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

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

A Valid Ministry.

BY THE REV. E. HIRST, M.A., A.R.C.M.

BEFORE His ascension, when His mediatorial work had been completed on the Cross and vindicated by the Resurrection, Our Lord commissioned His followers to their great tasks in His name. "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (St. John xx. 21). Here is the Charter of the Christian Church. In these words, Christ's followers received no new commission; their task was to carry out Christ's mission in the world He had come to save. This command is of the same character as two other commands: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"; and, "Ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (St. Matt. xxviii. 19; Acts i. 8).

This task of witnessing to the truth as it is in Jesus is the task of the entire Body of Christ,—the Church militant here in earth. We cannot think of it otherwise, for all believers are one in Christ. Distinctions are done away in Him. Every believer is joined to the Lord by faith. All have entered into the Christian Fellowship by the same door, having heard the call: "Repent . . . and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 38). This body of believers has entered into possession of all the privileges and responsibilities which Christ came to secure for His own. All the yearnings of humanity for reconciliation with God are satisfied in Him. He came as prophet, priest, and king. Being the Son of God, He could present God to man as did no other; being the Son of man, He could, as the representative man, present man to God. He consummated both sacrifice and priesthood in Himself when He offered Himself on the Cross and entered into the Holy Place "through His own blood . . . having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. ix. 12). He now reigns as King, the vicegerent of the Father. Because of all these facts, and the union of the believer with his Lord, St. Peter could speak of the body of believers as "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (I Pet. ii. 9). That body of followers, commissioned to take the news of salvation to the whole world, is the Holy Catholic Church.

Early in the Acts of the Apostles, we read of the Church fulfilling its Divine mission, even in spite of persecution. "There arose . . . a great persecution against the church which was in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles. . . . They therefore that were scattered abroad went about preaching the word" (Acts viii. 1, 4). It was as the Church grew that the tasks of evangelisation and organisation had to be distributed. The Eleven, to whose number had been added Matthias, would naturally take the lead, but clearly all the Church

recognised the duty of witnessing ; so while it is true that all Christians are God's servants, it is plain that the New Testament recognises different kinds and forms of service. In one epistle (I Cor. xii .28), eight classes of ministers are given ; in another epistle (Eph. iv. 11), four classes are named. We have here a clear recognition and acknowledgment of a special Christian Ministry by which the Church is able to express and perpetuate its life and witness.

In considering what is meant by " a valid ministry " in the Christian Church, it may be well to define our terms. By the Christian Ministry, we mean the exercise of a spiritual gift within the sphere of an ecclesiastical office. It is well to recall that the New Testament never names the Christian Minister by the Greek " *ιερευς* "—" a sacrificer ". This term is used of the Church in the plural : " He made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father " (Rev. i. 6). Elsewhere, the Church is designated as a priesthood ; " Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood " (I Pet. ii. 5). This is the natural outcome of Christ's consummation of priesthood and sacrifice in Himself, and His priesthood in both " intransmissible " and " undelegated " : " Because He abideth for ever, hath His priesthood unchangeable " (Heb. vii. 24). It may, then, be truly said that Christianity is, rather than has, a priesthood. The priestly acts of the Church belong to the Body, but if the Church has no sacrificing priesthood, for as Hooker says " sacrifice is now no part of the Church ministry " (Ecc. Pol. v. lxxviii. 2), she assuredly has a ministry ; and that ministry is the exercise of a spiritual gift within the sphere of an ecclesiastical office. There is another side of the matter, however, for those who receive the ministration have a right to the assurance that the exercise of such a spiritual gift is valid so that it might be received as a means of grace, that the gift is God-appointed, and that such a ministry is recognised not merely by the individual, but also by the whole Church as a God-given gift.

Our Church has spoken her mind on the subject of the Church in which the ministry is exercised, and also on the ministry itself. Yet in these matters, she makes it plain that she speaks for herself alone. The principle applies which has been laid down in the preface " Of Ceremonies ", in the Book of Common Prayer : " In these our doings we condemn no other nations, nor prescribe anything but to our own people only." Article xix. says : " The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered, according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." In these words we have a plain statement regarding the Church. Equally plain are the statements regarding the ministry in Article xxiii, Article xxxvi, and in the Preface to the Ordinal. " It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the congregation, before he be lawfully called and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard." " The book of Consecration of Archbishops, and Bishops, and ordering of

Priests and Deacons . . . doth contain all things necessary to such consecrating and ordering." "It is evident unto all men diligently reading the Holy Scripture and ancient Authors, that from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church; Bishops, Priests, and Deacons."

Article xxiii. refers to public ministry in the Church, and has no reference to any private or unofficial ministry for Christ. Its aim was twofold. First to assert the validity of Anglican Orders in the face of the Roman charge of invalidity. Secondly, to refute the error of the Anabaptists who denied the need of public order, authority, or commission for the exercise of ministry. Their claim was that Divine illumination alone was needed for the ministry. The notes of a valid ministry laid down by the Article according to New Testament principles are three—first, the Divine call; secondly, the Church's recognition of that Divine call; thirdly, the Church's public commission to a sphere of ministry. Each of these three are important, for, as Bishop Gibson says: "If only the call were necessary different ministers properly ordained might assert rival claims to execute their office in the same place, and the whole principle of Church order would be destroyed" ("The Thirty-nine Articles", p. 576).

All Christians will agree that a call from God is necessary before a man can presume to teach or minister in His name. The questions put to those who are to be ordained to the Diaconate and to the Priesthood recognise this fact. "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this Office and Ministration?" "Do you think in your heart, that you be truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the order of this Church of England, to the Order and Ministry of Priesthood?" We are reminded of words in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "No man taketh the honour unto himself, but when he is called of God, even as was Aaron" (Heb. v. 4).

