

The Doctrine of the Church In These Times

By

Chester E. Tulga, D.D.

1953

CONSERVATIVE BAPTIST FELLOWSHIP

Illinois

Chapter 4

THE MINISTRY OF THE TRUE CHURCH

"It is well to bear in mind that the distinction which has for ages prevailed in Christian society between clergy and laity is not primitive; was not known in the apostolic age. There was an apostleship and a discipleship, but no clerical caste, separated by a wide gulf of sacramental ordination from the common people . . . The Churches chose for their pastors and teachers such of their own members as exhibited the needed qualities which fitted them for the positions." E. T. Hiscox (*The New Directory for Baptist Churches*, p. 282)

"The Jewish and Catholic antithesis of clergy and laity had no place in the apostolic age." Phillip Schaff (*History of the Christian Church*, 1:131)

"The New Testament never uses the word 'priest' to describe the minister. Indeed, in the singular number it is found of CHRIST, and His Priesthood is said to be 'undelegated' or intransmissible' (Hebrews 7:24]. When it is used of the Church it is always in the plural, 'priests' (Revelation 1:6), or collectively, 'priesthood' (I Peter 2:5). The truth, therefore, is that Christianity is, not has, a priesthood. The silence of the New Testament on this point is a simple and yet significant fact. It is what Bishop Lightfoot calls 'the eloquent silence of the apostolic writings.'" W. H. Griffith-Thomas (*The Principles of Theology*, p. 316)

"It seems unlikely that modern scholarship, after the closest scrutiny of the documents, can do more than establish two statements as to the place of the Twelve in the Primitive Church. First, they were accorded a certain pre-eminence in the counsels and leadership of the community; second, the exact nature of their authority was undefined." R. N. Flew, *JESUS and His Church*, p. 130, 131)

"There is no more exalted, honorable and responsible calling among men than that of the Christian minister. He is an ambassador from the King of Heaven to the sons of men [II Corinthians 5:20]. He is a watchman unto GOD's people (Ezekiel 3:17).

- He is a husbandman, in charge of the Lord's estate (II Timothy 2:6).
- He is a steward of the mysteries of GOD, and of the manifold grace of GOD.
- He is a shepherd of the flock of GOD which He hath purchased with His own blood (I Peter 5:1-4)." Wilson T. Hogue (*The HOLY SPIRIT*, p. 301)

"Hopefully he looks, as the more intelligent of human beings have not looked for many a long year, to the Church and its ministers; but what he hears from them somewhat bewilders him. Can it be that the official proponents of GOD fail to understand the inner need that moves, the hunger that impels him? It often seems to him, from what he sees of Churchmen and from what he hears of what they say that they, too, have slipped their moorings, and are perhaps more adrift than he. Can this be so? . . . Why do the pulpits resound with lectures on almost every conceivable subject except those deeply spiritual ones which alone can strengthen him for life? . . . Why must he listen to well-worn minor platitudes, as though the preachers were twittering birds, almost unaware of the swift coming hurricane?" Bernard I. Bell (*Religion for Living*, pp. xii, xiii)

"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (I Corinthians 2:4).

"Even in the ordination of ministers the historic creedal standards are evaded with ingenious rationalizations and are almost wholly disregarded." Charles Clayton Morrison (*The Unfinished Reformation*, p. 45)

"A great change has come over the whole of Protestantism in the past half century . . . A significant clue to the nature of this change is seen in the virtual passing of the heretic." Charles C. Morrison (*The Unfinished Reformation*, p. 189)

1. The ministry of the true Church is not valid because it is in human succession, but because it has a direct call from GOD.

The special call to special service for GOD is well established in both the Old and New Testaments, from Abraham to Paul. It is rooted in the divine election, not in the gifts of the individual.

It depends for implementation on the HOLY SPIRIT in that person, rather than the attractiveness of the natural personality. No ordination, no show of numerical success, no amount of ecclesiastical prestige, no peacock show of scholarship, is a substitute for that elective call of GOD to Christian service. The call may come in various ways, but it must come as a compelling pressure from GOD upon the heart of the believing Christian or he is not a true minister.

2. The ministry of the true Church is not valid because it is in human succession or the recipient of ecclesiastical authority, but because it is based upon a living evangelical experience of GOD in CHRIST.

