

# Pulpit & People

**Essays in honour of William Still  
on his 75th birthday**

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# CHURCH AND MINISTRY IN 1 TIMOTHY

## I. HOWARD MARSHALL

It has been observed by no less a scholar than Rudolf Bultmann that presuppositionless exegesis is impossible; that is to say, we cannot avoid being influenced in our study of Scripture by all that has gone to make us what we are, and therefore we must at least try to be aware of our predispositions and allow for them in our study. I first sat in Gilcomston South Church of Scotland in 1946 shortly after William Still began his ministry there, and before long I became a fairly regular attender at Sunday evening services and mid-week Bible Studies. A continuing personal friendship with Willie, developed especially during my period of leadership of the Evangelical Union in the University, and the impact of his preaching and teaching during my student years have been a major influence in my life. Whether, therefore, what follows in this essay represents 'objective' study of the New Testament or whether it has been influenced by what I have learned from William Still is left to the reader to judge; for my part I believe that this important 'presupposition' in my life has led me to perceive more clearly what is objectively there in the New Testament, and for this I am grateful to God and to his servant as a minister of his Word.

The question of ministry in 1 Timothy and in the Pastorals generally is probably the most discussed topic in these letters. Many people would trace, rightly or wrongly, a kind of evolution of church order from the rudiments that we find in Paul's earliest epistles (1 Thess. and Gal.) to the more developed charismatic type of situation reflected in 1 Corinthians and then on to the more settled and regulated type of system in the Pastorals. This evolution can then be traced in the direction of a more elaborate and rigid system in the developing catholic church, and it has probably affected most of mainstream Christianity in our day. Nevertheless, there has been a return to a type of charismatic church order in certain quarters today, and of course there has always been a tradition of a much more free type of church order in so-called Free Church circles. Since the Pastorals contain some of the fullest teaching on ministry, it is not surprising that people regularly turn to them for guidance on this topic. In view of the reconsideration of charismatic influences in the church today the question of what the Pastorals teach is all the more interesting. We shall confine our attention to 1 Timothy, and it will be helpful for us first of all to consider the nature of the church as seen in the epistle.

### The Nature of the Church

The word church (*ekklesia*) is found only three times in 1 Timothy.

We can pass over 5:16 where the word 'church' simply refers to the local congregation. The other two uses are more significant. In 3:5 the qualifications for a bishop include that he must be able to manage his household well, since otherwise he will not be able to care for God's church. This suggests that there is some similarity between the church and a household, and this is confirmed by the remaining text, 3:15, which refers to 'the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth'. The word translated 'household' is simply *oikos* which can mean a house as a building but here must mean the entire set-up of a family including husband, wife, children and any other relatives together with the slaves. The church functions in the same sort of way as a family of this kind. The picture of the church as a house also appears in 2 Tim. 2:20f. which refers to the various utensils that may be used by the master of the house.

The term 'house' has a history in relation to its use with reference to God. A house is usually thought of as a dwelling, and it was common for a temple to be known as the house of God; this phrase is used of the Jewish temple or its predecessor, the tabernacle, in Mk. 2:26; 11:17; Jn. 2:16f. In the OT the idea that the temple is the actual house of God, as in some pagan religions, is avoided. The temple is rather the place where God is present to communicate with his people, and it is recognised that he is too great to be confined within a manmade building. In the NT it is recognised that God is present in the midst of his believing people. It is they rather than a building who constitute the temple or shrine of God, and this can be affirmed by Paul both of the individual believer (1 Cor. 6:19) whose body is the temple (*naos*) of the Holy Spirit and also of the community of believers who form the temple of God in which the Holy Spirit dwells and who are therefore holy (1 Cor. 3:16f.). It is interesting that in this context Paul thinks of the church as a building erected upon a foundation which is Christ himself; here Paul is thinking of the local congregation at Corinth, and when he says that he himself laid the foundation it seems probable that he is thinking of the apostolic teaching about Jesus. We find that Paul also speaks of believers as forming the temple of God in 2 Cor. 6:16 and therefore as people who cannot consistently join themselves to the worshippers of idols; God is in their midst and therefore they are his holy people. Further, we have the important passage in Ephesians 2:19-22 where believers, both Jews and Gentiles, form the house or household of God, built upon a solid foundation of the apostles and prophets (which must surely be a reference to their teaching) and with Christ as the principal stone; thus they form a holy temple in which God dwells by the Spirit. Here, then, we have the thoughts of the family or household and the temple closely joined together.

