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# A Theology of Ministry for the 21st Century

## I. Church History & Cultural Context

To develop a coherent twenty first century theology for ministry it is important to understand something of the past. Perhaps a little sermon will do here:

Genesis 16.7-9 The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." 9 The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her."

When the LORD arrested Hagar, she was fleeing from her own reality. It was an uncomfortable place, but God had set her there. The LORD asked her ". . . where have you come from and where are you going?" Twenty first century pastors must know where the church has been in order to know where they must lead it to. We, like Hagar, must return in some way to the place from which we have come. Once she left home and then returned, things were probably never the same; it was still where she needed to be. She would thereafter dwell in submission to proper authority. For us, that authority is the Bible.

So, we shall examine where we have come from and chart a course to return to the place God would have us to be. First, as believers we must adhere to the Scriptures and the Rule of Faith which is articulated in them. Furthermore, we must subscribe to the teachings articulated in the historical ecumenical creeds. These foundations are not optional for they define orthodoxy. Third, we must contend for the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith. We know that no person can please God without living by faith.

Having defined these prerequisites for Protestant orthodoxy, we will now consider where American Christians have come from, for it is within the American culture we are called to minister and proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

### **A. Enlightenment**

The nineteenth century brought with it significant changes in the American society. The Enlightenment had produced a rationalism that taught people to accept only that which could be proven according to scientific methods. This caused many people to reject the passages of Scripture that indicate the supernatural workings of God. Prophecy and miracles were rejected as superstitions of an antiquated world view. In America, many people became deists; they believed there was a God, but they viewed Him as a type of clock maker who created the heaven and earth and then left them to run upon predetermined scientific principles. He was seen as an aloof God who never intervened in the affairs of humankind.

### **B. Calvinism**

This trend also led many American people to abandon the Calvinism of their ancestors, and begin to accept not just the philosophies of Deism, but Universalism, and Unitarianism as well. Since God was no longer being viewed as a sovereign who predetermines the affairs of people, it came to be believed that people were furnished with enough sense to improve themselves. They thought humankind was equipped with a rational mind, and could *invent* their way to a better life.

Even in Christian circles the old line TULIP Calvinism, codified at Dort, found increasing challenges. “Crazy” Lorenzo Dow, a Methodist minister, succinctly ridiculed it with the following little ditty:

You can and you can't, -You shall and you shan't -You will and you won't  
-And you will be damned if you do -And you will be damned if you don'.<sup>1</sup>

### C. Charles G. Finney

Arminianism was making some inroads in England during the eighteenth century because the Wesleyan revivals were transforming many lives. This Wesleyan phenomenon was by no means restricted to England but was spreading in North America as well. This way of thinking was well suited to Americans.

The Methodist message was somewhat innovative, but it stopped short of declaring people can do anything to save themselves. They taught that people possess a free will, and are able to rationally choose to accept or deny Christ. The success of their approach was self-evident, for the gospel of Christ was being preached with positive fruits. As people accepted Christ, they were immediately placed in accountability classes, so they could develop into mature believers. A most eloquent proponent of this type of revivalism was a New York country lawyer named Charles Finney.

Rochester, New York is a very interesting microcosm for understanding the nineteenth and the twentieth century religious history. Nowhere were the fires of dissent and revival more evident than there. *The Burned Over District*, a famous book by Whitney Cross, documents all of the enthusiasms of those times.<sup>2</sup> They include evangelicalism,<sup>3</sup> prohibition-temperance,<sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> abolition,<sup>6</sup> female suffrage,<sup>7</sup> violent

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<sup>1</sup> Lorenzo Dow, *Reflections on the Love of God* (chapter. 6)  
<http://www.giga-usa.com/gigaweb1/quotes2/quautdowlorenzox001.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District, The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York 1800-1850*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1950, 1965)

<sup>3</sup> Charles G. Finney

<sup>4</sup> Theodore Weld

masonry,<sup>8</sup> Anti-masonry,<sup>9</sup> millennialism,<sup>10</sup> Mormonism,<sup>11</sup> and spiritualism,<sup>12</sup> all these phenomena manifested in western New York during the period between 1825 and 1845.

