

Equipping the Saints: Ministry in the Twenty- first Century¹

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Martin Luther King had a dream. History shows that, while there was breath in his body, he tirelessly shared it with his fellow countrymen in America. Dreams, some say, are dangerous. I suppose none of us would disagree if that statement implied nothing more than the fact that it is foolish to lose touch with reality. But we also know that, as the Authorized Version of the Bible puts it, 'where there is no vision the people perish'.² The New International Version's translation is somewhat different, but probably more accurate, 'Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.'

Our concern at this conference is to trail-blaze. We have a vision. We have a vision of what the Church of England should be at the end of the twentieth century and of where she ought to be going in the twenty-first. In one sense we are dreaming dreams for none of us knows precisely what state our national church will be in by the year 2000. If some get their way she will be dis-established. And if Erroll Hulse's analysis proves correct she will not even exist. As he shows in an article published in January 1989, if current trends continue the main denominations will cease to exist by the year 2050.³ These are critical days. Within the lifetime of some of us the Church of England may become a thing of the past.

It is essential that our vision is not the product of wishful thinking, mystical experience of empty minds. It must be moulded, fashioned and controlled by holy scripture. The New International Version's translation of Proverbs 29:18 points us to this. Revelation is to be the controlling principle. God wants his people to sit under his word. That's why ministry in the New Testament is consistently portrayed as a ministry of the word.

What, then will the people of God demand and do in the twenty-first century?

1. They will value the ministry of pastor-teachers

You will appreciate, I trust, that our exploration of this subject, ministry in the twenty-first century, is primarily, though not exclusively, concerned with the life, witness and activity of the local church. That is why we begin with the pastor-teacher.

We are introduced to this office in Ephesians 4:11. I say office as opposed to offices because most commentators agree that Paul refers to four rather than five groups of people that the ascended Christ gave to serve his church. The first three, the apostles, prophets and evangelists, had a commission to serve the church at large. The last, the pastor-teachers, were called to oversee local congregations. Hendriksen⁴ gives two reasons why we should treat the pastors-teachers as one group. First, the words *tous de* are not repeated before the noun *didaskalous*. Secondly, the parallel in 1 Timothy 5:17b speaks of overseers whose work is preaching and teaching. To these two reasons we can add a third, namely, that in his farewell to the Ephesian elders, Paul indicates their dual function. They are to guide [pastor] and feed [which is primarily done by teaching] the flock over which they have been set.⁵ The pastors and teachers, then, of Ephesians 4 can be taken as one group.

Moreover the New Testament indicates that they, unlike the others, still exist. The term apostles clearly refers to Paul and his colleagues. They were witnesses of the resurrection,⁶ accredited by miracles,⁷ and had a direct unlimited commission from Christ⁸ to preach,⁹ found and oversee churches.¹⁰ In this sense there are no apostles today. The term prophets refers to people, like Agabus,¹¹ who were extraordinarily endowed as 'occasional organs of inspiration',¹² while the term evangelists appears to have been used of people like Philip¹³ and Timothy¹⁴. The latter appears to have been nothing less than an apostolic delegate whose job was not just to oversee churches on behalf of the apostle Paul but also to preach the gospel. The question, Are there prophets and evangelists today?, though important, is not our present concern. Our interest lies in exploring the ministry of pastor-teachers, which we shall refer to as presbyters or elders. These, after all, are the terms by which they came to be known in the early church.

We want to make these points.

1. The New Testament appears to endorse a plurality of elders in the local church.

We have a hint of this in various places. For example, James tells the sick to call for the elders of the church¹⁵ whilst Paul speaks of elders with different responsibilities.¹⁶ Some, it seems, directed the affairs of the church *and* preached and taught while others primarily did the former. We shall return to this point in a moment. For the time being we note that in all probability when it came to delegating authority in the local church 'the apostles apparently adopted the pattern of the synagogues in appointing elders.'¹⁷ In other words leadership was not exercised by a one-man-band. It was a shared responsibility.

