

The Collaborative Character of Christian Ministry

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Stephen K. Pickard

Assistant Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Adelaide and Associate
Professor of Theology, Charles Sturt University, Australia

Abstract

This article explores the nature of collaborative ministry. It begins with a reflection on the body metaphor in Romans 12:5 in which Christians are described as ‘members one of another’. This text points to relationships in the body of Christ marked by collaboration which involves mutuality and cooperation. The article identifies and briefly outlines the critical developments required in a future ministry which is collaborative and thus truly Christian.

Key Words

collaborative, ministry, integration, cooperation, character, relational

The Collaborative Ideal: Exploring the Body Metaphor

The Apostle Paul writes: ‘we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another’ (Romans 12:5). The text is familiar enough. The Apostle appeals to the metaphor of the body to encourage the members of the young church at Rome to work together. He wants to help them understand that in the community of Jesus each has a part to play and each has different gifts and graces. The intention is not so much ranking or weighing the gifts (in proportion to a quantum of faith) but acknowledging that the charismata are diverse and distributed among the many members of the ecclesial body. From the Apostle’s point of view cooperation is a fundamental feature of ministry in the kingdom of God. We may readily agree that this is a good idea, and no doubt all those in Christian ministry aspire to such an ideal.

Certainly in chapter 12 of Romans the Apostle recommends a team approach to ministry and mission. Shared power and collaborative practice seems

like a gospel imperative. The Holy Spirit is the baptiser endowing the people of God with gifts and power for ministry. This Spirit is no respecter of position or privilege. We may be surprised and encouraged to find a theology of collaboration embedded, at least in embryo, in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*. Its origin is in Thomas Cranmer’s Second Collect for Good Friday in the 1549 Prayer Book. This prayer stresses the vocation and ministry of all the faithful:

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men [sic] in thy holy Church, that *every member* of the same, in his [sic] *vocation and ministry*, may truly serve thee; through our

Corresponding author:

Stephen K. Pickard
Email: s.k.pickard@gmail.com

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee, and in the unity of the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen (my italics).

The Collect presumes that all members of the Church have a vocation and ministry. It points to a profound mutuality in ministry wherein each ministry bestows life and energy on other ministries. This theology of ministry resonates with the apostle's words: 'So in Christ we who are many form one body, and individually members of one another'. We can imagine what it means to be members of the same body. We belong to families, networks of friends, work associates. And in the Christian community we talk much of being the body of Christ and embrace the organic image of the Apostle. Just as a body has arms and legs, eyes and mouth, so in the body of Christ there are diverse parts, different gifts and we share the common charismata of the Spirit. None of us owns our gifts; they are gifts! God is the giver. For this same reason everyone ought to act in faith and embrace the God who gives gifts and calls us to break the tapes of yesterday – 'I can't do it', 'I'm not good enough', or 'leave it to me you fools, or 'I'll show them how to do it' or 'they might have a gift but mine is more important and they will just have to learn that the hard way'. Perhaps we need a conversion to enter into the meaning of the metaphor of the body of Christ and shared ministry for mission.

But what about the unusual words tacked on by Paul: 'and you are individually members of one another'. How can I be a member of *someone else*? The Apostle's metaphor of the body breaks down. How do we hear this? Perhaps we hear this as a summons for the people and leaders of a congregation to actively play their part? Maybe we hear it as a call for everyone to accept their assigned role and fulfil their ministry? It also includes allowing others to be part of the community, to have a task, role and place according to their baptismal calling. However the Apostle seems to be going further. He is saying that as individuals in the body each of us is a member of someone else. How is this the case? The Apostle's main burden is to convince the Church that its members need to learn to recognise the ministry of others. Even the ministries we exercise are to be bent or inclined towards the ministries of others. Indeed we belong to the other! This is startling and is it not a little intrusive? The Apostle is ascribing to others the dignity of becoming part of ourselves: 'each member

belongs to all the others'. Here is a radical doctrine of ministry for mission. Learning to accept the ministry of the other *towards* myself is risky and often resisted. Not only am I to see myself as belonging to someone else; my ministry belongs to and bends towards another. In this way the other has a claim upon me. The emphasis is not on the membership of *the other person* in the body – e.g. whether we like them or not or have regard for their gifts – but something more radical. Rather our ministry is tied up with the ministry of others. The ministries are bound together.

