

Church and Ministry

Now the church is the embodiment of the Remnant ideal. It is a society within a society. But it is not an isolationist group, carefully fostering a private life of its own secluded from the contaminations of the world. It has to discharge a task in the world as well as to maintain its own inner life. It has to present the Gospel to those outside; and it can only do that effectively as its members live according to Christ in their relations to one another. In other words, the Church has a dual role—apostolic in relation to those outside and pastoral in relation to those within.¹

Do we take the church of Jesus with a grain of salt? Is the church irrelevant in the lives of God's people? Are Christ's church and His ministry a significant part of our walk with God? What is the purpose of the church? What is the church? We can say that the Christian *ecclesia* (church) is a society within a society. The Body of Christ is composed of priests, both men and women, who serve the living God through Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the church is to engage in the proclamation of the Gospel as well as to minister to each other within the congregation of God's saints. Not only is the community of Christ to be involved in the proclamation of God's way of salvation to the world, but it is also to be concerned about other activities outside the church, that is to say, social justice.²

The church is to be the light of the world. In our fulfillment of ministry, there is a sense in which we act as instruments of God to accomplish His desired goals in this life. In other words, God uses each of us as instruments of His to proclaim the Good News of redemption “in” and “through” Jesus. We need to view two current concepts of ministries within the Body of Christ—**instrumental**³ and **participatory**. **These two concepts of ministry are poles apart. Instrumental ministry is limited to a select few, but, on the other hand, participatory ministry involves the whole of God's people.** It is not uncommon for believers to fail to view ministry in God's kingdom as participatory. What do we mean by participatory? We simply mean that we, as His children, are to be actively engaged in kingdom work.

¹T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1947), 35. **T.W. Manson** (1893–1958) was a New Testament scholar and minister in the Presbyterian Church of England. He was Yates Professor of New Testament Greek and Exegesis at Mansfield College in Oxford and Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *The Sayings of Jesus* and *The Teaching of Jesus*.

²The heart of this study zeros in on the thoughts of Jurgen Moltmann in his book, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, which book examines in great detail the church and ministry. I read this book three times in preparation for the writing of this study. See Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). I have cited many authors to help insure impartiality and objectivity in this important subject about church and ministry.

³“Instrumental ministry” is not the same as one being an instrument of God to carry out His goals of reaching out to the lost and extending words of encouragement to the saints. By-far-and-large, “instrumental ministry” is limited to a select few, not to the body of Christ as a whole.

How do we view our ministry? Do we view ourselves as ministers and priests of God? Are we actively engaged in an outreach ministry or do we just sit in the pews? Do we talk to individuals about Jesus and His offer of redemption by grace through faith in His finished work upon Calvary? What is our concept of ministry? Is our concept of ministry just for the one in the pulpit on Sunday mornings, which is to say, ministry is limited to a select few? This view of ministry is the instrumentalist's philosophy.

As we contemplate the biblical point of view of ministry, ministry is not to be limited to just a particular group of saints, which we often call "clergy." **Ministry is a function of every individual Christian; ministry is the Body of Christ, as a whole, at work.** If we have a proper point of view of participation and a correct perception of the nature of the church, our theology of the church should assist us in our taking part. Also, if we understand the various types of models of input, our membership in God's community should be more effective toward the advancement of His kingdom on earth. When we speak of different kinds of contributions within the Body of Christ, we might ask the question: What are the various styles of outreach that we uphold?

When we reflect upon the numerous assortments of models of involvement within the local fellowship, we encounter many models, which patterns of formation unfold our perception of the church. For instance, how do we view the church in our theology? **Do we view the church as an ecclesiastical organization, a community of believers, or simply as an organizational structure with a hierarchy of selected individuals who rule the church with an iron fist?** In other words, what is our working theology of the church? Another aspect of our ministry concerns our relationship to the social issues of the human race. In our Christian outreach, do we need to become acquainted with the realities of the world? This study seeks to analyze the various models of ministry involvement.

WORKING THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

Models for Ministry

Before we can develop adequate models for ministry,⁴ we must have a sound working theology of the church.⁵ Our paradigm,⁶ or pattern, of the church will shape our models of

⁴See Howard A. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 11, 19, for an insightful, fully assessed definition of "model." He writes:

Models are not just opinions or theories; they are often the lenses through which we view reality. Models of the kingdom of God can have earth-shaking results.... What people believe about the kingdom often shapes what they do.... A further word should be added concerning the use of models in theology and specifically in discussing the kingdom of God. A considerable literature on using models in theology has developed over the past three decades, and models are increasingly employed today as a method of theological exploration.... 'A model is, in essence, a sustained and systematic metaphor.'... By constructing and exploring models one finds hints of what may be true about the hidden reality the models represent.

ministry. Our perception of the church determines our attitude toward our view of ministry as participatory or instrumentalist. In order for us to develop a working theology of the church, we must first determine what the word *church* means. What is the church? Is it a denomination? Is it an institution? Is it simply a religious social institution? Is it an organism? Is it the company of the redeemed? Is it the Body of Christ? Is it the community of God on earth? **Just how do we define or translate the word *church*? How is the true church identified?** Did Christ establish an organization? Or did Christ bring a body of believers into existence? Just how should we characterize the church? One model of ministry is our view of the church.

Answers to the above questions determine, to a great extent, our working theology of the church. For instance, some Christians are conditioned to identify the church as a type of corporate organized religious body, of which they are a part, as the true church of Jesus Christ, thereby excluding all others from belonging to the kingdom of God. In other words, any person who is not identified with his or her particular group, or denomination, is not a member of Christ's church. That which God intended as a rallying point for the lover of God and His truth has become a battleground on which ecclesiastical wars are fought.

Again, the questions are: **What is our model of the church?** Is it an ecclesiastical organization? Or is it a community of believers? Anders Nygren⁷ objects, and rightly so, to the current model of the church as an organizational structure. He uses the following pregnant words against accepting the organizational structure of the church as a part of our theology of the church:

Did Christ establish the church, or not? That question has generally been answered about as follows. During his lifetime Jesus gathered a group of disciples around himself, but there was as yet no kind of organization. Then if one moves on a bit into history one meets an organization which girdles the globe. It bears the name of Christ and announces itself as his church. Within that organization one finds a rich diversity of offices, as well as sacraments, a Christian cultus, and so on. The question presents itself, did Jesus actually found that organization? Did he actually envision anything of the kind? Is it not rather the product of a development whose result was not at all what Jesus would have approved? Is it not, in any case, an anachronism to speak of the church as instituted by Christ?⁸

⁵Manson, *The Church's Ministry*, 16.

⁶See Stephen R. Covey (1932-2012), *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1989), 23, where he says,

The word *paradigm* comes from the Greek. It was originally a scientific term, and is more commonly used today to mean a model, theory, perception, assumption, or frame of reference. In the more general sense, it's the way we 'see' the world—not in terms of our visual sense of sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding, interpreting

⁷ **Anders Nygren** (1890-1978), Lutheran theologian and professor of systematic theology at Lund University.

⁸Anders Nygren, "Corpus Christi," in *This Is the Church*, ed. Anders Nygren, Gustaf Aulen, Ragnar Bring, Anton Fridrichsen, and Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1952), 4.

