CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Leadership and Management Skills in a Pastoral Context

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> In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists. (Eric Hoffer)

Introduction

This paper sets out to explore what can be learned from contemporary secular experiences and practices of leadership and management for pastoral leadership in the church by clergy and laity. It focuses on the dynamics of the process of leadership and what makes for effective leadership rather than upon the concrete challenges faced by pastoral leaders today as such, though some of these will be examined.

Two objections to this exercise need to be dealt with at the outset. First, resistance to such learning is sometimes mounted on the basis of the unique nature of the church as an institution, and in particular the fact that the church is of divine origin. How can secular experiences of leadership therefore be of any value or relevance to the life of the church?

The reality is that the church is essentially both human and divine.[1] Though instituted by Christ, it nonetheless exists in history and thus 'has the appearance of this world which is passing.' The activity of the church is the activity of men and women, using their God-given gifts and talents in the service of the church's mission. As creatures, our gifts and talents are enhanced and liberated the more in tune with and responsive we are to our Creator; they do not have to be set aside or somehow supplanted in order that God can act in and through us. God's support to us in enhancing and developing our gifts comes in and through the wisdom of the age in which we live and serve.

1. See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 2; *Lumen Gentium* 48; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p 178; Karl Rahner, 'The Church of Sinners' and 'The Sinful Church in the Decrees of Vatican II,' in *Theological Investigations* 6, (London: DLT, 1969).

Indeed, God is co-experienced, co-known and co-loved in our encounter with and response to all created realities, so much so that the term 'secular' is somewhat of a misnomer as it can be a privileged place of graced encounter and response.

It is also the case that the manner in which the Spirit is present to those who exercise leadership in the church is not such as to make unnecessary the process of learning how to do things better, including learning from what is perceived as the secular world. Recently, we have seen, for example, the Catholic Church in Ireland accepting to comply fully, some would argue even obsequiously, with the demands of the state's Health Service Executive in terms of internal ecclesial governance with regard to child protection. Similarly, psychological testing, counselling and personal development courses have become a key part of seminary formation and few today would argue that prayer and spiritual direction, while indispensible, are enough to equip clergy for their pastoral responsibilities.

A second, related objection argues that the church is not a democracy and therefore patterns and principles of governance and leadership which one finds in secular bodies do not apply.[2] Joseph Ratzinger, for instance, has warned against viewing the church as 'a human invention ... which could be reorganised according to the needs of the historical cultural variables of the time'.[3] At the same time, Walter Kasper argues that 'to take up some democratic structural elements and procedures today in a manner both critical and creative' is not simply to pay tribute to the *Zeitgeist* but rather to seek to implement the ecclesiology of Vatican II.[4]

Just as the church in the past adopted a number of feudal and monarchical elements, elements that still persist in the church though long abandoned elsewhere, it is legitimate to explore what contemporary wisdom and insight into leadership and governance can be gleaned from secular society.

2. For a recent debate on this compare Donald Wuerl, in Francis Oakley and Bruce Russett eds, *Governance, Accountability and the Future of the Catholic Church*, (NY: Continuum 2004), 16-18, with Paul Lakeland, *The Liberation of the Laity*, (NY: Continuum, 2003), 207-219.

3. See Ratzinger, 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World', in Herbert Vorgrimler ed, W. J. O'Hara (English trs), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol V, (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 118-119.

4. Walter Kasper, *Leadership in the Church*, (NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 63.

At the same time, we will keep in mind that we are here discerning principles for leadership in the Christian community, for whom Christ remains, 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6), and thus, *the* model of Christian leadership. Maintaining a focus on Christ while considering secular experiences of leadership will not, in fact, be a problem, because what is best in human experience we inevitably also find in Christ.

Who are leaders?

We might begin by asking whether leaders are born or made. Sometimes people who find themselves in leadership positions in the church do not really consider themselves to be leaders and may be somewhat daunted at the demands that the position they hold seems to make of them.

Given the considerable flexibility that exists in most church leadership positions, as well as the absence in some instances of effective systems of accountability, the temptation is to 'reduce' the role to what we are good at, or consider ourselves to be good at, and to 'shelve' the rest or deem it unimportant. It is in the interests of the individual, and of the mission of the Christian community, that those who find themselves in pastoral leadership would begin by asking themselves soberly and honestly if they have the necessary talents and gifts, as well as energy and enthusiasm, to exercise the level of leadership the position requires. The recognition of our giftedness, and the evaluation of how it matches up to the demands of the leadership context, demand a process of prayerful discernment and continual growth in honest self-awareness.