The ministries we exercise can only be ministries of the gospel of Christ as they function in relation to others. It is as if the ministries give life to each other. Furthermore the ministry I exercise only has life as it belongs to others. The accent is thus not on ownership of ministries but truly shared visions of ministry for the common good. And this includes representative leadership in the threefold order of bishops, priests and deacons. My ministry is called forth by the ministries of others. In this way the ministries of the ecclesial body animate each other. There are no autonomous and self-perpetuating ministries. Our life is not only hid in Christ, our ministries are hid in Christ *and in each other*. And in the body of Christ all the ministries are interdependent. All act upon one another as if *each were not their own*; not self-constituting but constituted both *from* and *toward* each other. Such features of properly ordered ministries belong to a collaborative ethos and practise. Ministry as a collaborative and coordinating activity of the Church is, upon this account, a condition of it being a ministry ordered according to the gospel.

A Future Collaborative Ministry: Some Critical Moves

The problem with the above reflection on collaboration is that we seem to have great difficulty practising it. Of course the disjunction between theory and practice is not unusual. Indeed it is a constant challenge for us in many areas of life. Ministry is no different. The more important matter concerns the reasons why collaboration is difficult and what underlying changes are necessary to optimise conditions for improved practice. In what follows I want to explore what is required from an ecclesiological point of view in order that the body of Christ may minister not only in the power of the Spirit but more particularly in the Spirit that makes us "one of another".

From Fragmentation to Integration

There is no doubt that in the last half of the twentieth century the concept of ministry has undergone a transformation. No longer does the term 'ministry' simply refer to those who have been ordained in the Church of God. The undeniable fact is that ministry now includes the ministries of the whole people of God. So today we are familiar with references to the 'common' or 'corporate' ministries of the Church, 'ecclesial ministries', and ministries of the 'whole people of God'. And these ministries continue to expand in the quest for fresh expressions of being the Church in the contemporary world. Diversification and multiplication of ministries is a feature of the ecclesial landscape.

The trouble with the above developments, at least in the West, is the prevailing culture of the individual that skews human activity away from connection and integration and towards fragmentation and dissipation of energy. The environment is not conducive to collaborative practices. In our modern world it is far from clear that we are so knit together that we see ourselves as 'one of another'. Indeed our cultural values turn us in the other direction. Competition not cooperation is the clarion call of our times. But more of that in a moment.

The fragmentation can be observed in the long-standing split between clergy and laity. The roots of this have their origins in the ancient Christian tradition. For example the appeal to 'Holy Orders' is rooted in the early development of the threefold ministry (offices) of the Church in distinction from the *laos* of God. Interestingly the term 'lay' is foreign to the Scriptures and *klerikos* does not appear in the Septuagint and New Testament.¹ The religious deployment of the idea of laity (*laikos*) appears initially in Clement of Rome writing to the Corinthian Church at the end of first century. In the context of division and discord, Clement's overriding concern seems to have been to re-establish proper order within the Corinthian Church.² To this end he appeals

to an ideal ordering under God in which each has a particular 'rank'. Whilst the analogy with the idea of rank in the military is not difficult to discern, Clement also draws upon analogies with the Levitical cult of the Old Testament. He locates the ministries of the Christian community in terms of the orders of high priest, priest and levite. Those designated as 'layman (*anthropos laikos*)' are assigned their own place and are bound by 'lay precepts'. However in trying to carve out a place for the baptized, Clement managed to cement a division between priesthood and laity.