The question we need to ask is, Is there something prescriptive here? Is this a pattern we are to follow? And if so how? I venture these comments. First, in the absence of any specific instruction to the contrary, I see no

reason why we should not adopt this pattern. In fact if this was the apostolic practice and if the foundation of the church in the New Testament dispensation was the responsibility of the apostles and prophets¹⁸ then there is a very powerful argument for saying that we are to adopt this pattern, in which case difficulties need to be faced. One concerns costs. Most churches, in which case difficulties need to be faced. One concerns costs. Most churches, it will be objected, can not afford one, let alone two or more, ministers. I feel the force of the objection especially in the light of the increasing financial constraints under which the Church of England labours. But we are, at this juncture, not talking about stipends but personnel. The stipends question we will come to in a moment. For the time being we are asserting that the affairs of each local church should ideally be overseen by a plurality of elders.

The issue this raises for us in the Church of England is, How can we move in this biblical direction? One of our problems is that we have to function under the Church Representation Rules passed by the General Synod in February 1980.¹⁹ They, amongst other things, set out the various elections that need to take place every year in the life of each local church. We have Annual Vestry meetings at which churchwardens are elected and Annual General meetings at which the members of the Parochial Church Council are elected. Are the elders, over and above the one or two stipendiary ministers a church may have, to be appointed by democratic decision? I do not think so. Elders in the first place were not appointed in that way. They were 'appointed directly by the apostles or their helpers, and not by democratic election by the body of believers.'²⁰ Precisely what happened next we are not sure. But it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the elders themselves appointed to this office, after prayer and fasting, those men who had the necessary Spirit-given gifts.

If all this provides us with a pattern to follow then it means that those who seek to use their wardens or standing committee as the eldership of the local church are out of step. It may be that they are making the best of their present resources but it is, at best, a stop-gap. Those who see and use their readers and perhaps one or two other gifted spiritual men as the elders may well be moving in the right direction.

I realize some find this controversial. They will object that this is a departure from the received pattern of ministry within the Church of England. I feel the force of the argument. And I agree that it is. But I invite them seriously to explore the question not just of whether but of how we are to go down this road. If the Bible tells us that the ideal is a plurality of elders then those who love God's work should seek to obey it on this matter and push for the reform of the local church. All this brings us to a second point.

2. The Bible teaches us that eldership is male.

I know that this is a contentious issue today within the church at large but it is one that we must face. My own view is that evangelicals have

betrayed their heritage and failed the church on this matter. We have not spoken with clarity or confidence. We have shown a lack of biblical nerve.

Before we examine this point more fully may I highlight a difficulty we touched on a moment ago. If it is right that the eldership is male then some churches will find it difficult, if not impossible, to use their readers, their wardens or even, in some cases, their P.C.C. standing committees as members of the eldership team in their parish. I say this because in many churches women occupy these positions.

Having raised that difficulty let me now take the bull by the horns and discuss the question of the ordination of women to the presbyterate. I want to cut through all the sophistry, special pleading and gratuitous arguments that we have had to endure for far too long. We need to assert two things.

First, the Bible says that this proposed innovation is wrong. It teaches us that it is wrong in at least these two ways.

1. The Bible says that men and women, though equal are different. Let me stress that equal does not mean the same. Some may think the terms synonymous but they are not. It is possible to be equal yet different. Men and women enjoy the same status before God. We are made in his image. But we still have different bodies with different functions. Only a woman can bear a child. Only a man can make a woman pregnant. Only a woman can be a mother. And only a man can be a father. That is how God has made us. And these sexual differences go to the very core of our beings. Contrary to what some may say, maleness and femaleness are not issues of secondary importance.

