

FUTURE MODELS OF ORDAINED MINISTRY

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A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE HISTORY OF MINISTRY is sufficient to show that both the understanding and the models of ministry in general and of the ordained ministry in particular have changed frequently during the life of the Church. Changes recorded in the first three centuries point to the change and evolution of ministry which has taken place ever since.¹

Evidence from the early Church tells us that ministry changed first of all in order to cope with the needs of 'Greek widows' and then more markedly in the transition of the Church from the synagogue to the diverse Christian communities, in which there was 'no distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free', scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Ministry changed yet again as, in spite of persecution, the Christian Church became a credible religious force in the Roman Empire, and most especially when the Church was eventually recognized by the Empire. Its ministry then became 'sacerdotalized' and modelled on the role and status of Imperial functionaries. The models changed yet again after the collapse of the Roman Empire when, through travelling priests and through the establishment of parochial structures, the Church strove firstly to survive the onslaught of the Germanic tribes, then to convert them to Christ and finally to become interwoven in the fabric of civil life.

In the Middle Ages the clergy, because they were literate and educated, became the backbone of the establishment of a more settled civil and legal order. After the Black Death they embodied the need of society to cope liturgically and ritually with the trauma of apocalyptic plague, natural disaster and social upheaval. At the Reformation the priesthood was quite consciously remodelled by the Council of Trent with the establishment of seminaries, that is, professional academic training. Its theology and identity were to contrast with the theology of ministry of the Reformers. In fact the particular theological understanding of priestly ministry which was developed during and after Trent survived intact right until the 1950s.² The trauma of the French Revolution, together with the fight of the Church against secular liberalism and the centrifugal tendencies of Gallicanism meant that this

Tridentine priesthood was remodelled yet again by a centralizing, ultramontane Church. It was to function as the major instrument in ensuring the consolidation of the Church in the face of the modern state, social mobility, universal education and the impact of the Industrial Revolution.

It is clear then that models of ministry can change and have changed profoundly throughout the Church's history. They continue to change. Since the 1960s the Roman Catholic priesthood has been challenged and questioned, resulting in considerable change and in its being deemed by many to be in crisis.³

The crisis arises, broadly speaking, from four main causes. Firstly: the development of the role of the laity and the concept of the Priesthood of the whole People of God. Secondly: the social, spiritual and human changes that have taken place in a very mobile secular society. Thirdly: the declining recruitment of men into the ordained priestly ministry, especially in western countries. The fourth factor is that over the same period differing, not to say conflicting, theologies of ministry have evolved in the Church and indeed are presented side by side in Church documents.⁴ This has led to patchy and sometimes conflicting responses to the needs of the pastoral ministry at every level in the Church.

On the one hand there has been a very real development in the role of the laity in the Church and their collaboration with ordained priestly ministers. On the other hand there has been a retrenchment into traditional models of priestly ministry by some, often undermining the newly found position of the laity or thwarting their work. Since the Second Vatican Council the messages from the highest authority in the Church concerning the nature and purpose of the ordained ministry and the role of the laity have been very mixed.⁵

Throughout the historical changes in the model and function of ordained ministry there have always been certain continuous strands of meaning that have remained fairly constant: vocation from God, verification and authentication by the wider Church, being the focus of a broader Catholicity and Communion in relation to the local community, the task of *ἐπισκοπή* (episcopate), pastoral ministry and liturgical presidency of some kind. These are extremely important.

Does, however, the fact of change, even amid evidence of certain continuities, mean that everything is changeable and anything goes? Or conversely does evidence of continuity or antiquity rule out particular kinds of change? If, for instance, the Church has not always and everywhere been gifted with monarchical episcopacy or with the

particular gift of a 'sacerdotal' clergy who are 'set apart' and separated from the laity, then it is difficult to claim that such gifts must have since become essential for all time, whether on the basis of their antiquity, or because of their official recognition by the Church. The issue has, rather to be about determining the criteria by which any model of ministry and any change in ministry may be deemed authentic or inauthentic. It has also to do with discovering how changes in models and patterns of ministry come about. As ministry, by definition, is a means, an instrument of the Church, rather than an end or entity in its own right, no model of ministry can be defended or rejected simply by comparing it with another model of ministry from another age or place, however widespread or edifying.

Obviously the criteria to be used have to include past or even present traditions in the Church. However, of greater importance must be scriptural criteria (by which I do not necessarily mean scriptural models), the criterion of the requirements of the evangelizing role and mission of the whole Church; also the criterion of the context within which that mission has to be fulfilled. The concept of such criteria and of such an hermeneutic needs a much greater theological analysis.

