

Chapter One

The Ministry

(a) The Meaning of Order¹

Order is the co-ordinating of the life of the Church in its fellowship, worship, and mission in the service of the glory of God. The order of the Church's ministry is the ordering of its life and work through participation in the obedience of Christ. Let us elucidate that in a number of paragraphs.

(1) In the biblical revelation the whole concept of order is viewed over against disorder and chaos. Apart from the ordering of God's creative Word the world is without form or void, but into the ordered cosmos there has broken the disorder of sin. It belongs to the very nature of sin to divide, to disrupt, to be anarchic – sin is lawlessness, *anomia*. The opposite of all that is order, harmony, communion. When God made the world He made it in order and everything was set in its due proportion. But through the lawlessness of sin the world fell out of proportion, out of order, and was threatened with sheer chaos. Were it not for the persistent fact of God's purpose of love the world would destroy itself; but in His Covenant mercy God holds the world together in spite of its chaos, and to that end He has promulgated His law which restrains and contains disorder and chaos, and reduces it to a measure of proportion, even while it is in the grip of *anomia*, or lawlessness. But God's Covenant contains the promise of a new order, of a new creation when all things will be restored to their obedience and perfection in the divine Will. Meantime wherever there is *anomia* it is met by the divine *nomos*, and there is conflict between disorder and order.

(2) The biblical revelation does not work with a concept of natural law, that is, of an order immanent in natural processes capable of being brought to its self-expression. There is an order of creation (*ordo creationis*) but that is not discernible by observing the creation (*cursus naturae*) but only by observing the

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creative Will of God. This creative Will of God will restore to creation its lost order, and restore to creation its true form and harmony in the Word of God. That is shadowed forth in the divine law promulgated in the Old Testament, the revealed law of God, but as yet that law set over against the lawlessness of the world is revealed mainly in its negative aspect of judgment upon disorder, and of restraint upon lawlessness. It is through the judgment of disorder that order is maintained, and laws are formed to make life in the disordered world possible at all. But the ultimate function of that law is to point beyond itself to the new law, the new order of the new Covenant. Under the old Covenant there was a divine form of administration or economy given in the law of Moses; but that points ahead to the new Covenant when the Covenant Will of God will bring and manifest a new form of administration or economy. This will be inserted into the world and written into its inner being – the new law to be inscribed upon the heart through the Spirit. As such it is a new order that comes from without and is planted within.

(3) That new order, the new economy, or rather the eternal Economy of God for His creation, came into the world in Jesus Christ. In the Incarnation the Word of God entered into His own disordered world; the Light shone into the darkness; the divine economy entered within historical and creaturely existence. In other words, the Covenant Will of God broke into our world and is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ both from the side of God and from the side of man. That is the economy of which St. Paul speaks, when he describes its work as that of gathering up all things into Christ the Head, things visible and invisible, and their ordering in the eternal purpose of the divine love and fellowship. *OIKONOMIA* describes literally the ordering of a house, household administration. God is the great Householder who has come to take control of His own house and family and order it according to His Love. He does that in and through the Incarnation, in which His *OIKONOMIA* is not imposed upon the world from without but enters into it and operates from within it. *OIKONOMIA* represents the great condescension of the divine Will to work out His purpose of love without violence within the alienated will of man, to work out His divine economy within the disordered existence of the world. Now the *mode of that economic condescension* is the way of

Jesus Christ the Servant, the way of obedience even to the death of the Cross, and it is through that mode of economic condescension that He is exalted to be the Head of all things, and especially the Head of the Church, His Body.

