



# Tak the hand

*David D. Scott*

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*End is in beginning;  
And in beginning end:  
Death is not loss, nor life winning;  
But each and to each is friend.*

*The hands which give are taking;  
And the hands which take bestow:  
Always the bough is breaking  
Heavy with fruit or snow.<sup>1</sup>*

William Soutar entitled this poem, “Song”. He wrote it in Perth during the last years of his life. He was still a young man, bedridden as a result of ankylosing spondylitis contracted after a bout of food poisoning whilst serving in the Royal Navy during the First World War. At the heart of his poem is a truth about life and living together in community – those who give, take and those who take, bestow. A true community is one which values the gifts of others but is not constituted by the givers alone. That would be patronising. A true community is one where each person is not only a giver but a receiver. And so the dignity afforded to those who share their gifts is given to all and the humility of those who are willing to receive from others secures our growth and well-being. But the bough is always breaking! There is a generosity of spirit in this revelation which reminds us of the generosity of Christ turning water into wine at Cana in Galilee, or multiplying loaves and fishes to feed a multitude, or hanging on another breaking bough to bring peace on earth. The poet is a breaking bough too, laden sometimes with autumn fruit and at other times the harvest of a wintry desert. For he penetrates the mystery of creation and our creation and sees something of eternal worth.

In creation, God calls humankind into existence and not individuals per se – he chooses and calls *the people* of Israel to fulfil his purposes. As with the people of Israel, so with the Church. He has a plan ‘to gather up all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph 1:10). Within this corporate vocation, God calls individuals to help the people of Israel and the Church to fulfil their corporate callings. At the time of the Reformation, both the corporate and personal natures of our calling were celebrated in a unique way. Membership of the Church was through baptism, but entry to the priesthood was *not* through ordination for, according to Luther’s *Address to the German Nobility*, ‘we are all consecrated priests by baptism’.<sup>2</sup> Jesus is the only one who is styled a priest in the New Testament. Luther quotes from 1 Peter 2:5: ‘like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ This ministry, then, is not my individual calling but the calling of the Church, of which I am a part by virtue of my baptism.

The ordination rite included in Knox’s Liturgy was called “The Form and Order of the Election of the Superintendent”. Underneath the title, there was a word of explanation which made it clear that it ‘may serve in election of all other ministers’. The fact that the liturgy used for a superintendent could equally well be used for a minister says something significant about equality. The superintendent was not a bishop with episcopal powers but a minister of Word and Sacrament whose specific duties were delegated by the General Assembly with some local control. The word ‘ordination’ does not appear in the liturgy, but the term ‘election’ reflects the importance placed on the election of the minister. As in the early church and primitive liturgies of ordination, the people played a significant part in the election of their minister. This is laid out in some detail in the First Book of Discipline (1560).<sup>3</sup> Here, following the prayer of ordination, there is a liturgical innovation. Knox’s Liturgy states: ‘The prayer ended, the rest of the Ministers, if ony be, and Elders of that Kirk present, in signe of thair consents, sall tak the elected by the hand’.<sup>4</sup> This was the only ceremonial action in the liturgy. Whereas the Kiss followed the ordination prayer in the liturgies of the East and the medieval liturgies of the West, they did not *take the hand!* Although the Scottish

Reformers acknowledged the biblical authority for the imposition of hands, it was omitted here. This liturgical act, however, has been repeated in every ordination since, in what has become known as the ‘Right Hand of Fellowship’. This enables ministers and elders not only to participate in this liturgical action together but confirms the collegial nature of ordination and the egalitarian shape of the church.



## **A theology of ordination**

In his book, *Holiness and Ministry*, Thomas Dozeman presents what he describes as ‘a biblical theology of ordination’. His starting point is the holiness of God and his conviction is that ‘Without the realm of the sacred, there would be no profession of ordination.’<sup>5</sup> He examines two theories of holiness. The first is holiness as a dynamic force,<sup>6</sup> deriving from an experience of the numinous. The second is holiness as ritual resource.<sup>7</sup> It derives from sacred space as opposed to religious experience. In Dozeman’s view, the New Testament does not provide a developed theology of ordination. The primary purpose is, instead, to celebrate ‘the invasion of the sacred into the profane world through the mission of Jesus’.<sup>8</sup> Dozeman looks at the whole corpus of Scripture and sees in the Mosaic office a model for his theology of ordination. He examines the prophetic call to Moses in Exodus 3–4 and the priestly call in Exodus 6–7. In Deuteronomy, he observes that Moses exercises a ministry to second generation Israelites, explaining what the saving events mean and how the holiness of God invaded the life of his people. Dozeman further notes, ‘The dynamic relationship between a past event of salvation and contemporary religious experience is crucial to the office of the ordination to the Word in Christian tradition.’<sup>9</sup>