Over a period of time, the concept of the church changed from a community of believers to an organizational structure with its hierarchy (instrumentalist). It is in this same vein that Emil Brunner's⁹ assessment of the contemporary situation is also full of insight as he expresses the predicament of the modern church: "The church of Christ ruled by Christ is no longer Christianity, but the Church only as a corporate institution."¹⁰ Jurgen Moltmann¹¹ is also helpful in this area when he writes:

If the church does not see itself as 'the church of society', or as the 'German', or 'white', or 'male', church (even though it can often enough really be described as these things in terms of its actual situation), but calls itself instead 'the church of Christ', then it will also have to make Christ its starting point in its own understanding.¹²

The Dimensions of a Doctrine of the Church Today

An adequate formation of ministry demands a sufficient and adequate overview of the true nature of the church. Since the church is God's community, it will reflect upon its life in Christ. The church worships the One who calls it into being, the One who liberates it, and the One who gathers it to Himself. The church presents itself before men and women and before God. Moltmann is correct when he writes: "For it stands for God to the world, and it stands for the world before God."¹³ It is this perspective of relationship to the world before God that Paul speaks of his debt to humanity in his letter to the Christians in Rome (Romans 1:14). Not only do we, as Christians, participate in the Great Commission, but we also involve ourselves in teaching His followers to adhere to His teachings (Matthew 28:18-20). Again, Moltmann appropriately states, "the church of Christ is an 'open' church. It is open for God, open for men and women and open for the future of both God and men."¹⁴ The church of Christ concerns itself with "messianic liberation and eschatological renewal of the world."¹⁵ This concept of liberation is the ministry of every believer, not just clergy, that is to say, a select few with certain academic credentials.

The Trinitarian History of God

An understanding of the Trinitarian history of God can assist us in our participation in the ministry of God. **According to the Great Commission, the Christian community does**

⁹ **Emil Brunner** (1889-1966), an eminent and highly influential Swiss theologian.

¹⁰ Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1942), 42.

¹¹ **Jurgen Moltmann** (b. 1926) is a German Reformed theologian who is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen.

¹² Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 68.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

everything in the name of the triune God. The church sees itself in the Trinitarian history of God's dealings with the world. When we talk about the Trinitarian history of God, we are conscious of the "livingness of God which has moved out of itself ... which can only be understood through participating and engaged knowledge," writes Moltmann.¹⁶ To state it more clearly, the Trinitarian history of God includes knowledge of God's dealings with humanity. **The church can understand much more clearly its own position or part in the movement of God's ministry with the world if it attempts to understand the Trinitarian history of God.**

Our perception of the Trinity's role in our redemption will heighten our conscious participation in God's movement to reach the lost. It is this fuller understanding of the Trinity that entices us into an active involvement in ministry. When we appreciate the history of Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit in the light of Christ's coming into the world through His Incarnation, we will become more attuned to our roles as ministers of reconciliation. God sends both Christ and the Holy Spirit. The history of Christ is seen in the light of His origin (John 1:1-15). The Gospels record the history of Jesus as the history of the Messiah. Jesus is introduced by the synoptic Gospels in the light of His sending and His mission by God the Father and the workings of the Holy Spirit. John says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16).

For Mark, the ministry of Jesus begins when the Holy Spirit is conferred on Him in baptism (Mark 1:9-12). Even though Matthew mentions the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus at His baptism, nevertheless, he begins his history of Christ with Mary's conception by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:18-23). Luke also begins the ministry of Jesus with the conception by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-35). Again, Moltmann points out the role of the Spirit in the history of Christ: "The experience of the Spirit is to be found in the experiences of the history of Christ which men have in their own history."¹⁷ Luke also records the promise of the Holy Spirit as a gift following baptism (Acts 2:38).

Paul also speaks of God sending forth His Son and His Holy Spirit in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 4:4-6). Thus, as we reflect upon the origin of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we are immediately thrown back into eternity. Moltmann points out, with justice: "The Trinity in the origin is the foundation of the Trinity in the sending, and hence the Trinity in the sending reveals the Trinity in the origin as being from eternity an open trinity."¹⁸ In other words, Moltmann is saying that we cannot grasp the life of God in a finished circle. For Moltmann, our concept of God must include the Trinity. It is in the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit that humankind (humanity) encounters God.

The history of the Trinity opens fellowship for the human race through the coming of the Son and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity works together for the salvation of both men and women. We discover in the history of the Trinity that the Son glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son and the Holy Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son by freeing

¹⁶Ibid., 52.

¹⁷Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 54.

¹⁸Ibid., 55

individuals for fellowship with the Trinity (1 Corinthians 12:13). This comprehension of Trinitarian history helps us, as Christians, to fathom the ministry of the Trinity, and the Trinity's grace in allowing our participation in His ministry through the church of Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

The name Jesus (**Ἰησοῦς**, *Iēsous*) and His title (**χριστός**, *Christos*, “Anointed”) require that we see the church as subject to Christ. Since the church is the church of Jesus, then the Christian community must align herself with Him. The Scriptures employ a number of christological titles to describe who Jesus is—“Messiah,” “Son of Man,” “Lord,” and “Logos.” These titles help the church to understand the relationship of Jesus to His people. **In the same manner, the relationship of the church to Christ is depicted with descriptive terms, such as, “the body of Christ,” “the house of God,” “God’s people,” and the “communion of the saints.”**

Since the church is the church of the Anointed One, the church makes Christ the starting point in its own self-understanding of its mission to the world and to the Body of Christ itself.¹⁹ When we make the Christ our initial point of meditating upon the church of Jesus, then we must also contemplate the presence and activity of Christ in the church to fully appreciate God's call to participate in His ministry. When we are conscious of the residence and movement of Christ in His church, then we leap for joy in knowing that God allows us, His people, to experience His ministry. Do we thank God for such love?

The Presence and Activity of Christ in the Church

The existence of the church (**ἐκκλησία**, *ekklēsia*, “congregation, assembly, gathering”) is described through the activities of Christ. It is Christ who chooses, gathers, protects, and upholds His church. The final goal of Christ's activity is eternal life. Moltmann captures the true essence of the church when he writes:

The activity of God's Son is universal. It extends in space to ‘the whole human race’ and in time to all generations ‘from the beginning of the world to the end.’ He is the Christ of the one God for the whole human race. His choosing, gathering and protective activity creates the church, not as an institution for salvation or as a cultic group, but as a brotherhood to which the individual can profess loyalty as a ‘living member’. Ultimately, the election, gathering and preservation of the church are not an end in themselves but serve ‘eternal life’, as the final goal of Christ's activity, and of the church created out of that activity, is called.²⁰

¹⁹Ibid., 68.

²⁰Ibid., 69.

The activity of Christ is centered in the Word. Yet, Jesus is the Word. He is the Word of proclamation. John identifies Jesus as the “Word of life” (1 John 1:1). Consider how Rudolph Bultmann²¹ deals with the activity of Jesus as the Word.

All the activity of Jesus is centered in the Word.... That is why John always represents Jesus as saying almost nothing except that he is speaking the Word of God. For John, from beginning to end, Jesus is not meant to be the ‘historical Jesus’; he is the ‘Word’, the Word of the Christian proclamation.²²

We look to Jesus for the origin, the beginning, as well as the establishment of the proclamation of Himself as the Word, that is to say, the Gospel. In the pronouncement of the Word, there is always the declaration of the Gospel. **The Gospel is the dawn of the eschatological age foretold by the prophets.**²³ It is “Good News” to a lost and dying world and Christ provides redemption for all those who believe in Him. It is not a statement about some remote future, but a statement about liberation “in the here and now.” Isaiah speaks of this messianic age in glowing terms as he foretells the coming of the Messiah:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. (Isaiah 61:1)

The beginning activity of Christ’s ministry involves three specific aspects: (1) teaching, (2) preaching, and (3) healing. Matthew says, “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people” (Matthew 4:23). Mark sums up the mission as: “‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mark 1:15). If the church is not preaching the Good News, if the church is not fulfilling the Great Commission, and if the church is not the people of teaching, of preaching, of healing, and of the beatitudes, God’s community loses its fellowship with the messianic mission of Jesus to the world and to

²¹ **Rudolph Bultmann** (1884-1976), German theologian of Lutheran background and professor of New Testament studies at the University of Marburg.

