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Ministry in the New Testament

James W. Thompson

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Restoration Quarterly

- 129 A Brief History
of Levirate Marriage
as It Relates to the Bible
DALE W. MANOR
- 143 Ministry in the New Testament
JAMES W. THOMPSON
- 157 Victory in Jesus
DALE R. WELLS
- 161 The Johannine Concept
of Eternal Life
as a Present Possession
J. C. DAVIS
- 171 Book Reviews



Ministry in the New Testament

JAMES W. THOMPSON
Institute for Christian Studies

A study of ministry in the New Testament is motivated by more than antiquarian interests. The continuing scholarly concern over the question reflects the uncertainty and controversy over ministerial role models and the desire for the contemporary church to find appropriate paradigms in the New Testament. This controversy over ministerial functions reflects fundamental differences among religious traditions of the nature and task of the church and the primary functions of its leaders. Avery Dulles has observed that the very terms we use for ministry carry with them built-in assumptions, both historical and operative, about the way the church is conceived. "The various terms such as minister, pastor, priest, and presbyter are themselves biased toward one model or another."¹ "Minister" connotes one who serves with the word and sacrament or one who serves in a diaconal role in meeting human needs. "Clergyman" denotes clerical caste, set off from the laity. "Pastor" suggests the shepherding function. "Priest" underscores the mediating and cultic dimensions of ministry.² Thus scholarly research on the origins of the ministry often reflects the concerns and distinctive questions of various religious traditions.

Confusion over ministerial models is derived today not only from the biases of diverse traditions. We have seen a shift in the paradigm in many traditions toward a new interest in the functions of the minister as counselor, administrator, social critic, and helper of the needy in addition to the traditional functions of preaching and teaching.³ The many conflicting paradigms are undoubtedly a source of confusion for both minister and congregation, leading to renewed interest in the evidence of the New Testament.

Many of the changes in the ministerial model have affected the Churches of Christ. The model for ministry, I am convinced, has shifted from the previous generation. This shift is reflected in the title that most frequently appears to identify our full-time church leaders. As I recall, the title most commonly

¹Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 151. See M. H. Shepherd, "Christian Ministry," *IDB* 3:386.

²See Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), p. 36.

³Neuhaus, p. 35.

used for a full-time leader in the church a generation ago was "evangelist" or "preacher." The term "minister" was used sparingly, often for theological reasons. Today the common designation, "minister," reflects a change in our basic understanding of the task. The term suggests that the model has shifted from a focus on proclamation to other tasks.

A study of ministry in the New Testament is problematic enough to demand that we confront a basic difficulty before we look at the New Testament evidence. An initial problem with such a study is apparent when we recognize that the diversity of the New Testament and the changes within the church of that era involve changing paradigms of the ministry. Furthermore, the New Testament documents scarcely have a concept of "the ministry" as a category of its own, for there are a "variety of ministries" (1 Cor. 12:4) in the early church. In addition, the demands of space in this paper will necessitate that the study of ministry in the New Testament be less than definitive. Nevertheless, despite the problems associated with the study, we cannot avoid an examination of the views of ministry held by the early church. The conflicting models of ministry require that our priorities and agenda be examined in the light of the first ministries. Our claim to their legacy can be justified only when our ministries are rooted in the original vision of the task of Jesus' emissaries who were called and sent on a mission.

Although the New Testament does not have a concept of "the ministry," as it has evolved into the present time, we examine the documents in the search for a common vision of ministry that is pervasive in the New Testament. A starting place is provided by the Greek words *διακονία*, *διακονέω*, *διάκονος*. John Knox once observed that the Greek word for "ministry" was, and still is, the most favored way of referring to church workers and their work.⁴ This group of words is not limited to one level of tradition, for it appears throughout the New Testament as the most appropriate word for the task of the church and its leaders. Paul can use it as the umbrella term for describing all of the tasks within the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4). The term can be used for his special commission as an apostle (2 Cor. 3:6) and for the role of his co-workers in building churches (1 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; 4:17). It is also used in the gospel tradition for Jesus and his special mission (Mark 10:45) and for the work of his disciples (Matt. 20:26). The term is used in Hebrews and Acts for the church's service to human needs within the congregation (Acts 6:2; Heb. 6:10). According to Ephesians 4:12, the various gifts are intended "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." The pervasiveness of this term in the diverse New Testament traditions to identify the work of the whole church and its special servants suggests that "ministry" was not a term employed only

⁴John Knox, "The Ministry in the Primitive Church," in *The Ministry in Historical Perspective* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 1.

in Pauline, Petrine, or Johannine circles. There was a shared vision that the task of the church and its leaders was *διακονεῖν*.

