

THE MINISTRY OF ALL AND THE LEADERSHIP OF SOME: A BAPTIST PERSPECTIVE

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To state today that ‘ministry’ is the prerogative as also the responsibility of all God’s people is to state the obvious. The calling of the whole people of God to Christian service is accepted by Christians of all traditions. In the words of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (hereafter known as *BEM*) “The Spirit calls people to faith, sanctifies them through many gifts, gives them strength to witness to the Gospel, and empower them to serve, hope and love”.²

Sadly, the implications of the obvious have yet to be taken on board by all. Apparent theological agreement has yet to lead to general practical implementation. More often than not ministry is limited to the few, rather than encouraged to become the responsibility of the many. ‘Ministry’ is still the most frequently used term for the work of the ordained, as distinct from “the service to which the whole people of God is called, whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the universal Church”.³ ‘Ministers’ is still the preferred term for the ordained within the Free Churches and is also happily used in this sense too by the Anglican Church. The obvious is clearly still not obvious. Hence the need in this essay on ordination to restate what one would have hoped is the obvious.

1. The ministry of all God’s people

In the first place, all God’s people are called to ministry. This doctrine of every-member-ministry is based on the New Testament as a whole, but comes to the fore in particular in Eph 4.11-12 where Paul writes of the Risen Christ: “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (NRSV). Ministry for Paul is ministry of the whole people of God – it is not confined to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Furthermore, as Eph 4.11-16 makes clear, the body of Christ can only be built up as Christian in general are “equipped” for the work of “ministry”. Indeed, one can argue from the word Paul uses here for ‘equipping’ that without every member ministry the body of Christ will not function aright. For the underlying Greek word *katartizein* in other contexts is used of the setting of broken bones and the mending of broken nets: i.e. we can infer that where Christians in general are not fulfilling their ministries, the church can be likened to a hopeless cripple or to a fisherman seeking to catch fish with gaping holes in his net! If this is true, then we dare not restrict the calling of the whole people of God to the area of theological debate.

¹ ‘The ministry of all and the leadership of some: a Baptist perspective’ 157-174 in *Anyone for Ordination?* (MARC/Monarch, Tunbridge Wells 1993) edited by Paul Beasley-Murray

² *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (WCC, Geneva 1982) 3.

³ *BEM* 7b

In line with their calling, all God's people are gifted for ministry. This is the teaching of Paul in Rom 12.4-8 and 1 Cor 12.4-12, as also of Peter in 1 Pet 4.10-12. For example, Paul prefaces the list of gifts in 1 Cor 12.8-10 with the words "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12.7), and concludes "All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses" (1 Cor 12.11). In a very real sense all Christians are 'charismatic'. Hence the need to hear again the words of *BEM*: "All members are called to discover, with the help of the community, the gifts they have received and to use them for the building up of the Church and for the service of the world to which the Church is sent".⁴

Within my own denominational setting it is this concept of every-member-ministry, along with the related doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, that lies at the heart of our understanding of congregational government. For over against other sections of the Christian Church, the Church Meeting for Baptists "is the occasion when as individuals and as a community the members submit themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and stand under the judgment of God that they may know what is the mind of Christ".⁵ Or differently expressed, the Church Meeting is a 'charismatic expression of Christian community, in which gifts of leadership and discernment, of wisdom and or prophecy are shared, in order that God's people discern the mind of Christ for their life together'.

Similarly it is this radical belief that all God's people are 'ministers' which underlies the frequent Baptist practice of following baptism with the laying-on-of-hands. Here prayer is made that the baptismal candidates be filled afresh with the Spirit of God and be thus empowered for service (see Matt 3.16; Acts 1.8; 8.17). Or as the most recent Baptist manual on worship puts it: "We are now to lay hands on.... who have been baptized, commissioning them for service as disciples of Jesus Christ. We shall pray for the Holy Spirit to equip and empower them for their calling in the church and their witness in the world".⁶ For Baptists the church membership roll is – or at least should be – the 'ministry roll' of the church.