He must have in his own heart and life what he expects his Gospel to produce in other hearts and lives. Samuel M. Shoemaker, says, "I believe that if the Church is to be re-made and to take hold again in our day, the primary necessity is the conversion of the ministers to a full experience of the Lord JESUS CHRIST." (*The Conversion of the Church*, p. 45)

- It is entirely proper to ask whether any minister has been born again, or if he is living in fellowship with GOD, for if this is not true, he has no credentials. He himself needs healing before he can become a healer of souls.

- It is entirely proper to ask whether any Bible scholar, or professor has been born again, for the natural man is not a proper interpreter of Holy Writ (I Corinthians 2:14). The religious world is too much impressed by the religious views of unregenerate Bible scholars who, without the new birth, have no spiritual discernment into divine truth. A true Church will have a ministry which shares the apostolic experience of GOD which gave the apostles their strength and spiritual authority.

No human succession, no ecclesiastical ordination, no scholarship, will atone for this lack. One may be deprived of ecclesiastical credentials, one may be discredited by a human organization and be in apostolic succession, if they have suffered loss for CHRIST and His truth.

3. The ministry of the true Church is not valid because of its ecclesiastical sanctions, but because it preaches the apostolic Gospel.

Gordon Poteat, a liberal writer, observes, "Our Reformation forbears stood behind the Holy Bible and claimed a **'Thus saith the LORD'** when they preached their sermons. They were certain that the 'Book' infallibly proclaimed the Lord's injunctions and those who listened shared that conviction. The thunders of the pulpit reverberated in the souls of the people just as Sinai's thunders made the children of Israel tremble in awe. There are still vestiges of this sort of preaching which are fairly widespread but mostly among those who refuse to come to terms with modern biblical scholarship. However, preachers who have received a modern theological education, though they still stand behind the pulpit Bible when they speak, are unable honestly to preach as if they had in it unquestionable support." (*We Preach Not Ourselves*, p. 2) Poteat acknowledges that there is a ministry which no longer preaches the apostolic Gospel, and that the acceptance of biblical criticism has robbed liberalism of its spiritual authority.

As a result of the work of the higher critics, the rise of scientific thought, and the destruction of all religious authority, the ministry is confused and uncertain concerning its message. Leland P. Bechtel (*Eastern*, Eastern Baptist Seminary, 12-1947) reporting on the North American Interseminary Conference said, "In the student discussion group to which I was assigned there was little agreement as to the exact nature of the Gospel . . . Lack of agreement as to the Gospel was evident not only in the student interpretation of the platform lectures . . . but also in the Bible study periods when the nature of the Gospel was discussed." The liberal ministry of our day, rejecting the Gospel as set forth in the New Testament, has lost its way and lost its divine credentials. Uncertain of its authority, uncertain of its Gospel, the liberal ministry has an uncertain message.

Many who consider themselves evangelicals have watered down the apostolic Gospel until it is only a pale imitation of the real thing. Much that passes for "Gospel preaching" in our day lacks the rich content of the New Testament Gospel, often given to harmless and inoffensive generalities, and, providing an "invitation" is given at the end, will pass for "Gospel" preaching. The evangelical world must restudy the content of apostolic preaching if it expects to be in apostolic succession. A modern writer Daniel T. Niles, calls attention to the evangelical tendency to weaken the presentation of the Gospel, saying, "Often, particularly for the evangelist, the temptation will be strong to make modifications in the Gospel which will make it more acceptable and more reasonable, modifications that will take out of the Gospel its offense. But this temptation must be resisted." (*That They May Have Life*, p. 80) Many evangelicals,

preaching a shallow Gospel, are credited with being orthodox, but their orthodoxy is superficial indeed. The mere absence of modernistic denials is too often taken as an evidence of orthodoxy.

As a result of liberal confusion and evangelical "trimming" the world is largely ignorant of the true meaning of the Gospel. Vincent Taylor (*The Apostolic Gospel*, p. 3) says of our world, "A generation has arisen which is ignorant of our Gospel and contemptuous of what it believes it to be. It has followed the false gods of materialism, and although the shaking events of our times has left it bewildered and skeptical, it does not believe we have anything relevant to offer." How can the world take the Gospel seriously when a large portion of the ministry no longer preach it, while others offer only an abridged edition of the Gospel, lacking spiritual power? ***The ministry of the true Church preaches the apostolic Gospel with certainty and without abridgement.***

~ end of chapter 4 ~
