

APOSTLES, PROPHETS and GOVERNMENTS



Gordon Lindsay

*Apostles, Prophets and
Governments*

By Gordon Lindsay

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INTRODUCTION

Gordon Lindsay was a man of far-sighted vision. He seemed to live on a higher spiritual level than many, and God revealed Himself to Gordon in prophetic ways.

Apostles, Prophets and Governments was written over twenty years ago. Its reception and popularity then is largely unknown. We do know that it has long been out of print. Some of the material in it served as a foundation for a later work, *The Pentecostal Ministry*.

Apostles, Prophets and Governments was a score of years ahead of its time. Its message today is more timely and pragmatic than when it was originally penned. Charismatic prayer groups have started a revolutionary revival throughout the world. Many of these have become congregations. Most have sought to establish a "New Testament" order in their meetings. The offices of apostle, prophet and elder are being reexamined for their scriptural

functions. Church governments that are viable and that don't lapse into classical denominationalism are being sought. This book attempts a look at the proper twentieth-century New Testament neo-pentecostal Body of Christ.

Gordon Lindsay wrote this book for today.

Chapter 1

The Ministry-Gift of Apostles

The word "apostle" has a much wider meaning than is generally understood. The word comes from "apostolos" which means "one sent forth," "a messenger," "an ambassador," "a missionary." An apostle is one that is sent on a special mission.

The Scriptures show that there are different orders of apostles. Christ Himself is spoken of as an apostle.

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the *Apostle* and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3:1).

Christ was sent to this world by the Father on

a mission of redemption. As the "Sent One" He was an Apostle.

Then there are the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb. These were given a distinctive mission, and they received exclusive promises concerning position and authority during the millennium that were given to no other group. The original Twelve were witnesses of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord (Acts 1:21, 22). In the choosing of Matthias, Peter stood up and said:

"Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22).

The Twelve Apostles were given a special promise as to their position in the Kingdom at the time of the gathering of Israel.

"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when

the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28).

There are those who claim that the apostles' choice of Matthias as the apostle to take the place of Judas was not accepted by the Lord, and that Paul was chosen to fulfill that position. But Paul, when describing the resurrection of the Lord, declared that Christ was seen of the "Twelve" not of the "Eleven." Judas, having committed suicide, was not present; hence Matthias must have been the one indicated (I Cor. 15:5). As for Paul, he does not include himself in the Twelve, and of course could not, for he was not yet converted. Instead he declares of Christ, in His post-resurrection manifestations, that He appeared to him as one born out of due time.

"And last of all he was seen of me also, as one born out of due time" (I Cor. 15:8).

THE THIRD GROUP OF APOSTLES

Since Paul was not of the Twelve, but is also called an apostle, it is evident that there is yet another group of apostles. Matthias became the thirteenth because Judas had betrayed the Lord and committed suicide. He was the last of the original Twelve.

The fourteenth apostle was not Paul, in order of time. It was James, the Lord's brother. Paul, speaking of his visit to Jerusalem, declares that he met James, the brother of the Lord, who was an apostle.

"But other of the apostles saw I none,
save James the Lord's brother" (Gal.
1:19).

There were two James in the apostolic group, but neither of them was the son of a Mary. Hence this James was another apostle—the brother of the Lord. During the Lord's earthly ministry he did not believe the Lord's claims. After the resurrection of Christ he became a believer and was present at Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

The fifteenth and sixteenth apostles were Paul and Barnabas. Their office is spoken of in Acts 14:14,15:

"Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? . . ."

Paul calls Apollos an apostle. In I Cor. 4:6 he says: "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes." And then in verse nine, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles," evidently linking Apollos with himself as an apostle. Thus Apollos is the seventeenth apostle.

In the sixteenth chapter of Romans we have a remarkable declaration by Paul concerning Andronicus and Junia. In the seventh verse he says: "Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me." Here the apostle declares that Junia and Adronicus were older than he in the

Lord, were fellow prisoners, and were of note among the apostles. As one writer puts it, "If we were to say that a certain man was of note among the ministers would we mean anything else but that he was a minister?" The meaning is clear that Andronicus and Junia were the eighteenth and nineteenth apostles.

In Philippians 2:25 the Apostle Paul speaks of Epaphroditus as his brother and companion in the Lord. He also speaks of him as "your messenger." But this word in the original Greek is "apostolos" or apostle. The revised version makes this correction and uses the word apostle. Thus Epaphroditus is the twentieth of the apostles mentioned in the Scriptures.