2. The leadership of some

All God's people are called to serve, but not all are called to lead. As Paul so delightfully makes clear in 1 Cor 12, God gives many and various gifts: "If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members but one body" (1 Cor 12.19,20). Most of God's gifts relate to ministry in general. Some, however, relate to the ministry of leadership in particular. indeed, it is highly significant that in all three lists of spiritual gifts in Paul's writings the gift of leadership is found. True, the actual term 'leadership' does not always appear in our English translations, but the idea is present.

in Rom 12.8 for instance, Paul writes of "the leader" serving "in diligence" (NRSV). Similarly the NIV: "If it is leadership, let it be done diligently"; or the GNB: "whoever has authority should work hard".

⁴ *BEM* 5

⁵ *Baptist Union Statement on the Church* (Baptist Union 1948)/, 1

⁶ *Gathering for Worship: Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples* (Canterbury press, Norwich 2005) edited by Christopher J. Ellis & Myra Blyth for the Baptist Union of Great Britain) 75.

In 1 Cor 12.28 Paul speaks of “forms of leadership”. The underlying Greek noun literally means ‘helmsmanship’. It was a term often used metaphorically in Greek literature of the art of government: the statesman guides the ‘ship of state’. In 1 Cor 12 the ship in question is the church. Within the context of every-member-ministry there are those specially gifted to “preside” over the church’s life, “guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission, and its caring ministry”.⁷

The concept of leadership is also present in Paul’s third list of spiritual gifts in Eph 4.7-13, where amongst the various ‘offices’ of ministry is to be found that of the pastor-teacher (in the Greek there is only one definite article covering both “pastors and teachers” which indicates that this is one and the same office). Like all the other offices, in the first place this is an ‘enabling’ ministry – enabling God’s people to fulfil their ministry. However, the actual term “pastor” would also have carried overtones of leadership, for in the ancient world ‘pastor’ or ‘shepherd’ was often used as a synonym for a ‘leader’ or ‘king’.

With such Scriptural precedents in mind, it seems fair to argue that this concept of leadership is the distinguishing concept between the ordained ministry of the church and the general ministry of the church. How that leadership will be exercised will vary. Its content, however, will include in particular the preaching and teaching of God’s Word (Eph 4.11; 1 Tim 3.2: see also Acts 6.4), the oversight of God’s people (Acts 20.28; 1 Pet 5.2), and the equipping of God’s people for service (Eph 4.11,12). An evangelistic thrust will also be a mark of such ministry (2 Tim 4.5). But none of these specific tasks of teaching, pastoral care, evangelism, and enabling, are exclusive to the ordained. indeed, in any given local church it would be exceedingly limiting if, for instance, pastoral care and evangelism were to be the exclusive preserve of the ‘minister’ alone – if a church is to grow and develop, such tasks need to be shared. However, as the overall leader of a church the ordained ‘minister’ is responsible for ensuring that these tasks are responsibly delegated. Leadership – or rather ‘servant leadership’ – is the defining mark of the ordained.

Does this therefore mean to say that the ordained are the only leaders in a local church? hopefully not. Leadership is a task to be shared. In the New Testament church there was always a plurality of leadership (see Acts 13.1; 14.23; 15.23; 20.17, 28; Phil 1.1). The New Testament knows nothing of the one-man ministry (the so-called ‘monarchical episcopate’) still so prevalent in many churches today. Or rather, the only example of a one-man ministry in the New testament was Diotrephes “who likes to put himself first” (3 John 9) – he is no example to be followed, but a warning to be taken note of! Likewise in today’s churches leadership should always be corporate. it matters not what the nomenclature of the leadership team be – whether the leaders be termed ‘deacons’ or ‘elders’, ‘stewards’ or ‘the oversight’, the ‘ministry team’ or the ‘church wardens’ – the important thing is that there be people who share in the task of leadership, giving oversight and direction to the ongoing life and mission of the church.

⁷ BEM 13.