Clement's use of the term *laikos* did not reappear until a century later in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian. Tertullian, writing in the early years of the third century, was the first Western theologian to distinguish the *ordo* of the clergy from the *plebs* – what we call laity or *laos*.³ Tertullian was alive to the increasing divide between clergy and the baptized and even in his pre-Montanist days he held a strong doctrine of the laity. Certainly by the time of Cyprian in the fourth century the lines had been established between clerical and lay life. From this early period tensions between the two would become a feature of the Church. The appeal to laity today reflects both the early tradition which distinguished laity from clergy and a more recent tendency to include all the baptized under the term laity or more usually *laos*. The conflation of these two usages often creates confusion.

The threefold order of ministry (offices of bishop, priest and deacon) that had become relatively fixed and stable, at least from the sub-apostolic period, was now clearly distinguished from a general priesthood. Such an ordering of ministries was associated with Cyprian in the fourth century. It involved a strong correlation of the threefold offices with the priesthood of the Old Testament.⁴ It came to overshadow the fluid and dynamic aspects of ministry of an earlier formative period. Yet the Christian tradition bears witness to a

¹ *Kleros* has its roots in the Old Testament notion of 'casting lots' (receiving one's 'portion' or 'inheritance') and in the New Testament this idea continues, though in, for example, Colossians 1:12 the 'lot' or 'inheritance' is with the 'saints in light' and clearly applies to the company of believers. Only later is the *kleros* associated with a particular group or 'lot' i.e., the *klerikos*.

² Alexandre Faivre, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*, trans. David Smith, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), pp. 18-19.

³ Alan Hayes, 'Christian Ministry in Three Cities of the Western Empire', in Richard Longenecker (ed.), *Community Formation in the Early Church and in the Church Today*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Pub., 2002), p. 140. Only a few years earlier in 177 at Lyons, in a letter transcribed by Eusebius, there is no such distinction between clergy and laity. Rather the *kleros* ['allotted portion'] as 'class' or 'order', refers to the martyrs. See Hayes, *ibid*, p. 133.

⁴ Hayes, *ibid*, pp. 148-153; Faivre, *Emergence of the Laity*, chap. 6. Faivre shows how for Cyprian the clergy do not belong to the laity.

richly differentiated *ordo* in the Church that has included a wide variety of ministries with pre-eminence in the early church being accorded the order of martyrs.⁵

Notwithstanding the ancient roots of the split between clergy and laity the western preoccupation with the individual and more recent emphasis on professionalism, performance and success ensures that the rupture between clergy and laity deepens. The various solutions offered to heal this open wound between clergy and laity usually involve diminishing either one or the other. The unresolved tension between clergy and laity can be traced as a red thread through the long tradition of Christian ministry. The result has been a loss of inner coherence between the ministries of clergy and laity. Furthermore the more recent proliferation of the ministries of the people of God is often viewed as a threat to clergy. Sometimes the laity repay the complement by behaving as if their ascendancy is a case of 'the empire strikes back'. Furthermore within a culture of individualism the increasing diversity of the ministries of the body of Christ can easily operate in an uncoordinated and incoherent manner. Under these conditions fragmentation increases rather than abates. The future of a ministry that is Christian will be one that strives for integration of the ministries of the people of God, that does not play one off against the other, that does not exalt one ministry by diminishing the other.

Over the last two decades there have been a number of attempts to develop more integrative accounts of the ministries of the Church. Robin Greenwood's *Transforming Priesthood* (1994) and more recently *Transforming Church* (2002) are clearly indebted to the emergence of trinitarian thinking in relation to the doctrine of the Church and ministry.⁶ Greenwood argues that a trinitarian basis for ecclesiology, when applied to a doctrine of ministry, points to a relational understanding of ministries. Such a relation is not established through 'a process of causality of any kind' eg. 'chain of individuals' or 'historically "guaranteed" line of apostolic communities'. Rather, the accent is upon 'interdependence'⁷ wherein 'the entire

church rather than the priest alone ...is said to represent Christ'.⁸ In this context the priesthood of the ordained represents a 'focussing' of the priesthood of Christ's body.⁹ Yet Greenwood's rationale for the 'uniquely distinguishing role of the priest' may not be convincing and evidence too much debt to traditional notions of setting apart.¹⁰ This may be at odds with his notion that the ministries 'co-create' each other.¹¹