FALSE APOSTLES

Since the apostle is an office of such importance in the Christian Church, it is certain that Satan, the imitator of all things spiritual, would seek to raise up false apostles. God must set apostles in the Church. Man cannot do it. He who usurps the position of an apostle is a false apostle. Some attempted to do this in the Early

Church and were denounced as false apostles. Speaking of these Paul said,

"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works" (II Cor. 11:13-15).

A false apostle is identified first by his usurpation of the office of an apostle, and second by failing to produce the works of an apostle. The Early Church took note of those who claimed apostleship but in fact were false apostles. They were tried and found liars and exposed so that they would not be able to lead away the sheep of the Church of Christ.

It is evident that the office of an apostle is needed in the Church today. But history shows the danger of any man calling himself an apostle. Groups that have attempted to restore

apostolic functions by electing apostles have merely exposed their own folly. Those claiming to be apostles sometimes have, at the beginning, manifested a generous spirit. But they soon became arbitrary and sectarian and usually succeeded in bringing people under bondage. When James and John sought, through the help of their mother, to get a preferred position among the apostles, thus causing indignation and jealousy among the other ten, Jesus reproved them saying:

"Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28).

TRUE APOSTLES

True apostles will first manifest their apostolic ministry by humility. They will reveal the ministry that God has given them by their works rather than by a public proclamation of their office. One can do the work of an apostle without calling himself an apostle. The office of an apostle is to a great extent misunderstood. Many think it is an elevation to a position of authority whereby one may rule over God's people. The words of Jesus just quoted show how wrong such a conception is. Let one do the works of an apostle and he will find that his ministry will become recognized.

The humility of John the Baptist is an example for God's ministers today. John said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). God sent this messenger forth in the Spirit of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to the fathers to bring an awakening to Israel, and to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17). There was no greater born of women than John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11). But when they asked him if he were Elias (Elijah),

he answered that he was not (John 1:21). Yet when they asked Jesus concerning His ministry, He replied, "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come" (Matt. 11:14). It is evident that one does not have to assume titles in order to fulfill a scriptural ministry. To fulfill the work of an apostle one does not have to take to himself such a title. In fact assuming such a title might greatly hinder rather than help. Even Jesus very cautiously revealed His Messiahship. Public proclamation of it would have rallied the people to Him in a manner that would have hindered His mission.

Another distinguishing feature of an apostle is that he is "a sent one," "a world missionary" for evangelizing the world. Anyone who claims to have the office of an apostle and has no burden for the whole world is not a true apostle.

THE MARKS OF AN APOSTLE'S MINISTRY

1. *An apostle will have a burden for the whole Church, and he will be interested in the welfare of the entire Church. That does not*

mean that he will physically minister to all members of the Body, which may number millions. But his burden will be for the whole Church of Christ. This is very clearly seen in Ephesians 4:11-16.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

- (a)For the perfecting of the saints,
- (b)for the work of the ministry,
- (c)for *the edifying of the body of Christ.*
- (d)*Till we all come in the unity of the faith,*
- (e)and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
- (f)unto a perfect man,
- (g)unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

THAT

"we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him

in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. "

A study of the above passage clearly reveals that the responsibility of a true apostle, as well as that of a prophet, evangelist, teacher, or pastor, is indeed to the whole Body of Christ. A true apostle will intuitively manifest an interest in the whole Body of Christ, and will labor for the edifying of the whole Body until all members "come into the unity of the faith."

2. *He will not have a covetous spirit or be a seeker after financial gain.* Judas, one of the original Twelve who shared their ministry, disqualified himself and also destroyed his own soul by using his position for personal gain. He was treasurer of the apostolate, and carried the bag. Before he committed the climactic act of treachery by betraying Christ for 30 pieces of

silver, he had become a habitual thief. When Mary poured the ointment on Jesus, Judas was indignant and demanded to know why the ointment was not sold and the money given to the poor. The Scriptures reveal that Judas said this,

"not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:6).

A true apostle must be above even the suspicion of a covetous spirit. He may, in the interest of the Kingdom, become responsible for the handling of large sums of money, as the apostles were when the multitude sold their possessions and laid them at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-37). But he will be a faithful steward and will not lavish on himself money given to the cause of Christ for the work of the Kingdom. The story of Judas, given such prominence in the Scriptures, is of deep significance.

3. *True apostles do not seek the glory of men.*
Jesus said,

"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5:44).

