

## **A Call to the Ministry**

*Wallace Benn*

The opening question in the Book of Common Prayer Ordering of Priests (or Presbyters) asks: "Do you think in your heart, that you be truly called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the order of this Church of England, to the Order and Ministry of Priesthood?" The candidate answers: "I think it".

It is of the utmost importance to believe in your heart that God has called you into the ministry. Nothing less will keep you at it during a tough time other than a deep conviction of that call, and therefore of God's faithful commitment to enable you and see you through.

### *How does that conviction come about?*

Are you converted to Christ? Have you seen your need of Christ's atoning death for you? Have you responded in repentance and faith, and now out of gratitude for what the Lord in grace has done for you, do you want to serve Him? All Christian service begins here. A particular growing conviction about a call to ordained ministry will normally be the result of daily prayerful consideration and seeking God's will over a period of time.

Every keen Christian man should consider whether God might be calling him to the ministry, and for the vast majority it will be 'no'. It has been helpfully said: "Don't go into the ministry unless you have to!" That is, if you could do something else in the service of the Lord, do it! But if you cannot escape the gentle nagging voice of God about it, then pursue it prayerfully.

### *What about the opinion of others?*

That personal conviction of course needs checking out with others. One of the most encouraging prompts in guidance is if a number of respected people independently suggest to you that you should consider the ordained ministry. Also, most importantly if you are married, does it have the support of a godly wife, as well as the encouragement of your local minister and other trusted Christian friends? It needs all that to prevent us from well intentioned delusion

### *Where does the wider church come in?*

The wider dimension beyond a personal call, and the encouragement of trusted Christian friends, is seen in Titus whom Paul sends to Crete to "appoint elders (presbyters) in every town" (Titus 1:5) It is right therefore for a bishop to appoint a DDO (Diocesan Director

of Ordinands) and others to check out a candidate's suitability, and indeed the question of suitability is asked right at the beginning of the service mentioned above. One might question the suitability of some of the assessors in some places that have been appointed by some bishops to do this job, but on the whole the system is helpful as it seeks to discern a true call.

### *Is God's Providential timing significant?*

Other factors need to be taken into consideration as well. God's providential timing and over-ruling in our lives needs to be considered. What point are our children at in their education? Is it possible at this time, or soon, to move and begin training for ministry? What other family or job circumstances do I need to prayerfully consider?

Also, Scriptural support by way of fulfilling the God given qualifications revealed in the Bible for a minister are essential. More of that in a moment. But wonderfully often a call to the ministry is written large on a person's heart by a verse or passage encouraging us to go ahead. In my own call to the ministry I found Jeremiah 7:2 very encouraging!

*What exactly is the ministry to which we are being called?*

Many people have very different expectations of clergy! Many church wardens ask the wrong questions of a potential Vicar, seeking often to simply compensate for the shortcomings of the last one, rather than asking what kind of leadership is it that God requires in his church.

Fortunately, God has not left us in any doubt. Firstly, the New Testament in passages like Acts 20, Ephesians 4, I & II Timothy, Titus and Hebrews 13 make it plain that a presbyter/elder/overseer is to model Christian values and lifestyle in his personal life and family life. While all Christians are called to holy living, a Christian leader needs to model that standard and be a good example. Secondly, the above passages make it plain that he is to “preach the Word” (II Tim 4:2) and “he must hold firm to the trustworthy Word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound (healthy) doctrine and also rebuke those who contradict it’ (Titus 1:9). He is to be a pastor, or under-shepherd of the flock of Christ who cares for Christ’s own by loving and feeding them (Acts 20:27,28). For that he will need people skills and the ability to take a lead.

But the one indispensable gift in the list of gifts for different churches in the New Testament is that each church must have a teacher or teachers. And those ministers must be Gospel people committed to the Apostolic Gospel and to the total trustworthiness of the Holy Scriptures that reveals God’s saving plan. They need to have a heart for the lost too, and a desire to do the work of an evangelist (II Tim, 4:5)

*How do I test out my call?*

So, any person beginning to believe God is calling him to the above ministry should be given opportunities in their home church to teach and preach on some occasions to test out their calling as teaching pastors. This preaching/teaching emphasis is written large in our Ordination services. The Ordinand is being called to the ministry of the Word first and foremost. And to the ministry of the Sacraments also as Christ given visual aids to the Gospel, and when rightly received with faith, they encourage and confirm us in that faith.

*Could it be me?*

It is a very high calling then, not to be undertaken lightly! Before you are ordained as a presbyter/priest in an Anglican church,

you must first previously have been ordained a Deacon. This is a helpful reminder that all ministry must come from a servant hearted attitude that sees ministry as service (not a career path) to our Lord, who “came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). It is also a huge privilege and sometimes a tough task. But God’s Church, for its health and well-being, needs the right people to respond to God’s call. *Might that be you?*

Footnote:

At the present time of writing, the question might well be asked: ‘Why be ordained in the Church of England?’ To which the answer is: As long as the door for the ordination of classical evangelicals is open, why go elsewhere? We must not hand over our Biblically based church to liberals who lead people away from authentic Apostolic New Testament Christianity. But if you stay in the Church of England, make sure you are trained at a Bible believing College that develops your faith rather than undermines it!