

Towards a Theology of Ordination and Ministry

A Discussion Paper

Purpose of this Paper

To stimulate discussion towards an agreed Theology of Ordination and Ministry for the purposes of helping the Diocese and local ministers to discern and develop the various ministries necessary to support the proposed Ministry Strategy in the Diocese of Carlisle.

This paper does not say everything we might want to say about Ordination and Ministry, but I hope, to articulate the points of agreement, recognising that, around these points, there is a whole glorious cloud of Anglican controversy and opinion, God be Praised!

Declaration of Interest

The reason why this paper is needed is that our theologies of Ordination and Ministry can vary significantly depending on our background theology and churchmanship. I write as an evangelical stipendiary minister with a concern for a rigorous scripturally-based approach to this question. However, I also seek to situate that ministry within tradition of the Church of England's understanding of a three-fold order of ministry.

Elephants in the Room

1. We only have Vicars!

In its recent history the Church of England has only had a single model of minister - the Vicar. That Vicar has been a full-time stipendiary professional. For our brothers and sisters who ally themselves most closely to the Reformation, this reflects a theological understanding of a single ordination to 'leadership' in the church. For most of us, however, it has simply become a default setting, which owes very little to Scripture or Tradition and owes a great deal to the accidents of (relatively) recent history. I propose that a single minister model of ministry is in fact neither Biblical nor Anglican.

2. Clericalism

The Church of England tends (rightly in my opinion) to have a deep scepticism of clericalism. One of the main reasons why many of us feel uncomfortable talking about 'orders of ministry' or even ordination itself is that we are rightly opposed to the Christian faith becoming something performed only by the clergy on behalf of the rest. In this paper I will propose a 'high' theology of the laity, but I refute any dualism between clergy v laity. Neither clericalism nor anti-clericalism is an appropriate response. Rather I propose that a properly conceived theology of ordination enables the laity to flourish in its ministry.

3. Function v Calling

There is a tendency to reduce ministry to mere functionality. Thus, when we talk about the nature of ministry, we talk about its function - presiding at communion, taking funerals, pastoral visiting, evangelism etc. We then create a working 'theology' of ministry carved out of the functional tasks we expect ministers to undertake. The danger with this course is that we only get the kind of ministry that suits our past, but is blind to the range of ministries The Holy Spirit is calling men and women to for our present and future, as St Paul articulates in 1 Corinthians 12.

I propose that although function and calling are related, there is a distinction between them. For example, I have never felt called to chair committee meetings - that is a key part of my function, but is incidental to my calling. I did, however, feel called to preach God's word - that is central both to my calling and my function. More generally, my calling is as a priest/presbyter in Christ's church. My function is that of a local Vicar. This is important, because in many

people's mind, there is simply no distinction between a Vicar and a priest and thus it is difficult for people to conceive of any other kind of Christian ministry than an 'old-fashioned vicar'. But in seeking to understand ordination and ministry theologically, it is essential to focus on calling so that we are led by the Holy Spirit rather than mere pragmatism. It will then become possible for us to see what Christian ministry God might be calling his people to and from that, to draw up 'job descriptions' that work out the practicalities of those ministries, rather than starting with the functions of an 'old-fashioned vicar' which will only tell us that we need an 'old-fashioned vicar'!

4. *Authority and Power*

Both the Catholic and Evangelical traditions have tended to promote the professionalised single-model of ministry for different reasons to do with authority and power. In the Catholic tradition, it has to do with church order and preserving the Apostolic Succession. In the Evangelical tradition it has to do with purity of preaching and teaching. Whilst both of these concerns may be valid in themselves, the desire to control has led to an unspoken consent that ordination must be reserved for the rarified chosen few. However, the New Testament evidence suggests that, even in the quite small home-based early churches, God appeared to be calling numbers of people from every congregation into ministry. So we must ask ourselves whether our concern for control is stifling God's call to ministry.

As an Evangelical, I am deeply concerned about the purity of preaching, but the reaction to clerical control is in real danger of leading to (a) a power battle with the laity; and (b) a suspicion of orthodox doctrine. In the latter case, there is a dangerous temptation (egged on by secular orthodoxy) to see all orthodox doctrine as an attempt at thought control (and anyone who has studied the Athanasius v Arius debate will know what a travesty of reality that is!)