William Countryman sets out on a different tact in developing 'the fundamental priesthood of Christians' grounded in 'the true life of humanity in the presence of God, illuminated by the priesthood of Christ'.¹² The basis for this is life in relation to the Holy, a life of encounter at the borderlands between God and the world. A bond is thus established at the heart of creation between God, creation and a kind of natural priesthood arising from such encounter. It is an approach with strong affinities to the tradition of F. D. Maurice in Anglicanism. For Countryman the difference between this 'fundamental priesthood' of humanity and Christian priesthood is epistemological: 'If our Christian priesthood is unique, it is so only in that we have been graced, for no merit of our own, with the integrating clarity of that vision'.¹³ Countryman refers here to the understanding that the truth that anyone encounters is at one with the 'Word incarnate in Jesus'. In this conception creation has ontological priority over the Church in relation to a ministering priesthood. An interdependence between creation and church is thus posited. On this view a ministering priesthood is clearly orientated towards the world.

What is not so clear in this approach is the logic of an ordained ministry. Humanity's 'need for religion with it[s] sacramental priests' seems to be the

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 145.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 142.

¹⁰ See Greenwood, *Transforming Priesthood*, p. 143, for references to the idea of the priest being 'set apart', 169. Properly speaking in ordination people are not set apart but rather set within a new set of relations within the community of the faithful.

¹¹ *Transforming Church*, p. 75.

¹² L. William Countryman, *Living on the Border of the Holy: Renewing the Priesthood of All* (Harrisburg, Pasadena: Morehouse Pub, 1999).

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 137.

⁵ For the importance of the order of the martyrs see Hayes, 'Christian Ministry', Longenecker (ed.), *Community Formation*, p 133.

⁶ *Transforming Priesthood: A New Theology of Mission and Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1994); *Transforming Church: Liberating Structures for Ministry* (London: SPCK, 2002).

⁷ *Transforming Priesthood*, p. 164.

key for Countryman.¹⁴ The purpose of the sacramental priesthood is to so model its life that the fundamental priesthood 'can more readily do its work'. The chief characteristic of the Church's sacramental priesthood 'is not its own power or authority or even its sacredness, but the way in which it emerges within and points towards the priesthood that is dispersed throughout the Christian people and the whole human race'.¹⁵ Countryman has brought into focus the significance of the idea of the Holy as that to which and about which priestly life revolves for the sake of the priestly community and the wider human race. This has the great merit of placing the discussion of ministry and orders within a richer context of creation and human society. Sacramental categories become critical and the ancient tradition of salvation through illumination is given a contemporary ring. Yet Countryman is unable to say how the fundamental priesthood contributes to the sacramental priesthood in any way notwithstanding his espousal of contemporary patterns of mutual ministry.¹⁶ It is ultimately a one-way relation, the latter (sacramental priesthood) facilitating the work of the former (fundamental priesthood).

A recent book by Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown, *Being a Priest Today*, provides an excellent introduction to the ordained ministry today.¹⁷ For practical wisdom interwoven with the fabric of the ministry tradition in theology and scripture this book is good value. It offers a fresh, humane and powerful vision for ministerial priesthood today. Here there is an aliveness to the relation between presbyter and people: 'Presbyters are not a caste outside the *laos*, they are a category within the *laos*. They are members of the *laos* who are placed in a particular pastoral relation to other members of the *laos*'.¹⁸ This emphasis upon the presbyter's particular placement among the people leads the authors to

state that 'presbyters are defined by their relationship to other members of the *laos*'.¹⁹ Following the lead of R. C. Moberly, *Ministerial Priesthood*, a century earlier the authors refer to this relationship in terms of an 'intense "for-other-ness"'.²⁰ Underlying this is the fact that 'Christian identity is fundamentally relational'. But what is the nature of this relationality? Drawing from early church sources (eg. *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* and John Chrysostom) the authors point to the interdependence between presbyter and people observed in the New Testament: 'The presbyter needs the people to be a presbyter. The people need a presbyter to be the people of God'.²¹ The one 'interanimates the other'. The instincts here are surely right. The book is an exploration of the inner life of the ordained who are called to serve the 'health and beauty' of the Church. Yet it is unclear in this relational approach exactly how, in the words of a 1987 report of the Church of England on theological education, the ministry of the people 'bring the other [ministry of the ordained] to be'.²²

