Toward a Fundamental Theology of Ministry

Kathleen A. Cahalan

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, kcahalan@csbsju.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/sot_pubs

Part of the Practical Theology Commons

Recommended Citation

Toward a Fundamental Theology of Ministry

The character of Catholic ministry has changed dramatically over the past 50 years and the historical, social, demographic, and economic realities of Catholic ministry have been exhaustively researched and explained. Nearly every article and book on contemporary Catholicism cites the same statistics about ordained and lay ministers. But because the theological foundations for our understanding of ministry do not match its current reality, theologians are working to articulate an understanding of ministry that is both faithful to the tradition and inclusive of ideas developing in ecclesiology, biblical and patristic studies, and systematic theology.

Thomas O'Meara O.P. has been an important voice in developing a fundamental theology of ministry more consistent with present realities. He defines ministry as “doing something, for the advent and presence of the Kingdom of God, in public, on behalf of a Christian community, as a gift received in faith, baptism, ordination, and as an activity with its own limits and identity existing within a diversity of ministerial actions.”1 Four features of this definition of ministry are especially noteworthy.

First, O'Meara claims that ministry is a verb, an action, best understood biblically and historically as a service rendered by someone for another. Second, O'Meara locates ministry as a theological and ecclesial reality prior to distinctions about the office of the minister. An important shift is the emphasis on baptism as ministry's foundational sacrament, the ground of ordination and lay ecclesial reality. From a common base, the distinctions in roles and identities can be made.2

Third, O'Meara specifies how and in what ways ministry is distinct from Christian acts of charity, mercy, and service. Not all Christian activity is necessarily ministry, but because theologies of ministry increasingly are anchored in baptism, it is necessary to distinguish between what ministers do as ministry from the other acts of the baptized. For O'Meara, the Christian life is broad and serves as a “backdrop to ministry” that is effectively a sign pointing to a deeper reality, though not always specific, intelligible, and readily known. Ministry makes the sign explicit in terms of “a public voice and action directly for the Kingdom.”3 There should be no mistaking what a minister is doing when he or she is doing ministry: they make the Kingdom of God explicit through speech and act.

Fourth, O'Meara begins with a phenomenology of ministry, charting historical and social shifts that have opened up and changed how ministry is practiced and by whom.4 O'Meara is one of many Catholic theologians who see in the recent changes the movement of the Holy Spirit: neither a council nor ecclesial documents nor theological ideas launched the changes we see evident today in every U.S. parish and diocese. According to O'Meara the enduring aspect of ministry is the presence of the Holy Spirit, providing continuity with the ministry of Jesus and the early community. What changes over time is the way ministry is implemented, because all ministry takes place in particular historical and cultural settings.


O'Meara, 145.

Members of the Collegeville Ministry Seminar support a similar idea: “theologies of ministry must begin with an experiential description of ministry today,” Wood, 256.

Kathleen A. Cahalan


3 Susan Wood, Richard Gaillardetz and Edward Hahnenberg each argue that rites of ordination, commissioning, and installation reposition the baptized believer in relationship to the community as minister. The concept of “ordered

Kathleen A. Cahalan
O'Meara’s work can be further advanced because his definition opens up the possibility for greater precision and expansion. Ministry is “doing something,” but what does that doing entail? Understanding the doing can help us understand how ministry is both related to the Christian life and distinct from it, and can give greater specificity to O’Meara’s claim that there is something enduring about ministry that arises from the Spirit active in community. Like many authors today, his primary focus is the theology of the minister, and not a theology of the doing of ministry. While O’Meara links baptism to ministry in order to explore a foundational theology of the minister, his distinction between ministers and members of the Christian community does not explore either the identity and vocation of the baptized as disciples of Jesus Christ and how ministry arises from the reality of discipleship, or the advent of specialized roles and professionalization of ministry.

I intend to advance a fundamental theology of ministry by interpreting ministry in relationship to Christian discipleship. I will expand O’Meara’s definition of ministry by responding to these four issues: 1) How has specialization in ministry shaped the vocation and work of ministers today? 2) What is the “doing” that constitutes ministry? 3) How is that doing related to the reality of baptism, the baptized life of being disciples of Christ? 4) How can answers to these questions contribute to a fundamental theology of ministry?