I propose that it is a Christian discipline to stand under authority (which applies to all Christians). Consequently, there is a need for authorised ministry to be broad-based and generous in its scope.

5. *Words, words, words*

When talking about ministry in the Church of England it is impossible to avoid the word 'priest'. However, as soon as that word is mentioned, it produces an allergic reaction from those whose theology does not permit of a New Testament priesthood. I do not have the space (or the willpower) to address that issue here. The nub of the issue is that church usage has translated two Greek words which appear in the New Testament as 'priest'. The Greek word *hieros* refers to priest in the Old Testament sense. This is used in the New Testament only of Christ (as High Priest) and of the whole people of God (the Royal Priesthood). The Greek word *presbuteros* is also translated by some as 'priest', but to some it refers to a new and different category of ministry which represents a distinct and intentional break with the Old Testament priesthood.

I do not believe that anything in this paper hangs on this distinction, but for the sake of simplicity I use the words 'priest' and 'presbyter' interchangeably. I do not intend, by use of the word 'priest' to imply any continuation of the Old Testament cultic priesthood into the New Testament Church. I use it, by Anglican convention, to translate the Greek New Testament word 'presbuteros', with all its richness and controversy.

6. *Where is the Ecumenical Dimension?*

I submit that this is a bad question! Under the ecumenical enterprise, it is not necessary for each denomination to have the same theology of ordination and ministry. What is expected is that each denomination will have a ministry true to its own theology and tradition, but will recognise the equivalence of each others' ministries. This paper does not seek to articulate anything other than an Anglican theology because unless we know what our theology is, it will be very hard for our ecumenical partners to understand it!

Summary

At the risk of causing people not to read the rest of the paper (let the reader beware!) my proposition is, as follows:

1. Ministry is principally the work of Christ entrusted to his people (the 'laos', aka 'people of God' or 'laity'). **The laity are the main front-line unit of Christian ministry.**
2. Therefore, **baptism, not ordination, is the principal authority for ministry** in the name of the church.
3. The range of ministries to which God calls his people is very broad, but roughly falls into **three 'types' - servanthood ('diaconos'), presbyteral/priestly ('presbuteros') and oversight ('episcopo')**. These principally describe types of ministries, not formal orders.
4. However, Scripture still envisages that there is a **role for authorised forms** of these types of ministry. The scriptural means of authorisation was the laying on of hands in a manner that we have come to recognise as ordination.
5. There scriptural conception of Christian ministry envisages lay *and* ordained forms of diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministries.
6. What principally distinguishes 'ordained' ministry from lay ministry is that a call to ordained ministry is a call to:
 - a) **life-long** ministry of a particular type (diaconal, presbyteral or episcopal-);
 - b) **representative** ministry **on behalf of the whole Church of God** - i.e. the ordained person now acts with the representative authority of the whole Church of God as vested in the bishop;
 - c) **public** ministry - i.e. the ordained person now conducts his/her ministry in the public domain, as a public, permanent Christian. He/she may take a 'day off' from the function of ministry, but never from the calling itself.
7. All ministries, whether ordained or lay, **must be authorised at the appropriate level**. The key point is that *the authority carried is consistent with the authority of the giver*. Thus:
 - A ministry of welcome is a diaconal ministry which can be authorised at congregational level. That welcomer conducts representative ministry on behalf of the local congregation;
 - A PCC member's ministry is a presbyteral ministry which should be authorised by the whole local community (and is, at the annual meeting of parishioners). That PCC member conducts representative ministry on behalf of the whole local community;
 - A Local Lay Minister, authorised to work in a specific area, may be a diaconal or a presbyteral and can be authorised at Diocesan or Deanery level. That LLM conducts representative ministry with the authority of the Diocese or Deanery;
 - An ordained deacon should be ordained episcopally, thereby carrying the representative authority of the whole church.
8. There should be **no expectation that Christians will 'progress' through a hierarchy or ministerial orders** from laity - bishop via the diaconate or priesthood. Rather, each type of ministry should be honoured for its distinctive calling at the initiative of the Holy Spirit.
9. All ministries, whether ordained or lay, are founded on the baptismal call to all Christians to imitate Christ in his ministry and are properly conducted only under the authority of the church, as endowed to the bishops (to be precise, endowed by Christ to the Apostles and in turn by the church to the episcopo).
10. Scripture envisages a three-fold ministry, which is a truly collaborative form of ministry based on serving and enabling the ministry of the laity. The single-model professional 'vicar' model does not do justice to the Biblical vision of ministry as interpreted by the early church. Indeed, in both the New Testament and in the post-New Testament early church, the diaconate was the crucial link between (a) the laity and the bishops/priests; (b) the bishops and priests

