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Reflections on Ministry in the New Testament*

I. INTRODUCTION

The attempt to relate the contemporary practice of ministry to New Testament structures of thought represents a complicated undertaking which encompasses the broad scope of the fields generally identified as biblical and practical theology. This occasion provides an opportunity, therefore, to consider some aspects of the relationship between these theological disciplines.

The effort to correlate the work of biblical and practical theology must begin at the level of presuppositions. The problem focuses most sharply upon the definition of appropriate foundations for the task. This setting does not permit a review of the process through which biblical and practical theology have achieved their current understanding of their individual tasks. However, when the effort is made to correlate these two fields of endeavor, two issues come immediately to mind which call for some consideration, namely, the problem of biblical authority and the issue of hermeneutical procedures.

1. The Problem of Biblical Authority

In the Christian community the New Testament constitutes a — in the vast majority of cases the — basic point of orientation for understanding ministry. Obviously, this reliance upon the New Testament arises out of certain assumptions concerning biblical authority. Apart from these assumptions there would be little reason to interpret contemporary ministry in the light of New Testament perspectives. In some instances in the past history of the church it appears that inherited ideas regarding the function of the Bible in the life of the church have been adequate. However, the tumultous events of the past two centuries have called for greater precision regarding the issue of biblical authority. Indeed, the fundamental question which confronts both biblical and practical theology at this juncture is this: Why appeal to the New Testament as the basis for understanding and practicing ministry in the current situation? Although we often assume that responsible answers to this question are available, these answers are frequently less satisfactory than we suppose.

Paradoxical as it may appear, the concept of biblical authority is nebulous in many segments of the Christian community. This fact is often

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attributed to the development of historical-critical modes of research during the past two centuries. However, the issue lies more deeply imbedded in the life of the church than such an explanation allows. In fact, we must candidly admit that the church has never produced a compelling statement regarding biblical authority which has been adequate for the total Christian community for an extended period of time. This fact can be explained in part by the apologetic nature of such statements, i.e., these statements are inevitably formulated *against* certain points of view concerning the scriptures. When the crises pass the statements regarding biblical authority sooner or later lose a measure of their original force. Also, it may be that the perennial recurrence of the issue of biblical authority may be traced in part to an unfortunate choice of the term to describe the role of the scriptures in the life of the church, namely, the choice of the term "authority" itself.[1] The frequency with which major publications dealing with the question of biblical authority have appeared in recent years documents contemporary concern with the problem.[2] As the titles of these works show, "scripture" and "canon" have unfortunately been widely used as synonymous terms.[3]

While the Christian community has not succeeded in creating a final statement concerning the precise role of the Bible for its life and ministry, it has, nevertheless, persistently ordered its life according to these writings. As Professor Ernst Käsemann once remarked, "It is simply a fact of history that wherever and whenever the Christian community has gathered together, it has done so around the scriptures." Hence, a paradox has marked the life of the church throughout much of its history: The attempt to define the nature of biblical authority has often resulted in a deficient description of what the church has actually felt impelled to do by its own theological intuition.

In the face of this disheartening ambiguity regarding the role of the scriptures in the life of the church, what reasonable counsel can be advanced, since the church shows no inclination to abandon its historical stance? Certainly, it is not the purpose of this discussion to propose yet another alternative answer to the question of biblical authority. It may be that the reference to the complexity of the question can serve the purpose of this discussion. At the same time, two suggestions may be appropriate here. First, the attempt to relate contemporary ministry to New Testament models and perspectives must sooner or later deal with underlying assumptions concerning the nature of biblical authority.

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[1]R. C. Briggs, INTERPRETING THE NEW TESTAMENT TODAY (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), pp. 276ff.

[2]For representative examples of these works, see the following: Kurt Aland, THE PROBLEM OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON (London: A. R. Mowbray and Co., Limited, 1962); Floyd V. Filson, WHICH BOOKS BELONG TO THE BIBLE? (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957); Willi Marxsen, THE NEW TESTAMENT AS THE CHURCH'S BOOK, trans. Jas. E. Mignard (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972); Ernst Kasemann, ed., DAS NEUE TESTAMENT ALS KANOW (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1970); Inge Lonning, KANON IM KANON (Munchen: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1972).

[3]Cf. R. C. Briggs, INTERPRETING THE NEW TESTAMENT TODAY, pp. 209ff.

