

Various Ministries in the Church – Need and the Biblical Basis

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1. Introduction

The word 'ministry' is understood by and large as a churchy word, usually signifying what the church leaders do: preaching, performing liturgical activities, guiding a church/parish community. But the opening of the windows in the Catholic Church has led to do new and newer ways of thinking, acting and actualizing. Creativity and initiatives have crept in into the various types of ministries of the church. Once the unthinkableables have now become actualities. 'Ministry' has been burst open into giving birth to new ministries in the church. It is very much in conformity with the central message or manifesto of Jesus and hence a ministry of wineskin bursting quality that determined, decided and delimited Jesus' ministry runs through the church. As Jesus broke through the categories of Judaism so is the Church witnessing a breakthrough in its new different special ministries that were once not at all conceptualized but now actualized in time and space. Should there a question arise are today's special ministries justified or do they go well in consonance with Jesus' way, the answer has to be affirmative. The newer ministries and initiatives of the Church ought to have a Christological context, for the *diakonia* of the Church is the paradigm of the Church's service.¹

The word *diakonia* need not only be limited to service rather be generously applied to ministry for those chosen to serve at the tables and to serve at humanity in various platforms (Acts 6: 1- 7).

2. The Church and the Global Village

The church is in the world and the world is a global village. This one village has several villages in it, hence 'Ministry' has several ministries . The Church can be fully alive and active only because of its contextuality in the global village. This contextuality is expressed when various local churches are fully involved in the particular total situations of its own people. The mission of the Church is essentially a contextual ministry because, "the concreteness of sin and alienation differ radically from one cultural and historical context to another".² This is marvelously illustrated by Shoki Coe in his terms as "double wrestle". The first wrestling signifies the text, the message received from the tradition, and the second wrestling denotes the context, the message received from the contemporary situation.³

This factor is traditionally and conceptually understood, accepted and adopted by the Church through the compelling forces of signs of the times. The GS, no. 4 points out "To carry out such a task (serving the world), the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other".

We must therefore recognise and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings and its often-dramatic characteristics.⁴ In recognising these expectations if need be, we will have to reorganize them also.

3. Basic Christian Communities

One of the functions of reorganizing the Church is its dissecting the very anatomy of the Church and the World. The outcome is the Basic Christian Communities. Though they came into existence and practice from the natural felt need of the people of South American Continent, yet its reliability and relevance has become a day today need of the Church and churches. These groups lead to a fuller participation of the churches in Christian life. They have been arising in other parts of the globe for the last 50 years as a response to specific needs and the changing situations of World and Church. The uniqueness of the groups is a participatory leadership and a shared responsibility.

3.1. Basic Christian Communities and Compassion

Basic Christian Communities under the life pattern of Jesus and the inspiration and model of the apostolic church in the early Christian era create the platform for the feel and share of compassion. Only in BCC, compassion like that of Jesus can be compartmentalized in each and every car of human life. With BCC, no humans may be left out without the smell and joy of compassion. Therefore, nurturing and culturing the BCC is a ministry that can move the Church into a movement in the future.⁵

3.2. Basic Christian Communities and Modern Trend

Basic Christian Communities could become the spokesperson or the mouthpiece of the Universal Catholic Church. The Church can breathe in and breathe out through the nostrils of these small Christian communities. They are the living Whatsapps, Facebooks, Short Message Services of the Church. The fast and forward level interactions can take place through these new models of the Church.

3.3. Basic Christian Communities and Neighbourhood Groups

The extension of the BCCs now as “Block Groups” or “Neighborhood Communities” find their fitting and filling places in the midst of the heterogeneous communities of all peoples. The growing trend of neighborhood communities will be the great crowd (*polus ochlos*) of all peoples which moved Jesus to Compassion (Mk 6:34). These neighbourhood communities should be in future heading for a greater sharing and shaping of power and should be the models of the parliamentary functions.

The *koinonia* and the breaking of the bread (Acts 2:42ff) as in the apostolic Church can and should take place the neighbourhood communities. In the first three centuries of Christendom, this type of *koinonia* and sharing was a major threat to the Roman feudals which resulted in the persecution of the Christians. But now and in future in the global society only this type of communion will be the thread between communities of peoples, though the fact of threat to the ruling classes cannot be eliminated.