²²Rudolph Bultmann, *Faith and Understanding* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 308, 310.

²³See Dallas Burdette, “Last Days in the Old and New Testaments,” in Dallas Burdette, *Biblical Preaching and Teaching: Series of Specialized Studies from Psalms • Revelation • Hebrews* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2010), 303-337, for a detailed study of the “last days” as foretold by the prophets. **Dallas Burdette** (b. 1934) has been a serious student, teacher and preacher of the Bible for sixty-seven years, supporting himself for many years as an agent for AFLAC. He has written numerous articles for religious journals, as well, as many essays and sermons which are available on his website (www.freedominchrist.net). He is also the author of fourteen books. He has developed a keen interest in promoting unity among God’s people through a more accurate reading of the Word. He has degrees (B.A., M.S., and M.Div.) from Amridge University (formerly Southern Christian University) and he holds the Doctor of Ministry degree (1999) from Erskine Theological Seminary. He was also the Director of Extended Learning for five years with Amridge University.

“the least of these” (See Matthew 5:3-10; 25:31-46). The world and “the least of these” are still the concern of the Messiah.

Moltmann captures in concise language this new life and hope when he writes: “The church is the fellowship of those who owe their new life and hope to the activity of the risen Christ.”²⁴ The church receives its liberation from the self-giving of Christ. Thus, the church of Christ exists in its fullness if it is obedient to the rule of the Servant of God in its adherence to the Great Commission and its participation in the sharing of liberation through Christ as a new way of life. **We take part in ministry as servants of Jesus Christ.** Again, Moltmann seems to be right when he pens:

The church is not a ‘holy autocracy’; it is the fellowship of believers who follow the one Lord and have been laid hold of by the one Spirit. It is in principle the community of equals, equipped with equal rights and equal dignity. All have the gift of the Spirit. If, in thinking of Christ’s self-surrender, we talk about ‘the priesthood of all believers’, then in thinking of Christ’s lordship we must speak of ‘the sovereignty of all believers.’²⁵

In reflecting upon our sharing in the ministry of Christ, a proper understanding of the place of the church in the presence of Christ will enhance our philosophy of ministry. For example, “The question *what* the church is, is not the same as the question *where* it is,” says Moltmann.²⁶ It is not “Where the church is, there is Christ”; rather, “Where Christ is, there is the church.” To state more plainly, “Where Christ is, the church had better be.” It is in this vein that Jesus says, “Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me” (John 12:26).

Again, Moltmann captures the essence of Jesus’ statement: “If the church is, according to its own claim, ‘the church of Jesus Christ’, then it is Christ who leads the church into its truth. In this case the true church is to be found where Christ is present.”²⁷ **Every believer participates in the ministry of Christ through becoming a servant of the Servant, which includes women.**²⁸ Jesus instructs His disciples about true servanthood: “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Where is Christ? Is He not present in “the least of these”? Is He not present in His community of believers? There is a sense in which Jesus is present in the proclamation, in the Lord’s Supper, in water baptism, and in the fellowship of His believers.

²⁴Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 105.

²⁵Ibid., 106.

²⁶Ibid., 121.

²⁷Ibid., 122.

²⁸See Dallas Burdette, *Women’s Role in the Christian Community: Interpreting First Timothy through First-Century Eyes* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2017).

CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE PROCLAMATION

Christ is present not only in the “least of the brethren,” but He is also present in the proclamation, that is to say, through written Word, the Lord’s Supper, baptism, and the community of the proclaimers in the fellowship of the brethren. The proclamation of Christians includes the missionary charge of Jesus to His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). In this missionary instruction, Jesus promises His presence to the church in the proclamation (the apostolate): “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (28:20). **Today, the church still takes up the missionary charge and participates in the proclamation of the Gospel as Christ’s representative.** Jesus’ promise runs thus: “He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). God has given “us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18) and “has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (5:19). Once more, Moltmann’s view is to the point:

In the movement of the apostolate [the Great Commission given to the Apostles] the person of the apostle takes on the form of Christ’s destiny. He does not merely bear Christ on his lips in the word of the gospel. He also ‘carries in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in his body’ (2 Cor. 4.10). The promised presence of Christ is the presence of the one who was crucified.²⁹

Christ’s Presence Is in the Lord’s Supper

In the sacraments (Lord’s Supper and baptism), it is not only beneficial to see the presence of Christ, but it is also helpful to understand the purpose of the sacraments in relation to the church. Just as Christ is present in the proclamation of the Word, so also is the promise of Christ’s presence found in the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). It is in the Lord’s Supper that we participate in the body and blood of Christ. Jesus describes the bread: “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me” (11:24), and the cup: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24).

This presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper is a feast of remembrance.³⁰ Moltmann says, “It recalls to our memory the history of redemption, which took place on the cross of Christ for us.”³¹ Again, “This remembrance bridges the difference between the history there and the events here.”³² Once more, Moltmann reflects upon the presence of God and Christ in this feast: “The Lord’s supper can further be understood as the earthly sign of the presence of the God who has become man and of the man who has been exalted to God.”³³ Moltmann, in

²⁹Ibid., 124.

³⁰See also Dallas Burdette, “The Significance of the Last Supper,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 440-448.

³¹Ibid., 252. For Moltmann, the “apostolate” includes proclamation through the Word and sacraments and the Christian community.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

addition to the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, also develops the view that "The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of confirmation and the path of grace."³⁴ Again, he writes:

Baptism precedes the Lord's Supper. It is the sacrament of initiation and the door of grace. The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of confirmation and the path of grace. Through baptism men and women are born again to eternal life. Through the Lord's Supper they are sustained in that life. Accepted into the covenant of grace through baptism, believers are sustained in it through the Lord's Supper.³⁵

Once more, Moltmann captures the participant's reflection of the Lord's Supper when he writes: "In the Eucharist the congregation thanks the triune God for all his acts of goodness and sets itself in his Trinitarian history with the world."³⁶ The significance of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine is that this Supper joins the past and the future, but it also represents God's grace of liberation from sin, from wrath, from law, and from condemnation. In God's ministry of liberation, He allows His creatures to participate in this ministry of reconciliation.

Christ's Presence Is Found in Baptism

Baptism also contains a corresponding promise of Christ's presence (Romans 6:3-5).³⁷ We are baptized into His Death in order that we might also walk in a new life. Paul expresses it this way: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (6:4). The following extract from Moltmann explains graphically the role of baptism in the life of the believer: "Just as the Christian church is called into being through the proclamation of the gospel, so through baptism it is called to the freedom of the messianic era."³⁸

Over again, Moltmann writes: "Through baptism in Christ's name, we enter Christ's fellowship; through baptism in the name of the triune God, we are "simultaneously set in the Trinitarian history of God."³⁹ **In other words, through baptism we enter into covenant relationship with the Trinity. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and the door of grace.** It is in baptism, says Moltmann, that one is given the certainty of God's grace "through the medium of visible signs."⁴⁰ In baptism we can look back and say, "That is the day that my sins were washed away." **As a result of our new life through faith in Christ and submission to**

³⁴Ibid., 227.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 256.