Second, practical theology fulfills its theological responsibility to the extent that its proposed patterns and structures of ministry remain consistent with its deliberate and implied assumptions regarding the nature and function of the scriptures.

2. The Problem of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics — the science that deals with the total phenomenon of the transmission of meaning — confronts a problem inherent in human communication. The phenomenon is complicated at the simplest level, as the effort to make oneself "understood" to a friend demonstrates. It is further complicated when the content of the communication is expressed in written form. The phenomenon is further complicated when the author and recipient of the communication are separated by barriers of language, culture, time, and world view. An ultimate dimension of complexity occurs when the document just described is said to represent religious authority. This extended description refers, of course, to the basic contours of the hermeneutical task of contemporary biblical interpretation.

Like the problem of biblical authority, the hermeneutical issue is as old as the scriptures themselves. However, the rise of historical consciousness in modern times has immeasureably enhanced the awareness of the scope of the problem. Since the time of Karl Barth — many would say Friedrich Schleiermacher — the hermeneutical question has not even been temporarily laid to rest.

When practical theology enquires concerning the meaning of the New Testament for contemporary ministry, it raises a primary hermeneutical question. In some respects, practical theology proposes to provide the appropriate laboratory in which hermeneutical assumptions are tested and clarified by reference to the life and work of the church. The consequences of this procedure can be illustrated by reference to a particular example in the traditional stance of the church concerning the life and work of Jesus.

Throughout most of a Christian history the church has derived its model for ministry from the biblical narratives of Jesus' life and work. His words, deeds, perspectives, and attitudes have constituted the basic points of reference for defining ministry. Prior to the rise of critical methodology little objection to this procedure was possible. However, as is well known in this circle, modern biblical scholarship has largely discredited this approach. The discovery of the theological character of the Gospels — documented most forcefully in the work of redaction criticism — clearly precludes the use of the Gospel accounts in this manner. It is clear that we do not have biographical accounts of Jesus' life and work and cannot, therefore, use the biblical writings as authentic representations of Jesus' attitudes, perspectives, and motivation. With the recognition of this fact an entire epoch in biblical and practical theology came to its conclusion, particularly with respect to the use of

the New Testament as a source for defining the mode of contemporary ministry.

Any attempt to provide specific solutions for the problems related to biblical authority and hermeneutics would transcend the structure and purpose of these discussions. At the same time, every interpretation of Christian ministry in our time rests inevitably upon basic assumptions concerning biblical authority and hermeneutical procedures. Perhaps the awareness of this fact provides an appropriate background for subsequent reflection.

II. THE STRUCTURE OR LOCALE OF MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Modern biblical scholarship has often assumed that the way to understanding lies along the path marked by exhaustive analysis of words. Consequently, attempts have been made to analyze the root meaning of stems apart from the context in which they function. The study of the New Testament concept of ministry has largely followed this pattern. To be sure, the detailed exegetical commentaries have appeared in German, French, and British circles still provide a wealth of necessary information. The almost completed German series, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (10 volumes)— now available in English under the title, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* — incorporated the theological dimension of the study. The fruits of this work have been widely disseminated and repetition of this material here would represent an exercise in recapitulation.

The New Testament concept of ministry can also be understood by reference to the offices or ecclesiastical structures which are indicated in the New Testament writings. However, this field, too, has been well plowed in modern times. It is difficult to do more at this point than catalogue the results of this work.

In this discussion we shall approach the New Testament concept of ministry from a point of view which differs in some respects from those described above. It may be helpful to indicate the essential outlines of this approach. In the first place, we are concerned with the idea of "ministry" rather than "the" ministry, i.e., we are concerned with the ministry as the expression of Christian selfunderstanding rather than ministry identified with ecclesiastical structure. Second, we assume that New Testament writings reflect thought and practice at various stages of Christian history and in a variety of geographical locations, i.e., New Testament writings reflect the diversity that marked the history of the early Christian community. Third, the intention here focuses upon the effort to hear what the New Testament actually says. For, as Professor Kümmel has aptly indicated, "The scientific concern with the understanding of the New Testament must, precisely when it is pursued in the context of the church and from the presupposition of faith, take account of the fact that we *can* come to a believing hearing of the message of the New Testament in only *one* way: namely, by seeking to make the utter-