In Exodus 19 to Numbers 10, holiness becomes available to the people through their participation in the rituals of the Tabernacle. The furnishings and the vestments are imbued with holiness. Dozeman also notes the connection with the sacraments: ‘The transfer of holiness in Christian sacraments is not rooted in the charismatic experience of the numinous, but in the act of participating in the rituals.’<sup>10</sup> The two Mosaic vocations, then, are reflected in the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Dozeman is not shy about exposing the

terrifying dimensions of God's holiness, tamed in our preaching and administration of the sacraments. However, the dangers of religion and religious experience are not unfamiliar in our contemporary world. Right at the very beginning of his study, Dozeman warns, 'The two characteristics of holiness are in such profound tension with each other that they cannot be harmonized.'<sup>11</sup>

Where, then, does that leave the minister of Word and Sacrament? Is this tension, which can never be resolved, a problem or an opportunity? Is it the very thing which brings to birth creative ministry? A ministry focusing on the holiness of God, albeit exercised through Word and Sacrament, is not easily specified. Management models are often used to assess the work which people do. The use of such models, however, means that we are encouraged to think in unbiblical terms about the effectiveness of our ministry and the life of the Kirk. Three key terms of this approach come to mind: growth, success, and fulfilment.



## **Growth**

The classic statement illuminating ministry is to be found in Ephesians 4. It is considered such a vital text that it has been incorporated into ordination prayers.<sup>12</sup> It celebrates the unity of the body and the diversity of ministry – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The nature of these ministries is twofold. The first is 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry' (Eph 4:12). The second is to build up the body of Christ. Preaching the Word and celebrating the sacraments provide opportunity for people to experience the holiness of God and thereby develop their gifts and build up the community. In attempting to measure this, we are sometimes inclined to consider growth in solely numerical terms. The definition of growth in this letter, however, is different. We are to continue to do these things 'until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ' (Eph 4:13). There's our measure – the full stature of Christ! What measuring tape shall we use for this? The writer goes on to talk about growing up into Christ and not being like immature children tossed about by this novelty and that! Indeed, in his study on *Spirituality and Pastoral*

*Care*, Kenneth Leech argues that attention to numerical growth may actually impede inner spiritual maturity!<sup>13</sup>



## **Success**

While the term ‘success’ is related to the use or abuse of growth models, it has a wider reference. There are, in fact, different criteria to delineate success and failure. Whatever they may be, failure may not be far away, for all have ‘fallen short of the glory of God’, says St Paul (Rom 3:23). Consequently, we have to cope with disappointment. However, God is not only the originator of our vocation, he is also the one who fulfils it. This is a very important biblical principle which is seen in several Pauline images. Consider the earthen vessel. The sheer ordinariness of the vessel makes clear that the effectiveness of our ministry comes not from us but from God (2 Cor 4:7). Consider the gardener. ‘I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth’ (1 Cor 3:6). We are not alone. We belong to a team. The responsibility is shared. And the outcome of our work is in the hands of God. Growth is one of the mysteries of which we are stewards, for ‘It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me’, says St Paul (Gal 2:20).



## **Fulfilment**

If growth and success don’t tempt us, a lack of fulfilment may nevertheless cause us grief! Jesus promises life in all its fullness but this is to be measured by the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. In the paradox of the gospel, we find our true life by losing it! This paradox abounds in ministry. By virtue of our ordination, we are called out of the membership of the Church to fulfil a particular vocation. Fulfilment of this calling is challenged by a desire to retain our identity as a member of the Kirk. Ordination makes us visible. It brings with it separation. It carries with it responsibilities. It requires discernment, therefore, to know how to lose our life in this public sphere without abrogating responsibility or losing our humanity. We talk about ‘Minister and Kirk Session’. As a member of the Kirk Session, the minister shares in the government of the congregation.