At the same time, we should not underestimate the power of God's grace to draw forth from us in particular circumstances energies, gifts and talents that we did not know or might not have recognised that we possess. Oscar Romero is an example of this. He was considered for most of his life to have been a rather reserved, scholarly, orthodox and devout priest and later bishop, known if anything for his criticism of the more progressive elements in Liberation Theology. Confronted with the horror of the senseless and brutal murder of one of his closest co-workers along with other innocent members of his flock, and unavoidably faced with the suffering of his people, a level of courage and conviction was drawn out of him that became the source of confidence and hope for a whole nation. We can think of many other examples like this.

This brings us to our first leadership attribute: empathy. If this is missing, then all the leadership techniques we might acquire will be useless; if we have the capacity to empathise, then the best leadership techniques will come to us naturally. The Oxford Dictionary defines empathy as 'The power of projecting one's personality into (and fully comprehending) the object of contemplation.' This reads a little too clinically. The sense of 'suffering with' belongs to the etymology of the word. Empathy is about the ability to be disturbed by others; to see as far as is humanly possible, the situation from the perspective of others. It requires gentleness with ourselves, and especially, in the leadership context, with regard to our own projects and ambitions, if others are to be taken seriously and not merely be 'objects' to be integrated into our plans.

From a Christian point of view, we can add two observations. The first is that empathy is fundamentally about love. It is true, as the history of Christian spirituality bears out, that we can only change that which we first love and accept. This is true of ourselves, but also of others. Love alone can heal; love alone can give the confidence to let go; love alone provides the courage to see things differently, or to move forward, as is often the case, when things are anything but clear. It is critical in leadership to bear this in mind: we can only change what we love.

By way of contrast, we know how criticism unless properly mediated can be crippling. In management circles it is recognised that 'negative feedback' in the workplace is only ever effective, and can only really be heard, if it is offered within a context of general respect and mutual regard.

I remember many years ago hearing a very short homily at a priest's ordination by the late Cardinal Basil Hume in which he said simply, but profoundly, that a priest's first responsibility was to love his people. If we are without love, or if we fail to bring love to bear on a particular pastoral task, then, despite all out talents and techniques, we will be, as St Paul said, like 'a gong booming or a cymbal clashing' (1 Cor 13:1). The well known saying from St Augustine, *'Ama, et fac quod vis'* (Love, and do what you will) applies also to leadership.

The challenge, as St John of the Cross noted, is to persist in love when we find ourselves in anything but a loving situation. 'Where you do not find love', he says, 'put in love so that you will draw love out.' In a leadership context where we run up

against conflict and even hostility, the challenge is to avoid reciprocating with hostility, out of a sense of our own vulnerability. The challenge is not to allow one's own empathetic disposition to be altered or constrained by the attitude of the other. To be loving is not to be foolish: there is what is called 'tough love'. Being loving is not to be confused with being 'nice'. But the toughest love of all is an unconditional love that does not allow itself to be limited or determined by the rejection or hostility of another.

We can make a second observation from a Christian point of view. 'Christ plays in ten thousand places' (Gerard Manley Hopkins), and God reveals God's self in the minds and hearts of all God's people. By being empathetic, listening to others, relating to them with respect and with reverence, we also listen to, respect and respond to God's will present and active in their lives.

In summary, then, the first challenge good leaders face is to have sufficient love to accept people and situations as they find them, not in order to leave people and things as they are but in order to create the spirit of acceptance, trust and confidence which allows and enables change to happen.

So what can leaders do to help people to have confidence and trust in their leadership?

Earning People's Confidence and Trust

Most pastoral leaders are appointed rather than elected. The people we work with seldom choose us and are unlikely to be able to get rid of us if they do not like us or if we are doing a bad job. While we may have automatic authority by virtue of our appointment, increasingly our influence and effectiveness are not guaranteed and we have to work hard for these. So what approach to leadership can we take that is likely to earn people's confidence and trust in us?

