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Chapter 3

On Knowing One's Relations: Church, Ministry and Theology

Church and Ministry in Dynamic Relation

The rediscovery of the ministries of the whole people of God has occurred at the same time as ecclesiology has emerged as a major theme in contemporary theology in the last century. As indicated in Chapter 2 the history of mission and ecumenism has been the field on which these twin developments have flourished. Undergirding and informing this has been a renewal in Trinitarian theology in which the theme of communion has been strong. The literature on these developments is significant. A persistent and unresolved issue in these developments has been the nature of the relationship between Church and ministry. Lack of attention to and clarity about the nature of this relationship continues and is the reason for many of the present difficulties the Church faces in ordering its ministries for worship, service and mission.

Identifying the dynamic relation between the Church and its ministries is a critical step in understanding how the ministries work together to bear witness to the gospel. Not surprisingly neither the Church nor its ministries operate in a freewheeling manner but rather are heavily influenced by different theological emphases. How this dynamic relation between church, ministry and theology operates is the focus for this chapter. The rediscovery of the ministries of the people of God and the relations between the ministries will be found to be the result of the way in which church, ministry and theology operate. The nature of this dynamic needs uncovering in order to clarify the interrelatedness of the ministries and their place within the purposes of God in creation and redemption. This is the purpose of the present chapter. This will be particularly important as background analysis for the theory of collaborative ministry developed in Part III.

The Priority of Ministry and Christology

One powerful stream of thought usually associated with the more Catholic wing of the Church, but not entirely so, has given priority to ministry over Church. On this account the Church is constituted by a validly and divinely instituted ministerial office that has its origins in Christ's authority and institution. The more Catholic version appeals to an apostolic succession in the ministry either in a 'harder' form – through tactile succession from Christ and the first apostles – or a 'softer' version that locates the succession in office as such but still appeals to

the antiquity of this succession.¹ This theory of continuity of ministry is associated with a view that ministry is constitutive of the ecclesia. It is a view well attested in Roman Catholicism and became particularly important in nineteenth-century Tractarianism in Anglicanism. The Anglican theologian Paul Avis, refers to this as the 'apostolic paradigm' and links it in Anglicanism with the movement for the Church's autonomy in relation to the state.² However its lineage goes back much further and continues to exert considerable influence upon Anglican scholars.

Thus when the former Anglican primate of Australia, Peter Carnley, considered the matter he noted, somewhat cautiously at first, that 'there is a sense in which this apostolic ministry is logically prior to the Church itself, insofar as the Church comes to be around the ministry of word and sacrament' (my emphasis).³ However, the correlation between Christ and the ministry, and its constitutive force for the being of the Church is unambiguous for Carnley: 'The starting point for our understanding of ministry is the mission and ministry of God who calls the Church into being; the ministry of word and sacrament is a share in, and an instrument of, this ministry, which is constitutive of the Church'.⁴

There is a Protestant version of this approach to ministry and Church. It is familiar in Reformed theology and polity and has traces in Calvin's doctrine of ministry. In this case the appeal is not to an apostolic succession stretching back into the earliest period of Christianity. Rather the accent is on the preservation of the apostolic succession in faith through the divinely instituted office of those called by God to exercise the ministry of preaching the Word in the Church. The supposition is that Christ has instituted this office in the Church in order that the Church will be continually called to new obedience to Christ and be reformed. This approach is the basis for the reformation notion of *ecclesia semper reformanda*. It is the logical result of a doctrine of the Church as a *creatura verbi divini*.⁵ If the Church is the creation of the divine and eternal Word then that ministerial office which is charged with preaching the authoritative word is absolutely pivotal in the re-constituting of the ecclesia at any point in time and space. Thus in a recent restatement of the Reformed position on the integrity and authority of ministry

¹ See Richard Norris, 'Bishops, Succession and the Apostolicity of the Church', in J. Robert Wright (ed.), *On Being a Bishop*. Papers on Episcopacy from the Moscow Consultation, 1992 (New York: Church Hymnal, 1992), pp. 61–2.

² Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), pp. 167–72.

³ Carnley, *Reflections*, p. 173.

