ONE MISSION: MANY MINISTRIES

By WILLIAM BRODERICK

...how much more worthy of consideration is Christ our Lord, the Eternal King, before whom is assembled the whole world. To all his summons goes forth, and to each one in particular he addresses the words: 'It is my will to conquer the whole world . . .'

HIS TABLEAU known as the Call of Christ the King with its stirring invitation would have been the subject matter of Mary Ward's prayer when she made the Spiritual Exercises. Even St Ignatius who wrote them could not have grasped the full implications of these words. He had the mystic's sweeping vision. The precise meaning for her own life and her own time Mary Ward had to discover for herself. Ignatius did not have the language nor concepts to work out what is meant by 'all'. In what sense and in what ways are 'all' summoned? In our own time Vatican II has gone some distance towards answering this question, by asserting that the apostolate belongs to every baptized person (laity included) in virtue of baptism—and not as a concession from the hierarchy.

In the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises we contemplate Jesus, the One who is sent by the Father and who in turn sends others. The mysteries of this week are all to do with sending and being sent. In the finding in the temple Jesus sees the Father's world-purpose as the over-riding task of his life—his life is not his own. In the departure from Nazareth and at the baptism he sets out on, and dedicates himself to his public ministry. In the temptation in the desert he discovers more precisely the nature of his mission, its style and manner. It is to be that of the humble suffering servant. In the sermon on the mount he engages in the ministry of the Word. In the feeding of the five thousand and in the healing miracles his mission finds new expressions. In the call of the apostles he summons others to be his fellow-workers and sends them in his turn. (We know that this mystery in particular meant a lot to Mary Ward.)

All talk about mission and ministry must go back to this contemplation of Jesus as being sent and sending in his turn. Other questions about ministry, (e.g. who should minister, what

sort of ministries should be done etc.,) are all subordinate to Jesus as sent and as sender, and draw their inspiration and guidance from this fundamental mystery of Christ's life. The form of ministry is in many ways culturally conditioned. Who should do what ministry depends on historical circumstances. Should women preach? This might well be unacceptable to the culture of one age, but be perfectly acceptable to another culture and age. The evolving life and vision of Mary Ward is largely the story of her search for a suitable form of ministry for women in her own time and place. It was conditions in England that made cloister impossible and so revealed that cloister is not of the essence of religious life. So often it is changed historical conditions, especially of an extreme kind, that reveal new possibilities of ministry. Conventional and accepted ideas are shattered.

New ministry for women religious-Mary Ward's discovery

To study and compare Mary Ward's three successive plans of the Institute gives a fascinating glimpse into her growing understanding of ministry, how she moved from the traditional form of religious life for women embodied in the first plan (Schola Beatae Mariae 1612) through the second plan (Ratio Instituti 1615) to her third and final plan (Institutum I, 1620), a plan so new and radical that the Church authorities of the day refused to give it their approval, even though its forerunner and exemplar—the jesuit Constitutions—had received papal approval.

In the first plan, Schola Beatae Mariae, there is certainly an apostolic thrust, even if this is somewhat limited in scope, namely to remedy 'the very distressed condition of England, our native land . . .' and this by giving girls a christian formation. But already as in a symphony a note is struck which indicates what is to come. '. . . women also should and can provide something more than ordinary in face of this common spiritual need'. Women are to share in spiritual ministry. But for the rest, the model is monastic, adapted to the contemplative life, with an officially ordered day and formal times of prayer, ('at the sound of the bell'!). Obedience is to the local bishop. There are to be cloister and grill. The image is that of a monastic way of life with a school attached. But however traditional this first plan, something new is already emerging—availability for service:

... we also feel that God (as we trust) is inspiring us with the pious desire that we also should embrace the religious life and yet that we should strive according to our littleness to render to the neighbour the services of christian charity which cannot be discharged in the monastic life.

These 'services . . . which cannot be discharged in the monastic life' were going to become the determinant.

In the second plan, *Ratio Instituti*, the break with the traditional monastic way of life is made clear:

... the manner of our life is ordinary on the exterior and does not bind us by obligation of the Institute to cloister, or to any particular form of dress or other austerities to which other religious are obliged by the order and rule . . .

An official order of the day is no longer mentioned. The emphasis is much more on apostolic service. This apostolic service now goes beyond the christian formation of girls, to include reconciling those who are at variance, visiting the sick and afflicted, and 'all other works of charity which might suit our sex . . .' In the first plan they had been forbidden even to visit the families of externs. Perhaps the most indicative change of all is Mary Ward's petition that her Institute be no longer under the jurisdiction of the local bishop but under that of the pope! '... it is most humbly and greatly desired by us that the whole hierarchy of this work depend entirely on the most Holy See alone and on no other . . . 'This petition shows a growing awareness of the universality of the Institute's mission, a growing share in the one universal mission of the Church, symbolized and given a focal point in the pope. Different forms of ministry are now being seen in terms of that one universal mission and so are being seen in truer perspective.

The third plan, *Institutum I*, unhesitatingly gives the primacy to apostolic service. The Institute's purpose is:

to strive for the defence and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in christian life and doctrine, leading them back from heresy and evil ways to the faith, to a christian manner of life and to special obedience to the Holy See.

