

Renewed Ministry in Church – David meets Goliath?

A talk given by Angela Hanley

The International Federation for a renewed Catholic ministry study day
Saturday 17th October, All Hallows College, Dublin

When you read Church history you realise that, truly, there is nothing new under the sun. The current crisis in the Catholic Church is just one more in a history of crises – but a significant one in that a better educated laity will not be easily won back. One response to the crisis is to explore the idea of a renewed ministry. The Dutch Dominican document on renewed ministry describes the important issues: parish practice, Eucharist, priesthood. Given that the limited involvement that currently passes for ministry is conditional, dependant on the whim of the priest and/or bishop in charge, and *always* has ordained ministry, as currently understood, as its reference point, an altogether more fundamental review needs to be undertaken.

If there is to be any chance of a renewed ministry within the structure of Church as we know it, four fundamental issues need to be addressed – i.e. a renewed ecclesiology, renewed theologies of Eucharist, of ministry and a renewed pneumatology.

a) Ecclesiology

Because the Church is not a pre-existing entity to which we somehow ‘belong,’ we need an urgent development of ecclesiology. The Vatican II documents are a good starting point, so long as their limitations are fully acknowledged. Within these documents, despite the insight of Church as *The People of God*, “**the Church**” is frequently used to mean the teaching magisterium, which in our time means the Pope, with a little window dressing from the bishops to give the impression of collegiality. The term ‘Church teaching’ is, in itself, inherently flawed. How can, what is called, ‘Church teaching’ be considered authoritative and binding, when 50% of its membership has had no opportunity to contribute to it and inform it. A new ecclesiology needs to be heavily influenced by women. It also needs a review of:

- the petrine office. The unilateral claim of Innocent III that the pope was the Vicar of Christ, no less, set the papacy on a very questionable path with dictatorial consequences still visible in our own time.
- the role of bishop as leader. True collegiality was an idea strangled at birth.
- the magisterium of the theologians. One only has to think of how effectively the theologians educated the bishops of Vatican II. The freedom of theologians in

the academy is a necessity for the Church – the freedom to explore ideas and expose them to peer review. But always at the service of God’s people.

b) Eucharist

Theology of the Eucharist is ‘heavy’ with the sacrificial aspects. If there is a recovery of the ‘memorial’ and ‘representational’ aspects of Eucharist, then the gathering, rather than presiding, role of the priest is more likely to foster the idea of *communio*. The Eucharist grew from the memorial of the Exodus experience – and that surely was no accident. The *Pasch* was memorial and remembrance, and through it the whole Exodus experience remained an integral part of not just Jewish experience, but Jewish identity. It was encoded in their emotional DNA, as it were. This is the depth of remembrance Jesus was asking of us – not just his death and resurrection but all of his public ministry, the whole experience – how he treated people, how he behaved when rules ceased to be an aid to life and became oppressive, how the weak and vulnerable were to be treated; what he thought of people who were puffed up with their sense of importance, and his instruction that leadership meant service, not lordship. It is not just gathering, remembrance and memorial – it is also ‘go and do likewise.’

c) Ministry & priesthood

So, how do we go and do likewise? Obviously, we need to dispense with the idea of male only, celibate priesthood and broaden the view of priesthood and ministry. There is room for a celibate priesthood – male and female; a married priesthood – male and female; full-time stipendiary priests and part-time non-stipendiary priests whose income comes from other employment – male and female, of course. In such a broad view of priestly ministry we would not have the ridiculous situation that we do at present, where, for example, a hospital chaplain (man or woman) who accompanies a person and their family through terminal illness has to call an ordained priest at the end to utter the final words.

Undoubtedly, there is a liturgical role in *gathering* the community, but it ought not be central to it. With a varied and inclusive priesthood, the current disturbing tendency towards ‘clustering’ which makes the priest, rather than Eucharist, central to all things, can be abandoned. This non-central role is only possible with the empowerment of a full lay ministry. But the full empowerment of the laity can only come about when the demi-God status of ordained priesthood is fully abandoned.

The rethinking of priesthood is inextricably linked with the theology of Eucharist. A significant part of the reasoning for an ordained priesthood is the philosophical interpolation of transubstantiation into theology. To effect this act of change, the priest somehow has to acquire a power to do so. So ordination, as we know it, suggests some kind of ontological change in the priest to give him this power – it truly borders on the notion of the magical.

d) Pneumatology

A renewed Church requires a renewed pneumatology. A more developed and coherent theology of the Holy Spirit will surely bring extraordinary results – it will open up the possibilities for change. The guardians of orthodoxy might be a lot less frightened if they were willing to risk being exposed to the Holy Spirit – and learn to live with the uncertainties of faith, rather than making idols of the certainties of dogma. Through a theology of the Holy Spirit women could truly come into their own in Church – not least as a full retrieval of the female in God – not just the feminine aspect of a male God, which is what we seem to have at present.