Michael Richards makes the point vividly with regard to one aspect of ministry when he says:

If one starts from the separation of clergy and laity into two classes as a fact of life with which one has to work, and then seeks their closer collaboration, demarcation disputes arise as they have done in the past, for example over the apostolate of the laity and as they are doing at the present moment over the priesthood itself. We need to start from what we are and what we have in common, and remain aware of it throughout our analysis of the respective roles in the Church; otherwise we shall overlook the very basis of our collaboration, and find ourselves using artificial and external means of organising our joint action.⁶ . . . The clergy/laity distinction is a cultural, not a theological one; it is foreign to the New Testament and has masked the inner unity of the Church.⁷

A Christian church which sees itself founded in divine revelation, cannot have a ministry which is totally pragmatic and changeable: there must be some given principles and continuities. On the other hand, as ministry is by definition functional, those strands which are *a priori* can only be few and clearly fundamental. Theologians and official church documents must be very wary of canonizing functional aspects and models of ministry inappropriately. Any study of ministry

must also place it in context; there can be no such thing as a transhistorical model. Any study of ministry can only discern its nature and purpose within the holistic study of the mission of the whole Church. Kenan Osborne says:

In all of this, it is obvious that priestly spirituality can only be thought through and understood, and, for that matter, lived, when priestly spirituality and priestly life are not viewed in isolation, but within the very meaning of the gospels, of faith, of the Christian Church, of the Kingdom of God. In a word, an isolated understanding of priestly spirituality is a deformed spirituality.⁸

What is true of priestly spirituality is radically true of any attempt to define priestly ministry.

Historically creative changes in models of ministry appear to have come about through the need to preach the Gospel in changed circumstances and situations and within the context of differing cultural and 'political' backgrounds. They have also come about through theological reflection on the Scriptures and on past teaching. Sometimes perhaps the theology has been used to 'justify' a change retrospectively; sometimes a theological shift in perception has induced a change. Often there has been conflict. The present age would appear to be ripe for considerable change in the pattern and models of ministry, certainly in the European world and perhaps also according to different models in Africa, Asian and South America. Change is being precipitated both by developments in society and also by a significant theological shift.

The European values study gives some indication of the societal change. It shows what while:

approximately three-fifths of the Western European population regard themselves as religious, three-fifths felt the need for moments of prayer or meditation and a little under half gain comfort and strength from religion . . . God is very important in the personal lives of only one fifth of the population.⁹

Greater confidence (in the Church) is expressed by those over 50 years (63%) than by those under 35 (35%), by those on the political right (68%) compared to the left (27%), and to those in the lowest socio-economic and educational groups.¹⁰

The analysis of this data by Professor de Moor suggests that 'individualization makes religious people more critical of the institutionalized aspects of religion and de-institutionalisation of religion will, in the long run, lead to a loss of religiosity'.¹¹ He also says:

the diminishing influence of the churches is particularly observable in the domain of moral norms, conjugal morality and norms with respect to abortion and euthanasia. Social control has been replaced by the principle that moral choices are personal choices. People may have clear, even traditional, moral standards but they accept that others have different standards. This leads to the morally pluralistic society.¹²

Obviously such social and cultural trends must have a profound effect on what would seem to be the current fairly autocratic model of priesthood. It must also affect the expectations of lay people, especially the young, with regard to church structures and their role in relation to them. In fact the *Values study* is quite explicit in spelling out the imperative that arises from these phenomena. It states:

The morally autonomous Europeans, disengaged from the churches, disenchanted with democratic institutions and the political process, demanding greater involvement in the decisions which affect their lives and willing to take direct political action to achieve their aims, pose a fundamental challenge to political and religious leaders. Confidence in church and parliament is eroding. The responses offered to contemporary moral, social and environmental problems are seen as inadequate. Leaders are an elderly and remote group whose messages do not resonate with the young. They are in danger of addressing only their shadows. Fundamental reform of political and religious structures and a revised notion of the obligations of citizenship may be necessary to reintegrate political, religious and community life in a way consistent with more egalitarian social relations.¹³

In the past, the Church has adapted itself, its structures and its ministry to the demands of different political and cultural environments, even if at the time they seemed inimical to many aspects of its self-understanding. One obvious example is the way in which Rome and the Anglo-Irish Church sought to confront, convert but also be in dialogue with the Germanic tribes of Europe in the so-called Dark Ages. While some aspects of modern European society do indeed run contrary to fundamental aspects of the Church's beliefs and traditions, there is no evidence that the only way to face such a situation is by retrenchment, especially in regard to structures and issues that are not so fundamental. In fact, given the extent of change and the demands of the mission of the Church in secular society, it is not only most unlikely that a policy of widespread retrenchment could resolve the issues, but granted the nature and meaning of evangelization, almost impossible.

