., *cf.* RSV),⁸ whose task is the planting of the seed of the Gospel, the watering and cultivation of his field, the Church (*cf.* Is. 5), the erection and upbuilding of God's house (3:6,9). The Christian ministry is thus a divine provision for the service of the Church.

(3) Because their task is to serve the Church, Christian ministers can be said to belong to the Church (3:21f.). The ministry is therefore neither constitutive of the Church nor independent of it; rather, it is a part of the Church with the specific function of serving the rest of the Church.

(4) Christian ministers are united by an essential oneness (*ἕν*, 3:8a) in the source of their commission which is God (3:9) or Christ (4:1), in the purpose of their commission which is the service of the Church (3:6,9; 4:1), and in their dependence upon God for the fruitfulness of their commission (3:7). At the same time, they are differentiated from one another by the peculiar gifts and calling of the Lord to each (3:5; its strong resemblance to Eph. 4:7 and Rom. 12:3 is noteworthy), the specific nature of their individual tasks, planting or watering, laying the foundation or building the superstructure (3:6,11), and the distinctive contribution that each can make (3:8b, 10b, 12-15, if, for the present purpose, the negative element of failure may be passed over). In the Christian ministry is thus clearly exhibited the principle of unity and diversity, as also in Paul's conception of the Church as the Body of Christ and in his conception of the spiritual gifts.

(5) Christian ministers are meant to be, as Paul was, an example to the Church. In 4:6f., Paul states that what he has written in the preceding context (3:1-4:5)⁹ about the Christian ministers are intended for the instruction of the Corinthians. They are to learn from Paul and Apollos as object-lessons or examples. The exact meaning of *το Μῆ*

131

⁸ In favour of this rendering, over against that of the AV, NEB and NIV ('God's fellow-workers'; *cf.* A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *First Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1967), 58), is the consideration that the preceding context emphasizes the thought that Paul and Apollos are not opposed to each other but are workers together (C. K. Barrett, *First Corinthians* (HNTC; New York, 1968), 86; *cf.* F. W. Grosheide, *First Corinthians* (NLC; London, 1954), 82).

⁹ The fact that Paul in 4:6 mentions himself and Apollos again shows that *tauta* refers not to 3:1-5 only (as in Grosheide, *ibid.*, 102), but to the entire section 3:1-4:5, especially 3:5-17 (*cf.* Barrett, *op. cit.*, 106; Robertson-Plummer, *op. cit.*, 80).

ὅπερ ἂν γέγραπται is perhaps obscure, but the stress in the following verses on humble acknowledgement of God and subordination to him seems clear. In particular the contrast in verses 8-13 between the lowliness of the apostles in their deprivation and hardships and the haughtiness of the Corinthians in their fancied sufficiency and honour implies that 'the Apostles are what God means the members of the Church to be, while the Corinthians are not'. The picture of the harassed, precarious life of the ministry is not an appeal for pity, but rather an indirect injunction to follow in the steps of the apostle.¹⁰ This is given direct and explicit expression in the words of verse 16 — 'I urge you, then, be imitators of me' — the point of the imitation which Paul has in mind being his 'humility and self-giving'¹¹ as exemplified in the kind of life described in verses 9-13, which bears remarkable parallels to the life of the Lord himself (*cf.*, *e.g.*, Is. 53:3; Lk. 9:58). While the call to imitation here is to imitation of someone vested with apostolic authority, it nevertheless illustrates the general principle that all Christian ministers should be examples to the Church (*cf.* Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3). It may thus be said, with A. T. Hanson, that the ministry 'shows us in miniature what the Church should be'.¹²

132

Paul's view of the Christian ministry as revealed in this section (1 Cor. 3-4) may now be summed up. The ministry is a divine provision which is responsible to Christ. It is a part of the Church given to the rest of the Church to be employed in its service. It comprises a multiplicity of gifts and functions, but is united by the unity of God and the unity of the Church. It serves the Church by itself first living out the life of suffering and sacrifice exhibited by the Lord on earth, thereby setting an example for the Church as a whole to follow. The pattern which emerges, therefore, is that of Christ-the ministry-the Church. The ministry thus sustains a double relationship:

It is related to Christ as responsible to him and as being the primary means by which his life is reproduced in the world. And it is related to the Church as serving the Church, and as leading the Church as a whole into the same life which itself is exhibiting . . . the ministry is the pioneer in Christian living for the Church, as Christ was the pioneer for all of us.¹³

2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-6:10

This second main section, which was written largely as a defence of the

¹⁰ A. T. Hanson, *op. cit.*, 60, quoting H. L. Goudge.

¹¹ W. P. De Boer, *The Imitation of Christ: An Exegetical Study* (Kampen, 1962), 207.

¹² Hanson, *loc. cit.*

¹³ Hanson, *op. cit.*, 65, 72, 62 (whence the quotation).

ministry as exercised by Paul and his colleagues, may be regarded as a 'sustained exposition of the nature of the Christian ministry'. It is possible so to regard this passage, since Hanson's study of Paul's use of 'we' has shown that Paul 'wrote to the churches always in the name of, and on behalf of, what we may call the mission, that is the group of workers for whom Paul himself was leader and centre, but not by any means the only member', so that here when he speaks of 'servants' (plural) and uses the first person plural he may be taken to be 'writing about the ministry, and not merely offering *obiter dicta* about his own personal experience'.¹⁴ On account of its length, we shall divide up the passage into several sub-sections.

