

NOT AS SERVANTS, BUT FRIENDS

By FRANCINE CARDMAN

Two sayings of Jesus as reported in John's gospel provide us with touchstones from which we can go about the work of building an adult Church. They also serve as limits or boundary markers for our efforts to grow into 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph 4,13). Both sayings are from John's account of the final acts and days of Jesus's life, as he eats together with his disciples for the last time and engages in his last extensive conversation with them. The Last Supper and Jesus's farewell discourse mark a crucial point in Jesus's ministry and, from the vantage point of the community he left behind, a significant moment in their self-understanding as his followers in the Church.

The first saying described the new relationship that the disciples have with Jesus and hence with God:

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from the Father I have made known to you (Jn 15,15).

As friends, the followers of Jesus are in the privileged position of knowing what Jesus is doing and, indeed, what God is doing in and through Jesus. They know, too, what Jesus would have them do—'love one another as I have loved you' (15,12)—and what will happen to them for doing so—'if they persecuted me, they will persecute you' (15,20). Throughout the farewell discourse in John's gospel, Jesus's friends are being taught the meaning of discipleship. Strengthened by the Comforter whom Jesus will send once he has left them, they are to be the presence of his love in the world. This is one measure, then, of what it means to be an adult Church: to be the friends of Jesus, doing the will of God by loving one another and all whom God has given us.

A second measure is held up to us a little earlier in John's gospel, in the account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet after his

last meal with them. In his reflection on this symbolic action Jesus prescribes the kind of relationships that he desires among his followers and, hence, the nature of authority among them:

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them (Jn 13,14-17).

If one who is Teacher and Lord exercises his authority through the humble service of washing the feet of his guests at table, then his disciples are not to consider themselves above such behaviour in their relationships with each other. Neither are they to mistake themselves for the one who remains their Lord and Teacher, even in his humility and his friendship with them. Similarly in the synoptic gospels, Jesus warns the disciples against lording it over each other as do the rulers of the Gentiles (Mt 20,25ff; Mk 10, 42ff; Lk 22,25ff), cautions them to call no person teacher or master on earth (Mt 28,8ff), and instructs them that to be great or first means to be last of all and servant of all (Mk 9,35; cf Mt 20,26-27; 23,11-12; Lk 22,26).

Not as servants, but friends; not as lords and teachers, but disciples: thus are Christians to be with one another and with their Risen Lord, who sends them to be his presence in the world. Friendship and discipleship are the terms that measure our way of being Church. It is from these two touchstones, then, that we can understand the true meaning of servanthood and thus come to know the true measure of an adult Church. In another pointed example from the disciples' experience of eating and drinking with him, Jesus instructs them in the way both friendship and discipleship are qualified by the model of servanthood he offers to them:

For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves (Lk 22, 27).

As friends, we are charged with doing what Jesus does; exalted to the position of co-workers with him, we nevertheless remain disciples of the one master; and with each other and with those in

the world to whom God has sent us, we are to be the servants of all.

Given this model of Jesus's ministry and his instructions about how we are to live together in following him, let us consider in more concrete terms what it means to be an adult Church.

Becoming religious subjects

In their organization no less than in the way they rehearse the 'myth' of their corporate identity ('tell their story,' or put forward summaries of their self-understanding), institutions reveal their assumptions about human nature and motivations. This is no less true of religious institutions than it is, for instance, of business or industry. In thinking about what it means to be an adult Church, therefore, I have found some observations from organizational theory to be helpful in demystifying the way in which the Church is or could be structured.

In particular, the insights of Douglas McGregor on 'Theory X' and 'Theory Y' are illuminating.¹ Theory X is the traditional view of direction and control in organizations, and underlying it are three basic assumptions about human nature, assumptions that have become so pervasive that they are virtually taken for granted. While the assumptions are stated in terms of work and refer to the context of business or industry, the point they make about human motivations and behaviour in organizations has ready parallels to experience in the Church. Theory X assumes that the average person inherently dislikes work and will avoid it if possible; that because of this most people must be coerced and controlled to get them to work for organizational objectives; and that in fact the average person *wants* to be directed and to avoid responsibility. Theory X organizations and their management are, as McGregor points out, 'admirably suited to the capacities and characteristics of the child rather than the adult.'²