The original meaning of *διακονία* was service. Indeed, the word appears on numerous occasions in the ordinary sense of "wait on tables" (Mark 1:13 par; Luke 10:40; Luke 17:8; John 12:2; Acts 6:2). While the term, like *λειτουργός*, was used in some instances for the messenger and spokesman for the gods, the New Testament references to *διακονία* suggest that the connotation of serving others and being at their disposal is never lost.⁵ The word is thus commonly associated with living for others (cf. Mark 9:35; 10:43-45). Consequently, the term is frequently associated with charitable acts for the sake of others (Acts 6:2; Rom. 15:25, 31; 2 Cor. 8:3-4; 9:1-7). Indeed, Romans 12:7 and later references to the *διάκονος* as an office (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8) suggest that the association of ministry with the meeting of physical needs was not lost. Paul suggests that *διακονία* involves far more than the distribution of goods, for his ministry and the ministry of his co-workers involve being at the disposal of the churches (2 Cor. 11:8). Thus Hans Küng's point is basically correct, if slightly overstated, that the early church chose a new word to describe the task of its leaders.⁶ The term *διακονία* suggested the refusal of the church to perceive leadership in terms of the rulers and the ruled. There was a common vision of *διακονία* as the task of the church. Those who are specifically distinguished by the term *διάκονος* are commissioned to be at the disposal of others.

Because our current terms "minister" and "ministry" commonly refer to a special office and to the one who has been legitimized by a title and appointment to that role, we are faced with the problem of determining whether the confusion over the role of the minister can be illuminated from texts that reflect a pattern of church life where "minister" was seldom, if ever, used as a title. The answer to our problem lies not strictly in a word study of *διακονία* and its cognates. It will be helpful, rather, to examine the roles and titles of those who are specifically mentioned as leaders and workers in the New Testament. E. Earle Ellis has pointed out, for example, that there are more than 100 names of co-workers of Paul in Acts and the Pauline corpus.⁷ In many instances these names are associated with assorted titles that apparently were not given to every Christian. While *διάκονος* appears frequently as a title, it has many synonyms that suggest labor and struggle for the sake of a cause. Such terms as *ὁ κοπιῶν*, *ὁ συνεργός*, and *σύνδουλος* are synonyms of *διάκονος*. Thus it is likely that while "the ministry" does not appear in the New Testament, there are

⁵H. Küng, *The Church* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967), pp. 389-390; Knox, p. 1.

⁶Küng, p. 389.

⁷E. Earle Ellis, "Paul and His Co-Workers," *NTS* 17 (1971): 437.

ministers who are distinguished from the rest of the church by a special call and special duties. The paradigm for the minister is Apollos, Timothy, Tychicus, Phoebe, Archippus, and Epaphras, all of whom are described as *διάκονοι*. These and many others are described with similar titles.

There is an awareness in the New Testament that those who call themselves ministers may in fact only be disguising themselves under the use of the term *διάκονος*. The early church had to choose between the true ministers and those who were only masquerading as ministers of Christ (2 Cor. 11:15, 23). Thus the early church, like the modern church, was forced to choose between conflicting models of ministry. Paul's debate with the Corinthian opponents indicates that ministry in the New Testament involves more than the correct title. There were criteria for determining authentic ministry.