This is a corporate responsibility. But as a minister inducted by the Presbytery, she is also detached from the congregation, carrying other responsibilities with their attendant difficulties and opportunities. Dozeman has clarified the tension which is inherent within a ministry of Word and Sacrament. In his study on *Ordination*, Stephen Sprinkle lists no less than five areas of tension. There is a tension between the many and the few and another between functional and sacramental models of ministry, to mention only two. He finds some understanding of this predicament in two powerful biblical images – the seed which has to die in order to bring forth life, and the fruit which reveals the identity of the true disciples of Christ. Ordained ministers are both ‘the fruit of the community that ordains them and the seed out of which the community grows in the world.’<sup>14</sup>



## Rites of ordination

In the Articles Declaratory of the Church of Scotland, the words ‘call’ and ‘ministry’ appear only once. The call is not to the individual but to the Church of Scotland which ‘acknowledges its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry.’<sup>15</sup> This is in keeping with the call to Israel and to the Church. The particular calling of the individual is to facilitate the calling of the whole church. The World Council of Churches sees in ordained ministers a reminder of the divine initiative and our dependence on Christ, a means of building up the community and strengthening its witness and an example of holiness and loving concern.<sup>16</sup> What happens when a person is ordained? Are they changed or do they remain similar to those who are not elected to this office? How decisive is the ordination service or is it part of the process which has begun long before and continues long after? Our ordination rites cast some light on this question.

Every rite is conducted within an act of public worship. The whole community is invited to participate. The central feature is the ordination prayer which has a similar shape to the Great Prayer: an anamnesis celebrating the work of the Holy Trinity; an epiclesis invoking the Holy Spirit to set apart and provide all that is necessary for the fulfilment of this vocation; a doxological conclusion; and the

Lord's Prayer. While Knox's Liturgy did not include the imposition of hands, this was quickly restored and in succeeding liturgies the ministers and elders were invited to 'tak the elected by the hand'.<sup>17</sup> When the Westminster Divines drew up their guidelines in "The Form of Presbyterial Church Government" there was a satisfactory innovation. In the rubric, the Presbytery 'shall solemnly set him apart to the office and work of the ministry, by laying their hands on him, which is to be accompanied with a short prayer or blessing'.<sup>18</sup> According to Paul Bradshaw, 'it appears to have been the Westminster Assembly that first restored the association of the imposition of hands with the principal prayer of the rite.'<sup>19</sup>

So the ordinand is offered to God with what Calvin describes as a useful symbol whereby 'the dignity of the ministry should be commended to the people, and he who is ordained, reminded that he is no longer his own, but is bound in service to God and the Church.'<sup>20</sup> Of course, the ordination was not effected by the symbol but by God! In the ordination liturgies it is implied that a change is effected in the ordinand. In the laying on of hands, he is set apart and offered to God. In the ordination prayer and, in particular, the invocation of the Spirit, there is the belief that what is lacking may be fulfilled by God's grace and suitable development effected. With the declaration of induction to a specific pastoral charge, the most obvious change has been effected. The ordained minister enters into a new relationship with a particular congregation and parish. She now has new responsibilities and changed perspectives and people look to her to exercise leadership, not least by a holy example. In the New Testament, it is only Paul who appears to have hands laid upon him twice.<sup>21</sup> In the tradition of the Church, ordination, like baptism, only happens once. However, a minister may be inducted several times to different charges. The singularity of ordination implies that something has been effected which can never be repeated.

On the other hand, despite ordination, the minister remains the same person she has always been. Calvin is reassuring on this point. Those who are called to preach may be insignificant but 'among the many endowments with which God has adorned the human race, one of the most remarkable is that he deigns to consecrate the mouths and tongues of men to his service, making his own voice heard through

them'.<sup>22</sup> In the “Ministers of the Gospel” report (2000), the authors were keen to navigate the General Assembly away from focusing too much on the debate between ‘who ministers are’ versus ‘what they do’. Instead, the Assembly was encouraged to embrace the view that ministers are people ‘who in their person and in their particular service manifest the same life of grace and the same practice of truth.’<sup>23</sup> The Reformers departed from the view that ordination conferred an indelible priestly character on the ordinand. According to James Ainslie this was for a number of reasons. First, the spiritual character of priesthood belonged to all Christians, not just the ordinand, who had also received it by virtue of baptism. Second, the permanency of the priestly character was discredited when priests often proved unworthy of their office.<sup>24</sup>