Changes in European society (and elsewhere) have an immediate and inescapable impact on the very functioning of the Church itself.

One need only look at the impact on churchgoing and vocations, let alone on marriage breakdown and the alienation of younger generations from the Church. Taking a brief look at the UK alone, from the aspect of priestly manpower in a relatively well-placed Church the basic statistics are as follows: of the 3,616 diocesan priests 2,176, nearly two-thirds, were over 50 on 11 April 1991 and 600 were under 40. Even more critically, 1,350, nearly 40 per cent, were over 60. Few of these are likely to be in the ministry at the turn of the century. These figures, added together with the number of priests leaving the ministry for other reasons and the inevitable deaths, mean there will probably be around 1,700 fewer priests, about half our present total. Basing our calculations on the number of students in seminaries and assuming that 50 per cent of these will be ordained, we can expect to replace the drop of 1,700 priests with no more than 400 new priests. This means that the total number of priests will fall by a third to 1,300 priests by the end of the century. This underlying trend will probably be offset for a while by the ordination of some 200 former Anglican clergy. That however is a one-off; it does not alter the basic thesis in fact.

What will be the impact of this loss? It probably means that early in the next century there will be about 1,000 priestless parishes out of 2,703 in the UK. During the 1980s the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales relied on stop-gap solutions (removal of assistant priests, handing parishes to religious orders) which are no longer available. Bishops can no longer look to the religious orders. In fact the issue of priestless parishes will worsen as orders return parishes back to the dioceses. This is inevitable because the age profile of the religious orders is, if anything, worse than that of diocesan priests. Bishops could continue to remove assistant priests, perhaps another 200 or 300, but that creates another set of problems as it is likely that a large parish with just one priest will fare rather worse than a small parish with no priest.

Of the 53 parishes that were regarded as priestless in 1991 the solution for most of them was for them to be taken on by a neighbouring parish. But this is not really a solution; priests can barely cope at the moment and certainly rapidly aging priests and priests new from seminary cannot be expected to carry responsibility for two or more parishes each. It is no solution to the stressed and overworked for them to be expected to double their workload.¹⁴

Alongside the decline in priestly manpower there is also a consistent decline in church attendance among Roman Catholics in England and Wales. Between 1970 and 1991 the overall number of people regularly

attending Sunday mass declined by 33.2 per cent from 1,934,853 in 1970 to 1,292,312 in 1991. Some of this decline will have been part of a fall in the general population. For instance between 1965 and 1989 the annual national figures for live births declined from 862,275 to 687,725. Over the same period Catholic baptisms declined not only absolutely but they also declined as a percentage of the live birthrate from 15.5 per cent to 11.4 per cent. In 1965 Catholic baptisms peaked at 134,055. Between 1975 and 1988 they averaged 73,300. Since 1988 they have risen to nearer 80,000 a year.¹⁵ Some of the decline in mass attendance will also be due to an aging Catholic population and to an increasing death rate among Roman Catholics. This has risen from 36,596 in 1970 to 44,947 in 1985; more importantly it has doubled as a proportion of the annual baptismal rate to nearly 60 per cent.¹⁶ The *worshipping* Roman Catholic Community appears to have a strongly aging profile and its numbers are declining, although the total number of *baptized* Roman Catholics in England and Wales is now increasing.

The second factor bringing about changes in patterns and models of ministry is a shift in theological perception. Over the last half century such shifts have clearly been taking place and many of them have been explicitly endorsed by the Second Vatican Council and later church documentation. Karl Rahner says that the teachings of the Second Vatican Council constitute 'the church's first official self-actualization as world church'.¹⁷ By 'world church' Karl Rahner is not referring just to its geographical extension, but also to every aspect and circumstance of the 'world': cultural, spiritual, social etc. He believes that more than any other Council or development in the history of the Church since apostolic times, Vatican II shifted our perceptions concerning the Church – for instance: by seeing the work of the Spirit in other religions, and seeing the agenda of every area of fundamental human concern throughout the entire world as the responsibility of the Church. The Vatican Council says: 'By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a sacramental sign and instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind'.¹⁸ 'The Church serves as a leaven and as a soul for human society'.¹⁹

In 1975 Pope Paul VI specified the Church's role more clearly. He stated that 'Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity, she exists in order to evangelize',²⁰ and he defined evangelization in more detail:

... the field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, as well as the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It

also includes other realities which are open to evangelisation, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work and suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often repressed and buried, the more these realities will be at the service of the Kingdom of God and therefore at the service of salvation in Jesus Christ, without in any way losing or sacrificing their human content but rather pointing to a transcendent dimension which is often disregarded.²¹

This definition has been reiterated and further defined.

