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A Ministry to Ministers

An Examination of the New Testament *Diakonia*

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THE student generation has never been known for stability and singleness of purpose. Sharp swings in mood, indecisiveness, and fickleness in professional intent may be regarded as normal psychological phenomena. Yet there is a growing concern among teachers in our ministerial training schools. The present student generation seems to be suffering from an unusually aggravated case of rootlessness and indecision. Many students find it extremely difficult to project themselves into their future parish situations. They seem to have only vague notions about the nature of congregational life and the demands of the ministry. Some, even among the more promising young men, leave our schools to prepare for some different profession. Others are busy planning their retreat into the horizonless future of continued graduate studies, still others into the tempting haven of some of the growing number of specialized ministries. It is tempting for our generation to evade responsibility by laying the blame to the general malaise of the postwar world. That some of the blame does lie there is certain. But could the church, and especially the professional ministry of the church, be at least partly responsible through a failure to project a clear and challenging image of the church's ministry?

A few years ago, under the leadership of the American Association of Theological

Schools and with the financial support of the Carnegie Corporation, a center was established for *The Study of Theological Education in the United States and Canada*. Under the direction of H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Day Williams the commission published three books. "From their sifting of evidence from ministers and laymen and from our theological seminaries," says James Smart,

they assert unequivocally that the heart of the problem is an inability of our churches to say what a minister is intended to be. There is no scarcity of persons who are quite confident that they can answer that question, but when the answers are on paper, they merely add new evidence that the church is in deep confusion about its ministry. What is a minister? He is an evangelist. He is a preacher. He is a priest. He is a religious administrator. He is a social reformer. He is a director of worth-while enterprises for the community. He is a species of amateur psychiatrist. He is an educator. He is an interpreter of life somewhat in the fashion of the poet. He is the voice of the community's conscience. He is the custodian of the values of democratic civilization. He is a man of superior wisdom and virtue whose task each week is to show men and women how to live more wisely and virtuously. Is it any wonder that young ministers, and some not so young, find themselves dragged in a dozen different directions as they try to fulfil the claims of the ministry?¹

¹ James D. Smart, *The Rebirth of Ministry* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 17 f.

The claims upon the ministry, one might argue, have always been great. Here, for example, is a summary of some paragraphs from Chrysostom's tract on *The Priesthood*:

[The priest] is the instructor of his people through the pulpit; a skilled theologian, he must be able to refute the heretics and the pagans. As a preacher he will have to compete with tragedies and musical entertainments. He has a pastoral function and must be able to mingle with men in all walks of life. If he does not make a round of visits every day, unspeakable offense will ensue. He must distribute his smile with utter impartiality and not beam inordinately on anyone in particular. The virgins are under his care, and he must endeavor to confine them to their homes, save for inexorable necessity. The widows will try his patience since they are garrulous and querulous. The married women he must visit when sick, comfort when sorrowful, and reprove when idle, and in all of this scrupulously guard himself, recognizing that chaste women may be even more upsetting than the wanton.²

So far Chrysostom. Few of us would qualify for membership in a celibate clergy, but even Chrysostom would blanch at the demands of an organized modern American parish. In candor I must admit entertaining the thought that if the unsettled and troubled young men on our campus really knew what might await them, I would perhaps find myself without a job.

It would be folly to claim to have a solution to the many-sided problem of the modern parish, and it would be presumptuous to pit the experience of a few years and the thoughts of a few random mo-

ments against the hard-won experience and the chastened and accumulated wisdom of a conference of parish pastors. Perhaps, however, I shall be permitted to suggest an approach to a more integrated ministry. I would hesitate to try even this were I not convinced that the approach I have to suggest is drawn from the heart of the New Testament itself. The Christian ministry, I would propose, is in one of its important aspects best understood as *a ministry to ministers*.

I. THE CHURCH'S MINISTRY

Although the New Testament is particularly rich in synonyms for the act of serving, the characteristic Greek word for "ministry" is *διακονία*.³ It is the favorite way of referring inclusively to the church's fundamental activities. To give our minds a nudge in the direction of our topic, let me quote two passages in which the *διακονία* is found. In each case it will be advisable to quote several verses of the context.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses unto them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.

