

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

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

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

If we are not careful, one of two things will happen: (1) we shall either have fewer good men coming forward for holy orders, or (2) we shall have to put up with a supply of ill-trained, half-educated, ill-cultured men, and the laity must not grumble if, in the near future, they find the tone of the clergy plainly deteriorating. If good men are worth having, they are worth fair pay. This is a self-evident proposition. In the words of one of our Bishops: "It will be a fatal day to the Church of England when she shall be obliged to recruit her ministry from men of lower education and social position." Further consideration of this subject will be taken up in a future paper.

J. R. HUMBLE.



#### ART. V.—THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

ANY sufficiency to which the Christian minister can attain is, of course, only of a relative kind. According to New Testament usage, the word always conveys the idea of fulness or adequacy with regard to a given standard. But what is this standard as it regards the minister's office? It so happens that the two Epistles to the Church of Corinth alone afford us the fullest answer to this question. The true evangelical ideal of the Christian ministry in relation to Christ is that of an agency devoid of any meaning or worth, save only as it receives strength and energy from Him, the whole Source of any motive power it may possess. Hence this ministry, if not a life-like or real representation of its great Prototype, is nothing at all.

In the fourth chapter of the first Epistle we have what we may call a formal definition of the estimate which St. Paul wishes us to take of such an office. The Christian minister is a *ὑπηρέτης* (*lit.* "an under-rower;" "a servant"). This name had long previously been commonly applied to anyone who bore a responsible office under a higher authority. But in the beginning of St. Luke's Gospel we have the first instance of its consecration to religion; and in the twenty-sixth chapter of the Acts we find Christ Himself designating St. Paul by this title of honour on his election to the Apostleship.

But what an apt expression is this word of the dependent place which a minister fills under the only Leader and Commander, the only effective Worker, Priest, Pastor, and Bishop of the Christian Church!

Ministers are mariners and stewards in God's ship under the direction of a Divine Captain. They are appointed to render service to the passengers of this ship during the

dangers, risks, and difficulties of an earthly voyage till they reach their destined haven of rest. They must work this ship till it, at last, reaches the eternal shore, and convey messages from their Master to all on board. Hence the name "angels," or "messengers," as they are sometimes called. And further, they have a commission to feed the passengers under their charge, as stewards, with the supplies provided for the voyage, and in the distribution of which fidelity to their Lord must be a special feature of their stewardship. God's mysteries of salvation from sin, of the righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, never openly revealed till brought to light in the Gospel, are the heavenly stores which they have thus to deal out to needy souls.

The names of "pastor" and "shepherd" and "overseer," also, by which "ministers" are often distinguished, have each a significance of their own.

But there is another aspect of the minister's service which belongs to the very essence of his office. He must be always on the alert to receive the Master's commands, to run through the dust of the road, and to endure the humblest toil of the travel-worn in their execution. He thus commends himself as Christ's *διάκονος*.<sup>1</sup> But he is even more: he is Christ's *δούλος*, or slave. Yet this is a glorious title. No higher has been sought by the holiest and best in every age; and so honourable is it, that no better can be found even for the saints in heaven. But, as applied to the Christian minister, it bears a specially significant meaning. It indicates at once his absolute servitude to one Master, and his freedom from all others. No ancient monastic rules of self-denial and obedience could be more complete and rigid than those by which in spirit and truth he feels bound to serve one Master, even Christ. He can know nothing about the troubles of a divided service or an undecided will. If he bears branded on his soul, and on his body too, the *στίγματα*, the slave-marks which betoken, as in the case of St. Paul, the Owner to whom he belongs, he can hear of no allegiance or obligation but such as he learns in the fellowship of the Cross of Christ. This idea, then, of a life entirely dedicated to one exclusive purpose and work is at the very root of the Christian ministry.

But passing now from these titular characteristics of a minister's sufficiency, let us give a few thoughts to the nature of his service and the signs which point him out as one who labours with the ability which God giveth. And, first of all, he must be in sympathy and living touch with that new

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 6, *ικάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους*. "Made us sufficient as ministers," R.V.

covenant under the authority and power of which he ministers—"not of the letter, but of the spirit." No religion revealed to persons in contact with this material world can possibly dispense with outward forms and ceremonies: Christianity has therefore, of necessity, taken and consecrated to its use certain earthly symbols of the great facts and living truths of which it bears witness and affords pledges to men. But the Gospel minister feels assured that, in so far as he has to do with such forms, he only fulfils his office effectually when they are the mere outward tokens of an inward communion between Christ and those who in them draw near to Him. He is not a minister of the letter, but of something infinitely deeper and better; of that invisible grace, and anointing with power and the Holy Ghost, which are at the bottom of all forms. He is not a minister of the law, but rather of that which is the spirit and body of all law, namely, Christ, and Him crucified. Very fitly, then, is his ministry described as that which is able or sufficient.