³⁷See the following studies by Dallas Burdette, "Baptism from Heaven or from Men?," "Baptism: Sharing in the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Jesus," and "Baptism: Symbol and Sacrament," in Dallas Burdette, *Biblical Preaching and Teaching: Jesus and Our Privileges* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 234-243, 244-254, and 255-270.

³⁸Ibid., 226.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., 227.

baptism, we then participate in the service of Christ for the advancement of God's kingdom.

Christ's Presence Is Found in the Fellowship of Believers

We see the presence and activity of Christ in the body of believers: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20). When we assemble, we relate the story of Christ and our own story with His history, because our fellowship and activity in God's kingdom springs from the story of liberation brought about through the vicarious sufferings of Christ. Moltmann is perfectly right when he insists that

The messianic community belongs to the Messiah and the messianic word; and this community, with the powers that it has, already realizes the possibilities of the messianic era, which brings the gospel of the kingdom to the poor, which proclaims the lifting up of the downtrodden to the lowly, and begins the glorification of the coming God through actions of hope in the fellowship of the poor, the sad and those condemned to silence, so that it may lay hold on all men.... Where the gospel corresponds to Christ, and the messianic fellowship of the people corresponds to the gospel the truth of the proclamation is recognizable from the freedom it creates. The 'true world' is promised in the gospel of Christ and is made accessible in the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹

The Christian fellowship "must stop being a church of ministers functioning on behalf of laymen, and become a charismatic fellowship in which everyone recognizes his ministry and lays hold on his or her charisma."⁴² In other words, the fellowship of believers must recapture the priesthood of all believers, not a special class of male priests. Every Christian is to participate in the ministry of Christ. Within the church there are no laymen versus clergy—in God's kingdom all are ministers—both men and women. Ben Campbell Johnson⁴³ explains the concept of a participatory ministry this way: "To be a minister of Jesus Christ means to participate in his body, the incarnate presence of God in the world."⁴⁴

⁴¹Ibid., 226, 227.

⁴²Ibid., 242.

⁴³ **Ben Campbell Johnson** (1932-2016) was an American ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and a Professor Emeritus of Evangelism and Spiritual Direction at Columbia Theological Seminary. He is known for his work in church renewal movements and on interfaith relations between a variety of faith traditions.

⁴⁴ Ben Campbell Johnson, *Pastoral Spirituality: A Focus for Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988), 77. Even though this comment appears in the context of ministry as "instrumentalist," nevertheless, this statement is an excellent illustration of what is meant by "participatory" ministry.

THE CHURCH IN THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The church in the presence of the Holy Spirit focuses on the power of the Spirit as the Spirit empowers the presence and activity of Jesus Christ in the world and the church. In other words, it is the Spirit that manifests Christ and unites us with Him and glorifies Him in men and women (1 Corinthians 12:13; Titus 3:5). Moltmann maintains that “It is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in particular that depicts the processes and experiences in which and through which the church becomes comprehensible to itself as the messianic fellowship.”⁴⁵ It is these “processes and experiences” that Moltmann defines as the “means of salvation.”⁴⁶ That is to say, “proclamation, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, worship, prayer, acts of blessing, and the way in which individual (sic) and fellowship live.”⁴⁷

According to Moltmann, “the presence of the kingdom of God and the revelation of the divine mystery of the last days are to be found in the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁸ Peter in his Pentecostal sermon speaks of this eschatological gift of the Spirit to believers (Acts 2:38). Paul, too, in his Corinthian correspondence, speaks of the activity of the Spirit in the church (1 Corinthians 12:1-13). We must not discount the activity of the Holy Spirit in Christian experiences. The Holy Spirit is associated with the new birth. Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus says, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). Also, Paul relates the Holy Spirit’s activity with regeneration:

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:5-6)

Again, Paul informs the Corinthians that no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). In this same correspondence, Paul recognizes the Holy Spirit’s role of induction into the body of Christ (12:13).

THE CHURCH IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When we celebrate baptism and the Lord’s Supper, “the church sees itself in the presence of the Holy Spirit as the messianic people destined for the coming kingdom.”⁴⁹ That is not to say that we see the Spirit in the sacraments, but rather, we see the sacraments in the movement

⁴⁵Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 198.

⁴⁶Ibid., 198.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., 205.

⁴⁹Ibid., 289.

and the presence of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰ This is also true of the various ministries of the Spirit; the ministries are conceived of in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Again, Moltmann aptly remarks: “There is no ‘Spirit of the sacraments’ and no ‘Spirit of the Ministry’, there are sacraments and ministries of the Spirit.”⁵¹

For Paul, the church is where the Spirit manifests its power in an abundance of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14). According to Joel, the Spirit is the gift promised in the last days (Joel 2:28-29; see also Acts 2:12-21). Fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus, the disciples witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2). Hans Kung⁵² also draws attention to the church as the creation of the Spirit.⁵³ The Spirit calls them into being (Titus 3:5), and the Spirit creates unity (Ephesians 4:3). Paul writes about the charismata (carivsmata, carismata), which means the energies of new life, or the powers of the Holy Spirit. The gifts in the Corinthian church existed as a result of the creative grace of God. The various ministries that exist in the church today exist as a result of the powers of the Spirit. In the Roman letter, Paul speaks of eternal life as the “gift of God” (Romans 6:23).

In the ministry of the Spirit, Paul does not write about “ecclesiastical orders.” In other words, he speaks not of hierarchy, but of service in Christ’s ministry. Every individual is a servant in the Spirit’s ministry. This ministry is both instrumentalist and participatory. If we have an exaggerated concept of the instrumentalist aspect of ministry (isolated individuals set apart for ministry) instead of the participatory philosophy of the whole body of believers, this instrumentalist model may lead to a super ego. It is in this regard that Campbell writes:

When the ego becomes inflated, it tends to operate disconnected from its data. Recall Salieri’s confession: ‘I wanted Fame.... I wanted to blaze like a comet across the firmament of Europe!’ Here is an ego gone mad. The desire stems from a hunger for recognition beyond the capacities of the person.⁵⁴

An inflated ego is indicative of the instrumentalist philosophy of ministry that exceeds the boundaries for a healthy attitude toward one’s ministry. We must never forget that God in His mercy allows us a participatory ministry. Moltmann goes right to the point about participatory ministry when he writes: “Through the powers of the Spirit, the one Spirit gives every individual his specific share and calling, which is exactly cut out for him, in the process of the new creation.”⁵⁵ The Spirit is the Spirit of power. Paul speaks of the Spirit’s power in the Resurrection: “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you” (Romans 8:11).

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² **Hans Kung** (b. 1928), Swiss Catholic priest, controversial theologian, and prolific author.

⁵³ Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 150-203.

⁵⁴ Campbell, *Pastoral Spirituality*, 44.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 295.

It is through the power of the Spirit that we exercise the gift or gifts that the Spirit has given to us. Again, Moltmann expresses that even the most menial task is exercising one's gift: "The widow who exercises mercy is acting just as charismatically as a bishop."⁵⁶ **We must never forget that within the Kingdom of Christ there is no essential difference between the so-called clergy and an individual member of the church, which is God's community of redeemed ones.** In other words, every person exercises his or her own function of ministry in the power of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12). The questions that confront us are: What is ministry? What are models, or functions of ministry? Is just one particular group of individuals set apart for ministry (the instrumentalist concept of ministry—the clergy system)? Or is everyone within the Body of Christ to be a participant in God's Good News of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary?