² Niebuhr and Williams, ed. *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (New York, 1956), summarized by Roland Bainton, pp. 82 f.

³ See the introductory paragraphs to the articles on *διακονία* in Kittel and in Cremer for a comparison of the various designations for service.

We beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God. 2 Cor. 5:16-20 RSV

When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men. . . . And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain 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 fullness of Christ. Eph. 4:8, 11-13 RSV

We all recognize the passage from 2 Cor. as the charter of our ministry as proclaimers of the Word of reconciliation. Do we also see it as a possible charter for the ministry of all Christians, laymen and clergy alike? "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled *us* to Himself and gave *us* the ministry of reconciliation." What shall we make of those plural pronouns? Whom does Paul recognize as commissioned with the ministry of reconciliation? With remarkable unanimity commentators refuse to see in the second "us" an inclusive use of the plural pronoun. Paul means either himself or himself together with his co-workers; he does not, however, include his readers. Moffatt even translates the plural with the singular: "It is all the doing of the God who has reconciled me to Himself through Christ and has permitted me to be a minister of His reconciliation."

That Paul does refer to himself with the plural pronoun on many occasions is obvious. That he so refers to himself in the present context is also clear. V. 16: "From now on we regard no one from a human point of view." V. 20: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His

appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ." Yet the immediate context should render Moffatt's translation at least doubtful. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. . . . All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself." Moreover, "the world," which in v. 19 is referred to as being reconciled to God in Christ, appears to be the "us" of v. 18 extended to its ultimate limits. In the article on *καταλλάσσω* in Kittel's *Woerterbuch*, Buechsel recognizes this and calls attention to a parallel use of the pronoun of the first person plural in the passage on reconciliation in Rom. 5: 9, 10 RSV: "Since therefore we are now justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life." Yet Buechsel may be regarded as representative of the numerous commentators who, while recognizing the inclusive function of the pronoun in the first half of 2 Cor. 5:18, nevertheless restrict the second "us" to Paul or to Paul and his companions. This is certainly perverse. The mental gymnastics required of the reader by such an interpretation pass the bounds of reason. We move from the very general "anyone" of v. 17, to an inclusive "us" in v. 18, then suddenly to an exclusive "us" in the same verse and in the same syntactical segment, and proceed immediately in the next verse to "the world." Moffatt's rendering is at least defensible; this one is not. That the majority of commentators, nevertheless, choose to support this view bears strong witness to the force of dogmatic preconception. Only one of the commentators noted by me

frankly states that the "ministry of reconciliation" cannot be ascribed to all Christians and that therefore the second "us" cannot be inclusive; the others tacitly make the same assumption.

When we turn to the second passage in which the word *διακονία* occurs (Eph. 4), we find a very curious thing. Once again there is a certain ambiguity in the use of the word in its context, but here the majority of commentators believe that Paul is ascribing the "ministry" to all believers. The punctuation in the RSV as well as in the AV suggests that the three phrases in v. 12 are to be regarded as parallel. Christ has given His servants to the church for three closely coordinate reasons: "for the equipment of the saints," and "for the work of the ministry," and "for building up the body of Christ." This is certainly a possible rendering. The variation in the prepositions between the first and the second clauses (*πρός* — *εἰς*) does not necessarily indicate a lack of parallelism in thought. Commentators who believe that *διακονία* here as well as in 2 Cor. 5 refers to an official ministry of the Word naturally favor this rendering. Abbott goes so far as to state: "In a connection like this, where offices in the church are in question, *διακονία* can only mean official service; and this," he dogmatically states, "does not belong to the saints in general."⁴ As already noted, however, the majority of commentators prefer to see progress and development of thought in this passage, the second phrase growing out of the first, and the third suggesting the ultimate goal of Christ's ministration through His servants. Christ, then, has given His serv-

ants to equip the saints themselves for their work of ministry. Luther already chose this rendering: "dass die Heiligen zugerichtet werden zum Werk des Amts." But — and this is the curious thing — if *διακονία* here is ascribed to all the saints, then, we are told, it refers to the mutual ministration of saints through deeds of love and does not refer to the "ministry of reconciliation." Why not? Because this is an official function.

