Ministry, Mission and the Social Sciences

(IV) MODELS FOR MINISTRY

I. The dilemma of the ministry.

Previous articles in this series have examined three aspects of mission and ministry (the local church, community and pastoral care) with the help of modern sociological insights. The fourth mark of the Baptist tradition is right ordering. The main stream of Baptist life has maintained the Independent pattern of seeing the pastoral ministry as essential to the life of the congregation, along with deacons and elders. At this point we come across one of the thorniest problems of the contemporary Church, its dominating and comprehensive importance being best illustrated by the two poles of the discussion. At one end the ministry is the nub of the ecumenical problem. Rightly, it is discerned that the doctrine of the ministry is determined by the whole concept of the Church and indeed the Gospel. At the other end, in practical terms, there is a common ground shared by all clergy, where they can work together or jointly bemoan their fate, which has little or nothing to do with traditional theological argument but everything to do with coping with the contemporary world.

Here, then, is exposed the need to recognise the intimate relationship between theology and social context. However pure we try to keep our theoretical reasoning, in fact doctrine has changed over the generations. Very often the same theological point is used to defend the opposite concrete situation. Nor have Baptists been exempt from this. Our ministry has changed since the seventeenth century with the emergence of the Free Churches into the mainstream of national life, with rising educational standards, the romantic individualism of the last century and the effects of modern secularised society. Despite the sense of contrast between one's own tradition and other traditions, it can be argued that a common experience is by far the most important factor in discussing the reality of ministry. Therefore in any realistic appraisal of the plight of the ministry it is essential to understand the sociological factors, rather than to indulge in theological exhortation. The sociological study of the ministry is a comparatively new venture. There are practically no major studies, but in scattered papers and sections of other work, material is beginning to accumulate.

II. Two reactions.

What seems to have happened is that the established clergy have been more and more pushed out of the mainstream of social life, and have found themselves effectively limited to local congregations. Meanwhile in the growingly open society, all religious groups have equal status and their ministries are recognised as equal.

This process, however, also describes the place of the Church in society. It is a voluntary association, like football clubs, or it provides part of our cultural dimension, like the cinema. While there seems, despite the ambiguity of the polls, to be a general respect for the ministry and its work, it is not usual for anyone, unless they are "religious", to turn to the clergyman for help. As part of this pattern, almost paradoxically, the Churches and their ministeries are seen and welcomed as voluntary agencies making a major contribution to the welfare structures. It is this marginal function, defined in negative terms (doing what the state has left over), that depresses the status of the ministry.

A similar process has been happening internally to the Church. Baptists have not had to face the changes imposed by the creation of synods and assemblies, but even so the minister is regarded less and less as the educated authority. The theological rediscovery of the laity has actually meant a reassessment of the ministry. Much talk about supplementary ministry and team groupings is subtly defensive on the part of the full time elite. If and when the ministry does try to reassert its authority or does not meet the expectations of the people, there is either a clash or an exodus, leaving behind a dependent, sycophantic remnant.

It is not surprising, therefore, if we are all at sixes and sevens. There is no agreement as to what is meant by the work of the minister and life is not easy if there are constant strains between different expectations. The situation, however, need not be regarded as necessarily disastrous. Out of it come numerous experiments trying to meet the social realities, to provide adequate job satisfaction and to express the Gospel in the modern world.[1]

It has been plausibly argued that there have been, basically, two types of reaction to the situation in which the ministry finds itself. The first is to accept that the Church has become marginal to society and to try to reestablish the centrality of the Gospel apart from the Church. Usually this means using the established organisation as the base from which to operate but considering the task as being in the world. For a minister of a local congregation this can take the form of becoming involved in the social services, in local politics and so forth. For others it is in terms of specialised ministries in, e.g., industry or education. For others it means becoming "worker-priests" by being involved primarily in another profession. The arguments for this are that the Gospel drives us to take the world seriously and that a prophetic voice is necessary and proper. The difficulties have been the tenuousness of the connection between the experimental ministry and the parent organisation. Too often these experiments have overreacted against the Church structures, sometimes to their own self-destruction. Yet it is equally true that the inherited structures have not been imaginatively flexible nor have the traditionalists been willing to accept such ministries as part of the whole work of the Church. Fortunately there are signs that attitudes on both sides are maturing.