Jesus and His Disciples

When Paul and his opponents at Corinth debated the questions about legitimate ministry, the two sides appear to have agreed on one point: all ministry takes its meaning from the story of Jesus. While the two sides disagreed in their understanding of the story of Jesus, they could agree that the legacy of Jesus Christ is continued in his ministers. Consequently, Paul commends his ministry by repeated references to his identification with the sufferings and weakness of Christ (2 Cor. 1:3-7; 4:9-10; 13:4). The norm for Paul's ministry was a particular vision of Jesus' ministry, for Paul's ministry was shaped by Jesus' suffering for others. The fact that "one died for all" (2 Cor. 5:14) provided the coherent vision for his ministry. The "for others" of the cross had determined the character of Paul's ministry.

While it is true that Paul's view of ministry is based on the whole drama of the humiliation of Christ rather than on the concrete biographical details of Jesus' life (cf. Rom. 15:8; Phil. 2:6-11), it would be a mistake to see in the early church a general lack of interest in Jesus' life and teaching. That Jesus' life and teachings provided the criterion for the ministry of the church is suggested by the existence of the four Gospels. The four Gospels reflect the continuing concern of the church to let the story of Jesus evaporate into myth. The evangelists and those predecessors who collected and preserved the stories about Jesus were dedicated to the task of remembering what kind of man Jesus was. The Christian ministry would be misguided if it were to lose its roots in the character of that one life. The missionary preaching that is recorded in Acts 10:38-42 recalls the importance of the man Jesus in the proclamation. Jesus is remembered as the one who "went about doing good and healing those who were oppressed by the devil" (10:38). The one who proclaims the story recalls that he was commissioned to be a witness for Jesus. The four Gospels, as C. H. Dodd ar-

gued,⁸ expand this memory with concrete details that illustrate what kind of man Jesus was. The fact that they wrote Gospels indicates that the prototypes for the Christian ministry were Jesus and his disciples. The original story was a paradigm for the church at a later period.

Although the purpose of the Gospels was not only to write history, they do contain a history that has always been normative for the church. The life of Jesus had a consistent character that could not be fit into the patterns of ministry known to traditional Judaism. Jesus was neither an expositor of Torah like the rabbinic teachers nor a leader of an ascetic sect like the Teacher of Righteousness. Jesus was a preacher of the kingdom who announced the coming of God's kingdom into human history. The major tasks connected with his ministry—preaching, teaching, and healing (cf. Mark 1:14, 21, 22, 39; 5:20; 6:2)—were connected to his proclamation of the kingdom. In the exorcisms, Satan was being bound and the kingdom of God was coming upon its recipients as a divine power. The parables, though not an invention of Jesus, were the powerful metaphors intended to open the eyes of his listeners to comprehend the new reality of God's kingdom. The radical demands of Jesus and the authoritative tone of his moral challenge cannot be understood apart from Jesus' message of the kingdom. His ministry consisted in revealing God's new world of the kingdom, a world where God's power is present and paradise is restored already. Thus the radical demands, as in Jesus' proclamation about marriage, are based on the announcement that the new possibility for returning to the beginning has come.

The proclamation of the kingdom was accompanied by a call to repentance (Mark 1:14-15). Jesus, like John the Baptist, issued his call to all Israel. In his table fellowship with sinners, an activity that challenged the basic principles of holiness and separation, Jesus was the physician treating sick people (Mark 2:17). His table fellowship, with sinners, as the parables of the banquet and the lost son illustrate, was an invitation to repentance. Jesus' joyful table fellowship reflected a sense of mission, a ministry to those who had been excluded from the people of God.

The Gospels suggest that Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom to sinners and his freedom from the law led inevitably to the conflict that resulted in his death. A tradition that was known for its capacity to absorb many movements and charismatic leaders could not absorb this teacher whose mission for others led to a violent conflict. Thus Jesus was willing to die for this message of the kingdom and this mission to the lost.