That the Church is guaranteed the Holy Spirit to protect it from error does not mean that, as a man-made organisation, it cannot err. It does, and often – history is littered with the bodies. Surely, protection from error means to have the insight to recognise that a mistake has been made, wisdom to realise that a reversal is necessary and courage to realise that a new direction can be taken in good faith. (Understanding, Wisdom, Courage – gifts of the Spirit?).

I could keep going, but a renewed ecclesiology and renewed theologies of ministry, including ordained ministry, of eucharist and of pneumatology are the most urgent. And this renewal needs input from lay theologians – male and female, obviously, who ideally ought to be in the majority. But if we are honest, we need to admit that none of this is likely to happen. So what can we do?

We can only start from where we are – a claim so obvious that it seems foolish to state it. Yet from the crash course I put myself through about participative ministry in the Church, it seems to me that people in the Catholic Church in Ireland are really trying to start from some mythical *Hy-Brazil*, where ministry is desired and encouraged rather than from the cold reality of Church as it exists today. And what is this reality?

Model of Church

Holy Mother, Bride of Christ, Mystical Body of Christ, A Pilgrim People, People of God – all noble, lustrous interpretations of Church. Today, I would like to consider another, less attractive, but I believe, more relevant image, (though I don't think it would have found favour with Avery Dulles) that is, Church as Abusive Spouse. Using this model, we might better understand the failure of participative ministry and why it will continue to fail so long as current attitudes prevail.

Let us consider what the issues are in spousal abuse:

- Control
- How control is achieved
- Secrecy
- Denial: on the part of the abuser – the violence is somehow the abused spouse's fault.
- Collusion

Control

That control is an issue for Church administration is indisputable. Though it is often interpreted thus, leadership and control are not synonymous. Leadership and *authority* are intimately related – with authority coming from knowledge and competence, applied justly and fairly. Bernard Häring tells us of one cardinal's description of the control mentality of members of the 'Holy' Office: - "in such a person one could find 'a complete proportionality between ignorance and arrogance.'" (Häring, *My witness for the Church*, p.94).

Control is exercised in all kinds of ways - from the headline-grabbing censure of theologians to a simple aspect of the liturgy. No sane person can dispute that order is necessary – but order should never become a strait-jacket. At times, it is necessary to answer children: "No! Because I say so!" This is *never* an acceptable response to adults. But the most effective control is through violence: verbal, emotional, spiritual and physical.

Verbal, emotional, spiritual and physical violence

To speak of physical violence, one may immediately think of beatings and, as such, not relevant to this argument. However, the insistence on *Humanae Vitae* as a valid teaching of the Church is to inflict a physical violence on poor Catholic women who have to struggle in conditions totally

alien to those in the Vatican who have their tailor-made soutanes, their cooks and cleaners; who do not have to worry where the next meal is coming from, or whether they can keep the roof over their head.

Augustine's neo-Platonism with its emphasis on the division of spirit and matter has deeply scarred the Church, despite Aquinas' Aristotelian intervention. While we do not have to go further than the perception of women historically in church, and their treatment, to understand verbal, emotional and spiritual violence, it is necessary to acknowledge that this is still going on. The treatment of Ludmila Javorova, a Czechoslovak priest, whose faculties were withdrawn, is a 20th century example of the deep rooted misogyny of Church leadership. If you are the parent of a homosexual son or daughter, to hear that he or she is 'intrinsically disordered' and must endure their sexual orientation as some kind of cross – a permanent disability, as it were, is a verbal and spiritual violence. There is also the prevalence of stress illnesses among theologians who have had to endure Vatican censure. Three examples are: Bernard Häring (throat cancer), Richard McCormick (nervous breakdown) and Jacque Dupuis (stroke).

Secrecy

One of the most bizarre manifestations of the obsession with secrecy by the Vatican comes, appropriately, from the Synod on the Laity. The bishops were forbidden to give out full texts of speeches (many did, regardless). They were told that their final conclusions were to be held secret "on pain of grave sin"! Even the (handpicked) lay auditors were not allowed to see them. The reason: any publication of the propositions would interfere with the freedom of the pope. (In other words, his freedom to abandon collegiality and disregard most of what the bishops had to say when he was compiling *Christifideles Laici*). One of the most frightening examples of secrecy was the *Sodalitium Pianum (Soc.Pius V)* which came into being under Pius X and was encouraged by him. Theologians, ecclesiologists, liturgical reformers, scripture scholars were, quite simply, terrorised. Excellent scholars were sacked, compliant non-entities were promoted – sound familiar?