But the differences are not just biological. The Bible states that we have different rôles. We discover an indication of these at the time of creation when we are told that woman was made for man.²¹ The creation pattern is that woman is 'a helper suitable for man'. This is the biblical principle that we need to grasp, work through and apply. Or to quote Werner Neuer we need to recognize that 'There has been no time in history in which it was more urgent to put into practice the biblical view of male and female than today.'²²

2. The Bible says that within the church women are not allowed to teach or have authority over men.²³ Many try to argue away what Paul says in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians. But the cultural relativism arguments, for that is what they are in the main, do not stand up under critical scrutiny. For one thing they make the texts contradict themselves. Learned people would have us believe the very opposite of what Paul actually says. Friends, that is not scholarship. It is irrationalism. The issue at stake is that of biblical authority. Will we be ruled by scripture or not? My prayer, as we approach the millennium, is that God's people within the Church of England will recover their nerve; jettison the errors and excesses of the new hermeneutic; and return to the old tried and tested paths.

A careful analysis of 1 Timothy 2:12, according to the traditional historico-grammatico-theological method of interpretation, shows that the

apostle lays down a principle that is to be followed at all times. In doing this he is in line with both the Old Testament and the teaching of our Saviour. The apostle does not appeal to his feelings or prejudices. Nor does he allude to passing circumstances. Instead he tells us that both creation and church history teach and support what he says! The 'creation' argument comes in v.13, 'for Adam was formed first, then Eve'; whilst that from 'church history' in v.14, 'and Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner'. It comes as no surprise, then, to find the apostle telling the Corinthian church that male eldership was in his day a universal practice.²⁴ He was clearly justified in taking to task those who did not respect it.²⁵

The second assertion that needs to be made on this vexed issue is that the legislation at present before the synod is unjust. In response to this accusation at least these two things are said. First, we are told that the opponents to this innovation have a ten year period to decide whether to leave or not. And secondly, generous financial provision will be made for those who do. But my quibble concerns neither periods for reception nor compensation. It concerns the fact that once this practice is introduced the Church of England will cease to be the church in which you and I, and countless others, grew up. At a stroke the church will be radically and permanently changed.

Within a short time three things will happen. First, those against will be marginalized. Very quickly we will find that all new bishops have to support women priests. And at the local level there will be no way of ensuring that at deanery and diocesan events the consciences and sensibilities of those opposed to women presbyters are respected. It will be impossible to guarantee an all male ministry outside the parish. Moreover those against the ordination of women who offer themselves for ministry will find they are rejected. It just will not be practical to ordain in a church which accepts women as presbyters those who do not. Archbishop Runcie made this point on a number of occasions but not in those precise terms. But let us suppose someone does pass through the net. What will happen to him when he is ordained? Will he be able to object to a woman being ordained presbyter at the same time, or even to women laying hands on him at his ordination? I doubt it.

Secondly, those against this development will be told to 'shut-up'. I put it that starkly because that is what will happen at the 'coal-face'. In the corridors of power it may well be put more politely. It is already commonplace to hear diocesan officials and senior clergy complain that some ministers and parishes ignore the decisions of synods. Such complaints generally concern the quota or share-capping that some parishes have informed dioceses they are imposing. But since when have synods been infallible? Our own Articles make it clear that they may err. And they do so for the simple reason that not all churchmen are governed by the Spirit and word of God.²⁶ The general synod was wrong when it said 'that there are no

fundamental objections to the ordination of women to the priesthood'.²⁷ There are. For one thing the Bible says women are not to lead churches.

Thirdly, those against will be excommunicated. This is the long-term effect. If passed in November the Church of England will in effect add a new unwritten section to the historic creeds. As well as affirming our belief in God we will also be required to affirm our belief in the rightness of women presbyters. I submit that it is nothing less than unjust to lay such a requirement on anyone at anytime. For the Bible teaches that eldership is male.