The evangelising Mission of the Church is a single but complex and articulated reality. Its principal elements are: presence and witness, commitment to social development and human liberation; acculturation; liturgical life, prayer and contemplation; interreligious dialogue; proclamation and catechesis. Local Christians are called upon as witnesses to Christ . . . to stand up for human rights, proclaim the demands of justice, and denounce injustice not only when their own members are victimized, but independently of the religious allegiance of the victims. There is need also to join together in trying to solve the great problems facing society and the world, as well as in education for justice and peace.²²

John O'Donohue in his recent article in *The Way* spelt out the nature of evangelization of any 'foreign' culture in a way that is particularly relevant to our secular culture. He describes the collapse of culture, the fragmentation of societies and the loss of depth and respect for the sacred which are manifest in our modern media culture. For him, the authoritarian imperialist Church destroys indigenous culture just as the media destroys it. 'Evangelization is the good news that touches the origin, memory, identity and destiny of life itself.' Evangelizers do not 'bring God to people'. Each person is a temple of God's presence. The delicate task is to awaken awareness of this. This awareness ranges from a cursory sense of presence to the depths of a mystical desire for God.²³

A brief look in the Catholic Directory for England and Wales at the titles of Bishops' Conference Departments, Committees and Agencies and at the notice board at the back of a reasonably lively parish, will show the proliferation of tasks and structures that has occurred as the Church attempts to tackle the demands of evangelization. One consequence is that the agenda of parishes has suddenly exploded:

Liturgy	Justice and Peace
Schools	CAFOD
Catechesis	Buildings and Fabric
RCIA	Social Welfare
Adult RE	Church and Industry
Care	Sacramental Preparation
Youth Work	Ministry Training
Young Families	Financial Planning
Community Building	Fundraising
Social Events	Work with Other Faiths
Women's Issues	Environmental Concerns
Ecumenism	Evangelization
School, Hospital and Prison Chaplaincy	
Marriage Preparation and Family Support	

This list is not exhaustive. It increases all the time. Few parishes have begun to understand the situation, still less to know how to handle it.

The agenda posed by Evangelization is a far wider and more subtle one than that adopted by the Church prior to the Second Vatican Council. By any stretch of the imagination its implementation requires models of ministry, both ordained and lay, and also structures that are very different from those which appertained previously. In fact fewer and aging clergy, the widespread disappearance of consecrated religious from many areas of Church's life, alienation among the young, declining church attendance and the collapse of normal community networks both within the Church and in civil society mean that the agenda has become impossible. The danger is that both priests and lay people will become victims.

Michael Hornsby-Smith describes the phenomenon of what he calls the 'greedy institution' (quoting Coser 1974).

It seems that at the moment there are two tendencies which appear likely to weaken such a radical and critical involvement (of the Catholic Church) in the life of British society; one tendency is for Catholic institutional life to deteriorate so that a detached communal involvement is the major outcome; the other tendency is for active Catholics to develop an uncritical, total communal involvement which provides high levels of affective rewards and interpersonal bonds, but in a way which consumes all their interests and energies so that their critical contribution to the life of the nation is negligible by default.²⁴

A consequence of both tendencies is that those who strive to live out an evangelizing commitment to the world become stressed because

their experience is of an 'unsupportive parish', while those typified in the second tendency become drained by the demands, find conflict with family priorities or become disillusioned and frustrated because of a lack of clear objectives or continuity in parish policy.

The stressed reality contrasts with the ideals described in church documents: 'The activity of lay people within Church communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the Pastors is generally unable to achieve its full effectiveness'.²⁵ 'The parish is the eucharistic community . . . a community properly suited for celebrating the Eucharist, the living source for its upbuilding and the sacramental bond of its being in full communion with the whole church.'²⁶

The lay faithful should accustom themselves to working in the parish in close union with their priests, bringing to the Church community their own and the world's problems as well as questions concerning human salvation, all of which need to be examined together and solved through general discussion. As far as possible the lay faithful ought to collaborate in every apostolic and missionary undertaking sponsored by their own ecclesial family.²⁷

Canon Law tells us that the task of evangelization must be done by encouraging the laity 'to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world. This obligation is all the more insistent in circumstances in which only through them are people able to hear the Gospel and know Christ' (Can 225). It is no wonder that Catholics are bewildered. The past is gone, retrenchment seems at best a vain hope, at worst irrelevant, and the Church's expectations of itself and its members seem grossly unrealistic.