As stated in my first paragraph of this chapter, when we speak of ourselves as instruments of God in His ministry, we should always bear in mind that this simply means that we are bearers of Christ, not ecclesiastical potentates. We must not look upon our ministry as one of more privilege than another believer, but rather, we should see our role in God's ministry as a bearer of Christ, that is to say, our ministry is a symbolic presence of God."⁵⁷ How should we view the various functions in ministry? **Are certain individuals the voice of God in an instrumentalist sense, that is to say, big "I" and little "you"?** Are specific individuals the hands of God? Are only distinct individuals the feet of God? Ministry needs to be returned to the so-called laity. **We are all instruments (agents or ministers) of God, not just a certain class (instrumentalists—clergy).** Some respond by saying yes to a certain class, which is the instrumentalist view of a ministry.⁵⁸ On the other hand, some Christians view themselves as participants in God's ministry, which concept is the biblical view. A healthy view of ministry is to view our ministry as consisting of both—instrumentalist (instruments of God, not the negative concept of ecclesiastical rulers) and participatory (participants in sharing the Good News).

MODEL OR FUNCTIONS OF MINISTRY

In most instances where "minister" or "ministering" is found in English versions [versions of the Bible], the Greek has some form of *diakonia* ("service" or "ministry"), which occurs thirty-four times. A related noun, *diakonos* ("servant," "minister," or "deacon"), occurs thirty times. The verb *diakoneo* ("to serve" or "to serve as a deacon") is used thirty-seven times.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Ibid., 298.

⁵⁷See Campbell, *Pastoral Spirituality*, 77, for an excellent discussion of this concept of ministry.

⁵⁸See Ibid., 87-90.

⁵⁹Lawrence O. Richards, "Minister/Ministry," in *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 433. **Lawrence O. Richards** (1931-2016) was the most prominent and prolific Christian education writer in evangelical circles during the last half of the Twentieth Century. He wrote over 200 Christian books, including commentaries on every book of the Bible and the best-selling *Adventure Bible* and *Teen Study Bible*.

What are models of ministry? What is a model? What is ministry? These are questions that we must seek an answer to in order to effectively minister to others as the people of God. Once our working theology of the church is developed, then, we are able to set forth a coherent paradigm, or pattern, of ministry as it relates to the various functions exercised in the fulfillment of our ministry. **Under the rubric of models of ministry, our ministry includes the prioritizing of the various functions in the order of their relative importance:** (a) proclamation of the Gospel, (b) teaching, (c) evangelism, (d) pastoral care, and (e) ecumenical and interfaith activities. In Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians, we see both aspects of ministry involved—instrumental and participatory:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **6:1** As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. (2 Corinthians 5: 17—6:1)

Ministry Defined

How do we define ministry? Is there a wide sense as well as a narrow sense in which ministry is defined? What examples do New Testament writings contain that incorporate ministry? Is ministry healing the brokenhearted, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, teaching ethical instructions to the saved, seeking justice for the wronged, ministering “to the least of these,” and so on? Is ministry reserved for a special class known as “clergy” (narrow sense)? Or, is ministry for every Christian (wider sense)? Just what does it mean to minister?

These are questions that we must answer to adequately form a proper conception of our own ministry with its various models as it is set forth in the Bible. **Moltmann cautions Christians about a proper understanding of ministry:** “As the messianic congregation the people of God cannot recognize the sovereignty of a priestly caste or special ministerial class.”⁶⁰ No Christian should surrender his or her freedom, which Christ has brought about, to a select group of men or women to do his or her ministry or thinking. James A. Wharton⁶¹ has rightly picked up on the meaning of ministry:

The familiar word “minus” is beneath “minis-try” in whatever sense the term is used. A “lesser” person or persons understood to be somehow “greater.” Ministry may describe the service by a courtier to a king, a slave to a master, or a wage earner to an employer out of motives as diverse as loyalty, duty, compulsion, or personal gain.⁶²

⁶⁰Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 303.

⁶¹**James A. Wharton** (1858-1923), Methodist minister.

⁶²James A. Wharton, “Theology and Ministry in the Hebrew Scriptures,” in *A Biblical Basis for Ministry*, ed. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald Sunderland (Louisville: Westminster, 1981), 19-20.

Proclamation of the Gospel

The word *proclamation*, in and of itself, does not disclose the object of what is proclaimed. We may proclaim the Word of God in its totality, or we may proclaim the Good News about Christ as God's Way of salvation. The church's proclamation of Jesus as the Messiah is in essence the Gospel of the kingdom. Moltmann says, "The messianic church grew out of the apostolic proclamation of the gospel and is alive in the act of proclamation."⁶³ Moltmann includes the following in the proclamation of the Gospel: "preaching, teaching, conversations with groups and individuals, storytelling, comforting, encouraging and liberating, through the publicity of the media in the proclamation of the gospel."⁶⁴

It is through the proclamation of the "Good News" (εὐαγγέλιον, *euangelion*, "Gospel") of God that individuals are made disciples. Once an individual is called through the message of redemption, then, he or she must be taught to be submissive to the teachings of God (Matthew 28:18-20). Mark begins the ministry of Jesus by informing his readers that Jesus went about

Proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news' (Mark 1:14-15)

It is in the same vein that Matthew paints a concise picture of Jesus' ministry as "teaching," "preaching," and "healing." Matthew writes:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

We, as followers of Jesus, participate in preaching and teaching as a part of our ministry. Even though we cannot perform "healing" in the sense that Jesus executed, nevertheless, we can assist individuals in their sickness as a part of our ministry (Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 25:31-46). As mentioned above, Paul speaks of the "preaching of the gospel" as the "ministry of reconciliation," that is to say, declaring (proclaiming) Jesus as the Word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). In other words, Jesus is God's way of salvation for a lost and dying world. This "ministry of reconciliation" rests upon the shoulders of every believer.

Matthew and Mark begin their ministry of Jesus with the proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom. In the conclusion of their Gospels, we observe that both men and women are given instructions to continue this ministry of preaching.⁶⁵ Mark, for example, gives the final words of Jesus as:

⁶³Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 206.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵For an in-depth study of the role of women in the Great Commission, see Dallas Burdette, "The Role of Women in the Great Commission," in Dallas Burdette, *Old Texts Through New Eyes: Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 234-250.

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16)

On the other hand, Matthew phrases the Great Commission with these words:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

Proclamation of the Gospel and proclamation of the teachings of Christ are two distinct activities in the Great Commission. This is the reason that preaching is prioritized first and teaching second in our ministry. Once we are called through the message of redemption and placed in a right relationship with God through faith in Christ Jesus, then we must be taught to be submissive to the teachings of God. There is, so it appears, a distinction between preaching and teaching. Alan Richardson gives this pertinent comment on preaching:

In the NT preaching has nothing to do with the delivery of sermons to the converted, which is what it usually means today, but always concerns the proclamation of the ‘good tidings of God’ to the non-Christian world.⁶⁶

It is critical that we understand the distinction between preaching the Gospel and teaching the Word in order to restore the biblical ideal of preaching. One has to do with birth, the other with spiritual digestion. The Gospel is that which brings us into being while the doctrine is that which is essential to our growth and well being. There is as much difference between Gospel and doctrine as there is between the sperm from which life comes and the daily bread upon which the child feeds. This understanding is crucial to the fellowship of the saints. There has been a critical lack of this distinction in Church of Christ theology, which distinctive fellowship today is divided into about twenty-five warring camps. It is not uncommon for Christians within this religious movement to associate the twenty-seven books that comprise the so-called New Testament as the Gospel. Thus, Gospel and doctrine are wedded together. As a result of this merger, then, for one to disagree with the religious leaders is to preach another gospel.