The third point that we need to note about presbyters is that their main responsibility is to teach and preach. Reference has already been made to v.17 of 1 Timothy 5. In that verse Paul appears to make a distinction between ruling and teaching elders. We must not push this distinction too far for, as Hendriksen says,

All [elders] rule, and to a certain extent all teach, but some (in addition to ruling) *labour* in *preaching* and *teaching*. They specialize in it, working hard at it. It requires most of their time and effort: preaching, teaching, and preparing for it. (his italics)²⁸

We do well to note that the word translated 'work' in the New International Version and 'labour' in the Revised Standard Version conveys the idea of hard work that makes one weary. In other words presbyters are to give themselves wholeheartedly to the ministry of the word. This point is borne out in other parts of the pastoral epistles. Note for example these statements from the pen of the apostle.

Paul instructs Timothy to 'devote' himself 'to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and teaching'.²⁹ He tells him he is to 'be diligent in these matters' and that he is to 'give' himself 'wholly to them, so that everyone may see' his 'progress'.³⁰ He is 'to guard the good deposit that was entrusted to' him³¹ and he is to 'entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others' all that he heard from Paul.³² Furthermore he is to 'preach the word' and 'do the work of an evangelist'.³³

It is true that Timothy was an apostolic delegate and therefore there was something unique about his particular ministry. However that does not mean we cannot find within the letters that bear his name some general principles that apply to all presbyters. The pastoral epistles are amongst the youngest of the New Testament's books, having been written probably between 63–67 AD. They post-date the other Pauline letters and were clearly written so that the church would know the way forward after the apostles had departed the scene. In other words, when it comes to looking for a pattern for post-apostolic ministry we need to start with an analysis of them. What do we find? The elders are to give themselves to preaching apostolic truth. They are to toil at preaching and teaching. Like Timothy, they are to do their 'best to present' themselves 'to God as one approved, a

workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth'.³⁴ It is the duty of the congregations that they serve to encourage and facilitate this style and type of ministry. This is the biblical pattern; the pattern that we are to own and value.

As the twentieth century draws to a close we need to ask, What are our presbyters doing? Are they professional synodsmen or preachers? Do we demand and expect the right things of them? Are they increasingly effective Bible teachers? Do they proclaim biblical truth with accuracy and clarity so that unbelievers may be saved? Certain recent experiences have not done much to encourage us. I am referring to two broadcast programmes, one radio, the other television, and also to two newspaper articles by the Bishop of Durham.³⁵ But these sad events, in which some ministers have publicly paraded their doubts or unbelief, must not be allowed to eclipse the excellent work done by many in the pulpits of our land. Those doing a good job need to be encouraged to excel all the more. And we need to do our utmost to add to their number.

Furthermore we need to ask, What sort of training do ministers have? One of the sadneses of our day is that ministerial training no longer focuses (if it ever did) on the essentials. One wonders what matters most? Is it the ability to rattle off the latest ideas and pet theories of scholars? Or is it knowing what the Bible actually says and how to handle it? Is it the acquisition of various counselling skills, and in particular those of non-directional counselling? Or is it the ability to preach with authority and clarity the apostolic message? Is it going on in-service training courses at which participants pool their ignorance? Or is it praying for the Spirit to come down on us in power so that we might have boldness to preach the word of God everywhere? What are our priorities today?

I am not arguing for an untaught ministry. Nor am I saying that all or some of the things that I have just mentioned are not important. What I am saying is that we need to ask some radical questions. We need to ask radical questions concerning the activity of our ministers. We need to ask radical questions about their training. Are our ministers sufficiently Bible-literate to be able to help their congregations see that the Don Cupitts and David Jenkinse of this world redefine faith, deify reason and experience and make everything relative?