So you see we can have it both ways. If the *διακονία* in question is the ministry of the Word, then it must refer to the official servants of Christ in the church; but if the context suggests the ascription of *διακονία* to all the members of the church, then it must be some secondary ministry that is meant. Now, one or the other of the interpretations of these two passages may or may not be correct. It is not my purpose to argue about the meaning of a single word in two given contexts. Exegetical truth is never found along that path. But my purpose has been to point to two fundamental assumptions that underlie most of these interpretations and that dictate the understanding of the ministry in the minds of most of us most of the time. These fundamental assumptions are as follows:

1. There are two *διακονίαι*, two ministries: one is the ministry of the Word, the other the ministration of love.
2. The ministry of the Word is tied to the office of the ministry; the ministration of love is a general ministry among all the saints.

With some hesitation, and with full awareness that the truth here cannot be confined to any set of propositions, I would offer two counterassumptions:

⁴ *International Critical Commentary*, in loc.

1. The essential ministry of the church is one: the ministry of reconciliation.
2. The ministry of reconciliation belongs to all the saints of God both as a privilege and as an obligation.

If these assumptions should prove correct, or at least approximately so, then the official servants of Christ indeed might well be regarded as ministers to ministers.

But to return to the interpretation of *διακονία* in our two test cases. It is true that the emphasis often does lie on the deed of active love.⁵ This is in keeping with the original meaning of the word. *Διακονία*, basically, is service at a table; a *διάκονος* is a table servant. Thus when in Acts 6 service of the Word is contrasted with service at table, it is likely that some of the original meaning adheres to the former concept of service as well as to the latter in this context: it is the cup of life that is offered in the Gospel proclamation. Especially instructive are the cluster of passages in which *διακονία* or one of its cognates refers to the apostolic collection for the needs of the Jerusalem congregation. *Διακονία* is here a very specific deed of love.⁶ The word, however, can properly be used of any and every deed of service. "Then they also will answer, Lord, when did we see Thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to Thee? Then He will answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to Me" (Matt. 25:44, 45). There is thus a certain validity in isolating a min-

istry of active love from other conceivable forms of service.

It is also true that *διακονία* is employed to refer to specific churchly offices, especially the office of apostle.⁷ Moreover, service of the Word and the service of love are sometimes paired in a manner which might suggest a division of labor. So in 1 Peter 4:10 f.: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever speaks, as one who utters oracles of God: whoever renders service as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies." The varied grace of God seems to resolve itself into the utterance of His words, on the one hand, and the rendering of service, on the other.

The clearest example of a division of labor, of course, is in the already mentioned passage in Acts 6:22 ff.: "And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word." The verb *διακονεῖν* is used of the service at tables; the noun *διακονία*, of the ministry of the Word. Although the title *διάκονος* is not employed for the seven, most commentators and many church historians see in this account the first beginnings of the later diaconate. This may be correct. Yet it would be wrong to assume an absolute division of labor between the seven and the twelve, the former confining themselves solely to the

⁵ 1 Cor. 16:15; Acts 2:19.

⁶ Acts 11:29; 12:25; Rom. 15:30 f.; 2 Cor. 8:1-6, etc.

⁷ Acts 1:17, 25; 20:24; 21:19; Rom. 11:13; 2 Cor. 4:1, etc.

physical welfare of the congregation, the latter to the spiritual welfare. Luke's chief purpose in telling this story is not to give an etiological account for the diaconate; his main concern is to introduce his readers to Stephen and Philip, two of the seven. Stephen, far from confining his activity to welfare service, might well be regarded as the first creative theologian of the apostolic church. It was he who first drew the universalistic implications from the Gospel, and it cost him his life. He was hated, not for what he did but for what he said. "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the Law" (Acts 6:13) — and from a Jewish particularist point of view the false witnesses were right. As for Philip, he is the first missionary to be singled out for mention. "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the Word. Philip went down to a city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ" (Acts 8:4). Note this well: So little is the ministry of the Word the sole responsibility of the twelve apostles that one of the seven is specifically singled out as the first missionary. What is even more noteworthy is that he is only one of an unnamed host of lay missionaries.