Theory Y is based on a rather different set of assumptions about human nature and motivations. This approach assumes that human beings do not inherently dislike work; that they will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which they are committed; that, under proper conditions, the average person learns not only to accept but to seek responsibility; and that imagination, ingenuity and creativity in the solution of organizational problems is characteristic of large numbers of people, not just a few. Theory Y proposes that institutional and individual

goals can be integrated, so that members of an organization best achieve their own goals by working for the success of the enterprise, and the organization in turn more effectively achieves its objectives if it makes significant adjustments to the needs and goals of its members. The commitment to the organization's objectives that is necessary for the self-direction and self-control of members cannot be obtained simply by the exercise of authority. Rather, encouragement to develop and use capabilities, knowledge, skills, creativity and so forth for the good of the organization is a far more effective means of strengthening commitment. Theory Y is oriented toward adult human beings engaged in a dynamic process of growth and development. It is, as McGregor puts it, 'an invitation to innovation.'

Perhaps that is why the Church continues to operate from Theory X and the basically pessimistic anthropology that underlies it. The dominant roman ecclesiology understands the Church to be hierarchical in nature, its structures determined by the Lord, who appointed the apostles and their successors as shepherds to lead the flock of the faithful. This view is put forward even at Vatican II, though tempered somewhat by the context in which it occurs in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Sections 18-23 of *Lumen gentium*, which one theologian has termed an 'existential history' of the origins of ministry,³ and, indeed, the whole of chapter III on 'The hierarchy' sets forth a Theory X model of Church.

But the lineaments of an emerging Theory Y model can be observed distinctly in this and other documents of Vatican II, especially the Pastoral Constitution in the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et spes*), the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam actuositatem*), and in a particular way in the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis humanae*). In its stress on the mystery of the Church, its character as the people of God, and its eschatological nature as a pilgrim people, Vatican II gave added impetus to a movement already under way in the Church, a movement toward religious adulthood.

Since the close of the Council twenty years ago this December, this movement has continued to gain momentum and has come to a certain maturity. In very different forms its effects can be seen in developments as diverse as the rise of vigorous base communities in Latin America,⁴ the burgeoning interest and participation in lay ministry in the United States,⁵ the growing call from european

theologians for a 'post-bourgeois' Christianity,⁶ and the emergence of contextual theologies and an inculturated Church in Africa and Asia.⁷ In all these instances, Christians are in the process of becoming the *subjects* rather than the objects of their religious history, to borrow (and modify) a phrase from Paolo Freire. They are becoming an adult Church.

In moving from a servile dependency and passivity to a mature, active interdependence, Christians throughout the world are overcoming the effects of an internalized patriarchal Church in which nearly everybody is and remains a religious minor, subject to the authority of the only ecclesially significant persons, male clerics whom they address as 'Father'. Johannes Metz aptly describes this movement as a 'revolutionary formation process for a new subjectivity,' a process in which people cease to be fixated on authority from above and instead begin to take responsibility themselves for reform of the Church. 'The fact is,' he asserts, 'a dependent people has to transform itself, and not just behave like a people being taken care of.'⁸ When they begin to do so they realize, in Karl Rahner's words, that 'Churchpeople are not merely recipients of what is done by the institutional Church but are themselves the Church.'⁹ As Christians become religious subjects, they begin to live as the friends of Jesus: knowing what Jesus is doing in the world, they knowingly continue his mission. By acting on this new relationship, they are bringing into being a new Church which is at the same time an old Church: the Church as a community of equal disciples.

Discipleship of equals

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her groundbreaking work, *In memory of her: a feminist theological reconstruction of christian origins*,¹⁰ used the phrase 'discipleship of equals' to describe the new kind of community called into being by the *basileia* (reign) of God and the praxis of inclusive wholeness in the Jesus movement. It has passed quickly into common parlance among feminist Christians in North America, though it potentially applies with equal aptness to base communities and other movements of liberation when they are inclusive of and responsive to the experience of women as well as men. The vision of Church as a discipleship of equals is of an organization that is non-hierarchical, declericalized and collegial, characterized by collaboration, mutuality and accountability. Despite differences in methodology, feminist theologians such as

Rosemary Radford Ruether (Church as liberation community) and Letty Russell (partnership in new creation) join Fiorenza in envisioning a depatriarchalized Church, grounding that vision in the message and praxis of Jesus.¹¹ In each case, it is an adult Church that is being imagined, named and brought into being.