We need also to ask radical questions about what we spend our money on. The statistics make depressing reading. In most dioceses something like thirty per cent. of expenditure goes on maintaining the bureaucracy. I am not saying we should have no diocesan officials or central costs. But I am saying that we need to review things. Since the 1950s the number regularly attending Church of England churches each week has declined dramatically. It is now approximately half of what it was thirty years ago.³⁶ Moreover the number of clergy in parochial posts (on the frontline) is declining. The years 1977-88 saw a ten per cent. reduction, with numbers falling from 11,000 to 9,900. Over the same period the number of diocesan

appointments increased from 282 to 323—a rise of nearly fifteen per cent. Between 1957 and 1988 the number of dignitaries rose from 258 to 384—a rise of fifty per cent.³⁷ The trend, if the Newcastle Diocese is anything to go by, continues upwards.³⁸ What does all this mean? It means that increasing numbers of ‘chiefs’ are being employed to look after fewer and fewer ‘Indians’. It also means that fewer and fewer people in the pews are having to pay for increasing numbers of people who are not directly engaged in full-time ministry on the frontline in local churches.

We need a radical re-think. The time has come for us to demand that resources be used, not just carefully, but also strategically. Synodical government, at all levels, needs an urgent overhaul. One wonders whether the work done by the Synod’s boards expands to fill the time available to staff and to justify the appointments made. Furthermore it is questionable whether each diocese needs its own team of special advisers. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear that quota-capping is not just spoken about but actually practised by increasing numbers of churches. Obviously the godly prefer to see their tithes used to finance an expository and evangelistic ministry as opposed to oiling the cogs of a somewhat liberal-dominated bureaucracy. And why is this their preference? Because, as Paul told Timothy, this is the means that God has appointed and uses thoroughly to equip the saints for every good work.³⁹

I foresee the time coming when parishes will argue that their first responsibility is to find the finance for their clergy as opposed to the diocesan quota. In practical terms today this means finding about £8,500 per head per annum—£6,500 for the stipend (the other £6,500 is found by the Church Commissioners at present) and approximately £2,000 towards housing. I do not include any figure for pensions as they are financed by the Commissioners from investments. Perhaps a little needs to be added for in-service training but most parishes may well prefer to meet these expenses directly as and when they arise. Once these costs have been met by parishes for their stipendiary clergy they will then demand the freedom to help finance other needy parishes in which the word of God is loved, respected, obeyed and taught, as well as being ready to pay a reasonable amount for reasonable central costs. We are, after all, a connectional, as opposed to a congregational, church. We should be eager to give expression to that fact. But our first allegiance is to our brothers and sisters who live by God’s word written. Biblical Christians want to see biblical, and not liberal, churches established and maintained throughout the country. Without them the Church of England will cease to exist.

2. They will value the ministry of deacons

In the New Testament at least two forms of ministry existed within the local church. On the one hand there was, as we have seen, the ministry of presbyters. On the other there was the ministry of deacons.

It is debatable as to whether we should look to Acts 6 for the institution of the diaconate, although I do not doubt that that passage has much to teach us. For example we learn from the Jerusalem situation that a caring, practical ministry is essential for the growth, prosperity and well-being of the local church. By the time the pastoral epistles were written—some thirty years after the events of Acts 6—the diaconate appears to have become a regular office. Hence Paul wrote to give specific instructions concerning the deacons.⁴⁰ What should be said about them?

1. Their ministry is essentially practical in character.

The word from which our word deacon is derived primarily means servant or minister. It is a word that points to the acts of charity and service in which they engage. In New Testament times the deacons supplied material, or secular, needs. And the fact that they are mentioned alongside the bishops, elders and overseers in Philippians 1:1 probably indicates that by the year 60 AD the practical serving ministry of deacons was seen as established and necessary for the good of the church.

2. Both men and women may exercise a diaconal ministry.

Whilst it is true that, according to Acts 6, no woman was elected to this position in the Jerusalem church at the time of the dispute between the 'Graecian' and 'Hebraic Jews', it is also true that Paul refers to Phoebe as a deaconess.⁴¹ Moreover his instructions in 1 Timothy 3 appear to imply that this office, or at the very least something akin to it, is open to women as well as men. It is worthwhile remembering that the Greek does not have the word 'men' and the words 'their wives' which are supplied in the New International Version translation of vv.8 and 11 of that chapter. Hendriksen, very helpfully says,

That these women are not 'the wives of the deacons' nor 'all the adult female members of the church' is clear from the syntax: 'The overseer therefore *must* be. . . Deacons similarly [must be]. . . Women similarly [must be]. . .'. One and the same verb coordinates the three: the overseer, deacons, women. Hence, these women are here viewed as rendering special service in the church, as do the elders and deacons.⁴² (his italics).

