

TEAM MINISTRY: A THEOLOGICAL EXPOSÉ

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BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The phenomenon of the team ministry can be traced to the relationship of the three Persons in the Godhead. The Three, though distinct, are intricately connected in their persons and functions. Down the centuries, the Church in response to this ideal of ministry has always exhibited different attitudes depending on her theological-eclesiological stance about herself and her mission to the world. The earliest times could be regarded as very close to the biblical tradition, as such the sense of team ministry was quite strong. In the middle ages, the Church was conceived exclusively in hierarchical terms. In this type of Church model, there was no much space for team ministry. The era of the Second Vatican Council calls for a return to the roots, hence a high sense of team ministry arising out of the communion of the Church is being championed.

This write-up aims at bringing to focus the universal relevance of team ministry to the Church's mission of evangelisation. This is a view to call all those who are given different offices in the Church to a rethink on the methods and models of carrying this out. The work gives a descriptive analysis of the word 'ministry'. This takes us to the various types/models of ministry. Then it examines the 'what' of team ministry while zeroing on the challenges and consequences of team ministry. In addition it investigates the theological-eclesiological basis of team ministry. The issues of the biblical foundations, systematic reflection on Church's teaching and ecumenical perspectives are also brought to the fore. Finally, it offers some genuine contributions towards the achievement of team ministry irrespective of the difficulties that might be encountered.

MINISTRY: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The notion of ministry and its practice has undergone a process of metamorphosis according to different historical settings and ecclesial existential situations. This process of change invariably leads to a crisis situation. The crisis in the notion of ministry is well articulated by Ralph Keifer:

One of the greatest tragedies of our time is that our notion of ministry is so vertical and so clericalised that we never even ask the question as to what role the sick, the poor, and the suffering might have in ministering to the needs

of those who are whole especially in meeting with the problems of a faith even more rarefied and removed from reality.'

Hence J. Asanbe writes: "a wholesome, a holistic and a realistic theology of ministry must attempt to free ministry from this over-clericalised, impoverished and lopsided conception."²

MINISTRY: AN ATTEMPT AT DEFINITION

Ministry can be defined or described as the public activity of a baptised follower of Jesus Christ, flowing from the Spirit's charism, and carried out by an individual on behalf of a Christian community, to witness, serve and realise the Kingdom of God. Since it is carried out on behalf of the community, it has to receive her mandate. The emphasis here is on service vis-à-vis the community. The Holy Father, Pope Paul VI emphasises this point in his catechesis to the audience of June 17, 1970: "ministry means service — service for love, for the benefit of others, together with sacrifice of self."³ Ministry in this context acquires a tactical undertone as a ministry of salvation in the service of all human beings.

VARIOUS TYPES/ MODELS OF MINISTRY

As there are varieties of gifts but one Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-7), so also we have varieties of ministries but one mission. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council evidence this when they affirm:

Various types of ministries are necessary for the implanting and the growth of the Christian community, and once these forms of service have been called forth from the body of the faithful, by divine call, they are to be carefully fostered and nurtured by all.'

So, what counts in ministry is the service and edification of the community, not the glory of the one who receives the gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 14: 5, 12, 19, 25-26). There are two broad types of ministries, namely, ordained and non-ordained ministries, otherwise called sacramental and non-sacramental ministries.

The ordained ministry is a ministry of pastoring, which is conferred on a candidate by the sacrament of Holy Orders. In the Tridentine Church, this was considered as the only form of ministry. With the Second Vatican Council, there is a return to the New Testament understanding of ministry, which is all-embracing. The non-ordained ministry is the ministry of service to which all the faithful are

called with the reception of the sacraments of initiation (A.A. 3). Pope Paul VI says that this ministries are not a share in the priesthood of order, but are exercised by lay people by virtue of their share in the priesthood of Christ through baptism (*evangelii nuntiationi*, 73).

Of the many models of ministry, this work delineates two broad categories, namely, hierarchical and communitarian-dialogical models. While the former is exclusive, the latter is all embracing and inclusive. The hierarchical model emphasises the prerogative of the ordained in the power of governing and pastoring. The others are only beneficiaries of the ministry of the clergy. They are not to make much input. The communitarian-dialogical model on the other hand underlines participation in ministry. All are welcome and responsible in the planning and execution. It is this sort of ministry that brings to fore the notion of team ministry.

THE 'WHAT' OF TEAM MINISTRY

The notion of team ministry entails making out a team out of ministry. This means that several people work together in achieving the particular and specific objective for which the ministry is put in place. Team ministry presupposes some sort of equality of dignity among all those involved. Their charismas are appreciated and everyone is accountable to the entire team for his or her area of activity. In the context of this work, those involved in team ministry are, namely, the priest, the religious, catechists, prayer leaders, laity, youth, educational and social workers, etc. The peculiarity of each ministry, the needs of the people, the environment and the context somehow moderate the kind of team-work/spirit that is called for. In our pluriform world of today, there is certainly the need for various types of ministry and even the inter-dependency of ministry and ministrants.