To begin I employ O’Meara’s phenomenology of ministry to briefly describe a prevailing reality in ministry today that is unexamined by most theologians: specialization. I then turn to seven aspects of discipleship in relationship to the key features of ministry (teaching, worship, preaching, pastoral care, prophecy/social ministry, and administration). I conclude with a revised definition of ministry that incorporates this understanding of Christian discipleship.

AN OVERLOOKED PHENOMENON: SPECIALIZATION IN MINISTRY

Specialization in ministry is so commonplace that we hardly notice. Prior to the Second Vatican Council Catholics would distinguish the work of the priest (primarily sacramental) from that of religious women and men (teaching, nursing or social ministry). But from the end of the Council to today ministry has become a highly differentiated field in the parish as well as in schools, hospitals, and universities. Many large parishes employ staff to oversee some specific aspect of parish life such as faith formation, liturgy, music, youth ministry, social justice and outreach, pastoral care, and the now emerging role of the business or parish administrator. Advertisements seek ministers qualified in each of these roles and it seems rare that a minister trained in one “area” crosses over to apply for a position in another. The minister with ten years’ experience in faith formation would not be considered qualified for a position in liturgy.

Why have specialized ministry roles developed and expanded? First, the body of knowledge related to all areas of ministry has exploded over the past century. Academic disciplines have risen in relation to each area of ministry, so that catechesis, liturgy, pastoral care, and preaching each constitute a discipline. Along with disciplinary identity and expertise, ministry has witnessed the development of academic and professional organizations, each with their own national and regional conferences, academic and professional journals, as well as the offering of degrees at both the masters and doctorate level, including doctor of ministry and philosophy degrees. The field of catechesis, for instance, has several journals for practitioners (Catechist, Liturgical Catechesis), professional organizations (National Conference for Catechetical Leadership, National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association, National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry), as well as journals and organizations for scholars (Religious Education, and the Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education). Catechists and faith formation directors can be certified according to the

5 The list is drawn from the most common forms of parish ministry as cited in Philip J. Murnion and David De Lambo, Parishes and Parish Ministers: A Study of Parish Lay Ministry (New York: National Pastoral Life Center 1999) 48.

6 “An academic discipline is a branch of knowledge which is formally taught, either at the university, or via some other such method. Functionally, disciplines are usually defined and recognized by the academic journals in which research is published, and the learned societies to which their practitioners belong.” See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_discipline. It is also common to refer to the areas of ministry as sub-disciplines under the umbrella of pastoral or practical theology.
There have been at least three positive developments related to the growth of knowledge and the development of disciplines, or sub-disciplines in pastoral theology, related to ministry. First is a theoretical base that draws on biblical and theological sources to balance the social science theories that help to explain human dimensions of knowledge, affect and social behavior. Liturgical studies draws heavily on anthropological research on ritual, homiletics turns to communication theory, pastoral care has had a long-standing conversation with several branches of psychology, and so on.

The second positive outcome is that the status of ministry as a profession, judged by university standards and academic criteria, has enhanced each field as an area of study. University divinity schools and seminaries hire professors in pastoral care or liturgy; likewise free-standing seminaries have conformed to university academic requirements for curriculum and faculty. If theological education had not moved into the modern university and ministry become a professional area of study, the knowledge base would have developed differently, probably in narrow and parochial ways.

The third positive aspect is the impact that specialized knowledge has had on the practice of ministry. In important ways, the minister's knowledge and skills are distinctive and can claim a unique public place within the "helping" professions: ministers, counselors, teachers, and social workers may draw on a similar body of knowledge, but each is distinct in the way it uses that knowledge and the rationale for doing so. Not just anyone can preach, or lead worship, or teach the faith, but only those who have acquired special knowledge and skill through accepted and legitimate sources. A minister is viewed as a professional who is accomplished in these areas and able to lead a faith community or some aspect of its life together. One reason that many lay ecclesial ministers are seeking advanced degrees is related to the specialized and professional roles they can acquire. The job market also demands it: parishes are larger than ever and effective ministry demands leaders with highly developed knowledge and skills.

For all that is positive about the expanding knowledge base, specialization has other consequences that can be perilous for ministry. It can lead to narrow understandings of ministerial identity and vocation that play themselves out in less than helpful ways in the local church. It can also distort theological education. Worst of all, it can lead to a fractured and incomplete understanding of ministry. What are the symptoms of these dangers?