In 1 Tim. 3:15 the idea of the household is probably the dominant one. Is it significant that the writer talks about the house of God and then goes on to explain that it is the church rather than talking about the church and then going on to explain that it is the household of God?

Why this strange form of expression? It seems that his uppermost thought is that of the conduct which is appropriate for those who are members or leaders in the household of God, and which has already come to expression in 3:5. Then he goes on to qualify the household of God by stating two further things about it.

The first is that it is the church *of the living God*. What is the fresh point that is being made by this addition which seems rather superfluous? It may be significant that already in 2 Cor. 6:16 Paul has spoken of believers as constituting a temple and he states that it is the temple of the living God. The reference to the house of God as being the church of the *living* God may well suggest that the thought is partly of the living presence of God among his people. The intention may be to emphasise the solemnity of the instructions. Thus the idea of a discipline within the church comes to expression. And this may be important in view of the presence of heresy within the church. Heresy is inconsistent with obedience to the Lord. Furthermore, may there be a hint that the church is indeed *the ekklesia* of God? It is *the* people of God over against the Jewish synagogue, and therefore the attempt of the heretics to turn it into a synagogue is uncalled for.

The fact that heresy is in mind is further to be seen in the second qualification, namely that the church is *the pillar and foundation of the truth*. The expression tends to identify the truth with the church rather than to say that the church is merely a sort of outside buttress which helps to prop up a truth which somehow exists independently of it. The church is to be the place where the truth is found, and thus it must be the entity by which the truth is supported. The truth is almost thought of as a sort of roof held up by a pillar established on a solid foundation. Yet at the same time the church is surely itself based on the truth. Hence the importance of truth in the church is stressed, and once again the background of heresy in the church comes to mind. The church must stand firm as the defender of the truth against heresy.

Thus the maintenance of godly order in the church, which depends upon a properly instituted set of leaders, is closely tied up with the character of the church as the foundation of truth. It is because of the nature of the church as the foundation of the truth over against the attacks of heresy that there must be such care taken about the character of its leaders. All this leads naturally to the question of the function of the leaders.

### The Importance of Teaching

One of the points that most demands attention in the present-day church is the great emphasis in the NT generally and especially in 1 Timothy on teaching as a central activity in early Christian meetings. Our tendency is to think of such meetings as being for the primary purpose of worship, in the sense of the service that we render to God. Consequently the attention gets directed to liturgy, which of course

means service, and to what we do towards God. For some people the word 'liturgical' seems to mean rather the involvement of the members of the congregation in some kind of verbal and even bodily activity by the provision of responses and other material in which everybody can join, instead of just sitting passively except for rising to sing hymns and putting one's hand into the collection plate. Insofar as 'liturgical' signifies the involvement of the congregation I am all for it. But the word can shift the emphasis away from something else that is vital. It is the fact that the church meeting is a place for our listening to what God has to say to us. Two activities take place simultaneously. The one is that we all of us listen to what the Lord our God has to say to us. We come together to hear his word. The other thing is that his word must be declared, and this is done by some of the very people who are there to listen to it. They share their listening with others and so become the agents of God's further speaking to the congregation as a whole.

The problem which surfaces in 1 Timothy is the activity of people who are promoting strange ideas in the church that are not in accord with the author's understanding of the Christian faith and in fact take people away from it. Heresy can of course have disastrous effects on behaviour, but the starting point is usually in false teaching. And it is this that is a major concern in 1 Timothy. The author sees a twofold antidote to it.

On the one hand, he stresses the importance of Christian character, especially faith and love, and he wants to divert attention from heretical teaching that leads to dissension and to turn his congregations to genuine love and harmony. But at the same time he sees the need to engage with heresy by presenting sound teaching in its place. He will not waste time in futile arguments over nonsense, but at the same time he is prepared to discuss with people in the church who are misled and some parts of the letter are meant to be a reply to heretical teaching (1:8-11; 4:4f.; 6:6-10). But above all he wants to see the true faith properly presented. He doesn't use the Pauline word 'edification' (*oikodome*), but that is what he has in mind.

This points us to one of the great stresses of the letters. The writer sees the main duty of all Christian 'leaders' (we use this vague word for the moment) as being teaching. A study of the vocabulary used in the letter would quickly establish how important this theme is. But the most helpful way for us to approach the matter may be to look quickly at the various church leaders who are mentioned.