The different models of team ministry can be divided along these lines, namely:

- I. The ministry under one person's control;
- II. Participatory ministry where members are given specific assignments to do and then to report back;
- III. Team ministry as a way of life where all the members are given ample freedom to operate and take certain decisions. There are, however, some issues that need to be referred to the central body. This model of ministry makes every member responsible and it brings out the best in everyone.

CHALLENGES OF TEAM MINISTRY

From the delineation we have given on team ministry, it is obvious that there are a lot of challenges to an effective team ministry. There is a gamut of differences; cultural, age, ideological, situational, congregational (in respect of the different religious institutes), etc. For instance, a good number of our local churches still have

some expatriates working in them. There is some strain in relationship between the local ministers and these expatriates in method and in participation. A lot of reasons concur to explain this not-so pleasant situation; continental differences, cultural influences and biases, superiority complex arising out of the colonial past, desire for identity, pride and authenticity, etc. Among the local ministers also, tribal differences still make their influence felt at the operative level, while sex differences also constitute some sort of tension. These differences are to be seen as challenges to be surmounted. They are to be explored in the ministries.

THEOLOGICO - ECCLESIOLOGICAL BASIS

Trinitarian-Theological Consideration:

In the Christian economy of salvation, the Father is the primordial source of the saving mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Through this two-fold mission, everybody is gathered into the unity of the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Consequently, the unity of the divine Trinity brings into being the unity of the people of God.¹ The Father entered the world in a very decisive manner through the Son in the incarnation. The Son who came in the flesh communicates the revelation of the Father's love and draws all those who hear him into union with the Father. This very act is carried out in the power of the Holy Spirit who works through his ministry (cf. Lk. 4:4). In the Church, the same Spirit bestows the gift of faith and works through the believing disciples in accordance with their gifts to gather everyone into the unity of the Father through the Son. Thus, through the gift of faith and particularly charisms, the members of the Church are enabled to mediate to one another and those who are called to the Church. This insight today, has led to rediscovery of the old patristic understanding of the Church as a people called to live a style of life in imitation of the Trinity. In the Trinity, unity and multiplicity are bound together in a dynamic union of divine life just as all members of the Church in the power of the Spirit are enabled to live in communion with Christ and with one another. This communion or dynamic personal union is realized through the action of the Spirit who fashions the life of the Church after that of the Trinity through the gifts he bestows on everyone.

Church's Teaching:

With the coming of the Second Vatican Council, especially in the documents, *Lumen Gentium* 28 and *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, the earlier understanding of the priesthood changed. The priestly ministry has various dimensions, namely: preaching, sanctification (through the administration of the sacraments), direction of the community and individuals. In all, the celebration of the Eucharist has a focal place. There is a very strong emphasis today on the idea that the priestly office is one of

service and that this is described as a ministry, *ministerium*.⁶ Priests are consecrated in order to preach the gospel and shepherd the people of God. Besides, they also celebrate the divine worship as true priests of the New Testament as well as unite the votive offering of the faithful to Christ's sacrifice. On behalf of the faithful who are moved to sorrow or are stricken with sickness, they exercise a tremendous degree of reconciliation and comfort as well as taking their needs and supplications to God the Father (cf. Heb 5:1-4). Having been joined with the Episcopal order, the office of priests share in the authority by which Christ himself builds up and sanctifies and rules his body. Consequently, the priesthood of priests, while presupposing the sacraments of initiation, is also conferred by its own particular sacrament, (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2).

The priesthood of the faithful or the universal priesthood or even still the common priesthood means the participation of the whole Church and all those who belong to it through faith and baptism. In the patristic and medieval tradition, we hear a lot about the priestly character of the baptised. The authors of this period were thinking less of the cultic functions or sacramental empowerment than of the spirituality that is implicit in the concept of a priest. The Catholic Church was for a very long time regarded as a Church of official priesthood.⁷ Today, the Church has intensified her stand by laying emphasis on the priesthood of the faithful, thus tackling the concerns that seemed to be peculiar to the churches of reformation in the past. Therefore, the participation of the Church and her members in the priesthood of Jesus Christ finds expression in the common priesthood of the faithful, for the church is his body, and he is, its Lord and Head.⁸ Because of its common priesthood, the church, which is concrete in each community, is not only the addressee and object of action by possessors of the special priesthood, but also the subject of a priestly life of prayer, weakness and service.

Systematic Reflection:

A priest is a representative in two main ways. In the first instance, he represents Jesus Christ to the community and he represents the Church. Secondly, in a derivative sense, he is a mediator without in any way detracting from the abiding sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; L.G. 14). In the early Church, the apostles were not slow to share with others the ministry of apostleship (cf. Acts. 1:25). They transmitted to their successors the task of teaching. Besides, they entrusted it also to the deacons from the moment of their institution: Stephen, full of grace and power, taught unceasingly, moved by the wisdom of the Spirit (cf. Acts. 8:4). Furthermore, the apostles associated many others with themselves in the task of teaching (cf. Acts 15:35) and even simply Christians who were scattered by persecution, went about preaching the word (cf. Acts 8:4).