Whether he is right to go on to describe these women as 'deacon's assistants' is open to debate. But none will quibble with him when he says, 'Nothing can erase the fact that according to scripture, and particularly also according to Paul's epistles, women perform very important ministries in the church.'⁴³

At this point we need to assert that there is no hint in scripture that the diaconate denoted a special 'order' or 'sub-priesthood'.⁴⁴ It has become commonplace within the Church of England to see ordination to the diaconate as an automatic stepping-stone to the priesthood. The fact that

women are now ordained to this office has affected this received 'wisdom' to some extent for they are at present ordained to what some call the 'perpetual diaconate'. However, it still holds true that it is assumed that all men who are made deacons will be ordained presbyter a year later. This is to be lamented, chiefly because it belittles the diaconate office. We need to do something urgently about this. May I volunteer these suggestions.

First, we need to return to the biblical concept of the diaconate. There is nothing wrong with the idea of women deacons, or better deaconesses, *per se* but to assume that all women ordained to this office will automatically be licensed to preach and lead church meetings is both misguided and unbiblical. As some argued when the ordination of women as deacons' debate took place a decade ago, before we make women deacons we need to re-establish a proper pattern of diaconal ministry. That need still exists. We need to draw the distinction between the diaconate and presbyterate more sharply. At present it is confused and unclear. In particular we need to assert that the diaconal ministry is more about *maintaining* the church and its members, whereas the presbyterial ministry is concerned more with *its government*. On the practical level such rethinking will lead us to conclude that our synodical structures really do need a major overhaul.

Secondly, we need to appreciate the distinctive rôle of women within the church. Some ask, What can women do if they cannot teach and preach in the mixed congregation? Let me again quote William Hendriksen. He says, and here he is speaking primarily of the widows of 1 Timothy 5:9,

Their duties seem to have been: giving good counsel to the younger women, praying and fasting, visiting the sick, preparing women for baptism, taking them to communion, and giving guidance and direction to widows and orphans who were supported by the church⁴⁵

As he says nothing in this list about children I think we can safely conclude that it is not exhaustive. There is much that women can do within the life of the church. This point is further underlined when we bear in mind that our P.C.C.s can be described as exercising a diaconal ministry within our churches. Invariably you will find many women on these P.C.C.s. Is it not the case that some are endowed with administrative and caring skills, to name but two? These are not just to be highly valued in theory but also seen as definitely needed and used in practice.

Thirdly, we need to deal with the question of remuneration. If it is the case that 'It is difficult to establish beyond doubt that the local teaching elder did or did not receive regular remuneration',⁴⁶ then it must be concluded that it is impossible to know whether the deacons ever did. There is, therefore, a need for flexibility and freedom. Each congregation must do what it believes right, never forgetting that 'The worker deserves his wages'.⁴⁷

3. They will endeavour to fulfil their own ministry

Thus far we have concentrated on the ministry of presbyters and deacons. It is now time to say a word about those cared for by overseers and those who benefit from the diaconal ministry of some within the church. What part are they to play? At least these two points need to be made.