The other reaction to the signs of the times, which is the stronger because it appears to be more in keeping with the tradition and thus more acceptable, is to accept the marginality of the Church but to establish its niche in the structure of modern society. Thus the aim of ministry is to build up the congregation by appealing in various ways to the needs of individuals and groups and to weld them together into an impressive voluntary organisation. This is the American or suburban pattern and fits that kind of society admirably, concentrating on the residential, domestic area of life. Certainly it expresses the Gospel promises of fellowship, of a place apart from the world for spiritual refreshment, of the gathering of Christ's people around word and sacrament and the commission to go out. Such a congregation can be seen to be making valuable expressions of Christian service in community provision, whether it be through clubs and meetings or as a converting agency. One of the strengths of conservative evangelicalism is that its theology and practice chimes in with and reinforces this pattern of churchmanship. The danger is, however, escape into a sanctified ghetto. The minister under this approach acts as a manager, director of operations, a general inspiring the troops. His vulnerability is that survival depends on success.[2]

It is tempting to opt for one of these approaches as the proper form of ministry, but that is to be forced into a theological decision by social circumstances. Such a choice, even implicit, would limit the concept of the Church which is meant to be, at least potentially, catholic, in the whole world for the whole world. Similarly it would in fact not recognise the reality of the ministry. The minister, at least at present, is recognised as having a function both within and outside the congregation. He is a leader for his people and for the Church in the wider community. This is not simply a residual social fact, but properly part of the ministry of the Christian Church, for presumably, however weak it may be, the "Church is mission", serving, as William Temple put it, "those who are not its members". In this the ministry is bound, by definition, to play a key role. So every ministry has this tension in it, even if it is corporately expressed by some being more directly engaged in one aspect than in another.

III. Exploring models.

It is against this background that various models of ministry have been propounded. Models act as a point of comparison in order to clarify the meaning of a concept. Valid comparisons have been sought to provide a pattern for ministry. Many of these have been taken from parallel situations or professions. They illustrate the way in which theological concepts are related to the actual social circumstances. All of these models reflect attempts to relate to, or to overcome the differences between, the two approaches outlined above, some obviously stressing one more than the other. Some of these models have been suggested in earlier articles. Here we can set them side by side.

The first is that of the minister as professional.[3] This has its immediate attractions. It reflects, especially for Anglicans, the traditional place of the clergy alongside lawyers and doctors as members of the professional classes, whose occupations are described as vocations rather than trades or work. Professionalisation is also one of the phenomena of our society. More and more groups are seeking to be recognised as professions with their own professional machinery, claiming an expertise that they must safeguard. Much of the discussion among teachers, social workers and others can be understood in terms of this concern. The ministry is in an ambiguous position here, for it is a profession that is challenged by new professionals and does not have an obvious niche in the professional structure. A profession can be defined, in part, by its specialist skills and services. On this reckoning the contribution of the minister to, for example, a professional social team is that he is an expert in things spiritual and ministers to that dimension of the person. By what criteria, however, is this expertise judged?

The weaknesses of this position are both pragmatic and theoretical. In the first instance while clergy are often welcome in the caring community, this is by no means universal. Seldom are they seen as equals in a team, and if they are, it is normally because the minister has earned his place on other people's terms. Most usually he is recognised as a valuable voluntary worker who can do some of the tasks the other professionals would like done but cannot find time to do. All this is an expression of the bewilderment as to what to do with "spiritual" problems even if such things exist. This is not to deny that clergy should work alongside professionals with as much professional expertise as possible. In some situations, such as the hospital, it may be the only and proper style. Underlying this, however, is the question as to whether such a description is adequate to the nature of the Gospel expressed in the person of the minister. The task of the ministry is to point to the questions underlying the separate disciplines, to query the very bases on which we work, to seek to understand the comprehensiveness of man and the ultimate dependence of all on God. Therefore, while he may be properly concerned with specific questions raised by the client, he is at the same time concerned with the whole of that man's life and with the healing team and with the society that contains the situation. With such a wide concern as his terms of reference, the minister cannot be a professional nowadays, for the contemporary concept of professionalism has moved away from the original concept of professing, that is becoming immersed in, taking up the total life style of some avocation. Ministry of the Gospel must involve the whole man. He is in the best sense of the word, an amateur: being paid (!) to do that which he loves, nevertheless becoming highly skilled, without being limited to any preconceived framework. He is also an amateur in the sense that he bridges the gaps, he has interests in many spheres, he cannot be pinned down. Nevertheless the impulse that drives the ministry to

seek a clearly defined role, either publicly or within the Church, is easy to understand and in a real sense proper. It is very difficult to sustain a satisfactory existence if you do not know what you are and no one else seems to know what you are meant to be.