It is through the holiness of God that we become whole people. This is the maturity, the measure of the full stature of Christ to which we all aspire, along with the writer to Ephesians. Our vocation is born out of our person and our person is what God desires to use in the proclamation of his glorious Gospel. As Timothy discovered, this is a holy calling for it has come from God ‘not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace’ (2 Tim 1:9). When John Donne heard that his friend had been ordained, he wrote a poem entitled, “To Mr Tilman After He Had Taken Orders”. He wonders whether his friend has changed as a consequence of his ordination:

Thou art the same materials as before,  
Only the stamp is changed, but no more.

He likens the ordination to the coinage which is minted when a new king is crowned. The face on the coin changes but the value of the coin remains the same. So it is with the ordinand at his coronation. Changing the image to God’s heavenly messengers, he asks:

Or, as we paint angels with wings, because  
They bear God’s message, and proclaim His laws,  
Since thou must do the like, and so must move,  
Art thou new feathered with celestial love?<sup>25</sup>



A change is effected but the effect cannot easily be specified. It has something to do with being equipped for the ministry to which we are called – messengers of the gospel of God’s grace touched and transformed, new-feathered with celestial love. It is another of the mysteries of which we are stewards.



## **A ministry of Word and Sacrament**

Since our work as ministers of Word and Sacrament is to enable the people of God to share in his holiness through Word and sacrament, we may conclude that the approach which leads us prayerfully into the presence of God may help to determine how we shape our ministry. Consider these four areas.



## **Assessment**

In the National Assessment Conferences, there are lists of ‘Indicators for Assessment’.<sup>26</sup> In the assessment process, these key indicators are developed more precisely into lists of more specific indicators. This is a highly skilled process which has evolved out of a management model over the past sixty years. There are two concerns here. The first is the number of indicators which have been established and the way the list of specific indicators continues to grow. This may make the process more precise but also more arduous. It certainly makes the characterisation of prospective ministers much more complex. The second is the relationship between the indicators and the people whom God is calling into the ministry. There is no human instrument capable of determining the will of God accurately and so there are checks and balances built into the process. However, in choosing some indicators over against others, are we failing not only to recognise vocations but the new ministry which God is bringing to birth? In a 2005 report to the General Assembly that looked at the call to ministry, the authors wrote that Paul ‘lists the “indicators” of calling against which the churches of Galatia may test their own calling – love, joy, patience, kindness, etc (Gal 5:22–25) as well as indicating some of the things which might indicate a lack of calling.’<sup>27</sup>

What would happen if we removed all the existing indicators of assessment and replaced them with the nine fruits of the Spirit – joy, love, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control? Could these new indicators become a suitable instrument for discerning a call to ministry? They are the characteristics which confirm that someone has a vocation to be a Christian. And there is an obvious link with ministry through the words of Jesus. After talking about the vine and the love which lays down its life for friends, Jesus says to our eternal comfort, ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you.’ And then he goes on say, ‘And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last’ (John 15:16). If the ministry of Word and Sacrament is primarily about the holiness of God and the sanctification of his people, it would seem appropriate that in this land of the Spirit we use the fruit of the Spirit in our discernment.



## Training

In his delightful book, *A Priest to the Temple*, George Herbert has a chapter entitled, “The Parson Preaching”.<sup>28</sup> In three short pages, he gives a valuable lesson on homiletics. ‘But the character of his sermon is holiness’, writes Herbert, ‘he is not witty, or learned or eloquent, but holy.’ In this he gets to the heart of his ministry: the holiness of God. ‘He often tells them that sermons are dangerous things; that none goes out of church as he came in, but either better or worse; that none is careless before his judge and that the Word of God shall judge us.’ In this he has captured Dozeman’s engagement with the numinous – its awesomeness, its danger, its power generating within us what we used to call ‘the fear of the Lord’. In his letter to Timothy, the writer touches upon a similar theme when he says, ‘Do not neglect the gift that is in you’ (1 Tim 4:14). This gift is literally a charisma which needs to be nurtured. Ministry requires training. Time management? Pastoral techniques? Homiletics or liturgy? Not according to our writer. ‘Train yourself in godliness’, he says (1 Tim 4:7). It defies easy definition. At the root is awe and the awesomeness of God. Become awestruck in the presence of the living God. Nurture a sense of the otherness of God – his greatness, his power, his holiness. It will inform worship and discipleship and defy the managers and the trainers and all those

who would reduce his calling to a series of tasks carefully defined and fulfilled. Most especially, it will provide the best foundation in leadership training.