First, the scriptures make it abundantly clear that each of us has a ministry to perform. We refer again to Ephesians. A little earlier we made reference to the gifts that the ascended Christ gave to his church. 'He gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.'⁴⁸ But why? Why were these gifts given? So that God's people may be prepared for 'works of service'.⁴⁹ That is the answer that Paul gives in the very next verse. And, you will readily appreciate, that is very much in line with what the apostle says a little earlier when he speaks of us doing the 'good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do'.⁵⁰ Peter throws more light on this when he says that you have been chosen 'to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light'.⁵¹

Secondly, too many have been too ready for too long to allow too much to be done by one man, namely, the vicar or minister. As it says in one discussion document,

Worship has been taken over by 'services'; praying by the whole church has been superseded by prayers on their behalf by the preacher; the exercise of spiritual gifts to a large extent has become the province and prerogative of one elder, the preaching elder. In other words, the exercise of the collective gifts in the church has largely fallen into disuse, and there is no doubt that one of the main contributors to this state of affairs has been the rise of the 'one-man ministry'.⁵²

Even a quick glance at 1 Corinthians 14 shows that a variety of church members, other than office-holders, participated in the worship and ministry. The apostle's aim was not to restrict. It was to remind us that all is to be done in a way that pleases God. For Paul this meant two things. First, it meant order, 'For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.'⁵³ Secondly, it meant mutual edification, for 'All,' he says, 'must be done for the strengthening of the church.'⁵⁴ Paul, of all men, recognized that 'we have different gifts, according to the grace given us.'⁵⁵ That is why in his letters he lists no less than fifteen gifts.⁵⁶ The thorny questions which need to be asked are: Have some of these gifts been withdrawn? And, how many, if any, are not specifically connected to public worship? The answers you give to these questions will have a direct bearing on how you work out how each member of the one body is to be free to fulfil his or her own particular function or ministry.⁵⁷ What we can and must assert is that the New Testament knows nothing of the 'clerical-lay divide' which is endemic in so many churches.

Sadly, the movement for the ordination of women inadvertently perpetuates this divide by insisting that women should be able to join the all-male 'priests' club. Many would not like to hear it put that way, but by insisting that women be priested so that they can preside at the Lord's table—and this, many say, is the only thing they cannot do at present—they perpetuate the myth that communion is only valid if conducted by a priest. Notwithstanding this, some within the corridors of power are campaigning for what is called lay-celebration. If the ordination of women to the presbyterate goes through the likelihood is that this issue will come to the fore.

Personally I see no fundamental theological objection to a non-presbyter presiding at the Lord's table. But I question the wisdom of it. In Jewish homes, even to this day, the Passover celebration is essentially a family affair with the father taking the leading rôle. In principle, then, I cannot see why only a 'priest' has to conduct communion. However, having said that we need to add that if it is the work of the elders to oversee the congregation then it seems only right and proper that they should preside over the church family meal. I am not in favour of a free-for-all. In the normal course of events the stipendiary teaching elder should preside, assisted by any other elders there are in the parish. Whenever he is absent the other (non-ordained) elders should be allowed to preside. It smacks of priestcraft and sacerdotalism to insist that a priest from elsewhere must come in to conduct communion even though there are some recognized and respected lay 'elders' in a fellowship. I am thinking especially of those churches in which a ministry team, say of vicar and readers, exists. They may call themselves the pastoral committee, or something similar, yet in reality they may be a modern day equivalent to the New Testament concept of a group of elders. If and where such exists the lay elders should be permitted (call it licensed if you wish) to preside at the Lord's supper.

To conclude, we have discussed three areas in particular—presbyters, deacons and the church membership as a whole. We have endeavoured to look at the biblical material germane to each. And we have sought to begin the process of challenging our present structures in the light of it. We have not said everything that could be said but there is one point that needs to be underlined. As we, and the Church of England, approach the beginning of the third millennium since the first coming of Christ we must assert afresh and reclaim the primacy of the local congregation.

The tendency in recent decades has been to centralization. This is true at both the local, diocesan level and at the national, denominational level. The Church of England, though the national church, is not a centralist church like Rome. Nor is she a loose federation of independent congregations. Instead she is a connectional church. She is a church made up of semi-autonomous units that are (supposed to be) wedded to the theology of the Bible as summarized in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion; that accept the devotional standards and practices as set out in the Book of

Common Prayer; and that are happy to adopt the administrative structure of parishes grouped in dioceses as a valid way of expressing their relationship to one another. We must strive to maintain the qualified independence of the local church. We must set it as our goal that each parochial unit seeks to become self-financing as well as evangelistically oriented. We shall only achieve this goal if we follow the advice of that great missionary, Hudson Taylor, and do God's work in God's way. Those who do this will never lack God's supply.