Two further attempts to relate to socially recognised roles are found in seeing the pastor as counsellor or community leader.[4] The first takes the model of the caseworker. It is clearly tempting to locate the ministry in pastoral counselling alongside the growing army of the counsellors. It is obvious that personal pastoral work can and should benefit from casework skills, but it is impossible to fit the minister entirely into this role. The second points to an essential factor in the work of ministry. Both inside the congregation and in the wider community he is a leader and enabler. This is in fact probably the professional model most fitted to ministry. The aims and methods of community development relate closely to the nature of pastoral work. Also in the community, the minister, like the ideal community worker, is in a real sense unattached. In fact it might be argued that the minister, if allowed by his congregation, owes allegiance alone to the Lord and is thus more free than any other community worker.

The images of the prophet and pioneer have a contemporary vogue not only in terms of the charismatic movement but in relation to a style of political leadership.[5] Indeed Weber used "charismatic" to categorise a style of leadership. The prophet through his imagination and insight opens up new challenges and possibilities while by his gifts of inspiration the people catch the vision and move forward. It is not a comfortable situation for the leader or those affected. The challenge is to go into the unknown. We can recognise, however, the legitimacy of this element of renewal and challenge in the life of the Church.

Management as a model for ministry appears to be most suitable to the congregational, "voluntary organisation" form of the Church.[6] It also reflects the bureaucratic world we live in and the structure of Church life that has developed. Administration and the decision making processes must not be despised and are necessary in the world in which we have to serve. More attention ought to be paid to this aspect of the Church for which we need a greater theological understanding. Management techniques have a great deal to offer. Indeed one of the emerging facts is that we inevitably use a management style; the question is whether it is the right one for the administration of the means for proclaiming the Gospel. Yet it would be disastrous for ministry to become management and for theology to be divorced from administration.

Closely allied to this is the model of the boffin, the "backroom boy" who is supplying the troops with the ammunition and strategy to work in the world.[7] The minister, it is argued theologically, is the minister of Word and sacrament in the midst of the congregation. The doctrine of the People of God means that it is the ministry of the laity to live in the world. The image of the congregation gathered round the

Word and sacraments is a valid one so long as two caveats are inserted. The Holy Spirit does not work in a single direction, from the liturgy outwards to the world, but works in the world, manifestly and openly through the gathering of the Church within the world. Therefore, the minister also is as much in the world as in the Church, embodying in himself the tension of the "now but not yet" of the Church. Of course the ministry of the Word in the congregation will normally be his special task, but he can never escape his dual role as ordained and yet still lay. One suspects that this model, however carefully conceived, has been influenced by contemporary pressures to a greater extent than is realised. Education images are closely parallel, from the traditions of authoritarian instruction to the contemporary concepts of experimental training. Both education and ministry depend on the activity of a person who, directly or indirectly, communicates knowledge which is necessary for undertaking a task.[8]

A corrective to this is found in the concept of the "market place".[9] The ministry, while it has its special task to expound the Word, has at the same time to wrestle with all the pressures that the layman encounters in his daily task. The Word can only be heard through its realisation in the contemporary world.

Lastly we come to a group of models that attempt to express that what is essential about the minister is, perhaps, not what he does but who he is, the quality and style of the Christian life.[10] In him the agony of the Gospel and the reality of grace should be found. Thus we have the images of the man of prayer, the one whose function is "to be" (rather than "to do"), the guru. Obviously it is impossible to divorce "being" from "doing" yet it is useful to recollect that activity can be a substitute and can even destroy the inner reality from which all true action springs. Nevertheless whether as a "person" or as an embodiment of the Church, the minister will be representative in this way both within the Church and within the world.