Along with feminists, more 'classical' theologians such as Rahner, Schillebeeckx and Metz have begun to imagine a different sort of Church than the hierarchical institution that has dominated Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism, for so long. Without explicitly using the phrase, what they are calling for is Church as the discipleship of equals, a Church *from below*. As the sociological supports for the Church in developed, western society disappear, 'living communities from below' begin to replace the 'established' Church. No longer can the Church stand over against its people, but instead it must be constituted from below, by the people themselves, so that 'relations between base and ministry will and must be given a form very different from that to which we have been accustomed.'¹²

Structural change is the obvious concomitant to such changed relationships. Beginning from a renewed understanding of the ministry of all Christians that flows from their baptism, all members of the Church will be understood to have responsibility for its mission in the world. The 'laity' will come into their own as the realization grows that lay life is the basic form of the Church's existence. It follows from this that participation in decision-making and the provision of visible structures that make possible the collaboration of laity and their ordained ministers are necessities for a transformed, adult Church. So too is freedom. Because respect for the freedom and dignity of persons is an essential element of an adult Church, decisions not only ought to be made in a participatory fashion, but once made 'they should be set forth in such a way as to invite a free and reasoned assent.'¹³ Opposition and responsible criticism are to be expected, even honoured. Similarly, justice is another of the hallmarks of this Church, whether in regard to its treatment of groups of people (women, for instance) or in its provision for due process in canonical matters. In all these aspects of its life, the adult Church seeks to embody in its structures the fundamental equality of all the disciples of Jesus, who wash one another's feet after the example of their teacher.

If the Church is, as Avery Dulles observes, 'the place where

authentic discipleship to Jesus himself remains possible,' then 'authoritarianism, which seeks to keep the general body of Christians in a state of servile dependence, can have no place in the Church as community of disciples.'¹⁴ Although a Theory X model of Church is not simply or solely authoritarian, it is in sufficient conflict with the emerging Theory Y model that its proponents have felt it necessary to make repeated reassertions of the essentially hierarchical nature of the Church and the structures of dependency that follow from it. This is most notable in the case of Vatican strictures against liberation theology (at least as it is understood in Rome) and some theologians and bishops who espouse it, but it is also evident in the response to recent reflection on ministry.¹⁵

While european theologians such as Rahner (especially in his later years), Schillebeeckx and Metz are sources of concern to the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and, presumably, to Pope John Paul II as well, it is latin american theologians such as Boff and Gutierrez who particularly exercise these proponents of a Theory X model of Church. For on its way to becoming an adult Church, the Church is also fast becoming non-european and, in an important sense, non-roman. Theory Y proponents, on the other hand, see this as reason for celebration, and argue that there is a causal connection between the increasingly non-european nature of Christianity and its growing maturity as a prophetic and servant presence in the world.

Church as prophetic servant

There is a certain irony to the fact that Churches in the third world—often referred to as the 'younger Churches'—are already clearly demonstrating what it means to be an adult Church. Their experience offers a prophetic service to Churches of the overdeveloped world, showing us, as Metz contends, a way of being a person in solidarity, a new connection between salvation and liberation, and a model of and inspiration for a base-community Church.¹⁶ In this they are pointing the way to an 'anthropological revolution' in which the long-standing 'anthropology of domination' gives way to a movement of liberation, freeing us from our wealth, excessive prosperity, apathy and illusion of innocence. Conversion is what such a revolution is about: 'The food that nourishes this revolutionary conversion is the "bread of life".'

This anthropological revolution could be called our christian response to the so-called crisis of survival. It is our attempt to achieve a new relationship to ourselves, to our natural and social environment, which is not one of domination and exploitation. It is our intrinsic contribution to ecology, and its inspiration comes from the heart of our eucharistic community. But this revolution, this struggle against ourselves, against our dominating-exploiting identity, is simultaneously and indivisibly the fundamental praxis of our solidarity with the poor and exploited peoples of this earth.¹⁷

In its praxis as a prophetic Church serving the integral liberation of all, the adult Church, whether in the third or the overdeveloped world, becomes a sign of the reign of God.