Our examination of Jesus as the prototype for the ministry is justified by the Gospels' memory that Jesus called twelve disciples during his ministry and

⁸C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York: Harper, repr. 1964), pp. 47-48.

sent them out as his emissaries. The relationship of Jesus to his disciples was not analogous to the rabbinic institution of the teacher and disciple, for the focus of Jesus' relationship to his disciples was not on the school setting and the handing on of a tradition. Nor did the disciples of Jesus, like the students of the rabbis, come to their teacher in the hope of establishing their own school. The stylized accounts of the call of the disciples focus the narrative on the initiative of Jesus.⁹ The gospel narratives indicate that the compelling call of the twelve has no close analogies in the literature of that period. The disciples share the itinerant existence and the poverty of their teacher. To be a disciple is to adopt his kind of life.¹⁰

The narratives suggest that discipleship was a calling that involved a special task. Thus the itinerant life and the poverty of discipleship were not equivalent to entering the kingdom. Gerd Theissen has called attention to the distinctions between the itinerant disciples and the wider circle of Jesus' adherents and sympathizers.¹¹ Thus there appears to be a small group of disciples who had a special call and task. We are justified in referring to them as "ministers" who had a special vocation.

The task of the disciples was to share in Jesus' mission. As men who are "sent" (Mark 3:14; par.; Mark 6:7 par.), they fulfill the role of the *shaliach* who is deputized to act as the personal representative of another.¹² They are commissioned by Jesus and given the ἐξουσία (Mark 6:7; Matt. 10:1; Luke 9:1) to act on his behalf in preaching, teaching, and exorcism. They share the role of announcing the kingdom and of summoning Israel to respond to the new possibilities now made available by the coming of the kingdom. This sharing in his mission also involved the acceptance of Jesus' fate (Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16). Thus the disciples could expect that, as personal representatives of the one who called them and commissioned them, they would share his rejection.

The Gospels

While the Gospels contain the history of Jesus, they were not written because of mere historical interests.¹³ The Gospels were written because this history was considered normative for the identity of the church a generation later. The purpose of the evangelists, therefore, was to re-present the story of Jesus

⁹E. Schweizer, *Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), p. 40.

¹⁰J. Blinzler, "Jesus and His Disciples," in *Jesus in His Time*, ed. H. J. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), pp. 84-86; U. Luz, "Discipleship," *IDBS* 1:232.

¹¹Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 17. Cf. U. Luz, "Discipleship," *IDBS* 1:232.

¹²Cf. M. H. Shepherd, "Christian Ministry," *IDB*, 3:386.

¹³P. Achtemeier, "Resources for Pastoral Ministry in the Synoptic Gospels," in *A Biblical Basis for Ministry*, ed. E. E. Shelp and Ronald Sutherland (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 146.

for the needs of the later church. This re-presentation is, as the church recognized in ancient time, gospel (cf. Mark 1:1) and not biography. The Gospels grew out of and were intended for the pastoral use of the reader and the preacher. Because each evangelist collected specifically the material that could be used to answer the questions and issues before his community, the evangelists are justifiably seen as paradigms of ministry. In that role they recognized that the major task of the minister is the re-presentation of Jesus Christ.

When the author of the Fourth Gospel concludes with the statement that the Gospel was written to lead his audience to faith in Jesus Christ and to life (John 20:31), his stated intent was scarcely different from the purpose behind each of the four Gospels. Despite the differences in the Gospels, these documents present a shared view of the good news. Together they affirm that Jesus is good news and that he alone is the Christ. Their story ends, not with the cross, but with resurrection and victory. Their miracle stories tell that God's power, which was present in Jesus, remains active in the church. They are also intended to communicate the new possibilities of existence available in Jesus Christ. For each of the gospel writers, the story of Jesus was not to be compared to any other. This story was intended to shape the consciousness and the values of those who heard it.

The achievement of the gospel writers was that the story that they told continued to provide their audience with a coherent vision that would remind them of who they were. The writers recognized the constant temptation for the church to hear other stories and to adapt their ministries to other models. Through the medium of the narrative, the gospel writers confronted the church with its own obligations and destiny. The stories of Jesus and his disciples functioned as paradigms for the later community.

In the achievement of the gospel writers, there is an important resource for the task of the minister. The gospel writers are engaged in making moral demands, challenging false views of ministry, and encouraging bewildered Christians. But through the medium of the story they have given a coherent vision to maintain the continuity between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the later church.¹⁴

While the four Gospels are similar enough to be classified as one genre, their differences are striking and theologically significant. We have, therefore, not one vision of the story, but four. The existence of four Gospels is a reminder that the story of Jesus is never a mere fact of history; it is a narrative that needs to be retold in new situations. Thus the one coherent vision of the savior whom death could not defeat was applied to new issues and situations.