(1) What is the picture of *Paul himself*? The whole letter consists of instructions to be taught to the congregation which he is transmitting to Timothy to pass on to them. He presents himself as a preacher and apostle and a teacher (2:7). The verse is intriguing. The use of preacher, Gk. *keryx*, herald, is found only here and in 2 Tim. 1:11 where the same triad is repeated, and in 2 Pet. 2:5 of Noah (who may be tacitly a 'type' for the Christian preacher). 'Apostle' we already know as Paul's favourite self-description, but here the company it

keeps must give it a particular sense. 'Teacher' is the operative word, linked as it is to 'of the Gentiles'; Paul does not use it of himself in his earlier letters. Now is this picture of Paul as teacher 'different' and hence possibly emphatic? It is certainly in harmony with his earlier picture of himself. Paul regards himself as the instructor of his congregations, who gives them commands and exhortations to follow. Similarly in Acts 11:26 the function of Paul along with Barnabas at Antioch is to teach the church. The picture seems to me to be a consistent one. The fact that Paul is an apostle gives his teaching authority. This is apparent from the way in which in 2 Tim. 1:13 Paul speaks of the pattern of sound words which Timothy has received from him. See also 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:14. Thus when Paul is described here as a teacher, this simply brings out the meaning of the word 'apostle'; earlier in 1 Cor. 4:1 he described himself and Apollos as 'servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God', and the point here is just the same.

(2) Next we should look at the situation of *Timothy*. The word which sums up his position is 'servant (Gk. *diakonos*) of Jesus Christ' (4:6) which indicates formally at least his position. But this is straightway expanded by reference to his being nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which he has followed. Timothy is thus able to be a servant of Jesus Christ inasmuch as he has been taught. His duties, therefore, are public reading, preaching and teaching. The first of these is generally understood to be the reading of the OT, but it is possible that by this date the reading of early Christian documents was in mind. We may find a hint in this direction in 5:18 where the writer quotes both an Old Testament text (Dt. 25:4) and a saying of Jesus recorded in Lk. 10:7 as being from 'the scripture'. Again Timothy is to take heed to his teaching, so that he may save both himself and his hearers. Thus his role as a teacher is clear.

(3) As for the *church leaders* who are to be appointed, we note that there are some elders who labour in preaching and teaching and are to be given double honour. The qualifications for the potential bishop include, admittedly rather incidentally, that he is to be apt to teach (3:3; cf. Tit. 1:9). His other tasks involve caring for the church, and that is all that is said; from the lack of mention of other duties we may safely argue that teaching was an essential element in his task. It should be observed that the noun translated 'preaching' (Gk. *logos*) is really to be translated 'word'. 'Word' and 'teaching' are joined together in 6:3 and 'word' and 'doctrine' in 4:6; hence we can assume that the activity of the elders is primarily in doctrinal teaching.

(4) Were there *any other teachers* in the church? We hear of prophetic utterances in connection with the 'ordination' of Timothy (1:18; 4:14), and also there are reports of prophetic utterances by the Spirit regarding conditions in the last days (4:1), but nothing is said about who exercised this ministry. We certainly cannot rule out the existence of persons with the gift of prophecy as in 1 Cor. 12 and

elsewhere.

(5) Is it significant that some of the 'heretics' wanted to be '*teachers of the law*'? Where exactly does this fit into the life of the church? I suspect that these people may have wished to turn the church back into a kind of synagogue. If so, this would further confirm that the church was seen as a place for teaching, since this is precisely what the synagogue itself was.

From all this it emerges that a major element in the life of the church was teaching, and that the need arose particularly from the fact that the heresy was being promulgated by people who were acting as teachers. They probably wanted to turn the church back into some kind of synagogue with 'teachers of the law' as its leading members. The author holds that bad teaching is to be dealt with by better teaching, by the clear and compelling presentation of the apostolic tradition.

#### Church Leaders

We have singled out the importance of teaching in 1 Timothy as one of the elements which arises out of the nature of the church, namely in its function as the foundation and pillar of the truth. Now we take a further look at the task of leadership or management which arises out of the nature of the church as the household of God.

In 3:1 the writer speaks about the character of a bishop. By this term we are to understand a local church leader, probably also known as an elder in view of the clear equation in Tit. 1:5, 7. It is often thought that elders and bishops are synonymous terms, so that there would have been a plurality of bishops in a local church, but it is possible that by this time a smaller number of people, or even only one, within a local group of elders were being given special tasks as bishops. The task of a bishop is said to be a good work. Elsewhere good works are spoken of in a broad sense (5:10, 25; 6:18) and they are to be the characteristic of all believers. But a narrower sense seems demanded here in the context. The writer appears rather to be commending the desire to act as a church leader of this kind.