It has always been the mark of a false apostle to covet human adulation rather than the honor which comes from God. Diotrefes was such a one who desired "preeminence." He refused to recognize the true apostles, "prating against us with malicious words" John says, and casting out of the church those who were loyal. Diotrefes, who sought to divide the Body of Christ to the intent of furthering personal ambition, revealed himself as a false leader (III John 9-11).

Paul shows the humility of a true apostle when speaking of his own conduct.

"Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ" (I Thes. 2:6).

In fact an apostle, far from finding his

ministry a popular one, may on occasion be faced with severe persecution. Consequently, he must possess unusual grace and humility if he is to be successful in fulfilling his mission. Of this Paul declares,

"For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: *for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men*" (I Cor. 4:9).

It is apparent that only those who can mortify personal ambition would be successful in such an office. Those who seek after such an office for the prominence and honor that it might give are manifestly unqualified for the office, regardless of what other talents they possess.

4. *An apostle possesses a supernatural ministry.* An apostle's work is a supernatural one and he must be fully armed with the power of the Spirit and the gifts thereof. He can accomplish his work in no other way. To profess the office of an apostle without the signs following would be to mark one's self as a false

apostle.

We are informed that in the Early Church the apostles preached the Gospel of Christ with great signs and wonders.

"And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33).

In the next chapter, a similar statement is made.

"And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (Acts 5:12).

Paul associated the ministry of the supernatural with the ministry of a true apostle. In writing to the Corinthians he says:

"Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (II Cor. 12:12).

But even a supernatural ministry in itself is

not enough to qualify one as an apostle. Evangelists, prophets, and even deacons possessed such a ministry in the Early Church. Notice in the above Scripture that an apostle should minister among the people "in all patience." That means he cannot *be reckless in the Kingdom of God*, but must patiently minister to God's people, not seeking to vindicate his own honor, but laboring for the good of the whole body of Christ.

5. *Apostles minister discipline supernaturally.* Another mark of an apostle is that when severe discipline is necessary in the Church, he will minister it supernaturally. As we shall see, when discipline is meted out in the usual manner it leaves the individual free to foment opposition against the Church. The methods used by the apostles in the Early Church kept it pure and free of evil elements.

6. *An apostle is "a messenger, "he is one "sent" on a mission.* The vision of his soul is to evangelize the world for Christ. He has been sent of God to help turn the nations to God. The

vision of a lost world will flame in his soul, and he will be possessed by a burning desire to reach the world for God. This was the vision of the early apostles.

Notice to what remarkable extent the world was evangelized in apostolic days:

"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and WHICH WAS PREACHED TO EVERY CREATURE WHICH IS UNDER HEAVEN. . ." (Col. 1:23).

Christ in His Great Commission said, "Preach the gospel to every creature." That command must be fulfilled in our generation. As Jesus said,

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

It is unthinkable that an apostle or any other ministry set in the Body of Christ should have

otherwise than this vision.

7. *He will be a man of sound words.* Since the work of an apostle is to bring men into a knowledge of the Son of God so that they will "be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine," he will be a man sound in the faith and in purity of doctrine. The great Apostle Paul in writing to Timothy and Titus urged them repeatedly to hold to sound doctrine, and to avoid those things that excite curiosity and vain wrangling and which do not edify the church.

AN APOSTLE'S CALLING

Lewi Pethrus, in *The Wind Bloweth Where It Listeth* writes concerning apostles:

"Some have found fault with us because we have not been anxious to choose or elect apostles. Church history reveals that at certain periods such acts and steps have been taken. When some strong and mighty spiritual movement has broken loose, many have suggested

that we must choose twelve apostles. The Irvingians chose twelve apostles, and they held forth that Jesus would come before they died. Their last apostle died years ago. Because we have not given ourselves to such practices, some have said that we do not respect the office of an apostle. But this we do. We believe in the ministration of an apostle. We believe in the ministration of an apostle's office, just as much as in the pastor's or teacher's ministrations. This must continue in the church.

"For my part, I have always had a sense of fear concerning these high ministrations. I have felt that much that concerns them might be misinterpreted and misunderstood. There are those who go about calling themselves apostles. A few months ago I noticed something that brought me deliverance on this point. I was reading about John the Baptist. Jesus more than once said that John the Baptist was that Elijah that should come.