The question immediately arises as to what then is the distinction between such leaders and the ordained? If leadership is shared, then how may one leader be distinguished from another? Are the ordained leaders to be distinguished from other leaders within the church on the ground of the training they have received? Clearly training is crucial – the ability to handle God’s word knowledgeably and to reflect theologically upon issues facing the church is of major importance. First and foremost, however, the distinction is to be found not within education and formation for ministry, but rather in calling and function: the ordained person (the ‘minister’ or whatever the appropriate term may be) is called to be the leader of the leaders. As in the Jerusalem church James exercised the role of the ‘presiding elder’. so in today’s churches ordained ministers are called to exercise ‘presidency’, and in this way spear head the life and mission of the church. (In the case of a church enjoying the services of more than one ordained minister, then the ordained will form a ‘ministry’ team within the ‘leadership’ team). However, in today’s context there is a further distinction related to this function. Over against the locally recognized ministry of ‘lay’ leaders such as deacons and elders and others, the ministry of the ordained is nationally recognized. The former enjoy the recognition and trust of their local church, the latter have been accorded recognition and trust by the wider church as also by the local church. This wider recognition and trust come into particular focus within the service of ordination itself, and result in enrolment on the particular denomination’s list of ‘accredited’ ministers.

Within my own denomination many Baptist churches today recognize the particular ministry of deacons and elders by ‘commissioning’ them with prayer and with either the ‘giving of the right hand of fellowship’ or even ‘the laying on of hands’.⁸ However, unlike ordination this commissioning service is very much an act of the local church.⁹

In ordination recognition and trust are formally accorded to the ordinand by the wider church. it makes the culmination of a fairly lengthy period of testing and training, and is the occasion when churches together publicly recognize individuals as called of God to exercise leadership among them, and through the laying on of hands and prayer ask that God will fill them afresh with his Spirit as they embark upon this new stage of their Christian service (see Acts 6.1-11; 13.1-3; 1 Tim 4.14). Although in a British Baptist context an ordination service normally takes place in a local church, ordination is never just an act of the local church. Precisely because ordination involves national recognition, the wider church is always present through its representatives. For British Baptists at the very least both the local association of churches as also the Baptist Union are represented in the act of ordination.

It is important to stress that leadership gifts are not restricted to men. The Scriptures teach that the Spirit gives his gifts irrespective of gender (Acts 2.17,18). Although certain cultural situations might have limited leadership to men at one stage (see 1 Cor 11.3-6; 14.33-36; 1 Tim 2.11-15), in principle there is no Scriptural reason why women should not share in church leadership. Just as in the church in Rome women took the lead where Paul mentions Phoebe the deacon (Rom 16.1-2), Prisca the teacher (Rom 16.3), and Junia the apostle (Rom 16.7) so also may they today. The presumed superiority of male over female no longer exists

⁸ See *Gathering for Worship* 117-119

⁹ Amongst Baptists in the USA, however, deacons are often ‘ordained’ – with their ordination being accepted when they move to another church.

in Christ (Gal 3.28). In Christ a new order has come into being. Women can and should expect to play varying roles within Christian leadership.¹⁰

3. The ministry of all and the leadership of some: the consequences

If we are right in our understanding of the teaching of the Scriptures on the ministry of all and the leadership of some, then this means that much of the mystique that over the centuries has built up around ordination ought to be eliminated. Indeed, a fairly radical shift needs to take place, if the church is to begin to operate on New Testament principle

a) *Ordination is not to **the** ministry.* As has already been argued, ministry is not the exclusive preserve of some, but the duty and responsibility of all God's people. In many ways the present use of the term 'minister' for the ordained is unfortunate. All God's people are ministers. It would be a far healthier witness to the New Testament understanding of the church if 'ministers' in the UK were known by the functional term of 'pastor'. However, there are difficulties with this term. For instance, amongst British Baptists 'pastor' has tended to be used of 'lay pastors', while 'minister' has been used of 'the professionals'. Furthermore, it has to be admitted that the term 'pastor' is a hang-over from a rural society and sounds strange in today's largely urban world. In addition not every ordained minister remains a 'pastor' of a church: they may become chaplains, theological college tutors, regional ministers, and eventually they will retire when they will still feel that God has a call on their life as a minister.¹¹ Furthermore, there is also the fact that 'minister' is currently the only term acceptable to all the mainline Protestant denominations.

