

# ORDINATION AND INDUCTION OF A WOMAN MINISTER

I preached this sermon on the occasion of the ordination and induction of a Woman Minister to the Church of which I am now a member. While not in the nature of polemic in favour of women in the ministry, it suggests an appropriateness, and several have since told me that they found this helpful.

## SERMON

Our text is in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, Chapter 4, verses 11 and 12, in the Good News Bible: "It was (Jesus) who 'gave gifts to mankind'; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ."

After this sermon the Presbytery will be proceeding to the Act of Ordination and Induction. The opening of the Preamble goes like this:

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, who, being ascended on high, hath given gifts unto men for the edifying of the body of Christ ..."

The Preamble begins by stating that the Church of Scotland, though a national Church, owns no King and Head but the Lord Jesus Christ: it is a statement of what Dr Chalmers called "the Crown Rights of the Redeemer". Then it goes on to quote part of our text in the words of the Authorised Version. I'd like to look with you at the text as a whole. It speaks of three things:

of Jesus the Giver;  
of the Gift of a Leader; and  
of the purpose of Leadership.

1. It speaks of Jesus the Giver. "It was (Jesus) who 'gave gifts to mankind'; (literally) he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers."

Notice that while we might expect the gifts to be spiritual endowments of various kinds, Paul goes on to specify spiritually endowed people. It is clear from Acts 2 verse 33 that after Jesus ascended, he sent his Holy Spirit as a gift to his Church; and from I Corinthians chapter 12 that the Holy Spirit gives various gifts to Christian people. But the gifted people are themselves Christ's gifts.

Who to? Our text says "to mankind". They are gifts not just to the Church, but to mankind.

Today we all thank God for the one to be ordained minister of this congregation. She is Christ's gift - not just to us, but to the whole parish in which our congregation is set.

2. Jesus, then, is the Giver, and his gift is the Gift of a Leader - "Jesus gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers".

Should I not here say "the Gifts of Leaders"? It is true that Paul, writing to the early Church, was speaking of various spiritually-endowed leaders. In a sense, we can say that the apostles of whom Paul spoke, people who had seen the Lord Jesus, his life and death and resurrection and witnessed to it, were unrepeatable. And it is also true today that Christ needs, and provides to his Church, people endowed with different gifts of the Spirit. Even the apostolic gift has been needed by the pioneer missionaries.

But there is a sense in which every Parish Minister has to be an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher.

- an apostle, in the sense of one sent by God. The Greek word apostello means "I send". In that sense Jesus was the supreme Apostle. In Hebrews Chapter 3, verse 1, in the Authorised Version, he is called "the Apostle and High Priest of our faith". This is well put in the Good News Bible: "whom God sent to be the High Priest of the faith we profess". But Jesus said to his apostles (John Chapter 20 verse 21) "As the Father sent me, so I send you". But the first person Jesus sent after his Resurrection was not one of the Twelve, but a woman, Mary Magdalene, to whom he said: "Go to my brothers and tell them ..." (John, Chapter 20, verse 17).

- a prophet, in the sense of one who has to hear and proclaim the word of God. As Jeremiah says, in Chapter 23, verse 28, "the prophet who has heard my message should proclaim that message faithfully". The prophetic office is particularly mentioned in the New Testament as having been exercised by women in I Corinthians, Chapter 11, verse 5. The Good News Bible translates "any woman who ... proclaims God's message in public worship ..." and in Acts Chapter 21 verse 4 we read of the four daughters of Philip that they "proclaimed God's message".

- an evangelist, in the sense of one who brings Good News (the Greek word for which is evangelion), the Good News of the Gospel. Mary Magdalene

was an evangelist in this sense, bringing to the apostles the Good News that Jesus had risen from the dead. The Good News of the Gospel is summarised in the Preamble to the Act of Ordination as being

"the Gospel of the sovereign grace and love of God, wherein through Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, incarnate, crucified, and risen, He freely offers to all men, upon repentance and faith, the forgiveness of sins, renewal by the Holy Spirit, and eternal life, and calls them to labour in the fellowship of faith for the advancement of the kingdom of God throughout the world".

This is a noble statement, but it sounds quite a mouthful, doesn't it? The task of an evangelist is to make this Good News clear and relevant to people of all ages and conditions.

- a pastor and teacher. Paul groups these together by omitting "the" before "teacher". Grouped together, then, we have the ideas of caring for and of instructing, the work of a shepherd looking after the flock and guiding them. We think of Priscilla and her husband Aquila - when the two are mentioned together, Priscilla is nearly always mentioned first, and was obviously the one who took the lead. In Acts Chapter 18, verse 26, we are told that Priscilla saw that Apollos needed care and instruction in the full understanding of the Gospel, and so "they took him home and explained to him more correctly the way of God". That care today has to be exercised not just in the congregation, but in the Parish as a whole, and opportunities to do this will come especially in times of trouble and bereavement.

3. Finally, we come to the Purpose of Leadership - "He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ". I prefer the older translation "ministry", which is wider in its meaning than "service". The same Greek word in the plural - "ministries" - is used in I Corinthians, Chapter 12, verse 5 for the exercise of spiritual gifts.

When I myself was considering a call to minister in this part of Scotland, I was told: "The people here won't be pushed, but they expect the Minister to lead them." Jesus gives the gift of a Leader in order to stir up Christians to exercise their particular gifts, and thus build up the body of Christ. Paul links the two together again in verse 16: "When each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love."

At the moment our Presbytery is studying the Interim Report on Ministry, sent down for discussion by the Panel on Doctrine. I'd like to make two quotations from it:

"Could not much more be done ... encouraging the general membership to develop gifts, shoulder responsibilities, exercise leadership, and to interpret their varying expressions of commitment as no less ministry. and no less a sharing of Christ's ministry, than that of any other within the Body?"

"The Spirit will find a myriad ways of liberating Christian women and men to meet the demands of grace in humble but active forms of proclamation and service, in the pattern of Christ's own ministry."

My experience in this area has been that the Minister has generally to recognise the gift, and ask the person to use it; but sometimes the recognition comes directly as a response to the preaching of the Word.

Let us, then, thank God for the gift of a Leader for this Parish. Let us pray for her in her role of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. And let us be prepared to respond when through her ministry we are challenged to exercise our gifts in the building up of Christ's body in this place, so as to serve the Parish effectively.

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## **A DIP IN THE ARCHIVES**

Dr. Lees, addressing the Annual Meeting on 31st May 1877

"There has been a decided improvement in the public services of the Church within recent years. When I made this statement in the Assembly it met with considerable acceptance. It received, however, a flat denial from the Rev. Principal of Aberdeen, who stated it was his opinion that the old style of services in the Church of Scotland was the most reverent and becoming. I have always had a high opinion of the Rev. Principal's opinion in regard to matters of constitutional law, but I have never had a high opinion of his taste in matters regarding aesthetics, and his views upon worship do not affect me greatly, for they are not these of a competent judge. The feelings throughout the Church, whatever may be the feeling of a solitary member in the frozen north, is that there has been a decided improvement in the services of the Church."