The verb “to preach” frequently has for its object “the gospel.” Charles Harold Dodd⁶⁷ believes that there is a distinction. It is in this regard that he seeks to set forth a correct understanding of what the Gospel is all about. He writes:

Indeed, the connection of ideas is so close that *keryssein* by itself can be used as a virtual equivalent for *evangelizesthai*, “to evangelize,” or “to preach the Gospel.” It would not be too much to say that wherever “preaching” is spoken of, it always carries with it the implication of “good tidings” proclaimed.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1960), 171-172.

⁶⁷ **Charles Harold Dodd** (1884-1973), was a Welsh New Testament scholar and influential Protestant theologian.

⁶⁸ C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching* (New York: Harper & Roe, 1964), 8.

Also, Alexander Campbell⁶⁹ differentiated between “preach” and “teach.” For instance, Campbell quotes from Dr. George Campbell concerning this difference:

Dr. Campbell observes: “No moral instructions, or doctrinal explanations, given either by our Lord or his Apostles, are ever, either in the Gospels or the Acts, denominated preaching.” Again, he says that the Greek word *kerrusso*, which means to preach, “always implied public notice of some event, either accomplished or about to be accomplished, often accompanied by a warning to do, or forbear something, but it never denoted either a comment on, or explanation of any subject, or a chain of reasoning in proof of a particular sentiment.” Thus, we find that the preacher’s mission is altogether to the world, and that he takes upon himself another office entirely, when he presumes to teach the church.⁷⁰

Once more, Alexander Campbell, in an address delivered before the Kentucky Convention, held at Harrodsburg, Kentucky, September 28, 1853, pungently states his thoughts:

Preaching the gospel and teaching the converts, are as distinct and distinguishable employments as enlisting an army and training it, or as creating a school and teaching it. Unhappily for the church and for the world, this distinction, if at all conceded as legitimate, is obliterated or annulled in almost all Protestant Christendom.⁷¹

This is no mere speculative distinction. It was appreciated and understood and acted upon in the ministry of the Apostles. For example, Luke records the early ministry this way:

They never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. (Acts 5:42)

When believers confuse “biblical preaching” and “biblical teaching,” division is created rather than unity. With a proper understanding of the two different functions, this apprehension will contribute toward a more effective ministry. Victor Furnish⁷² captures the essence of preaching when he writes:

Only when we recognize that Paul’s preaching was a *ministerium Dei*, and not just personal religious testimony, are we able to understand how he could rejoice even when Christ was proclaimed for the wrong reasons, but those who acted from unworthy motives and out of pretense (Phil.1:15-18). The word Paul preached was not about what God had done for him; it was a word from God that spoke of what God had done in Christ for all those who believe.⁷³

⁶⁹ **Alexander Campbell** (1788-1866), early leader in the Second Great Awakening and one of the founders of the American Restoration Movement—Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches, and Churches of Christ)

⁷⁰Alexander Campbell, “Use and Abuse of Preaching—III,” in *Millennial Harbinger*, 3rd Series, 3, no. 6 (June 1846): 318.

⁷¹Alexander Campbell, “Church Edification,” in *Millennial Harbinger*, 4th Series, 3, no. 10 (October 1853): 541.

⁷² **Victor Paul Furnish** (b.1931) is University Distinguished Professor, Emeritus, of New Testament at Southern Methodist University.

⁷³Victor Paul Furnish, “Theology and Ministry,” in *A Biblical Basis for Ministry*, eds. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald Sunderland (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 107.

Victor appears to be correct when he says: “In the Pauline understanding of ministry, preaching is an occasion, not just an ‘occurrence.’”⁷⁴ Again, Victor is right when he says: “In Rom. 10:5-21, Paul describes the gospel as ‘the word of faith’ which comes ‘near’ in preaching.”⁷⁵

Evangelism

Christians exist to communicate God’s Word; Christians are ambassadors for Christ. It is the mission of believers to evangelize the world. As long as there is one person who does not know Christ, the church has a mandate to keep growing. Growth is not optional. It is commanded by Jesus in His Great Commission (Matthew 18:20). Paul, too, expresses this same truth in the Corinthian correspondence when he says: “God ... gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18) and “has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (5:19) and, again, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (5:20). Moltmann points out:

The messianic mission of Jesus is only fulfilled in his death and is put into full force through his resurrection.... Through his death and resurrection the church participates in his mission, becoming the messianic church of the coming kingdom and man’s liberation.⁷⁶

Again, Moltmann is very insightful in his statements concerning the missionary nature of the church in his description of the true nature of the church: “The church understands itself as ‘the church of the world’”⁷⁷ For instance, according to Moltmann, “It is the vehicle of the gospel of freedom, not a schoolmaster for the nations.”⁷⁸ In other words, when the church proclaims the Gospel of Christ, it is calling men and women to repentance and to a new start into freedom. Jesus fulfills His mission through the proclamation of the Good News of redemption made available through faith in Him. Moltmann demonstrates this most impressively with his description of the church:

It is the community of the liberated, the community of those who are making a new beginning, the community of those who hope. Their fellowship serves to spread the call of freedom in the world and, as new fellowship, should itself be the social form of hope. Fundamentally, all Christians share in the prophetic ministry of Christ and are witnesses of the gospel.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁷⁶ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 83.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 85

Teaching

Moltmann also calls attention to the importance of teaching versus speaking in tongues in the assembly when he writes:

The apostles recognized teaching as one of the gifts of the Spirit (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28-29; cf. 1 Cor. 2:13), and he clearly valued it above speaking in tongues when it came to public worship (1 Cor. 14:6).⁸⁰

Teaching involves a “building up” of the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:8). The Sermon on the Mount is an excellent example of teaching (Matthew 5-7). Whether we participate in the preaching of the Gospel or the teaching of the Word, it is essential that we understand ministry in its essential aspect—God’s ministry. In other words, if we perceive ministry as the service of God and not so much as the service of the world, or of the church, or of individuals, or of society, then we allow God to use us in accomplishing His objectives—the salvation of the world. It is ultimately God’s ministry, not simply our ministry. We, as men and women, are participants in God’s ministry.

Spiritual Development

The Christian community is to be involved in the spiritual development of each individual. Not only are we instruments of God, but we are also participants in God’s ministry. We must never forget that God allows us to participate in His ministry. One aspect of teaching is to develop the spiritual maturity of individuals to strengthen their commitment to Jesus as God’s Son. The spiritual development of Christians is a part of the growth process that the New Testament writers focus on. One classic example is the judgment scene in Matthew 25 concerning God’s judgment upon the nation of Israel for its rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. In this parable against the religious leaders, Jesus speaks of the “least of these.” In one’s spiritual development, he or she must realize that the “least of these” involves care on the part of all believers. There is some sense in which all Christians are to become involved in pastoral care. James, our Lord’s brother, expresses true spirituality this way:

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:26-27)

The Hebrews’ writer also captures the concept of the “least of these” in the following words:

⁸⁰Ibid.112.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:15-16)

We today need encouragement just as much as they did in the first century. It is in this vein that the author of the Book of Hebrews exhorts believers not to fail to assemble:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (10:24-25)

The “Day approaching” refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 as described by Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.