The first thing to realise is that earning confidence takes time and effort and is not to be confused with being considered popular or being liked. For instance, we can have confidence in people in leadership positions whom we do not particularly like but nonetheless whom we consider to be doing a good job. The following approaches are helpful in terms of building confidence:

• *'Not lording it over them'*

It is very important to make time to meet with those whom we work, informally as well as formally, and to meet with them in circumstances where they feel comfortable to communicate freely.

We have all had the experience of being summoned by our 'boss' to his/her office. Whether intended or not, from the very outset there is a built in sense of the 'superior' meeting the 'inferior'. Little things like not revealing in advance what the meeting is about, making contact through a secretary or by email rather than personally, sitting behind a desk, all tend to reinforce the boss's authority. We may be told in such circumstances that we are free to speak our minds but it is likely to be the last thing we would feel safe to do. Meetings in such circumstances tend to breed fear and compliance rather than build trust and confidence. At least twice in the New Testament, Christians are admonished not to 'lord it' over those entrusted to them (See Matthew 20:25 and 1 Peter 5:3).

Formal meetings have their place in working relationships and are unavoidable. At the same it is important to make time to meet with those we lead apart from formal agendas, and in an environment and context in which they feel comfortable and secure. It can be invaluable simply to drop in to people's offices, to enquire how their work is going, to show interest and openness with regard to their tasks. We usually learn more from such informal interaction than from formal meetings. We also build relationships and foster trust and confidence. Given that pastoral leaders seldom have formal means of receiving feedback, in such circumstances people also feel more confident to tell us things we need to hear.

• *Offering a clear sense of direction*

It is very important for leaders to get the balance right between, on the one hand, offering a clear sense of vision and direction, and, on the other, doing this in such a way that people feel invited and empowered to become involved and give of their best. I have heard this described as 'the light grip on the throat' approach.

• *The willingness to take responsibility*

It is important to be willing to take responsibility for one's decisions as a leader, and not to seek to hide behind those with whom we work. Good leaders will take responsibility not only

for their own mistakes but also for the mistakes of their team members. This is only fair, as they usually get the credit when their team is successful. Good team leaders will promise their team members that they will stand by them, and protect them from criticism or rebuke. However, leaders can legitimately ask in return for a commitment to be kept fully informed of what is going on, and especially of any difficulties or problems. It is not fair if leaders first hear of these from a third party. Shirking responsibility, criticising openly or blaming others, especially those with whom one works, utterly undermines confidence in a leader.

• *The toleration of failure*

The gospel urges us to be forgiving and so we could expect that in Christian leadership contexts there would be a high tolerance of failure, but this is not always the case. Entrepreneurs are generally successful because they have a high tolerance for failure. It is important to be able to forgive quickly one's own mistakes and failings as well as those of others. It is also important to have strategies in place in order to learn from failures and integrate such experiences into future planning. Leaders who cope well with their own failures and those of others are more readily trusted than those who appear never to make mistakes or who think that admitting to mistakes and failures is a sign of weakness.

A culture in which failure can readily be admitted is important so that there is no tendency to cover-up, and mistakes can quickly be identified and rectified. A tolerance of failure is also important in order to encourage creativity and risk-taking. It is important, especially in a time of transition, that leaders have created a context in which people on the ground feel free to explore solutions to emerging problems and do not fear criticism or punishment if they get things wrong.

The toleration of failure is important for another reason: most learning in life is stumbled upon through trial and error; it is rarely predicted or planned.

As a leader, sometimes it is important to let failures go without comment; to trust that people themselves will deal with the situation. There is a place for occasional benign neglect, provided it is not just avoidance of conflict on one's own part.

• *Follow-through*

Confidence and trust depend upon a leader's ability to honour decisions made or else explain honestly why they are not being

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Confidence and trust depend upon a leader's ability to honour decisions made or else explain honestly why they are not being

followed through on. Building confidence requires consistent implementation even of small commitments undertaken.

In conclusion of this section, it takes serious work to earn sufficient trust to bring people with you, and an investment of personal time and resources which is easy to underestimate. In what follows, we will examine approaches to working together that are particularly important in the effective leadership of others.

What Working Together Takes

• *Leading, not just managing*

The importance of recognising the difference between leading and not just managing is well noted in leadership theory. Whereas those with management responsibilities do not necessarily have to be leaders, leaders have to be both able to lead and, at times, in order to follow through on projects and commitments, to manage effectively both people and resources.