The search for more integrative relations between the ministries, and particularly between the ordained and wider ministries of the people of God remains a continuing challenge and a somewhat illusive ideal. However one thing is clear. It is incumbent upon any future theology of ministry to recognise and resist fragmentation and seek a deeper integration of the ministries.

Associated with the fundamental move from fragmentation to integration are a number of other related moves in the direction of a future Christian ministry. I would identify them as follows: from mechanism to organism; from competition to cooperation; from non-relational to relational; from skills to character.

From Mechanism to Organism

There is a long-running tension between what may be not inappropriately termed mechanistic accounts of ministry and more organic conceptions. An interesting and influential example of this from the

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The anthropological and sociological factors that underpin structures and symbols for meditation of the sacred are well known and important. How they might be related to the theological dimensions of sacral leadership is the critical issue in ministry.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹⁷ Christopher Cocksworth and Rosalind Brown, *Being a Priest Today* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2002).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 20.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²² *Education for the Church's Ministry*. Church of England Advisory Council for the Church's Ministry (ACCM). The report of the Working Party on Assessment of the Committee for Theological Education, Occasional Paper no. 22, 1987, p.29, para. 29.

Anglican tradition is the theology of ministry developed by the late nineteenth century Anglican theologian R. C. Moberly. In his well known but perhaps not so well read *Ministerial Priesthood* Moberly presents two interlocking but ultimately unreconciled traditions regarding the nature of Christian ministry.²³ On the one hand the Anglo-Catholic Moberly, writing at a time when the status of Anglican orders was a matter of contention argues that the apostolic ministry is fundamentally a gift given by Christ to the Church from beyond. He couches this in a manner to make it abundantly clear that the ordained ministry has not evolved out of pre-existing ministries nor is it authorised from within the congregation. Rather the authorisation is beyond human contingency and set above and over against the body of Christ. This form of divine origin for ministry was instituted by Christ and passed on via the apostles to the bishops and had the weight of history on its side.

On the other hand there is an equally strong vein running through his argument which is indebted to the organic metaphor of the body of Christ. This latter stream emphasises the representative nature of ordained ministry and the deep inter-relationship between the ordained ministry and the laity. He isn't interested in the varieties of the ministries of the laity as such but he is keen to show how the ordained representative ministries of the Church have their being in the priesthood of the people of God. For Moberly 'the priesthood of ministry and of laity are not really antithetical or inconsistent, but rather correlative, complimentary, nay, mutually indispensable ideas'.²⁴ Furthermore it didn't really matter from which angle one approached the issue: either from ministerial priesthood and thence to the 'dignity and power of the priesthood of the laity' or from the 'lay priesthood', 'and mount from thence to its *concentrated meaning* in those who are set apart personally to represent the collective priesthood' (my italics).²⁵

Moberly's mechanistic account via a particular Tractarian version of apostolic succession has not stood the test of historical analysis but the appeal has nevertheless remained in the Anglican psyche. On

the other hand his appeal to organic notions of ministry have been a critical feature of the development of a doctrine of ministry in the twentieth century. Which Moberly do we listen to? The tension remains in Anglicanism and in various ways inheres in most churches. The future for an integrated doctrine of ministry is a future which gives greater weight to the organic metaphors, to interdependence, connectivity and cooperation. The quest to secure in a quasi-mechanical way a doctrine of ministry that will endure has to be relinquished in favour of the riskier but open way of the Spirit that breathes new life into ancient forms.

