

The Papal and Hierarchical System - Part 6

by Joseph John Gurney

Joseph John Gurney preaches about the Christian ministry, highlighting the fallacious claim of the priesthood by Rome, the importance of apostolic succession, and the true qualifier for the ministry being the Holy Spirit. He discusses the diversity of gifts within the church, the unity of believers as one body, and the avoidance of patronage and popular election of ministers. Gurney emphasizes the congregational nature of worship in the early church, where all members participated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, promoting a deeper reliance on Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of truth and power in ministry.

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Transcript

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 hasTranscript: true oneLinerSummary: "The speaker argues that the Papal and Hierarchical System is contrary to the New Testament's view of the church and its members, and that all members of the church should be encouraged to use their gifts and talents to serve and minister to others." sermonType: "expository" topics: - name: "Church Government" slug: "church-government" - name: "Holy Spirit" slug: "holy-spirit" bibleRefs: - text: "Isaiah 59:21" bookId: "ISA" chapter: "59" verse: "21" - text: "Acts 2:16" bookId: "ACT" chapter: "2" verse: "16" - text: "1 Corinthians 12:4" bookId: "1CO" chapter: "12" verse: "4" - text: "1 Corinthians 14:29" bookId: "1CO" chapter: "14" verse: "29" - text: "1 Timothy 5:17" bookId: "1TI" chapter: "5" verse: "17" - text: "1 Peter 2:5" bookId: "1PE" chapter: "2" verse: "5" outline: - heading: "The Papal and Hierarchical System" - heading: "The New Testament's view of the church and its members" - heading: "The apostolic view of the church and its members" - heading: "The implications of the apostolic view for the church today" - heading: "All members of the church should be encouraged to use their gifts and talents" - heading: "The church should be a community of servants, ministers, and priests of the living God" - heading: "The order and harmony of the church depend on the distinctness of the service into which every member is called" faq: - q: "What is the Papal and Hierarchical System?" a: "The Papal and

Hierarchical System is a system of church government in which a select group of clergy are set apart as priests and mediators between God and his people, and are supported by the temporal support of their brethren." - q: "What is apostolic succession?" a: "Apostolic succession is the idea that the Holy Spirit is bestowed on every approved candidate for sacred orders through the laying on of the hands of the bishop, and that this succession has been unbroken from the apostles." - q: "What is the New Testament's view of the church and its members?" a: "The New Testament teaches that the church is the flock of Christ, not a select body of clergy, and that all members of the church have a role and function, and should be encouraged to use their gifts and talents." - q: "What are the gifts of the Spirit?" a: "The gifts of the Spirit are various abilities and talents that are given to members of the church to enable them to serve and minister to others, such as the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, and discerning of spirits." - q: "What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the church?" a: "The Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual gifts and abilities, and is the one who qualifies and equips members of the church for their roles and functions." quotes: - "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." - "Ye shall be named the priests of the Lord; men shall call you the ministers of our God." - "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." applicationPoints: - "All members of the church should be encouraged to use their gifts and talents to serve and minister to others." - "The church should be a community of servants, ministers, and priests of the living God." - "The order and harmony of the church depend on the distinctness of the service into which every member is called." keywords: - "Papal and Hierarchical System" - "Apostolic Succession" - "Episcopal Ordination" - "Protestant Clergy" - "Romish Priesthood" - "New Testament View of the Church" - "Gifts of the Spirit" - "Holy Spirit" - "Church Government" ---

ON THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

WE have already found occasion to observe, that Rome spiritual lays claim to the continuance, under her auspices, of the sacerdotal system. No sooner have the ministers of religion, within her borders, received full ordination at the hands of the bishop, than they become priests, in the sense not of presbyters only, but of mediators and sacrificers. That this claim to the priesthood is utterly fallacious that no such office is recognized under the gospel dispensation, except in the person of the risen and ascended Saviour has, I trust, been sufficiently demonstrated on the authority of Holy Writ; and will probably be allowed by the generality of Protestants.