⁴ *Ibid.* However, having argued for the logical priority of ministry over Church, Carnley then asserts, contrary to the position of Robin Greenwood, 'that the Church is not a community gathered around a minister but a ministering community ... in fact it is both'. For this to be the case a more nuanced account is required than Carnley has offered for the nature of the relationship proposed between Church and ministry.

⁵ Christoph Schwobel, 'The Creature of the Word: Recovering the Ecclesiology of the Reformers', in Gunton and Hardy (eds.), *On Being the Church*, pp. 110–55.

James Haire and Gordon Watson expound Calvin's emphasis on Christ's rule in the Church through proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments.⁶ The designated agents for this rule of Christ are the teachers and pastors through whom the body of Christ is 'built up'. In ordination the Church recognises 'that its Lord through the means He has chosen mediates its life to it'.⁷ In this context it is clear that being 'built up' and 'mediates its life to it' point to a fundamental constitutive activity for the office of the ministry.

Calvin's own position may not be entirely clear. On the one hand he was in no doubt that the ministry was essential for the Church and authority for ministry was from Christ not from the Church. On the other hand he did not really examine in detail to relationship between Church and ministry. He was clear that the Church is founded on the doctrine of the apostles and prophets. When the Anglican Anthony Hanson considered the matter he concluded that Calvin 'was a supporter of the traditional view: our Lord instituted a ministry to which he committed all rule and authority (or nearly all rule and authority) in the church'.⁸ The ministry may not be constitutive of the Church without qualification but it is clear in which direction Calvin was pointing. This approach finds strong and continuing support among theologians in the Reformed tradition and is implicit in the restriction of 'ministry' to those ordained for the building of the body of Christ.⁹ Hanson's main complaint with the Reformed view was that it had not given sufficient attention to the relationship between church and ministry.

However, fundamental to this stream of thinking is its strong Christological foundation for ministry. In both Catholic and Protestant forms the ministry, as the mode through which the presence of the living Christ is actualised (in sacrament and/or word) is formative and reformatory of the Church. There is a certain inner logic to this position and it has exercised considerable power in the history of the Church.

The priority of ministry in relation to the Church (certainly practically and implicitly theoretically) is operative across the Protestant/Catholic divide, though in different ways. This can be observed in the well-known depiction of Catholicism and Protestantism stated so sharply by Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century: 'The antithesis between Protestantism and Catholicism may be provisionally conceived thus: the former makes the individual's relation to

⁶ See James Haire and Gordon Watson, 'Authority and Integrity in the Ministry of the Church', *Phronema* 18 (2003): 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁸ Anthony Hanson, *The Pioneer Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1975 [1961]), p. 127.

⁹ See Collins, *Diakonia*, p. 35, for reference to the distinction in the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 between the common priesthood and 'the ministry', and much later in Edinburgh in 1937 the determination of ministry (ordained) for the building up of the body of Christ.

the Church dependent on his relation to Christ, while the latter contrariwise makes the individual's relation to Christ dependent on his relation to the Church.¹⁰

The divinely instituted ministry was fundamental for both communions. For Protestantism it was the office for instruction and preaching of Christ's doctrine as foundational for a person being of the Church. In Catholicism the ecclesial world of the Christian is actualised through the ministration of the Eucharistic celebrant who offers the sacrifice of Christ. In both cases the ministry is pivotal for being in relation to Christ in the Church.

However, it is also true that in a more self-consciously ecumenical age the ecclesial dimension of ministry has received a much stronger emphasis in both Reformed and Catholic churches. The major ecumenical dialogues of the twentieth century bear ample testimony to this. From the Reformed wing the Scottish theologian, Thomas Torrance, developed a notion of the royal priesthood in which ministry is understood as the priesthood of the Church and an associated emphasis upon the corporate episcopate.¹¹ In the wake of Vatican II, Roman Catholic theologians have tended to discuss ministry within a richer ecclesial setting, though tensions remain. However the recent assessment of Roman Catholic developments in ministry by Edward Hahnenberg is as relevant to Reformed and other Protestant churches as to the Catholic Church: 'The concern is that, despite qualifications to the contrary, granting priority to the christological representation weakens the ecclesial and relational nature of the priest's ministry.'¹²

The Priority of Church and Pneumatology

In recent years there has been a rediscovery of another quite different approach to ministry that significantly reconfigures the relationship between ministry and Church. In this approach ministry is an emergent *charism*-generated activity of the whole Church. The community of faith, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit receives and exercises the gifts of God for the common good, witness and service: the mission of the Church. In this case the relation between ministry and Church places the accent clearly on the Church as the community of faith in which and for which ministries arise. The ordering of ministries is thus an ecclesial activity.