ances of the New Testament understandable, just as their contemporary readers or hearers could or had to understand them. Hence, there is no other access to understanding of the New Testament writings than the method of historical research which is valid for all writings of antiquity."[4] Although such a limitation precludes any serious effort in the area of hermeneutics, it represents the indispensible point of departure for correlating contemporary ministry with the New Testament. Finally, the hope here is that we may be able to grasp a bit more than the material explicitly expresses, i.e., at the edges and beyond the concrete expressions of New Testament writings we may become sensitive to implications and assumptions that do not come to full expression in the New Testament material. For, as Professor Bultmann has pointed out, "The science called New Testament theology has the task of setting forth the *theological thoughts of the New Testament,* both those that are explicitly developed (such as Paul's teaching on the Law, for example) and those that are implicitly at work in narration or exhortation, in polemic or consolation."[5] For example, numerous words express some dimension of the idea of ministry in the Old Testament, such as *sharah,*† *kalah, shamas, avad,* etc. Likewise, diakoneō, therapeuō and leitougeō, represent only a few words related to the idea of ministry in the New Testament. However, the New Testament concept of ministry cannot be understood by compiling the meanings of these individual words. Rather, we must enquire concerning the implications and listen for the overtones of that which is never brought to full expression in these explicit statements.

1. The Place (topos) of Ministry in the New Testament

Some basic ingredients of the New Testament concept of ministry are to be found in the qualifying contexts in which they occur. One such important qualification is expressed by the word *topos,* place. Since *topos* appears in various strata of early Christian tradition concerning ministry, it is helpful to consider its basic connotation.

The characteristic force of *topos* appears in a well-known passage in Acts: In Acts 1:24-25 we read, "You, O Lord, know the hearts of all men. Show us, therefore, which of these you have selected to receive the *topos* of the ministry (*diakonias*) and apostleship from which Judas went down to his own topos." In this prayer the apostles are concerned with the topos of ministry which Judas has forsaken to descend to his own *topos.* Primary emphasis is customarily directed to *diakonias* and *apostoles* in this verse. However, both words appear in the genitive case and serve as qualifying adjectival descriptions of *topos.* The author is primarily concerned with the topos of ministry.

[4]W. G. Kummel, THE THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, trans. John E. Steely, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 16.
[5]Rudolf Bultmann, THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1955) II, p. 237.
†Because of limitations of printing facilities it has been necessary to transliterate Hebrew and Greek characters. Apology is hereby made to the reader for this inconvenience. (The editors)

The underlying force of *topos* can be seen in Greek secular usage. Aristotle said that *topos* indicates a "fitness" or "appropriateness" *for* something. For example, *topos, oikias,* a place of dwelling, refers to a place that is appropriate for habitation rather than merely to a building in which a person resides. *Topos* frequently translates the Old Testament term *makos*. According to the Old Testament idea, God takes the initiative in designating the place of worship. For example, God chose Palestine (Jerusalem) as an appropriate place of cultic worship. The New Testament reflects this perspective in many strata of its concept.

Luke's emphasis upon the role of the apostles and the centrality of Jerusalem is well known. However, both language and subject matter in Acts 1:24-25 indicate that Luke is using material that assumed its form in the primitive Christian community (Jewish Christian church). Thus, the idea that God designates both the *topos* of service and the *topos* of punishment coresponds to important strata of Old Testament thought, particularly with the redactor of Deuteronomy.

Paul's writings also reflect a similar understanding of *topos*. In Romans 15:25 he writes that he no longer has a *topos* in these parts. Although *topos* is often understood here as a reference to a geographical region, i.e., he had run out of space, it is more likely that he is indicating that he has exhausted his "opportunity." Accordingly, he is expecting God to designate another *topos* (opportunity) for service. In this sense, Acts 23:11 — the Apostle's vision regarding Rome — also indicates that God assumes the initiative in determining the structure (*topos*) where the Apostle is to render service. Similarly, in Romans 12:19 Paul counsels the Roman Christians to refrain from attempts at selfvindication but rather to give *topos* for wrath because God himself has designated his own *topos* for vindication of his cause.

Finally, the book of Hebrews contains interesting parallels with the thought of Luke and Paul. Since the tradition in Hebrews seems to represent an independent tradition in New Testament thought, it too, may reflect elements of earliest Christian thought. In describing the function of the Old Covenant (Hebrews 8:7), the author claims, "If the first (covenant) had been without flaw (defect), a *topos* for the second (covenant) would not have been necessary (required or sought)." Apparently, the problem had reference to an appropriate opportunity for achieving God's religious purpose. Also, Hebrews 12:17 asserts that Esau was rejected when he desired to receive his father's benediction because Esau could not find a *topos metanoias*. In other words, Esau's rejection arose out of the fact that the place of repentance is determined by God's initiative rather than by men's changing attitudes.