Whilst the inward call to ministry in the Church must come first, it is necessary that such a call must be answered by a recognition on the part of the Spirit-filled Body that he to whom the call is given has the Divine equipment and enabling for his task. As Dr. Griffith Thomas pertinently remarks, "This, of course, involves spiritual perception on the part of the Church" ("Principles of Theology" p. 314). That the inward call should be answered by an external call is a principle which has the distinct support of the New Testament and of antiquity. Whilst God sends His messengers at His own will, as in the person of St. Paul, who claimed that his apostolate was "not from men, neither through men, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father", He supports such actions by evidence of His will which men can recognize. We know from the New Testament that it was necessary for the Church to prove and check the claims of men. St. John writes: "Believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God" (I John iv. 1), and "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God" (II John 9). The normal course adopted in the New Testament is that shown in the appointment of "The Seven" where the Church selected and the Twelve appointed: "Look ye out therefore, brethren, from among you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we

may appoint over this business." (Acts vi. 3). That same spiritual perception is still expected of the Church of Christ.

Turning again to the New Testament, we find that the existing ministry ordained and commissioned to their tasks those who were recognised as having the Divine equipment for the ministry after they had responded to the inward call. "The Seven" were chosen by the Church but appointed by the Apostles. Paul and Barnabas appointed Elders in the Churches which they founded (Acts xiv. 23). Timothy was commissioned by the then existing ministry (I Tim. iv. 14 ; II Tim. i. 6). Titus was instructed to "appoint elders in every city" (Titus i. 5). There can be little doubt that the New Testament thinks of the Ministry first as a spiritual gift and secondly as an office.

The closing passage of Article xxiii. deals with the manner in which the ministry has been perpetuated throughout the ages. "Those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the congregation, to call and send ministers into the Lord's vineyard." This principle of succession is part of our great heritage, and is emphasised in the preface to the Ordinal which has already been quoted. The Church of England has held tenaciously to this principle of Episcopal Ordination, for we have good reason to believe that our Church has been under episcopal order from its foundation and that there has been no break in the laying on of hands from the days of the British Church to our own age. Yet in maintaining the value of succession, we assert that of itself, episcopal ordination is no substitute for truth of belief and holiness of life. Moreover, it is clear that the unity experienced in the early Church was one of spiritual content rather than of ecclesiastical organisation. Within this unity of the Spirit, the ministry found its sphere of work, it being recognised that spiritual equipment came from God and that ordination gave ministerial authority to use and exercise those spiritual gifts within the Spirit-filled body. We have no warrant from the New Testament to believe that ordination conferred spiritual gifts and powers, and we cannot presume that ordination is different to-day from New Testament examples. We must be apostolic in truth and life as well as in Order.

Recognition of these truths seem to have inspired the words of the "Appeal to all Christian people from the Bishops assembled in the Lambeth Conference of 1920." This appeal has a statement on Episcopacy which reads as follows: "It is not that we call in question for a moment the spiritual reality of the ministries of those Communions which do not possess the Episcopate. On the contrary, we thankfully acknowledge that these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace." It seems that we have here a statement on what is a valid ministry—"ministries that have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace." Wherein, then, lies the difference between these ministries and our own? It cannot be in the principle of succession in ordination, for the so-called Free Churches ministries have their own succession, and these orders of succession can be traced to their origin. It must lie, then, in the method of succession which we maintain, and it is more than probable that the differences and difficulties about it arose in the course which the

Reformation took in different parts of Europe. Our Church was able to retain the Episcopal order because the Episcopate was willing to tread the path of reform. On the Continent, the Episcopate would not accept reform, so reformers had to proceed without them. It is clear that the Continental Reformers had no desire to part with Episcopacy had they been able to effect the Reformation with its retention. This fact is proved by the words of the Augsburg Confession, and those of Melancthon, Calvin, Bucer, and Beza.* Yet their hopes were dashed to the ground. In our Ordinal, we upheld the threefold ministry as the lineal representative of the apostolic order in the Church. We do not claim that episcopacy is of the "esse" of the Church, so that without episcopal ordination any ministry must be invalid; but we claim that it is of the "bene esse" of the Church. "The Form and Manner of Ordering of Priests" in our Ordinal combines the essential principles of both Episcopal and Presbyteral ordination which are exemplified in Timothy's ordination. Thus we follow the New Testament examples for the perpetuation of the Ministry. The inward call of the Holy Spirit is answered in the soul of the individual; the Church recognises the bestowal of the spiritual gift; the existing ministry ordains and commissions for service. We recognise the responsibility of the Church to "prove the spirits"; and so full opportunity is given to express assent to, or dissent from, the fitness of the candidate to be ordained to this Divine calling. Encouragement, too, is expected in corporate prayer for those who are to be ordained.

Whilst we do not condemn those Churches which are not under Episcopal government, we assert that we ourselves have kept to the "old paths". In all kindness and Christian charity we assert that for ourselves our course is clear and our decisions are made. We feel that it cannot be right either for an individual himself, or for a number of individuals, to break off from the body of Christians who have such a history as is ours, and form a separate body. Such an action is of the very nature of schism which divides the unity of His followers for which Christ prayed.

We express a very hearty dissent from any mechanical claims for an apostolical succession which would make a valid ministry dependent upon Episcopal ordination. Yet we feel that ours is the best system of Church order, as being in accord with New Testament principles, as having the support of antiquity, and as having the cumulative approval of Church history throughout the ages. As such, we believe that the progress of re-union will best be served as Episcopacy is adopted by the whole Church as a rallying point in the future.

* These opinions are quoted in "English Church Teaching," Moule, Drury and Girdlestone, pp. 187-188.