But there are other parts of the system of ministry, adopted by Rome spiritual, which are p135 maintained, and that with no small measure of zeal and determination, by Protestants themselves. The Romanists in the whole matter of ministry, depend on what they call apostolical succession; and the means which they adopt in order to secure this succession, is episcopal ordination i. e. an appointment to the ministerial office by the laying on of the hands of the bishop. Thus, from generation to generation, there is provided a supply of persons who shall be devoted to the service of the temple, and who are regarded as a perfectly distinct class constituting the church itself, or at any rate, its essential life its living, acting, and governing head or soul.

A large proportion of the links of this sacred chain, and especially the earlier links, are merely imagined or supposed. History makes no mention of them; and some of them, in all probability, have been entirely wanting; but the church decrees that the succession has been unbroken, and her ipsa dixit is sufficient for her purpose. On the other hand, history does afford the most explicit evidence that many of these links have been composed of extremely base metal -- that many of the popes and prelates who have been the

means p136 of continuing this succession, as well as multitudes of the inferior clergy themselves have been men of notoriously corrupt and vicious lives.

Nevertheless, ecclesiastical romance takes it for granted, that, through this vitiated channel, the pure stream of the Holy Spirit has quietly flowed on, from age to age, as the true source of the clerical office. The Romish church boldly assumes for herself the continuance of the well-known apostolic miracle, and openly pretends that, by the laying on of the hands of the bishop, the Holy Ghost, as the ever-flowing fountain of ministry, is bestowed on every approved candidate for sacred orders.

Here we have, first, a recognition of the promise of the Spirit; secondly, a restriction of that promise, so far as gifts are concerned, to the clerical class; and thirdly, a practical mockery of sacred things, in the notorious fact, that no such miraculous communication of spiritual gifts is believed in, or really thought of, either by the supposed giver, or the supposed receiver the ordainer or the ordained. It is certainly a remarkable circumstance, that these gross and dangerous superstitions did not perish under the axe of the Reformers, and that p137 they are still maintained by the Protestant episcopal churches at any rate by the most reputable and powerful of these bodies the church of England.

Like her mother of Rome, that church pleads the apostolic succession as the authority for her ministry; and she does not hesitate to confess, that this succession is derived to her through the medium of that corrupt parent, from whom she separated herself. Like her mother of Rome also, the church of England professes to convey to her ministers from generation to generation, by the laying on of episcopal hands, the gift of the Holy Ghost. Were such a gift the true consequence of episcopal ordination, as it was in primitive days of the laying on of the hands of apostles, no sincere Christian could object to such a method of ensuring a supply of Christian ministers.

But every one knows that this is not the case. Notwithstanding all pretensions to the contrary, it is universally understood among the members of the church of England, that her ministers are appointed to their office by the simple authority of the ordaining bishop, and without the accompanying communication of any spiritual gift. It ought to be observed, that in thus making p138 mention of the Holy Ghost, as the true qualifier for the ministry, the bishops of the churches of Rome and England, profess a sound and scriptural principle; yet they are evidently liable to the charge of irreverence, in pretending to the exercise of a miraculous power, of which they know themselves to be destitute.

The ceremony of the laying on of hands is also practised by the generality of other Christian sects; but they lay no claim to the apostolic faculty of bestowing spiritual gifts. Among the Independents, Baptists, and others, the ministers of the respective congregations are chosen by the churches, and ordained by their elder brethren in the work. Among the Wesleyan Methodists, they are both chosen and ordained by the already existing body of ministers -- the clergy of that denomination who hold in their own hands the power of discipline, together with the trusteeship of all the property belonging to the Society.

Thus it appears that not only the Romish church, but almost all the churches and sects which have been formed since the Reformation, have given their countenance to the setting apart, by human authority, of a particular class of men out of the p139 whole community of Christian believers, on whom alone are to devolve the various functions of the Christian ministry. They are separated from their brethren as much as the Levites were in days of old; they are ordained to be preachers by their fellow men, and by them are appointed to the care of particular congregations; and wholly abstaining as they do from the pursuit of any worldly calling for their own support, they are maintained either by compulsory ecclesiastical provisions,

under the law of the land; or at the voluntary expense of their brethren who provide them with salaries.