Ministers of Word and Sacrament are called to gather the worshipping community around the Word of God and the Holy Table to equip them for ministry and mission, serving the world in the ways of justice and peace. But this leadership belongs not to the minister but to the Spirit of God. ‘The spirit of the Lord God is upon me’, says the prophet Isaiah, ‘He has anointed me to bring good news to the oppressed: he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted’ (Isa 61:1). Through the workings of the Spirit and the preaching of the prophet, the people ‘shall be called priests of the Lord [...] ministers of our God’ (Isa 61:6). If our primary focus was on learning leadership skills and techniques, to what extent would this bypass the leadership of the Spirit? This is learnt, not from a training expert, but from our engagement with God and his holiness! This is also different from looking at the person of Jesus and learning some useful hints and tips. ‘Jesus is not a leadership guru’, writes Graham Tomlin. ‘Instead, whatever leadership anyone exercises in the Church is derived from Christ, and serves and bears witness to his headship, or leadership, of the Church.’<sup>29</sup> Otherwise, he argues, we usurp the place of Christ as leader!



## Ministry

In his reflections on the first liturgies of the Reformed churches, James Puglisi makes two penetrating criticisms. The first concerns what he calls ‘The overvaluation of the election at the expense of the “*tradition*”’.<sup>30</sup> The most dramatic feature of our liturgies is the place which they give to the people of God in the election of the minister. This was not revolutionary so much as a recovery of what had pertained in the early church. However, the Reformers were keen to realign the ministry with the body of Christ and did not consider it to be a separate order apart from the laity. As a result, Puglisi argues, ‘The fact that ordination integrates and empowers the ordinand is lost sight of.’<sup>31</sup> Overemphasising election and the ministry of the people has diminished the significance of the act of ordination. The second

criticism concerns the celebration of the Sacrament. The primitive ordinals all locate ordinations not simply within an act of worship but within the Eucharist. This clearly didn't happen within our liturgies until provision was made for it in recent interim-liturgies. However it rarely happens, not least because the Sacrament is still celebrated infrequently within the Kirk. As far as Dozeman's theology of ordination is concerned, this is a serious diminution of the means whereby the people of God are enabled to grow in holiness and maturity to the measure of the full stature of Christ and the ultimate growth of the body of Christ. The truth remains – the ritual resource of the sacraments is just as vital as the dynamic energy of prophetic preaching.

Puglisi goes on to argue that both the pre- and post-Reformation Church made a similar mistake. They each saw in the ordination of their priests and ministers, specific powers and responsibilities – to celebrate the sacrifice of the mass and forgive sins on the one hand, and to preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments on the other. 'Neither side saw ordination as integrating the newly ordained into an organic, charismatic whole, because the structural role of the Spirit was forgotten, giving way to an almost Christological interpretation of ordination', writes Puglisi.<sup>32</sup> Despite the minister being ordained into a specific pastoral context, Puglisi argues that the Reformers continued to think about ordained ministry in 'a unilateral fashion'.

If we are going to recover the pneumatological dimension of ordination, we need to do much more than recover the Eucharist, both in its central location within the life of the Kirk and its fulfilment of ordination liturgy. We need to reshape our understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God. Recently, Graham Tomlin has written about the priesthood of all believers and the very individualistic understanding of it in nineteenth-century German Pietistic circles: 'Luther's understanding of the priesthood of Christians means the opposite of the usual individualistic idea of the priesthood of all believers. It emphatically does not mean that I have no need of my fellow Christian. Instead, it means that I am a priest to my fellow Christians, just as they are to me.'<sup>33</sup> Whilst it is certainly true that everyone has been given a gift by the Spirit for the common good, this is different from thinking about individual Christians all exercising