The writer is mainly concerned with the character of the potential bishop. He has to fulfil various requirements, which can be summarised as:

(1) Living at a standard of morality recognised by secular society at large, and hence having a good reputation among people outside the church. This point can be demonstrated by observing how some of the qualities are the same as those found in secular lists of the time setting out the qualities required for various kinds of officials.

(2) Having a character that is the opposite of that which the writer ascribes to the heretics. If we were to compare the vices of the heretics who are condemned in the Pastoral Epistles with the good qualities desired in church leaders, we should find that there are many correspondences between them. This indicates that part of the reason for the appointment of bishops is to deal with the heretical situation in the church.

(3) Having various characteristics directly related to his role in the church. A bishop must be hospitable: this may refer both to welcoming travelling Christians and to welcoming the church into his home. (This is a characteristic of believers in general in 1 Pet. 4:9). He must be able to teach. He must be able to manage his own household well and this means that he must be able to command obedience from his children. Otherwise he will not be able to lead the church, since the church is thought of as a household. We thus have in effect three church-related characteristics: hospitality; teaching ability; firm leadership.

Thus there were people in the church who had some kind of authority over the other members. The extreme case of the exercise of such authority would be in the excommunication of members, exercised by Paul himself in the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20) and earlier by the church meeting at Corinth (1 Cor. 5). But we are told very little about how the bishops were to lead the church, and our best policy may be to consider the role ascribed to Timothy himself and assume that the task of a bishop would be modelled on his.

Since the deacons are discussed after the bishops, and since the description is shorter, it seems likely that they are less important. The actual word 'deacon' (Gk. *diakonos*) is of course used for all servants in the church. The qualifications are similar to those for bishops. There is no mention of their leading the church, but they are not to be greedy for gain, which may suggest financial responsibilities in charitable care. But they are also to hold the mystery of the faith with a good conscience, which might perhaps suggest a teaching role. They are also not to serve unless they have fulfilled a period of probation; this is probably to avoid the possibility that they are recent converts (as in 3:6). It is not clear whether bishops were to be chosen from among the deacons. Only men with wives and households are in mind. If they do their job well (cf. 5:17) they gain a good 'stand' for themselves and much assurance in the faith. Again the wording is obscure. It is unlikely to mean a step in promotion and is more likely to be a 'good standing' or reputation; one commentator appears to suggest that they have a good position from which to evangelise and also that they gain in assurance, which may mean the ability to witness in the world. Unfortunately deacons are not mentioned again in the Pastorals, so we are left in the dark about their functions. Space prevents a discussion of whether 3:11 refers to deacons' wives or to female deacons.

Next we must ask about the elders who are mentioned in 5:17 and how they are related to the other leaders. Those who lead well — the word is the same as in 3:5 — are to receive double honour. Perhaps this just means additional honour. In any case it distinguishes one group of elders either from those who do not 'lead' at all or from those who do so badly or perhaps from those who have minor as opposed to major responsibilities. Included among those to receive double honour are especially those who labour in word and teaching. This suggests that the reference is to those who have greater functions. Now this takes us

back to the reference to elders in 5:1 where Timothy is told not to rebuke older men: the word is the same, but the reference here must be simply to people in the older age group. They are to be respected because of their age. The implication is that Timothy is a young office-bearer. Does the word *presbyteros* then simply mean 'old person' throughout, as has sometimes been urged? There are difficulties with this view (especially in 4:14 which suggests that an office of eldership existed or that the old men/elders ordained Timothy, and in Tit. 1:5 unless this verse means that Titus is to appoint certain of the old men as bishops). Nevertheless, it may give a good sense here. It may well be that there was a certain fluidity in church organisation with the result that the older men generally exercised a role in the community by reason of their age, and some were preeminent among the others by doing the tasks of the bishops. The situation is problematic in that in the ancient world there were only the two categories of young men and old men, with the rather hazy dividing line coming at the age of forty. There was to be respect shown by the young to the old, and this could cause problems with young church leaders like Timothy (4:12) and probably Titus (cf. Tit. 2:15). Travelling missionaries must have included younger people who were fit for the task in a way in which older people were not. Moreover in the local church we also have people who seek to be bishops. Thus in some cases younger people might be specially marked out to be church leaders (what is known in the academic world as 'accelerated promotion'), while in the case of the older people they were at least honoured and had some influence simply through being old people.