There is no doubt that this approach to ministry has become an increasingly important feature of ecclesial self-understanding over the course of the last 50 years. A good example of this way of interpreting the relationship between Church and ministry is offered by the New Testament theologian, James Dunn. In an important paper in 1982, 'Ministry and the Ministry: The Charismatic Renewal's Challenge to Traditional Ecclesiology', Dunn drew attention to the connection between the

¹⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1968), p. 103.

¹¹ Hanson, *Pioneer Ministry*, pp. 153–4.

¹² Hahnenberg, *Ministries*, p. 56.

work of the Holy Spirit, the nature of the Spirit's *charisms* and the ministry of the whole Christian community.¹³ He noted that the Pauline conception of the Church (esp. 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12), in which 'Paul envisages the local church as the body of Christ, as a charismatic community, where each member, by definition, has a function within the body, a role within the community of faith' has been a key element in Charismatic renewal and classical Pentecostalism. Dunn explains that in Paul's vision of the body of Christ – the charismatic community:

Charisma cannot be restricted in terms either of the 'who' or the 'what'. Charisma is not given to a select few; 'to each is given the manifestation of the spirit' (1 Cor. 12:7). And *charisma* is not reserved for a particular set of clearly defined gifts; whatever word or act mediates grace to the believing community is *charisma*.¹⁴

Dunn goes on to note that for Paul, '*charisma* is synonymous with *diakonia*, ministry (1 Cor. 12:4-5) and concludes: "Ministry" is not given only to a few, but to each; "ministry" is not confined to a particular set of clearly defined functions but describes every word or act of grace to the believing community.'¹⁵

The purpose of Dunn's argument at this point was to highlight the Pentecostal and Charismatic contribution to a theology of ministry that recognised 'its proper range and diversity' following the Pauline concept of '*all-member* ministry, of ministry as *every* expression of grace'. Over against this Dunn referred to the traditional concept of *the* ministry in which 'the ministry' 'reflects the long established presumption that when Christians talk of 'ministry' they are to all intents and purposes talking about the role of the 'ordained ministry', the clergy'.¹⁶ In Dunn's view even the important reformation appeal to the priesthood of all believers had become 'confined, in effect, to the realm of personal piety, the right of the head of the household to conduct family prayers as its highest expression'.¹⁷

Dunn recognised advances amongst the churches in respect to the ministry belonging to the whole people of God. However, he argued that this had merely created two classes: the ministry of the ordained and the ministry of the laity 'with only the sketchiest or rather incoherent attempts to explain their relationship to each other'.¹⁸ The concept of *charism* 'has been drawn in, but only as a kind of sop to the laity, not as an alternative concept of ministry which might actually call in question the axiomatic structure between clergy and laity and the hierarchical

¹³ Dunn, 'Ministry and the Ministry'.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 292–3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Of course it was precisely the dangers of rather loose conceptions and ministerial practices that was one of the motivating factors for the development in later canonical documents of more stabilised notions of 'the ministry', i.e. the clergy.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

structure built upon it'.¹⁹ Furthermore, the term 'laity' remained an embarrassment since it denoted the whole people of God.

The burden of Dunn's paper was to assess the challenge of Pentecostalism to the traditional doctrines of ministry. However, his discussion highlights the impact of pneumatology in finding an approach to ministry and church in which the body of Christ is the ministering community of faith. Ministry does not precede nor constitute the Church but arises out of and for the life of the community. In this approach the ecclesia has a practical (and perhaps ontological) priority in relation to ministry. Such a conception is not unproblematic as the experience of Pentecostalism has shown, where charismatic leaders have exercised excessive authority over the community and/or communities of faith simply fail to heed wise counsel. Nor does this approach necessarily resolve the matter of the relationship between the ministries within the organizational life of the presently constituted Christian churches.