¹⁴See Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), pp. 71-81, for the importance of the story in providing a "way of being in the world," p. 73, and an identity.

It is commonly assumed today that Mark's Gospel was written at a time when the significance of Jesus' suffering and death was in danger of being diminished.¹⁵ At least part of the purpose of Mark was to demonstrate that the death of Jesus was central to the faith. The climactic scene of Peter's confession is the transition toward the death on the cross. If Mark is "a passion narrative with an extended introduction," it is because the author wishes to challenge his readers with the reality of the cross. Mark is a minister intent on reminding his readers that the path to glory is the cross. His theology of the cross challenges the values of his own day, calling his readers to follow the one who went to the cross.

As an evangelist Mark presents stories about discipleship that answer the question "What does it mean to be a Christian?" The disciples of Mark's Gospel become the prototypes of every Christian. They learn that discipleship involves bearing the cross (8:34) and assuming the servant's role. They also learn the concrete demands of the Christian life in daily life through the stories about marriage and divorce (10:1-9), children (10:13-15), and wealth (10:17-22). These stories together indicate Mark's interest in shaping his community—its belief and morals—by a coherent vision of Jesus and his mission.

The Gospel of Matthew also presents a coherent vision of what the church is meant to be. The only one of the four evangelists to use the word "church" writes as a minister concerned to remind his readers of the church's agenda. Despite claims to the contrary circulating in Matthew's community, the church is the community that remains faithful to the law as interpreted by Jesus. In place of the "yoke" of the Torah as interpreted by the rabbinic halakah, Matthew's community is faithful to the yoke of Jesus (Matt. 11:28-30). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges the disciples with a radical obedience as an alternative to the "righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees." The agenda of the church, according to Matthew, is doing the will of God (7:21). He is especially concerned that the church embody a life of mercy. In his Gospel the entire law and the prophets "hinge" on the twofold command to love (22:40).¹⁶ The judgment at the eschaton will consist of questions asked of the church about its treatment of "the least of Jesus' brethren" (25:40).

The agenda for the church is given in clear focus in Matthew 18, where Matthew addresses the needs for the church. The church is here authorized to bind and loose in Jesus' name (18:18). In its communal life in worship, the Lord is present. Its task is to conduct its corporate life in such a way that none of the "little ones" are lost. The whole community apparently has the pastoral

¹⁵Achtemeier, p. 160.

¹⁶See G. Barth, "Matthew's Understanding of the Law," in G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and H. J. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 77-78.

responsibility of finding those who go astray and nurturing the corporate life. Matthew writes to remind his readers of the tradition that continues to nourish the identity of a church that is authorized to bind and loose in Jesus' name. The authority to represent Jesus in his mission is, according to Matthew's Gospel, vested in the church.

The two-volume work Luke-Acts extends the coherent vision of the church's task. The sequel is not, however, an appendix to the story. Luke's intention, as announced in Acts 1:1, is to continue the same story. Volume one had recorded only what "Jesus began to do and teach." The mission of the church in Acts is to continue the mission that Jesus initiated in the original story. The ministers of the church in Acts—Peter, John, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Aquila and Priscilla—are to carry on a legacy that began in the ministry of Jesus and received a new power on Pentecost. Acts is the book of church growth; the legacy is the proclamation of Christ and the establishment of churches. The ministers in Acts are remembered for their roles in missionary activity and teaching. Luke's hero is obviously Paul, whose missionary travels take him to the capital of the empire.