For the most part they are distinguished by a particular dress, and often by robes of office when they are publicly engaged; and under a variety of titles, from the Right Reverend Father in God, down to the simple Reverend, they are, with little exception, even among the dissenters, called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. A calm consideration of the subject may serve to convince every reflecting mind, that the Protestant clergy of various grades and denominations, are a modified type and yet a type of the Romish priesthood.

While the generality of them do not p140 profess to be priests in the sense of [GREEK], or sacerdots, they nevertheless assume, in various degrees, (the degree varying with the character of the denomination) an authority over the flock, a mediatorship between God and his people, an exclusive handling of sacred things, and a claim on the temporal support of their brethren, which are all more or less connected with the motion of an Aaronic succession, and all form integral parts of the Papal and Hierarchical system.

The reader will of course understand, that I am not attempting to sit in judgment on the individuals who have constituted, in past days, or who are now constituting, this great clerical fabric. I rejoice in the belief that notwithstanding the obstructions, which such a plan of ministry appears to me to offer to the free course of a divine and saving influence, the Holy Spirit has condescended to display his power in many of these persons -- first, in truly calling them to their work, secondly, in qualifying them for the performance of it, and thirdly, in winning souls to Christ through their instrumentality.

No one who knows anything of the state of the churches in this country and America, and no p141 one more especially who is acquainted with the history of Protestant foreign missions, can deny that such a work of grace has been carried on, in and through many members of this vast clerical body, to a considerable extent. Nor are there wanting examples of Roman Catholic priests, who have laboured for the diffusion of evangelical religion. Under whatsoever administration or particular form of religion my fellow men are at work in promoting the cause and kingdom of Christ if they are but sincere in their love to him, and faithful to that which they believe to be their duty I can, from my heart, bid them "God speed" in the name of the Lord.

The one thing needful -- is the life of religion -- its vital operation on the hearts of individuals; and if this necessary work is but experienced if the leaven, which quickens the dead souls of responsible men, does but spread all questions respecting modes of worship, and all that comes under the head of religious polity, must be regarded as comparatively unimportant. Nevertheless, truth is truth, and principle is principle, and it is by adhering to these that we shall best promote, in the end, the diffusion of this leaven.

There can be little doubt p142 that were they to have full sway on the subject of the Christian ministry -- were they to bear down all obstructions to their course, not indeed by the hand of violence, but by their own native efficacy the result would be a far wider and deeper flowing of the waters of life, than has hitherto been experienced since the days of primitive Christianity. The sacred stream which flows from under the throne of God and of the Lamb, instead of being bricked up in particular channels, and confined within certain precincts, marked out by the caprice and prejudice of man, would diffuse itself, by a divine and unrestricted energy, on every side.

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." The liberty of the Spirit would be found a blessed freedom indeed, fraught with happiness to mankind, and wonderfully efficacious in promoting the reign of the Messiah, and the glory of God. What then is the truth, and what the recta ratio, or right principle, in

reference to this subject? For an answer to this question, we must apply ourselves, with all diligence and simplicity, to the testimony of Scripture, and particularly to that of the New Testament. p143 Now the New Testament is so far from giving any countenance to the division of the body of Christians into the two classes of clergy and laity, priests and people, that it everywhere upholds a unity by which any such division is wholly precluded.

In the first place, it is ever to be remembered that the church is not the select body of those who are appointed to feed the flock of Christ, but the flock itself either the assembly of believers in any particular place; or in a wider sense, the whole community of true Christians all the world over. Thus the apostle Paul salutes "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops (or overseers) and deacons, (or servants.)" The "overseers" here mentioned, formed part of the body.