What this construal of the relation between church and ministry draws attention to is the agency of the Spirit as the giver of *charisms* for ministry. It contributes to what has been termed the 'laicizing of Christianity'.²⁰ It is an emphasis recognised across the ecclesial spectrum. In Hahnenberg's recent theology of the ministries he recognises the impact of this Pauline emphasis on *charism* of the Spirit for ministry. But he notes that: 'Unfortunately, Paul's vision of broadly available *charisms* did not last. In the Christian West, the rise of christological approaches to ministry pushed pneumatological approaches aside.'²¹ He notes the division that emerged between *charism* and institution, the loss of *charism's* ecclesial and hence relational context and the resultant marginalisation of *charisms*. He might also have noted the tendency for such *charism* to be assimilated into the traditional ministerial orders. In the wake of Vatican II there has been a recovery of *charism* as the dynamic underlying the Church's ministries. How this emphasis on *charism* funding both traditional offices and newer ministries will be developed remains to be seen.²²

The significance of the Spirit and *charism* for the recovery of a more ecclesial approach to ministries is not simply the preserve of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic renewal. There is an emerging ecumenical consensus that the ecclesia is foundational reality for all ministry. The debt to pneumatology may be less

¹⁹ Ibid. This is an interesting and important point given the major examination of *diakonia* by John Collins that gave scant and unsatisfactory attention to the relationship between *diakonia* and *charism*, see *Diakonia*, pp. 255–6.

²⁰ David F. Wright, 'The Charismatic Movement: The Laicizing of Christianity?', in Deryck W. Lovegrove (ed.), *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 253–63.

²¹ Hahnenberg, *Ministries*, p. 61.

²² Hahnenberg discusses Küng's notion of 'temporary' and 'permanent' *charisms* and the *charism* of leadership as a way of singling out certain central ministries in the community. See *ibid.*, pp. 72–3.

clear. However, what is clear is that there is a powerful pneumatological stream feeding into the understanding of the relationship between Church and ministry that destabilises traditional conceptions of the relation which have tended to give priority to the authority of ministry.

Church and Ministry: Towards a Trinitarian Integration

Problems remain where the emphasis is on either Christology or Pneumatology. Where ministry is developed in relation to Christology the differentiation and authority of ministerial office is accentuated. This is the strength of this approach. But the danger is over-differentiation and closure in relation to other ministries. The effect is to leave little opportunity for a satisfactory specification of the scope, legitimacy and authority of other ministries. Ministry tends to be sucked up into a Christologically determined ministerial office focused on the clergy. Where the emphasis is on pneumatology the field of ministries is significantly expanded and remains relatively open. Whilst this has many benefits it also generates an inability to achieve properly differentiated ministries. This may lead to significant confusion in the effort of the ecclesia to fulfil its calling.

It is possible to recognise a correlation between capacity for differentiation and relative openness or closure.²³ It seems that high degrees of differentiation generate relatively strong closure and make it difficult to give a sufficiently rich account of the relations between the ministries. It is not the fact of differentiation per se but the strength it exerts in creating sharp boundaries that easily operate as barriers. The supposition here is that the well-being of the entity – in this case a particular ministry or office in the Church – is more firmly secured by 'standing alone'. Often in the history of the tradition this separateness and over-againstness from the Church has been associated with an appeal to an originative event that has 'fixed the boundary'. Such over-differentiation bestows an undue self-importance upon the ministry. From this perspective it is almost inevitable that attempts at relating this ministry to other ministries inevitably diminish the latter. One result of this dynamic is that the system (in this case officially instituted ministry) is over-stabilised leading it to ossify and stagnate.

Where differentiation of ministries is relatively fluid there is an associated openness for innovation in ministry but it becomes difficult to give an account of the diversity of forms of ministry and their inner relations. The reason being that there are no longer any stable forms in view. This danger arises from an over-idealised notion of 'absolute openness', 'an infinity which overflows every thought

²³ The conceptual frame offered here is indebted to the important discussion of the issues of relative closure/openness and differentiation in the human sciences in relation to the nature of human beings in Daniel Hardy, *God's Ways with the World: Thinking and Practising Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 23–4, 93–7, 103–13.

and differentiation'.²⁴ This 'converts openness into a closure, but one which is beyond understanding'.²⁵ Whilst this approach presents a fundamental challenge to the former view it struggles to generate enduring forms through time and space. The system is constantly in danger of dissipation. Relative closure and openness and degree of differentiation and boundedness, are important conceptual heuristic tools for understanding both the history of ministry and the interrelationships between the ministries of the Church. The above difficulties are associated in different ways with an essentially static ontology of order. How this might be overcome through a reconception of order is addressed in Chapter 7.