4. Ministry to the Elderly

4.1. Ministry to the elderly and the effect of consumerism

Perceptions change as to the age of human persons. It varies from country to country. A person of 70 years old in the Netherlands has applied legally to acknowledge his biological age as 50, thereby reducing 20 years from his actual age as he himself feels healthy and young as that of 50 year old person. He now wants to have this new age marked in his official documents. Age cannot delimit the ‘oldness’ of a person in the modern *medi* and *foody* world (medical advancement and various food culture) world. However one common phenomenon in all civilizations and societies is that at particular point of time, physical or psychological inability is experienced and accepted. Consequently, those people are thrown out of the usual flowing

society as used up things. The culture of consumerism and a mere pragmatic world view add up to this pitiful end.

4.2. Ministry to the Elderly and Corporate Companies

Though ministry towards these people is on the rise and homes for the senior citizens are on the new arrivals yet there is a growing danger. If they are new arrivals on the market, it is corporate. If they are new heralds in the culture of humankind, it is compassion. What is needed is not corporate, but compassion. The inhuman act of preying on the corpses or preying on the inability of the human persons is the modern outrageous atrocity of the corporate over the vulnerable of the society. Such bestial outrage can never be tolerated. Hence when a ministry in the Church as ministry to the senior citizens is done, it is compassion. Only compassion moves the bowels like that happened to Jesus (Mk 6:34); but corporate can move only their pockets.

4.3. Ministry to the Elderly and their Wisdom

Not only is the ministry to these people is the service rendered to them but rather there is another ministry that has to be received from them. The modern world fails miserably to understand this fact. The wisdom and experience of the aged is another ministry that the Church has to receive from them. “Wisdom is with the aged and understanding in length of days” (Job 12:12) goes the biblical proverb. The modern world craves for knowledge but not for wisdom. Knowledge is business, wisdom is life. In our service to the aged and elderly consists also respecting their wisdom which the world should in good conscience and humility expect and accept from them.

The ministry towards such disadvantaged people has their strong base in the Bible also (Ps 71:9; Prov 30:17; Joel 2:16; Sir 8:6,9). However, there is fear that such homes should neither be an excuse nor a substitution for the younger ones to escape from their love bound duties towards their parents and elders.

5. Ministry to the Disabled

Disability, deficiencies and impairments are also the words used to denote the physical, intellectual and psychological disabilities. Our concern is not to argue the basic differences between these terms, but to understand these people in a Christian and humane aspect.

5.1. A Radical Difference in Understanding

First of all the emerging outlook towards these people is a changing perspective which appears to be highly positive and optimistic. The evolution of terms that travelled from 'impaired- unable-lame, blind, deaf to 'disabled' and now to 'differently-abled' is in itself a revolutionary and cultural broadening. It is not only progressive but also liberative. The wonderful result of such radical thinking is that the world knows that no humans are disabled rather are they differently-abled. Such an evolution in thinking is a revolution. It is respect and dignity to the persons and all the more to the creator God. It is a total acknowledgement of the Creator and the creation.

5.2. Ministry to the 'Right to be Different People'

Another radical view is that is it disability or right to be different? Such a view is pregnant with a lot of positivism and courage, boldness and a kind of pride. Therefore to say that it is right to be different is a new basis for a reasonable self esteem.

5.2.1. Ministry to 'the right to be different' and Eugenics

New ministries towards these people of God are adding up human dignity to the nature. It is reaffirming the image and the likeness of God implanted in the humans at the very creation. Such an understanding has driven away or expelled to a greater extent the unjust and idiotic craving for superior traits through 'selective breeding' and the inhuman drive for extinguishing those defective offsprings as the philosophy of eugenics

advocated, operationalised in the second world war. (Eugenics was a movement, a social philosophy that believed in the transmissions of culturally desirables and superior traits through selective breeding). This led to the shameful historical human abuses and atrocities committed against those ‘right to be different’ people.

After the eugenics philosophy and the continued perpetuated atrocities, a new approach has been born in the existing world. There has been a radically positive and optimistic approach towards these people. Consequently are the terms like ‘most desirable ones’ or ‘differently -abled’ or ‘right to be different’ or ‘special children’ in the place of retarded ones. Even people affected with HIV call themselves as ‘positive people’. The change in the very concept itself paves the way for a progressive action towards these people.

5.2.2. ‘Right to be different’ and the Social Integration

In some communities of Africa (Nyole people in rural Uganda), the intellectual ability or disability is judged not on the basis of one’s ability to read and write or performance in intelligence tests but rather in terms of social functioning and integration or participation in the local cultural systems of life.⁶

In Shona and Songye peoples in South Eastern Africa, personhood is defined within the broader social context. Physical or mental deficiencies are viewed as result of ‘wronged relationships’ with nature, relatives, ancestors and God. Therefore, these persons with disability are absorbed and accommodated within the networks of family, kindred and neighbourhood.⁷ Naturally such an affirmation places the importance and affirmation on understanding the importance of social network of interdependence, relatedness and affiliation thereby minimizing the mere ‘individual abilities’.