He said it as he preached to the people, and also as He came from the Mount of Transfiguration. The disciples understood Him. Then they went to John personally and asked him, 'Are you the Elijah that is to come?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.' This enlightened me. I learned that one may have a high calling and ministration without knowing it. John did not consider himself that Elijah. Jesus did. Then, too, I learned that we need not go about trumpeting our calling and attracting attention to ourselves.

"If they insist on knowing who we are, we answer like John did, 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.' I am not an apostle; I am not Elijah. I am too unworthy for this, and I am not capable. But this I know, I have a heavenly calling and a message to deliver.

"So many are weak for titles. And if these high and holy titles be given, it would not be long before we would hear: 'I am an apostle;' 'I am a prophet,' etc. Some time ago a sister came to me saying, 'I have the gift of healing.' I answered, 'That is fine sister, and the gift will manifest itself by your healing the sick.' By what actually happens, folks will see and understand and the kind of gift we possess. We need not go about and proclaim our gifts and callings. And if some should ask if we have this or that gift, we can humbly say, 'No I have not,' even though we may within ourselves feel God has given us a gift. We should turn away from all honor-seeking in connection with these high and holy blessings. We serve the Lord, and in His own day, He will reveal what gift and ministration we had in His field of service.

"I believe it a wonderful grace of God that we did not get into the same

channel as the so-called apostolic church in Wales. I was privileged to have a conversation with a couple of apostles from that church. I learned much that will benefit me the rest of my life. They go about calling themselves apostles, and let themselves be ordained to this calling by being anointed with oil. I asked how they could perform such an unbiblical act. And the leader said, 'I admit we have no real ground in Scripture for this, but we do it nevertheless because there has been so much blessing connected with the act.' The truth of the matter is, this act had been suggested by a false prophecy that they were following. I answered that new light had been thrown upon their entire work and organization. When they could deal with such high and holy callings on such unbiblical grounds, the entire movement was on loose foundations. They had dragged down heavenly things to an earthly plane. Divine things were

put on a human basis.

"It is impossible for humans to choose those who are to be given spiritual ministrations. Delegates of a church or denomination can never know what God may deposit in an individual's life. Organs and members of a body are not placed there mechanically. They come through a process of life. For instance, take a character like Martin Luther. No human chose him to be a reformer. He arose nevertheless. Popes decreed that he should not live, but he lived. Those that God sends are equipped and bring forth a wonderful service. 'But now hath GOD set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him' (I Cor. 12:18). These administrations cannot be set in the church through the choice of majorities. God alone does this work. Ephesians 4:11, tells us, 'He (God) gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and

teachers.' These are God's gifts to the church. Those having such a spiritual ministry have received it from God directly. He has deposited within them His power and they cannot be set aside by humans. Who could set aside a Luther or a Wesley? Such gifts to the church come and go without anyone appointing them or dismissing them."

Chapter 2

The Ministry-Gift Of Prophets

The ministry of prophecy is an integral part of the New Testament Church. There were at least three prophets in the Corinthian Church (I Cor. 14:29). This ministry is second in importance and order in the Body of Christ. The purpose and character of this ministry is declared in the Scriptures as follows:

1. A prophet possesses a definite gift of prophecy. There are certain other qualifications. Jesus had a ministry of prophecy and therefore referred to Himself as a prophet (Luke 4:24 and Luke 13:33). Jesus of course was far more than a prophet.

2. A true prophet will show proper humility and will be amenable to advice from other

ministry-gifts set in the church.

"If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37).

3. While the gift of prophecy is infallible when the prophet is perfectly yielded to the Spirit, yet New Testament prophets were not to be considered infallible.

"Let the prophets speak two or three and let the other judge" (I Cor. 14:29).

It is quite proper to judge all prophecy in the light of the Scriptures.

4. It is the ministry of prophets to exhort and confirm the brethren (Acts 15:32). This is further shown in I Cor. 14:3:

"He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

5. Another ministry of the prophet in the

church is the foreseeing of events of the future. Agabus forewarned the church at Antioch that a great dearth was coming upon the world. And forewarned, the church at Antioch was able to send relief in good time to the brethren in Judea. The dearth actually came to pass, as was prophesied, in the days of Claudius Caesar (Acts 11:27, 30).

6. It is the ministry of the prophets to pray over and lay hands on those being separated unto a special ministry (Acts 13:3).

7. Prophets, together with the apostles, are a part of the foundation of the New Testament Church.

And now let us note a warning given by the Apostle John concerning false prophets:

"Beloved believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I Jn. 4:1).