Thus it is wrong to read back into Acts the situation reflected in the Pastoral Epistles. There we must assume a rather formal distinction between the *διάκονοι* and the *ἐπίσκοποι*. What the precise duties of each group were, however, we shall probably never be in a situation to say. The texts do not yield the necessary information, and we must rely upon inference based upon the description of the ideal candidates for these offices and upon later developments. With that brief reference we shall have to leave the much-

vexed question of church order in the Pastorals. Even if it could be proved that there were two offices in Asia Minor at the time of the Pastoral Epistles and that there was a radical division of labor between the two offices, that would prove nothing for the situation in the early Jerusalem congregation. And it would prove nothing about the relationship of the nonoffice-bearing Christian to the ministry of the Word.

Basic for our purposes are those passages in which our Lord calls all of His followers *διάκονοι*. "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matt. 23:11). "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am there shall My servant be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him" (John 12:26). In a germinal study of this subject we read: "All Christians are *διάκονοι*, ministers, called to a ministry. . . . All the stress is on the *διακονία*, the ministry of the whole membership, because the church as a whole stood under the same token as its Lord, i. e., servanthship."⁸

With that we reach the heart of the matter. All of Christ's followers are ministers and servants because He who came in servant's form has called them to follow in His steps. "I am among you," said He, "as one who serves [*ὡς ὁ διακονῶν*]" (Luke 22:27). "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave" (Matt. 20:27). What is the argument for this imperative rule? "Even

⁸ Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia, 1958), pp. 139 f.

as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). This imperative, this rule, is thus not an imperative at all; it is a description of any life that is lived in fellowship with the suffering Servant.

Fundamental is this insight, which realizes that the very life of every member of the church is, to use Manson's phrase, "a continuation of the Messianic ministry." This does not mean merely that "certain admirable lines of conduct were taught and practiced by the great prophet of Nazareth who was martyred in the '30s of the first century; and that other men of good will, convinced by his teaching and inspired by his example, have since been doing their best to follow in his footsteps. The continuation of the Messianic ministry means its continuation by the Messiah."⁹ To be a Christian at all, to be in Christ and in His body, means to be a minister.

Our second thesis, that all Christians share in the essential ministry of the church, is thus affirmed by the imperious Word of the Lord of the church. Our first thesis, that the ministry of the Word is basically one, namely, the ministry of reconciliation, is also confirmed by our Lord. He was among us as a *διάκονος*. And as He was a *διάκονος*, so all His life, both in word and in deed, was *διακονία*. That is best seen in the cross. "All aspects of Jesus' ministry," in Smart's words, "come to their climactic expression in the cross. Strangely it was in His dying that His ministry was fulfilled with the profoundest power. Again we meet the oneness of Gospel, ministry, and person. The cross, with which men

thought to silence Him once and for all, became the unveiling of the mystery of who He was and the instrument whereby He completed His ministry of reconciliation."¹⁰ So, too, in the church, the good news and the good deed cannot be separated, the ministry of the Word and the ministry of active love. All Christian ministry is basically one; it is a ministry of reconciliation. In Kraemer's sharply pointed phrases, "the church does not *have* a ministry, it *is* ministry."¹¹

II. THE MINISTERIAL FUNCTION AND THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE

The essential ministry of the church, then, is one: the ministry of reconciliation, and all Christians are empowered with this ministry. But what is the relationship of this universal ministerial function to the office of the ministry? Or differently put, what is the relationship of the called minister of the Word to the ministering congregation? This question has been variously answered. We shall confine ourselves to presenting two sharply antithetical views, both of which must be regarded as false, and we shall then seek a synthesis in the understanding of the office as a ministry to ministers.

The first false view we might call the Low Protestant view:

The office of priesthood is shared by all Christians. Consequently, the official ministry of the church has no different status from that of the layman. The difference is one of function only. Furthermore, the special function of ministering the word and administering the sacrament belongs to the ministry only by virtue of the fact that the church has dedicated them as its

⁹ T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry*, (Philadelphia, 1948), pp. 22 f.