their individual ministries, albeit within the Church. This is yet more unilateral thinking! The Church is not made up of individual people exercising individual ministries. The Church is made up of the people of God who are like living stones, invited to let themselves be built into a spiritual house. We find our true identity in being built together. Here we are called to be a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices. The image is corporate not individualistic, and it is by letting ourselves become a part of the body of Christ that ministers of Word and Sacrament are enabled to discover and exercise their true vocation – which is to equip the Body of Christ to exercise theirs. For a moment we have come back full circle to William Soutar and the bough which is always breaking, heavy with fruit and snow. As a holy priesthood, we belong to that organism in which ‘The hands which give are taking; / And the hands which take bestow’. It is in this mysterious amalgam of giving and receiving that the ministry of Word and Sacrament has its origin and fulfilment. It is the gift of the Spirit which enables everything in heaven and on earth to cohere in Christ (Col 1:17).



## Ordination

The rubric, ‘Tak the elected by the hand!’ reaches out to include the new minister and celebrates the importance not only of friendship but collegiality. Here the minister is reassured that she is not alone. She has been welcomed into the ministry of Word and Sacrament, which is not simply the gift of individuals but a gift to the whole church. In the World Council of Churches’ seminal document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, there is a discussion about the language of ordination. The English word comes from the Latin *ordo* or *ordinare* which means ‘to order’. These terms are ‘derived from Roman law where they convey the notion of the special status of a group distinct from the plebs’.<sup>34</sup> The New Testament doesn’t use this word when describing what happens when someone is set apart by fasting, prayer and the laying on of hands. The verb used is *cheirotonein* whose secular meaning is ‘to appoint’, but whose original meaning is about ‘extending the hand, either to designate a person or to cast a vote’. Although people see in this term a reference to the imposition of

hands, it is also what happens when people are invited to ‘Tak the hand!’ This is to extend the hand to affirm the worth of another, to include him in a wider circle of friends and to make a commitment to encourage, support and stand by him – in Bunyan’s famous phrase – ‘Come wind, come weather’.<sup>35</sup>

There is more to ministry than the day of ordination – as Isaiah found out. His is the classic call, but in its youthful spontaneity and naked commitment, we are told nothing about what is going to unfold in Isaiah’s ministry. All we can see on the day of ordination is a glorious beginning. But read on! The second half of Isaiah 6 outlines the ministry to which Isaiah has been called. Surprisingly, we don’t often go there! ‘Go and say to this people: “Keep listening but do not comprehend; keep looking but do not understand.”’ What is this all about? Isaiah wonders too. How long will I have to do this? ‘Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is utterly desolate’. God is calling Isaiah to a ministry of failure! Here we have a brilliant preacher but no-one listens to his words. Here we have a faithful servant but no-one responds to his invitations! The Assyrians do their worst. The land is laid bare. The trees decimated. Only the stumps remain. And in the last verse, the secret is revealed: ‘The holy seed is its stump’.<sup>36</sup> Five chapters later, we hear these marvellous words: ‘A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of its roots.’ And we are led into the great prophecy in which the Church traces the roots of the incarnation. It wasn’t just that Isaiah failed. God failed too. His first plan did not work. Hence the incarnation of Jesus. Isaiah has to wait seven hundred years for the validation of his ministry.



## Conclusion

What about us? This is the mysterious landscape in which people are called to minister. It is not a call to success (is ‘success’ a theological term?). In these difficult times, Isaiah is told by God not to walk in the ways of the people nor to fear what they fear: ‘But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread’ (Isa 8:11–13). His ministry derives from the holiness of God, and in his faithfulness he reveals a sign of hope: ‘the young woman

is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel' (Isa 7:14). It is such an ordinary sign. Two a penny! Many have read the birth of the Christ child into it, but to all intents and purposes it may be no more and no less than the birth of a child – and that is sufficient intimation of the new life which God promises. But neither mother nor child are identified. Isaiah is no wiser but in this disclosure he remains what he is called to be, the faithful messenger and steward of God's mysteries!