We have now reached a point at which, perhaps, we are in the best position to form a sound opinion on a subject which has exercised the thoughts of many—I mean that of Apostolical succession in the Christian ministry. But what are we to understand by Apostolical succession in its true sense? Does it signify that unless a minister can trace his descent to the Apostles by an outward chain, from link to link, whether or not it may be the medium of any vitalizing spiritual influence, his sacred commission is not valid? If so, I fear, a task almost impossible to fulfil is imposed upon us. The Jews may have been able to do this, in tracing their lineal descent from Abraham; but we know how little that availed those who were not also the spiritual children of his family. John the Baptist was the true successor of Elijah, even though we cannot trace the order of Abia to the great prophet of fire.

In reference to the ministers of the Irish Church, their orders have doubtless been transmitted to them from the most ancient and indubitable sources of authority. I am satisfied that this Church is the only religious body which can point to anything like an unbroken historical continuity, identifying the orders of its ministry with those of the men who adorned primitive Christianity in our land. But yet, can we positively affirm that there have been no technical flaws and irregularities in the line of their succession? The annals of mediæval Ireland, I fear, do not justify any very positive presumption under this head.

Consider the story alone of the way in which St. Columba, then a deacon, obtained his priest's orders. He is sent by St. Fennian of Conarld to Echin, Bishop of Clonfad, to

receive consecration to the episcopal office. When Columba reached Clonfad for this purpose, he learned that the Bishop was out ploughing in the field. He went after him, received a hearty welcome; but, lo! in the subsequent course of his proceedings, the good agriculturist and Bishop so lost his head that, by a mistake, he only ordained Columba a priest instead of a Bishop. If the man after God's own heart were precluded from raising up an earthly temple to His glory, because he was a man of war and had shed blood, the claims of the blood-stained Phelim, Bishop of Cashel, and his no less sanguinary successor, King Cormac, also Bishop of Cashel, to transmit the sacred deposit, were not such that, did I fail as a builder on the true Gospel foundation, exactly to trace my holy orders to them, I should thereby feel in the least disqualified to discharge my pastoral office. This Phelim, and even Cormac, with all his taste for literature and art, as well as many of their primatial brethren in Armagh, and who, I suppose, were only samples of many other ninth century bishops, would just as coolly seek conquest or revenge by the sword as any worldly chieftain who never heard or professed allegiance to the Gospel of peace.

By these remarks, however, I would by no means seek to weaken any of those strong historical ties which bind the Church of Ireland to that of SS. Patrick, Columba, and Columbanus, and which identify our religion with that which once gained for this country the distinguished title of "*Insula Sanctorum.*"

It is the worthy, able man who now adorns the high position of provost in Trinity College, Dublin, that has said, "It so happens that we can recall with more pride the religious than the political history of our island." True, but all periods of our religious past are not fitted to awaken such pride. The chain of a literal ecclesiastical succession is very long; and it has undoubtedly come down to us through some very dark and turbid mediums. I therefore, for one, am persuaded that the more excellent way of proving the genuineness of my commission is that which shows it to be in conformity with the spirit rather than the mere letter of Apostolical authority.

The marks of true Church communion which distinguished primitive Christians were, their steadfast continuance in Apostolical doctrine and fellowship, "in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers." We need no other standard. The family likeness to St. Paul which I want is that which proves I am one with him in faith, love, zeal, singleness of purpose, and devotion to the Master's work, rather than in any material identity between the outward credentials of his ministry and

mine. The miraculous call to the Apostleship, which he received from the Chief Shepherd, gave him a title to his office which none could gainsay or resist. Yet he delighted, also, to appeal to other "letters of orders," *ἐπιστολαὶ συστατικάί*, in commendation of his claims on human souls, which were not, however, written on parchment, but rather on the hearts of those whom he won to Christ. He indeed, with unutterable gratitude, could say that he received not only grace, but Apostleship as well, from Christ. Yet he felt it also a testimonial of the highest value to be able to declare that he commended himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God, and that the signs of an Apostle were wrought by him in all patience.

From his teaching we can further learn tokens of a minister's sufficiency which may well claim our deepest attention. If we rightly grasp the great central truth, which shines so brightly in his life and doctrine, we find it to be this—that he regarded himself as one who lived the life of Christ over again on this earth. He as much as proclaimed to the world, "The Lord Jesus now lives in heaven, therefore I live. He works for, in, and with His Church, now at the right hand of God. Consequently I work;" and therefore could exhort his hearers, saying, "We, then, as workers together with Him, beseech you." Hence it was not in his successes, or in any of his mighty labours for Christ, that he so much rejoiced as in those sufferings which brought him into conformity with Christ. And as I can never read his recital of such sufferings without feelings of the deepest self-abasement and humiliation, I can only here fervently pray that the same spirit which fired his soul may also burn in mine and in those of my brethren at the present day.