By their fruits ye shall know them. True prophets will have the Spirit of Christ. Their

works will be of the Spirit of Christ. False prophets are known by their nature; though clothed in sheep's clothing, they may be cruel and relentless. They will not continue long before they disclose their true character.

THE NATURE OF PROPHETIC MINISTRY

In the Old Testament the prophetic ministry was essentially foretelling. In the New Testament, the emphasis is on forthtelling. When man was placed in the Garden of Eden, God conversed with him directly. That communion was broken by man's disobedience. In a certain sense, the gift of prophecy restores that direct communion.

The prophetic gift has many variations. It may be exhortational; it may take the form of song or poetry as in the Psalms; or it may on occasion reveal future events. The gift has varied operations and in some instances may be a vehicle for other gifts such as the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, or discerning of spirits.

Prophecy relating to the future is of two distinct kinds. Some prophecies are unconditional, as for example the Abrahamic covenant or the Messianic prophecies. Others are conditional such as Isaiah's warning of Hezekiah's impending death (II Kings 20:1-6) or Jonah's pronouncement of judgment on Nineveh (Jonah 3:3-10). Unconditional prophecies are not dependent upon man for fulfillment. *Conditional prophecies, however, depend on the obedience of the person or persons to whom they are addressed.*

There is a difference between revelation prophecy and that which is exhortational. In the latter, the Spirit of God takes over the person's subconscious mind and from his storehouse selects, rearranges, and anoints certain truths for the edification of the hearers. Revelation prophecy is a higher form of the gift and involves a greater yielding to the Spirit. Exhortational prophecy is more prevalent and usually is the kind manifested in public services (I Cor. 14:26).

It is true that there is an increasing hunger in the hearts of people for revelation prophecy. Nevertheless, because of the complexity of the gift, certain safeguards are important in its operation. The gift of prophecy involves the merging of the human and the divine, the finite with the infinite, the imperfect with the perfect.

TRUE PROPHECY

"The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev. 19:10).

True prophecy ever points to Christ, to His deity, His ministry, His purpose in coming into the world, and to His return to earth. Alleged prophetic gifts that engage in telling fortunes, divining mysteries, predicting the outcome of political events, locating lost articles, etc., betray the fact that they are something other than the Bible gift. The true gift of prophecy is not to be confused with fortune-telling, extrasensory perception, clairvoyance, and other psychic manifestations. It may, however, at times give guidance and counsel. It is important, nonetheless, that people should search the

Scriptures first before looking for further guidance. Moreover, just as some people misinterpret Scripture, so it is possible to misinterpret a prophecy. In all cases people need spiritual discernment to understand either.

Old Testament prophets on occasion failed to recognize the time of fulfillment of their prophecies. Some make that mistake today. For example the Bible speaks of apocalyptic judgments taking place during the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord. That time is not far off, but it has not yet come. When folk are given the impression that some catastrophic event is to happen immediately, and it fails to take place, they are prone to lose confidence in the gift altogether.

It is true that God does give certain kinds of guidance by means of the revelation gifts. Such was the warning received by Paul when he was on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22, 23). Even so, the prophecy had to be correctly interpreted. But Paul interpreted the prophecy only as a warning of what would happen to him if he went

to Jerusalem; he did not see it as a prohibition. The apostle went on to his destination, apparently in the will of God, although it happened to him just as the prophecy had said.

The gift is not intended as a vehicle to establish new doctrine. We are warned by Peter of men who will come into the church with "damnable heresies" which can lead to great confusion. Some of the most serious heresies owe their origin to the "private interpretation" of some self-styled prophet.

Despite these cautions, let us say that we sorely need the inspiration and revelation gifts in operation in the church. May God give His ministers discernment to distinguish between the true and the false. Paul commands us to

"Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thes. 5:20, 21).

Chapter 3

The Ministry-Gift Of Governments

Besides apostles and prophets there are many other ministries which the Holy Spirit has set within the Body of Christ. Included are teachers, miracles, gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues (I Cor. 12:28). "Helps," for example may include a great variety of less spectacular, but nonetheless important ministries. All of these ministries must function freely within the Body. What do the Scriptures have to say about the ministry of "governments?" Does this office have the element of the supernatural in it? Or is it a ministry that functions entirely through the use of natural methods, such as those which are used in the governing of human organizations or in institutions? The Scriptures we believe are clear

as to the purpose of this ministry of "governments."

