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TRANSFORMING MISSION

Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission

David J. Bosch



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to manifest *the cosmic rule of Christ* (cf Saayman 1984:21-55). The church (but only insofar as it is the *one* church) is "the sign of the coming unity of mankind" (Uppsala, Section I.20 – WCC 1968:17). The 1989 San Antonio Conference of CWME concurs: "The church is called again and again to be a prophetic sign and foretaste of the unity and renewal of the human family as envisioned in God's promised reign" (Section I.11; WCC 1990:28). The reign of God is not only the *church's* final fulfillment but also the *world's* future (Limouris 1986:169).

Lastly, we have to confess that the *loss of ecclesial unity is not just a vexation but a sin*. Unity is not an optional extra. It is, in Christ, already a fact, a given. At the same time it is a command: "Be one!" We are called to be one as the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one, and we should never tire of striving toward that day when Christians in every place may gather to share the One Bread and the One Cup (cf Crumley 1989:146, 149). At the moment, this appears to be nothing more than an eschatological lightning on a distant horizon. Both the "world church" and the "unity of humankind" are, in a sense, fictions. But both fictions are indispensable if we wish to do justice to what it means to be church and to live creatively and missionally in the face of the eschatological tension which belongs to our very being as Christians (cf Hoedemaker 1988:174).

MISSION AS MINISTRY BY THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD

The Evolution of the Ordained Ministry

The movement away from ministry as the monopoly of ordained men to ministry as the responsibility of the whole people of God, ordained as well as non-ordained, is one of the most dramatic shifts taking place in the church today. Boerwinkel (1974:54-64) has identified the "institutionalization of church offices" as one of the characteristics of the Constantinian dispensation and the contemporary "laicization" of the church as indicative of the end of Constantinianism. Moltmann (1975:11), in addressing the task of church and theology in our time, formulates six theses, one of which reads: "Christian theology . . . will no longer be simply a theology for priests and pastors, but also a theology for the laity in their callings in the world".

The crisis we are facing in respect to ministry is part and parcel of the crisis church and mission face in this time of paradigm shifts, when virtually every traditional element of faith and polity is under severe pressure. **For almost nineteen centuries and in virtually all ecclesiastical traditions ministry has been understood almost exclusively in terms of the service of ordained ministers.** In order to grasp something of the magnitude of the shift that is now taking place and its significance for the mission of the church today, it will be necessary to survey, very briefly, the developments that have led to the present impasse.

There can be no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth broke with the entire Jewish tradition when he chose his disciples not from among the priestly class, but from among fisherfolk, tax-collectors, and the like. This was part of his "wine-skin-breaking ministry", of the "reversal" feature in Jesus' teaching, of turning

the proprieties of the time upside down by going contrary to normal human expectations (cf Burrows 1981:44f). I have argued, in chapter 1 of this study, that the Jesus movement began as a renewal movement within Judaism, not as a separate religion. This may be the reason why the terminology used for the movement and its members was borrowed neither from Jewish nor (after the movement consciously began to recruit non-Jews) from Greek religious culture.

The main word for the community, *ekklesia*, was a term from the secular sphere. Meeks (1983:81) draws attention to the fact that the Pauline churches are not called "synagogues". Neither, in fact, are they called *thiasoi*, the common Greek word for cultic or religious meetings. The believers simply "gather" (cf 1 Cor 11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34; 14:23, 26), mostly in private homes (cf Beker 1980:319). Indeed, the *household* may be regarded as the basic unit in the establishment of Christianity in any city (Meeks 1983:29). The church has offices—if we wish to call them that—particularly those of *episkopos*, *presbyteros*, and *diakonos* (all of them secular terms). But, first, these offices are always understood as existing within the community of faith, as never being prior to, independent of, or above the local church (cf de Gruchy 1987:27), and, second, it would be grossly inaccurate simply to plug these terms into a later sacral-juridical understanding of ecclesiastical office (Burrows 1981:77, drawing upon H. von Campenhausen and H. Conzelmann). Most of the "leaders" in the early church are charismatic figures, natural leaders, both men and women.