But there is one great element in the ability of a Christian minister which we cannot pass over, and that is, *spiritual influence*. All who came in contact with the Chief Pastor when on earth felt at once that they were in the presence of such power, and such as that in the unlimited exercise of which He now bears sway in heaven and on earth. Hence the true minister, I believe, is now armed not only with the spirit, but in measure with this power of Christ. There were giants on the earth in those pentecostal and reformation days, when valleys of dry bones rose up like mighty armies at the call of God, and went forth conquering and to conquer in His service. We may not, indeed, again see an Elijah, a John, a Paul or a Luther amongst us. They may not be the want of our times; but we may and must have that which lay at the root of all their glorious triumphs, that is, spiritual influence over the souls of men. Well may we pray and long for this power. Define it

I cannot. It is not the praise of men, it is not eloquence or popularity, or the mere power of attracting large congregations; it is something invisible, intangible, but most real; it is that to which the wills, hearts and consciences of men really bend and pay homage; it is that by which people instinctively distinguish the true from the false shepherd. Perhaps its real secret lies in what St. Paul calls "the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus;" and the man who has found it out, is he who in private and public, in life and doctrine, has always managed to hide himself behind the Master.

We cannot omit to notice one function or gift of an able Christian ministry which gives it an especial claim upon the acceptance of mankind. This office is not that of the bygone and temporary Jewish priesthood. The minister of Christ is never designated a sacrificing priest in the New Testament. Here the term is only applied to all glorified saints in common. The only Priest of our Confession is that unchangeable, ever-living Priest Who has no need to delegate His office to others. But there is an ancient, precious ministry as old, at least, as the days of Enoch, which Christ has ended with mighty power; and invigorated with the energy of a new life, purpose and work. That is the place filled, of old, by the prophet, and handed down to the pastors of the Church at the present day. The essence of the prophet's office consisted not in his being a foreteller of future events, but rather in the fact of his speaking for or instead of God, in his being the mirror to men of the true mind of God. Now, the very greatest importance is attached to this function in the New Testament. St. Paul tells us that it is the highest gift bestowed by Christ on His Church, and is that which he exhorts us specially to covet or desire above all others. He who rightly uses this gift introduces us into an atmosphere far above the clouds of religious doubt and speculation, and makes us feel that he has brought us into the very presence of Christ, and face to face with God. Of him who possesses the true prophetic instinct, it can be said:

Who took the suffering human race,  
And read each wound, each weakness clear,  
And struck his finger on the place,  
And said, "Thou ailest here and there."

In that priesthood of prayer whereof all the Lord's people are partakers, it is, of course, the minister's place to take a foremost part. In the ministry of the sacraments, a lot is assigned to him by the heavenly Householder of indispensable value to perishing, needy souls. But I think if we can at all interpret the signs of our times, and take account especially of the masses as yet untouched by anything like the supreme

power of spiritual religion, we must see that the want and desire of this age at large is not so much the ministry of the priest as of the prophet.<sup>1</sup> Men are jealous of any claim which would put a fellow-sinner between them and their God, and which would as much as say to them, "Stand aside, I am holier than thou;" but at the same time, in their secret hearts, they long for some guide who would pour in true light upon their blindness and ignorance, and with authority and power point out to them the way of peace. A prophetic caste no longer exists, and is no longer needed; but a prophetic order of men able to speak what they have seen, and to testify what they know of heavenly realities—men faithful and wise, well instructed in the things of God, and qualified to "prophesy according to the proportion of faith" and the spirit of Christian charity—perhaps never stood more in demand than they do at the present time. If we fail then, now, to reach cold and rigid hearts, to inspirit the apathetic, to stir the dull consciences of sinners, and direct them into the path of well-doing, we must look somewhere else for the cause rather than in the message we have to deliver. Wherever we turn, whether in the world of our respective parishes, or to that of this earthly sphere, the deeply-felt, earnest, though unspoken cry of men and women to us is: "Come over and help us, if you can." And if we have something real and solid, something sufficient for the cravings of the inner man to offer, no former generation in the Church's history could more thankfully appreciate such help than that of our own day.

Space does not now permit the further pursuit of this wide and most instructive subject; therefore with some remarks regarding what has been advanced, I shall conclude.