From Competition to Cooperation

A collaborative approach to ministry in the body of Christ presumes cooperation. The philosopher Raimo Tuomela states: 'Cooperation seems to be innate, a coevolutionary adaptation based on group selection, the basic reason for this being that human beings have evolved in a group context'.²⁶ However he also notes the fact that people seem disposed to 'defect, act competitively, or even act aggressively'. The result is that we live in constant tension between these two elemental drives. However within contemporary Western societies there seems to be an overriding emphasis upon competition. Human society is geared to a market economy that thrives on competition. It seems that the competitive spirit is deeply encoded into our way of life economically, socially, politically and alas religiously. Where competition rather than cooperation dominate the scene it is axiomatic that power will be skewed in unhealthy ways.

In the life of the Church we see all too clearly the influence of the competitive spirit between churches; within churches; and among leaders and the ministries of the body of Christ. The prevailing cultural values have a far greater impact on our religious life and forms of ministry than most of us either realise, or care to know. Even more troubling are the remarkable ways in which competition and misuse of power can acquire religious legitimation. Divine sanction of competition is the final seal and establishes the conditions for unfettered misuse of power in the supposed interests of a higher good. With a well established rupture between clergy and laity and the

²³ *Ministerial Priesthood, Chapters (Preliminary to a study of the Ordinal) on The Rationale of Ministry and the Meaning of Christian Priesthood* [1897] (London: SPCK, London, 1969).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Raimo Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 150.

all pervasive influence of western individualism, performance and success it is axiomatic that competition rather than cooperation will be the basic default when it comes to the ministries of the body of Christ. In one sense the problem is not new. Paul's letters to the Corinthians would be a good place to start to see how competition endangers the cooperative venture in ministry (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:11-17). It is no surprise that the Apostle regularly appealed to the idea of being 'partners' in the gospel.

Fragmentation and competition often go hand in hand. Integration and cooperation do so also. The ministries of the body of Christ will only have a Christian future as they focus on the 'we-mode' cooperative venture rather than prevailing '1-mode' competitive practices.

From Non-Relational to Relational Praxis

Integration and cooperation necessarily involve a genuine relational way of thinking and behaving. The language of relationality is a feature of contemporary discourse on ministry. Not surprisingly the quest for integration has been associated with a strong appeal to the doctrine of the Trinity. In this respect Edward Hahnenberg's, *Ministries: A Relational Approach*²⁷ provides the most coherent and creative attempt so far to develop an integrative approach to the ministries of the Church. Although his focus is on the Roman Catholic Church his insights are relevant across the ecclesial spectrum. His relational approach is indebted to a richer trinitarian dynamic. Such an approach makes good sense. It is apparent in modern ecumenical dialogues where there is regular appeal to a trinitarian ecclesiology as the backdrop for reflections upon the ministries of the divided churches. Such language is fundamentally about connectivity, about thinking together rather than apart, about living and acting mind-full of the other, indeed bent towards the other. But this is a big ask for it means letting go of our claims to authority, of our cherished power or learning. It is only as we let go of such powerful claims upon us that we are free to recognise authority and power as coordinates around which we move together and share in different ways. Ministry on this score is primarily perichoretic in character. And it echoes the perichoretic (literally: to

dance around) life of God which is the deepest foundation for a collaborative ministry.

Rublev's icon captures the collaborative spirit so well. Each of the members of the Trinity inclined towards the other with a deferential posture of respect and acknowledgement; of shared life; wherein each is constituted as person by virtue of their relation to the other. The persons of the divine Trinity are pre-eminently 'members one of another'. However the movement includes a double gesture; the inclination to the other is at the same time directed to the holy table. It is an invitational gesture of hospitality to the world to gather. God's collaborative character is by nature outer-directed, open, invitational and hospitable.

