Diverse forms of Ministry

The Military Chaplaincy

The ministry of the Word is seen in many aspects of Christian action. Historically the four offices of the Reformed faith reflect definitive functions of the ministry. Changing situations provide for other reasonable manifestations of this holy calling. The chaplaincy is recognized as a vocation within the order of events. Where people are, there the church must have clergy. The military establishment composed of men from all walks of life, farm and factory, business and profession deserves a ministry of the Word distinctive in its identity with soldier needs and normal in response to church order.

The military chaplaincy is not particularly set apart from other functions of the ministry of the Word. The differences are experiential. Soldiers separated from home and fireside are subjects of a discipline. This discipline demands a full loyalty of time and effort. They are engaged in an adventure involving the whole person. The rod and the staff, the valley of the shadow, peace among men of good will and the pursuit of a freedom for nations of like mind and heart are inherent concepts which give life to the adventure. Distinctively, chaplains as ministers of the Word must love, live, and cherish the spirit of this adventure as an essential fiber of their being.

The companion of adventure is sensitivity. Soldiers grow old only after retirement. Therefore, chaplains absorb frustration, share hopes, and vitalize dreams. They are concerned with moral courage and the refining upward thrust of youthful ambitions into the Father heart of God. The Word and the Sacraments undergird the complexity of all their effort. They are shared as the enlivening gifts of God. Adventure and sensitivity are the brands of a chaplain’s vocation.

Charity by the very nature of the holy calling must be considered as an every day experiential norm. Chaplains come from many religious disciplines. The people they serve bring with them loyalties to their own household of faith. These loyalties may be strong conviction or mere preference. Only a very few of our people deny a faith. When paths meet the shadows of the valley a chaplain stands at their crossroad under the sign of the cross or the star of David. His closest friend and companion at home or abroad, in peace or war, on bivouac or the battlefield is a chaplain of another faith. In quiet moments the dialogue of differences and great truths mutually cherished obtain height and depth. Long before the

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contemporary dialogue in the ivory towers and the market place the charity of our Lord marked friendships born out of the love of God. We live and die together. The rule of our Lord's charity applied in the society of men long since forced hands to reach out and meet over the boundaries of creeds and races. The unspoken greeting, "You are my brother," brings the responsive cordiality without which all causes are lost.

Supporting a chaplain as a minister of the Word is his initial calling, background, training, and the pulsation of the interior ties within the body of Christ outside of which there is no salvation. The Lord of the church rules. He brings into action the experiential inclinations of noble adventure, keen sensitivity, and reasonable charity. The chaplaincy is a ministry of the Word.

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THE CALL TO PREACH (Continued from page 4)

part charismatic, and if by institutional one can mean contributing to the growth and orderly function of the church, it was also in every part institutional."¹ This does not mean, of course, that we can equate the formally structured offices of a later period with these rather loosely defined ministries of the New Testament church. Yet it is clear that the church was not without its acknowledged leaders. The picture that emerges is one of a "large charismatic circle" that includes all God's people, all the members of Christ's body, but within which some members with unusual gifts are set apart for special ministries with official standing.² In other words, there was an official group, but the qualification for it was that these officers should possess certain gifts. Out of the fellowship of gifted persons, the official ministry was chosen.

It is this conception that underlies the Reformed understanding of "offices" in the church, particularly, in this connection the office of "minister of the Word." The Reformed view is rooted deeply in the conviction we have noted before: namely, that specific ministries within the church are given and established by Christ Himself. In other words, as Howard Hageman notes, we stand together with Presbyterian, Episcopal, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches, and over against Baptist, Congregationalist, and sectarian churches in our view of the ministry.³ The basic question at issue is, "Does the ministry come from Christ, as a part of his appointment, or does it come from the church as an aspect of its own domestic arrangement?" The Reformed Church answer is clear. As our original Liturgy puts it, "The pastoral office is an institution of Christ." The church does not make men ministers of the Word; it recognizes those whom God has gifted for this particular work. As P. T. Forsyth crisply observes, "The preacher has not