It is because all God's people are called to ministry that the use of the terms 'clergy' and 'laity', as also the word 'lay' is unhelpful. By definition those who are ordained are themselves members of God's people (*laos*, from which the English terms 'laity' and 'lay' are derived, is the Greek word for 'people').

My personal view is that the wearing of distinctive clerical dress, whether it be cassock and bands or a clerical ('dog') collar is questionable, for it reinforces the image of ordained ministers having a special status and minimises the ministry of other Christians. If a badge is needed, what is wrong with a cross? If necessary, a sizeable wooden cross worn around the neck. Harsh though it may sound, the 'dressing up' that has been the hallmark of many Anglican churches and to a lesser extent of the Roman Catholic churches, gives the impression of effeminacy and lends conviction to the underlying feeling that the 'clergy' do not belong to the real world.

Likewise, there is no justification for the title 'Reverend', let alone other titles such as 'Right Reverend' and 'Most Reverend, let alone 'His Grace'. An ordained minister may be worthy of respect, but surely not of 'reverence'. False distinctions are being created. At the very least, within the church, the title 'Reverend' should be done away with. As far as the wider public are concerned, we may still have to continue with the use of this title, since it has

¹⁰ *BEM* 18 unfortunately sat on the fence and instead of making specific recommendations in favour of the ordination of women, preferred to recognize that there were differences between churches on this issue.

¹¹ See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Make the Most of Retirement* (BRF, Abingdon 2020).

come to be perceived as a mark of those who are deemed as professionally competent by their peers.

b) *Ordination does not involve 'metamorphosis' into another kind of being*, further along the evolutionary scale. Ministers are brought nearer to God as a consequence of ordination. There are no first- or second- class citizens within the kingdom of God. All God's people are called to be men and women of God. It is true that to fulfil their role as leaders of the people of God, ministers do have a special responsibility to develop their relationship with their Lord (see Acts 20.28). Ministers need to practise what they preach, for otherwise their authority will be totally undermined. Hence in many ordination rites ordinands are asked to commit themselves afresh to daily prayer and a daily reading of the Scriptures. However the living of a holy life is not dependent upon ordination, or is it an inevitable consequence. Those who have been ordained still belong to the human race.

Ordination is primarily about recognition and trust, and is not a means of special grace, conferring some new status. At the most ordination is a special means of grace, in the sense that it is the occasion when prayer is made that God may bless his servants with the infilling and empowering of his Holy Spirit (see 1 Tim 4.14). This blessing, however, is not confined to the day of ordination – for the blessing that is sought is the blessing on all the years of service that lie ahead.

c) *Ordination is not indelible*. If ordination is primarily functional, and has more to do with role than with status, then it is possible for that function to be given up. Once a 'minister', one is not necessarily a 'minister' for ever. Although *BEM* is correct in stating that "Initial commitment to ordained ministry ought normally to be made without reserve or time limit"¹², there may well be circumstances, positive or negative, when it may be right for a minister to withdraw from his or her role. Unfortunately, there is a tendency on the part of some to equate being taken off their denomination's accredited list of ministers with being struck off the Medical Register or being 'defrocked'. Removed from an accredited list is often unnecessarily associated with guilt and failure. This need not be the case. There is no New Testament warrant to assume that ordination need to be for life.

d) *Ordination does not lead to a special form of ministerial 'priesthood'*. The ordained share with all God's people in the corporate priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2.4,9). Strangely *BEM* contradicts itself on this point. It begins by rightly recognizing that "the New Testament never uses the term 'priesthood' or 'priest' to designate the ordained minister", but reserves the term "on the one hand for the unique priesthood of Jesus Christ and, on the other hand, for the royal and prophetic priesthood of all baptized".¹³ However, on the basis of later church usage *BEM* argues that the ordained "may appropriately be called priests because they fulfil a particular priestly service by strengthening and building up the royal and prophetic priesthood of the faithful through word and sacraments, through their prayers of intercession, and through their pastoral guidance of the community".¹⁴ However, as Derek Tidball has rightly said, "This is an evasion of biblical truth and an unhelpful confusion of terminology, as the word 'priest', when applied to leaders in the church, carries