Ministers can overly identify with one practice of ministry because they are hired for a particular role in a particular context. A catechist, pastoral counselor, or school administrator may come to view their particular practice as so pre-eminent it becomes disconnected from the other practices over time. Because the role and setting strongly determine the ministry, ministers may fail to see the ways in which catechetical ministry or pastoral care encompasses all aspects of ministry, not just specialization in a particular area. In other words, to what extent does the catechist understand his or her ministry to include pastoral care with parishioners or students, and when does the pastoral counselor take time to catechize a hospital patient and family? Further, how does the liturgist play a role in catechizing the parish and how is preaching related to prophecy and the administration of the community's resources?

Specialized knowledge can heighten a sense that because one's expertise lies in a particular area, one's ability in other areas is

---

7 Specialization within religious education is also a feature of the field. Boston College offers a masters degree in religious education with a concentration in "total community catechesis" or "high school religion teaching," or a masters in education in educational administration. The school also offers a doctorate in theology and education. Similar examples of practitioner and academic journals, organizations, and degree programs can be found in the area of liturgy and worship, primarily at Catholic institutions, and preaching, and pastoral care, primarily at Protestant institutions. The area of social ministry/mission and administration are less developed areas of ministry education and professionalization.

8 William May identifies three characteristics of a profession: to profess something in terms of a body of knowledge, on behalf of someone or some institution, and in the setting of shared colleagues. According to May, to profess means to "testify on behalf of," "to stand for," or to "avow" — a profession defines one's fundamental commitment, a covenant that shapes and constrains the practitioner. See William F. May, Belaegured Rulers: The Public Obligation of the Professional (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 2001) 1-14.
limited. We see this in the profession of medicine, where the orthopedic surgeon who specializes in knees will not (or cannot) answer a question about neck pain. Both doctors are in orthopedic medicine but only treat one joint. But do we want ministers whose primary identity is with one aspect of ministry and not with ministry as a whole? "I'm a preacher, go see the administrator about that question." Or "I'm a chaplain; you need a liturgist to plan the service." (I once heard a group of ministry students say they would not plan a liturgy because none of them were liturgists.) A minister may feel that "I cannot encroach on other aspects of ministry because I lack that expertise," or tend to embrace other areas of ministry through the lens of their own specialty: "As a catechist, I teach about liturgy and social justice."

In the worst cases, specialization leads to competition between ministers and ministries—office space, parish resources, the attention of the pastor, or the priorities of the parish council. Parishes also can become overly identified with one aspect of their ministry—the church with great liturgy but an under-developed social justice program, or the "social justice" parish with little or no catechesis, or the community with great preaching but little pastoral care for its members.

Specialization has had an impact on theological education as well as parish life. In the 1960s and 1970s schools began offering masters degrees in religious education or liturgy for the growing number of people seeking advanced education in ministry, first religious women and then lay persons. Today most graduate programs for lay ministers offer a masters degree in pastoral studies or ministry (88), many with specialization in religious education, liturgy, or spirituality; or a masters in religious education (49); there are a smaller number Master of Divinity degree programs (22), and degrees in spirituality (12) and pastoral counseling (5).9 Students may become overly identified with a particular area and fail to be educated broadly in ministry. Specialized degree programs certainly should not be eliminated, but they should first attend to the broad practice of ministry, the ways in which the areas are related to each other, and how specialized practice reflects all aspects of ministry.

Seminaries can become overly specialized in one or two areas, and fail to keep the areas in balance.10 Ministry faculty resist teaching in several "fields" because they have been trained in one area, yet few faculties can afford to hire a full-time faculty person in each area of pastoral theology.11 Curriculums reflect the expertise and specialization of the faculty, shaping the understanding of ministry imparted to students.

Grounding specialized ministries in a fundamental theology of ministry is particularly important for younger students with little theological background, limited experience and formation in an ecclesial community, and limited exposure to ministry.12 Students can lack a broad perspective on ministry—what it is as a whole and fail to see the parts related to the whole. There is a danger of coming in through one door (e.g., campus ministry or RCIA or parish social justice program), and leaving through it. Ministers need a vocation rooted in the whole of ministry and must be prepared and educated to lead the Christian community from that perspective. Young adults preparing for ministry will likely be called upon to fulfill several ministerial roles in any one parish position; they will also likely change roles over time.