A fundamental truth of the New Testament is that every believer is his own priest in contradistinction to Old Testament days when the believer had access to God chiefly through another. In the Church age all members of the Body of Christ should have personal communion directly with God, and not be entirely dependent on someone else. Thus Peter declares in I Pet. 2:9:

"But ye are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light."

Nevertheless the New Testament believer is not to be an "individualist" but is interdependent with other members of the Body of Christ.

He is therefore under obligation to cooperate with other members of the Body as well as to be

subject to the Head, which is Christ. The position of a New Testament believer is not to be as those who lived in the days of the Judges, when

"every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

God has placed "governments" in the church, for He is a God of order and not of confusion. Moreover, this ministry of governments has a supernatural element just as the other ministries of the Body of Christ have.

The New Testament speaks with some detail of government in the local church, but sparingly of that which goes beyond the local church. It is evident that the New Testament purposely omitted giving detailed instructions concerning any universal church government, and in fact uses the plural "governments." The Church was to extend through two millennia. During this long period, circumstances and conditions would greatly change. A full revelation was given as far as principles were concerned, but definite methods of organization were not

specified. What would be best at one time might not be best at another. What might be best for one group might not be for another. This is clearly seen in the order set up in the first church at Jerusalem.

THE EARLY COMMUNAL CHURCH

The first Church was a communal church. The people sold their possessions and had all things in common. Few today advocate that we should return to that form of organization. Attempts to revive a communal church have met with varying degrees of success.

Yet it was successful for a time and apparently it carried the blessing of God, though we have no information that it was specifically authorized by God. It is interesting to note the reasons why a communal church was successful at the time:

1. It was a voluntary arrangement. No one was forced to sell his property and give it to the apostles (Acts 5:4).
2. All the people were filled with the Holy

Ghost and their hearts were aglow with a great love.

3. The Church was under a severe persecution. Some were martyred, others thrust in prison. Such persecution drives people together. The multitude living together experienced a sense of security they would not have felt had they been isolated one from another at that critical time. It is interesting to note that many Jews in Israel today live in communal settlements, especially in areas where they are subject to Arab raids.

4. The apostles exercised divine discipline, thus removing wicked persons from their midst that might have soon destroyed the purity and unity of the Church. This brought great fear on the Church and prevented an infiltration of evil into it (Acts 5:11-14).

5. Another most important reason that impelled the people to dispose of their property was because they had been warned by the Lord of what was ahead. Jesus had told them that judgment was coming on Jerusalem; the city

was to be destroyed, in fact, leveled to the ground (Luke 13:34, Luke 19:42-44, Luke 21:20-24). And this was to come to pass in their generation (Matt. 23:35, 36). Knowing these things, it is not surprising that they felt a strong urge to dispose of their property and invest it in the Kingdom of God. Judgment did come in the years 66-70 A.D. about the time of the martyrdom of Paul, but the Christians, warned beforehand, escaped to Pella.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

While it is true that God did not lay down an absolute form of organization in either a local church or inter-church system (else we would have to follow that of the communal church at Jerusalem), some government is necessary. But whatever the method chosen, it must not violate any of the principles of the Body of Christ. These divine principles must always supersede any human arrangements that might compromise these principles. In other words any ecclesiastical laws that compromise the headship of Christ are unconstitutional.

1. The Church must acknowledge the principle of the supreme Headship of Christ. There is no place for a vicar of Christ.

2. It must acknowledge the fellowship of the whole Body of Christ. That is, no group may restrict fellowship on the lines of its own organization. That would be dividing the Body of Christ.

3. It must acknowledge all the ministries which God sets in the Church. It should not deny initiative to those whom God has called to special ministries in the Body (I Cor. 12:28).

4. Doctrinally it should stand for the principles of the doctrine of Christ (Heb. 6:1, 2).

5. It should be flexible and responsive to revival, when and where God should send it. Historically revivals have come through individuals. Church organizations may greatly benefit from such visitations if they are sensitive to the moving of the Spirit of God.

Paul declares that there are "diversities of operations." Hence, it is evident that every man's

ministry will in some degree differ from another's. All these ministries are needed in order to edify the Church, and to bring it into a holy unity and fellowship. Certain ministers, because of the ministries that they possess and because of their burden for the whole Body of Christ, will be recognized as pillars in the Church (Gal. 2:9). But even these men, Paul hastens to show, are not infallible; they are subject to mistake (Gal. 2:11-14). Peter on one occasion was about to give way to Jewish pressure for a separation of fellowship between the Jewish Church and the Gentile Church. Paul insisted that this fellowship not be broken.