(1) Chapter 3 verses 1-11 contains two main points which deserve mention. The one is the emphatic denial of any self-competence on the part of Paul and his colleagues and the corresponding acknowledgement of God as the source and stay of their ministry. The confidence which they had before God,¹⁵ that the very existence of the Corinthian church was a letter of recommendation bearing testimony to the effectiveness of their work (vv.1-3), came 'through Christ'. Everything is attributed not to self but to God: 'Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God; who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant' (vv.5f., RV).¹⁶

133

The other point is the stress laid upon the superiority of the new ministry to the old as invested with far greater splendour. The old ministry was (a) a 'dispensation of condemnation' (v.9) and therefore (b) a 'dispensation of death' (v.7), since it was based on a covenant which, being γράμμα (v.6), *i.e.* a written code of law 'engraved letter by letter upon stone' (NEB), only set up lofty standards without providing the ability to reach them and condemned to death all who thus failed; and it was (c) only transient (v.11 — τὸ καταργούμενον, present participle = 'that which was being done away'). The new ministry is, by contrast (a) a 'dispensation of the Spirit' (v.8) and therefore (b) a 'dispensation of righ-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66, 56f. *Cf.* D. E. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford, 1964), 201; R. R. Covell, 'Inclusive-Exclusive First Person Plural Pronouns in the Pauline Epistles' (unpublished Th.M. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, 1964), 136.

¹⁵ The phrase πρὸς τὸν θεόν is more likely dependent on the whole sentence than on the word πεποιθήσιν alone (as in AV, RV, RSV, NASB); *cf.* R. Bultmann, *TDNT*, VI 8, n. 2, *s.v.* πεποιθήσις.

¹⁶ The aorist ἰκάνωσεν points, in the case of Paul, to the time of his commission as an apostle, which coincided with his conversion (Acts 9:3-19; 26:16-18; 22:14-15). The repetition of the three words beginning with ἰκάν- is marked also by the NEB, NASB and NIV renderings, but is lost partially in the translations of AV and RSV and completely in J. B. Phillips.

teousness' (v.9), for the life-giving Spirit (ζωοποιεῖ, v.8) writes the law upon the hearts of God's people (v.6) and enables those who walk according to the Spirit to fulfil the just requirement of the law (cf. Rom 8:4); and it is (c) permanent (v.11 — τὸ μένον, 'that which is here to stay'). The old ministry, indeed, had been inaugurated with splendour (v.7, ἐγενήθη ἐν δόξῃ; cf. v.9a, δόξα; v.11a, διὰ δόξης), but the splendour was transitory (v.7, τὴν καταργουμένην); with the advent of the new ministry, the old ministry has been paled into non-splendour (v.19, οὐ δεδόξασται) as something which only once had splendour, by a splendour far superior (v.8, πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον; v.9, πολλῶ μᾶλλον περισσεύει . . . δόξῃ; v.10, τῆς ὑπερβαλλούσης δόξης; v.11, πολλῶ μᾶλλον . . .) and permanent (v.8, ἔσται ἐν δόξῃ; v.11, ἐν δόξῃ). The Christian ministry, then, far surpasses the Mosaic ministry in splendour, even as Christ far surpasses Moses in glory (cf. Heb. 3:1-6). The Christian ministry is not only initiated by God and sustained by God, it is something of surpassing splendour; it is a very 'splendid thing'.¹⁷

(2) The next sub-section, 3:12-4:6, provides further illustration of some of the truths already noted. The main observation has to do with the pioneering nature of the Christian ministry. Whereas Moses used to hide the reflected splendour of Yahweh on his face by means of a veil (v.13), the ministers of the new covenant are characterized by great openness (v.12), both in their lives (4:2a) and, especially, in their preaching — in 'the open statement of the truth' (4:2b), in the bold proclamation of the glory of God in the face of Christ, who is the image of God (4:6b, 4b).¹⁸ This is possible because into their hearts (καρδία = the centre of man's personality) has shone the light of revelation.¹⁹ Having themselves first recognized the glory of God as now fully revealed in Christ, they boldly set it forth. Now it is stated in 3:18 that all Christians (ἡμεῖς πάντες), as they continuously behold²⁰ the glory of God, are in the process of being transfigured into the likeness of the Lord in increasing degree. Here A. T. Hanson sees 'that transition from the work of the ministry to the work of

¹⁷ J. B. Phillips, section heading at 3:12. It is worth noting with A. Plummer, *Second Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1966), 85, that in vv.7-11 δόξα appears eight times, together with δεδόξασται and δεδοξασμένον (once each).

¹⁸ The explicit meaning of the πρόσωπον of Christ is particularly appropriate in Paul's case as an allusion to his experience on the Damascus road.

¹⁹ The genitive in φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως is probably not subjective: 'the illuminating which the knowledge of the glory (or, the Gospel of the glory) produces' (Plummer, *op. cit.*, 120f.; cf. Phillips), but, more likely, a genitive of definition: 'the illuminating which consists in the (imparting of the) knowledge of the glory, etc.' (so, apparently, AV, RSV, NEB and NIV).