As Peter Drucker, author of the famous *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, puts it, managers are entrusted the task of asking the 'how' and the 'what' questions, whereas leaders must also ask 'why' and 'when'. A manager, when examining a ladder placed against a wall will ask how high it is, consider if it is safely positioned and strong enough for the task in hand, and so on. A leader will also consider the more basic matter of whether or not the ladder is lying against the correct wall and ask if this is the right time to start using it. Managers set out to do things right; leaders, to do the right thing.

• *Communication*

Most experiences of working together that go well have excellent communication as their basis, and most projects that fail identify weak communication as the cause. Poor communication fosters distrust which in turn demotivates people and makes it easy for them to detach or disassociate from a project. Good leaders ensure that those for whom they are responsible never hear important information second-hand or inappropriately. Really important information should be given directly, and not even by email, letter or phone, so that questions can be asked and difficulties raised and addressed immediately.

It is also important for those who exercise leadership not to 'surprise' their superiors or to leave them to hear important information about their work from others. There are no compelling

reasons as to why principles of freedom of information that apply in state organisations should not also apply in the church. People have a right to the timely dissemination of all information that pertains to them and this practice should characterise our working together in pastoral contexts. But communication is more than about the exchange of information: it is about a quality of presence to one another that is marked by mutual respect at the service of a common goal.

• *Unity, not uniformity*

It is tempting, but ultimately damaging to most projects, only to recruit people to a team who see things more or less as we do; to choose only those we think we will best get on with or be able to 'handle' – variations on the 'safe pair of hands' syndrome that very often characterises the church's way of doing business. We should not underestimate or be fearful of our own ability to lead a challenging team. A united team of people with diverse views is likely to be much more creative and visionary than a team comprised of people with uniform perspectives.

•*Trusting people*

It is important to strike a balance between, on the one hand, avoiding micro-managing, and on the other, delegating to the extent that we lose oversight.

We have all had the experience of working with people who simply cannot let go of responsibility for particular aspects of a project. Leaders who engage in micro-management may well be paying too little attention to 'the bigger picture', or be missing it altogether. They may well be compensating for their lack of vision or for the fact that they have lost oversight of what is going on.

Most people work best when they have delegated responsibility; when they experience being trusted; when they enjoy some freedom with regard to how they fulfil their responsibilities; when they operate within agreed procedures for accountability.

The Catholic principle of subsidiarity can be applied here: matters are best handled in the first instance at the lowest possible level of organisation. At the same time it is important to distinguish between delegating responsibilities on the one hand, and abdicating responsibility on the other. Leaders should have interest in all aspects of the work in hand and remain sufficiently informed so as to be able to co-ordinate and direct as required.

• *Clarity regarding decision-making*

People on pastoral councils often complain that they are given the impression that a decision is being taken jointly until it turns out not to be the decision that 'Father' wants, and then it emerges that they were only really being consulted. We cannot expect to be happy with every decision taken by our leaders or by teams of which we are a member, but we are entitled to be happy with how decisions are made and reassured that the decision-making process is clear and fair.

As leaders, we need to distinguish between situations in which we are consulting people, but taking responsibility ourselves for the decision and its implementation; and situations in which we are sharing the decision-making, and consequently responsibility for the decision, with others. The 'buy-in' we can reasonably expect of people differs in both of these situations: people feel a greater sense of identity with and responsibility for decisions which they themselves have taken.

• *Time management*

Usually when we think of the resources a project might need, we think in terms of finance, equipment, etc. However, the key resource in any project is always people and the time which they are able to put at the disposal of the project. Employees and volunteers in any organisation can have differing levels of commitment and different expectations, and careful management with regard to both is needed.

We usually underestimate the amount of people's time a project requires. It is a key leadership responsibility to ensure that people are clear from the beginning regarding the level of time and commitment expected of them, tempted as we might be to fudge this at the outset in order to win their co-operation. Understandably, people become resentful if they find out that we have deliberately understated the amount of work a project requires.

In managing our own time as leaders it is a constant struggle to rise above the 'fire-fighting'; to ensure that important issues are not neglected as we deal with what presents itself as urgent and in need of immediate attention. The challenge is to work 'smart, not hard'. If we ourselves or fulltime employees reporting to us cannot accomplish the work expected within a normal working day and instead have to work evenings and weekends over an extended period, something is wrong and a review is

needed. Such a situation is unsustainable and burnout or meltdown will inevitably result.