Prior to 1825, most Rochester area churches were Calvinistic. The advent of Finney, Rochester and western New York became more and more Arminian. Rochester is the birthplace of a new American Christianity, a religion of the wild west; one that is characterized by rugged individualism, along with an outworking of the principles of *Manifest Destiny*. Optimism, capitalism, and industrialization all came together and the mixture was dynamic. The financial aspect of the revival is well documented in *A Shopkeepers Millennium, Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York 1815-1837*.<sup>13</sup>

#### **D. Liberalism**

Rochester was also a major player in Protestant liberalism. Coinciding with the revivalistic emphasis in the middle nineteenth century was the rise of Biblical criticism. Unlike the scholars of the past, the new Protestant scholars tended to be academics and not church people. The study of theology was being conducted by skeptical people, some of which may have had no real concern about how their conclusions might affect

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<sup>5</sup> Theodore Weld is painted as an abolitionist in *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* by Donald W. Dayton, but Whitney Cross informs us of Weld's early temperance preaching in Rochester before he became a famous abolitionist.

<sup>6</sup> Frederick Douglass

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth C. Stanton

<sup>8</sup> William Morgan

<sup>9</sup> Gov. Myron H. Clark

<sup>10</sup> William Miller

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Smith

<sup>12</sup> the Fox Sisters

<sup>13</sup> Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeepers Millennium, Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York 1815-1837*, (New American Century Series, Hill and Wang, 1978)

the church. Other scholars did have real concerns about the church and sought ways to retain faith in light of the newly discovered documents and archeological advances.

In 1835 Augustus Rauschenbusch, a German Lutheran, had undergone an evangelical conversion akin to the conversions that were then taking place in America. He was water baptized by immersion, and moved to America as a missionary to German immigrants.<sup>14</sup> In the 1850s Augustus Rauschenbusch moved to Rochester and began to lead the German Department at the Rochester Theological Seminary.<sup>15</sup> This move coincided with the time other German theologians were writing some very critical documents. While Augustus Rauschenbusch remained an evangelical for the remainder of his life, the Rochester Seminary began to slide into the liberalism during his tenure.<sup>16</sup>

## II. Scripture and Tradition

### A. Catholic Developments

While Liberal Protestantism was being beguiled by their own reasonable minds, and as the whole world was being seduced by the thoughts of Charles Darwin, both Roman Catholic and Evangelical Protestant thinkers mounted an attack against those who would dilute the authority of the Scriptures. Surprisingly, the Roman Catholics and conservative Protestants were found to be saying very similar things.

In the work entitled *Providentissimus Deus*, Pope Leo XIII, makes a strong argument for the authority of the Scriptures. Using the testimony of many respected

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<sup>14</sup> Paul M. Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch, American Reformer*, (New York, Macmillian Publishers, 1988) 3

<sup>15</sup> Paul M. Minus, *Walter Rauschenbusch, American Reformer*, (New York, Macmillian Publishers, 1988) 6

<sup>16</sup> Leroy Moore Jr. *The Rise of American Religious Liberalism at the Rochester Theological Seminary 1872-1928*, (A dissertation presented to the Clairmont Graduate School, 1966)

saints he demonstrated that the Scriptures are indeed accurate, and should have full authority in the lives of believers. Leo notes that Catholic tradition is replete with testimonies to the authority of the Scriptures. St. Jerome is quoted as saying, “to be ignorant of the Scripture is not to know Christ.” And again, “A man who is well grounded in the testimonies of the Scripture is the bulwark of the Church.”<sup>17</sup> Gregory the Great has charged that, “Those who are zealous in the work of preaching must never cease the study of the written Word of God.”<sup>18</sup>

## **B. Fundamental Developments**

By the late 1800s, the more conservative Protestants were also reacting to the lack of orthodoxy in their liberal counterparts. They, like the Catholics, were calling for a traditional approach to understanding the word of God, but they began to define scriptural authority in a novel way. The Roman Catholics first announced that the Scriptures were dictated by the Holy Spirit, and then fundamental Protestants came to similar conclusions, and began to call for a doctrinal statement that spelled out some fundamental beliefs. The first fundamental belief is plenary inspiration.<sup>19</sup>