Ecumenical and Interfaith Activities

Another activity of ministry, as stated earlier, is the ecumenical aspect of ministry within the Body of Christ. For example, Paul in writing to the Ephesians encouraged them to work toward “the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Also, Paul in the beginning of this short Epistle expresses God’s plan for the unity of His people:

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

God’s people must learn to be *peacemakers* not *piecemakers*. It is in this regard that Professor Leroy Garrett⁸¹ says,

The point of the gospel is that now in Christ Jesus “you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13). This makes all men in Christ *blood* brothers, irrespective of what garb they wear or what infirmity they bear. It is a blessed reality that Jesus came to make men brothers. This is something far different than merely sharing a space on a church roll. Men become brothers only through an inward experience that transcends them both.⁸²

As a part of our ministry, we should work toward breaking down the barriers that separate us from other believers as well as disunity within fleshly relationships within the Body of Christ. In this vein, Moltmann states: “The ecumenical movement seeks the visible unity of

⁸¹ **Leroy Garrett** (1918-2015), a reformer in church unity and a professor of philosophy, history, and religion at Bethany College, Texas Woman’s University, and Dallas Christian College. He was the editor of *Restoration Review* for 34 years and *Bible Talk* for six years.

⁸²Leroy Garrett, “The Catholicity of the Church,” in *Restoration Review: The Church of Christ Yesterday and Today* 15, no. 3 (March 1973), 45-46.

Christ's church."⁸³ Again, he rightly insists on looking beyond our own denomination in defining the true "Church of Christ":

But the question of the 'true church' moves into the foreground. Just as we seek for the true church in the shape of our own denomination, so we will seek it in the forms of other churches as well; for the true church is one and indivisible.⁸⁴

Again, he says, "In the ecumenical context Christianity loses its provincial character."⁸⁵ Moltmann speaks of the church as one and indivisible. Garrett, too, uses the following pregnant words in his "Catholicity of the Church" article:

And we should use the term *catholic* much more than we do in our references to the church. *Why I Belong to the Catholic Church* would be a better title for a talk than *Why I Belong to the Church of Christ*, for with that topic one is at once on universal ground, whereas the term "church of Christ," since it has been adopted by several groups as a distinctive name, has one treading the waters of sectarianism.⁸⁶

Thomas Campbell,⁸⁷ while a Presbyterian, wrote the following words about the universal nature of the church:

That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures.⁸⁸

Campbell was conscious of the causes of divisions within the true church of Christ. He himself sought to call attention to the "uncharitable divisions among them." Again, he wrote:

That although the Church of Christ upon earth must necessarily exist in particular and distinct societies ... yet there ought to be no schisms, no uncharitable divisions among them. They ought to receive each other as Christ Jesus hath also received them, to the glory of God.⁸⁹

Richard Niebuhr⁹⁰ was also to the point when he writes:

⁸³ Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁶ Garrett, "The Catholicity of the Church," 44.

⁸⁷ **Thomas Campbell** (1763-1854), American religious leader and father of Alexander Campbell.

⁸⁸ Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in *Declaration and Address and Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (Pennsylvania, Thomas Campbell, 1809; reprint, St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1975), 44 [page references are to reprint edition].

⁸⁹ Ibid., 44-45.

⁹⁰ **Richard Niebuhr** (1894-1962) was a former Director for The Study of Theological Education in the United States and Canada.

The confusion between part and whole is not to be avoided by denying the reality of the parts but only by the acceptance of diversity and limitation and the corollary recognition that all the parts are equally related in the whole to the ultimate object of the church.⁹¹

A part of one's ministry is to work toward the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17). One's philosophy of ministry—participatory (all members participate) or instrumentalist (clergy system—dictator)—determines one's attitude of unity. In the participatory philosophy of ministry, one participates, but, on the other hand, the extreme instrumentalist philosophy of ministry says, "I am the voice of God."

REALITIES OF THE MODERN WORLD

The Urban Christian

An excellent modern-day example of ministry in the "realities of the modern world" is Ray Bakke's book on *The Urban Christian*. In his autobiography of ministry, he states that his purpose in writing *The Urban Christian* is "to indicate something of the big corporate picture within which your personal ministry is situated."⁹² In the beginning of his ministry, he established a discipleship group, which took a total of five years for the formation of the first Christians in Action (CIA).⁹³ This group formed a committee and other neighborhood action committees. As a result of this action, at one time over forty gays and lesbians attended support groups. Their ministry also included hosting an Alcoholics Anonymous Group.⁹⁴

They, according to Bakke, "wanted to be known as people who cared—for the community, for schools, for senior citizens, and so on."⁹⁵ Bakke's group adopted training programs to strengthen people under stress, to encourage people experiencing divorce, or to assist those involved in drugs or alcohol.⁹⁶ This kind of ministry introduces one into the "realities of the real world." Bakke questioned pastors from all over the world as to the greatest ten basic barriers to effective evangelism. This questionnaire revealed that all barriers could be summed up in the statement: "We never did it that way before—the Seven Last Words of the Church."⁹⁷

He discovered that hindrances to effective evangelism did not exist in the so-called "big bad city itself," but rather in barriers created by "church politics, policies, priorities or personalities."⁹⁸ In other words, failure to evangelize is not in the cities, but in the failure of an

⁹¹H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 40-41.

⁹²Ray Bakke, *The urban Christian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1987), 124.

⁹³Ibid., 96.

⁹⁴Ibid., 98.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., 59.

⁹⁸Ibid., 60.

individual to interact within his or her own setting. Christian ministry involves participation in the “realities of the real world.” One should participate with the congregation of which he or she is a member for an effective ministry. Bakke suggests that one begin with the question: “How did you come to know Jesus Christ?”⁹⁹ This question unlocks the pilgrimage of the individual.

We should share our personal pilgrimage of faith with others in order to strengthen their faith. A second question put forth by Bakke is: “What were the circumstances of your life when you became a Christian?”¹⁰⁰ This question causes us to reflect upon the faith that has sustained us over the years. Then, Bakke asked a third question: “What have you enjoyed in church life over the years?”¹⁰¹ As a result of this question, individuals recalled things long forgotten. He discovered many prior social activities no longer in practice. Finally, he concluded his interview with this question: “If you could wave a wand and bring about a future for this church, what would it look like?”¹⁰² This final question awoke people to commitment and to future possibilities in their ministry. Bakke’s concept of ministry is a functional ministry.

Bakke’s ministry included “networking social agencies,”¹⁰³ such as: (1) police, (2) schools, (3) welfare agencies, (4) prisons, (5) courts, (6) hospitals, (6) political groups, and (8) offices of city hall.¹⁰⁴ This kind of ministry introduces us to the “realities of the real world.” Surely he is correct when he writes: “I part company with those who say, ‘Only do a social ministry,’ and with those who say, ‘We only announce the good news.’”¹⁰⁵

Another individual, Lester R. Brown,¹⁰⁶ also calls attention to a “social ministry” in his book, *Who Will Feed China?*¹⁰⁷ Even though he did not address this concern with quotations from the Bible, nevertheless, food production is one aspect of the Christian community. What can Christians do in this area of food shortages? Brown issues a wake-up call to alert people to the problems in China that could affect the entire globe.¹⁰⁸ As Brown explains, “All the leaders of China today are survivors of the massive famine that occurred in 1959—in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward—a famine that claimed a staggering 30 million lives.”¹⁰⁹ Brown seeks to avoid another famine that could affect, not only China, but also the whole world.