These various models, and the list is by no means exhaustive, have all fastened on to a legitimate aspect of ministry, yet all have in some way or other expressed less than the whole. In fact the effect is cumulative. What is demanded of the Christian ministry is as comprehensive and varied as the Gospel itself. This confirms the note of caution about making too close a definition. Indeed it urges a concept of the ministry which is flexible, admitting the varied contributions of those who find themselves through talents or circumstances in very different milieux. More trouble, therefore, needs to be taken to assess the specification of each task, and this should lead to more selective training and recruitment. Underlying all this is a question mark against the too easily accepted equation of ordained ministry, full time employment, leadership and pastoral work. If the various aspects of ministry are part of the ministry of the whole People of God, then we should be free to express these in whatever structural ways are believed necessary. The problem is to move from what has been inherited to what is now needed.[11]

NOTES

[1] (i) On the social place of clergy:
Paul Halmos, *The Faith of the Counsellors* (Constable, London, 1965) chap. 2. Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Watts, London, 1966) chap. 8. Joan Brothers, *Religious Institutions* (Longman, London, 1971) chap. 5. W. S. F. Pickering, "Religion—a leisure time pursuit" in *A Sociological Year Book of Religion in Britain* 1 (S.C.M., London, 1968). R. Towler, "The Social Status of the Anglican Minister" in R. Robertson, *Sociology of Religion* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969). R. Towler, "The Changing Role of the Clergy" in *The Christian Priesthood*, ed. N. Lash and J. Rhymer (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1970). C. L. Mitton, *The Social Sciences and the Churches* (T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1972) chaps. 13, 14, 16.

(ii) On the ministry in the Church:
S. Mackie, *Patterns of Ministry* (Collins, London, 1969) based on a W.C.C. study. C. K. Ward, *Priest and People* (University Press, Liverpool, 1961). L. Paul, *The Deployment and Payment of the Clergy* (London, 1964). L. Paul, *A Church by daylight* (Chapman, London, 1974). The latter works are on the Church of England. On Baptists and Free Churches: Baptist Union Report, *Ministry Tomorrow*. Eric Carlton, "The Call: The Concept of Vocation in the Free Church Ministry" in *A Sociological Year Book of Religion* 1. Eric Carlton, "The Probationer Minister: a Study among English Baptists" (unpublished M.Sc. (Econ.) thesis, London Univ., 1965).

[2] R. Towler, "Puritan and Anti-Puritan: types of vocation to the ordained ministry" in *Sociological Yearbook of Religion* 2. R. Towler, in C. L. Mitton, *op. cit.* J. D. Glasse, *Profession: Minister* (Abingdon, Nashville, 1968).

[3] G. R. Dunstan, *The Sacred Ministry* (S.P.C.K., London, 1970) chap. 1. Justus Freytag, "The ministry as a profession: a sociological critique" in D. M. Paton, *New Forms of Ministry* (Edinburgh House, London, 1965). cf. Paul Halmos, *The Personal Service Society* (Constable, London, 1970). On hospitals: H. Faber, *Pastoral Care in the Modern Hospital* (S.C.M., London, 1971). N. Autton, *Pastoral Care in Hospitals* (S.P.C.K., London, 1968).

[4] (i) On counselling and ministry:
Joan B. Miller, *The Casework Ministry* (S.C.M., London, 1972).

(ii) On community leadership and ministry:
F. Milson, *His Leadership and Ours* (Epworth, London, 1969). George Lovell, *Church and Community Development—an Introduction* (Grail, London, 1971). George Lovell, "The mission of the Church and community development" in C. L. Mitton, *op. cit.*

[5] R. P. C. Hanson, *The Pioneer Ministry* (S.C.M., London, 1961). cf. study of Weber's concept by R. G. Waddell, "Charisma and reason" in *Sociological Year Book of Religion* 5.

[6] P. Rudge, *Ministry and Management* (Tavistock, London, 1969). Kenneth Thompson, "Bureaucracy and the Church" in *Sociological Year Book of Religion* 1.

[7] Neville Clark, "The Fulness of the Church of God" in A. Gilmore: *The Pattern of the Church* (Lutterworth, London, 1963) argues theologically, with care, for this position, which I find to be too doctrinaire. See also his "Ministry—a Review and an Assessment" in *Baptist Quarterly*, vol. 24 (1971-72), pp. 145-157.

[8] There has been a considerable literature on the nature and method of Christian education in day and Sunday Schools. This has considerable bearing on the style of ministry if only because preaching and teaching have been regarded as parallels. To modify the understanding and practice of one must challenge the other.

(Continued on p. 274.)