themselves; and (c) the church and the secular world. We must take seriously the thought that a renewed diaconate (ordained and lay) may be critical to the success of ministry strategy unlocking the ministry of all believers. In any event, the **principal purpose** which all ordained ministers must therefore have in view **is to enable the laity** to fulfill its ministry as the '*laos*'/'People of God'.

Digging Deeper

Sadly, it is not possible to draw a neat line between the ministry of the New Testament Church and the church of today. This is problematic for a church which is founded upon Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Whether you stand in the Evangelical tradition (which seeks to take its authority from the New Testament) or the Catholic tradition (which seeks to take its authority from the Apostolic Succession), the aim (rightly) is to have a church which is consistent with the New Testament church founded by Christ and the Apostles. However, the number of gaps in the story have left room for any number of controversies about church order and ministerial structure, which still dog the church today, so that it can be tempting simply to duck the issue. Unfortunately, we cannot do that if we are focusing specifically on overhauling our ministry. We have to ask the question, "what is Christian ministry?" and its associated question "what is *ordained* Christian ministry?". Moreover, since this is God's church, we need to ask these questions from a theological, not merely a pragmatic point of view.

There is, however, I believe, sufficient solid ground for a generous platform of agreement, from which we can hold our various opinions.

"You will be my people and I will be your God"

There is general agreement across the Christian traditions from Reformed to Roman Catholic, that the all ordained ministry is founded upon the priesthood of all believers. All Christians are *laos*, all *laos* are *diakonoi* and collectively they constitute a 'royal priesthood'. Baptism is the key prerequisite for Christian ministry. There is also recognition that within the Body of Christ, people are called to different ministries, so not all are called to ordination. There is, therefore, a need for Christian ministry to be broader in scope than a single-model presbyter ('the Vicar').

An accident of history

Our single-model minister is not, in fact, Biblical, nor is it particularly historical. Following industrialisation, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw an alarming decline in the church and by the mid nineteenth century this posed a critical threat to clergy roles. Firstly, a number of new roles emerged in society meaning that clergy were no longer the administrators of alms to the poor, the local teacher, the registrar of births and deaths, the doctor, or the local policeman. Clergy were left only the roles defined by the ordinal.

Clergy responded by justifying their existence through two great movements: the Evangelical Movement and Tractarian (or Anglo-Catholic) Movement, the former claiming an authority direct from scripture, the latter from the Apostolic succession, and both establishing an authority that was independent of the state.

Increasingly, clergy conceived their role as spiritual and sacerdotal, leading to a widening separation of secular and spiritual life and opening up an unprecedented gap between clergy and laity. Clergy became what Dr Anthony Russell describes as "technologists of the sanctuary." This led to a number of significant changes: an increase in the celebration of Holy Communion; adoption of distinctive occupational dress; a change of lifestyle, with the gradual withdrawal from normal social life (balls, hunting etc); the establishment of

clergy meetings: Rural Deaneries, Deanery Chapters etc.; the proliferation of clergy journals; and the establishment of professional training colleges.

Increasingly religion became a technical skill to be carried out by expert clergy. Some became disillusioned by this and left the church, (many becoming Congregationalists and Presbyterians – the foundations of the URC!) Those who remained, however, were more clergy-dependent than ever.