Even though this group was disbanded immediately following the death of Pius X by his successor, Benedict XV, the seed of a very, very resilient and poisonous plant was sown. There is an odd synchronicity in that Benedict XVI, as Prefect of the CDF once again fostered such

denunciations and delations. Emotional blackmail is abuse, and this regularly employed where religious are 'got at' through their leaders: Lavinia Byrne eventually left her community to protect its leaders from Vatican pressure. In the secular world that would be considered constructive dismissal; lecturers in pontifical institutes afraid of not having contracts renewed.

Denial

The abusing spouse simply cannot see that his/her actions are a problem. If only the abused spouse would 'behave' then 'corrective action' would be unnecessary.

An interesting example of denial is women's ordination. In 1976 the International Biblical Commission set up for the purpose, reported back to the Vatican that there was no scriptural basis either for refusing women's ordination or for granting it. So the question was open..... However, *Inter Insigniores* issued by the CDF in 1976 was the firm slap that ended discussion, if only temporarily.

With the maturity of the women's movement and the flowering of feminist theology, it was inevitable that the issue would rise again. This time the 'corrective action' by JPII was the promulgation of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, not only by what was said in the document, but that it was to be "**definitively** held by all the Church's faithful." To add insult to injury – this was promulgated on the solemnity of Pentecost.

It is interesting to note that the report of the Biblical Commission has been omitted from the AAS and is impossible to find on the Internet. References, yes...document, no.

Collusion

I could never, ever understand what used to be known as 'battered wife syndrome.' How could a person treated so badly constantly return to the one who caused the injury, expecting that somehow things will now be different – because it never was. How could they be so....blind? naïve? innocent? foolish, even?

In preparation for this talk I looked at various periodicals from 1987, the year of the Synod on the Laity. *Doctrine & Life* for that year contains many excellent articles, including the papers from the first *Pobal* conference. When I put this volume down, I understood, for the first time, why bruised and battered women kept returning to those who hurt them. It actually *was* love. A misplaced and utterly misguided love, but love it was, nevertheless. The desire to participate fully

in the life of the Church was almost like a pulse in the various articles – a contained energy, throbbing, just waiting to be released. The cry to be loved was loud and clear.

The response to this plea was predictable in this model of Church as abusive spouse – sit down and stay quiet!

We need to remember one important thing: to collude with abusive behaviour is to enable it.

What should be done?

a) One response is to fully realise the vision of Vatican II – this is strong in the Dutch paper. Unfortunately, its documents have been compromised to varying degrees. They incorporate many important insights that have benefited Church immeasurably, but because the fathers of the Council had to bow to a vociferous minority to give the appearance of unanimity, it means that the documents themselves can be used in a way never intended by the majority of the bishops. Because of this, Vatican II documents can be, and have been, quoted to support encyclicals and other documents in a manner that runs contrary to the spirit of the Council. Another problem is that there is a significant amount of proof-texting in the Vatican II documents, with some very questionable sourcing. The reference to support a celibate priesthood actually comes from the discourse on divorce in Matthew’s gospel!

b) Another response is the convocation of a new council. That has possibilities... rather than starting from scratch, the documents of Vatican II could be a starting point for a new *aggiornamento*, developing them in the light of the insights of the past forty-five years. A sort of Vatican II ½ ! The chances of this are unrealistic, primarily because the papacy has long since arrogated to itself the exclusive power to call a Council. Though a Synod-type gathering would seem to offer possibilities, experience says otherwise. The Synod of 1985 to assess 20 years of Vatican II was a non-event, reporting little more than a few pious platitudes. Both the major Synods of 1980 (family) and 1987 (lay participation) had limited, and *very* selective, participation of interested/affected parties. The contributions of the world’s bishops had a very minor impact on the subsequent documents. E.g.: In their preparatory documents, the bishops attending the Synod on the Laity erased the distinction between the ministry of the ordained and the mission of lay people that still existed at Vatican II and used the word ‘ministry’ for all participation; a timely and useful advance. However, the “Ministry” of the People of God simply disappeared

without trace from the vocabulary of *Christifideles Laici*. Words like ‘mission,’ ‘vocation’ and ‘apostolate’ abound and we are left in no doubt about our subservient status:

[The ordained] *ministries express and realise a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ that is different, not simply in degree but in essence, from the participation given to all the lay faithful through Baptism and Confirmation.* (CF #22)

It is worth noting that following the world-wide exposure of the clerical sexual abuse scandals, especially so here in Ireland – the response of the Vatican was to declare a **year of the priest**.

What can be done?

How is it possible not to collude with abusive behaviour when one is so inextricably entwined with it. Very simple really – **detach with love**.

This is the motto of Al-Anon, the support group for families of alcoholics. Abusive people are often highly manipulative, playing on the emotions and weaknesses of others. For so long, the Church authorities played on people’s fear of eternal damnation – it is difficult to imagine a more powerful control.