Specialization and professionalization are new realities in Catholic ministry and we need more information on both their positive and negative features. We have been so concerned to define the theologies of the ordained and lay ecclesial minister

---


10 Seminaries contribute to the problem. I served as a visiting professor at Christian Theological Seminary where pastoral care has had a long and central role in the curriculum, with five full-time faculty in the area, a masters degree as well as a Doctor of Ministry degree. The area far outnumbered faculty in catechesis, worship and preaching, each of which had one faculty person. At Saint John's in Collegeville where I currently teach, liturgy has been an important part of our heritage: currently we have four faculty in liturgy but we rely on adjunct professors to teach pastoral care and catechesis.


that this widespread reality in ministry has skipped in under the theological radar.

CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP AS THE FOUNDATION FOR MINISTRY

An analysis of specialization in ministry leads to the question of vocation. To what is the minister called? A great deal of emphasis is placed on vocation in relationship to the person of the minister (i.e., vocation to priesthood, the diaconate, or lay ecclesial ministry), but vocation also relates to the work that is done by the minister. Vocation to ministry is first a call to the whole of ministry, and only second to one of its parts or roles.

To understand the whole of ministry and the charisms necessary to fulfill its tasks, we begin not with ministry but with Christian discipleship. Baptism initiates a person into the Christian community, "configures us to Christ, incorporates us into the Body of Christ and initiates us into ecclesial relations." Baptism is the "most fundamental ordering of the Church" and "we assume our place in the order of the Church according to our state in life and the charisms we bring for the upbuilding of the community and Christian discipleship." This reordering of personhood and identity is the fundamental reality of the Christian life shared by all Christians.

The life Christians are initiated into is the life of discipleship. Ministry arises out of the Christian life, is directed toward it, and acts in its service. It does not give rise to the Christian life. Discipleship precedes all forms of ministry. Ministers run the danger of thinking that discipleship is something they form or make through teaching, preaching, and counseling. Ministers shape, form, guide, sustain, challenge, teach, nurture, mediate, and facilitate the reality of discipleship as they find it in the community where they serve. The vocation to ministry entails the call to understand, interpret and heed the demands of Christian discipleship for the entire community.

It is surprising that discipleship is missing from definitions of ministry today, including O’Meara’s. Most definitions, like

O’Meara’s, point to the Kingdom of God as the prevailing theological reality related to ministry. By emphasizing the Kingdom or Reign of God, most theologians have attempted to place the church within a broader theological reality, both as eschatological promise and as in-breaking reality that guides and critiques the church. But placing the Kingdom of God within definitions of ministry can associate ministry with bringing about the Kingdom, though this is not what is meant by O’Meara and others. In fact, most claim that ministry does not build up or bring about the Kingdom, as the Kingdom is a gift and reality of God’s creation. Ministry is best understood in relationship to discipleship, as the baptized believer’s response to God’s reign in the here and now and in the future.

Discipleship, then, is the primary goal of ministry. Ministry arises from Christian discipleship and is present in the community to serve discipleship. The community of disciples, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, calls forth ministers to lead, guide, and assist each person and the community as a whole, in that way of life. Ministers do not serve the laity — ministers serve disciples for the sake of discipleship.

IDENTIFYING FEATURES OF DISCIPLESHIP

What is discipleship and what are its distinct features? I understand discipleship to have seven identifying characteristics, seven basic practices or ways-of-being in the world that are rooted in Jesus’ ministry and the early community’s response. Though states, “Ministry is rooted in the Holy Spirit; there is a distinction between general and particular ministry; all ministry is functional, that is, for the benefit of others, not primarily for the benefit of the minister; and ultimately all ministry is for the sake of the Kingdom of God, which is the object of the Church’s mission.” Richard P. McBrien, Ministry: A Theological, Pastoral Handbook (San Francisco: Harper & Row 1987) 22. Groome states, “Thus the metapurpose of all Christian ministry is to serve the reign of God as portrayed and catalyzed in history by Jesus the Christ. Christian ministry must carry on Jesus’ mission of doing and bringing others to do God’s will ‘on earth as it is in heaven’ (Matt 6:10). Ministry is to help realize the fullness of life that God wills for all and the values of God’s reign in every arena of life, on every level of existence, for here and hereafter.” Thomas Groome, Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry (San Francisco: Harper 1991) 300.

Kathleen A. Cahalan
several aspects of discipleship can be discerned in the New Testament, it is important to emphasize that discipleship is one, and that to be a disciple involves living out one’s baptismal identity in and through a range of words and deeds. Disciple is clearly the most prevalent term to identify followers of Jesus; it is mentioned 260 times in the gospels and Acts. It means a “follower of a great leader,” a “believer in Christ,” and “one who follows after” or “one who learns.” Though I am highlighting seven features of discipleship, others may see more or combine features of discipleship in other ways.