By the eighties of the first century AD it was, however, clear that Christianity had become a new religion and could no longer be contained within Judaism. This also meant that the terminology used by adherents of the new faith was increasingly understood in a strictly religious sense. The church now had to cope with heresy from without and a hollowing-out of faith from within. In these circumstances the most reliable antidote appeared to have been to encourage believers to follow the directives of the clergy, in particular the bishops, who soon—particularly because of the writings and influence of Ignatius and Cyprian—were regarded as the sole guarantors of the apostolic tradition and the ones endowed with full authority in matters ecclesiastical. Henceforth the ordained minister would hold a dominant and undisputed position in church life, a situation that was further bolstered by the doctrines of apostolic succession, the "indelible character" conferred on priests in the rite of ordination, and the infallibility of the pope.

The clericalizing of the church went hand in hand with the sacerdotalizing of the clergy. Apart from a questionable reference in Ignatius, the term "priest" was not applied to Christian clergy until around the year 200. After that the term, and the theology behind it, was the "received view", strengthened by an elaborate "sacrament of holy orders", which gave the ordinand the power to represent sacramentally the sacrifice of Christ and brought about a mystical and ontological change in the soul of the priest (cf Burrows 1981:61). At the same time it cut off the priest from the community, putting him over against it as a mediation figure and as a kind of *alter Christus* ("another Christ") (:60, 88). The priest had *active* power to consecrate, forgive sins, and bless; "ordinary" Christians, enabled thereto by their baptism, had only a *passive* role to

play, namely, to *receive grace* (:105). The church consisted of two clearly distinct categories of people: the clergy and the laity (from *laos*, "people [of God]"), the latter understood as immature, not come of age, and utterly dependent on the clergy in matters religious.

It was inevitable that, in this arrangement, it would be believed that the church's sole business was the sacred (even if clergy, in particular bishops, often wielded secular power!). In reviewing the five models of the church identified by Dulles (1976), Burrows (1981:38) points out that all of them (the church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant) actually understand the church almost exclusively as a means of communicating grace and thus reinforce the sacerdotal picture of the church. The church is a community mainly concerned with mediating eternal salvation to individuals. The ordained ministry is the primary vehicle for that work, so the shape of the church is built around it (:61f).

As the hegemony of the Catholic Church was not disputed in medieval Europe, it became customary for the church to understand itself as the actual kingdom of God on earth. The simple sociological fact at work here is that any dominant religion tends to adopt this sort of position. In this case, the Catholic Church viewed itself as stocked with a supply of heavenly graces which the clerical proprietors could disburse to customers. When, in the sixteenth century, its supremacy was challenged by the Protestant Reformation, it reacted (in the Council of Trent) by dismissing the Protestant claims out of hand. At the same time it embarked on "mission", an activity of a corps of "specialists", priests and religious, authorized by the pope to extend the church's hegemony to other parts of the world. In those countries, ecclesiastical structures identical to those on the "home front" were erected and an analogous leadership cadre installed.

The question is whether Protestants have really done any better. It is true that Luther is to be credited with the rediscovery of the notion of the "priesthood of all believers". In his thesis that "the Christian . . . congregation has the right and power to judge all teaching and to call, install and dismiss teachers" (quoted in Pfürtnner 1984:184—my translation), Luther most certainly broke with the dominant paradigm. However, when Luther's understanding of church and theology was under assault from Anabaptists (some of whom had jettisoned the idea of an ordained ministry altogether) and Catholics alike, he reverted to the inherited paradigm. In the end, he still had the clergyman at the center of his church, endowed with considerable authority (cf Burrows 1981:104).

The other Reformers and their heirs followed Luther in this. To be sure, they rejected Catholicism's sanctioning of the form of the priesthood as it had stood at the end of the fourth century and settled, instead, for the shape the offices had taken at the close of the formation of the New Testament. The key to this was the "threefold office of Christ"—King, Prophet, and Priest—which, in the Protestant view, had clearly crystallized in the three offices of pastor, elder, and deacon. Instead of showing appreciation for the fact that, in the early stages, these offices had evolved only to a rudimentary degree, they took them to be explicitly instated by Christ and therefore immutable. In practice, most denominations in mainline Protestantism today are muddling along with

an understanding of the ordained ministry vacillating between the traditional Reformation definition and a view closer to that of Catholicism. On the other hand, many evangelical denominations, which tend to follow a congregationalist polity, are struggling to avoid one of two pitfalls: either the minister becomes a little pope whose word is law, or the congregation regards him as their employee who has to dance to their tune.