²⁰ Κατοπτριζόμενοι (present middle) should probably be taken here to mean 'beholding' (AV, RSV, NASB) rather than 'reflecting' (RV, NEB, NIV). As R. V. G. Tasker remarks, 'It would . . . seem more natural that it is by beholding the image of Christ,

the Church' noted above. For, avers Hanson, 'this process of being transformed from glory to glory surely cannot be separated from the thought that those who are thus transformed do thereby show forth the glory which they increasingly receive', so that the effect of the Christian ministry is that 'bit by bit we all become centres of radiating glory, and thus all partake in the apostolic function of the Church'.²¹ Once again, the pattern of Christ-ministry-Church can be recognized, and the ministry is seen as possessing a pioneering nature.

Three other observations from this sub-section (3:12-4:6) may be briefly made. First, the ministry is traced to the mercy of God (4:1a). Not only the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, but also the commission to propagate that knowledge, comes through God's mercy: human ability and merit is thereby absolutely excluded; as in redemption so in ministry, all is of God. Second, the ministry is answerable to God. While seeking to commend themselves to the conscience of all men (πᾶσαν συνείδησιν ἀνθρώπων),²² Christian workers conduct their ministry above all 'in the sight of God' (4:2) as the One to whom they are ultimately accountable and beyond whom there can be no higher court of appeal. Third, the ministry is again depicted in terms of lowly service: 'It is not ourselves that we proclaim; we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake' (4:5, NEB). The preaching of Christ as Lord naturally implies the preachers' status as δούλοι (cf. 2 Cor. 6:4, θεοῦ διάκονοι), but a further step is marked when 'for Jesus' sake' the ministers become also the δούλοι of the Church (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19ff.). The use of the human name Ἰησοῦς and of δούλοι instead of διάκονοι serves as a reminder that the ministry of Christ's servants is to be patterned after that of their Lord who took the form of a δούλος, being born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7).

(3) Of the next sub-section, 4:7-5:10, the second part (4:16-5:10) speaks of the hope of future glory as one reason for the courage of Christ's ministers (5:6), but this hope is the common property of all believers. It is the first part (4:7-15) that has a more direct bearing on Paul's doctrine of the ministry. A few features may again be noted. First, the power of the ministry is stated to be God's. The priceless treasure of 'the light of the

rather than by reflecting it, that the Christian becomes changed into it' (*Second Corinthians*, (TNTC; London, 1958), 68). Cf. C. K. Barrett, *Second Corinthians* (BNTC; London, 1973), 124f.; G. Kittel, *TDNT*, II 696; J. Behm, *TDNT*, IV 758.

²¹ Hanson, *op. cit.*, 71f. Cf. J. Héring, *The Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, E.T. (London, 1967), 27, n. 21: 'Every Christian has become a Moses . . .'

²² P. E. Hughes, *Second Corinthians* (NLC; London, 1962), 124. 'Literally, to every conscience of men; all — πᾶσαν — brought forward for emphasis' (Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 129).

knowledge of the glory of God' (v.6) is contained in earthen vessels (v.7),²³ so that the transcendent power may be (ἡ =) seen to belong to God and not originate from the ministers themselves. The extraordinary quality (ὑπερβολή) of this power is illustrated from actual experience (vv.8f.). Once again, the ministry is seen to be derived from God and sustained by God. The treasure is deposited in 'pots of earthenware' (NEB) by God in the first place, and the insignificance of the vessels throws into greater relief the magnificence of God's exceeding power.

Second, verses 10-12 enunciate what may be called the living-through-dying principle of the ministry, a principle which has a twofold application. Paul and his colleagues (as seen from vv.8f.) perpetually bear about in the body the dying of Jesus (τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, v.10) — that life of obedience as the Suffering Servant of God which was a continuous process of dying,²⁴ and of which the ultimate death on the Cross was but the final stage — and are perpetually being delivered over to death (v.11, εἰς θάνατον). But it is through this dying (including both the νέκρωσις and the παραδίδοσθαι εἰς θάνατον) that life comes: to the ministers themselves, 'the life of Jesus' (vv.10b, 11b) — as experienced in the deliverances which come in the transcendence of God's power and as 'evidence that the Crucified is still alive and has Divine power';²⁵ and, to the believers, the effective working (ἐνεργεῖται) of 'life' (v.12) — life spiritual and eternal. The 'dying of Jesus' on the part of the ministry is the very means by which the 'life of Jesus' comes both to itself and to the Church which it serves.²⁶

Third, the expressions 'for Jesus' sake' (v.11a) and 'for your sake' (v.15a) may be regarded as indicating a double motivation for the Christian ministry. The apostles are 'fools for Christ's sake' (1 Cor. 4:10); Paul and his colleagues account themselves δούλους of those whom they serve, 'for Jesus' sake' (2 Cor. 4:5); it is 'for Jesus' sake' that they constantly risk death (v.11). Part of the meaning of this phrase may be defined from the present context — in order that he may be recognized to be the glorious

image of the God of glory (vv.4,6), the crucified and risen Lord (vv.10,11, 14), to the praise of the glory of God (v.15). From another perspective, all things (in context, the things mentioned in vv.8-13) are being endured for the sake of the elect (cf. 2 Tim. 2:10), that they may have life and know its effectual workings in them (v.12b). Thus, the immediate purpose and motivation of the ministry is the good and benefit of the Church; its ultimate motivation and goal, the glory and praise of the Church's lord.