Jesus’ teaching on discipleship reveals that disciples are followers, worshipers, witnesses, forgers, neighbors, prophets, and stewards. The biblical meaning of disciple begins with the summons of Jesus, “Come, and follow me” (Matt 4:19). To be a follower means that one enters into a life-long process of learning what it means to follow Jesus, to come to know who and what Jesus is and what Jesus is claiming about the Father and Spirit. As the theology of the adult catechumenate emphasizes, initiation into the Christian community means living in a state of permanent mystery or mystagogia. To be Christ’s follower is to embrace Christ as teacher, to seek wisdom and understanding for what the path and cost of discipleship entails, and to embrace the mysteries of the faith as one’s own identity.

In following Jesus, disciples learn to join him in worshiping God as creator and redeemer and calling upon God as “Abba” (Matt 6:7-15; Luke 11:1-13). Christ teaches the disciple to pray and to be in relationship to God as a worshiper. Christ is the model of the true worshiper: his entire life is an act of praise and adoration, the foundation for the sacrifice of the whole self to God. Jesus’ radical form of self-giving love lies at the heart of all worship. Disciples


Kathleen A. Caahan
Christ's challenge to be a forgiver directly relates to his radical definition of the neighbor. Jesus stretches the biblical meaning of neighbor beyond a fellow member of the covenant to include all people, all those in need, the whole human community, even enemies (Matt 5:36-48). Being a disciple also demands that we see every person as a neighbor and that we are ready to help and serve another regardless of who the person is or the need they possess (Luke 10:25-37; 14:15-24; 15:11-32). For the disciple, being neighbor means practicing charity, mercy, and service in the neighborhood. The Catholic understanding of parish emphasizes the literal meaning of neighbor, the one who is living near or beside, which reminds the community that it dwells in the world insofar as Christians embrace all those near and beside, regardless of social, ethnic, or cultural difference, as a neighbor.

To be a neighbor is also to be a prophet. Prophets are witnesses with a keen perception for all that harms a neighbor: scorn, hatred, disobedience, hubris, unbelief, greed, and selfishness. Prophets see a larger reality than just the neighborhood: they give witness to neighbor relations that become distorted, forgotten, and abused. They see social and cultural realities that harm people's lives on the personal, interpersonal, and systemic level. Disciples are called to embrace their identity as prophet when they witness harm, evil, or oppression that besets a neighbor. Disciples are prophets when they demand that neighbors not be harmed by either individuals or systems, when they call the community back to its covenant with God, and when they work to change patterns of wickedness that destroy human life and flourishing. Prophets are witnesses to the power of the Spirit in transforming human hearts and minds. After Jesus' resurrection, prophecy became one of the gifts of the Spirit and at least in some congregations was a regular part of worship (1 Thess 5:20; 1 Cor 12:28-29; 14:26-32). By virtue of being a prophet, a disciple learns to see the whole world as God's gift to be nurtured and shared.

Disciples, finally, are stewards of God's creation, all the earth, all that is living and non-living (Gen 1:28, 2:15). Disciples are stewards of the goods society produces and uses, as well as the resources of the Christian community such as buildings, organizational structures and processes and material goods. In addition, as St Paul reminds the Corinthians, disciples are "servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Cor 4:1). Disciples are stewards of all that is necessary to carry forth the church's mission, including the scriptures and tradition that bear the truth to which they give witness. Finally, disciples are stewards of community, embracing the expectations of membership, while at the same time, building up and sustaining its resources.

Discipleship is not an achievement. It is an identity, a commitment, a way of life, and a response to a call. It has particular parameters and markers so that disciples of Jesus are readily identified. To be a disciple means to be a follower of Christ, committed to learning his ways; to be a worshiper, joining Christ and the community in praise of God's wonders; to be a witness who proclaims the good news to the world; to be a forgiver by practicing reconciliation, healing and peacemaking; to be a neighbor by living mindfully of others' needs and reaching out to them with compassion; to be a prophet willing to tell the truth about the injustices that harm neighbors; and to be stewards of the creation, the community, and the mysteries of the faith. A fully developed understanding of discipleship is yet another way of understanding the church's mission.