Any consideration of ordained ministry, or indeed other forms of ministry, cannot ignore the realities that I have outlined. Any attempt to reshape ministry or indeed to restructure church communities must strive to be appropriate for the task of tackling this vast range of issues. Plainly it is possible readily to visualize all manner of ministerial models – full-time celibate priests, part-time married priests, priests in community, forms of diaconate, women deacons, lay institutes, temporary lay communities, women priests and so on. However, it is not the precise form of ministry that may be visualized that is the point. More important are the principles which have determined the chosen models of ministry and whether a particular model of ministry is appropriate to enable the whole Church to achieve its mission. Only then can one discuss the precise practical shape of a ministry. Indeed, it is even more complex than that for as Kenan Osborne says:

One cannot simply take a Euro-American idea of priest and ask that African-cultured people, or Hispanic-cultured people or Asian-cultured people – each with their own multi-cultural differences – become basically and fundamentally Euro-American priests, who simply speak a different language. When culture is suppressed, identity is deeply injured. . . . Rather there is a larger question: namely, the entire understanding of Christian community and Christian ministry needs to be thought through from the basic and foundational building-blocks of a given culture.²⁸

The role and model of the ordained priestly minister cannot but change profoundly over the coming years. It will change not least because, as there will be fewer priests than parishes, the priest will have to work in partnership with lay-led parishes and in many ways he will need to treat their lay leadership as just as competent as his own and in some areas more so. If there are fewer priests than parishes, then the priest's ministry becomes one among many and there will be a tendency for much parish administration and oversight to be centred among a group of parishes or in the diocese, rather than on an 'omnicompetent' monarchical priest. The diocese will need to set policies for parish management and pastoral care, to organize training and supervision, and to review the situation at regular intervals. This is the only way to ensure continuity and the reliable meeting of expectation. Without this lay people will, rightly, refuse to spend their energies on officially approved work that can be destroyed at the whim of a priest (or even a bishop) who often enough will be living elsewhere. In any case, this sort of administrative management cannot be left in the hands of a priest, now responsible for several parishes, and probably not trained in the task of being an 'area manager'. This means that the priest will have to work alongside others, be one extremely important competence among many. In order to be able to cope with some issues, parishes, even if they have a priest, will have to be grouped together and work in collaboration. This applies particularly to skills like counselling, youth work, faith and work, social commitment, adult religious education and formation, and lay training.

In fact, rather than have one parish with an hands-on style parish priest and the others (as second class?!) without a priest, it would seem to be far better to treat all parishes as if they were equally 'priested' and equally 'priestless'. This would make for much better lay involvement and lay accountability. If the situation were to be managed in this way then it would be possible for several priests to offer their ministry to a group of parishes, including chaplaincies (hospital, school, prison,

military, youth), in a way which would enable the particular priestly charisms to be used flexibly and to best advantage.

It will immediately be apparent that this kind of restructuring of itself alters the models of priesthood, the priest's self-perceptions and the understanding of his role by the lay people. In fact such a strategy will probably prove to liberate the priests. Rather than being burdened with autocratic leadership for all aspects of parish life, they will find themselves able, for once, to exercise a truly spiritual and liturgical leadership with space for prayerful scripture study, a more thorough homiletic, spiritual guidance and direction, and more thorough sacramental preparation.

Many priests may find the loss of authority or 'power' difficult to cope with. Some, sensing accurately their inadequacy to cope with the new situation, may be content to 'let go'. Some, however, will find it impossible to adapt; they may have to be placed in one-man-band parishes that, for one reason or another, do not impinge particularly on the broader pastoral strategy across the deanery or the diocese. The role of the bishop will also have to be adapted. Instead of exercising an authority that mainly requires obedience from ordained ministers (priests and deacons) who share his ministry, he too will now have to act and exercise his authority in a context of collaboration and accountability with competent lay experts, both volunteers and employees. Diocesan structures will also have to be rather different.

Whether the decline in the number of priests leads to a renewal of parish life or the collapse of it depends on the ability of the diocese to recruit, train, supervise, support and develop the gifts of lay people in ministry, without being 'a greedy institution'. Niggardly resourcing, over-burdening willing workers, poor policy, ill thought-out strategy, a refusal to establish the appropriate structures of diocesan leadership management and accountability, or of co-ordination for the different pastoral responsibilities and demands can only lead to the further collapse of the parish and its pastoral care. Unfortunately the trend to voluntary lay involvement in recent years has been directed mainly at maintenance at parish level. What is now required are ministries which are more skilled, more responsible for and responsive to pastoral needs, branching out into 'territory' that existing priests have never entered. It is within this context that the role of a restored diaconate needs to be studied and discerned.