For the moment we note that the relationship between ministry and Church is clearly not simple; it cannot be stated as a simple one-way dynamic. The best insights of modern ecclesiology recognise this and attempt to describe the dynamic in richer and more satisfactory ways that do justice to the reality of a Church and ministry informed by the life of the triune God. As a result the appeal to Trinitarian relations and communion as a clue to the form and function of the ecclesia and its ministries is widespread.²⁶ However, it is questionable how successful the discourse has been in uncovering the proper relations between the ministries.²⁷ There are a number of reasons for this. First, to some extent reflection on ministry continues to be driven by either strongly Christological or Pneumatological emphases and this ensures that the attempt to specify the relations between the ministries will succumb to the problems noted above. Second, the current appeal to Trinitarian and relational modes of understanding often fails to generate insight at more particular levels, such as relations between the ministries.²⁸ The discourse tends to remain abstract and uninformative. This problem has been noted by Daniel Hardy:

That is the reason why the recovery of relational thinking in theology, which has been so much stressed in modern times, is only a first step in the development of adequate conceptualities for theology. What is required is more attention not only to the fact that relations are intrinsic (or internal) to their terms but also to their variety and dynamics – how they operate in differing situations. Without this, when used either for God and for God's relation to the universe, relational thinking will remain an abstract idea.²⁹

²⁴ Hardy, *God's Ways with the World*, p. 109. The result is yet another form of 'transcendental monism'.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See, e.g., Greenwood, *Transforming Priesthood* (Anglican); Colin Gunton, 'The Church on Earth: the Roots of Community', in Gunton and Hardy (eds.), *On Being the Church*, pp. 48–80 (Reformed); Hahnenberg, *Ministries* (Roman Catholic); Zizoulas, *Being as Communion* (Orthodox).

²⁷ The recent attempt by the Roman Catholic theologian, Edward Hahnenberg, is the most sophisticated and ground-breaking in this respect.

²⁸ This is a problem with Robin Greenwood's *Transforming Priesthood*.

²⁹ Hardy, *God's Ways with the World*, p. 138.

Hardy's comments are apposite for the present enquiry. Notwithstanding increasing attention to issues of church and ministry it is far from self-evident how relational approaches to ecclesiology and ministry have advanced our understanding about the ways the ministries of the Church operate in a genuinely collaborative manner. In other words, whilst the trends in Trinitarian thinking in relation to ecclesiology and ministry are evident, the work of transposition and interweaving of Trinitarian and relational categories into an ecclesiology of ministry remains significantly underdeveloped.

A simple one-way relationship between church and ministry is not sustainable. Most commentators would recognise this, at least to some extent. Yet the dynamic relationship between church and ministry is often missed or not grasped. The deeper and more intractable problems that arise from faulty construals of the church–ministry relation remain embedded within the familiar affirmations concerning ministry and church. For example, it is not unusual for churches to reach agreement on a range of ministry matters: the ministry of the whole people of God; the nature of the Church as a community in which there are a variety of gifts and graces; the importance of ministerial offices amidst a growing diversity of other ministries. Furthermore, there is often a consensus on problems to do with ministry, for example, rampant Western individualism, the democratic spirit of the age and the loss of a sense of authority in communities of faith, and conflicts between clergy and laity.