(4) In Jesus Christ, therefore, in His Incarnation and in the whole course of His obedience, there has taken place in the divine economy a restoration of alienated man to fellowship with God, a conversion of rebellious humanity to the obedience and love of God. In other words, in the whole human life of Jesus the order of creation has been restored; in the midst of our disordered, sin-disrupted existence, there has been lived a human life in perfect order and proportion to the Will of God. The Covenant purpose of God in creation has been fulfilled and more than fulfilled. Here we have the divine economy entering into our creaturely and human existence and ordering it from within *against* our human nature, that is, against the consequences of sin in all its disorder, chaos, and lawlessness entrenched in fallen human nature. This is the order of redemption which reaches back to the original order of creation and far transcends it in the amazing purpose of the divine love, as the order, of the new creation. Here in the new Humanity in Jesus Christ nothing is out of order, or out of proportion. Everything has its proper order, proper time, proper place, proper sequence, and proper end. From beginning to end the whole life of Jesus in obedience to the Father is directed to His praise and glory, so that the new order of creation established and revealed in the Humanity of Christ can be spoken of as the praise of creation for the Creator.

(5) Order in the new creation is to be regarded as a third dimension. We are not concerned here simply with the Will of God and the obedience of man, with the Law of God, and the conformity of man to that divine law, but with a *third dimension*, with a divinely provided fulfilment of the divine Law. In the Old Testament we have a situation in which God gathers His children into Covenant relation with Himself, and within that Covenant He declares: "I will be your God, and you will be my children. ... I am holy, therefore be ye holy. I am God, walk before me and be perfect." But God knows that His children are unable to be holy or obedient or perfect before Him; they are unable to fulfil the requirements of His Covenant Will, so that within the Covenant and as part of its Covenant

mercies He graciously provides a way of response to His Will, a way of obedient conformity to His Covenant which He is pleased to accept as from His people in the Covenant. That was provided in Israel's Cult or *leitourgia*. But that cultic pattern of response had to be acted out in obedience, while it pointed beyond itself to God's promise of a way of obedient fulfilment of it in the actual existence and life of His people. That was the theme in the Servant Songs, which was fulfilled at last in Jesus Christ, who in His obedient Humanity is our God-given way of response to the divine Will. God's Covenant Will is fulfilled for us, on our behalf, and in our stead, and through our participation in the obedient Humanity of Christ we are given to share in the fulfilled economy of the new Covenant, indeed of the new creation. That then is the third dimension: We are not simply concerned even in the Christian Church with the Will of God in love and grace, and then with the obedience of man in love and fellowship. We are concerned with these two, but with the two as fulfilled and completed in Jesus Christ, in the obedient ordering and perfection of His human life as an oblation of all praise and thanksgiving to God the Creator and Father, and therefore of our sharing in His obedience through the power of the Spirit. Thus *order in* the New Testament refers to the concrete ordering of our human life and being in the obedient Humanity of Jesus Christ. All order in the Christian Church is a participation in His obedient Humanity – whether that order be an ordering of its daily life, daily worship, or daily fellowship, or daily mission. The whole of the Church's life is ordered through participation in the ordered life of Jesus Christ, the New Adam, the Head of the New Creation.

(6) The form which this re-ordering in Jesus Christ takes is the form of a Servant. It was through His obedience within our disobedient humanity that He restored us to order and peace in God. But in that He the obedient Servant is given to be the Head of all creation, all creation is now re-ordered in obedience to Him, for He gives it to share in His obedience to God. Because Christ is the Head of creation, chaotic, lawless creation is restored to order in Him, and because He restored order through obedience to the Father, He restores order to the creation through bringing creation into obedience to Himself, by granting it through the Spirit to share in His own obedience.

Thus as Jesus was obedient in the Father, who sent Him to fulfil His Will, so the Church is ordered in its obedience to Christ who sent it to fulfil His Will. The obedience of the Church to Christ is not simply an imitation of His obedience but a fulfilling of God's Will through participation in Christ's obedience.

(7) It is through the Spirit that the Church is given to share in Christ's obedience, and so to be ordered in and by and through His obedient Humanity. Christ is the Law of the Church's life, the Law according to which its life and work are to be ordered, but that Law is fulfilled not simply by external obedience and conformity but by inner and outer sharing in His Life, so that *through the SPIRIT* the Church is in-the-law to Christ (*ennomos Christou*), conformable to Him through communion with Him. It is the Spirit who is the Law of the Church's ordered life; not the Spirit as a new law of nature, not the Spirit as the soul of the Church, not the Spirit as a new immanent norm in the development of the Church through history, but the Spirit who gives the Church to share in the obedience of Christ the Head of the Body and who is other than the Church, its Lord and King but who in economic condescension has come to be obedient to the Father from within the Church, that the Church may share in an obedience not its own, and in an order that is new to it, indeed against its own nature; an order from beyond the Church's own being but in which it is given to participate by the Spirit.