¹² *BEM* 48

¹³ *BEM* 17 Commentary

¹⁴ *BEM* 17

so much baggage with it. It is a faulty foundation on which an unhelpful hierarchical superstructure is built.”¹⁵

Since in the Church of England ‘priest’ has now become the standard term for the ordained minister, let me elaborate on this further by quoting from my book, *Entering New Territory*, where I dealt at length with what to my mind is a misleading term.¹⁶

As the late Michael Green, a former Anglican college principal, pointed out many years ago, this is “simply amazing”,¹⁷ for the New Testament writers were steeped in the Old Testament sacrificial system, and the cities in which they and the first Christians lived were surrounded by a plethora of temples and priests, and yet never once did they call a minister ‘priest’. In the words of David Bennett, “We must conclude that this was not a matter of oversight, but of conscious avoidance”¹⁸.

The fact is that in the New Testament the metaphor of priesthood is applied in only two ways. In the first instance, Jesus is described as our High Priest, for he is the mediator of the New Covenant: see Heb 7,24-27; 8.1-20; also 1 Tim 2.5. In the second instance, the church in the sense of the whole people of God, are described as a priesthood: 1 Pet 2,5,9; Rev 5.9; and perhaps Rom 12.1.....

It is not true that “to call the religious functionary of the Church of England ‘a priest’ is a theological definition grounded in the writings of the New Testament”.¹⁹ Nor is it true, as Steven Croft, now Bishop of Oxford, has argued, that there are “hints” of this word (*hiereus*) used with reference to Christian ministers: the only Scripture reference he can find to back up this assertion are words used by Paul of his preaching the Gospel.²⁰ For Paul towards the end of Romans wrote “of the grace given to me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15.16). Paul likens his preaching role to that of a priest presiding over offerings presented to God, the offering consisting of Gentile lives being surrendered to God. The Good News Bible therefore translates: “I serve like a priest preaching the Good News from God, in order that the Gentiles may be an offering acceptable to God, dedicated to him by Jesus Christ”. But this has nothing to do with presiding in a worship service let alone celebrating the Eucharist at the ‘altar’.

‘The priesthood of ministers’ is not a concept found in Scripture: rather it is a later development. I find it significant that Graham Tomlin, now Bishop of Kensington, in

¹⁵ Derek Tidball, *Ministry by the Book: New Testament patterns for pastoral leadership* (Apollos, Nottingham 2008) 191.

¹⁶ Paul Beasley-Murray, *Entering New Territory. Why are retired Baptist ministers moving to Anglican churches? What are the underlying theological issues?* (College of Baptist Ministers, Chelmsford 2019) 80-83.

¹⁷ Michael Green, *Freed to Serve* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1983) 74.

¹⁸ David Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical images for leaders and followers* (Paternoster, Carlisle 1983) 104.

¹⁹ Anthony Russell, *The Clerical Profession* (SPCK, London 1980) 3.

²⁰ Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and leadership in the local church* (DLT, London 2nd edition 2008) 101.

his... influential book on priesthood, accepts that “There is no mention of the word *hiereus* in relation to Christian ministers – a whole range of other words are used (*presbuteros, episkopos, diakonos, apostolos*, etc.) but not *hiereus*”.²¹