5.2.3. 'Right to be different' and Karma Theory

Any defectiveness or disability connected to the Hindu Karma theory of illness due to the past misdeeds will be another superstition, will be another forceful binding of someone to his or her unknown past to which he or she is totally not responsible. In the healing of the man born blind, (Jn 9) to the question "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:2), the answer of Jesus is categorical, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned"

In continuation, Jesus says, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him (9:3)". Any miracle is a glory of God expressed, as it is a splendid cooperation between God and humans. So also, any deformity ought not to be condemned as a curse or condemnation of God. But any deformity is an occasion that the glory of God may be expressed through the right intervention of the humans.

5.2.4. 'Right to be different' and the New Social Bond

In treating the persons with disabilities, family is the key site where the disability is compassionately met and managed. However, the contemporary family in India is under great stress due to globalization, neoliberal economy, unwanted urbanization, fallacious development plan- all of these posing a big challenge to the infrastructure of care and concern and the social attitudes to be shown towards these persons. Even NGOs and special school are at times unable to co-op up with the growing educational, vocational, psychological and social needs of the disabled persons. Hence, the Church in its new pastoral plan has to adopt this new ministry to these people. Basic Christian Communities could be made as the expansions of the scope of kinship ties as per the model of some of the African countries that we just mentioned above. Thus the limited biological bond between the disabled and the society will be extended to a new social bond thereby broadening the world of the 'right to be different people'.

5.2.5. Positively Approaching ‘Positive People’

Effect does not exceed the cause. To explain it further, the effect is proportionate to the cause. In and outside nature this holds true. Whatever the development in science and technology in the modern world may be, the consequences are also on the increase. ‘New medicines for new diseases’ - has now turned to be as if ‘new diseases for new medicines’.

The increasing number of patients with chronic illnesses like cancer, HIV, malaria and at time the outbreak of new viruses is not merely threats to human life, but also challenges to the humanity and science. Apart from the research of finding out new remedies and medicines, the handling of these people affected with terminal diseases is equally serious and significant.

5.2.6. Biblical Basis

The story of Namann the Syrian leper and his encounter with Prophet Elisha, the Israelite is an event that will portray the idea that diseases and sicknesses know no borders. So also the healings and recoveries have no barriers. Namaan the Syrian had to come to another territory to be healed of his leprosy. At the end the healing takes place with the seven time dip in the river Jordan (2Kgs 5:14) resulting in the total cleansing of the disease. The nature has the cure for many sicknesses.

Sometimes diseases can be treated crossing the borders and barriers. Jesus did heal the sick people of Jews as well as Gentiles. The first healing of cleansing the demoniac in the Jewish area (Mk 1:21-28) and the first healing of cleansing the demoniac in the Gentile area (Mk 5:1-20) are a proof that Jesus crossed the borders of Galilean sea (Mk 4:35) to reach out to the other side (Mk 5:1). Any prophet or Messiah in the advent of the kingdom of God will challenge the infirmities. Jesus allowing the people to touch him in both the territories (Mk 3:9-10=Mk 6:53ff), Jesus crossing the condemnations of leprosy and healing the lepers individual as well as in

groups (Mk 1:40-45; Lk 17:11-19), Jesus allowing the woman with the flow of blood for twelve years to touch him (Mk 5:24ff) - are great credentials that Jesus was happy and free to deal with people of all infirmities.

Therefore, a positive approach towards people affected with HIV and other chronic diseases who are already labeling themselves as 'positive people' is a ministry of the church that should also be dealt positively and affirmatively.

6. Ecology and Human Response

The call to preserve and cherish the earth both by science and religion (*Laudato Si*, 62) has been an outcry in the recent past by civil as well as religious world. Though late, yet is a reasonable much needed call to save our "common home" (*Laudato Si*, 03). Many seminars, meetings in the national and international level are on the steady increase. The much appreciated Encyclical of Pope Francis, the "*Laudato Si*" has received an overwhelming welcome from the whole international community. His call to the humanity to have a "new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" (*Laudato Si*, 04) has to a good extent accelerated the international and national climate summits in the world.

Hence, "preserving and cherishing the earth"⁸ and as Mascow Declarartion puts it "new planetary perspective"⁹ so as to include a spiritual and ethical basis for human activities on earth- are all new warnings or vocations to have "fundamental changes in the attitudes and practices that have pushed our world to a perilous brink"¹⁰ This has a resonance with the call of Pope Francis' words "the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion" (*Laudato Si*, 217). Hence conserving the common home is termed as ecological conversion (*Laudato Si*, 217).