¹⁰ Smart, p. 28.

¹¹ Kraemer, p. 137.

representatives in this regard. Apart from practical considerations, there would need to be no order of ministry set aside in the church. But to give men time for prolonged study of the faith in order that they might preach and teach the Gospel, and to have order and decorum in services of worship and in the administration of the sacraments, the church ordains ministers to do these things in their name. But this in no way exalts them to status different from others.¹²

That sounds almost like Missouri Synod teaching. Almost, but unless I am very wrong, not quite. According to Miller's view an official ministry belongs merely to the *bene esse*, in no sense to the *esse* of the church. The office of the ministry is merely a prudential arrangement of the church and is in no way essential to the life of the church.

Before offering more extensive criticism, let us look at the second false view of the relationship between office and ministry, a view which we might characterize as High Catholic. Our representative spokesman says:

Wherever the laity is able and willing to accept its proper measure of pastoral, evangelistic and theological responsibility, it is both futile and wrong to deny such representation. On the other hand it is in no way essential to the life and integrity of the church militant, and there exist areas of the church's life, for example missionary churches ministering to simple and undeveloped peoples, in which nothing of the kind is for the moment even possible. It is always desirable; nowhere is it essential.¹³

¹² Donald Miller, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Richmond, 1958), p. 89.

¹³ J. V. Langmead Casserley, *Christian Community* (London, 1960), p. 34.

Again we feel almost persuaded. Almost, but not quite. Whereas Miller wants to remove all distinction of status between pastor and people, clergy and laity, Casserley remains with a pre-Reformation understanding of the church, wherein the clergy in a very special sense are the church and laymen merely belong to the church. If the church is *διακονία*, and if all essential *διακονία* is the sole prerogative of the clergy, then in a sense the laity are not the church. Casserley gives himself away with one word. "Even today," he says, "it remains an obvious fact that there can be no recovery of the unity of Christendom without a return to the episcopal structure." Obvious, yes, if one shares his presuppositions.¹⁴

Where does the truth lie between these two sharply contrasting views? Fortunately, we are not forced to choose. Both views are correct in what they affirm, but both are wrong in what they tacitly deny. Miller wishes to affirm the universal priesthood of all believers. In this he is certainly correct. In the presentation of my thesis that all members of the church share in the essential ministry of the church, I have purposely avoided alluding to the New Testament teaching of the universal priesthood. I did not want to confound the category of ministry with the related but sharply differentiated category of priesthood. To employ the categories of ministry and of priesthood in the same context can lead to a contamination of both. For example, it has often been held that the universal priesthood really means that all Christians are potential candidates for the ministry of the church or that they may

¹⁴ Casserley, p. 37.

dispense the means of grace in cases of emergency. But that is to rob both priesthood and ministry of any functional meaning in the normal workaday life of the Christian. The category of ministry is central in the New Testament, that of priesthood almost incidental. It is only in antithesis to a predominantly priestly view of the ministerial office that the New Testament teaching of the universal priesthood moves from the periphery to the center in the history of Christian thought. In the New Testament there is only one Priest, only one of whom we can properly say that He is *the* Priest in distinction from the mass of believers. Priest and laity are never opposed in the New Testament. Never once is the term priest employed of the special offices in the church, and rarely are the verbs which are characteristic of priestly activity (λατρεύω, λειτουργέω) employed of individual officers or of individual incumbents of churchly office. All Christians are priests. And now this is true too: All Christians are laymen, i.e., λαϊκοί, the λαός of God, the New Israel, God's people. We may insist with Bultmann that the distinction between priests and laymen is unknown to the New Testament and is, indeed, contradictory to it.¹⁵

Thus Miller is right in what he affirms. But if so, then Casserley must be wrong in what he denies. The ministry of the laity is essential to the life of the church. Yet Casserley, too, is correct in his affirmation. The special ministry is essential and not merely accidental to the life of the church. Not too long ago it was a staple of New Testament criticism that Jesus had no intention of founding a church, and that

everything that is said in the gospels about the life of the church and about the commissioning of special servants for the welfare of the church was superimposed upon the life of our Lord by the church itself. It is now generally conceded that, in at least some sense, Jesus envisioned a future community of disciples and followers and that the special office of minister derives its ultimate sanction and authority from the Lord Himself. It should not be necessary to argue the point further in this company. But if this is true, then Casserley is correct in affirming that the ministry is essential to the church, and Miller is wrong in denying any ultimate authority and importance to the special ministry.