If the task of the church in Acts is the expansion of Christianity and the establishment of churches, it is because the church has its roots in the prophetic vision of Isaiah 49 and 61. Jesus' ministry of "good news for the poor" (Luke 4:18-21) extended first to the oppressed Israelites in Luke, but the mission extends beyond the Jews. The parable of the banquet, as told in Luke's Gospel, reminds the church's ministers that "still there is room" (Luke 14:22), even after the invitation has been given to those along the highways and byways. Thus, according to Luke's unique perspective, ministry consists primarily of continuing a mission in an expanding circle under the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John was apparently written to a community that faced potential rivals and alternative claims about salvation. Against this background, John writes with the exclusive claim that only Jesus is the way to the Father. The "I am" statements of John's Gospel press the exclusive claims of this Gospel in a world where rival claims are being made. The one who embodies the glory of God on earth meets resistance and rejection from this world (cf. John 1:10-11), a rejection that is shared by his disciples (John 15:20, 17:15). The church in John's Gospel lives in tension with "the world," sharing the fate of its Lord.

Ministry within this context involves the community's care for each other in the context of an alien world.¹⁷ There is little accent in the entire Johannine corpus on special ministries; the twelve and Peter appear to have a diminished role in this literature, as compared with the synoptics. The focus of John's Gos-

¹⁷D. Moody Smith, "Theology and Ministry in John," in *A Biblical Basis for Ministry*, pp. 219-222.

pel is on the loving service of the whole community for each other. The disciples do for each other what Christ has done for them. They love one another as Christ has loved (1 John 4:7-12). Ministry, therefore, is self-giving service within the community.

Paul and His Coworkers

The Pauline epistles were written by one who claimed to be God's minister. Paul refers to himself with a variety of terms that suggest service. He is God's διάκονος (1 Cor. 3:5), ὑπηρέτης (1 Cor. 4:1), οἰκονόμος (1 Cor. 4:1), συνεργός (1 Cor. 3:9), and λειτουργός (Rom. 15:16). Some of these terms are derived from the sphere of religion and cult (i.e., λειτουργός, ὑπηρέτης), and some of them are derived from the sphere of household management. Together they suggest service on behalf of another.

It is only in 2 Corinthians that the words διάκονος and διακονία play an important role in the Pauline literature. The words were apparently introduced by opponents who claimed to be "ministers of Christ." Against the background of opponents who criticized Paul's ministry, the major units of 2 Corinthians contain a defense of Paul's ministry. When Paul's defense in 2 Corinthians is compared with other statements in his letters, the major contours of his understanding of ministry are apparent.

There is a recognition both in 2 Corinthians and elsewhere that the ministry is a task that has been entrusted to the apostle. According to 1 Corinthians 4:1, he is a "steward of the mysteries." He insists that the "mysteries" have come only by revelation from God. Consequently he claims that his words are not his own (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Cor. 5:18-20).¹⁸ Just as the original disciples of Jesus were compelled to follow Jesus, Paul speaks of the divine necessity that was laid upon him (1 Cor. 9:16). He has been, in Käsemann's words, "conscripted into service" for the sake of the proclamation that Jesus is Lord.¹⁹ He is involved in God's great victory parade (2 Cor. 2:14-17) as a minister, and he knows that God alone equips him for such a task (2 Cor. 3:6). This ministry into which he has been called is nothing less than the turn of the ages.

As a "steward of the mysteries," he recognizes fully that he is subservient to the message. Consequently, he neither tampers with the word of God (2 Cor. 4:2) nor treats it like wares to be sold (2 Cor. 2:17), for his proclamation of God's reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) in Jesus Christ has been given to him. He is an emissary (2 Cor. 5:20), and he speaks for another.

His credentials as a minister are stated sharply both in 1 and 2 Corinthians. Because he has been conscripted into service, his ministry consists in being

¹⁸E. Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), p. 81.

¹⁹Käsemann, p. 230.

conformed to the cross. The encounter with the gospel leaves him with the stigmata of Christ on his flesh (Gal. 6:17). He describes himself and other apostles as "condemned to death" (ἐπιθανάτιος). He can rightly compare himself with a gladiator in a worldwide arena, a spectacle to angels and to men, and the dregs in the eyes of everyone (1 Cor. 4:9). In 2 Corinthians he commends his ministry by recounting his sufferings. His entire ministry involves carrying around the dying of Jesus in his flesh (2 Cor. 4:9-10). Like Jesus' disciples, Paul recognizes that Jesus' ambassadors share the fate of their Lord.