(8) This being so, *actual order* as we see and have it in the historical Church on earth is essentially ambiguous. Its basic order is the obedient new humanity in Christ. The Church shares in that through the Spirit, so that its life is ordered through the Communion of the Spirit. But the Church that shares in that order of the New Creation is the Church that is sent by Christ out into history, to live its life in the physical and temporal existence that awaits redemption in the second advent of Christ. The Church in the midst of the old creation and all its disorder shares in the new creation and its new order. By sheer participation in the empirical life of this fallen world which comes under the divine judgment, and therefore the divine law, the Church participates in worldly forms and laws and cannot escape from them. It is sent to have its mission right there under law, but under law to share in the new order in-the-law to

Christ through the Spirit. Just as the Son of God Himself condescended to be made under the law and through obedience to fulfil the Will of God, and as such was exalted above all, so the Church which is given to share through the Spirit in the new Humanity of Christ is sent into history to live out its new life in the form of a servant under the law – not to be fettered by the law, not to be schematized according to the forms and patterns of this age, that is, not to be legalized in its life, but to use the patterns and forms of the law of this age in the service of its new life in the risen and ascended Lord. Thus all order in the historical Church is essentially ambiguous because it is order in the overlap of the two ages, this present age that passes away and the new age which through the Spirit already overlaps it in Christ.

Another way of putting that is to say that all order in the historical Church is essentially eschatological. By “eschatological” here two things are meant: (a) that order carries within it the tension between the new and the old; and (b) the tension between the present (including the past) and the future. True order in the Church of Christ is order that points above and beyond its historical forms to its new order in the risen Christ, and points beyond its present forms to the future manifestation of its order in the new creation. All order in the Church is thus ambivalent and provisional: it is order that visibly reflects its life hid with Christ in God, and order that exercises a provisional service in time, until Christ comes again. The outward order is like the scaffolding of a building which is to be torn down and cast away when the building itself is complete. In history God has given the Church its historical order and structure which participates in the forms of this passing world, but when the building of the Church as an habitation of God is complete, and its new order is revealed in the advent of Christ, the historical forms of order and structure will be cast away. Or to put it another way: all order is at once juridical and spiritual. It is at once participant in *nomos* and participant in *Pneuma*, that is, in Christ through the *Pneuma*. The validity of orders in the Church partakes of that ambivalence. Validity is at once a juridical term relative to the particular nomistic structure of a Church, relative to the law of a Church, but validity is also a spiritual term referring to the sharing of the

Church in the authority of Christ through His Spirit, a sharing in the *exousia* of the Son of Man. It is that essential ambiguity in validity that makes it such a difficult term, and forgetfulness of it that causes persistent confusion.

Now in the light of all these eight paragraphs we have to think of the *order* of the Church's ministry with reference to its actual life in the space and time of this world. The ordering of the Church's life through sharing in, and therefore according to, the obedient Humanity of Christ, is an ordering within the physical and temporal life of this world. Order has therefore to be thought out in terms of *space* and *time*.

(1) Order in regard to Space

Because the Church is the Body of Christ, it has a physical and spiritual life in which the physical and the spiritual are not to be separated, though they may be distinguished, from one another. The Church as Body of Christ in history has therefore space. It has its place in this world, the place which it has been given by Christ, and into which He has sent it. It is in its place in the physical world that its life is to be ordered. Let us look at that in this way. Jesus Christ, the Man Jesus, is the place in this physical world where God and man meet and where they have communion with one another. The Temple in the Old Testament was the place where God put His Name, where He kept tryst with His covenanted people, and where they kept covenant with Him. Jesus Christ is that Temple on earth and among men where God has put His Name, and where He has appointed us to meet Him. It is the place where heaven and earth meet, the place of reconciliation. Jesus Christ is Himself God's mercy-seat, God's place in this world where He is really present to us in our place. But Jesus Christ ascended and He is in heaven – that is, He has a heavenly place far beyond anything that we can understand and far beyond our reach, but Jesus Christ through His Spirit has also bestowed His presence upon us in the Church, so that the Church on earth is the place of Christ.'