This explanation of the seven aspects of discipleship requires much greater biblical and theological elaboration. It offers a more powerful way of describing and delineating what baptism initiates a person into than the prevalent emphasis on defining the "laity." 21 Discipleship is a much more compelling personal and ecclesial image, one that offers a way of holding in relationship members of the community and their ministers. Almost twenty years after his landmark book, Models of the Church, Avery Dulles wrote that the church as "community of disciples" draws out important elements of each of his five models of the church better than any other image because it is inclusive of all the images (church as institution,
community, sacrament, servant, and herald). Furthermore, Dulles claims that it holds forth the most compelling image of the church in our times, and helps us avoid "too sharp a distinction between the minister and those ministered to." 22

MINISTRY AND DISCIPLESHIP
Ministers are disciples and remain disciples even as ministers. Broadly defined, ministers are disciples who become leaders in the community. In the early community ministers were called forth by the community to preside over the community, which included leading worship and coordinating the community’s evangelization and outreach. The church did not require full-time ministers for several centuries, not at least until the community was large enough to require ministers to serve only in the ministry and the community had the means to support that person.

Discipleship, as Mark’s gospel attests, is a demanding life, filled with misunderstandings of what the call is about and outright rejection of the master. As Luke recounts, disciples require an experience of God’s healing and forgiveness to become true neighbors. Matthew and Paul go to great lengths to explain what being a member of the community requires, and John explores friendship with Christ in community. Discipleship is a many-faceted reality, not a singular pursuit or a task to be accomplished; it is both a personal and communal reality, a mystery to be learned, understood, practiced, and embraced.

Being a disciple of Christ is no easy calling, and disciples are wise enough to know that they need people who are committed to being stewards of discipleship. Disciples also know that Christ did not leave them on their own, but assured his presence, through the life-giving Spirit to guide and sustain the community in its life and witness. Christ entrusts the community with leaders who are responsible for continuing his ministry and preparing the community for the Kingdom to come.

What are commonly understood as the key elements of ministry have their genesis in discipleship. Teaching, catechesis and faith formation arise from the call to follow Christ and learn his ways.

It is not uncommon for Catholics to comment on the low quality of preaching from their pastors. Bishops as well as theological educators have gone to great lengths to improve the quality of preaching among priests and deacons, recognizing it as a primary and important part of ministry. But one reason preaching has not been a strong area within Catholic ministry is not simply because of a lack of training; it also stems from the fact that giving witness has not been a focal practice for Catholics. Certainly in regard to liturgy, traditional practice had Catholics in a more passive role; but even today, prescribed communal prayers are the center of a church’s public prayer. There has been little place for witness in the Catholic community, though the popularity of small Christian communities in Catholic parishes is probably related to the need for people to express their faith orally to others, to give a witness.
give witness on behalf of the entire community; administrators are granted the responsibility of overseeing all the goods of the community; catechists are required to teach disciples what discipleship entails. By linking ministry and discipleship more explicitly, I think our understanding and appreciation of ministry can be heightened, since it clarifies how ministry is both connected to the life of discipleship and yet distinct from it.

EXPANDING THE DEFINITION OF MINISTRY
Defining the key aspects of discipleship and their relationship to the practices of ministry is my response to the four issues I raised at the outset. It also provides a basis for expanding O'Meara's definition of ministry. First, the doing of ministry can be defined as teaching, preaching, worship, pastoral care, prophecy/social ministry and administration; these constitute a core set of practices that are continuous throughout the tradition. They are the key elements of all Christian ministry because they arise from discipleship and are in continuity with Jesus and the early community's demands for discipleship. They constitute, using O'Meara terms, both an enduring and a changing aspect of ministry. The six elements of ministry are enduring because they proceed from discipleship. Though distinct from each other, taken together as a whole, they constitute the doing of ministry. The practices also change insofar as ministers have to adapt to the historical and cultural conditions where they serve.

The vocation to ministry is the call by God and the community to be a leader of disciples. This understanding of vocation contributes to recent attempts to explain ministry prior to distinctions between lay and ordained ministers or specialties in ministry. Ministers share a common vocation, leading disciples of Christ and assuming responsibility for discipleship. Ministers are stewards of disciples, precisely because discipleship is such a difficult path to follow. It requires vigilant watchfulness. This does not negate the role of the ordained or the lay ecclesial minister nor the distinctions between their leadership roles: both assume positions of leadership for the sake of the community, though different forms of leadership.