DISCIPLINE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The ordinary methods of discipline were exercised in the Early Church, when such sufficed. But when they failed to preserve the unity of the Body of Christ, then discipline was exercised supernaturally. This was true in the punishment of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). Again, in the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander

in I Timothy 1:20, who denied one of the principles of the doctrine of Christ-the doctrine of the Resurrection (II Tim. 2:18). Thus was the unity of the Early Church preserved.

As we have seen, there were "helps" and "governments" which God set in the Church. Specific methods of their ministrations are not given in detail in the New Testament. But however they functioned, they were to work in harmony and accord with the other ministry gifts.

CHURCH ORGANIZATION IN THE WILDERNESS

Moses, under the heavy responsibility of leadership of the people of the Church in the wilderness, was advised of his father-in-law to appoint others to work under him. Moses followed the advice of his father-in-law (Exodus 18). This form of government that was set up completely failed. In the course of time we find Moses confessing that he was about to break under the burden (Numbers 11:14, 15).

It is commonly thought that Jethro's advice was all wrong. But is that altogether true? The principle of deputation of work is sound. What was wrong was that the men who had been appointed at the first were elders who were not anointed of the Spirit. Consequently, they could only fail in their task, just as those of any other church organization today who are without the anointing of God upon their lives, must fail. God took some of the spirit that was upon Moses and put it upon 70 elders (Num. 11:16-29). Thus they became qualified for their task. These, as has been pointed out, may well have been the same elders.

A certain amount of organization is necessary where men labor together for a common purpose. Organization is a working agreement between brethren. But spiritual tasks require men with Holy Ghost anointing. Without this they are sure to fail. The ministry of "governments" is a supernatural ministry, just as the "gifts of healings" are. This office must have the anointing of God upon it, as certainly as other supernatural gifts, as "the word of

wisdom" and "the word of knowledge" must have, if they are to be successful in their operation. Above all, "governments" must truly recognize the Headship of Christ over the Body.

THE LOCAL CHURCHES

When Christ sent His messages by John to the local churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2, 3), He called them to an accounting. Each church was responsible directly to the Lord for its conduct. Thus the Headship of Christ was maintained in the Body. Elders were appointed as overseers of the Church (Acts 20:28 and I Tim. 5:17). These were also called bishops (I Tim. 3:1), and were subject to certain qualifications. Under them were deacons whose duties were more in the temporal sphere (Acts 6). These were appointed by the elders after they had been nominated by the church.

FELLOWSHIP EXTENDED BEYOND THE LOCAL CHURCH

Lack of transportation facilities in the days of the Early Church limited fellowship between the

various churches. Yet a fellowship was maintained, as much as was possible under the circumstances. When an important question came up in the church at Antioch, the leaders of the church went to Jerusalem where the elders and apostles came together to consider the matter, and to arrive at a decision (Acts 15). When Peter and Barnabas thought to withdraw fellowship from the Gentile church, Paul sharply rebuked them.

There was no elaborate organization in the days of the apostles. The elders of the churches, however, came together on occasion for mutual counsel. Paul commissioned Timothy to travel and ordain elders in certain churches. The Early Church was organized to care for the poor and for the widows and to do missionary work. The autonomy of the local church in apostolic days is strongly evident.

THERE WAS A STANDARD OF FELLOWSHIP

The fellowship was not all inclusive. Men had to come up to a certain standard to be

accepted in the fellowship. Immoral persons were not permitted in that fellowship; neither were those who were unruly or walked disorderly (II Thes. 3:6). Domineering and sectarian leaders were excluded (III John 9-11). They who defiled their separation from the world were to be excommunicated by divine command (Rev. 3:15-19; James 4:4). Fellowship was also based on acceptance of the doctrine of Christ (II John 9-11).

In the Early Church it was common to carry letters of recommendation when an evangelist or minister came into an area where his ministry was not known or there was a possibility that it would be in question (Acts 15:22-31). The principle was that a man should carry a letter of recommendation from a previous field of labor when he went into another. Throughout the letters of Paul we find statements in which he recommended the ministry of some and warned the churches against others.

CERTAIN MINISTRIES SET IN THE CHURCH

We are told specifically that God set certain ministries or ministry-gifts in the Church:

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come into the unity of the faith... That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. . ." (Eph. 4:11-14).