A Fundamentalist is a born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who:  
1. Maintains an immovable allegiance to the inerrant, infallible, and verbally inspired Bible. 2. Believes that whatever the Bible says is so. 3. Judges all things by the Bible and is judged only by the Bible. 4. Affirms the foundational truths of the historic Christian Faith: The doctrine of the Trinity; the incarnation, virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection and glorious ascension, and Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; the new birth through regeneration by the Holy Spirit; the resurrection of the saints to life eternal; the resurrection of the ungodly to final judgment and eternal death; the fellowship of the saints, who are the

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<sup>17</sup> [http://papal-librarysaint-mike.org/leoXIII/encyclicals/Providentissimus\\_Deus.html](http://papal-librarysaint-mike.org/leoXIII/encyclicals/Providentissimus_Deus.html) 6/1/2003, 4

<sup>18</sup> Providentissimus Deus, 4

<sup>19</sup> *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* reprinted by Baker Books from the 1917 edition issued by The Bible Institute of Los Angeles. 1993 On-line copy: <http://www.xmission.com/~fidelis/>

body of Christ. 5 Practices fidelity to that Faith and endeavors to preach it to every creature. 6. Exposes and separates from all ecclesiastical denial of that Faith, compromise with error, and apostasy from the Truth. 7 Earnestly contends for the Faith once delivered.<sup>20</sup>

Point four of this statement covers most of the Nicene Creed, but the fundamentalists seem to call for a church that only consists of people who believe in Biblical infallibility and plenary inspiration. While this pseudo creed spells out many necessary doctrines, it is apparent that those who subscribe to it are quite willing to divide over dozens of other issues as well.<sup>21</sup>

### **C. Liberal Developments**

In the book, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, Donald W. Dayton has attempted to quell the myth that Christian liberalism is the parent of the social reform movements. Dayton argues that some features of Charles G. Finney's thought moved him toward egalitarianism, which in turn bore the twin fruits of abolitionism and feminism.<sup>22</sup> It is true that the social gospel eventually found its voice among liberal theologians at the Rochester Theological Seminary such as Walter Rauschenbusch,<sup>23</sup> but the abolition, temperance, and the women's rights movements all grew from the theologically conservative.<sup>24</sup> Rauschenbusch merely stretched the evangelical fervor to its humanly logical, political conclusion. In his books, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (1907) and, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, (1917) he redefined every major Christian doctrine into socialist tenets. Many evangelical people were appalled at this,

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<sup>20</sup> <http://logosresourcepages.org/tim-5.html>

<sup>21</sup> KJV only, pre millennialism, Tongues, types of government, baptism, etc.

<sup>22</sup> Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, (Peabody, Hendrickson, 1976) 17

<sup>23</sup> American born son of the aforementioned Augustus Rauschenbusch

<sup>24</sup> Donald W. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, (Peabody, Hendrickson, 1976) 99



including Dr. Augustus Strong, the former president of the Rochester Theological Seminary, and the man to whom Walter Rauschenbusch dedicated his theology book.

Strong predicted the demise of seminaries headed in this direction:

This method of interpretation switches off upon some side-track of social service many a young man who otherwise would be a heroic preacher of the everlasting gospel. The theological seminaries of almost all our denominations are becoming so infected with this grievous error, that they are not so much organs of Christ, as they are organs of Antichrist. This accounts all over the land, of Bible schools, to take the place of seminaries.<sup>25</sup>

Why social justice became the main issue of liberals is hard to say; perhaps the evangelicals threw the baby out with the bath water. Perhaps they were so scandalized by the lack of evangelical fervor in the liberal church that they may have felt they needed to concentrate upon preaching and teaching, and leave the lesser work for the liberals.

#### **D. Pentecostalism**

Dr. Strong was correct about the advent of Bible schools. They proliferated everywhere. Another major development was beginning to emerge also. By the time Dr. Strong lamented the liberalism of his own seminary, Pentecostal fervor had already burned from Topeka Kansas to Azusa Street in Los Angeles. It was springing up in Rochester too. In the fall of 1911, Ivan Q. Spencer enrolled in Elim Tabernacle's *Rochester Bible Training Institute*.<sup>26</sup> Spencer would, in 1924, go on to found Elim Bible Institute near Rochester.<sup>27</sup> Elim Bible Institute was destined to provide many orthodox

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<sup>25</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, *A Tour of the Missions - Observations and Conclusions*, (Philadelphia, The Griffin and Rowland Press, 1918.) 189-191