Paul's destiny and calling as a minister lie behind his refusal to accept financial support for his work. While he has the right to such support (1 Cor. 9:5-7) and is on some occasions dependent on other churches (2 Cor. 11:8), he does not make a claim to financial support. In a world where financial support conferred legitimacy and where taking up a trade was considered humiliating,²⁰ Paul plied his trade. The fact that he "worked with his hands" (1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Thess. 2:9) suggested his willingness to "spend and be spent" for the souls of his churches (2 Cor. 12:15). His craft involved wearisome toil (2 Cor. 6:5; 11:27) and a life of having nothing, of being poor (2 Cor. 6:10). Unlike the opponents who enslave the church with their demands (2 Cor. 11:20), Paul is the διάκονος for the church.

As a διάκονος of his communities, Paul suffers a load of anxiety for them (2 Cor. 11:28). His letters indicate that he is more than evangelist, for his correspondence shows his ongoing concern for the church. He writes because there are pastoral problems, and the images he uses indicate the role that he assumes for himself.²¹ He writes as father (1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Thess. 2:11) and mother (Gal. 4:19; 1 Thess. 2:7b)²² who know that parental responsibilities are not yet completed. He is the anxious father of the bride (2 Cor. 11:2) who is concerned to preserve the purity of his daughter. He is also the architect whose concern is to build his churches on a solid foundation (1 Cor. 3:10). His images suggest anxious concern over his churches, not autocratic rule.

Bengt Holmberg has observed that, in Paul's role as father of his churches, he seldom uses the words for "command."²³ Paul makes no claim to "lord it over" his churches, for he is their servant and "fellow worker" (cf. 2 Cor. 1:24). His letters consist largely of what he would have said if he had been present with the local communities. Like the four evangelists, he reaffirms the narrative that shapes the consciousness of his audience. In the light of the word

²⁰See Ronald Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), p. 64.

²¹Knox, p. 8.

²²See Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 77-79.

²³Ibid., pp. 83-84.

that he preaches, he appeals to his audiences to live a life that is worthy of this gospel (Phil. 1:27). He wants to establish at least the outlines of a common halakhic practice among his churches,²⁴ and thus he appeals to them to observe moral norms that are expected in all of the churches. He writes also to ward off a schism and to deal with differences of opinion. In addition, he writes in order to clarify a situation by appealing to the authoritative tradition.²⁵ His distinctive way of urging his churches toward a particular behavior is his repeated use of *παρακαλέιν*, a term that reflects Paul's status as a brother rather than an autocrat.²⁶ Paul often appeals to his readers to adopt a particular moral quality, but he seldom commands.

Although Paul sees himself as the recipient of a special ministry (Rom. 11:13), his references to colleagues is a reminder that others shared in his ministry. He and Apollos together are *διάκονοι* and *συνεργοί* of God. If he laid a foundation, others legitimately "build on" to the original foundation (1 Cor. 3:10). In keeping with the metaphor of the building, the task of all ministries combined is *οικοδομή*. Paul is a builder of churches, and his associates follow his model. Together, according to 1 Corinthians 3:9, they were God's fellow workers. In many instances, they are regarded as Paul's coworkers (cf. Rom. 16:13ff.; Philemon 24; Phil. 4:2f.; Phil. 2:25). Thus Paul assumed that others would continue his work of proclamation and building churches.

Some of Paul's coworkers functioned as his special itinerant envoys in proclaiming the gospel.²⁷ Timothy and Titus are regarded as Paul's fellow workers and representatives in teaching (1 Cor. 4:17) and doing the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 16:10). The Corinthians are told to accept Titus as Paul's partner (*κοινωνός*) and fellow worker (2 Cor. 8:23). As Paul's emissary, Titus shares all of the anxiety, encouragement, and joy that Paul experiences. Timothy has the authority to remind the Corinthians of Paul's ways (1 Cor. 4:17). Tychicus encourages a distant church and informs the members of Paul's activities (Eph. 6:21). Perhaps Euodia and Syntyche are also traveling emissaries of Paul, for the Philippians are asked to "receive" them; they have shared Paul's struggles in the spreading of the gospel. The emissaries have the same right to financial support that Paul can claim (1 Cor. 16:11). These fellow workers are primarily envoys of the apostle, empowered to speak and act for him, communicating in his absence what he would say if he were there (cf. Eph. 6:21).²⁸

In addition to the traveling emissaries, there were ministers of the local congregations. Erastus is an *ἀπόστολος* and *λειτουργός* of the Phi-

²⁴Ibid., p. 73.