As for the position of Timothy himself, he is regarded by Paul as his co-worker and fellow missionary. He is best understood as having the office or function of an evangelist, a person who fulfils a role like Paul himself as a church-planter to use the modern jargon. He is in charge of the churches in the area of Ephesus. Here the analogy of Titus, left in Crete to appoint bishops in every town, is in mind. On this view Timothy functions like Paul himself with authority given him by a group of church leaders (4:14) including Paul himself (2 Tim. 1:6). Although he occupies a supervisory position over a number of churches (perhaps akin to a diocesan bishop in the modern sense), he nevertheless is to demonstrate the kind of character and qualifications that should be shown by church leaders in general. The whole of the Pastoral Epistles thus function as a pattern for all church leaders and ministers.

## Conclusion

In our discussion we began from the comments on the nature of the church in 3:14-16 and saw that the church is seen both as the foundation of the truth and as the household of God. The teaching about ministry in the epistle is related to these two characteristics.

(1) On the one hand, great stress is laid on the need for *teaching*

which will expound the apostolic gospel and will enable the church to resist heresy. It goes without saying that the character of the teacher must be in harmony with his message. This emphasis on teaching as what takes place when God's people gather together as a church is fully in line with Paul's emphasis in 1 Cor. 14:26 that the purpose of the various activities in the meeting is to edify or build up the congregation.

Critics have sometimes claimed that the Pastoral Epistles lay too much emphasis on the preservation of the apostolic deposit. The truth handed down from the past is to be handed on, and there is said to be little if any scope for creativity in the formulation of the message. Truth has become 'static' in a manner unlike Paul. This criticism ignores the fact that Christianity is concerned with the handing down of the faith once delivered to the saints; an initial period of great creativity is to be followed by the preservation of the apostolic witness. The emphasis of the Pastorals on this point is a necessary one.

Whenever there is heresy abroad, then the church must respond with a return to fundamentals. There can still be room for a creative approach to Christian doctrine, bearing in mind that 'the Lord hath more light and truth yet to break forth out of His holy word', but the contribution of the Pastorals is to remind us that creativity can go astray and that the tradition must be firmly held to. It may be that those who are most critical of 1 Timothy on this point are themselves not sufficiently appreciative that the faith has been handed down once and for all to God's people.

(2) On the other hand, it is necessary that the household of God be led by people who are qualified to give it proper *direction and oversight*. But what exactly does 'managing' the church as the household of God mean? The fact that church leaders must be able to manage their own households well suggests that *mutatis mutandis* the leaders of the church must have a similar function. The church meetings have to be organised. One must decide where and when they will be held, possibly who will take part in them, to whom charitable relief is to be given, who is to be listed as a widow, what action is to be taken against heretics, whether discipline is to be called for, and so on. These activities require that people take wise decisions on behalf of the community; even if they are decided by discussion among the members (or by whatever method enables the church to hear the Spirit's guidance), there must still be people to carry them out and no doubt in the course of doing so to use their own initiative and commonsense in making further decisions. Such people may have to tell other members of the community what to do, and their instructions are to be accepted and followed. They have to set an example that others will follow by the moral force of their personality and conduct. All this is involved in leadership.

It is interesting that the use of the verb translated 'manage' (Gk. *prohistemi*) is found as early in Paul's writings as 1 Th. 5:12 where it is

clear that some kind of leadership is present in the church, even though the church also has charismatic ministry. The same thought is also present in 1 Cor. 16:15f. where the subordination of the church to certain people is demanded, namely to people who are involved as Paul's fellow workers in labouring and in the service of the saints. Thus beside the charismatic roles in the church meeting there is a leadership role by some people, including the first converts.

As far back, then, as we can trace in the Pauline churches, we may observe the presence of leaders who held some kind of more permanent role and alongside them the activity of persons who exercised charismatic gifts. To be sure, 'official' and charismatic roles are not to be equated with leadership and teaching respectively. The various tasks in the church cannot be rigidly separated. 'Management' of the church is charismatic in that some of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Cor. 12:28 are directly connected with it, and the bishops in 1 Tim. are to be able to teach. Thus the more charismatic pattern in 1 Cor. and the more 'official' pattern here need not be seen as so very far apart. If the stress in 1 Timothy tends to fall on the need for appointed leaders more than on the duty of each member of the congregation to seek for the gifts of the Spirit, this may be due to the exigencies of the situation, where the presence of heresy demanded a more 'fixed' type of leadership, and should not necessarily be taken as the one and only model for all time.

We see that there are tasks of ministry = teaching and ministry = leadership in the church. In both aspects of ministry the crucial function is to guard what has been entrusted to us by the Lord and to act as his servants.