(4) The last sub-section, 5:11-6:10, contains a passage (5:18-6:1) which makes clear the basis of the Christian ministry.²⁷ This includes the basis of Christian redemption, which is the work of reconciliation which God effected in Christ (vv.18f.) — the laying upon Christ the full penalty of men's sin (v.21; cf. Gal. 3:13), and consequently the 'not counting their trespasses against them' (v.19) but rather counting them righteous in Christ (v.21b).²⁸ But the specific basis of the ministry consists in God's giving 'the ministry of reconciliation' (v.18b), or, entrusting 'the message of reconciliation' (v.19c), to certain people. Whether the recipients of this 'ministry', here said by implication to be the preaching of 'the message of reconciliation', are the whole body of believers or Christian ministers only, depends on the scope of reference in ἡμῖν in verses 18b and 19c. The latter interpretation seems more likely;²⁹ but in any case the

²⁷ Hanson, *op. cit.*, 79f., claims that 2 Cor. 5:11-15 'brings out the pattern (Christ-ministry-Church) even more clearly (than heretofore) . . . Paul exercises his ministry among the Corinthians because Christ died for all . . . He is giving the *raison d'être* of the ministry. The ministry is founded on the redeeming act of Christ, and its task is to carry out in the Church that task of mutual caring and redemption which its very being involves . . . Again, it may be questioned whether in this passage Paul's purpose is to give 'the *raison d'être* of the ministry'; it seems rather that Paul is here explaining how the love of Christ (v.14, subjective genitive) restrains him and his colleagues from all self-seeking and confines their aims to the service of God and their fellow-men (v.13; cf. Plummer, *op. cit.*, 173). In our view, therefore, the passage has no direct bearing on the ministry, but rather enunciates the love of Christ as a motivating principle of Christian ethics — a principle which, of course, applies also to the conduct of Christian service.

²⁸ On 2 Cor. 5:18-21, cf. R. Y. K. Fung, 'Justification by Faith in 1 & 2 Corinthians', in *Pauline Studies*, F. F. Bruce *Festschrift*, ed. D. A. Hagner and M. J. Harris (Exeter/Grand Rapids, 1980), 246-261 (254-257).

²⁹ Hanson, *op. cit.*, 80, maintains that in vv.16-19 ἡμεῖς 'should be taken throughout as referring to all Christians . . . In that case (the ministry of reconciliation) will also apply to all Christians'. But this looks like begging the question. A rather strong point in favour of taking ἡμεῖς as referring to a narrower circle than the whole body of believers is the conspicuous change in v.19 from αὐτοῖς . . . αὐτῶν to ἐν ἡμῖν; ἐν αὐτοῖς would have been more natural for the other view. In v.18 ἡμᾶς, to which ἡμῖν corresponds, need not refer to all the reconciled (as per Hanson). 'St. Paul may be continuing to think only of himself and his colleagues . . . He is deeply conscious, and is anxious to avow, that an Apostle has as much need as anyone of the reconciliation which was effected through Christ' (Plummer, *op. cit.*, 182). Cf. also H. Alford, *The Greek Testament*, revised by

²³ Plummer, *op. cit.*, 127, rightly maintains that here the 'vessel' is the whole personality, not just the body of the messenger.

²⁴ 'Νέκρωσις here retains its proper significance of an actual *process*, of dying, in contrast to Rom. 4:19 where it is used of a *state* of deadness' (Hughes, *op. cit.*, 141, n. 12).

²⁵ Plummer, *op. cit.*, 130.

²⁶ Hanson would seem to be going beyond the warrantable limits of this passage (4:7-16) when he writes (*op. cit.*, 75): 'Christ's ministers . . . die that the Corinthians may live, but also that the Corinthians may in their turn die. Verse 14 hints of this death, with its implication that the Corinthians also will be raised from death by God. The ministry then leads the way in dying; but they do not obviate the necessity of the Christians' death . . . What is stated here (apart from the first clause) is far from obvious from the text and it may be doubted if it can legitimately be derived from the present passage.'

point is made that the ministry is based on the commission of God. Those who are thus commissioned are 'ambassadors for Christ', his representatives (v.20b, ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ) who seek to promote his interests (v.20a, ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ). Through them 'as co-operators with God himself' (6:1, J. B. Phillips) God appeals to men to be reconciled to himself (v.20a,c), *i. e.*, personally to appropriate the benefit of his reconciling work already effected in Christ (v.19). As the work of Christ is completely identified as the work of God,³⁰ so the work of the ministry is seen to be based upon and in a sense continuous with the work of God in Christ.

The various features of the Christian ministry which have emerged from this review of Paul's exposition of it in 2 Corinthians 3-6, together with the points noted in connection with 1 Corinthians 3-4, may now be collected and summarized. They are tabulated as follows:

- (1) The ministry is something initiated by God. Its origin can be traced to the mercy of God (2 Cor. 4:1); its basis lies in the commission of God (1 Cor. 5:18f.); it owes its validity to the 'qualifying act' of God (2 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor. 3:5,10).
- (2) The ministry is wholly dependent on God. In God is its sufficiency (2 Cor. 3:5); God's transcendent power is its support and stay (2 Cor. 4:7ff.); God's blessing is the condition for its success (1 Cor. 3:7).
- (3) The ministry is ultimately responsible to God. Christian ministers are servants of the Lord (1 Cor. 3:5), attendants of Christ and stewards of God (1 Cor. 4:1); they discharge their ministry 'in the sight of God' (2 Cor. 4:2; *cf.* 1 Cor. 4:5) as 'knowing the fear of the Lord' (2 Cor. 5:11).
- (4) The ministry is given for the service of the Church. It belongs to the Church (1 Cor. 3:31f.) as a divinely-appointed means of blessing (1 Cor. 3:5). Christian ministers are servants of the Church (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 4:5); they endure all things for its benefit (2 Cor. 4:13, 12).
- (5) The ministry is continuous with and patterned after the ministry of Christ himself. In declaring the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19f.), in treading the paths of lowly service (2 Cor. 4:5), in dying-with-a-view-to-living (2 Cor. 4:10-12), Christian ministers are fol-

lowing in the footsteps of their Master and in a sense continuing his work.³¹

- (6) The ministry is largely pioneering in nature. It serves the Church by being a pioneer for the Church, by setting an example for the rest of the Church to follow (1 Cor. 4:6,16; 2 Cor. 3:12-18).
- (7) The ministry is a very splendid thing, on account of the splendour of the new covenant with which it has to do (2 Cor. 3:7-11).
- (8) The ministry shows unity and diversity (point (4), in previous section), and has as its ultimate goal the honour of Christ, the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:11,15).

EPHESIANS 4:7-16

In Ephesians 4:1-16, Paul is dealing with the Church's calling as the Body of Christ. Having shown the Church to be a spiritual unity (vv.4-6) he goes on to point out the diversity of gifts and functions which exists in the Body and to indicate their relation to the over-all purpose which God has for the Church (vv.7-16). This latter passage is of great importance for the light it throws on Paul's conception of the Christian ministry. The enumeration in verse 11 is not, indeed, intended to exhaust all the forms of ministry, but it is doubtless representative of the ministry as a whole, so that what Paul says here about the ministry may again be taken as his doctrine of the ministry.³²

Of supreme importance is the statement in verse 12 about the purpose of the ministries that Christ has bestowed upon the Church, which is expressed as follows: πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας εἰς οἰκὸδομήν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. These three successive prepositional phrases have been variously construed. (a) AV and RSV apparently take the phrases as co-ordinate and as yielding the sense that the various ministries are given by Christ 'for the equipment of the saints = for the work of ministry = for building up the body of Christ'. The use of different prepositions (πρὸς, εἰς, εἰς), however, is against

E. F. Harrison (Chicago, 1958), II, 665b; F. V. Filson, 'The Second Epistle to the Corinthians', in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. G. R. Buttrick *et al.*, vol. x (New York, 1953), 341f.

The effect of this and the previous two notes is to suggest that the pioneering nature of the ministry appears clearly in fewer passages than Hanson has made out, though it does have an exegetical basis.

³⁰ Hanson, *op. cit.*, 80, says that in 5:16-6:2 'Paul connects the work of the ministry with the work of God in Christ perhaps more explicitly than anywhere else'.

³¹ *Cf.* T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry* (London, 1948), 100, thesis no. 1: '... the Church's Ministry is a continuation of the Messianic Ministry of Jesus'. In this connection, G. S. Hendry has rightly warned that 'it is misleading... to speak of the mission of the apostles as a continuation of the mission of Christ, as if they were on the same level. The mission of the apostles remains subordinate and instrumental to the mission of Christ (in relation to which it might be more accurately described as a *commission*). In other words, the apostolic function of the twelve remains a *ministerium*; it does not become a *magisterium*: 2 Cor. 4:5' (*The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia, 1965), 64). Hence our phrase 'in a sense'.

³² Hanson, *op. cit.*, 104.

such an understanding.³³ (b) T. K. Abbott regards the 'equipment of the saints' as 'the ultimate purpose, with a view to which the teachers, etc., have been given εἰς ἔργον διακ. εἰς οἶκ. κ.τ.λ.'. ³⁴ This has the merit of doing justice to the change in the prepositions, but it is unlikely that in such a succession of prepositional phrases as is present in our text the ultimate purpose should be placed first; and it hardly seems correct to make 'building up the body of Christ' subordinate to the purpose of equipping the saints (on the assumption which Abbott himself makes that the terms are not co-ordinate with each other). (c) M. Dibelius subordinates the second member to the first, and co-ordinates the third with the first.³⁵ The sense would then be: Christ appointed the apostles, etc., 'for the equipment of the saints with a view to the work of ministry, for the building up of the Body of Christ'. In other words, the ministers of Christ build up the Body of Christ by equipping the saints for the work of ministry. (d) S. Hanson suggests that διακονία has a technical meaning approximately equal to 'office', and that the sense of the passage is therefore: 'Christ appointed the apostles . . . (for putting the saints in order) to their ministry, *i.e.* to the building up of the Body of Christ.' This assumes that 'the three prepositional members are co-ordinated, though the two εἰς-members are not for that reason parallel, but the latter has a separate position'.³⁶ This interpretation is, however, open to the objection that it is awkward to regard the πρὸς-phrase as somewhat parenthetical and that in fact εἰς ἔργον διακονίας is too remote from ἔδωκεν for the two to be regarded as forming a single unit, so that ἔδωκεν . . . εἰς ἔργον διακονίας has the meaning, 'appointed . . . to their ministry'. (e) In the view of A. T. Hanson, πρὸς expresses the object of the giving of the ministry and εἰς in each case expresses the purpose for which the saints are perfected.³⁷ The meaning then is: the ministry is given for the equipment of the saints, so that they may engage in the work of ministry (namely, or, thereby), in the building up of the Body of Christ. Such an interpretation is in line with Hanson's thesis of the pioneering nature of the ministry.