This is a legacy with which we still live. In seeking to establish lay ministry as the new norm, we are battling against our own history and a confused population who, until recently, we taught to defer to the clergy. *Lord, have mercy!*

However, this inherited position is neither Biblical, nor truly Anglican. To understand our tradition better, we must look back to the New Testament, on which our Reformation principles were founded, and the Early Church, from which our orders of ministry emerged.

In the beginning...

Although the New Testament texts on ministry are nearly all contentious to scholars, there appears to be general agreement that Christian ministerial orders (deacons, priests and bishops) did not emerge until after the Apostolic Age (i.e. the lifetime of the first Apostles). In terms of church leadership, the apostles assumed priority, followed by prophets and teachers. The orders we recognise today, deacons (*diakonoi*), priests (*presbuteroi*) and bishops (*episcopoi*), emerged later in the New Testament, but their roles were not fixed until the post-apostolic age.

Among the ministries we recognise today the diaconate is the most frequently referred to in the New Testament. However, it did not initially emerge in the New Testament as a formal 'order'. Rather it emerged as individual Christians embarked upon a conscious imitation of Christ. Far from seeking status, they sought to imitate Jesus' self-giving service, embracing Jesus's subversive kingdom values, where service is not seen as menial or degrading, but as an expression of the deepest humility and love. Thus the New Testament picture is not one of emerging hierarchy, (even by the time the church has moved beyond the confines of Judaic worship into the wider Gentile world), but rather is an emerging body of mutual servants imitating the humility of Christ. The New Testament deacons were simply living out the principles of Matthew 20:25-28, by which Jesus created a radically new understanding of the kingdom, based not on power and rank, but on humility and service and where serving one another is recognised as serving him (Matthew 25:31-46). The only qualification for such ministry is baptism. Baptism, in the New Testament, is the key authorising rite for ministry, confirming vocation and conferring authority and grace.

Moreover, the structures of New Testament congregations bear this out. Each congregation (most of which were relatively small) was overseen by *episcopoi*, assisted by *presbuteroi* and *diakonoi*, but not in the form we now recognise. *Episcopoi* were congregational leaders (they could also be *presbuteroi*). *Presbuteroi* acted as an administrative council and *diakonoi* were the servants of the Church who did not derive their authority from the *episcopoi*, although in some cases they offered service to the *episcopoi*. As Colin Buchanan puts it, "it looked more like a vicar, a PCC and a curate." Yet even that overlooks the fact that all were *laos*. Lay ministry is the hermeneutic of the Gospel.

So in the apostolic age, ministry was not formed into three orders. However, the ministries of deacon, priest/presbyter and bishop emerged during the apostolic age as identifiable *dimensions* of Christian ministry.

It is only at the end of the apostolic age, when the generation of apostles, prophets and teachers died out, that church leadership passed to the *episcopoi*, *presbuteroi* and

diakonoi. Thus the three orders of minister were founded less by design than by evolution - they simply took over the mantle of leadership at the end of the apostolic age.

For some of us, this is a major problem. Because there is no *direct* scriptural authority for the three orders of ministry, some argue that they are inherently unbiblical and they want nothing to do with them. To that argument I say this:

1. You might not be able to prove Scriptural authority for the three *orders* of ministry, but there is no getting away from the Scriptural authority for the three *dimensions* of ministry. At the very least, our ministerial vision must encompass these three dimensions, as opposed to a single-ministry model.
2. If ordained ministry is founded on and consistent with lay ministry and if lay ministry operates in these three *dimensions*, then ordained ministry ought surely also to operate in three dimensions.
3. In any event, we cannot avoid or annul the weight of history which conceives Anglican ministry as a three-fold order.

However, whether one leaves the matter there depends upon whether one sees the transition to three-fold ministry at the end of the apostolic age as an initiative of the Holy Spirit or as an accident (possibly even a mistake). Whilst accepting Colin Buchanan's contention that one cannot assume that what has developed is necessarily right, there is good reason to affirm the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the development of ministerial orders.