Though ministers are disciples and never cease being disciples, disciples are not ministers. Disciples can be ministers insofar as they are called forth and prepared to be leaders in some aspect of the Church's ministry, but discipleship can be lived fully and authentically without participating in ministry, that is assuming some leadership role in the community. A disciple may never be a catechist or lector or adult leader in a youth program, but this in no way lessens their life as a disciple. Disciples will participate in various ways, with differing levels of involvement, in parish life, but this is never an indication of the fullness of discipleship, since they live out their calling primarily in family, neighborhood, work, and society. Disciples who serve in catechetical, liturgical, governance, or service roles, are participating in the church's ministry, and are increasingly commissioned as ministers for a designated role. O'Meara's expanding circles of ministry help to describe the patterns among ministers (ordained and lay ecclesial minister) in leadership roles and disciples who participate in various levels of the church's ministry.24

Ministers are distinct from disciples insofar as they have received the charisms for teaching, preaching, pastoral care, prophecy and administration. These charisms comprise three elements of ministry - leadership, presiding, and representation - that "reorder" the minister in relationship to the community.

Finally, is it the case that when a person is called to ministry they are called to leadership in all areas of ministry or to a specialized role? My answer is "yes" on both counts, but with qualification. If a minister's calling is to steward discipleship this means they commit themselves to the whole of discipleship, leading disciples to be followers, worshipers, witnesses, forgivers, neighbors, prophets, and stewards. Every minister meets the disciple as disciple - not some part of discipleship. The catechist is not meant to relate to the disciple solely as follower, or the pastoral care-giver to a person as forgiver or neighbor. Each minister strives to embody all aspects of ministry in their work because they meet the disciple as disciple. Likewise, ministers are called to serve in relationship to the whole of ministry in whatever setting or role they assume: the liturgist is also catechist, the pastoral counselor is also prophet, and the administrator is able to lead the community in prayer.

Kathleen A. Cahalan

24 O'Meara, 156.

Toward a Fundamental Theology of Ministry
It is also the case, however, that ministers do not receive every ministerial charism: one person is a good preacher but not as well equipped for accompanying the dying, another has gifts for administering institutions but not teaching. Good ministry abounds when ministers serve in roles that best express their charisms, and that means ministers will have specialized roles. The size of our parishes and institutions also demand specialized knowledge and skills of ministers. Therefore, specialization is well suited for ministers’ charisms and the community’s good. But that specialized role is never separate from the minister’s responsibility to participate in a community in which all aspects of ministry are present. Likewise, in areas where an individual minister is not as well equipped or capable, they work in tandem with others to insure that disciples are well served. The preacher asks for assistance in visiting the dying, and the administrator seeks help from good teachers.

Based on this analysis of discipleship and ministry, I conclude with a revised definition of ministry; O’Meara’s original definition is in parentheses. “Ministry is leadership of disciples through teaching, preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, prophecy with social outreach, and administering organizations (doing something); for the sake of discipleship lived in relationship to God’s reigning presence (advent and presence of the Kingdom of God); as a public act discernable in word, deed, and symbol (in public); on behalf of a Christian community (on behalf of a Christian community); as a gift received in faith, baptism, commissioning, installation and ordination (faith, baptism and ordination); and as an activity that calls forth the fullness of discipleship in each member of the community by attending to ministry as a whole and in each of its specific parts (with its own limits and identity existing within a diversity of ministerial actions).”

One of the characteristics of ritual inside and outside of the contemporary ecclesiastical context is the increasing emphasis on subjective signification and intense personal experiences. Rituals are deployed in an apparently unrelated manner in meeting the need for self-expression; they serve as vehicles of unique individual experiences. In many senses forms of new religiosity can be perceived as pioneers in this trend towards religious individualization. One example is the charismatic/evangelical movement, which places a particular emphasis on the spontaneity of religious acts as manifested in the form of musical and physical expression, rapture, and prayers with laying on of hands. Evangelicals often deny the ritual dimension of these practices in the sense of non-spontaneous and formal practices; within this context religious expression coincides with spontaneous communication with the Holy Spirit. In essence, this exhibits a similar accentuation of religious subjectivity, namely, the subordination of the ritual to personal needs and motivations. What is referred to as “alternative spirituality” is also characterized by the emphasis on subjectivity, although

Peter G. Versteeg

Meditation and Subjective Signification
Meditation as a Ritual Form within New Christian Spirituality

Peter G. Versteeg is a post-doctoral research fellow in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in the Netherlands.