⁹⁹Ibid., 88.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid., 89.

¹⁰³Ibid., 114.

¹⁰⁴Ibid.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 145.

¹⁰⁶ **Lester Russel Brown** (b. 1934) is a United States environmental analyst, founder of the Worldwatch Institute, and founder and former president of the Earth Policy Institute.

¹⁰⁷ Lester R. Brown, *Who Will Feed China? Wake-Up Call for a Small Planet* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995).

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 17.

Racism in the World

Our attitude toward the race question can have extreme consequences in the development of another's attitude toward Christianity. How should we respond to racism? Should we become involved in seeking answers to the problems of racism? Professor James Hal Cone¹¹⁰ penned the following words:

Unlike white churches, which separated religion and politics when the racial question was involved, black churches have always viewed them as belonging together, especially in regard to race.¹¹¹

Martin Luther King Jr.¹¹² reminded the clergy: “a minister cannot preach the glories of heaven while ignoring social conditions in his own community that cause men an earthly hell.”¹¹³ Again, Cone remarks:

There was no way anyone could be the kind of Christian that King's theology called for without being willing to suffer on behalf of the “least of these,” a biblical reference he often used to describe the poor.¹¹⁴

King correctly understood that God is concerned about every area of our lives, not just the so-called spiritual aspects confined within the church building, which is usually one, or, at the most, three hours weekly. This ministry of God involves not just proclamation of the Gospel, but also requires involvement in social actions. When we sit on the sideline and hope that things will get better, God is not pleased with this insensitivity. Jesus confronts this issue head-on in his “least of these” in Matthew 25. God, through Isaiah, complains: “No one calls for justice” (Isaiah 59:4).

The religious leaders of Israel did not speak out against injustice. The people as a whole did not speak out against unfairness. **The Lord looked and was displeased that no one called for justice.** Again, Isaiah says, “The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene” (59:15, 16). God questioned Israel by saying that the kind of “fasting” that He is concerned with is: (1) “to loose the chains of injustice,” (2) “to set the oppressed free,” (3) “to share your food with the hungry,” (4) “to provide the poor wanderer with shelter,” and (5) “when you see the naked, to clothe him” (58:6-7).

¹¹⁰ **James Hal Cone** (1938-2018), Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in the city of New York. Also, he was an American theologian, best known for his advocacy of black theology and black liberation theology

¹¹¹ James H. Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America* (New York: Orbis, 1995), 143.

¹¹² **Martin Luther King Jr.** (1929-1968), American clergyman, activist, and prominent leader in the African civil rights movement.

¹¹³ Cited in *Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

As mentioned above, when our ministry does not consider the “least of these,” then, our testimony about our faith in Jesus is weakened. **Malcolm X¹¹⁵ is a classic example of a weakened ministry among many Christians.** Malcolm X, as he was called, rejected Christianity because he did not see Christ in believers in the real world, as Cone makes clear. He writes:

Malcolm’s opposition to Christianity was not based upon his examination of its creeds and doctrines or the scholarly writings of its theologians. Rather, it was defined by the practices of people who called themselves Christians.¹¹⁶

What did Jesus say about love? Jesus reminds every believer: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

Transcendence and Immanence of God

Our consciousness of God’s **transcendence** (above and independent of the material universe) and **immanence** will control our ministry. David Wells¹¹⁷ develops the evolutionary rearranging of God to nothing in modern society. In other words, according to Wells, God is pushed to the periphery and ceases to be relevant in the lives of men and women.¹¹⁸ He also calls attention to the “weightlessness of God,” that is to say, God ceases to be relevant to the modern context.¹¹⁹ In order for us to be effective in our ministry, we must be conscious of the values in a modern society. In other words, we must distinguish between two concepts—**modernization** and **modernity**. What is the difference between these two terms? Wells explains the distinction:

The former is producing changes in the outer fabric of our life; the latter is altering the values and meanings that emerge from within the context of the modernized world—values and meanings that in the modern context seem altogether normal and natural.¹²⁰

He calls Christians back to a realization of the **transcendence** and **immanence** of God. In other words, believers need to encompass the *distant* God and the *near* God. Our attitude toward transcendence and immanence affects our view of the world. There are two opposing perceptions prevalent in the world. One is natural and the other is supernatural. **Without a**

¹¹⁵ **Malcolm X** (1925-1965)—born Malcolm Little and assassinated in 1965; also, an American Muslim minister and human rights activist. Some saw him as a courageous advocate for the rights of blacks and a man who was disillusioned with what he witnessed in many who professed Christianity.

¹¹⁶ Cone, *Martin & Malcolm & America*, 167.

¹¹⁷ **David Wells** (b. 1939) is the Distinguished Senior Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is the author of several books.

¹¹⁸ See David Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 118-185 for a detailed explanation of the modern-day concept of God.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

transcendent God, then there can be no objective standard by which we are to determine right from wrong.¹²¹

We must recapture the focus of “transcendent biblical truth,” writes Wells.¹²² When we minister to the world, there must be recognized an objective standard by which things are to be judged; otherwise, there is no hope of ever resolving the question of “right” versus “wrong.” In the words of Isaiah, it is: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (Isaiah 8:20). Why do people refuse the Word of God? Wells states the reason concisely: “Modernity inexorably relocates God to its periphery, rendering him first impotent, then irrelevant, and finally invisible.”¹²³

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to call attention to two concepts of ministry, namely, instrumentalist and participatory. Christians are invited to participate in God’s ministry. This ministry involves “the least of these,” as well as the various functions of ministry. Ministry is not reserved for a special class, but for every believer. Each person is to perform whatever gift(s) the Holy Spirit has given to him or her. Christians are concerned with the proclamation of the Gospel as well as with teaching the instructions of God, which includes the social issues. God is as concerned with relationships as He is with the assembling of His people on Sundays. If we do not love individuals we can see, then how can we love God whom we have not seen?

An understanding of the church as the company of the redeemed heightens our perception of the privilege of ministry. There is a sense in which the church is Christ Incarnate; in other words, it is the Body of Christ. **The church is not an ecclesiastical structure; rather, it is an organism. It is the company of the liberated.** This proclamation of liberation is the business of every believer. Once Christ sets a person free, then that individual seeks to teach others to be submissive to the whole council of God.

There is no area of life that is not affected by the Christian’s call to ministry. A perusal of the prophets reveals involvement in the affliction of widows and orphans; the prophets also addressed the concern of inadequate wages and justice in the courts. **Even though there is a separation of church and State, there can never be a separation of God and State anymore than there can be a separation of God and church. Both of these entities are under God’s control.**

How did we respond to the opening paragraph in this study concerning questions put forth for our consideration? In conclusion, it is necessary to ask the following questions again: What is our definition of ministry? What is our meaning of church? Are we participants in God’s ministry? What is our concept of ministry? Is it participatory or instrumentalist? There is

¹²¹For an in-depth study concerning right from wrong, see Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994). I highly recommend this book. **Ravi Zacharias** (1946-2020) is an Indian-born Canadian-American Christian apologist and a defender of evangelical Protestantism.

¹²²*Ibid.*, 58.

¹²³*Ibid.*, 119.

a distinction between being an instrument in God's service and the dictatorial powers of the instrumentalists. Are we conscious that we, as instruments of God, are to become involved in God's ministry, which ministry is participatory? Are we concerned about social issues as well as the proclamation of the Gospel? Should we, as Christians, be involved in politics? Are we ministers of God?