Base communities, seeking 'to bind together mysticism and politics, religious and societal practice,'¹⁸ give flesh to this sign of God's coming reign. In the north american and north atlantic context, the form such base communities take might most appropriately be that of 'ecclesial mission groups.' The concept, proposed by Shawn Copeland OP, in a paper delivered to a conference on lay ministry,¹⁹ envisions small groupings (ten to fifteen members) of women and men, young and old, individuals and families within the parish or ecclesial community, committed 'to live differently, to engage in social analysis leading to transforming action, to live critically and consciously, to actualize their gifts for the whole Church in witness to the reign of God.' Ecclesial mission groups provide the context in which Christians grow to maturity in a faith that does justice and lives prophetically the message of God's loving kindness to humankind.

As a prophetic servant, the adult Church embodies in the world Jesus's ministry of reconciling love and inclusive wholeness. Only in the adult relinquishment of claims to power and domination can the Church achieve the 'solidarity from below' that is required by the *basileia* of God and thus become the child/servant that is its sign.²⁰

NOTES

¹ McGregor, Douglas, 'Theory X and Theory Y' in *Organization theory: selected readings*, D. Pugh, ed. (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1971), pp 305-23.

² *Ibid.*, p 315.

³ Komonchak, Joseph A.: 'Church and ministry', *The Jurist*, vol XLIII, no 2, 1983, p 275.

⁴ See Torres, Sergio and Eagleson, John, eds.: *The challenge of basic christian communities* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1981).

⁵ See Doohan, Leonard: *The lay-centred Church: theology and spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN, Winston Press, 1984); Power, David N.: *Gifts that differ: lay ministries established and unestablished* (New York, Pueblo, 1980); and Finn, Virginia Sullivan: *Pilgrim in the parish* (New York, Paulist Press, forthcoming). I have explored some aspects of the resurgence of the laity and the role of women in "The Church would look foolish without them": women and laity since Vatican II', in *Vatican II: open questions and new horizons*, Gerald M. Fagin, ed. (Wilmington, DE, Michael Glazier Inc., 1984), pp 105-33.

⁶ See Metz, Johannes: *The emergent Church: the future of christianity in a postbourgeois world* trans. Peter Mann (New York, Crossroad, 1981).

⁷ See Bavarel, Michael: *New communities, new ministries: the Church resurgent in Africa, Asia, and Latin America* trans. Francis Martin (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 1983).

⁸ Metz, *op. cit.*, pp 42, 82.

⁹ Rahner, Karl: *Concern for the Church*, Theological Investigations XX, trans. Edward Quinn (New York, Crossroad, 1981), p 123.

¹⁰ New York, Crossroad, 1983.

¹¹ Rueher, Rosemary Radford: *Sexism and god-talk: towards a feminist theology* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1983), pp 201-13; Russell, Letty: *The future of partnership* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1979) and *Growth in partnership* (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1981). Sandra Schneiders offers a feminist perspective on both Church and ministry in a paper on 'The american catholic cultures—helps and hindrances regarding collaboration' *NOCERCC Newsletter*, vol 12, Special Resource on Collaboration in Ministry, 1984.

¹² Rahner, *op. cit.*, p 62.

¹³ Dulles, Avery: *A Church to believe in: discipleship and the dynamics of freedom* (New York, Crossroad, 1982), p 77.

¹⁴ Dulles, *op. cit.*, p 11.

¹⁵ See, for instance, the 'Instruction on certain aspects of the "theology of liberation"', reprinted in *Origins*, vol 14, no 13, 13 September 1984, where perhaps the most telling criticism is this one: 'Building on such a conception of the Church of the people, a critique of the very structures of the Church is developed . . . It has to do with a challenge to the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church, which was willed by the Lord himself. There is a denunciation of members of the hierarchy and the magisterium as objective representatives of the ruling class which has to be opposed' (IX, 13) p 201. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's response to Leonardo Boff's *Church: charism and power*, trans. John Diercksmeier (New York, Crossroad, 1985) is in similar vein: 'This relativizing concept of the Church stands at the basis of the radical criticisms directed at the hierarchic structure of the Catholic Church'. The text is reprinted in *Origins* vol 14, no 42, 4 April 1985, pp 683-7. Extensive criticism has also been directed at Edward Schillebeeckx's *Ministry: leadership in the community of Jesus Christ* (New York, Crossroad, 1982) both from the Vatican and the United States National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

¹⁶ Metz, *op. cit.*, p 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 43.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 63.

¹⁹ 'Ecclesial mission groups: towards "being Church"', unpublished paper originally delivered at the Symposium on Lay Ministry in New England, October 1984.

²⁰ Fiorenza, *op. cit.*, p 148.