I find it significant too that Graham Tomlin states: “The primary ceremony in which commissioning for ministry is given to the Christian Church is not ordination but baptism... Every Christian has a ministry in and outside the Church, not just clergy... Ordination is not a commissioning for ministry, but a setting apart for a particular kind of ministry.”²² This understanding of what may be termed ‘the ministry of all believers’ arises directly out of the pages of the New Testament – but to go on to call church leaders ‘priests’ runs counter to the evidence of Scripture. Indeed, as he recognises, all the Scriptures he draws upon (for instance 1 Pet 5.1-4 and Tit 1.5-7)) outline “a distinctly presbyterial ministry”.²³ As he rightly says, “The main word used in the New Testament for oversight, or leadership within the Church is *presbuteros*, commonly translated elder”.²⁴ His admittedly nuanced understanding of priesthood – in which he accepts that ordained priests do not leave the ranks of the laity – is an unhelpful theological construct which creates confusion. For a priest, by definition, is a ‘go-between’ God and his world – not surprisingly the Latin word for ‘priest’ is *pontifex* which literally means ‘bridge-builder’. Priests are ‘mediators’. But as Paul writes to Timothy: “there is one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2.5). Admittedly Tomlin is at pains to emphasise that the priestly role of ‘mediating’ does not mean that clergy belong to some different race – “like the old Irish joke where there were three sets of public conveniences: one for Men, one for Women and a third for Priests”²⁵. But why then choose to use the word ‘priest’ as the key term for describing the role of those engaged in the ministry of leadership in God’s church? It is a misleading and unhelpful term which only creates confusion if not error in the thinking of the ordinary man or woman ‘in the pew’.

If there are no Biblical grounds for the Anglican and Roman Catholic view of ordination as equivalent to ‘priesting’, neither are there biblical grounds for the Reformed understanding of ordination as a setting aside of a person to ‘the ministry of word and sacraments’. For although the ‘ministry of the word’ is a vital and important part of any minister’s calling, there is nothing to indicate that this is an exclusive calling. Likewise, although in most church situations the minister will normally participate in the baptizing and preside at the Lord’s Table, neither ‘ordination’ is the minister’s exclusive preserve. Where ministers baptize or preside at the Lord’s Table, they do so, not by virtue of being a priest mediating between God and his people, but by virtue of being the recognized and trusted leader of God’s people. Indeed, there is no Scriptural reason why anyone may not perform either function provided it is at the invitation of the church. Because of the biblical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, it is important that churches do not encourage any false sacerdotalism. In this regard, the practice in British Baptist churches of asking the newly ordained minister to pronounce a blessing at the end of an ordination service is unhelpful,

²¹ Graham Tomlin, *The Widening Circle: Priesthood as God’s way of blessing the world* (SPCK, London 2014) 64.

²² *The Widening Circle*, 116.

²³ *The Widening Circle*, 117.

²⁴ *The Widening Circle*, 121

²⁵ *The Widening Circle*, 114.

for it gives the impression that ordination has conferred special powers upon the ordinand. Likewise, any tendency to encourage the newly ordained minister to preside at a celebration of the Lord's Supper within the context of ordination is to be resisted – for again the impression is given that through ordination a special priestly status has been received.

4. The call to leadership: a precondition of ordination

Ordination presupposes the call of God.²⁶ Indeed, ordination is the occasion when the church recognizes God's prior call upon the life of the ordinand. The question, however, arises: how is that call recognized? Of what does a call to leadership in God's church consist?

The call to leadership amongst the people of God is made up of a number of components:

First the call needs to be sensed within the life of the individual. However, just as there is no stereotyped conversion experience, so too there is no fixed pattern of all. A call, for instance, need not be dramatic in nature – the experience of Isaiah in the temple (Isaiah 6) is no more typical of a call than was the experience of Paul on the Damascus Road (Acts 9) typical of conversion. In other words, "people are called in differing ways to the ordained ministry... This call may be discerned through personal prayer and reflection, as well as through suggestion, example, encourage, guidance".²⁷ Nonetheless, common to all those called of God to leadership among his people will be a sense of inward constraint (1 Cor 9.16) and a real desire to serve the Lord in such a way (1 Tim 3.1).

Secondly, the call will be evidenced by appropriate gifts for leadership. In order to lead God's people, the ordinand will need to be able to communicate effectively (1 Tim 3.2) and relate helpfully with others (1 Tim 3.3). An ability to think and a facility for self-awareness are equally vital.