However, notwithstanding consensus reached, both formal, and informal, regarding the above matters, the unresolved tensions between the ministries remains embedded in the discourse. For example, doctrines of ministry that have traditionally appealed to a strong Christological basis for the legitimation of office and exercise of authority often simply reassert the tradition as a means of securing the *communio* of the Church in a fragmented world. Those doctrines of ministry that look to the gifts of the Spirit in the body of Christ appear to have an easier time of it. Spirit, ministry and community seem more organically related. This pneumatological approach can function reasonably well at the 'local church' but is unable to provide a wider ecclesial vision of the Church. It does not generate structures of continuity and forms of ministry to enable the endurance of the community of faith. One result is that energy for ministry is too easily dissipated and loses coherence. This spirit led ecclesiology often ends up appealing to an overarching authoritative office such as 'apostle'.³⁰ Yet problems inherent in either a strong Christological or Pneumatological emphasis in ministry are rarely interrogated. The result is that for all the consensus achieved concerning the nature of Christian ministry little genuine advance is made in understanding (a) why the doctrine and practice of ministry is such an intractable and divisive issue for the churches and (b) how ministry and church are dynamically related.

³⁰ See David Cannistraci, *Apostles and the Emerging Apostolic Movement* (Ventura: Renew Books, 1996) for a discussion of the place of 'apostle' in contemporary Pentecostalism.

How then might church and ministry be related? Robert Hannaford suggests a more organic conception as a way to overcome a view of ministry 'divorced from the collective life of the Church'.³¹ In overcoming this we need to show that a theology of ministry, understood as action for and on behalf of the Church, is consistent with an understanding of the Church as an organic community, where ministerial differentiation contributes to and does not diminish the unity and coherence of the whole body.

It is a sentiment few would disagree with no matter what their church affiliation. Hannaford is pointing to a relationship between church and ministry which is highly integrative. It may be possible to extend this further. A fully integrative relation would point to an essential interweaving of ministry and Church. On this account the Christian community would not have priority over its ministries. Nor would the ministries of the Church have priority over the Church. Neither would be the sole constitutive power of the other. 'Rather there is a reciprocal relationship such that to be an apostolic community is to be a ministering community in which there are particular ministries. Church and ministry are given in and with each other.'³² This important insight from a report of the Uniting Church in Australia has much to commend it. It indicates both a genuine complementarity and co-inherence between church and ministry. The same report finds this essential link between community and ministry embedded in baptism. This is a sacramental sign of incorporation into the life of the triune God and the apostolic community of the gospel; a ministering community for the sake of the gospel. Thus in baptism community and ministry 'are given in and with each other'. Under such conditions neither one nor the other has ontological priority; neither one nor the other are the constituting power of the other. Ministry arises in and is given with the reality of the Church. The Church arises in and is given with the reality of ministry. Some such relation would seem to be necessary in order to develop a rich ecumenical ecclesiology of ministry.

The challenge in such a fundamental conception is to allow the force of this interpenetrative relation to inform a theology of ministries and their relations. However this conception remains too general and requires further specification. For example, what might we expect such a reciprocal relation as envisaged here, to achieve in relation to the question of the ministries? We have already observed a number of problems associated with less integrative accounts of the relation between church and ministry. The problems were twofold. One failed to maintain an appropriate openness due to an over-differentiation of certain ministries (Christological model). This necessarily impoverished its account of the variety of ministries and their complimentary forms. The other approach was under-differentiated and lacked the stable structuring necessary for the endurance of ministries (Pneumatological). Thus it could not generate an appropriate closure regarding the forms of ministry. In both cases the interrelationship between the

³¹ Hannaford, 'Foundations for an Ecclesiology of Ministry', p. 26.

³² *Ordination and Ministry in the Uniting Church*, p. 11, par. 19.

ministries was defective; the former too sharply delineating between traditional offices and newer ministries; the latter unable to generate sustainable boundaries.

But how might one test for the existence of a genuine reciprocity between Church and ministry? Its manifestation in the actual forms of life of ministering communities would be an important litmus test of its operation. One place where this feature of the life of the Church could be tested would be in the area of ministries of the Church. Where a reciprocity obtained between Church and ministry the relations between the ministries would manifest both appropriate closure through enduring specifications and at the same time exhibit a relative openness to new forms of differentiation. In such a dynamic ministries would have both fluidity and yet perdurable forms.