They might be, and probably were, its most important and influential members; yet they were only members of that whole body of which Christ is the head. This point is so obvious, that it will not be disputed by any reasonable person, and need not be further argued. But we cannot stop here. Discarding from our view, for the present, the mere professor of Christianity, p144 whose membership in the church of our blessed Lord is purely nominal, we must consider the true believers who constitute the living people of Christ, as baptized by one Spirit into one body; and although all the members of that body have not the same office, yet they all have some office; and if any single member fails to perform his own functions, or to perform them aright, the health of the body is thereby affected, and in proportion to the measure of the loss experienced, its life languishes; for the life of the body depends on the healthy, vigorous, and united action of all its parts.

The whole subject is laid down, in the most vivid and explicit manner, by the apostle Paul. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; p145 to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not of the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need p146 of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked; that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. 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.

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way:" 1 Cor. xii. 4-31; comp. Rom. xii. 4-9; Eph. iv. 11-16. p147 That more excellent way is charity or love, which cements all these members of the body together, and is itself the "bond of perfectness." It is evident from this description, first, that all the members of the true church of Christ are partakers of one and the same life, even as the whole body lives by the circulation of the same blood; and the life by which every Christian lives unto God, is the influence of the Holy Spirit.

By this, and this alone, he is quickened from dead works to serve the living God, in whom are his "springs." And, secondly, it is clearly taken for granted by the apostle, that every living member of the church will be brought into usefulness, and under some administration or other, will become profitable to the body. Thus it appears that in the true economy of the Christian system, the saving grace of the Spirit of God, and his gifts for particular services, although distinct, and not to be confounded, are correlative and co-extensive; and there is surely every reason to believe that the liveliness of any Christian body can never fail to be greatly augmented, where the spiritual functions, instead of being concentrated by force of human systems, in an p148 individual, are suffered to diffuse themselves, under the native energy of the Spirit, through the whole body.

Such, at any rate, is the theory of the church, and such the practical pattern of it, presented to us in the Scriptures. It is to the whole of Israel, that the prophetic promise is addressed "Ye shall be named the priests of the Lord; men shall call you the ministers of our God:" Isa. lxi. 6. And it is to the whole body of Christian believers that the apostle Peter applies a corresponding language, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ;" and again, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:" 1 Pet. ii. 5, 9.

It will probably be admitted by every reader, whose mind is free from educational bias on the subject, that this apostolic view of the component parts of a Christian church, while it proclaims a wonderful diversity of administration and function under one and the same Spirit, is directly opposed p149 to the customary division of the body of Christ, into the two distinct classes of clergy and laity. The setting apart of a tribe, like that of Levi of old, to be supported by their brethren, and to be devoted to the services of the temple, belongs to the dispensation of the law.

So far as appears from the New Testament, it is wholly foreign from the nature and plan of Christianity. Under the gospel, there is indeed a great variety of gifts, but no division into classes or tribes; no formula of one tribe officiating for God, while all the rest of Israel, so far as relates to spiritual function, is dead and passive. On the contrary, all belong to one and the same great class, that of the servants, ministers, and priests of the living God. In this character, "the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers that water the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons

of men:" Mic. v. 7.

Yet we do not forget that all the members of the body have not the same office. On the contrary, the distinctness of the service into which every member is called, must be maintained in its integrity; for it is thus alone that we shall preserve p150 the order and harmony of the whole body. Among such distinct services, are those of pastorship, eldership, and overseership, all which terms of spiritual office are nearly synonymous, and represent that care and government of the flock, which devolved, in primitive days, on the most experienced members of the body.

These were appointed to their office, with the laying on of the hands of the apostles and their brethren, but always under the especial guidance and qualifying influences of the Holy Spirit. They were probably, for the most part, the older Christians, who exercised, under Christ, a beneficent rule over the flock, and whom the younger and less experienced believers were exhorted to obey. There is reason to believe that in most of the churches of the apostolic age, these guides of the flock were numerous.

In others they might be few. In others again the office of overseership or government might devolve on a single individual. But whatsoever might be the circumstances of any particular church in this respect, the office itself was the result of a distinct gift or call of the Spirit, and not of the setting apart of a separate tribe or class by the authority of their fellow men. p151 As to the function of ministry (as we now call it), it was sometimes exercised by those who also received the gift of government; and the elders who laboured in word and doctrine were counted worthy of peculiar regard.