It is here at the heart of what St Paul calls the foolishness of God's call that we are glad to 'tak the hand' of our friends and colleagues, for we cannot minister easily on our own and, in any case, this is not our true vocation. We minister as a holy priesthood with ordinary things like water, bread and wine and the holiness with which God imbues them. 'So much can wither away from the human spirit and yet the great gift of the ordinary day remains', wrote William Soutar in his *Diaries of a Dying Man*. 'The stability of the small things of life which yet in their constancy are the greatest. All the daily kindness; the little obligations, the signs of remembrance in the homely gifts: these do not pass, but still hearten the body and spirit to the verge of the grave.'<sup>37</sup> He died a week later, aged forty-five. He left behind, however, his philosophy of life – the lively generousness found in ordinary things and ordinary people. These are the instruments of God's grace which we celebrate in St Paul's more excellent way, brought to mind and heart by the love of a crucified and risen Christ, a ministry of Word and Sacrament and a holy priesthood quick to *tak the hand!*

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> William Soutar, *Into a Room: Selected Poems of William Soutar* (ed. Carl MacDougall and Douglas Gifford; Glendaruel; Perth: Argyll Publishing; Perth & Kinross Council, 2000), 121.
- <sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation", in *Three Treatises* (trans. Charles M. Jacobs; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 12.

- <sup>3</sup> James K. Cameron, ed., *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1972), 96f.
- <sup>4</sup> *The Liturgy of John Knox: Received by the Church of Scotland in 1564* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1886), 31.
- <sup>5</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry: A Biblical Theology of Ordination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Based on Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*.
- <sup>7</sup> Based on Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (2 vols.; Anchor Bible 3A & 3B; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1991, 2001).
- <sup>8</sup> Dozeman, *Holiness and Ministry*, 104.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Liturgy of John Knox*, 30; "The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government", in *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh; London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1959), 185; Church of Scotland Mission and Discipleship Council, *Services of Ordination and Induction to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament* (2013), 12.
- <sup>13</sup> Kenneth Leech, *Spirituality and Pastoral Care* (London: Sheldon Press, 1989), 129.
- <sup>14</sup> Stephen V. Sprinkle, *Ordination: Celebrating the Gift of Ministry* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2004), 4.
- <sup>15</sup> James T. Cox, *Practice and Procedure in the Church of Scotland*, 6th ed. (ed. D. F. M. MacDonald; Edinburgh: Church of Scotland, 1976), 471.
- <sup>16</sup> World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), 22.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Liturgy of John Knox*, 31.
- <sup>18</sup> "The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government", 185.
- <sup>19</sup> Paul F. Bradshaw, *Rites of Ordination: Their History and Theology* (London: SPCK, 2014), 171.
- <sup>20</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.4.16 (trans. Henry Beveridge; London: James Clarke, 1953), 326.
- <sup>21</sup> Acts 9:17 and Acts 13:3.



- <sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.1.5. Quoted in James L. Ainslie, *The Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1940), 49.
- <sup>23</sup> Church of Scotland Board of Ministry, “Ministers of the Gospel”, in *Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2000* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland, 2000), 17/9.
- <sup>24</sup> Ainslie, *Doctrines of the Ministerial Order*, 191.
- <sup>25</sup> John Donne, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 2006), 193.
- <sup>26</sup> Church of Scotland Ministries Council, *Supervisors’ Handbook* (2014).
- <sup>27</sup> Church of Scotland Panel on Doctrine, panel report section 3: “The Call to Ministry”, in *Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 2005* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland, 2005), 13/18.
- <sup>28</sup> George Herbert, *The Temple & A Priest to the Temple* (London: Dent, 1908), 226–28.
- <sup>29</sup> Graham Tomlin, *The Widening Circle: Priesthood as God’s Way of Blessing the World* (London: SPCK, 2014), 142.
- <sup>30</sup> James F. Puglisi, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry: A Comparative Study* (trans. Michael S. Driscoll and Mary Misrahi; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 194.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.
- <sup>33</sup> Tomlin, *The Widening Circle*, 65.
- <sup>34</sup> WCC, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 31.
- <sup>35</sup> John Bunyan, “Who Would True Valour See” (Hymn 535, CH4).
- <sup>36</sup> I am indebted to Eugene H. Peterson’s commentary on Isaiah 6 in *Subversive Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Vancouver, B.C.: William B. Eerdmans; Regent College Publishing, 1997), 63f.
- <sup>37</sup> William Soutar, *Diaries of a Dying Man* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1991), 173.