Ministry and its Multiple Horizons

God with the World: The Ultimate Horizon

Certainly a great deal of contemporary reflection on the nature of the Church and the ministries suggests a genuine striving after a dynamic between the ministries that is both integrative and reciprocal. And there does seem to be a consensus that the clues, if not the answers, to some of the most intractable issues to do with the ministries of the Church lie buried in the riches of a dynamic Christian Trinitarianism. This suggests that the ultimate horizon for a theology of ministry and the relations between the ministries will have to find ways of tracking and specifying the dynamic presence and action of God in the world and therefore the Church. This should not be surprising given that the point of the ministries of the ecclesia of God is to enhance the Church's witness through word and deed to the ways of God in the world. The ministries which exist to serve this purpose do not exist at a distance from such divine action but rather ought to exemplify the actual form and life of the triune God in the way they perform their task and relate to each other. Ministry and its ministries are called to follow God's own mission in the world. This suggests two inter-related horizons for ministry; creation and the *missio Dei*.

The Horizon of Creation: Ministry as Work

To the extent that the locus for ministry transcends the boundaries of the institutional Church and is directed to the *work* of God in the world the language of 'ministry' is correlated to God's work and creativity in the world. Ministry is rooted in creation even as it is redemptive in its orientation. This matter has significant bearing upon the issues of ministry, vocation and work in the 'secular' world. It is worth pausing for a moment to consider this matter. There is a close theological link between *diakonia* ('service'/'ministry') and *ergon* ('work'). It breaks open the usual categories within which the question of ministry and the

ministries is discussed. For the most part the discourse of ministry operates within the frame of redemption and it is not difficult to see why, in the light of Paul's letters to the emerging post-Easter church, the ministry of reconciliation is the critical focus. However, such a ministry is grounded in the work of God.

The Johannine tradition of 'God the worker' is particularly rich and illuminating in this regard.³³ The work of God is manifest in the Word made flesh, the signs of God's glory are manifest in the works of Jesus, and the disciples are empowered to continue the work of God through the Spirit of God, the Paraclete (one who comes alongside to support another) who collaborates with them. The theme is present in the Pauline notion of 'fellow worker' with others (2 Cor. 1:24) and with God (1 Cor. 3:9).³⁴ For Paul there is a common work done in a collaborative manner, that is, in a way that befits those who are called to cooperate in the work of the triune God. As is clear from the text, for the apostle Paul, a cooperative approach to ministry is closely linked to a life of joy. Foundations for a ministry of reconciliation can thus be traced to the work of the reconciling God whose work in creation is doubled and renewed in the work of redemption. Behind the Johannine prologue lies Genesis; the light coming into the world is the light that gave light to the world and created all things (John 1:1-3). God's work and the incarnate work of Christ are bound together and the latter recapitulates the former. The primary reference to work is thus to God as the creator whose work is testimony to the divine creativity and energy.

To link the work of God to ministry is a particular instance of the larger issue of the relation between creation and redemption. The problem of the bifurcation of creation and redemption in the history of the Christian tradition is reflected, at least to some extent, in the problems encountered in relating ministry to the wider ministries of the baptised and indeed to the vocation and work of the people of God in the world. For the most part the discourse of ministry and the ministries has been somewhat narrowly construed and given a churchy reference. Ministry is something that takes place 'in the Church' or 'for the Church' and this has generated significant difficulties in giving an adequate account of the ministries and vocations of the whole people of God in the world. For this reason a theology of lay vocation and work has remained relatively underdeveloped and tangential to the concerns of the Church.³⁵ To this extent the bifurcation between work and ministry is an instance of the unreconciled tension between creation and redemption.

³³ See the discussion of work (*ergon*) in John's Gospel and elsewhere in the Scriptures in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 3:1150 and, more generally, pp. 1147-59.

³⁴ See for example the discussion of *synergoi* (fellow workers) in 2 Cor. 1:24 by Margaret Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 1:160-61

³⁵ See the remarkable recent book by Armand Larive, *After Sunday: A Theology of Work* (New York: Continuum, 2004) and the earlier book by Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

However, if the ministries of the people of God were rooted in a doctrine of creation – related to God the creator and worker – and followed the creating and redeeming work of God *in the world* this would give a particular orientation to the work of the baptised and their diverse ministries.³⁶ Far from undermining the particularity of ecclesial ministries (for example, those in orders) such an approach widens the reach for which such orders have responsibility. It also makes it abundantly clear that the creative and redeeming work of God is much wider than a narrow churchy focus. The baptised are called, in their life, vocation and work, to follow the creative and reconciling work of God and offer their gifts and talents accordingly. Ministry rooted in a creation/redemption paradigm is thus ministry founded in God the worker.

