

COVENANT RENEWAL

Genesis 1:26-28

Matthew 28:18-20

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COVENANTAL HIERARCHY II

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And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things. And when the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat." But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?" But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish." Then He commanded to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks,

And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. So they ate and were all filled. And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men (Mark 6:34-44).

When we come to the New Testament, we find a royal priesthood that is covenantally hierarchical, virtually identical to Jethro's. This means that as the hierarchy of the Old Testament fell within the covenantal structure of Deuteronomy, the New Testament does the same.

How do we know? Consider the passage at the beginning of this chapter. The context and details parallel Moses' situation in the wilderness.

Christ calls the disciples out into the wilderness, a "deserted place" (Mark 6:31, 35). When the crowd becomes hungry, He feeds them as God did in the Old Testament, bringing *quail* for the Israelites in the desert. He gives them

but we must keep in mind that the quail provided in the wilderness were "flesh from the" (Numbers 11:31), since the birds were brought in over the sea. Both groups were fed from the sea.

Christ, however, addresses the who are the twelve analogous to the twelve tribes of Israel. He distributes through the twelve. The parallel is too coincidental. The twelve disciples are the replacements of the twelve tribes. Out of them will come the "tribes," churches. Christ gives in such abundance that *twelve* baskets "full of fragments and fish" are left over (Mark 6:43). Why *twelve* baskets of leftovers? For whom are these leftovers provided? This food has to be provision for others to come at a later date, the under the twelvefold leadership of the Apostles. The reference has to refer to a shift in inheritance. What belonged to the tribal system of the Old Testament will be transferred to the Apostolic system

of the New Testament. The disciples are used to provide new food divided proportionately among the groups. Thus, the disciples were the first level of in the hierarchy of Jesus, representing a new hierarchy to come based on the organizational structure of the Old Testament, Jethro's.

The Exodus Eighteen Structure

Christ breaks down the hierarchy into Jethro size groups. He places disciples in some kind of hierarchy over the others. He the disciples to have the crowd sit down and organizes them in a common grouping for meals. Perhaps there is some reference to the military grouping of Israel by the number of loaves used to feed the crowd, (Mark 6:38), as well as the number of representative heads of households mentioned, *five*

(husbands). Israel marched in military array *five* abreast.¹ They walked into war with this kind of structure. They were organized as a military force. Jesus may have intended for this concept to be recalled in the minds of the disciples. He may have been indicating something else. Whatever the significance, it is another interesting coincidence about the passage. If Jesus is using the number of loaves to point back to the military structure, He is only using it as an allusion to another Old Testament system of organizing.

For certain, however, Jesus the disciples to arrange the people in groups of (6:40). He didn't give the disciples the option. He was deliberate in His structure. He apparently had a model in mind to which He wanted the disciples to comply. Does His organizational structure look familiar? It should, because Jesus organizes His followers in the same numerical hierarchy as the structure of the Old Testament royal priesthood. Why? Remember, Jethro was a Melchizedekal priest. He counseled Moses according to his priesthood. Since Christ is a priest after the order of Melchizedek and not Aaron, He establishes the same organizational hierarchy. The similarity is quite glaring.

We should not fail to miss another level, probably the lowest level of the hierarchy. When the text says that *five* were fed, it indicates a numbering system by

This would make sense. Israel applied the sacrament of circumcision by households, each male member representing the female, and each male head of the household representing the whole household. The same household numbering system carries into the New Testament. Christ fed five thousand men, households. But, after the death of Christ, Luke records conversions by heads

1. James Jordan, *The Sociology the* Ministries, 1986), pp. 214-217.

(Tyler, Texas: Geneva

of households, particularly male heads of household, in the same manner as documented by Mark's Gospel. Luke says,

"Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed;

(Acts 4:1-4).

What this means is that the organizational system is the same the death of Christ, and the feeding of the five thousand is a prophetic anticipation of the New Testament structure. Luke's method of recording by household also implies that the household was the smallest organizational unit in the hierarchy. We should not overlook this aspect of the lowest level of the system either in Christ's feeding of the five thousand households or in the conversion of the five thousand families in Jerusalem. Once again we see a remarkable parallel to the organizational structure of the hierarchy of the Old Testament and the hierarchy of the New Testament.

The Kind of Hierarchy

What does the hierarchy of Christ mean? Did it mean that individuals had to come through the disciples and others in the hierarchy to get to Christ? No, people came directly to Christ with their problems. Later in the Gospel of Mark, parents attempted to bring their children to Christ for a blessing. The disciples "rebuked those who brought them" (Mark 10:13). No apparent reason is given, except that the disciples stood between the parents with their children and Christ. Christ did not approve.