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NOTES

- 1 This paper is based on an address given to Church Society's 1992 Conference entitled VISION 2000.
- 2 Proverbs 29:18.
- 3 Erroll Hulse, *Reformation Today*, 107, Jan/Feb 1989, pp. ii, 5–8.
- 4 William Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1972, p. 197.
- 5 Acts 20:28. *cf.* 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7, 17.
- 6 Acts 1:22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; John 15:27.
- 7 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4.
- 8 For example, Galatians 1:1; Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13.
- 9 For example, 1 Timothy 2:7; 2 Timothy 1:11.
- 10 This point emerges especially in 1 and 2 Corinthians.
- 11 Acts 11:28; 21:19f.
- 12 William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 196.
- 13 Acts 21:8. *Cf.* Acts 8:26–40.
- 14 2 Timothy 4:5.
- 15 James 5:14.
- 16 1 Timothy 5:17.
- 17 Evangelical Movement of Wales: *The ministry and life of the Christian Church: a basis for discussion* 1968, p. 19.
- 18 Ephesians 2:20; 3:5.
- 19 See K. Macmorran, K. Elphinstone, E. Moore, *A Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors*, Mowbray, London, 1980 (revised edition).
- 20 Evangelical Movement of Wales, *op. cit.*, p. 20; *cf.* Titus 1:5.
- 21 Genesis 2:18.
- 22 Werner Neuer, *Man and Woman in Christian Perspective*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1990, p. 163.
- 23 1 Timothy 2:12f.; 1 Corinthians 12.
- 24 1 Corinthians 14:33b.
- 25 1 Corinthians 14:36.
- 26 The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, Articles 20 and 21.
- 27 General Synod passed a motion in all three houses that asserted this in 1975.
- 28 William Hendriksen, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1972, p. 180.
- 29 1 Timothy 4:13.
- 30 1 Timothy 4:15.
- 31 2 Timothy 1:14.
- 32 2 Timothy 2:2.

- 33 2 Timothy 4:2, 5.
34 2 Timothy 2:15.
35 *The Heart of the Matter* programme *Body and Soul* was broadcast on BBC1 on 19.4.92 (Easter Day) at 10.30 p.m. At 10.15 p.m. the same day Ludovic Kennedy (a humanist) chaired a structured debate, which included Don Cupitt and David Jenkins on the panel, on BBC Radio 4. Two articles, specially written for Easter 1992, by David Jenkins were published in newspapers. One was in the *Daily Mirror* on 17.4.92 (Good Friday) and the other in *The Newcastle Journal* on 18.4.92.
36 See note 2 above.
37 These figures are from official statistics published in books such as *The Church of England Yearbook*.
38 See the written answer given in response to a question on this topic at the Newcastle Diocesan Synod meeting on 18.5.91.
39 2 Timothy 3.16f.
40 1 Timothy 3:8–13.
41 Romans 16:1.
42 William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
43 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
44 Evangelical Movement of Wales, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
45 William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, pp. 173f. Cf. Titus 2:3–5.
46 Evangelical Movement of Wales, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
47 Luke 10:7; 1 Timothy 5:18.
48 Ephesians 4:11.
49 Ephesians 4:12.
50 Ephesians 2:10.
51 1 Peter 2:9.
52 Evangelical Movement of Wales, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
53 1 Corinthians 14:33.
54 1 Corinthians 14:26.
55 Romans 12:6.
56 From 1 Corinthians 12:8–10—words of wisdom; words of knowledge; faith; healing; miracles; prophecy; discerning of spirits; tongues; interpretation of tongues.
From Romans 12—prophecy; serving; teaching; encouraging; contributing; leading; mercy.
57 Romans 12:4.