Driven to its logical extreme, Miller's view ends in the Protestant heresy that each Christian is not only a priest but also a priest to himself alone. Not merely is the office of the ministry nonessential; the church itself is no longer essential. It degenerates into a voluntary association of like-minded men, bound together not by the will of the Lord but by their own will to fellowship.

I have reserved until now my chief criticism of the Low Protestant view of the ministry and of the church. Paradoxically, in seeking to demean the clergy, this position merely succeeds in demeaning the laity. As you will recall, Miller gave very clear expression to an *Übertragungstheorie* of the origin of the ministerial office. The members of the congregation hand over what are essentially their prerogatives to their ordained servants. They deliver their ministry into the hands of the minister. That this view of the transfer of authority, especially if it is confined to a very narrowly defined public ministry of the Word

¹⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, II (London, 1955), 110.

and sacraments, can be understood correctly, I do not doubt. But if we seriously want to encourage all members of the congregation to become active ministers of the Word, then we should try to find some better way of expressing the relationship of the pastor to his congregation. "That's your job, pastor," is perhaps not so much a remnant of the High Catholic view of the ministry, in which the functions of the clergy are radically distinct from those of the laity, as a product of the Low Protestant view, in which there is an almost mechanical transfer of prerogatives. We should find a way of describing the relationship of the pastor to his congregation which will neither deprive the pastor of his authority nor the congregation of its vital ministry.

According to the Low Protestant view, the relationship between the ordained minister and his congregation is too casual, almost accidental; according to the High Catholic view the relationship is too remote and distant. The corrective to both of these extreme views is suggested by the theme of this paper. The ordained servant of the Word is a minister to ministers. The emphasis is upon mutuality of service in the common life of the one body of Christ.¹⁶ Thus the function of ministry is in no way to be equated with the office of the ministry. It is the function that gives sanction to the office, not the office to the function. If this is correct, then to ask the question of status is to indicate that we have not understood the mind of our Lord. The relationship between the called and the

uncalled ministers is not one of relative rank or position in a hierarchy of status. Our Lord would put an end to all consciousness of status. "A dispute also rose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And He said to them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For which is the greater, one who sits at the table or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:24-27). Ministers to ministers — there is no higher status than that.

Let us, then, become what we are. Perhaps it is good that the parish minister is no longer regarded as the sum of all wisdom, earthly and divine. Perhaps it is good that he is no longer by mere virtue of office universally regarded as an important citizen. Can we admit among ourselves that there is too much pomposity about preachers, too much pride in status, too much desire for honor and distinction? The world perhaps knows better than we what we should be. It tells us that we should be satisfied to be ministers — lowly, self-effacing servants.

What would happen if we would make this concept of ministry to ministers the integrating factor in our work? And what if we really meant it, not on the level of mere verbal expression but on the level of solid and complete conviction? What if we would stop addressing our people with a distant "My dear Christian friends" or with a condescending "My dear people"? What if we would address them — and really mean it — as "My fellow ministers"?

¹⁶ In most NT references to the ministry the emphasis clearly lies on functioning relationships within the Christian community. See especially 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4.

I think I know at least something of what would happen. For us it might mean a radical revision of our ministries. There might be a great deal less emphasis on programs and organizations and addressographs. There might be a great deal more emphasis on teaching and training and encouragement, teaching and training for the work of the ministry, encouragement of our fellow redeemed to be what they are — ministers of reconciliation. Their task is infinitely more difficult than ours. They are on the front line where the church meets the world. Someone has well said, "The world rarely meets the church with a trained theologian present." It is through the average member in our average parishes that God would confront the world with the ministry of reconciliation. We must therefore be in the business of training ministers. That is our primary function.