We can remain, but refuse to be blind to the existence and extent of the problem and, more importantly, refuse to collude with it. To detach with love is not to abandon everything. It is to see the problem, name it and hand it back – “this is a problem of your making, not mine. I cannot help you. You must help yourself by making necessary changes.” This detachment requires determination and self-discipline, but is possible.

This gathering today is under the auspices of *The International Federation of a Renewed Ministry* –part of that renewed ministry is the rehabilitation of married priests into parish life with some kind of sacramental role. My challenge to you today is to stop and think. You will fill the gaps that will help postpone the inevitable collapse. You will collude with an organisation that insists on making a flawed teaching, a measure of orthodoxy by which bishops are chosen; with an organisation which refuses to acknowledge the usefulness of condoms in the prevention of HIV/AIDS and which imposes the risk of multiple pregnancies on women in abject poverty.

You will collude with an organisation that still repudiates not just women’s gifts, but that in truth, repudiates women. If you truly believe in the justice of women’s ordination, you cannot be an obstacle to it by offering your service. But that does not mean to do nothing.

David meets Goliath

When Paul's mission to the Gentiles began to succeed, the issue of circumcision arose. We must think deeply about the importance of circumcision in Jewish life and memory. This was nothing less than a mark of the sealing of the covenant between God and Abraham – it was integral to their very identity as God's Chosen People. Its symbolic importance cannot be over-estimated. Yet, when necessary – when it interfered with the transmission of the Good News, it was possible to dispense with it, practically as well as theologically – all it required was the will to change.

Even though we are numerically strong, within present structures the majority of Church members are powerless – if we continue to play by their rules, that is. The emasculation of Vatican II is proof of that. Why should we bother at all? What is at stake here? Quite simply, nothing less than the Good News – telling people that they are free, they are loved, they are precious in God's sight and empowering them to accept that.

Romano Guardini described power as “the ability to move reality.” And *that*, my friends, is something we have. We *can* move reality. We don't have to leave church to do so – I am not preaching schism here; although, there is already a ‘silent schism’ taking place.

I do not believe that a protest group is the answer. This is not to devalue such groups – they have their place in naming the issues – I hope a protest against the proposed Eucharist Congress in Dublin will become a live issue. But they will not be tools of renewal – because they are trying to fight Goliath on his own terms. Think of the protests in Boston over Bernard Law. Despite all the calls for his resignation, it was only when a majority of the priests of the diocese were in open revolt, that any action was taken. Although, the action didn't amount to much. He was given a significant ceremonial title in one of the four major basilicas Rome with a palace for a residence.

The model I suggest comes from within – basic ecclesial communities. People can get together to be nourished by the Word and find out how to make the Good News a reality for themselves and others. This then becomes a forum for adult formation. The theologians among us have a special responsibility to enable this. There is enough good theology out there from which to draw - although its dissemination is precarious at times. The Newman Institute in the West of Ireland was doing extraordinary work, and its demise is a tragedy. It is surely a case where the people looked for bread and were given stones. It is vital that people are given the information

and tools with which to challenge unsustainable claims. Distance education programmes in theology have an important role to play here. For example, the Irish Dominican province has made a full degree level course available by distance education run by the Priory Institute. <www.prioryinstitute.com>

There is an interesting exposition of the power of the small group in *Tipping Point* by Malcolm Gladwell – the optimum functioning number is 150 people. This fact is borne out by a study of Anglican church practice in England in 1990s (Richard Brierly, *The Tide is running out*) which discovered that no one pastor seems to be able to cope with more than 150 people if they are to do the job properly. The indigenous Anglican Church in Malaysia has used the idea of “cell church” to extraordinary effect and has grown exponentially – it is estimated that as many as 75 million people are members of these ‘cell churches’. These ‘cell churches’ are modelled on the basic ecclesial communities. Which throws an interesting perspective on why the Vatican deconstruction of Liberation Theology – was it irrational fear of Marxist ideology or the power of the small group?

A question we, all of here today, need to ask: are we trying to be Church in a way that is congenial to us with our privileged knowledge and education? Or are we trying to spread the Good News? Where... or what... is our focus? It is only when we can define our focus that we can truly move forward.

If we want change *we* have to *make* it happen. We need to broaden the idea of ministry – how to reach out to all people. (book clubs, intergenerational activity – book scheme for housebound, gardening clubs, group literacy programmes, homework groups, pupil mentoring, cookery classes ...all we need is to see the need – but always through the lens of the gospel, with the vision of service and the goal to eventual empowerment.

We cannot fight Goliath on Goliath’s terms. Like David, we need to shed the armour more suited to our opponent – it is an encumbrance, it is weighing us down. We need to use the stones in our slingshot: Our education, our determination, our imagination, the immense possibilities of communication with computers our fingertips and our willingness to act decisively on a small scale. It can be done. Are we willing to do what it takes?