Of these sample interpretations, (c) and (d) make the building up of the Body of Christ the responsibility of the ministry alone, while (e) seems

to make it belong exclusively to the individual believers. The passage would seem, however, to support a mediating position. (f) This takes the first εἰς as subordinate to πρὸς, and the second εἰς as dependent on the previous phrases together, as apparently in NEB: '. . . to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the Body of Christ.'³⁸ On this view, the ministers are instituted by Christ to equip individual believers to exercise their gifts (v.7; *cf.* v.16) in Christian service, to the end that (by means of both — what for convenience may be termed — the 'special ministry' of apostles, etc., and the 'common service' of the believers) the Body of Christ may be built up. This position is expressed succinctly by F. Foulkes, who writes: 'What is done *for* the saints, and *by* the saints, is for the edifying of the body of Christ.'³⁹ Such a view seems to do justice to the different prepositions in the Greek, to the emphasis in verse 11 on the importance of the ministry (*i.e.* ministers) as appointed by Christ, and to the corresponding emphasis on the part that each believer has to play in the growth of Christ's body (v.16).

The ultimate goal to which the process of the upbuilding of Christ's Body is to lead is described in verse 13, again in three prepositional phrases, as the attaining 'to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'. In the first phrase, the combination of faith with knowledge, together with the reference in verse 14 to steadfastness in the face of erroneous teaching, shows that 'the unity of the faith' spoken of is not the unity among believers created or inspired by faith (*cf.* v.5), but rather a unity which consists in the same mature understanding⁴⁰ of the Son of God as the object of the Church's faith and worship (4:5), the Head which fills the Body with its own life and power (1:23; 3:16). This unity of faith

³³ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, 1934), 624, however, thinks that there is hardly any distinction here.

³⁴ T. K. Abbott, *Ephesians and Colossians* (ICC; Edinburgh, 1968), 119.

³⁵ M. Dibelius, referred to by S. Hanson, *The Unity of the Church in the New Testament: Colossians and Ephesians* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1946), 157. Similarly, C. L. Mitton, *Ephesians* (NCB; London, 1976), 151f.

³⁶ S. Hanson, *loc. cit.*

³⁷ A. T. Hanson, *op. cit.*, 105; *cf.* F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London, 1908), 163.

³⁸ *Cf.* NIV; J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (2nd ed.; London, n.d.), 99, where he writes of the second εἰς-phrase, 'This is the process to the forwarding of which all that has been spoken of is directed.'

³⁹ F. Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (TNTC; London, 1963), 120 (italics mine). *Cf.* R. P. Martin, in D. Guthrie *et. al.* (ed.), *New Bible Commentary Revised* (London, 1970), 1116a: '. . . and so by the complementary functions of both a regular ministry, ordained and appointed by the Head of the Church, and of the rank and file of the church, Christ's body may be edified' (italics mine). S. Hanson, on the other hand, denies to this passage, and indeed to the whole epistle, the idea of believers building up the Church (*loc. cit.*); so does Martin in his later contribution on Ephesians to the Broadman Commentary (ed. C. J. Allen). As M. Barth rightly emphasizes, however, Eph. 4:16 shows that the Church has a responsibility to build herself up (*Ephesians* (Garden City, 1974), 450, 446, 273); *cf.* n. 46 below.

⁴⁰ The καὶ in καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως is perhaps best taken as expegetical. *Cf.* F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London, 1961), 86 ('the unity among believers which is produced by their common sharing of "the knowledge of the Son of God"').

and knowledge is an indispensable part of the ideal for the Church, introduced by the second phrase, to be ἀνὴρ τέλειος. Here the primary reference is not to individual Christians as such⁴¹ (not ἄνδρες τέλειοι), but to the totality of believers as the Body of Christ (v. 12; cf. the 'one new man' of 2:15). The meaning of this phrase is developed in the following words, 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ', which set up the goal of an intensive fulness which consists in the common 'appropriation of the full Christ', as the Church more and more becomes in the spiritual life of its members what it already is in Christ (cf. 1:23; 4:10).⁴²

For the Church collectively to attain to this goal (v. 13) means, in more practical terms, for it to be free from the instability of infancy (v. 14),⁴³ to be 'maintaining the truth'⁴⁴ and to be growing up in love⁴⁵ toward the Head in all things. Such growth takes place as (a) the Body is vitally related to its Head (v. 16, ἐξ οὗ), holding fast to him (cf. Col. 2:19, κρατῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν) and receiving nourishment from him (cf. 1:23), and (b) as its members are rightly related to one another, each making its own contribution (ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους), according to the measure of its gift and function (κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ), to the upbuilding of the whole in love.⁴⁶ This reference to the part which individual members have to play toward the building up of the Body, which is fully in accord with the fact that each has been given gifts by the ascended Christ (v. 7), and with the understanding that the work of Christ's ministers is to equip the saints for the service that they in turn are to perform (v. 12), seems to warrant the suggestion that the 'common service' of all believers is in a sense

142

⁴¹ As taken e.g. by Mitton, *op. cit.*, 154f.