• *Valuing what people do*
It is important to know what people actually do, and also to acknowledge it. In general, church leaders are good at saying thank you and at publicly acknowledging the work of volunteers as well as professionals. But valuing what someone does is not just about saying thank you or giving plaudits publicly. It is about actually integrating people's work into the vision and planning; it is about taking their contribution seriously and allowing it to be influential, even if we are not always or necessarily fully in agreement with what they have achieved.

• *Dealing with middle-managers*
In large leadership contexts, the leadership of 'middle-managers' is always considered particularly challenging. In the church we are talking here, for instance, about parish priests. Generally speaking, these are people who, in career terms, have reached a plateau, or some would say, a ceiling. As a result, they may feel frustrated and resentful. They may also have more vested in maintaining the *status quo* and in avoiding change and innovation than others. The existing system has brought them this far and it is at least uncertain that significant change would bring them any further. In fact, younger more flexible people might well be more likely to benefit from a changed working environment.

Dealing with middle managers poses a particular leadership challenge. Very often, middle managers have learned to tell superiors what they think they want to hear and they tend to sieve out any information that they think might be unwelcome. This is a communications challenge that needs to be addressed.

The first task is to earn their confidence. It is important to listen to them and to be prepared to learn from them. Insofar as they are dealing with people 'on the ground', their input is vital. Many of them will have been in middle-management roles for several years and will have immense experience. It is important to support them, to give them voice and to back them up when appropriate.

It is also important that leaders make clear to them that they value hearing the truth and in fact expect to hear it from them. In terms of helping them to 'buy in' to change, it is vital that they are helped to see that they will have a valued and valuable role

to play in the changed environment, one for which they are already well qualified and have sufficient experience, or else for which they will be resourced with appropriate training. It is also important to ensure that their basic human needs will be met regarding a sense of security in their work, a sense of identity in their role, and so on.

Above all it is important to build up with them and among them a sense of being part of a team with a shared responsibility. It is important to share with them how change is expected to improve things; how it will benefit not only them but also those they serve.

Insofar as many middle managers will have often already experienced failed attempts at restructuring and change in the past, it is important to build in measurable goals marking progress in implementation, and to be consistent in terms of follow-through.

No one should be appointed parish priest without some formal training. Those already parish priests should be fully involved in the making of decisions that affect them. At the same time the attitude that 'what is there will see me out' should be considered totally unacceptable. As long as parish priests hold office they are responsible not only for the community's present situation but its future also.

• *Dealing with conflict*

One of the most difficult things for those in leadership, and perhaps especially in the church, is to deal with conflict. We are not good at it. We frequently let things slide and avoid confrontation for as long as possible. Then, when avoidance no longer works and we have to act, we take the least painful way, which is usually the least personal way, of dealing with the issue, thus maximising the hurt and damage caused.

Very often when conflict arises there has, in fact, been some fault on both sides. As a leader I may not have seen things coming that I should have; I may have avoided dealing with an issue when I should have and when it was more manageable. The key is to act early. If trust and quality communication characterises working relationships then it should be possible to address and resolve matters before they get out of hand.

In dealing with a conflict situation the first criterion needed is honesty, both with oneself and with others. If we expect others to acknowledge culpability we have to be prepared to do so ourselves.

In many pastoral work contexts, especially where the state has influence, there will be guidelines for dealing formally and informally with conflict situations.

It is important to keep things in perspective, not to exaggerate, and to remain factual. Insofar as possible it is also important to distinguish between the person, and the role which they have to play in the exercise of which conflict has arisen. It is also important to accept that dealing with conflict is part of one's own leadership role and to get on with it.

• *Evaluation and Accountability*

Most dioceses and religious orders in the country will have a 'family history' of failed pastoral initiatives, and in many cases this has bred a cynicism that holds back contemporary attempts at renewal. Seldom are formal evaluations of pastoral projects conducted regardless of whether they are deemed successful or otherwise. Evaluation is important for a number of reasons: it may identify problems that can still be addressed; it gives all those involved or affected by initiatives an opportunity to voice their opinions; it can provide important information with regard to future planning. Evaluation is not something to be appended at the end of a project. It should be planned for and integrated into the project from the very beginning.