Why did the disciples think that they should forbid the children? Perhaps they thought that the structure set up by Christ at an earlier point was to be utilized to prevent people from having direct access to Christ. Jesus makes clear to them that the hierarchy was not for this purpose. He says to them, "'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter.'" And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:14-16). By using the child as an analogy of how people are to come to Christ, He was in effect saying that anyone had and has direct access to Him. The hierarchy of the royal priesthood is not to prevent this kind of immediate and direct approach to God.

Rather, the earlier situation of the feeding of the five thousand tells us exactly how the hierarchy is to be used. It is a *pastoral* setting. The organization that Jesus provides is for the pastoral oversight of the administration of needs among the people. They are hungry and in need of food. The disciples function diagonally by distributing what Christ provides. They carry the provision to the various people.

Christ's hierarchy has ramifications. The food that Christ provides is analogous to the manna in the wilderness of the Old Testament. In John's Gospel, the feeding is explicitly compared to the wilderness feeding of the manna. Immediately following the miracle of the feeding, which has the same important details as Mark's account, John says,

Therefore they said to Him, "What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven

to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world'" (John 6:30-33).

The Apostle Paul calls the food in the wilderness, "spiritual food," Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 10:1-3). Thus, there can be no mistake. The feeding of the five thousand was a picture of a greater and truer sacramental food, the Lord's Supper at a later point. As the disciples helped in the distribution of the food in the feeding of the five thousand, so they would also help distribute sacramental food of the Church. When Christ ascended into heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God. From that point forward, He needed others to administer and distribute His sacraments. If He needed assistants to help distribute before He ascended, how much more afterwards? Did this mean that man could not come directly to Christ? No, man would be able to come directly to Jesus for salvation. He would be able to talk directly to Christ through prayer. He would be able to walk into God's temple. He would be able to come forward and kneel at the communion table. The Holy of Holies would no longer be blocked to the common man. The Cross gave man more access than he had ever had before. But this didn't mean that there would not be some kind of hierarchy for the distribution of the sacraments. As a matter of fact, it is the same structure as the Old Testament, except that the tribal system was changed; it was replaced by the disciples.

The replacement of the tribal system has to do with the administration of the kingdom under apostles and other officers, making Jesus' hierarchy of a *governmental* nature. From a practical point of view, Jesus needed the disciples to function on His behalf in the feeding of the five thousand. On other occasions, He sent the disciples out two-by-two. He also commissioned the seventy for a comparable task. He was thereby setting up a structure that would come into full effect when He ascended into heaven. The Jethro organization served a similar function to Him as it did to Moses, except Christ was at the top and not Moses. When Jesus ascended into heaven, leaving the disciples, like Moses, on earth and in charge of a large body, the international Church, the twelve required a hierarchy to help them in the oversight of the Church. We see this at a number of places in the Book of Acts. The conflict of the widows, where Deacons were ordained, enabled the Apostles to continue in prayer and the ministry of the Word. The Jerusalem Council, where a dispute effected the Church all over the world, put the Jethro system into a court setting.

Thus, Jesus' hierarchy extended the Jethro organization into the New Covenant, transforming the old tribal system, a family controlled hierarchy, into an apostolic structure. It was not to prevent personal access to Christ in any way. It did, however, set up a pastoral, sacramental, and governmental hierarchy, facilitating the administration of His kingdom. Jesus provided through this system for the pastoral needs of His sheep to be met on the largest scale ever in His kingdom. He ordained the oversight of thousands of communion tables all over the world. He also established that the officers of His Church would oversee His ministry on the earth governmentally.

As we are hopefully provoked to examine the New Testament hierarchy with this Melchizedekal background, we shall see that all of the principles of Church Government are therefore similar to the government of the Old Testament. We do discover, however, greater development in the hierarchy of the New Testament because after all, Christ came in history, bringing His intense presence to the people of God in a way that it had not been before.

And, the people of God were no longer a but an international priesthood. Therefore, using the Jethro model that is confirmed and continued by Christ in the feeding of the five thousand, let us examine the same basic four aspects of the Old Testament hierarchy that we saw in the last newsletter.

The Pastoral

The functioning government of the New Testament Church has what Jethro called Here they are designated Apostles, Elders, and Deacons, who are not expressly mentioned although they were surely part of the meeting. They are clearly arranged in some sort of hierarchy. There are Apostles and Elders.

There is also James, who was not an Apostle according to the standards required of the replacement for Judas Iscariot (Acts 1 :21-22). He was called an Apostle (Galatians 1 :19), but he was not a primary Apostle; he did not meet the qualifications. He had not travelled with the Lord for years of His ministry, nor had he directly been called by Christ, as Saul was on the Damascus road. He was a Presbyter with some kind of special appointment as a secondary Apostle. He was not like any normal Presbyter (From the Greek, *presbuteros* translated He was distinct from the others. He presided over the Jerusalem Council, over Apostles and Elders. He does not act like a simple moderator. He listened for a consensus, but speaks to the issue, something which is not allowed in standard non-Episcopal settings without stepping down and handing the chair to someone else. There is no indication from the text that he did such a thing. Furthermore, he virtually makes the final decision for the entire body on the basis of a general consensus (Acts 15:19). He represented the whole body; this is the point. A moderator only moderates. He is not the embodiment of the whole. James was. He allowed some sort of democratic process, but he went beyond this by personally drafting the letter to the churches and in commissioning specific individuals. He was no *moderator* in any normal, modern sense of the word. He was chief overseer, the Presiding Bishop of the first General Council of the Church.