The distinction between 'ministry' and 'work' clearly requires more careful consideration for it draws attention to an underlying dynamic between creation and redemption. A strong correlation between these two themes gives renewed significance to a theology of work and vocation in the world. It also raises the stakes considerably concerning the purpose of 'orders'. Their domain of responsibility is much wider than traditionally thought. But this also makes it even more urgent to determine exactly how such responsibilities are properly undertaken. The specific ministries of the ecclesial redemptive order cannot be construed as antithetical to the wider ministries of the baptised expressed liturgically and dispersed in society. The dynamics of the reciprocity between the ministry and the ministries, between orders and the laity, between the ecclesial world and the wider society, between creation and redemption all belong to a similar field of inquiry. This is critical for our present purposes because it highlights the importance of uncovering the collaborative nature of all work and ministry. In this way reflection on the nature of ministry becomes a litmus test of our understandings of the relation between creation and redemption as well as our doctrine of the Church.

A second matter that necessarily follows from the above concerns the *missio Dei* as a critical horizon for consideration of the ministries of the Church. Here the economy of God's own life – that is, God's appropriate openness to the world and rich modes of self-differentiation – provides the resources and wisdom for understanding both the purpose and interrelations of the ministries of the ecclesia of Christ. This theme will run like a thread throughout this book and receive particular attention in Part III.

³⁶ Larive, *After Sunday*, locates work within a theology of creation and creativity but distances it from the redemptive and reconciling work of God. This is unfortunate for in trying to recover the creation perspective he has not attended to the dialectical relationship between creation and redemption and its implications for a well-rounded theology of work that incorporates this dynamic relation.

Conclusion

Chapters 2 and 3 have begun a discussion of the rediscovery of the ministries of the people of God, the emergence of ecclesiology and the different kinds of relationships that obtain between ministry and Church. It is a preliminary discussion in an area that has surprisingly received little treatment in an ecumenical and missionary period. I have observed the impact of both Christological and Pneumatological concerns on the nature of the relation between ministry and church. In this context I have proposed an understanding of the relationship between church and ministry that is genuinely reciprocal. Church and ministry are given in and with each other, neither have ontological or practical priority over the other. I argued that this reciprocity could be tested in the area of the relations between the ministries of the Church. In this respect I noted the fundamental challenge in exploring the interrelationship between the ministries, traditional and new. The challenge was how to develop a relational view of ministries that (a) recognised the importance of properly differentiated representative ministries to enable the Church to fulfil its mission and at the same time (b) protected a natural openness for the continued development and eruption of ministerial *charisms*. This is an ecumenical task of the highest order given the problems between the churches over the recognition of ministries and the difficulties faced within churches in relation to ministry.

This chapter has also drawn attention to the wider horizons for the consideration of ministry. The ultimate horizon was identified as the *missio Dei* and the dynamic of God's presence and action in the world (horizon of creation). A reciprocity was proposed between the way ministries were interrelated and the dynamic of God's own openness and differentiation in the world. What this means is that whilst our foreground concern is the ministries of the Church and their proper relations, the background informing the discussion reaches into the nature and form of God's manner of participating in the world and human affairs. Thus, although the theme of ministries is a properly ecclesial matter its resource is not purely ecclesiastical nor historical but theological. Moreover, the link between divine presence and action and ecclesial ministries is not a simple and direct one. For this reason the discussion ought never to fall into the trap of assuming to read off from the doctrine of the Trinity in a simple and direct manner an understanding of the ministries. Rather, the triune dynamic remains as background and is mediated through creation and the wider ecclesial world. The interrelations between the ministries of ecclesia ought to be able to show forth, or at least offer clues as to the ways, work and ministries of human beings in the world with God. Consideration of the ministries is thus fully ecclesial and precisely for this reason offers wisdom for the way in which human society might be ordered for creative and redemptive purposes in the world.

The chapters that follow will explore a variety of issues relevant to the understanding of the ministries and their relations. It is admittedly a selective approach but is undergirded by the schematic outline of the present chapter.

It will provide a background map for a critical appraisal of a number of issues in the ministry today.