The diocese and the parish (and indeed the deanery or other groupings of parishes) are to be the key instruments for what the present Pope calls the 'new evangelization'. This means that the laity cannot

simply 'work for' the priest, and that even having the laity 'working with' the priests and the bishop must mean much more than simply a consultative sharing of responsibility for the diocese or for parish and its life. The latter can at best only be a starting point. The Church has to become truly collaborative, and not just for practical reasons but also on the basis of a renewed spiritual and theological understanding. This new Collaborative Church is about laity, religious, clergy and bishop working together on the agenda described by Vatican II. It is not about getting more laity to work *for* the priest in his parish. Collaborative ministry *has* to go beyond parish boundaries for, as we are told in *Christifideles laici*, the Church's task is so enormous that the parish cannot adequately carry it out alone. For this reason the Code of Canon Law envisages forms of collaboration (albeit very modest ones) among parishes. In fact it is becoming clearer that some issues can only be tackled if there is collaboration between dioceses.

The skills of collaboration and its spiritual and theological demands are very different from those for which our present priests were trained. They also require a different relationship to the Church from the one that most lay people have come to expect. There are several theological bases, but the central one is the post-Vatican II theology of *communio* or *κοινωνία* (koinonia).²⁹

Working collaboratively with other people takes time; it involves investing time in dialogue and discernment to determine priorities, actions and responsibilities. It takes skill in planning, strategy formulation, personnel and task management. It requires the development of social skills, – debating, talking, listening, give and take, compromise, convincing, motivating, encouraging. Decisions are then taken jointly, actions are co-ordinated, responsibility is shared, accountability is recognized.

Some people and some priests will have a natural and intuitive flair for collaboration, many will not. These skills are so particular that industry, business, organizations, the Armed Forces etc. invest vast resources in training and developing managers and leaders. In fact in the Army 50 per cent of officer training is in leadership. How many priests have been trained in planning, strategy, management, social skills and above all leadership? How many priests have the background, skills or experience to cope with the intricacies of collaborative ministry? What percentage of the seminary curriculum is devoted to these areas – 50 per cent as in the army and business? Perhaps 5 per cent would be nearer the mark. The Collaborative Church requires a considerable re-think of the training that priests receive in the seminary

or as in-service training. It is no wonder that many priests are currently reluctant to adopt the principles of collaborative ministry when they are probably painfully aware that they do not feel confident in their own ability to manage it.³⁰

We will now consider two specific areas in which the basic foundations of ministry need to be rethought if new models of ministry are to emerge which are both authentic and relevant. One of the major issues in the rethinking of ordained ministry must be that of authority. At present the call to collaborative partnership of lay people and clergy is blighted by a poor exercise of authority by the clergy and by poor decision-making processes. This, as described above, undermines both the life of the Church and the consistency and effectiveness of its mission.

Edmund Hill points out that the original schema presented to the first session of the Second Vatican Council in 1962 (*Acta synodalia* I, iv, pp 60–63 chapter 8), which was devoted to the issue of authority and obedience in the Church never once referred to appropriate texts from the Gospels, but only to the bland statement from Romans 13:1, ‘all legitimate authority is from God’. As he says wryly, even the South African government which embraced apartheid claimed legitimacy on the basis of that text!³¹ But the very nature of authority among his disciples was a subject of considerable discourse by Jesus (Mt 20:25–28; Mk 10:41–45; Lk 22:25–27; Jn 13:4–15). This apparent blindness in the Church about Christian authority arises for two main reasons. One is because authority in Catholic ministries since the time of Constantine has been exercised according to a somewhat questionable Neoplatonic model – namely that of ‘the enlightened autocratic rule of the wise, of the philosopher-king’. This came to be the way in which the bishops in the Constantinian Empire began to interpret their authority. The second is the concept of ‘monarchical *ἐπισκοπή* (episcopate)’ exercised by both bishops and priests.

Christ’s authority is not simply an authority or service (most authority claims to be that!), but rather the authority of the servant, and the suffering servant at that, who gave his life in pastoral compassion and in sacrifice for many. Christ’s authority was also always intended to be shared. It is interesting how regularly even such a strong character as St Paul, while fighting his corner, submits himself both to the authority of the apostles and to that of the very communities he has founded. He always exhorts rather than commands (2 Cor 1, 10, 13).

The point usually made is that the Church is not a democracy. Indeed it is not – Christ’s truth is not to be discerned simply by resolutions and

majority voting. However the Gospels suggest that it is equally illegitimate for the Church to claim that it or its ministers are an autocracy.