Moreover, after the Jerusalem Council, James continues to function as a Presbyter over the rest of the Jerusalem Church, what later came to be called a Presbyter/Bishop. He was a presiding Presbyter, a Bishop. He was not simply the moderator for meetings. He was a functioning overseer of other Apostles and Presbyters. When the Apostle Paul goes up to Jerusalem, he seeks out "James and the elders" (Acts 21 :18). Why doesn't the text simply say that Paul went to see the "presbytery of Jerusalem"? It doesn't because he didn't. The text specifically says, "He went

This is different from saying, "He went to the presbytery." He went to one man, a captain, as well as a larger group of advice. Yes, other "presbyters were present." They came as the wider court, which we will examine later. But James is somehow different to such an extent that attention is specifically called to him apart from the group. was the one to whom Paul was going to see. Why?

The Apostle Paul was going to James and the other Presbyters for *pastoral* advice. The second trip to Jerusalem was not for a trial or a court of the Church; actually, he would be tried by a secular court. Paul had said that he was going "bound in the Spirit, not knowing what to expect" (Acts 20:22). He only knew that trials would begin even if they were not the official trials of the Church (Acts 20:23). He needed counsel. So, he went to James and the others. He met in a pastoral setting with them. But James stands out as a *pastor* to an Episcopal role. James

was a Presbyter with oversight over a larger sphere, including other Presbyters, which is confirmed by the way the letters to the churches in Revelation are addressed to "angels" (Revelation 2:1 ff.), being historically interpreted as the letters were not addressed to groups but to individuals. Thus, James had this role in Jerusalem as is apparent from the text.

In a manuscript I am developing,

will present a more extensive defense of the pastoral (as opposed to the prelatical) concept of the Episcopacy. For now, this will suffice to combine with the other obvious aspects of the New Testament structure (Apostles, Elders, and Deacons) to establish that Acts 15 and 21 present a hierarchy of presbyters, or captains, to use Jethro's terminology. We should initially see, however, that this hierarchy was pastoral, consisting of pastors to pastors.

Representation and Presence

The members of the Ecclesiastical ministry of the Church were of Christ's ministry. They were elected and ordained in a similar manner to the process described by Jethro. "The pastoral office implies a clearly definable distinction between laity (general ministry) and clergy (ordained ministry). The difference is based not on supposed moral superiority or political expediency but upon the inward call of God to representative service, outwardly confirmed by the whole church in ordination."²

The pastors of Acts 15 are not an empty kind of representative: they are filled with the Living Christ through the Holy Spirit, possessing the of Jesus, which is one of the cardinal principles of Christianity manifested in the Sacraments and their ministry. The ministers of the New Testament extend the of the ministry of the Living Christ to the Church, similar to the way that the captains of Jethro's system did to Israel. But the ministers of the New Testament have a greater manifestation of presence because the presence given to them is that of Christ Himself, as the larger context of the Book of Acts indicates.

When Saul persecuted the Church, the Living Christ appeared to him saying, "Why do you persecute am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:4-5). Saul was killing Christians, yet Christ said that his actions were tantamount to own death. The Church on earth was an Incarnation of the Living Christ through the Holy Spirit. This Incarnation should be understood under the same mysterious explanation of the Trinity itself. As the Persons of the Godhead are the Church is distinct but not separate from Christ. Christ's Incarnation on the earth is unique; He was born of a virgin and lived a sinless life. Yet, the Church is united to His Humanity and should not be viewed as separate. Remember, Christ didn't see the Church as separate when He said to the future apostle, "Why do you persecute

Christian ministry is the ministry of Christ because it begins with Christ's ministry. Jesus prayed, "As thou has sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). A moving analogy here begins to unfold between incarnation and apostolicity, between God's engagement in the world in Christ and our engagement in the world as ambassadors for Christ. As Christ is sent by the Father into the alienated world, so are his ministers sent into the darkened world by the Son. Listen to the analogy echo: 'For their sake I now consecrate Myself, that they too may be consecrated by the truth' (John 17:19). As Jesus is stranger in the world, so will the Apostles be strangers. Jesus then prays, 'that they may all be one' as He is one, and 'that the world may believe' (John 17:21). There

is a stunning congruity in all this. The apostolic mission is sent from God into the world and is therefore not finally explainable in terms of the world's criteria, yet it is sent in service to the real world to proclaim the healing word, that the world may believe and be saved."³