Revelation 2:5 further confirms the force of *topos*. Speaking in the name of God, the author warns the church at Ephesus to repent or, "I will come and remove your lampstand out of its *topos,*" i.e., you will forfeit your divinely appointed opportunity for ministry because of it (*topos*) will no longer be accessible.

The references indicated above are taken from widely separated strata of early Christian thought. They reflect two basic emphases that appear to be common to the early Christian perspective. First, *topos* refers to a designated opportunity for divine service. Second, and more important, it is assumed that God assumes the initiative in designating the opportunity. However problematic or foreign the latter emphasis may be for the modern mentality, it appears, nevertheless, to reflect the early Christian point of view. Furthermore, investigation shows that this assumption is present in other contexts which do not explicitly express the idea.

2. "Places" of Ministry in the New Testament

A. "Higher Authorities" (Romans 13:1-6)

Romans 13:1-6 has challenged interpreters as persistently as any passage in the New Testament. Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to subject themselves to the authorities of "higher" rank or status (*huperechousiai*). For, as Paul explains, the existing authorities (*ousai ekousiai*) have been structured (arranged in their place of function) by God himself. Furthermore, this order of existence is itself God's minister (*theou gar diakonos*). Without identifying the intricate problems contained in this passage, it is nevertheless interesting that one element of thought already encountered with reference to *topos* also occurs in this passage, namely, God assumes the initiative in determining the structure in which ministry is rendered. In this instance, the structure itself — the Roman government! — represents the point of reference for achieving God's purpose, i.e., God ministers to his people through the structure of the political organization.

B. The Church. Ephesians 4:11-12

It may be helpful to consider a fourth strata of early Christian tradition that deals explicitly with the concept of ministry. The deutro-Pauline book of Ephesians contains a specific reference that is instructive for the concept under consideration.

According to the author of Ephesians, both the church and the structures within it represent creations of the Lord of the church (Ephesians 4:11). Indeed, as Lord of the church his lordship is evident precisely in his activity within the church (Ephesians 1:22), since the structures of the church are designed to prepare the saints for ministry (Ephesians 4:12). It should be noted that ministry in this context refers to the entire Christian community,[6] rather than to the official ecclesiastical orders of the church.[7]

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[6]Heinrich Schlier, DER BRIEF AN DIE EPHESER (Dusseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 2., durgesehen Auflage, 1958), pp. 196ff.

[7]B. F. Westcott, ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1950), p. 62; J. Armitage Robinson, ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904), pp. 97ff.

It may be fitting at this point to return to the point of departure by way of review of the results of our discussion. First, four basic strata of early Christian tradition — the primitive Christitan community, Paul, Luke, and one segment of deutro-Pauline thought — witness to a common perspective regarding the *topos* of ministry, namely, the *topos* is created by God himself who assumes the initiative in creating it. Such a perspective does not imply that God thereby became the source of authentication for sociological structures — either ecclesiastical or political — which, in fact, exist within the empirical church. Rather, these structures (orders) seem to provide the occasion or points of reference for discerning the divine intention. Consequently, various *topoi diakonias* appear in New Testament writings. This point of view may reflect a kindred perspective in the Old Testament which understands unbelieving nations as *topoi diakonias,* i.e., as instruments of God's ministry for his people. Therefore, a specific *topos* is qualified by the character of ministry for which it becomes the occasion. It is therefore possible to distinguish between this perspective and that which deveolped later where ecclesiastical concerns focused attention upon the authority of the office rather than upon the nature of ministry. Finally, ministry in these strata of Christian tradition is consistently understood in terms of God's active involvement. This involvement does not represent a kind of "leasing" activity by which God allocates responsibility for work in whose ultimate outcome he maintains continuing interest. Rather, in some sense of the word, God is understood to be identified with the ministry in such a manner that he actually carries out the ministry, i.e., it is really God's own ministry.

