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Baptists and the Ministry

INTRODUCTION

THE purpose of this brief introduction is to indicate something of the scope and intention of other articles to follow in this series. What is written here is intended merely to show the broad outlines of matters to be discussed in each article, and it is possible that as the series progresses some adjustments of detail may have to be made.

The first article will deal with the Priesthood of all Believers. This is a phrase so familiar to us all. It is a conception which we are liable to define rather vaguely in our minds as lying at the heart of much Reformation theology and meaning that every Christian is some sort of a minister. But what did Martin Luther really teach about this concept? Has there been any misinterpretation of his thought? Or has it simply been taken to its logical conclusion? These and similar questions need to be faced at the outset of a series such as we plan. This first article, which will consider Luther's thought and its implications, will be written for us by an eminent Lutheran scholar. It will be of great value to have the situation presented to us from outside our own ranks.

Having laid the foundation of our thinking in the first article, we shall move, in the second, to a consideration of the nature of the Ministry. In this the question of the call to the Ministry will be discussed, both the call of God to a man to serve Him and the confirmatory call of a local church to a man to be its minister. In this context a discussion on the meaning and purpose not only of Ordination but also of Induction will naturally be in place. This will lead to the problem of the authority which a minister may be reckoned to possess and also whether the situation demands that there should be any distinction between the sexes in the matter of the Ministry.

But in the present situation all are called to exercise their ministry within the life of a particular denomination, and so the third article will consider the Ministry and the Church in the life of the Baptist denomination. This will raise the issue of the relationship between Ordination and Accreditation. The reasons for, and the theory behind, the Accredited and the Probationers Lists will be

examined. Are these lists theological or organizational? Or are they a little of each? Then again, the institution and development of the office of Area Superintendent needs consideration. Is such an appointment theologically compatible with Baptist principles? All this is another way of asking whether the Baptist Union can or should be viewed in any way theologically. Or is it merely a convenient organization? Three further matters will probably be touched on in this article, namely, the question of missionaries, their ordination and status, the position of ordained ministers in non-pastoral office, whether in theological colleges or universities or schools or elsewhere, and finally the status of deaconesses.

After considering the minister in his denominational setting the next article will look at the Ministry in the local church. This raises the issue immediately as to the responsibilities which belong to the minister on the one hand and the church meeting on the other. Whether the authority in the local church under the divine guidance resides in the minister or congregation, or in both acting together and if in both, what happens when they cannot agree? At this point, too, it will be necessary to consider the layman and the ministerial service which he renders, whether as lay pastor or lay preacher. In view of our firm conviction of the right of the church to invite a layman (or a lay woman) not only to preach but also to administer the Lord's Supper, we need to see clearly the basis of such a conviction, especially as our practice in this matter causes great difficulty to other Christians. Then, in the life of the local church, the office of deacon requires examination in the light of Baptist belief and practice. It may be felt that we do not always accord to this office the dignity and responsibility that it deserves. Should there be any question of ordaining men and women to any office in the local church, to the diaconate for example? There must also be a consideration of the other offices in the local church, whether Sunday-school teacher, youth club leader or caretaker. All need to be seen as part of the life and service in the local church—the Body of Christ.

The fifth and final article will sum up the series. Let no one of us think that this series is going to be able to answer all the questions. In fact it will probably raise more issues than it solves and we shall certainly not all agree with what will be written. Yet it is confidently hoped that the series will serve to clarify points which are generally accepted and also indicate those issues upon which further study and thought are needed. It will be the purpose of the final article to draw together the threads. The hope is also that in this last article certain suggestions can be made for subjects to be dealt with in subsequent articles in this journal. In this way, although the particular series will have ended, the discussion will go on.

This series, then, will be in a real sense a necessary adventure into present-day Baptist theology. Like most adventures we are confident that it will prove interesting and profitable. It may also turn out to be not a little dangerous!

THE EDITOR

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