<sup>26</sup> Marion Meloon, *Ivan Spencer - Willow In The Wind*, (Plainfield, New Jersey, Logos International, 1974) 22

<sup>27</sup> Marion Meloon, *Ivan Spencer - Willow In The Wind*, (Plainfield, New Jersey, Logos International, 1974) 60

pastors who would minister in western New York, and made that area a bastion for Holy Spirit enthusiasm. Elim's main contribution was not in the arena of pentecostal teaching for that had been accomplished by the Assemblies of God many years earlier. Their main contribution was the development of a pastoral theology and ecclesiology that understood the church as the body of Christ which is manifold in nature: Apostolic, Prophetic, Evangelistic, Pastoral and Catechetical. (Ephesians 4.11-12)

### **III. Doctrine**

Now I wish to turn my attention to things that make for a theology of ministry for the twenty-first Century. History has shown that the church responds and reacts not only to error, but to culture as well. Since the great commission demands that the gospel be preached to all nations, the church must find a way, (with the help of the Holy Spirit) to present Christ in a way that the common people of all cultures can understand.

My views of doctrine are described below:

#### **A. Catholic Doctrine**

A working theology for the twenty-first century must be based primarily on early Catholic doctrine. Orthodox doctrine is defined by these things; they are the things the whole church has always, everywhere, believed. It is not possible to reject the consensus of the patristic church and continue to pretend to be a real Christian. The very basis of Christian unity is based upon the Bible and the ecumenical councils. People are free to differ on lesser things that may not be clearly defined in the Scriptures or in the Rule of Faith.

#### **B. Wesleyan Doctrine**

The Augustinian - Calvinistic view of determinism really has no place in my thinking. To view humankind as possessing no volition, apart from the plan of God, is

both unreasonable and unscriptural. The Gospel must be preached to every creature. Each human being is responsible to either accept or reject the love of God. All people will either be justified or condemned by their own decision. The teachings of Jacob Arminius have prevailed over those who resisted them.

### **C. Baptist Doctrine**

It is very hard for me to understand why much of the Protestant church continues to contend for a sacramental view of the church, and why so many people insist on continuing the unscriptural practice of infant sprinkling. Some might ask if this position is not inconsistent with the views stated above in section A? I answer that that while the church did practice infant baptism very early, it was not the New Testament pattern. There is no use in describing why baptism by immersion is necessary. If Charles Spurgeon was not able to convince you, I will not be able to convince you either.

Those who have declined to practice believer's baptism have instead prescribed alternate testimonies such as the inquirer's room, or the sinner's bench. In recent years the sinner's prayer has become popular as a salvific act.

I do not believe that baptism should be performed within the church walls, as that denies the testimonial aspect of it. Public baptisms at crowded beaches can testify to the saving grace of God.

Many argue that the truth of the gospel is proven by the testimony of the martyrs who died rather than deny it. Can this truth not be verified by the fact that the Anabaptists preferred drowning to denial?

### **D. Pentecostal Doctrine**

Lastly, I have been convinced of the doctrine of pentecost. If Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, then His Spirit must be the same also. Many of those who

profess belief in the Scriptures deny the work of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it is their rational minds denying supernatural intervention, but in denying the present work of God in the world, they are leaving themselves to bring salvation about by their own works, thinking they are following the Scriptures. This approach has proved to be an utter failure.

#### **IV. Ecclesiology**

A proper Theology begets a proper Christology; the patristic writers understood this. They contended for a proper understanding of the Trinity, and the two natures of Christ because they understood that a proper soteriology was at stake. They understood Jesus to be fully God and fully human. He was the Word of God; he who had bridged the gap between a Holy God and sinful people; the exact expression of God's communication to people. If Christ is both divine and human, then it stands to reason that the church that is His representation in the earth must be human and divine also. God is dwelling in and among human beings.

When thinking of the church, some groups have tended to emphasize the gathered people of God. Others have viewed the church as being those who gather at the communion table, and equally partake of his body and Blood. Some others, like the Apostle Paul have tended to view the church as the Body of Christ. I have always tended to view the church as His earthly Body. Each member functioning differently, and each person contributing their own gifts to the good of the whole.

Being baptist in orientation, I view the church as being composed only of believers, each congregation being local in nature, but connected to other congregations spiritually. After studying the concept of catechesis, I am less inclined to

understand salvation as an instantaneous experience brought about by a crisis of faith. Now I see salvation as a process that begins with an awakening and then develops toward maturity.