This summary overview can only call attention to one assumption that seems to be characteristic of widely divergent strata of New Testament thought. Further investigation provides confirmation of the results of this limited work. The difference between this set of assumptions and the prevailing patterns of modern thought merely point to hermeneutical questions which call for serious thought. If it is appropriate to conclude this segment of our discussion with a question that is neither purely critical nor strictly hermeneutical, it might be phrased in this manner: Is there significance in the discovery that biblical writings seem to focus attention upon the *nature* and character of ministry while current concern appears to emphasize the work and problems of *the ministry*?

III. PATTERNS OR MOTIFS OF MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Each generation faces a variety of issues regarding the style or pattern of ministry. Some of the basic problems arise out of the twofold necessity of adherence to scripture and at the same time responding to current mentality. In our time, "doing ministry" seems to express the general consensus. Obviously, this slogan embodies the response to an earlier era in which theologians and preachers were largely content to

"talk" about ministry. In both instances the pattern of ministry expresses a comprehensive theological orientation.

One important result of modern biblical research can be seen in the changed perspective of the Christian community regarding the meaning and role of the scriptures in the life of the church. The New Testament has been used traditionally as a kind of ready-made manual for ministry. Blueprints were thought to be readily available in the alleged biographical and historical material of New Testament — Old Testament as well — writings. As is everywhere evident, modern biblical study has effectively closed the door to this procedure.

Although biblical research has precluded the continued use of biblical material as mere biographical and historical information, it has nevertheless opened the door to exciting new ventures for the appropriation of the scriptural message. One primary element of this expanded awareness concerns the discovery of the theological character of the scriptures. Indeed, it has become clear that theological motifs provide the substantial foundation for the historical and biographical forms which appear in the Bible. These theological motifs represent a rich and meaningful source for interpreting ministry in our situation. From the numerous motifs which appear in the New Testament, two may serve to illustrate the procedure, namely, cross and descent (frequently expressed in terms of humiliation).

1. The Cross as Motif or Pattern of Ministry in the New Testament

There is scarcely a stratum of thought among the writings of the New Testament in which the concept of cross is not dominant. It is generally conceded that among the New Testament writers only Paul explicitly develops a doctrine of the cross as an element of his deliberate intention. However, this fact should not lead us to conclude that the Pauline tradition alone embodies a theology of the cross. To the contrary, Paul's explicit concern with this aspect of the Christian confession was stimulated by its presence in the tradition which he received from the earliest Christian community. Likewise, post-Pauline material — notably the Synoptic Gospels and John — reflects an implicit theology of the cross even though its vocabulary does not explicitly call attention to the idea. Indeed, the theology of the cross is reflected in the structure of the Gospels — especially Mark and John — as well as the portraits of Jesus which they present. In this setting, we are concerned with the theological motif of the cross as it appears in two major segments of New Testament literature, namely, Paul and the Synoptic Gospels.

A. The Letters of Paul.

As has been indicated, Paul's letters contain the most explicit development of the concept of the cross. Since these works appeared more than a decade before the earliest Gospel (Mark), they afford a glimpse into Christian thought near the point where Christianity moved into the gentile environment.

The Corinthian letters contain Paul's response to an eclectic point of view that stands in sharpest contrast to the Christian confession of Jesus Christ as the crucified *and* exalted One. To be precise, major segments of the Corinthian church seem to have emphasized the authority of the exalted Lord at the expense or denial of the significance of the crucified One. This gnostic perspective emerges most clearly in those dimensions of Christian proclamation which relate to Jesus' humanity, particularly to his crucifixion. Paul appears to quote a gnostic slogan when he exclaims, "No one who speaks in the Spirit of God can say, anathema Iēsous" (Jesus is accursed). This gnostic rejection of all implications of Jesus' humanity constituted a decisive challenge to Paul's understanding of the Gospel, as well as the pattern of discipleship which it implies Thus, Paul's apology for the Christian faith serves as an instructive example for modern interpreters who seek to interpret theological motifs in defining the pattern of Christian ministry.

(1) I Corinthians 1:18, 23; 2:2.

The present structure of the Corinthian letters represents the work of redactors near the close of the first century. I Corinthians 7:1ff suggest that major elements of the remainder of the letter contain Paul's reply to specific questions posed by the Corinthian church. However, in I Corinthians 1:1-4:21 the Apostle appends an introductory section in which he deals with the essential elements of the assumptions out of which specific questions had arisen. The central role of the concept of the cross in this segment is evident when it is noted that of the seven occurrences of *stauros* (cross) in I Corinthians, six appear in the first two chapters.