⁴² Cf. H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, E.T. (Grand Rapids, 1975), 378, 435-438 (quotation from 436). Similarly, R. Schippers, *NIDNTT*, I 92, holds that here ἡλικία is probably used in the figurative sense of growing up to maturity rather than in the sense of physical stature; cf. also G. Delling, *TDNT*, VI, 302.

⁴³ Verses 14-16 are not a direct explication of v. 13 but rather indicate what in order to attain that goal, the Church must in the meantime be like. Cf. Abbott, *op. cit.*, 121; Barth, *op. cit.*, 441. Also see n. 51 below.

⁴⁴ So the word ἀληθεύοντες is rendered by J. A. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 185, where he writes: 'The large meaning of ἀλήθεια in the Christian vocabulary, and especially the immediate contrast with πλάνη in this passage, may justify us in the rendering given . . . The clause must not be limited to mean "being true in your love" (cf. 'to be sincere in love' — R. Bultmann, *TDNT*, 11, 251, s.v. ἀληθεύω) or "dealing truly in love" (RV mg.).' Cf. A. C. Thiselton, *NIDNTT*, III 887, who holds that possibly the word 'here entails integrity of life in addition to truthful speech'. On the other hand, Barth, *op. cit.*, 444, maintains that the context of 4:15 supports the sense of verbal confession.

⁴⁵ For thus connecting 'in love' with the following rather than the preceding words, cf. F. F. Bruce, *op. cit.*, 89; R. P. Martin, *op. cit.*, 1117a.

⁴⁶ M. Barth rightly observes that growth 'should not be understood just as a natural (Mark 4:27-28, 'automatic') process or event; rather it is an increase involving responsibility, decision, and activity' (*op. cit.*, 273); cf. 446, 450, and n. 39 above.

as important as the 'special ministry': the latter leads the way and in that sense occupies the more fundamental position, but the former has to follow if the Church is to be brought to its goal as described in verse 13.

A few propositions may be drawn up by way of summarizing the view of ministry as presented in Ephesians 4:7-16, and its general agreement with the conception of the ministry as derived from the Corinthian passages may be noted.

- (1) The fact that there is such a thing as the Christian ministry (termed 'special ministry' above) seems firmly established. It consists of specially-endowed men given to the Church by the Lord of the Church (v. 11). As in the Corinthian passages, the Christian ministry is something initiated by God and, by implication, dependent on God (cf. the previous summary, (1) and (2)).
- (2) The Christian ministry is given to the Church for the immediate purpose of equipping the saints and the ultimate goal of promoting the Church's growth to maturity (vv. 12, 16). This task is here not specifically described in terms of service, but it is at least clear that the ministry exists for the benefit of the Church (cf. previous summary, (4)).
- (3) The Church has a ministry of its own (v. 12). This common service also, inasmuch as it belongs to all believers, who all are endowed with gifts from the Lord of the Church (v. 7), is appointed by Christ. It, too, is intended to serve the goal of the growth of the Church as a whole (vv. 12, 16).
- (4) The Christian ministry, therefore, is largely pioneering in nature, as in the Corinthian passages (cf. previous summary, (6)). It leads the way in service to the Church, and equips the Church for an analogous service to itself.⁴⁷ The ministry thus has a special place in the Lord's purpose for the Church, but the common service of the Church itself also is indispensable for the attainment of that purpose.

143

⁴⁷ In the phrase εἰς ἔργον διακονίας the last word by itself can well include service by the Church to the world; but the context, where the Church's growth to maturity is in view, favours taking the word here in its Church-oriented aspect.

We are unable to go all the way with A. T. Hanson in his conclusions regarding the pioneering nature of the ministry and feel that some of his assertions made in connection with the Corinthian passages, if intended to be general statements concerning the subject, need to be modified in the light of the Ephesians passage: e.g., 'There is no suggestion here (1 Cor. 3:18-4:16) of the ministry doing anything which the Church as a whole cannot do' (*op. cit.*, 62); 'the task of the ministry is, not to undertake some specialist activity from which the rest of the faithful are excluded, but to pioneer in doing that which the whole Church must do' (72, in connection with 2 Cor. 3:12-18); and, 'the ministry does not really do anything that the rest of the Church cannot do or must not do' (76, commenting on 2 Cor. 4:7-16). The very fact that, as Ephesians 4 indicates, the Church needs the ministry to equip her εἰς ἔργον διακονίας implies that the Church would be unable to discharge this 'ministry' without the help of the ministry. The min-

- (5) The Christian ministry, as also the common service, shows unity and multiplicity: unity within the structure of the one Body and multiplicity in the variety of gifts and functions in its members (*cf.* previous summary, (8)).

Whether in the Corinthian letters or in Ephesians, it has been seen that the ministry is designed to serve the Church, so as to promote its growth to maturity; this emphasis is particularly clear in the Ephesians passage. In other words, Paul in speaking of the ministry concerns himself more with the contribution that it is to make to the Church than with the service that it can offer the world. An important aspect of the Church's ministry, indeed, is the work of proclaiming the gospel on the part of apostles and evangelists, which is a direct service to the world; but undoubtedly Paul's emphasis rests on how the ministry should serve the Church, and not on how it should serve the world. Again, the stated purpose of the Church's being equipped by the ministry is not that it may serve the world, but that it may upbuild itself. Whilst such an emphasis may appear narrowly and egotistically lop-sided, it is not entirely unreasonable or inexplicable. Paul by no means intends to deny the responsibility that the ministry or the Church bears towards the world; but the Church must first be equipped and built up to the point of being mature before it can effectively discharge its function in, and provide its unique contribution to, the world.⁴⁸ Hence, although ministry within the Church and service outside the Church can be spoken of separately, they are in the final analysis inseparable: the Church as the Body of Christ is the chief medium by which he continues his redemptive work on earth;⁴⁹ the ministry directly serves the Church, and yet by equipping the Church for witness and service in the world, it simultaneously if indirectly contributes its service to the world.