Accountability in the church has traditionally been understood only vertically or hierarchically – that is, the priest to his bishop, the bishop to the pope, the pope to God.

In the first instance we are always individually accountable to ourselves; to the standards and the expectations which we have set for ourselves. In the final instance, we are accountable to God in Christ. In between these, however, along with vertical accountability there is also room for horizontal accountability, that is, accountability to those with whom we work and those whom we serve. All those who invest in a project, whether through their time or through making resources available, all those affected by our efforts have a right to be kept informed of what is happening and to be given an opportunity to inform us of their views.

We will now look at the distinctive leadership challenges of leading change.

Leading change

Generally, people speak of two different approaches to change. Innovative change is where we 'dream the dream'. This is where we imagine a desirable future and develop strategies to attain it, only considering subsequently the limitations imposed by our starting-point or the present situation. In this context people like first to explore all the possible options, moving then to consideration of which options are preferable, and only then considering those that are most probable or likely given the limitations of the situation.

The contrasting approach is perhaps the more familiar and is known as conservative change. This is an approach to change which considers first and foremost where we are now and aims at reinforcing or re-establishing what was the *status quo*. The only changes envisaged are those which will restore the situation to what it was. Whereas the emphasis in the former, innovative change, is on discontinuity, the emphasis in the latter, conservative change, is on continuity.

In the church we are most familiar with conservative change, and most institutionally-led 'innovations' are in fact exercises in conservative change. Included here, for example, is the recent introduction in Ireland of the permanent diaconate which, no matter how theologically and sacramentally we might wish it to be otherwise, practically speaking and in the present context will have the effect of providing a limited reserve priesthood akin to the reserve police force. It would be worth reflecting on whether or not the clustering of parishes is also a form of conservative change. Is the matter of the radical transformation, and in some cases, breakdown of community, and the emergence of new forms of community, not just geographic but virtual, being sufficiently considered in pastoral planning? Is the driving issue meeting the canonical requirement of a priest pastor for each parish in face of dwindling and ageing clergy?

Few of us really relish change, and the reality is that conservative change is always more appealing than its more innovative counterpart. Generally, we only change significantly when we have to, either because of compelling external circumstances or because the situation in which we find ourselves is too painful to be allowed to continue.

The pastoral leader has a number of tasks specifically with regard to change. The first is to anticipate it and not wait until it

simply becomes inevitable and something that has to be undertaken in panic or under undue pressure. It is helpful in this context to point out to people that in the rapidly changing world to which the church must respond, the choice is not between changing and not changing. The only choice is between choosing and directing change, and allowing changes to overtake us and force themselves upon us. When we pause to reflect, we know this to be true of our own personal lives. To live is to change, however reluctantly, and it is preferable freely to choose change than always finding ourselves having to change led by others and under pressure.

The leader must also discern courageously whether in particular circumstances innovative or conservative change is required, and bring people through a process of discernment in this regard. In the pastoral context, the fear around innovative change, with its emphasis on discontinuity, is that we would end up being unfaithful to an aspect of the church's core mission and identity. The issue is not, however, one of having to choose between being faithful or unfaithful. It is more complex. It is to discern carefully that to which we are obliged to remain faithful and then to undertake the changes that are necessary in order to remain faithful.

The New Testament is full of examples both of conservative and innovative change undertaken as the nascent Christian community sought to establish itself between what was experienced as the conflicting demands of continuity with its Jewish roots and the needs of Gentile converts. As Peter Neuner, for instance, has pointed out:

> In the encounter with Hellenism, Christianity was challenged by new questions and problems with which the earliest community had not yet been confronted and which Jesus himself had not yet given an answer. These questions were new and the answer was given to them in faithfulness to the tradition in a creative process.[5]

The scripture scholar Peter Schmidt, has pointed out that:

> ... the 'will of God' does not impose any pre-existing and already fixed structural mould on history. Rather, a particular

5. 'Ministry in the Church:Changing Idenity' in Jan Kerkhofs, ed, *Europe Without Priests* (London: SCM, 1995), 129.

> development was accepted as the best translation of the gospel in certain circumstances in the church and it was therefore read as the historical expression of God's will (as tradition). An eternal immutability of structural forms is not part of this attitude of trust in the original inspiration – preparing a covenantal people for God.[6]

In the church today there is a real danger that we would be faithful to particular forms which the ministry of the church once took but which now are in danger of betraying the church's mission.