²⁵Knox, p. 8.

²⁶Holmberg, pp. 83-84.

²⁷Ibid., p. 57.

²⁸Ibid.

lippians who is commissioned to minister to Paul's needs in spreading the gospel (Phil. 2:25). Epaphras, as a local *διάκονος* in Colossae who is authorized to teach the Colossians, is constantly anguished about the fate of the Colossian church (Col. 4:12). There are also special servants in Corinth led by Stephanas, who "ministers to" the local church (1 Cor. 16:15-16). In addition, there are tasks in the early church that are mentioned without any reference to the individuals who perform them. Paul refers in Galatians 6:6 to the teacher who has the right to remuneration. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12 he refers to the *κοπιῶντας* and *προϊσταμένοι*, whose task is to admonish. All of these references appear to point to a specific ministry that was entitled to recognition and esteem by the community.²⁹

The relationship of Paul and his coworkers offers an appropriate paradigm for our understanding of the ministry. Paul recognized that the task of building churches required the contribution of those who served in his absence. They shared his submission to the message, the right to remuneration, the task of proclamation and teaching, and the "anxiety for the churches" (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28). Where alternative models of the ministry were offered, as at Corinth, there was a recognition that the Christian ministry has its model in the fate of Jesus, not in the cultural models.

Summary and Conclusion

We come to the conclusion of this study seeking answers that the New Testament, with its variety of witnesses, did not seek to answer. The New Testament offers no uniform view of ministry to be used to deal with our problems over roles and models of ministry. Nevertheless, because the major witnesses in the New Testament speak as evangelists and ministers, they offer important paradigms to a religious environment that is confused over its models for ministry. Despite the diversity of the New Testament, there is a consistency in the biblical vision of the ministry from which to derive a coherent view of ministry.

1. There is a consistent view that ministry consists in the telling of a story that will alter the hearers' perception of reality. Jesus' parables opened the eyes of his hearers to a new world that was breaking into history. The evangelists told a story that was an alternative to other stories by which men shaped their lives. Paul was certain that his proclamation was God's wisdom that was inaccessible to human reasoning. The story was intended to shape the imagination of the church and give the community its identity.

2. Ministry consists of a life that bears the marks of Christ (Gal. 6:17). The criterion for the special servants of Jesus was to share his fate. Similarly, the authentic minister in the Pauline corpus is willing to work with his hands, be

²⁹Ellis, p. 443.

deprived financially, and become the "offscouring of all things" because he is at the disposal of Christ and the communities with which he has worked.

3. If ministry involves communicating a new vision of truth, it also involves the communication of a new moral vision. The proclamation of the kingdom in Jesus' ministry was accompanied by the call to repent and concrete details about the life-style that accompanies repentance. The task of building and serving churches meant for Paul reminders about the moral demands of the gospel and concrete advice about a behavior "worthy" of the gospel.

4. The task of the minister also involves the interpretation of the Scripture and theological reflection. Jesus' ministry at Nazareth consisted of his interpretation of Scripture and his new understanding of the ancient text. The evangelists placed before their congregations gospels that were intended to offer a theological perspective to protect the church from false or inadequate views. Paul's task as father-of-the-bride was to provide sound theological reflection as an alternative to misleading and destructive views.

If there is currently a temptation to import models of ministry from management, the social sciences, or academia, the New Testament sources indicate the inadequacy of all nonbiblical models. Indeed, the early church once rejected the cultural models with its memory of the cross. The New Testament concept of ministry, rooted in the scandal of the cross, is a reminder that the emissaries of Christ continue his legacy when they share his fate.