The Apostles are sent with the promise, "Lo, I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20). They are given the pledge of Christ's meaning their ministry is His ministry. Their pastoral ministry was to present Christ to the world. He was called the Good Shepherd and they along with the future leaders of the Church are called "shepherds" (1 Peter 5:2). The ministry of the Church is the ministry of Christ and His presence to the people of God, which has two sides to it that parallel the two natures of Christ. As Christ is Divine and Human and the pastoral ministry of the Church conveys the presence of Christ, the minister is leader and servant. He is an authority representing the Living Divine Lord. He is also a servant who represents the Living Human Friend. As a matter of fact, only through the power of the present Living Christ can the pastor adequately convey Christ as Very God of Very God and Very Man of Very Man. He represents both natures to the people of God even though he does not have both; he is only human. Yet, herein is the challenge and the tension of the pastoral role.

Distortions of Pastoral Ministry

Thomas C. Oden more accurately than anyone else talks about two problems in pastoral ministry that result from two distorted directions in which the pastoral task may become misunderstood:

and *triumphalism*. Both misplace the paradoxical core definition of ministry as pastoral service. "Reductionism, the characteristically modern misjudgment about ministry, attempts to reduce the essence of ministry to a human social function, or to philosophical insight, or to moral teaching, or to psychological counseling, or to political change advocacy. These views diminish the pastoral office by failing to see its distinctive self-understanding, its Divine commission, its Spirit-led calling, its dependence upon revelation, and its accountability to apostolic faith. The tension is lost between the Divine calling and the life of the world by viewing Divine calling as being socially determined and dissecting it as a quantifiable object. Reductionism dilutes the ministry of the incarnation to its fleshly side by reducing it to quirks or parenting or social determinism. . . .

"Admittedly, the pastor is friend to many, even as Jesus was friend to many, expressing through ordinary human relationships the extraordinary love of God. But reductionism makes the mistake of seeing this friendship purely by analogy to human friendship, rather than through the lens of the Divine-Human friendship. The reductionism that sees ministry only as objectifiable sociological or psychological phenomena is not wrong, it only needs to be placed in a larger context and evaluated in terms of a more basic norm. When the divine and human sides are held together, ministry can be seen more wholly as human re-

sponse to divine gift, a beautiful amalgam of graced nature and naturally embodied grace.

"Triumphalism, the opposite distortion of ministry, is a habit more characteristic of premodern consciousness. It loses track of the human, finite side of ministry in the interest of inordinately stressing its divine origin and eternal purpose. It is more prone to allow ministry to be elevated to a privileged caste or an exclusive sacerdotal order. Instead of being set apart for representative service, ministry may become separated from the people as something over against them, alien to their here-and-now world and hence perceived as irrelevant. The tension is lost between the holy calling and the ordinary spheres it is called to sewe.

"This distortion misplaces human friendship in ministry in the interest of disproportionately asserting the divine companionship. It dilutes the ministry of the incarnation by ignoring the finite, temporal instruments of the divine will. This is the point at which classical Protestantism complained about medieval, sacerdotal conceptions of ministry wherein priesthood had itself become trapped in the subtle or overt management of power and prestige, amid its well-intended attempt to mediate between God and people. Ironically, Protestantism itself later fell into the same trap in different guise.

"There remains something legitimate even about the triumphalist, sacerdotal view of an elevated priesthood, in that it rightly stresses the instituted office for the feeding of the vulnerable body of Christ in the hazardous world, that the holy should never be mistaken for the temporal, and that the church is not reducible to the world. However legitimate these emphases may be, the triumphalist excess has tempted priesthood to become inwardly turned toward its own self-importance and thus separated from the people as if it were intrinsically superior, to the neglect of engaged service in the life of the world.

"In both of these misconceptions of pastoral authority there is a distortion of the essential idea of ministry: holy calling amid the life of the world."⁴

The pastoral ministry is first and foremost in Acts 15, concerned over the "unsettling of your souls" (Acts 15:24), as the letter to the Gentiles produced by this gathering said. In practice, these ministers of the Gospel engaged a crisis in the Church. They applied Christ to the crises, the crying need of the modern Church and society. "Just as the passion for food, shelter, and services creates economies, or the passion for the order and relative justice creates governments, so there appears to be some deep underlying divinely elicited passion that continues to create communities of prayer and the social apparatus to guide them spiritually."⁵ This is none other than the pastoral hierarchy of the New Testament Royal Priesthood.

Thus, the New Testament system of polity has a captains organization that is It is hierarchical while at the same time it is personal. It offers the closest attention to the needs of the people of God. Its very heart is the pastoral.

pp.

pp. 55-56.

5.

p.