Firstly, it is consistent with Christ's ordering of his community. While Jesus was concerned with people rather than institutions his community was nonetheless ordered, both in the sense that mutual humility and consideration created a community of order and peace, and in the sense that his community was deeply rooted in Israel's story - calling the Twelve to set them aside for a particular ministry. That calling may not initially have been perceived as life-long (as Peter's return to fishing after the crucifixion indicates), but it was gradually realised to be just that, such that the apostles each went to their death confessing Christ. It appears that baptism and Christian ministry are whole-life vocations.

Secondly, Jesus left us his spirit and gave his church authority. To conclude that the Spirit was not active in the way the Church developed so soon after Pentecost is to diminish the Spirit's activity and power. It is also to diminish the apostles. After all, they collaborated with the *episcopoi*, *presbuteroi* and *diakonoi* and made no other provision for succession at the end of their own ministries. Was that a monumental oversight or did the apostles approve of the emerging three-fold ministries as consistent with Christ's intentions and intentionally passed on their mantle to them? I suggest the latter.

There is a hint of this latter idea in the *Didache* (c.90-100): "Elect therefore for yourselves bishops and deacons...for they also minister unto you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. Therefore despise them not for these are they which are honoured of you with the prophets and teachers." Note firstly the suggestion that the bishops and deacons conduct the ministry of the prophets. Note also the tendency to despise the bishops and deacons, suggesting that their status was low, but within the Kingdom's subversive values this was no reason for despising them.

The third test of whether this transition was spirit-led is the fruit of their ministry. In this regard, it should be noted that the three-fold ministry, even when it evolved into orders did not abandon the servant-based principles of Christ, nor did evolve into a hierarchy (that only happened much later during the time of Constantine). Even Tertullian, who coined the phrase high priesthood (literally 'hierarchy') to describe the Church, emphasises that all priests are laity and all laity priests: "Are not even we laic priests?" he asked his fellow priests. Hippolytus, from whom we have the earliest known ordination liturgy, also insists that bishops, priests and deacons are to be chosen by election of all the *laos* and his liturgy

reflects the fact that deacons are seen as serving the church, not subservient to other orders. There is no status among the orders here. Nor is there any sense in which ministers progress through a hierarchy of orders. Deacons, for example, were usually ordained for life with no expectation that they would necessarily 'progress' to other orders. To serve in imitation of Christ's humility was the highest privilege.

Conclusions from the New Testament Sources

From what we can distil with confidence from the New Testament sources, we can conclude that in the New Testament, the recognised ministries were founded upon (a) the simple imitation of the humble service of Christ and (b) a full working-out of the implications of belonging to the *laos*, the people of God, the priesthood of all believers. Consequently those exercising ministry as deacons, priests and bishops sought to serve the laity and enable the ministry of all believers, rather than appropriate any rank, dignity or special function for themselves.

What about ordination?

Inconveniently, the biblical texts reveal a complex and disputed picture of ordination in the New Testament. None of the five 'ordinations' in the New Testament (Acts 6:1-6; Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14; & 2 Timothy 1:6) equate to ordination as we now understand it. Instead, ordination (like ministerial orders themselves) appear to belong to the post-apostolic age. However, I submit that it is still possible to draw out a common thread from those texts.

By way of a brief overview, the five 'ordinations' are:

Acts 6:1-6: the primitive Jerusalem church selects 'the Seven' to wait on tables so that the apostles can concentrate on the ministry of the Word.

Acts 13:1-3: the church at Antioch selects Paul and Barnabas for missionary work.

Acts 14:23: Paul and Barnabas appoint elders in the churches they have established.

1 Timothy 4:14: reminds Timothy of his laying-on of hands by 'the elders'.

2 Timothy 1:6: reminds Timothy of his (presumably different?) laying-on of hands by the epistle-writer himself.

These texts are not easy. Their meaning has been wrangled over by scholars for centuries and this necessitates a certain humility when staking claims upon them. For example, in its descriptions of 'ordinations', the New Testament is ambiguous in describing both the people who appoint 'ministers' and those who lay hands upon them. In Acts 6:1-6 it is clear that the congregation selects 'the Seven'. However, the Greek is ambiguous as to whether the whole church or the apostles alone lay-on hands. In Acts 13:1-3 the Greek is ambiguous over who selects Paul & Barnabas for mission - the whole church or just the apostles named? The latter seems most likely, but it is not clear. In Acts 14:23 it appears that only Paul and Barnabas elect the elders, but Luke uses the Greek verb 'cheirotoneo', which in ecclesiastical usage came to mean 'to impose hands in ordination'. However, the common secular meaning of that word at the time was 'raising the hand to express agreement in a vote', so did the whole church have a vote? Certainly Hippolytus, in his *Apostolic Tradition*, c.215 refers to and endorses an apostolic tradition of bishops, presbyters and deacons being elected by all the people, even if only the bishop ordains them. However, how authentic that tradition is to the New Testament is unclear.