6.1. Christian Understanding of Creation

Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scripture “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion” (Gen 1:28). Pope Francis rightly points out our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth does not justify absolute domination over the creatures. We are not God. The Earth was there here before us and it has been given to us. Moreover ruling in the Kingdom of God is to be expressed by service to the ruled. Ruling is not subduing but serving. Also Gen 1:28 is followed by another categorical imperative “fill it and keep it” (Gen 2:15). Here tilling refers to cultivating, ploughing or working while keeping means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. It implies a “relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature, and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations” (*Laudato Si*, 67).

A global conservation is essential for saving the mother nature which cannot be resolved by unilateral actions on the part of individual countries.¹¹ This is a global problem and therefore a global responsibility. What we as Christians can do in our available situations

6.1.1. An Awareness and a Conversion

The human beings lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging and of a future to be saved and shared with everyone. A pragmatic and consumerist view and use of the nature has exploited the beauty and the resources of the mother earth. Therefore, the basic awareness should create a kind of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. This awareness should take us to another dimension of personal conversion that entails the recognition of our errors, sins, and faults and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change (*Laudato Si*, 218).

6.1.2. Knowing God as Creator

The emphasis on God as Creator is sadly neglected in the modern world. The child at home at a single command or request receives what it wants. The child perceives its 'near' humans as the only givers or gods. This is a dangerous paradigm. The reality of God as Creator or Giver is fading away from the actual thinking pattern. The view that God is the Creator and we are all created "defines our place in the cosmos and our position before the living God, our Creator, just as it also defines our common bonds with other creatures and our special responsibilities to them".¹² In our ministry of protecting the nature, the "church must reclaim" the idea of God as Creator if the Church is to successfully lead people to know God and His world as they really are, and not merely as we might think them to be".¹³

6.1.3. The Celebration of Creation

To know God as Creator we must celebrate his creation. The Bible teaches the believer to find joy in the wonders of rock badgets and wild goats (Ps 104:18), to find joy even in the power of a thunderstorm (Ps 29:3). We must together with the psalmist praise and sing, "O Lord, how manifold are all your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Ps 104:24). Hence protecting mother earth consists in experiencing the joy of God's creation that is an essential element of Christian joy.

6.1.4. Creation and the Careerist Approach

People enter the field of resource management. They choose their career with high motives. They intend in the beginning to protect the environment, maintain ecosystem, save endangered species and educate the public. Because of this so-called 'good job', praise and advancement are attractively offered. However, as years go by, as earnings and promotion accumulate, the ministry of conservation of nature becomes careerism. The person who is supposed to protect – to be a steward- becomes a careerist.

6.1.5. Creation and Stewardship

Against careerism, God demands from human beings stewardship. Then the task is to cultivate, keep and name it. To this stewardship, goes in consonance, ‘the image and likeness of God’ and the authority to rule and subdue. Authority and rulership is to be conceived as service to one’s subjects, placing their needs ahead of one’s own. This kind of stewardship service ‘for God’s creation is a mission in God’s service’.¹⁴ With this view in mind, the Church has to train stewards in our educational resources. The Church must build people of personal integrity to combat corporate structural evils, the training of such people also has to be a corporal mission. The church also has to support Christian women and men who are engaged in graduate degree programs in secular universities with possible scholarships, fellowships, conferences, classes, bible studies and personal encouragement schemes.

6.1.6. Summary

As Christians, we have to make true this Christian witness of stewardship a plausible reality. Let us become doers, not merely speakers. Maintaining the following attitudes and activities will create the fundament for the stewardship realization.

Maintain the view that God is Creator and the Universe including humanity is His Creation. Maintain the view that God and the Creation are to be celebrated. Let us create a culture of yearning for Joy in the creation. Maintain the view that we are linked to creation in many ways, both physically and spiritually and maintain this linkage seriously till the end. Maintain the view that as humans we are distinct from other creatures by being made in the image of God and we are called to express this uniqueness by being the stewards of the creation as Christ instructed (Matt 20:25-28) and served (Jn 13:1-15). Maintain the view that God is Redeemer (from sin) and creation including humanity as objects of his redemption accomplished in Christ (Rom 8:19-21). Say this and do this as individuals (in ordinary conversation), as

churches (in the preachings), and in other Christian organizations as statements, policy and practice.