Thirdly, the call will be evidenced by character (see 1 Tim 3.1-7). Love, humility, holiness, industry and perseverance are essential characteristics for Christian leadership. It cannot be sufficiently stressed that the test of character is fundamental to the call of God. Gifts without the graces of character are worthless. The ordinand's life must be marked by spiritual authenticity, discernible both within and without the church (1 Tim 3.7). Fourthly, the genuineness of the call must be recognized by the people of God. It is not enough for an individual to feel convinced. As *BEM* rightly stated: "This call must be authenticated by the Church's recognition of the gifts and graces of the particular person, both natural and spiritually given, needed for the ministry to be performed".²⁸ Such objective recognition may at times precede the subjective call within the life of the individual, in the sense that on occasion individuals within the church may take the initiative and share their conviction that God is calling a particular individual to leadership among his people (see Acts 13.1-3). In today's context, however, it is usually the potential ordinand who submits a subjective sense of call to the scrutiny of others. In the first place it is surely

²⁶ See 'Ministry is rooted in the call of God', 1-4 in Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fifty Lessons in Ministry: Reflections on fifty years of ministry* (DLT, London 2020).

²⁷ *BEM* 45.

²⁸ *BEM* 45.

right that this call be tested by the local church of which the potential ordinand is a member.

Fifthly, the call should be further tested by the wider church. Precisely how this is done will vary from denomination to denomination. Within a British Baptist context, this is first done by the local association of churches through its ministerial recognition committee, and then normally through a Baptist college, which in its acceptance procedures tests the call on behalf of the Baptist Union.

Sixthly, as part of the ongoing testing process, the ordinand will receive training. Gifts need to be developed, character needs to be formed, spirituality needs to be deepened, the mind needs to be stretched and informed, practical ministry skills need to be learned. Training is not just desirable but necessary if competent leadership is to be exercised among God's people today. While the precise form of this training may vary from person to person, candidates will "need appropriate preparation through study of scripture and theology, prayer and spirituality, and through acquaintance with the social and human realities of the contemporary world".²⁹ In other words, a purely academic theological education is insufficient. 'Ministerial formation' is a broader exercise.

Seventhly, within a British Baptist context, final confirmation of the call is gained when the ordinand receives and accepts the call from a local congregation of God's people to exercise leadership among them.

5. The public recognition of leadership: the service of ordination

The precise form of an ordination service will vary from church to church, and denomination to denomination. However, within a service of ordination, the following actions would be desirable:

First, the nature of ordination and of the task involved in leadership amongst God's people should be made plain. On an occasion when the particular ministry of a person (or persons) is in view, it is important that the congregation is reminded that all God's people are called to ministry. Indeed, it would be good if an opportunity were given for the congregation to reaffirm their commitment to Christ and the ministries to which he has called them.

Secondly, a series of brief statements should be included in which the preconditions relating to ordination are seen to be fulfilled. Within my own denomination, where generally people are ordained on an individual basis within their local church, it would be normal for ordinands to affirm their belief that God has called them to be leaders in his church; for the 'sending' church from which they come to tell how they were led to recognize the call and to commend the ordinand for training; and for the 'calling' church to tell how they were led to invite the ordinand to be their minister.

²⁹ BEM 47.

Thirdly, an opportunity should be given for ordinands to reaffirm their faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to publicly commit themselves to the task of pastoral leadership.