MINISTRY AND COMMUNITY

It may be said that the three passages studied above present quite a rich and consistent view of the Christian ministry. It only remains to bring this into specific relation with Paul's conception of the Church, of which a study was offered in an earlier issue of the *QUARTERLY*.⁵⁰ That a close

istry, therefore, does seem to undertake some 'specialist' activity not shared by the Church as a whole, and the Church does not and cannot really do all that the ministry does. *Cf.* F. J. A. Hort, *op. cit.*, 163: 'Those more conspicuous functions (the ministry) were meant to train and develop analogous (not identical) functions of ministration, in each and all (the common service).'

⁴⁸ *Cf.* Mitton, *op. cit.*, 152, 201f.

⁴⁹ *Cf.* E. Schweizer, *TDNT*, VII, 1074.

⁵⁰ R. Y. K. Fung, 'Some Pauline Pictures of the Church', *EQ* 53 (1981), 89-107.

connection exists between the two is already clear from Ephesians 4:7-16, which directly links the ministry with the conception of the Church as the Body of Christ. This connection we must now bring out more explicitly and enlarge upon, doing so by reference to the results of our previous study on the Church.

(1) As the designation of the Church as the Body of Christ brings to the fore the Headship of Christ, who is both the source of the Church's life, the supplier of all its needs, and its absolute ruler, so the doctrine of the ministry shows Christ as the Lord of the Church from whom the ministry has its origin, on whom it must depend, and to whom it is ultimately responsible. It is as part of the rich provision made by the Head for the Body that the ministry is given by Christ to the Church for the purpose of serving it and as a means to its blessing. In this sense, it is also a continuation of Christ's ministry. Further, as the Church is a living organic unity composed of a multiplicity of members, so the ministry, itself illustrating this principle of unity and multiplicity, has as its immediate purpose the equipping of these members for service. The growth of the Body as a whole can be realized only as its members are properly related to the Head and to one another as members of the same Body; in exact accordance with this, the ultimate purpose of the ministry, which is the Body's growth to maturity, can be realized only as, under the direction of Christ, both the 'special ministry' (in its multiplicity) leads the way in service to the Church by equipping the saints and the 'common service' (in its multiplicity) follows in analogous ministry to the Church. In other words, to say, from the standpoint of the Church, that its members are to be properly related to one another and to Christ in order that the Body as a whole may grow up to maturity, is the same as saying, from the standpoint of the ministry, that both the 'special ministry' and the 'common service' have to make their due contribution, under Christ, to the Church's growth toward maturity. The one corresponds to the other.

(2) As the image of the Building is fused with the Body-metaphor (Eph. 2:20-22) and *vice versa* (Eph. 4:14-16), it is not surprising that the idea of growth, common to both metaphors of the Church, should link the doctrine of the ministry also with the conception of the Church as a building. For, since the ministry (in the persons of the apostles and prophets) is that which constitutes the foundation of this Building, it may reasonably be inferred that the ministry (the 'special ministry' in the first place, but then also the 'common service') is also the indispensable means to the growth of the Building; the proper exercise of the ministry entails precisely those conditions which are required for the upbuilding of the Body which signifies materially the same thing as the growth of the Building.

(3) There is correspondence also between Paul's doctrine of the ministry and his conception of the Church as the Bride of Christ. Christ as Head of his Body, the Church, is also its Saviour; he loves his Church as his own Body. He therefore cares for the growth of the Body, and the ministry is given as the fundamental means to the realization of that purpose. Again, the glorious destiny awaiting the Church of her final and ultimate union with her Bridegroom, Christ, may be linked with the goal of the ministry that the Church should grow to mature manhood, inasmuch as the Church's fulness which in Ephesians 4 is conceived of as capable being attained in time⁵¹ will be brought to perfection at the time of her ultimate union with the Bridegroom, which is envisaged as a definitely eschatological event.

(4) The doctrine of the ministry is also linked to the description of the Church as the people of God, by the idea of the covenant: the Church, as the people of God, stands in a relation to God which is based on a covenant sealed by Christ's blood; it is this covenant — the new covenant — with which the ministry has to do and on account of whose splendour it is a very splendid thing.

146

It is thus seen that the doctrine of the ministry is clearly related to all the four figures of the Church which play a significant role in Paul's conception of the Church, and that between it and the Building-, Bride- and Body-image of the Church (in ascending order) the consistency and harmony is especially conspicuous,⁵² the dominant idea which binds them together being that of the Church's growth to maturity and the ministry's being given specifically for that purpose.

⁵¹ That this is the perspective of Eph. 4:13 may be gathered from what is said by way of explanation in verses 14-16, which has to do not with the Church's eschatological glorification, but with her present, if ideal, conduct in time. *Cf.* n. 43 above.

⁵² It is not without significance that these are the images through which Paul makes his own distinctive contribution to the understanding of the Church's nature, over against the idea of the Church as the people of God, which he shares with other NT writers.