7. Ministry to Family

Marriage is the most sacred unit of the earth. As God in the creation accounts blessed the living beings in the waters and the seas, “be fruitful and multiply so did God after creating the humans as male and female blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:27). Family is the unit designed and decided by God. The formation of the family was also commanded by God in the following words, “therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh”(Gen 2:24). This plan of God is affirmed and confirmed by His Son Jesus (Mk10:8). In the context of an interrogative approach, the Pharisees asked Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Mk 10:2). Jesus categorically answered them, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mk 10:9). In this place, Jesus goes beyond the great lawgiver of the Israelites, Moses who is being quoted as having “allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away (Mk 10:4)”. Jesus accuses the people as the reason for the above possibility due to the hardness of the heart. Marriage is therefore a sacred indissoluble unity created by God. It is therefore a sacred covenant (Eph 5:21) and not a business contract.

Unfortunately, this close-knit unit is torn and is greatly under threat. The families being broken and consequently very many problems in all aspects breeding over is a day today experience. Due to separation and divorces among the families, the decadence in the value system appears to be irreparable. The Universal Church and the local churches have to find out ways and means of creating love bound families basing on the biblical family models and the biblical inspirations.

8. Matters of other Importance

8.1. On Market and Environment

A mere increase in the profits will solve the problems is a fallacious concept that leads to the deterioration of environment. Where profits alone count, there can be no thinking about the rhythms of nature. An irresistible, irrational profit motive will end up with the destruction of nature as well as the collapse of human life. The sayings of Jesus will fit in very well here, “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life” (Matt 16:26). A mere profit motive will always be a destructive motive.

8.2. On false Belief in Science and Technology

There is a tendency to believe that increase is progress; swelling is development. Due to this falsification of concepts, we have to accept the sad fact “our immense technological development has not been accompanied by development in human responsibility, values and conscience” (*Laudato Si*, 105). Unless science and technology create an ambience of goodness, truth, and values based on conscience towards nature, scientific development is of no use to the humanity and nature.

8.3. On Global Warming

Disturbing global warming results in the constant rise in the sea level and extreme weather events leading to natural catastrophe. A call to recognize the need for changes of life style, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it (*Laudato Si*, 23,24,26, 52) is an urgent need to save this mother earth from its evaporating.

8.4. Environment and Poor

The human environment and the natural environment grow together or deteriorate together. The gravest effects of all attacks on the environment

are suffered by the poorest. Therefore liberation to the poor consists in liberation to the environment from its blatant attacks. (*Laudato Si*, 48). God's desire and design is that the poor always remain blessed in the sight of God (Matt 5:3; Lk 6:20). But the contrary is actualized by the human beings in exact opposition to God's desire and design.

8.5. Environment and Humanity

Humans are the product of nature and environment. In the name of technology, the coexisting link between humanity and environment cannot be forgotten. Renewal of nature demands renewal of humanity. No ecology without an adequate anthropology is possible (*Laudato Si*, 118). Any destruction to ecology is deterioration to human race. Human race is intrinsically connected to nature (Gen 2:7). When humankind is not kind to ecosystems of the nature, there may not be any trace of humankind in future.

9. Conclusion

Church is alive because it adapts, adopts and accommodates to the various situations and needs of the world. Church is not framed within its fences. It rather is flexible, changeable and moveable. The various new ministries that originate in the Church are a witness that Church is a living organism. Its willingness to encourage the new ministries, its openness to evaluate and its ever-growing readiness to support them are the testimony for the broadening vision of the Church.

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Endnotes

- ¹ William R. Burrows, *New Ministries : the Global Context* (Mary Knoll, New York, 1980), 55.
- ² William R. Burrows, *New Ministries : the Global Context*, 5
- ³ Shoki Coe, “In Search of Renewal in Theological Education,” *Theological Educations* 9 (Summer 1973), 238.
- ⁴ William R. Burrows, *New Ministries : the Global Context*, 158.
- ⁵ Conclusions of Hongkong Colloquium as reported in J.Dupius “Ministries in the Church – An Asian Colloquium” *Vidyajyothi* XLI 1977, 249.
- ⁶ Nadini Ghosh ed., *Interrogating Disability in India: Theory and Practice*, (Springer, Kolkata, 2016), 101.
- ⁷ Nadini Ghosh ed., *Interrogating Disability in India: Theory and Practice*, 101.
- ⁸ Fred Dyke, ed.; *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical basis for Environmental Stewardship*, (Inter Varsity Press, Madison 1996), 163.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Fred Dyke, ed.; *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical basis for Environmental Stewardship*, 164.
- ¹² Fred Dyke, ed.; *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical basis for Environmental Stewardship*, 166.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Fred Dyke, ed.; *Redeeming Creation: the Biblical basis for Environmental Stewardship*, 170.