The net result was not fundamentally different from the dominant Catholic view. The church remained a strictly sacral society run by an in-house personnel. Only, the focus for the "cure of souls" was not, as in Catholicism, the sacraments but the proclamation of the word of God (cf de Gruchy 1987:18, on Bonhoeffer). For the rest, what Protestants and Catholics shared regarding the role of the ordained ministry was far more significant than their disagreements—in both traditions the clergyman-priest, enshrined in a privileged and central position, remained the linchpin of the church (cf Burrows 1981:61, 74). With the increasing specialization of theological training, the elitist character of the "clerical paradigm" was further reinforced (cf Farley 1983:85-88). Like Catholic missions, Protestant missions as a matter of course exported their dominant clergy pattern to the "mission fields", imposing it on others as the only legitimate and appropriate model, clothing David in Saul's armor, and making it impossible for the young church either to execute its particular ministry or to survive without help from outside.

It was highly unlikely that any change would appear in the dominant pattern until a transformation of profound proportions would manifest itself in both church and society. This is what has begun to happen in our time, in respect of the rediscovery of the "apostolate of the laity" or the "priesthood of all believers".

The Apostolate of the Laity

Catholic missions have always had a significant lay involvement. Their participation in the missionary enterprise was, however, clearly auxiliary and firmly under the control and jurisdiction of the clergy. In Protestant missions the prospects were more auspicious, particularly as the "voluntary principle" (see chapter 9) gained momentum.

Actually, from the very beginning Protestant missions were, to a significant extent, a lay movement. The voluntary societies were not restricted to ecclesiastics. Normally there were clergy involved in the founding of mission societies but they were often, as in the case of the CMS, clerical nobodies, who usually cooperated closely with prominent laypersons (Walls 1988:150). Walls (:142) describes the societies as free, open, responsible, embracing all classes, both sexes, all ages, the masses of the people—a truly democratic and anti-authoritarian movement, to some extent also anti-clergy and anti-establishment. North American societies, in particular, attracted large numbers of women. In some instances, women founded their own mission societies (by 1890 there were thirty-four of these in North America alone) and periodicals, and raised their own support (cf Anderson 1988:102f). On the "mission fields", even in the case of societies run by men, women were soon the majority (cf Hutchison 1987:101).

And they did all the things men used to do, including preaching (excluding the administering of the sacraments, of course).

After World War II the "home front" slowly began to catch up. It dawned upon the churches, both Catholic and Protestant, that the traditional monolithic models of church office no longer matched realities. The theological *aggiornamento* in both main Western confessions discovered again that apostolicity was an attribute of the entire church and that the ordained ministry could be understood only as existing within the community of faith.

In various ways Vatican II gave expression to the new theological and societal mood and to a new awareness about the central role of the laity in the church, particularly in respect to the church's missionary calling. The mood was, in this respect, fundamentally different from that of several earlier councils. Y. Congar has noted that words repeatedly used in Vatican II had never been used by Vatican I—words like *amor* ("love") 113 times, and *laicus* ("layperson") 200 times (quoted in Gómez 1986:57). LG 33 states: "The apostolate of the laity is a sharing in the salvific mission of the Church. Through Baptism and Confirmation all are appointed to this apostolate by the Lord himself." It adds that the laity have "the exalted duty of working for the ever greater spread of the divine plan of salvation to all people of every epoch and all over the earth". AG 28 (cf LG 12) urges every member of the church "to collaborate in the work of the Gospel, each according to his opportunity, ability, charism and ministry". It even states categorically (AG 21), "The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy". The *Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops* defines bishops primarily as pastors, not as "holders of the fullness of priestly power" (cf Burrows 1981:109). Most important, however, Vatican II produced *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the *Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People*, a document which describes the laity preeminently in terms of the church's mission, having the "right and duty to be apostles" (paragraph 3).

Not that all problems were suddenly solved. Far from it! Vatican II still refers to laypersons as "auxiliaries" of the "sacred ministries" (cf Gómez 1986:51). Also in other respects the old dichotomy between clergy and laity seems to be firmly upheld, so much so that Boff (1986:30) maintains that, in spite of Vatican II, the participation of the faithful in decision-making is totally mutilated. It seems, in fact, as if the tension between the "top" and the "base" has been increasing rather than decreasing in recent years, as more and more base communities, so-called "ecclesias", "critical congregations", and the like are being formed within the Catholic Church (cf Blei 1980:1). There is, on the part of the hierarchy, a certain apprehension about the consequences of according a larger role to the laity, a fear of what N. Lash (quoted in de Gruchy 1987:35) has called "the rediscovery of the 'congregationalist' element in Catholicism" (cf also Burrows 1981:39f; Michiels 1989:106f).