Sometimes fear is the problem. We know from scripture that there is no fear in love, that perfect love overcomes all fears (1 John 4:18). But our love is seldom perfect and our fears often imprison us, including the fear of infidelity. The parable of the talents is worth considering in this context (Matthew 25:14-30). This is not a parable about entrepreneurship; Jesus was not interested in how many talents the men managed to make. He was more interested in the fact that they had the courage to risk losing what they had. The message is that fear is the opposite of faith and trust and though disciples have to be aware of their fears, they should not be paralysed by them. Faith is all about risk-taking. It is about trusting that even in failure we are held and loved by God. This is why leaders who take their Christian faith seriously, regardless of whether they are working in the church or in industry, should be up there among their very best because of the liberating and empowering love of God in Christ which is freely given to them.

The parable of the talents is potentially a quite harsh judgement on us. As pastoral leaders we have to be vigilant that our personal fears, fears perhaps about how we might cope or be found wanting in a very changed pastoral situation, do not cause us to run away from necessary change under the guise of a false fidelity. Or it could well be plain laziness that underpins our loyalty to the *status quo*.

There are a number of what are sometimes referred to as 'lubricants' of change, factors or approaches that can be taken, which facilitate change, and which are helpful to bear in mind:

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6. 'Ministries in the New Testament and Early Church', in Jan Kerkhofs *Europe Without Priests*, 45

- The first is to allow for the reality of a sense of grief at the loss of the familiar. All the stages of grief apply when people come to realise that the *status quo* is no longer tenable and that change is inevitable, and dealing with grief takes time. Unacknowledged grief can breed negativity and stifle new initiatives.
- In order to bring people along, it is important to communicate fully what is going on, and to ensure, insofar as is possible, that the purpose and the implications of the changes are clear.
- It is also important to make changes incrementally and at a pace most people can follow.

Prayer and Attentiveness

Each of the synoptic gospels warns against gaining the world at the cost of losing our souls (Matthew 16.26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25). In pastoral leadership, the end is not just important but the means as well. The manner of our working together, and not just the task we set out to achieve, should witness to the kingdom and mark its in-breaking in our midst.

The story is told of a bishop who had, as his episcopal motto, 'God is my helper'. It was joked that this was precisely the problem: the bishop saw God as *his* helper. Personal prayer and reflection, as well as occasional prayer together as a pastoral team, is necessary not only to keep us on track but also to keep us in our place.

The emphasis in recent writings on ministry is to see ministers as 'active receivers'. On the one hand, this emphasises that God's kingdom discloses itself as gift in our midst; we do not produce it by our efforts. At the same time we are 'active' receivers: we are called to be enthusiastic co-creators with God, energetic co-workers in the vineyard.

The paper began by emphasising the centrality of empathy and love. We can only change what or whom we love. This includes ourselves. We can only change if we first know ourselves to be loved and accepted as we are. This sense of being loved comes to us in prayer. We also come to know this in and through relationships with others, both our family and friends, as well as those with whom we work. David Steindl-Rast has said that the more we are alive and awake the more everything we do becomes prayer. Attentiveness and deliberateness in our daily interactions and taking time to reflect on our actions can play a big part in our growth as leaders.

Conclusion

Until the recent past, pastoral leadership was the preserve of the clergy, working together occasionally but on their own much of the time. Very occasionally, lay people were entrusted with particular tasks and responsibilities. The situation today is much different. Increasingly lay people hold full-time and part-time posts in the church and more people are becoming involved on a voluntary basis. It is important that the working context is as human, wholesome and mature as possible, not only for the success of particular projects but also because of the nature of the church as the sacrament of Christ to the world.

In the past, clerical culture appeared on the surface at least to provide fraternal support and encouragement, and no doubt in many instances did so. At the same time we have to acknowledge that all too often a shallow and superficial bonhomie masked the fact that genuine communication among priests was poor and co-operation minimal. It is important today that priests find support among fellow clergy and that they have a clear sense of their own distinctive role and identity. This, however, cannot be established at the cost of developing a vibrant and supportive working relationship among the new teams of diverse people who are being commissioned to work in the vineyard of the Lord.