I do not begin to imagine that the majority of church members would be anything but displeased if they would be appealed to on this basis. They are generally quite satisfied with their contributory and secondary function in the church. The nearest they ever come to proclaiming the Word of reconciliation is when they ask their neighbors to come along to church. They are quite content to leave the rest to their pastors. I say, they are quite content with things as they are. The point is, however, that we should not be content. Nobody will ask to share your pulpit, but it is the Lord who asks you to share your ministry.

In a footnote in his book, Kraemer finds fault with the Niebuhr report, stating that it is "amazing and also disappointing" that in a study "in which the role of the church in American life is reevaluated, the laity

and its crucial significance in such a re-evaluation is hardly, if at all, mentioned."¹⁷ Amazing and disappointing it is, but it should scarcely be surprising. It is a depressing experience to page through book after book on the ministry and to find barely an allusion to the ministerial function of all God's people. Are we clergymen really so unsure of ourselves that we must constantly, in a steady stream of books, reassure ourselves of the glory of our office? I sometimes wonder why our Christian people are so charitable with our posturing and our posing. It is probably the best evidence that they are Christian people. Be that as it may, in one of the books of the Niebuhr trilogy I found these few significant sentences, perhaps the only sentences to give the lie to Kraemer's criticism:

Possibly we are experiencing a new awareness of the nature of the church as a ministering institution, a body which ministers to the needs of the world through all its members. The minister may function as a leader, a source of inspiration, an organizer, an administrator, but he cannot singlehandedly, or even with a staff, carry on the service which is the church's vocation. The complex and pressing demands . . . have brought with them a renewed awareness of the role of the church as a ministering body in which both lay and ordained ministers are called as servants of the Gospel, not only in the church but also in the world.¹⁸

We may hope that the day will come when such sentences are more an expression of fact than of wistful prophecy.

About eight years ago Elton Trueblood

¹⁷ Kraemer, p. 83.

¹⁸ Robt. Michaelsen in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, p. 266. See n. 2 above.

addressed a popular book entitled *Your Other Vocation* to the lay community of the church. Theologically the book is not very profound, but it rings a stirring challenge. Some of you may remember these sentences:

The existence of a large body of able and sincere pastors is one of the most hopeful factors in our present situation. If we can match them with still greater numbers of concerned laymen, men who are willing to break the religious conventions of the recent past, our time may be one of genuine hope. Good pastors need have no fear, since the basic Christian pattern really ennobles, rather than degrades, the work of the pastor or teacher. He is successful, not insofar as he makes men depend upon him, but rather insofar as he can help them to make their own religious lives strong. . . . A religion that is not contagious is not genuine. . . . Our opportunity for a big step lies in opening the ministry to the ordinary Christian in much the same manner that our ancestors opened Bible reading to the ordinary Christian. To do this means, in one sense, the inauguration of a new Reformation, while in another it means the logical completion of the earlier Reformation. . . . If in the average church we should suddenly take seriously the notion that every lay member, man or woman, is really a minister of Christ, we could have something like a revolution in a very short time. . . . Suddenly the number of ministers in the average church would jump from one to five hundred. . . . There have been different great steps at different times in Christian history, because one of the most remarkable features of the Christian faith is its ability to reform itself from the inside. However vigorous the outside

critics of the church may be, the inside critics, who love the movement which they criticize, are far more vigorous and searching. Reformation is not accidental or exceptional, but characteristic and intrinsic. The crust forms repeatedly, but there is always volcanic power to break through it.¹⁹

Shall we end where we began? I should like once more to quote our two test passages, this time from The New English Bible. If these passages appear in a somewhat new light, I would be grateful, indeed, if this paper, as well as the new translation, were to be the illuminating agent.

When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun. From first to last this has been the work of God. He has reconciled us men to Himself through Christ, and He has enlisted us in this service of reconciliation. What I mean is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, no longer holding men's misdeeds against them, and that He has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation. (2 Cor. 5:17-19)

And these were His gifts: some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip God's people for work in His service, to the building up of the body of Christ. So shall we all at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God—to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ. (Eph. 4:11-13)

Fort Wayne, Ind.

¹⁹ Elton Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation* (New York, 1952). Chs. I, II passim.