In respect to the laity, post-Vatican Catholicism thus reveals both old and new versions of ecclesiology. It is not essentially different in Protestantism. This is understandable if one keeps in mind the almost two millennia during which the ordained clergy model persisted unchallenged. The watertight division

between the "teaching" church and the "learning" church (the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia discens*), between the active mediating of grace and the passive receiving of grace, is too deep-seated to be expunged without some ado.

Even so, an unmistakable shift is taking place. Laypersons are no longer just the scouts who, returning from the "outside world" with eyewitness accounts and perhaps some bunches of grapes, report to the "operational basis"; they are the operational basis from which the *missio Dei* proceeds. It is, in fact, not they who have to "accompany" those who hold "special offices" in the latter's mission in the world. Rather, it is the *office bearers* who have to accompany the laity, the people of God (cf Hoekendijk 1967a:350). In the New Testament dispensation the Spirit (just as the priesthood) has been given to the whole people of God, not to select individuals. "The clergy, then, come from the community, guide it, and act in Christ's name" (Moltmann 1977:303).

For it is the *community* that is the primary bearer of mission. The project on the "missionary structure of the congregation", launched by the WCC's New Delhi Assembly in 1961 (a project which, however, to a large extent aborted), together with the rediscovery of the local church in Catholicism, are perhaps—from a missiological perspective—the most far-reaching contributions of the WCC and Vatican II. Mission does not proceed primarily from the pope, nor from a missionary order, society, or synod, but from a community gathered around the word and the sacraments and sent into the world. Therefore the ordained leadership's role cannot possibly be the all-determining factor; it is only one part of the community's total life (Burrows 1981:62). Gradually, churches are beginning to adjust to the new theological insight. The vertical, linear model, running from the pope via the bishop and the priest to the faithful (a model which has its parallels in Protestantism) is gradually being replaced by one in which all are directly involved (cf Boff 1986:30-33).

It goes without saying that a new model of church is of great significance for the entire debate about the ordination of women (cf, among other examples, Burrows 1981:134-137; Boff 1986:76-97). Their ordination is, however, only one component of the issue involved, as is the notion of authorizing laypersons to be directly involved in the celebration of the Lord's Supper (cf Boff 1986:70-75). The problem with this undoubtedly legitimate and crucial debate is that it still suggests that some form of ordained ministry and some form of authority to celebrate the sacraments is the be-all and end-all of what the church is all about.

Forms of Ministry

If it is true, as has been argued throughout this study, that the entire life of the church is missionary, it follows that we desperately need a theology of the laity—something of which only the first rudiments are now emerging. But also, such a theology is only now becoming possible again, as we are moving out of the massive shadow of the Enlightenment. For a theology of the laity presupposes a break with the notion, so fundamental to the Enlightenment, that the private sphere of life has to be separated from the public (cf also Newbigin 1986:142f). Moltmann, in his thesis that the theology of the future will no longer

be simply a theology for priests and pastors but also for the laity, goes on to say:

It will be directed not only toward divine service in the church, but also toward divine service in the everyday life of the world. Its practical implementation will include preaching and worship, pastoral duties, and Christian community, but also socialization, democratization, education toward self-reliance and political life (1975:11).

One must therefore say, emphatically, that a theology of the laity does not mean that the laity should be trained to become "mini-pastors". Their ministry (or perhaps we should say their "service", for "ministry" has come to be such a churchy word—cf Burrows 1981:55f) is offered in the form of the ongoing life of the Christian community "in shops, villages, farms, cities, classrooms, homes, law offices, in counselling, politics, statecraft, and recreation" (:66f). The contingent form this ministry will take must be recognized—as we should, in fact, recognize the contingent shape of the ordained ministry. It will not be the same for every age, context, and culture. In some parts of the Third World, in particular, the ministry of both laity and ordained will be much more extensive than it is in the West. Its wider scope may be occasioned by the circumstance that in a developing country the church's efforts may be more comprehensive than those of the government (:72) or, in a country like South Africa—which is going through a painful process of democratization—by the fact that, where the voices of political and community leaders have been silenced, the church is left as almost the only voice of the voiceless. In most such cases, it will be a combined ministry of clergy and laity, to the extent that it becomes impossible to distinguish who is doing what.