In catechesis, the sacrament of Holy Orders constitutes priests as educators of faith (P.O. Art. 6b). They work so as to be sure that the faithful are properly formed and reach true Christian maturity (c. 773). Conscious, on the other hand, that their ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood of the faithful (L.G. Art. 10), priests foster the vocation and work of catechists and assist them to carry out a function that springs from baptism and is exercised in virtue of mission entrusted to them by the Church. Thus, priests put into effect, the request, which the Second Vatican Council made of them: "to recognise and promote the dignity of the laity and their specific role in the Church's mission." (P.O. Art. 9b). In the sacrament of matrimony, parents receive the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children to whom they transmit, and bear witness to, human and religious values. This educational activity which is both human and religious is a true ministry, through which the gospel is transmitted and radiated so that family life is transformed into a journey of faith and the school of Christian life. As children grow, exchange of faith becomes mutual and in a catechetical dialogue of this sort, each individual both receives and gives (EN. 71b). It is for this reason that the Christian community must give a very special attention to parents.

Those in consecrated life are called in a special way by the Church to catechetical activity and wishes that religious communities dedicate as much as possible of what ability and means they have to the special work of catechesis (C.T., 65; c. 778). This is achieved above all else through their witnessing both in the Church and in the society at large. A good number of institutes for both men and women were founded to give Christian education to children and young people, especially the most abandoned ones (C.T. 65; R.M. 69). This same charism of the founder is such that many religious collaborate today in the diocesan adult catechesis. Lay people are engaged in catechesis on the basis of their insertion in the world. They share the demands of humanity and bring to the transmission of the gospel specific sensitivity and nuances. In fact, by sharing the same form of life as those whom they catechise, lay catechists have a special sensitivity for incarnation the gospel in the concrete life of both men and women. Considering the importance of catechesis, every religious community as well as parish in addition to the general catechetical work being carried out, have sisters and some lay people who are publicly recognised as being dedicated to catechesis. This group of people, in communion with the priests and the bishop, give the diocese the ecclesial form that is proper to it.

In the church today, more than ever before, the needs of the people are so numerous arising out of varied pastoral situations and experiences hence the need for a variety of ministries to respond to these varied needs. There is also need for collaboration in giving an adequate response. For instance, the challenges of

ecumenism and dialogue are more pronounced today and this requires a special ministry of dialogue and understanding, a new method of catechising, etc.

We may not however pretend that team ministry in the true sense of the word is easy to come by. The inherent difficulties are as puriform as there are members. We have cultural differences, ideological differences which give rise to problem of adjustment and accepting the viewpoint of others. There is definitely a call to conversion and a modification of approach and viewpoint. All ministers are called upon to regard these differences as real though they are also challenges. They are to be used as means of enriching and not hindering the ministers and their ministries.

We cannot fully quantify the gains of team ministry. Some of these gains are; better management of the task, acting as pillar of support for individual members, spiritual growth is engendered, and adequate response to the various needs. It need be said that this approach to ministry responds more to contemporary view of Church life and is more in line with the understanding of the modern man and woman.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

A good number of people think that team ministry is just one way of organizing the ministerial forces of the Church. Granted. But then, given the overall historical situation of the world in which pluralism is a way of life, sharing responsibility is becoming more common, working in secular team is almost the norm, democracy is preferred to other forms of governing, it appears therefore that team ministry is the best, if not the only acceptable means of exercising ministry in the Church today. Based on this pedestal, this work makes the following recommendations.

- i. There is the need for a new way of looking at ministry which is in line with the contributions of the Second Vatican Council;
- ii. Ministers are encouraged to broaden their horizon and be more opened to dialogue with others, accepting their viewpoints and admitting when they are wrong.
- iii. On-going formation/training programmes should be strengthened to further equip the different ministers in accomplishing their tasks diligently;
- iv. Spiritual rejuvenating exercises should be put in place to ensure the adequate conversion that is needed for a fruitful ministry.

As this work draws to a close, it is salutary to remark that whatever be the case, efforts should be intensified to sustain what is on the ground. Team ministry in the diocese has come to stay as mode of life today. The difficulties inherent have become challenges to ministrants of the present and the future. For all intent and purpose, the diocesan bishop and all the pastoral agents are to be fully galvanized towards this end.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ Cf. Ralph Keifer, *A Christian Initiation: The State of the Question in Made and Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, Indiana, 1976, p. 151
- ² Cf. Jude Asanbe, *The Ministry of the Catechist in the New Era of Evangelization* (With Special Reference to Ondo Diocese), Licentiate Thesis, C. I. W. A. June 1987, p. 52
- ³ See *The Pope Speaks in the Church Documents Quarterly*, 15, 3 (1970) 250
- ⁴ A. G. Art. 15.
- ⁵ Cf. J. Provost (ed) *The Official Ministry in a New Age Permanent Seminar Studies*, No. 3, Canon Law Society of America, 1996
- ⁶ L. G. Art. 24
- ⁷ Cf. Y. Congar, *My Path findings in the Theology of the Laity and Ministers*, 32 *Jurist* 169-188
- ⁸ See, K. Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come*, New York, 1974