"Let the elders who rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in word and doctrine:" 1 Tim. v. 17. But there was no official or necessary connexion, in primitive days, between the gift and office of government, and the gift and office of preaching. The preachers of the word, in that day were called prophets; not because they uttered predictions, but because they spake under the immediate influence of the Spirit of God. The gift of prophecy, although perhaps not of so high an order as that of tongues, and other gifts of a directly miraculous nature, is represented by the apostle as peculiarly desirable because of its usefulness.

"He that prophesieth," says Paul, "speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." The prophets or preachers in the primitive churches were numerous, and exercised their gifts in the assemblies of the saints, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Their services were not only for the building up of God's people, but p152 also for the conviction of the ignorant and unbelieving. "But if all prophecy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest, and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and acknowledge that God is in you of a truth:" 1 Cor. xiv. -4-, 25.

When, however, the anointed servants of the Lord were sent forth among the heathen to declare the salvation which is in Christ, to a dark and perishing world, they probably received the name of Evangelists. The apostles were enabled, by the laying on of hands and prayer, to call down on others the gift of prophecy, but the gift itself was bestowed only by the Great Head of the church; and as He alone could call unto this sacred office, so He alone, by his Spirit, could qualify any man to perform it.

The immediate influence of the Spirit was indeed found to be necessary, not only for the original introduction to the functions of a preacher, but for every successive act of speaking in the name of the Lord. Whether the prophets were called into preaching or prayer, in the primitive assemblies p153 for divine worship, they spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; and at all times when that divine

motion was withheld, they must of course have kept silence. "Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace; for ye may all prophecy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted:" 1 Cor. xiv. 29-31. From the description which the apostle gives of the prophets and their functions, it is abundantly evident that while they possessed a distinct gift, they were not, any more than the elders and rulers, a separate tribe or class. All the living members of the church were admissible into these functions, provided always that the Lord was pleased to call them into the work.

Neither did they require any preparatory course of literary instruction to qualify them for their service the grace of Christ was sufficient for them. There is every reason to believe that these remarks are true, as it regards the sisters as well as the brethren, in the church. When the apostle commands the women to "keep silence in the churches," the key to his meaning appears to be p154 given in the words which follow, "And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home."

They might not interrupt the preachers of the word by asking them questions, as was commonly done in the Jewish synagogues; neither might they undertake the office of public teaching which involved an assumption of authority over the flock: 1 Tim. ii. 12. But that Paul had no intention to forbid their prophesying i. e. their preaching or praying under the immediate influence of the Spirit may be safely concluded, first, from his saluting many women, in his epistles, not only as his helpers, but as his co-workers: and secondly, by his giving directions, in what manner the women were to be attired, when they were engaged in the public act of prophesying: see 1 Cor. xi. 1-16.

The plain fact is, as Grotius has observed, that the direct influences of the Spirit of God are beyond positive laws; and the effusion of those influences on both sexes, as a qualification for prophesying, was predicted by Joel, and marked out by the apostle Peter, as one of the distinguishing signs of the Christian dispensation. When the Spirit was poured forth, on the day of Pentecost, upon the whole company p155 of believers, Peter said, "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days (saith God) I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and on my servants and on my hand-maidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy:" Acts ii. 16-18; comp.

Joel ii. 28, 29. Nor are we to imagine that an inspired ministry, as it has now been described on apostolic authority, was to be confined to the primitive church. This might be in a great degree the case, as it regards those gifts which were directly miraculous, and intended as resistless evidences to an unbelieving world such as those of healing and tongues. But the gift of prophecy was for the use of the church in all ages, being "profitable for edification, and exhortation, and comfort;" and the blessed influence under which alone it can be rightly exercised, was to be bestowed on the believing children of God to the end of time.