Nonetheless, there are some clear and common threads within these texts. What is clear in all these New Testament accounts is that, one way or another, people are receiving **recognition, authority, prayer and commission to a particular ministry**.

Recognition

A common thread among the New Testament 'ordinations' is that they don't inaugurate a new ministry, but recognise an existing ministry. So the Seven in Acts 6 are chosen on the basis of their "good standing, fullness of the Spirit and of wisdom". Likewise in Acts 13:1-3, there is no sense in which Paul and Barnabas are being appointed as leaders - they are already recognised leaders. Rather, they are being commissioned for mission. The laying-on of hands here has connotations of two Hebrew concepts: *sim/shith* (blessing) and *samakh* (being 'leant upon') to commission them as representatives of the Antioch church. In other words, this 'ordination' begins with a *recognition by the church that a person is called and gifted for a particular ministry*.

Authority

The question of who conducts the discernment, prayer and commissioning in these 'ordinations' is in fact less relevant than it first appears. The point is that by setting apart the Seven in Acts 6:1-6, the Jerusalem Church is appointing the Seven as *their* representatives and delegating *their* authority to them. Equally, in Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas appoint the elders as *their* representatives and delegate *their* authority to them. In other words, the witness of the New Testament draws one to the conclusion that the person appointed carries the authority of the person who appoints. This is consistent with the semantic study of ancient texts by John Collins who concludes that *diakonoi* in the ancient world were not only servants, but recognised office bearers who acted as ambassadors or representatives of a particular person or community.

By extension we can reasonably conclude that in New Testament times, persons appointed by a congregation carried the authority of that congregation. Persons appointed by a particular apostle carried that apostle's authority. By analogy, today's Christians, if appointed to a position by a congregation carry the authority of that congregation. If appointed by the whole church, they carry the authority of the whole church (and in today's terms, the bishops carry representative authority on behalf of the whole church). Herein lies an important principle to which we shall return, but for now we can conclude in general terms that ordination appears principally to be about authorisation for representative ministry, although it also carries a blessing.

Prayer and commission

The third common thread, which applies to all five 'ordination' passages of the New Testament is the laying-on of hands with prayer. This has echoes of the appointment of Jewish rabbis, which may have been the model the New Testament church had in mind. At this stage it appears clear that there was no intention to create separate orders of ministry. Rather than conferring special dignity on a separate group of Christians, the emphasis appears to have been on common purpose, reliance on God's grace and firm faith in the power of prayer. In other words, these 'ordinations' appear to *endow the ministers with the grace required for their ministries*.

Ordination Beyond the New Testament

There appears to be general agreement that Christian ministerial orders did not emerge until after the apostolic age. However, quite quickly after the apostolic age, the leadership of the primitive church passed to the bishops, presbyter/priests and deacons. The recognition of those ministries as distinct orders still did not confer rank or privileged status on those Christians (their ministry was still seen as imitating the humility of Christ), but there was an increasingly clear sense of them being set apart for a particular ministry. Although these people were not ordained in the sense we would recognise today - that dates from the time of Hippolytus (170-235 AD) - these people were nonetheless 'ordained' by the laying on of hands, the recognised means of conferring authority and blessing and the rites and liturgies developed slowly over time to reflect this.