The move into more relational thinking and practices is a vital part of a future reinvigorated ministry. However such an approach has to be wary lest it avoid issues of conflict and difficulty in ministry. The appeal to trinitarian relationality in ministry can easily become overly idealistic and fail to tackle the hard issues. The kind of relational life that is genuinely trinitarian and makes sense of our life on earth in ministry is one that is focussed on the life of Christ in the power of the Spirit. The building blocks of a trinitarian approach to ministry are fundamentally Christological and Pneumatological. It seems to me that this twin focus keeps ministry properly earthed. The reason being that it takes its cue from the way Jesus lived in the messiness of life calling upon the power and wisdom of the Spirit. Accordingly relational ministry has to work at harnessing rather than avoiding conflict.

From Skills to Character

The great Roman Catholic ecumenist, Yves Congar, in his magisterial book on the laity,²⁸ referred to the two fundamental realities of the Church i.e. its structure and life. Disarming in its simplicity, it remains relevant for evolving patterns of ministry today. In anxious and pressured times the default for institutions and organizations and therefore the Church is to turn to structure and what I referred to above as mechanism. Of course our lives cannot do without an appropriate structuring and it is wrong to play off structure and life. They are essentially co-related. However there has been and still is a heavy investment in structure e.g. restructure, rationalisation,

²⁷ Edward Hahnenberg, *Ministries: A Relational Approach* (New York: Herder and Herder, 2003).

²⁸ *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity* (Westminster: Newman, 1957).

programs, strategic directions. The Church in mission mode latches onto such discourse and seems to give plenty of air space to those whose appetite for such things is great indeed. What about life? What about those human virtues that give life to structure, that breath spirit into ministry?

The future shape of Christian ministry will necessarily have a heavy emphasis on the virtues and character. I say necessarily because it is not possible to move in the direction of integration, organic networked ministry and cooperative ventures if the people involved are not the kinds of people who know how to work openly and joyfully with others in a higher task. In a fragmented, competitive, mechanistic environment questions of character and virtue will always be triumphed by skills and competencies. Whilst not wishing in any way to underrate the importance of such things for ministry my view is that the kind of moves I have been suggesting in ministry entail a focus on character and the nurture of wisdom.²⁹ This also means recovering the category of friendship in ministry, or at least setting it alongside the discourse of servant-hood as companion language.³⁰ Clearly this has implications for ministry formation and preparation for leadership.

Conclusion: Collaboration as the Christian Future for Ministry

I have tried to map out some of the key moves required for Christian ministry to be genuinely col-

²⁹ See Stephen Pickard, 'The Content of Theological Education' in *Called to Minister: Vocational Discernment in the Contemporary Church*, Tom Frame (ed.) (Canberra: Barton Books, 2009), pp. 93-109.

³⁰ Edward Zaragoza, *No Longer Servants but Friends: A Theology of Ordained Ministry*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

laborative. It might be more accurate to put the matter in another way i.e. what kind of future ministry will be genuinely Christian? The answer I have suggested is that ministry that is genuinely Christian is one that is collaborative. What we require in the future is a ministry that can bear witness to the truth enshrined in the Apostle's theology of ministry of the body of Christ: 'you are individually members one of another'.

Perhaps a final comment on mission. Today we regularly talk about a mission shaped ministry and recognise that there ought to be no other. The language of mission does indeed need to be rehabilitated and given new focus for the people of God. However the deeper issue in the language of mission concerns its meaning and content. Without due attention to these things the people of God grow weary and can suffer mission fatigue. Thus it is not sufficient to place the adjective 'collaboration' in front of ministry and mission, at least not without a fairly major reappropriation of what collaboration entails and why it is such a good idea. In short if ministry and mission is not genuinely collaborative along the lines I have tried to suggest above then it remains questionable whether ministry and mission have a *Christian* future regardless of what other kinds of futures might be invented. In the ecclesia of God it is never a question of whether we shall collaborate or not – that is never the question. The question is how shall we do it so that the true character of the gospel of God shines forth more brightly. Indeed it is only through a ministry that is collaborative in character that the bright mystery at the heart of faith can appear and transform the world.³¹

³¹ For further discussion on the theme of this article see Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009).

We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself with our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy (1844–1881)