"The Holy Ghost" was to "abide" with them "forever:" John xiv. 16. "The promise," cried Peter to the multitude of his hearers, "is unto you, and to your children, and to all that p156 are afar off; even to as many as the Lord our God shall call:" Acts ii. 39. Now this was the promise of the Spirit as the Author not only of grace, but of the gifts which were necessary for the edification and enlargement of the church. "My Spirit that is upon thee," says Jehovah to his Christ, "and my words which I have put into thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, from

henceforth, and forever:" Isa. lix. 21.

In this last most cheering passage of Scripture, is unfolded the true secret of continuation and succession, in the work of the Christian ministry. It was all well that a Timothy should commit those precious truths which he had himself heard from the lips of Paul, to faithful men, that they, in their turn, might be able to teach others also; and it was still better, that Paul and his inspired brethren should record those truths in the volume of the New Testament, which was appointed to become an infallible standard of faith and doctrine -- a test by which all human preaching should afterwards be tried.

But for the continuation of the work of the ministry in the church for the actual succession p157 of living preachers of the gospel our whole dependence must be placed upon God; who, by his own power, put his words into the mouth of his servants, even those whom He chooses, raises up, and ordains from generation to generation, in the church of Christ. I am persuaded that up to the present date, such living witnesses to the truth of God have never failed from the earth; and since the promises of God are yea and amen for ever, we may rest assured that they never will fail, while there is a church to be edified, and souls to be saved.

The golden oil will still flow from the olive trees of the Lord, which himself has planted, and through the golden pipes which himself has formed; nor can it be doubted that persons have been, and still are, truly called into the work, under a great variety of names and administrations. Yet it is not too much to assert, that if there was less of the admixture of human wisdom, system, and authority in some of these administrations, the work of the Lord would go forward with greater clearness, greater brightness, and greater effect.

His own word of truth would run and be glorified, and abundant would be the joy of his people in Him. p158 In the system of ministry which, on the simple authority of the New Testament, has now been described and advocated, two evils, which have since greatly perplexed the professing church of Christ, are entirely avoided. The first is patronage, and the second, the popular election of ministers. It is obvious that in primitive times, when all exercised the function of preacher, who were called into the work by the great Head of the church, and anointed for it by the Holy Ghost, there could, in the very nature of things, be no secularities mingled with the preaching of the gospel.

It was exclusively a spiritual office, and as it could not possibly be procured by purchase or hire, so it required no pecuniary remuneration. It was one of the Lord's free gifts to his children, and was exercised on the basis of his own precept, "Freely ye have received freely give." True indeed it is that the evangelists the apostles the travelling preachers of the word who had turned their backs, in the love of Christ, on their customary means of livelihood, had an undoubted claim, for temporal support, on those for whose benefit they were sent to labour.

The workman was worthy of his meat. But we find that Paul, p159 when he tarried any considerable length of time in one place, never failed to recur to his handicraft business for his own maintenance, that he might not be burdensome to the churches which he had planted; and he even ministered in temporals to those who were with him, being well assured that it is "more blessed to give than to receive." A fortiori there can be no doubt that the "prophets," who continued to occupy their own homes, pursued their various worldly callings for the support of themselves and their families, and for the help of those who needed their assistance.

Their spiritual office was accompanied by no temporal emolument; it could not therefore be a matter of patronage. For the very same reason, it could not be an object which any man would pursue in the way of canvassing the votes of the members of a congregation. There was nothing in the functions of a prophet, which could gratify either the avarice or the ambition of man, nothing which could call any one into the strife and turmoil of a popular election. The plain fact is, that the prophets were chosen from their very birth, by the Lord of life and glory, who reigns supreme over his own church: and p160 when ripened by his grace, and called to his work, they rose up in the congregations of his people, to declare of his goodness, or knelt down in public vocal prayer; not at the command or suggestion of man, but as the Holy Spirit, on each successive occasion, led them into their service, and qualified them for its performance.