There were still Christians carrying out diaconal, priestly/presbyteral and episcopal types of ministry on an informal basis, but three distinguishing characteristics marked out those whose ministries were recognised in 'ordination' to distinct orders:

1. Their ministry was *public*. Others might serve in quiet, unseen ways, or within the home or within the church congregation. Those 'ordained' to the orders were commissioned to public ministry.
2. Related to this, therefore, their ministry was conducted on behalf of the church. Accordingly, 'ordination' became a means by which the church conferred on specific individuals *representative authority* to represent the church in that public ministry.
3. Over time the church came to recognise that a call to public representative ministry was a *life-long* calling. This appears to have principally a working out of the understanding that baptism was a call to life-long ministry (baptism being the principal rite conferring a Christian ministry). However, since those 'ordained' to representative ministries were recognised as public examples of Christian living, it followed that their calling was integral to their new identity in Christ and therefore a life-long calling. Clearly this idea also led to the idea of ordination involving an ontological change (i.e. a change of identity or being) - an idea that has long been controversial, but I propose that, at the very least, it ought not to be controversial to say that those called to public ministry with representative authority should evidence a sense that Christ has a life-long call on their lives to minister in his name. Nor should it be controversial to say that, since baptism and Christian ministry are whole-life vocations fundamentally concerned with our identity in Christ, ordained ministry is *a fortiori* fundamentally concerned with the identity of the minister.

It should be noted particularly that the emergence of these orders did not initially lead to a tyranny of priests over the laity. Although by the time of Clement of Rome (bishop 88-97 AD), some bishops were claiming authority over others for the sake of order and humility (i.e. to prevent maverick bishops acting on their own whims), no clear hierarchy in the orders of ministry emerged until Constantine declared Christianity the official faith of the Roman Empire and ministerial orders began to model themselves on the juridical structure of the Roman Empire. Thus if there was any move away of the principles of Christ and towards clericalism, it seems that it took place, not with the formation of ministerial orders, but from the time of Constantine when the orders moved away from ministries of grace situated firmly within the *laos* to a hierarchy of rank and status. To begin with, however, the emergency of distinct ministerial orders did not obliterate lay ministry, but rather promoted and supported lay ministry. As Tertullian observed, all (even ordained priests) were *laos*. Lay ministry was (and is) the hermeneutic of the Gospel.

Consequently, a properly conceived understanding of ordained ministry does not override lay ministry, but supports and promotes it. All ministry, ordained or not, should be founded

upon a recognition of the claim that Christ makes on our lives through baptism and upon our response of seeking to imitate his humility and service in his name and in his strength alone.

Conclusions

What is clear from the evidence of the New Testament and the history of the early church is that God calls all Christians to ministry and that baptism confers a life-long call both to Christian living and to Christian ministry.

However, to encourage the people of God to work out their baptism calling, the church has, from the earliest time set aside certain people to represent the church publicly in its ministry. Those people were set aside by the laying on of hands - a right which evolved into the modern day ritual of ordination. The key purposes of ordination were (a) to recognise the validity of an individual's calling; (b) conferring representative authority; and (c) conferring grace for the ministry to which an individual is called.

Fundamentally ministerial orders exist to serve and promote lay ministry. However, there is still intended to be a gracious deference to episcopal authority, not for the sake of conferring rank or dignity, nor to rob the laity of its ministry, but to ensure that we 'submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Ephesians 5:21). It is to ensure proper humility so that, when we act with representative authority, we do not merely represent ourselves, but represent Christ. Consequently those exercising episcopal and priestly authority should behave with Christ-like selflessness 'just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (Ephesians 5:25 - the whole argument of Ephesians 5 likening the church to marriage and vice versa is particularly interesting here).

Thus, properly conceived, ordained ministry should not compete with the laity or lord its authority over the laity, but behave towards it as Christ does, so as to set the laity an example and to enable its ministry. Consequently a strong and robust theology of ordination does not inhibit every member lay ministry, but rather is the very thing which enables it.

Moreover, if in the early church with its small, home-based congregations, found that God was calling out of these congregations people to be deacons, priests and bishops - people who enabled the mission of the churches and maintained its sacramental life - does that not press us to the conclusion that the same God is doing the same within our small congregations. If we are not hearing and recognising that call, perhaps it is because our working theology of ordination needs to be renewed in the light of the evidence of the New Testament and early church, in order that we catch of glimpse of what God is doing among us.

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