Fourthly, the ordination needs to be seen not as an action of a particular person (a bishop or college principal, for example) but as an action of the whole church. Lest the impression be given that in ordination a special grace is conferred from one person to another, it is important that more than one individual is involved in the laying on of hands, and that not all of those sharing in the ceremony be ordained. A variety of representatives should share in the ordination. Within my own denomination, it would be customary for representatives of the sending and calling churches, as also of the local association of churches and of the wider Baptist Union, to take part in the laying on of hands. There is much to be said for ensuring that prayers for the ordinand are not limited to the presiding 'minister', who would normally be ordained (although there is no reason why this should be so), but that several people, ordained and non-ordained, lead God's people in brief prayers, in which God's blessing is sought on the ordinand as also a fresh empowering and falling of the Spirit. So that ordination is clearly seen as a church activity, rather than a priestly activity. Contrary to *BEM*, there are no Scriptural grounds for ordination being viewed as an exclusively episcopal activity:³⁰ If the doctrine of apostolic succession is to be found in Scripture at all, then it relates to the faithful transmission of the Word by the continuing apostolic community (2 Tim 2.2) rather than to a class of specially authorized ministers.

Fifthly, at the conclusion of the ordination it is normal to present to ordinands a Bible, as a sign of their authority, which in turn is a reminder that minister and people alike are all under the authority of the Word of God.³¹

6. Leadership amongst God's people: developments subsequent to ordination

Ordination makes a new stage of Christian service. Although the ordinand may have already shared in the leadership of a local church, in ordination the ordinand is given a new responsibility to lead the people of God forward in worship, fellowship and mission to the world. Such a responsibility inevitably brings with it a certain authority. Indeed, the church through the very act of ordination entrusts the ordinand with 'power to lead. This power, however, is limited. For following the pattern of the Servant-King, leadership in God's church will always be non-coercive (see 1 Pet 5.2-3). Leadership within a church may be authoritative, but never authoritarian. People must be free to accept or not to accept the direction offered by their leaders. On the other hand, where there is recognition of and trust in a minister's calling, there all necessary authority for leadership will be found. Such recognition and trust, however, although present within an ordination service, can never be taken for granted; they have to be repeatedly won. Ultimately people follow their leaders not because of their 'office', but because they discern within them the marks of Christian leadership.

³⁰ See *BEM* 52.

³¹ In addition to the presentation of a Bible, *Gathering for Worship* 130 suggests that "a towel may be presented with the words, 'Jesus washed his disciples' feet and gave us an example. Receive this towel as a sign that you almost must serve, for the one who would be first must be the servant of all'".

From a Baptist perspective it is important to stress that although in ordination the ordinand is given recognition by the wider church, the ordinand is not thereby created a representative of the wider church. The local church is always the representative of the wider church (see 1 Cor 1.2). Where in the community the minister is called to represent the local or wider church, such representation is always on behalf of the local or wider church. Contrary to *BEM*, there are no biblical grounds for asserting that the ordained “provide a focus of its (the church’s) unity”.³²

Hopefully, ordination does not make the end of personal growth and development, but should always lead to an ongoing commitment to study God’s Word and to a continual updating of ministry skills. In a rapidly changing world, ministers cannot afford to stand still in their thinking. If their leadership is to be creative and responsive to the new challenges which society constantly poses to the church, then ministers need to commit themselves to ‘continuing ministerial development’.³³

Ordination in the first place normally leads to pastoral oversight of a local church. However, the ministry of the ordained need not be limited to a local church. A wider ministry of leadership may be exercised in and on behalf of the churches – whether in a denominational or ecumenical appointment.

Although ordination generally leads to full-time paid ministry, this is not a necessary concomitant. As *BEM* stated: “the church may also ordain people who remain in other occupations or employment”.³⁴ The Apostle Paul himself at times exercised a tent-making ministry. Indeed, in an increasingly missionary situation, tent-making ministries may well increase.

In conclusion

There is no ministry in the church more important than that of pastoral leadership. We do, however, no favours to that ministry if we allow it to become encumbered with all kinds of unhelpful and even un-biblical practices. For the sake of effective ministry and mission the undergrowth of sentiment and tradition needs to be cleared, in order to free not only the people of God in general for their various ministries, but also the ordained for their particular ministry. Only where the ministry of all and the leadership of some is a reality can we expect churches to grow and develop.

³² See *BEM* 8.

³³ See ‘CMD is not an option’, 153-156 in Paul Beasley-Murray, *Fifty Lessons in Ministry*.

³⁴ *BEM* 46.