Paul's focal challenge to his opponents appears in I Corinthians 1:17, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, not according to the pattern of wisdom (*sophia*), lest the cross of Christ become an empty thing." The *sophia* by which Paul seems to identify the opponents' teaching seems to assume a measure of independence and self-sufficiency for those who have been transformed by the reception of its secrets. This denial of continuing dependence upon the gifts and sustainance of God's grace constituted a fundamental contradiction of Paul's understanding of the Christian message. The Apostle finds support for his stance in the character of the church. While the cross does not determine beforehand the historical status of the Christian community per se, the insignificant position of the church in the city of Corinth serves as an illustration of the implications of the cross for the life of the community of disciples who identify with the crucified One.

I Corinthians 2:1-5 speaks directly to our concern here. Referring to the pattern and authenticity of his practice and ministry, Paul attributes the pattern and style of his ministry in Corinth to his deliberate conformation to the meaning of the cross. In other words, the theological content of the message is said to contain decisive implications for the mode and practice of ministry. Even the Apostle's appearance and behavior arise out of his conformity to the meaning of the cross. Paul's

theology of the cross guides him in his response to questions concerning practical issues in the life of the church. The remainder of the letter, including his response to the "super-apostles" in II Corinthians, is filled with illustrations of the meaning of the cross for ministry. There is no clearer example in the New Testament where theological criteria are applied to practical issues in the life of the Christian community.[8]

Paul's second letter to Corinth — a collection of occasional brief notes — is notable for its explicit concern with ministry, containing eleven references scattered throughout six different chapters. It is striking that the Apostle chooses the symbol of the cross as a defense for both the pattern and the substance of his ministry (2:14-6:13). Lest Paul's description of his work — earthly vessel (4:7), affliction (4:7-8), exposure to the danger of death (4:11-12) — should be understood as the expression of despair or as the product of a morose mentality, it should be noted that this segment of his letter is concluded with confidence and exuberant joy (4:16-5:10). To the contrary, Paul's description of his position represents a deliberate expression of the theology of the cross. In II Corinthians 10-13, the Apostle reiterates his claim: Accreditation of ministry is solely by reference to the norm of the cross. For, Paul exclaims, "If I am compelled to affirm a basis of selfconfidence and adequacy (*kauchasthai*), I will do so on the basis of my weakness" (II Corinthians 11:30), i.e., I will do so in conformity to the cross.

Full reference to Paul's use of the motif of the cross requires detailed exegesis of extensive segments of his letters. It is sufficient here to point to cryptic expressions that are selfexplanatory. For example, "But for me it is unthinkable that I should boast except in the cross of Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14); "For many are living in such a manner — about whom I have spoken many times and now I do so weeping — that I must say are enemies of the cross of Christ (Philippians 3:18); "Are you unaware that however many of us were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3). Clearly, for the Apostle Paul, the primary theological motif is the cross of Christ by which proclaimation is to be measured. Since ministry is a reflection of the kerygma — in content and style — it, too, is grounded in the selfsame theology.

B. The Synoptic Gospels

Mark 8:27 seems to represent the watershed in the structure of the second Gospel. At this point in the work the writer depicts Jesus as having deliberately set his face toward Jerusalem. This journey to Jerusalem represents a symbolic manner of speaking about crucifixion, since Jerusalem as the place of crucifixion is symbolic of the meaning of the cross. It may be that the cross-symbol appears as early as 3:6 in

[8]Hans Conzelmann, DER ERSTE KORINTHER BRIEF (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1969), p. 7.

Mark, since the author alludes to a plot to destroy Jesus. Matthew follows Mark's general pattern with regard to the journey to Jerusalem. Luke even places his "great insertion" (9:51-18:14) under the motif of a journey to the place of the cross (Jerusalem). Thus, it is evident that the concept of the cross played a primary role in the structure of the Synoptic Gospels, even though the material itself does not represent an explicit development of the motif.

(1) Mark 10:35-45

This passage describes Jesus' confrontation by two disciples, James and John, who harbored an illegitimate ambition for prestige. Although Matthew and Luke alter minor details of the pericope, Mark clearly intends to refer to the church of his day. It stands under judgment because it fails to understand discipleship as a mode of life under the sign of the cross (10:38-40). For, the Son of Man did not come to be the recipient of ministry, but to do ministry (10:45). This saying doubtless arose in the early Christian community, since it is highly probable that the full-orbed doctrine of the cross did not emerge during Jesus lifetime. Therefore, the theology of the cross provides a motif that is applied to Jesus' entire life. In turn, this same motif becomes the model that defines the character of ministry in Jesus' name.