No thoughtful pastor, indeed, can consider the high calling he has received, and the tremendous responsibility which belongs to it, without great searchings of heart and a sense of the deepest awe. Even that prince of Apostolical labourers, the noble-minded Paul, when he looks at the terrible issues dependent on the faithful discharge of his office, exclaims, "Who is sufficient for these things?"<sup>2</sup> A too sensitive recoiling from such a charge led a holy man once to say, "For all the riches of the world, I would not have the charge of souls for one night;" and another to declare that "few, if any, priests can be saved." But without sharing in such morbid sentiments, I am sure, as we think of our Master, ourselves, and the work before us, we cannot but see what a lot of thrilling solicitude and magnitude

---

<sup>1</sup> The late Bishop Fraser, in common with many most influential divines held this view.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 16, *πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἰκανός;*



is ours. The example set before us seems unattainable. The difficulties in our way seem unspeakably great. To say nothing of outward trials, see what infirmities of body and mind compass us round and keep us in on every side. We walk by faith. Ours is a testimony which declares that beyond, in the future, is the Christian's golden age, is the time for which men should prepare and live; but how sorely beset and hindered are we by that world which has "Now!" written on all its attractions! How little, apparently, have we to learn, except the discipline of failure, in many of our undertakings! The successes of yesterday become but too often the reverses of to-day. Evidently the whole mass of the evils which afflict mankind are at war with us. Here is that misfortune and poverty we cannot cure. There is that stubborn perverseness in irreligion, drunkenness, or some other crying sin, upon which we can make no seeming impression for good. Here is that want of sympathy and coldness from professed friends which is as ice upon our souls. Then, amidst our dark musings, comes the chilling suspicion that perhaps the power of religion is failing, that its force is all but spent—at least in our hands—or that the awakening and influential efficacy which once attended our own ministry is now no longer visible. Will the experienced minister say that this picture of his lot and inner life is overdrawn? I think not. But it is doubtless well that we should have our *de profundis clamavi* experiences like the great and good in times gone by. Seeing, however, that our way passes through these valleys of Baca, we must be on the watch to gird up the loins of our mind in all sobriety and calmness, to arm ourselves with the self-possession and strength needful for such *dies mali*, and the despondency which they bring to our minds. But whence our fears and misgivings? Our work is not of to-day, or yesterday. That which the Master began both to do and teach long ago on the shores of the Galilean lake, He continues now to teach and do through us. Is not our office altogether His institution? That consecration of life to the service of men for the advancement of their spiritual and everlasting welfare, which is the meaning and intent of our ministry, has no counterpart in human inventions. Nothing like it has ever been thought of by man. Is not the ordinance, therefore, divine? We exist to spread the true light, to stand up for goodness and truth, and to carry on the old war of bygone saints against error, iniquity, and wrong. As long as the Bible and the Gospel are a force in the world, our place cannot be dispensed with. We may not gain the success we so ardently desire in our several spheres. But fidelity is ours; success belongs to the Disposer of all things. We may not accomplish the results we aim at

in our undertakings ; but our part is now rather that of the husbandman who sows, than of him who reaps. Like Abraham, we must follow our Master, often not knowing whither we go. The Christian servant gains no advantage by knowing the why and the wherefore of the work assigned to him, or the exact purpose which that work is designed to serve. In fact, I hope and believe, as in a country like Ireland, the indirect influence of God's ministers is often more important in His sight than any visible and direct ends they might accomplish. Let us learn, then, to look above the surface, and to sow seed which we ourselves may not reap in this life. Let us be not only teachers, but examples of that eternal patience which belongs to our present destiny, and which clearly marks that divine rule beneath which we now live. Let us aim at the mark, the golden centre of ministerial excellency now, and the prize, the due reward, will be ours in good time. Meanwhile, let us remember who and what we are, entrusted with a stewardship held direct from Christ, in a glorious household as wide and embracing as this earth, as far-reaching as Christ's whole family in heaven and earth. Let us always behave with an ever-present knowledge of the dignity and responsibility which pertain to us. Let us know our own minds and not be afraid to speak them. Let us not fear to point out boldly the way of life and the way of death ; and whatever we do, let us not lose that inner sacred fire of the soul which lights up the vista before us into things unseen, which keeps Christ, truth, and immortality at all times clearly in our view. Whilst our work is on earth, yet let Augustine's noble sentiment be ours : "Anima mea magis est ubi amat quam ubi animat" (*My life is more where it loves than where it lives*). An eloquent divine has said : "Our awful ministry starts from the foot of the Cross on which Jesus Christ died, from the grave from which He rose, from the mountain whence He went up, and it looks forward as to its close and goal to the day when we shall all stand before Him. We are the messengers of a divine forgiveness—ministers of a divine reconciliation—heralds of an everlasting peace. We are sent to feed the flock of God—to be gatherers of wandering souls into their Father's house, the stewards of His mysteries, the preachers and prophets of the Light of the World. There are many orders of work in God's world, and that is our work."<sup>1</sup> "Raise up, O Lord, we pray Thee, Thy power, and come amongst us." *Veni Creator Spiritus.*

FRANCIS BURKE.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dean Church.