These are the ministry-gifts that Christ has given to the Church as a whole. These gifts are also listed in I Corinthians 12, along with ministries that include persons in the Church who are not actual elders:

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings,

helps, governments, diversities of tongues" (I Cor. 12:27, 28).

THE PLACE OF DENOMINATIONS

What place does a denomination hold in the New Testament Church? Are denominations scriptural or unscriptural? Or should we ask first what is a denomination? A denomination actually is something that has been "denominated" or in other words given a name. R. E. McAlister sums up the matter when he says:

"Any group of Christians whether large or small, whether local, national or international, who are designated by a name, a doctrine, a form of worship, a policy of church government, or united in any common cause such as evangelism or missionary work, is a denomination. To be associated with a group of God's children who stand for the full Gospel, whether in a local assembly or in a larger fellowship which

takes on national or international proportions, is commendable.

"The first denomination of the Christian dispensation was called Disciples of Christ. In the four Gospels and the Acts, this group is referred to by name about two hundred and fifty times... The second designation of God's people in this dispensation was Christian. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch (Acts 11:26). Since that time several hundred denominations have taken the name and called themselves Christians. The Christian Church, Christian Missionary Alliance, Evangelical Christian and many others are still familiar names, which designate groups of God's children as denominations. It remained for the Apostle Paul, by divine revelation, to bring to the world the truth of the Body of Christ which is the Church. From then on the name 'church' came into prominence and that name is

used over one hundred times in the New Testament. These local churches were associated together and took on national, international, and universal proportions. In this affiliation or association they were designated as The General Assembly and Church of the First Born (Heb. 12:23).

"As time went on, the Church took on national and international proportions. In keeping with this expansion and extension, the recognition of one universal Church as members of the Body of Christ was retained. At the same time there was a local, national, and international recognized affiliation and organization to the point of efficiency and economy. Each assembly was a self-governing unit, in a great universal brotherhood of united churches in Christ."

Rev. McAlister's statement is a fair one. A church may function as a church independent of

all other churches. But for many reasons it is advisable that churches find a basis for cooperative fellowship. In these days when swift transportation contributes to the intermingling of people from various churches in a measure greater than any other time in history, it is urgently necessary that some basis of fellowship between all true believers be found. As Christ showed in John 17:21, the unity of the Church is necessary if the world is to believe that Jesus is The Christ.

Rev. McAlister adds in his statement concerning religious organizations that "Some denominations and sects are decidedly unscriptural and modern." One can scarcely deny this. Declension of spiritual power in a religious organization usually results in the usurpation of the headship of Christ. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that this headship be kept inviolate. A religious organization can by a simple test ascertain if it is in harmony with the will of God: Does it recognize the whole Body of Christ by lip service or in reality? Is it a fellowship that encourages the unity and

harmony of all members of the Body of Christ, or does the denomination regard its organization mainly as a defense against competition?

Recognition of the supremacy of the headship is necessary for the attainment of a universal fellowship of God's people. Only when a universal fellowship is attained can we say that we have given Christ preeminence. For only when the members of the Body are working in complete harmony and unity can it be said that the Head has full control over the Body.

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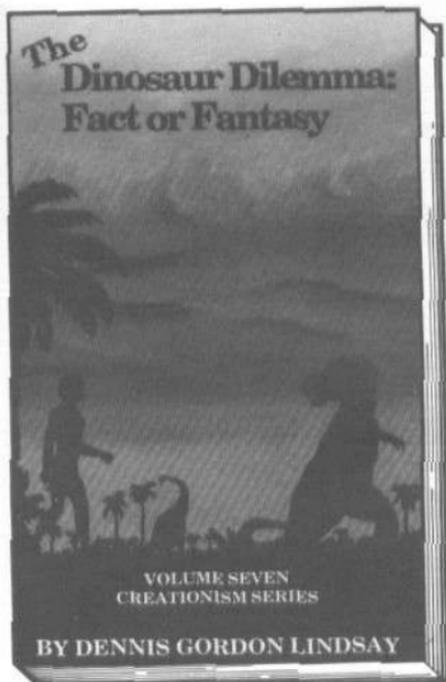
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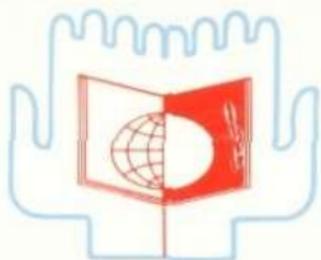
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