(2) Mark 8:34-35

Mark 8:34-35, too, appears in the context of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. Although the precise term for ministry does not appear in this pericope, *akoloutheitō* (to live or follow) corresponds to the idea. Hence, the distinction between discipleship and ministry practically disappears: To take up the cross and deny oneself is the mode of discipleship. Consequently, the theological motif of cross is applied alternatively to discipleship and ministry.

If the occasion allowed, abundant evidence could be adduced concerning the importance of the cross for the thought of the Fourth Gospel. It is sufficient to remember that chapters 1-12 revolve around the idea of the hōra toward which Jesus moves with deliberate intention. This hōra refers to the cross in whose shadow Jesus is depicted when he turns aside to instruct the disciples regarding their function in the world. The washing of the disciples' feet (John 13:15) provides the model (hupodeigma) for the future course of the mission in the world. Thus, John, too, is dominated by the theology of the cross.

2. Descent (humiliation) as a Motif for Ministry.

In addition to the cross, other motifs express the Christian confession. The "descent" motif functions to express the characteristic Christian trait of humility. While the cross is derived from the idea of sacrifice in cultic worship, "descent" is rooted in the Hellenistic religious mentality. It may be that this motif emerged first in Hellenistic circles of thought. Bultmann contended that this idea originated in gnostic thought.

The christological hymn in Philippians 2:5-9 is a well known example of this pattern of thought. The hymn itself appears to have originated in the worship of the early Christian community. Paul adopted and adapted the fragment to his purpose in this segment of the Philippian correspondence. Two words express the focal christological affirmation, namely, *ekenōse* and *etapeinōsen,* he emptied himself, and humbled himself. Obviously, only *etapeinōsen* can be applied to the mode of discipleship and ministry. Accordingly, the Apostle exhorts the Philippians to, "do nothing which arises out of selfcentered ambition or conceit, but with tapeinophrosunē, each is to consider the other superior to himself" (Philippians 2:3). Here, again, christology provides the motif for interpreting discipleship/ministry. Paul has already appealed to *tapeinos* as the mark of genuineness in his own ministry. It is important to remember that this Christian virtue does not stand on its own merits but, like the cross, derives its authenticity from christological roots. Hence, basic christological motifs become the symbols for authentic ministry. *Tapeinos* also plays an important role in the Gospel of Matthew, the work which is most explicitly concerned with the function of the disciple in the life of the church and the world. Jesus is described as the *praus* and *tapeinos* savior. Consequently, the latter motif plays a primary role in interpreting the nature of discipleship: "Whoever shall humble himself (*tapeinōsei*) as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (18:14). Finally, the greatest among you shall act as your *diakonos* . . . and precisely he who humbles himself shall be exalted (23:11-12).

IV. CONCLUSION

On the basis of this restricted purview of certain strata of New Testament material, what can be indicated regarding its concept of ministry? The following tentative conclusions may provide the basis for further investigation. In the first place, it appears that the basic motifs which interpret ministry are derived from christological confessions. Furthermore, these motifs play an important role in the development of the so-called "lives of Jesus" in the Gospels. The cross — the basic motif for discipleship/ministry — are central in the entire confession. Second, ministry has to do, therefore, with the proper presentation of Christ as the crucified and resurrected One. Third, in the earliest Christian community ministry focused upon the nature of Christian existence rather than upon the ecclesiastical structure in which ministry was expressed. First in the Pastoral epistles of the mid-second century an interest in official duties becomes clearly evident. (This fact does not mean that the concern developed first at this point, but only that New Testament material as a whole does not contain such focus). Furthermore, where structure or office emerges as a point of primary concern, the problem of authority prevails over the concern with ministry. Fourth, ministry and discipleship often coalesce in New Testament thought. Fifth, it may be that the New Testament provides its most comprehen-

sive answers regarding the pattern and style of modern ministry in those segments of writings which are not directly concerned with so-called "problems" of ministry. It seems to me that the New Testament does not function primarily as a "manual" for ministry. Rather, it provides most certain and direct guidance in the theological character and contours of its concepts and motifs.