Yet we are not to forget that the "spirits of the prophets" were subject to the prophets. They were to maintain a watchful regard for their brethren, to make way one for another, and to speak two or three (in succession of course) while the others judged. Among the various gifts then bestowed on the church, was that of the discernment spirits; there was the spiritually instructed ear which tasteth words as the mouth tasteth meat; there were the elders in the church, whose duty it was to look to the preservation of the quietness and harmony of the assemblies, that all things should be done "decently and in order."

Finally, there was the body of the Lord's people, who could not fail to compare the doctrine preached with the testimony of Scripture, and to feel whether it was so delivered in the life of the truth, as to reach the witness for God in their own bosoms. While p161 therefore the choice of the preacher could never be a matter of popular election, there can be no question that it rested with the church, under the guidance of its Holy Head, to try the pretensions of the prophets; to encourage or disallow their services; and publicly to acknowledge the validity of the gift, when experience had afforded sufficient evidence that it was indeed of God.

In order to bring our subject to a satisfactory conclusion, we must, in the last place, inquire what was the primitive plan of conducting congregational worship. If the clerical system which crept into the church in times of diminished vigour and purity, and to which the generality of Christians are accustomed in the present day, had been instituted by our Lord, and practised by his earliest followers, there can be no doubt that we should have found ample notices of it in Scripture.

We should have read of the congregations of the Lord's people, each under the presidency, guidance, and teaching of some one appointed preacher who should act as the head, heart, lungs, and tongue of the whole assembly; on whose lips all were to hang; on whose doctrine all were to depend, to the utter exclusion of the rest of the congregation. p162 But so far are we from finding such a pattern in the New Testament, that a directly contrary view is there presented to us. The apostle Paul has given us, incidentally indeed, yet most graphically, a living description of the Christian assemblies for divine worship as they were held in his own day see 1 Cor. xiv.

There we find that the vocal ministrations, practised on these solemn occasions, were, in no degree, restricted to the individual tenant of a pulpit; but were completely congregational, conducted under the immediate influences of the Spirit in the liberty of the Holy Ghost. One had a psalm, another a doctrine, another a tongue, another a revelation, another an interpretation. On all were poured forth, under different administrations, the gifts of the same Spirit. Above all the blessed gift of prophecy, through which the word of truth was freely preached, was liberally diffused by the Great Head of the church so that "all might prophecy" (when rightly called to the work), and all be edified.

Here the whole body is represented to us as alive in the native power of truth a joint and united spiritual priesthood, prepared of the Lord to offer up "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable unto God through p163 Jesus Christ." Now since all the vocal offerings of primitive congregational worship, were thus prompted by the moving of the Holy Spirit, it follows that when no such divine motion was felt, the congregation must have remained in silence. Nor is it, as I apprehend, possible that such a system of worship could have been conducted in true decency and order, on any other basis.

"Keep silence before me, all ye islands, and let the people renew their strength; let them draw near, then let them speak," &c. "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." These awful commands must surely have been found to have a virtual application to the primitive assemblies of God's people; composed, as they were, of persons who dared not speak aloud in divine worship, except as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance. At such times of awful silence, the Lord Jesus Christ must have been felt to be present with them, taking the office of Preacher into his own hands, and ministering to every member of the body, according to its need.

He is indeed "the Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which God pitched and not man" our Prophet as well as our Priest, who still speaks, p164 by his Spirit, "with authority" "as never man spake;" and it is only as we are gathered to a living dependence upon his teaching, that we can really grow and flourish in religion, and bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the praise and glory of God. In the whole matter of Christian ministry as its author, conductor, inspirer, and theme, and above all, as He who teaches us immediately by his Spirit our Lord Jesus Christ is, and ever will be, our ALL in ALL.

Could we but renounce our dependence on the systems, forms, and contrivances of men, and put the fulness of our trust in His wisdom, love, and power, there is every reason to believe that his truth would spread with wondrous energy; and mightily would that blessed day be hastened when "the kingdoms of this world" shall "become the kingdoms of our Lord; and of his Christ."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/joseph-john-gurney-/the-papal-and-hierarchial-system-part-6/>

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