## **V. Pastoral Theology**

### **A. Priesthood**

The events of the Babylonian Captivity had in effect divided New Testament era Judaism into two main camps. The Sadducees were clothed in the priestly robes of Aaron, and emphasized the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic covenant. They accepted only the teachings found within the Torah. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were congregational in their emphasis, and they concentrated on teaching and living the moral precepts of the Tanach. They were interested in the Psalms and the Prophets as well as the Torah. Their congregations were mainly led by rabbis who were not priests. It was mainly within this synagogue tradition that Jesus ministered. The early churches were founded on the synagogue model as well. The leaders were called bishops, presbyters but they were not thought of as a priesthood. The idea of a sacramental priesthood dispensing the grace of God is a much later development. The new Testament contains no such directive. I therefore believe that the Old Testament priest is not the best paradigm of the pastoral ministry. On the other hand, it might be useful in reaching out to lukewarm populations that are used to sacramental religion. The above statement should not be taken too far, for to do so might leave the impression that the ministry practitioner does not in any way function in a priestly role. One could argue that anointing with oil, and pastoral prayer are indeed priestly functions.

## B. The Five Fold Ministry

Dr. Douglas Cullum has proposed three historical models of ministry based upon the prophet, the priest, and the king.<sup>28</sup> A similar fivefold ministry model has been proposed by members of the *Latter Rain Movement*; this understanding is patterned on the *ascension gifts* mentioned in Ephesians 4.11. These ministry emphases are derived directly from the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is said to be an apostle, a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor, and a teacher. These aspects of Jesus Christ would not be denied by either a Roman Catholic or the most fundamental Baptist. If Christ is all of these things then the visible body of Christ must demonstrate these traits also. Some of the ordained clergy must be especially gifted in these areas as well if they are to teach the church.

Here is a table that explains the calling and motivation of ordained ministers according to this system:

	<b>Apostle</b>	<b>Prophet</b>	<b>Evangelist</b>	<b>Pastor</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
<i>Motivation</i>	Missions	Justice	Witness	Gathering	Instruction
<i>Christ</i>	Heb. 3.1	Mat. 21.11	Mat. 4.23	Joh. 10.11	Joh 13.13
<i>Women</i>	Rom. 16.7	1Cor. 11.5	Phil.4.2-3		Tit. 2.3

Many Americans are very uncomfortable with using the word *apostle* or *prophet*.

Yet they are good descriptive terms. To avoid using these terms the American church has tended to call them all *ministers* or *pastors*, when in fact their true motivation gifts may be missions or social justice. A healthy church will certainly contain all of these motivation gifts in order to carry out the great commission.

It also should be noted that the Apostle Paul, (the insensitive bigot who commanded the troublesome women of Corinth to shut-up) explicitly assigns the

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<sup>28</sup> Douglas Cullum, *Lecture on J. H. Newman's Essay*, Northeastern Seminary, BHT 514, Class Notes 6/3/2003

apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, and didactical ministries to women! To ignore these ministers is to reduce the work force by half.

### **C. Healer of Souls**

Scott Austin, a Northeastern Seminary student, has suggested that the metaphor of the shepherd is archaic. Perhaps this concept is no longer understood by our society, but the truth of it remains. Some have suggested metaphor of the physician of souls might be a better model for pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century. This concept is found in the writings of Chrysostom,<sup>29</sup> but I am not sure this is any better. It would depend on whether a person has a positive view of their doctor. I remember the days when an office visit was a dollar, and a house call was two dollars. Those days are gone. No doctor visits homes anymore, and neither do many pastors. Perhaps, if the church would just train ministers to be shepherds and spiritual doctors, it would help. They could then explain it to the people by word and deed.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The most important thing to remember in considering ministry in the twenty-first century is that believers have already experimented with, and thought about these things for twenty centuries. They have adjusted the church to changing conditions, world views, and empires. Some things remain the same: people are still alienated, guilty, and hopeless; they need to find some meaning in life. They need some questions answered: Why am I here? Where is God? Why is there evil in the world? How can I raise my children properly? Is there any hope? We can answer these questions.

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<sup>29</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Titus, Homily 2