What then is the legitimate exercise of authority in the Church? It is the exercise of authority which is based on the nature and essence of the divine gift of *κοινωνία*, (*communio*). Those who exercised *ἐπισκοπή* (episcopate) have to be faithful to the Scriptures and to the tradition; they also have to be faithful to the Spirit speaking through the community of the Church and beyond; they have to be true to and preserve the gift of unity; they have to enable God's people to exercise their own God-given authority. They are answerable both to God and to the community of the Church.

To be honest, authority is not often perceived to be exercised in this way at any level in the Church. As exercised in the Church, authority appears to be autocratic and lacking in any real concept of accountability. Lay people are told that their advice is 'only consultative' within a framework that fails to recognize any real channels of recourse, and those lay people who are involved in the apostolate so often hang nervously on the whim of the priest (or bishop) or his successor. It is not appropriate that a person who is not accountable to those who are affected by his actions is answerable only to a superior who is equally unaccountable to those same people; that is not an authority of service. It is not appropriate that an authority which in some issues can only be accountable to the truth of Christ should be autocratic in matters where Christ's truth is not at stake. Sole authority (even exercised only as part of a consultation or discernment process) should only ever be exercised by the ordained minister as a last resort, and then only when it is required to preserve radical catholicity, unity, apostolicity or the moral integrity of the community. In all other matters, especially in those areas in which the clergy can currently readily exercise authority whimsically, the priest or bishop must be a partner with the community in the discernment of its evangelical purpose and the decisions that arise from that purpose. The partnership must be exercised within an agreed, regularly reviewed framework of objectives, strategies, tasks and resourcing. Canon Law is concerned to preserve the authority of the ordained ministers and especially the bishop and the parish priest in a way that is largely monarchic and consequently in practice is often unaccountable. However, neither modern society, nor charity law, nor the demands of the apostolate can allow this state of affairs to continue unaltered.

The second area concerns the Eucharist. James Dallen, in his book *The Dilemma of priestless Sundays*,³² demonstrates conclusively that

the issue is not one of priestless parishes but, much more fundamentally, one of parishes prevented from being eucharistic. According to Vatican figures alone some 50 per cent of parishes or quasi-parishes world-wide have no resident priest and no ready opportunity to celebrate the Eucharist. In France in 1982 there were 22,000 such parishes; in the USA in 1992 2,027, a figure which tripled over the last 10 years.³³ Dallen shows that resolving the problem by the practice of what is known as SWAP (Sunday Worship in the Absence of a Priest), as described by Pope John Paul II in his talk to the Canadians, is not only second best, it is clean contrary to the ancient traditions and teachings of the Church, and can be shown historically to have led consistently to misunderstanding of the Eucharist and to a loss of the integrity of faith among baptized Catholics. He writes, 'We often fail to experience and understand that it is the Body of Christ that celebrates the Eucharist.'³⁴ Further Dallen states:

The Eucharist is the celebration of the Body of Christ wherein it recognizes and realizes its identity and mission. That is why the church has not merely a right to the Eucharist, but the responsibility to celebrate it on the Lord's Day. Communities thus have a right to have ministers presiding at their table who are signs of their ecclesial reality and communion with the Catholic Church. Without that celebration, Catholicism can survive only as an inflexible institution, a defective sacrament of Christ's nourishing Body . . . A choice is presently being made regarding the shape of the future church. Simply continuing the present policy is a choice, and it is one that is a more radical departure from tradition than changing the ordination discipline. It necessarily means the diminishment of a church that has always given pride of place to expressing its sacramental character in celebrating the eucharist. Catholicism should cease to be a catholic, sacramental eucharistic church.³⁵

James Dallen's thesis is, I believe, incontrovertible. The difference between the official statements about the meaning and significance of the parish and of the Eucharist³⁶ and the consequences with regard to the availability of the Eucharist that result from the present official modelling of ordained presbyteral ministry are quite frankly irreconcilable. It is difficult to understand how the Church could get itself in such a position.

The New Testament rarely used the terminology of 'priesthood' and 'sacrifice' and then only ever in relation to Christ or to the whole Church. St Paul uses this terminology in relation to the whole Church and its members to describe their self-giving in placing themselves at

the service of the gospel, of each other and of the poor (Romans: 12: 1) – a startling usage, and perhaps one that seemed blasphemous for some at that time. The Second Vatican Council described the liturgy as the source and summit of the life of the Church. Sadly, with the collapse of the religious orders and the inability of parish communities (and the Church as a whole) to grasp the demands of evangelization, described above, the relationship between liturgy and the Church's mission, especially to the poor, has become dangerously attenuated. The consequences are that, in spite of the aims of the Council, liturgical renewal has readily become neo-ritualism; 'autonomous Europeans', even those committed to the service of the poor and with a sense of the spiritual, are becoming 'disengaged' from worship and 'disenchanted' with the Church; and, as James Dallen has suggested, the Church itself is failing to grasp the full meaning of its vocation to be eucharistic.