The place of the Church in history is the place where Christ's presence is to be found. That is His real presence. It is of course above all in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in the midst of the Church on earth, that we are given the real presence of

Christ. That is the place of Christ in the place of the Church on earth. That is the place where heaven bends down to earth, and where man on earth is made to sit in heavenly places in Christ. Here we are concerned with two places, as it were: the heavenly place of Christ and the spatial place of the Church. The place of the Church is to be defined with regard to that heavenly place of real presence of Christ on the one hand, and with regard to its participation in the spatial context of the physical world on the other. The Church's life, worship, fellowship, and ministry are all ordered in regard to that twofold place, heavenly and earthly place. No adequate understanding of the order of the Church can neglect that twofold involvement in space enshrined so clearly in the Sacrament. Order will concern the indicating or defining of the place on earth where the heavenly place of Christ makes contact with it, but that earthly place cannot be so delimited and defined as thereby to define and delimit also the heavenly place of Christ. Christ the risen and ascended Lord is in a place that is beyond definition and delimitation. It is through the Sovereign Spirit that He graciously condescends to be really present in the appointed space of the Church and to make that His place on earth. But He does not thereby bind Himself to that place on earth; rather does He bind us through that place to His own real Presence, to His heavenly place, and so from that appointed place on earth He exalts us to sit with Him in heavenly places. All this means that the Church's *order* in space is concerned with the ordering of its physical fellowship and worship in the Spirit. Order serves the proclamation of the Word and the Eucharistic fellowship on earth, but orders it in such a way that it makes room in it all, makes a place in it all, for the Sovereign presence of the Spirit, for the heavenly place of Christ – that is, for His real presence. The Christian Church as the Body of Christ on earth knows nothing of a spaceless ordering of its life.

(2) Order in regard to Time

Because the Church is the Body of Christ, it has a temporal and eternal life in which the temporal and the eternal are not to be separated, although they may be distinguished, from one another. The Church as the Body of Christ in history therefore

has time as an essential ingredient of its reality. It has its time in this world, the time which it has been given by Christ, and into which He has sent it. It is in the time-form of this world, in historical existence that its life is to be ordered – to be ordered as Christ's Body in time. Now Jesus Christ in His historical life is the area in the time of this creaturely world where God and man, eternity and time, meet and have communion with each other. Israel through its history was the area within world-history into which God intervened with His redeeming purpose, in order to work into our time and from within our time toward that area in the fullness of time when God would become man and gather man into the life of God, when the Eternal would come into the passage of time, and gather time into union with the eternal. In Israel God bound our time into Covenant-relation with Himself, but all that is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ where time is not only the sphere of the eternal event, but time is sanctified, redeemed, reconciled, and given new reality in union with Eternity, once and for all.

In Jesus Christ, therefore, the Eternal Son of God has lived His life within our time; He became time, and has in Himself elevated time into abiding communion with the eternal God. In Jesus Christ God has recreated time, redeemed it from its vanity, from its guilt and irreversibility, its decay and corruption, and given it a new reality in the new Humanity of the incarnate Son. But Jesus Christ has ascended and He is in heaven, in Eternity – that is, He has an eternal time far beyond anything that we can understand, or can measure by the kind of time we have in this passing age. It is not a timeless time, or a timeless eternity, but eternal time in which our time, redeemed new time, is eternally real in union with Eternity itself. That is the new time of the Kingdom manifested in the forty days of the risen Jesus Christ upon the earth, and within the lapses of our temporal history; but now that Jesus Christ has ascended, He has withdrawn that new time of His New Humanity from sight, from the visible succession of passing time on the plane of history.

And yet Jesus Christ bestows Himself upon us in time, and in such a way that our faith and worship are not timeless, any more than they are spaceless. It is within our passing time that He has time for us, that He makes time for us, makes time for