A striking example of lay ministry is to be found in the phenomenon of "base" or "small" Christian communities which, having begun in Latin America,²³ are today spreading across the entire globe, even in the West. It takes many forms: house church groups in the West, African independent churches, clandestine gatherings in countries where Christianity is proscribed, etc. The movement is, as far as Catholicism is concerned, so exceptional that scholars are easily tempted to become too starry-eyed in their evaluation (cf, for instance, Boff 1986:1, 4). Still, it is a development of momentous significance. Bühlmann (1977:157) even ventures to say that these "experiments" are more significant than the theology of liberation and can, with better reason, be taken as the contribution offered by Latin America to the universal church. And their significance lies particularly in the fact that here the laity have come of age and are missionally involved in an imaginative way.

It took a very long time before the Christian church discovered that Christ, who had turned upside down the hallowed forms of ministry of the Jewish establishment of his time, might perhaps also challenge the established "theology of ministry" of the Christian church (cf Burrows 1981:31f). But, as always, Christ is not intent on destroying, but in fulfilling. This applies also to the ordained ministry. Nothing will be gained by abolishing it. Boff (1986:32), in

spite of all his criticism of the structures of the Catholic Church and all his enthusiasm for the base communities, repudiates any attempt at "despoiling the bishop and priest of their function in a sham liberation process". Indeed, clericalism is not overcome by rejecting an ordained ministry or by downplaying its significance and task. De Gruchy (1987:26) quotes E. Schillebeeckx in this respect: "If there is no specialized concentration of what is important to everyone, in the long run the community suffers as a result".

Therefore, Hoekendijk's tendency to regard church offices merely as functional and therefore, in the final analysis, as contingent (cf also Rütli 1972:311-315) leads us nowhere. Some form of ordained ministry is indeed essential and constitutive (see also Moltmann 1977:288-314), not as *guarantor* of the validity of the church's claim to be the dispenser of God's grace, but, at most, as *guardian*, to help keep the community faithful to the teaching and practice of apostolic Christianity (cf Burrows 1981:83, 112). The clergy do not do this alone and off their own bat, so to speak, but together with the whole people of God, for all have received the Holy Spirit, who guides the church in all truth. The priesthood of the ordained ministry is to enable, not to remove, the priesthood of the whole church (Newbigin 1987:30). The clergy are not prior to or independent of or over against the church; rather, with the rest of God's people, they *are* the church, sent into the world. In order to flesh out this vision, then, we need a more organic, less sacral ecclesiology of the whole people of God.

MISSION AS WITNESS TO PEOPLE OF OTHER LIVING FAITHS²⁴

The Shifting Scene

The *theologia religionum*, the "theology of religions", is a discipline that has evolved only since the 1960s. The same impetus that made Christians of a given theological denomination ask, Who are these Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Orthodox? also led to the question, Who are these people of other faiths, these Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims? At least in this *formal* sense, then, there is a relationship between ecumenism and the theology of religions.

The issue of the attitude Christians and Christian missions should adopt to (adherents of) other faiths is, of course, an ancient one, with roots in the Old Testament. For many centuries, however, this was hardly ever debated. Emperor Theodosius' decrees of 380 (which demanded that all citizens of the Roman Empire be Christians) and 391 (which proscribed all non-Christians cults), inexorably paved the way for Pope Boniface's bull, *Unam Sanctam* (1302), which proclaimed that the Catholic Church was the only institution guaranteeing salvation; for the Council of Florence (1442), which assigned to the everlasting fire of hell everyone not attached to the Catholic Church; and for the *Catechismus Romanus* (1566), which taught the infallibility of the Catholic Church. In the context of this model it was unthinkable that people should be allowed to believe as they chose; as late as 1832 Gregory XVI rejected the demand for freedom of religion not only as error, but as *deliramentum*, "insanity" (reference in Fries 1986:759). Protestants, it is true, did not have anything comparable to papal bulls. Still, their mentality often hardly differed from that