Plainly there is a creative theological ferment in the Church at the moment. On the one hand there has been a very real development in the role of the laity in the Church and their collaboration with ordained priestly ministry. On the other hand there has been a retrenchment into traditional models of priestly ministry by some, or an exercise of inappropriate modes of authority by others, which have only served to undermine the newly found position of the laity, thwarting their work. What is clear is that numerous models and patterns of ordained ministry and indeed other ministries are not only possible, but are now essential. They are essential if the demands both of maintaining the Church and also of enabling it to be truly eucharistic and evangelizing are to be met. The irony is that the official policy of retrenchment with regard to models of ordained ministry is itself likely to exacerbate the crisis and to precipitate just such changes. The tragic irony is that the price of these policies in terms of the increasing alienation of lay people and burn-out of priests could be unacceptably high. However, the agenda has been set and is fairly clearly spelt out; the Church now needs the courage to devise the patterns of ministry which will promote its implementation.

NOTES

¹ For example: Paul Bernier, *Ministry in the Church* (Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, 1992); Kenan B. Osborne, *Priesthood* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, 1988).

² K. Osborne, *op. cit.*, p 281.

³ For example: M. Richards, *A people of priests* (DLT, London 1995); Kenan Osborne, 'Mixed signals: priestly identity and priestly spirituality since Vatican II'. *The candles are still burning: direction in sacrament and spirituality* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1995).

- ⁴ M. Richards, *A people of priests*, pp 56–67. Kenan Osborne ‘Mixed signals’, *op. cit.*, p 73.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, M. Richards, *ibid.*, p 4–16; Kenan Osborne, ‘Mixed signals’, *ibid.*, p 73; Kenan Osborne, *Ministry* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, 1993), pp 535–7, 540–64.
- ⁶ M. Richards, *op. cit.*, p 62.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p 61.
- ⁸ Kenan Osborne, ‘Mixed signals’, *op. cit.*, p 80.
- ⁹ David Parker (UK) and Loek Halman and Astrid Vloet (Netherlands) *European values study 1981–1990 – summary report* (Gordon Cook Foundation 1992), p 48.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 48.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 10.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p 31.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p 10.
- ¹⁴ Statistics: Paul Hypher – unpublished research for the CCEE, April 1991.
- ¹⁵ Figures and statistics from Catholic Education Council/Catholic Education Services Annual Reports and other records.
- ¹⁶ See relevant editions of the *Catholic directory for England and Wales*, and Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *The changing parish* (Routledge, London, 1989), pp 2–3.
- ¹⁷ Karl Rahner, ‘Towards a fundamental theological interpretation of Vatican II’, *Theol. Studies* vol 40.
- ¹⁸ *Lumen gentium* no 1.
- ¹⁹ *Gaudium et spes* no 40.
- ²⁰ *Evangelii nuntiandi* no 14.
- ²¹ *Evangelii nuntiandi* no 60.
- ²² *Dialogue and proclamation* (Rome 1992), no 2 and no 44.
- ²³ John O’Donohue, ‘To awaken the Divinity within’ in *The Way*, Oct 1994, pp 265–67 *passim*.
- ²⁴ Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, *Roman Catholics in England* (CUP, Cambridge, 1987), p 196.
- ²⁵ *Apostolicam actuositatem* no 10.
- ²⁶ *Christifideles laici* no 26.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, no 10.
- ²⁸ Kenan Osborne, ‘Mixed signals’, *op. cit.*, p 79.
- ²⁹ Loughlan T. Sofield & Carroll Juliano, *Collaborative ministry* (Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, 1987). Loughlan Sofield & Donald Kuhn, *The collaborative leader* (Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, 1995). Norman Paul Cooper, *Collaborative ministry* (Paulist Press, Mahwah, 1993) and *Developing collaborative ministry* (Doctoral Project, CU Washington, UMI Dissertation Service 1991).
- ³⁰ I am indebted to Bill McQuillan, formerly Chairman of the East Anglia Diocesan Pastoral Council, for many ideas in this section; they are taken from his unpublished talk at the National Conference of Priests for England and Wales in Sept 1992.
- ³¹ Edmund Hill, *Ministry and authority in the Catholic Church* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1988), p 122.
- ³² James Dallen, *The dilemma of priestless Sundays* (Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, 1994).
- ³³ *ibid.*, p vii.
- ³⁴ *ibid.*, p 141.
- ³⁵ *ibid.*, p 143.
- ³⁶ See again *Christifideles laici* no 26, as quoted above.