There is to be a fourth vow of special obedience to the Holy Father:

... to carry out whatever the present and future Roman Pontiffs may order which pertains to the progress of souls and the propagation of the faith; and to go without subterfuge or excuse, as far as in us lies, to whatsoever provinces they may choose to send us—whether they are pleased to send us among the Turks or any other infidels, even those who live in the region called the Indies . . .

The universality and flexibility are breath-taking, more so when seen in the context of the seventeenth century and what was then permitted to women.

Most striking and impressive was Mary Ward's refusal to surrender the vision she had for her Institute. She had always sought the will of God. It is startling to watch the change in her life, from the time when to find God's will she listened to others—even to the egregious Jesuit, George Keynes—down to the time when she practised personal discernment, when the Creator in person communicated himself and dealt with her directly. If one asks where did Mary Ward get the inspiration for her Institute from, it was certainly not from the institutional Church of her day: quite the reverse. She drew her inspiration from her union with God and from her exceptional awareness of the new needs of the Church. In the Introductory Observations to the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius had written:

But while one is engaged in the Spiritual Exercises, it is more suitable and much better that the Creator and Lord in person communicate himself to the devout soul in quest of the divine will, that he inflame it with his love and praise and dispose it for the way in which it could better serve God in the future.²

However dangerous and threatening to the institutional Church such a doctrine of God's immediacy was, however much it might seem to smack of illuminism, both Ignatius and Mary Ward passionately believed in it. Of the three times when a good election can be made, Ignatius gives as the first of these:

When God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that a devout soul without hesitation, or the possibility of hesitation, follows what has been manifested to it. St Paul and St Matthew acted thus in following Christ our Lord.³

In other words, instead of assuming as many Christians do that Paul's conversion was something strange, unrepeatable, a 'one-off', with no light to throw on any other believer's experience, Ignatius believed that God's immediate and amazing direct action, as revealed in Paul's conversion and call, went on and was a contemporary event. All ministry in the Church, as indeed every new form of religious life, is the work of the Spirit and comes from the Spirit's inspiration. Each new form of ministry needs a revelation. It cannot be concluded by logical deduction from the general tenets of the christian faith. This is because the Church is

not a system of ideas but a living historical reality, always responding to the ever-new needs of the surrounding world, always revealing new facets of the inner riches of its human-divine life. It is the mystery of Christ's continued presence in the world. That is why we need the saints (canonized or canonizable). They are not merely men and women who are much holier than the rest of us. They have a representative role in the on-going revelation of the Church's life. Holiness has always to be discovered aneweven though always in the imitation of Christ who remains the inexhaustible model. As Rahner wrote: 'They [the saints] are the initiators and the creative models of the holiness which happens to be right for, and is the task of, their particular age'. 4 They show that a new form of ministry or service is both possible and needed. They prove this by actually living it out in their own lives. They show experimentally that such a way of life and service is believable. They live on in their followers, and their living on means that the example they have given of a specific service remains in the Church as a permanent form, a charism in which their followers share. For any congregation, second only to the pattern of Christ's own life, the most important guide to choice of ministry is the life and charism of its foundress or founder.

New ministry and official blindness

We tend to read the lives of the saints backwards. Once they have been accepted and their new form of ministry in the Church has been assimilated, it all looks so obvious and easy and predictable. We fail to notice how strange and even shocking the saints were in their own time. The new way in which a saint has lived out the gospel was not at all self-evident at the time. Such uncomfortably novel ways of serving, as worked out by the saints, are recorded afterwards as rather unfortunate features of the particular saint's life, as at best historical accidents and not touching the genuine sanctity and virtue of the saint, as though to say 'Isn't it marvellous that a woman could be a saint even in these conditions'. But those very conditions were an essential element in that saint's holiness. One need think only of the persecution and ignominy undergone by John of the Cross; Robert Bellarmine was almost put on the Index; Ignatius Loyola was put in prison by the Inquisition and had to fight the official Church in order to have an order without monastic choir. Mary Ward seems to have endured more than any of these. She saw her Institute simply suppressed. But christian truth is in the existential order; there it is revealed, tested and proved. That a woman with the requisite degree of faith-commitment and personal maturity could live the

kind of apostolic life envisaged in the Third Plan, with all its dangerous freedom, had been amply demonstrated by Mary Ward in her own life. This was nowhere more evident than when she sauntered disguised in and out of London high society, to win the creatures of that world back to the practice of their faith, and also when with her companions she crossed and recrossed Europe on foot in a manner that even today might cause a provincial superior to hold back permission. So, another criterion of ministry—a negative one, perhaps—is that it may well be in conflict with conventional wisdom. We should not be put off by opposition or conflict with canon law. To be nestling snugly within the bounds of current canon law is no guarantee that one's ministry is meeting the real needs of the times.

It seems certain that Mary Ward's Third Plan met the real historical possibilities and needs of the Church in the seventeenth century, and the Church's need for women to engage in directly apostolic work, when one considers that similar plans and inspirations occurred to other great saints of the same century: Francis de Sales, Jane Frances de Chantal, Vincent de Paul. Why these were rejected by the Church is to be explained by the Church's historically limited self-understanding. Besides the pluriformity of particular ministries there is another ministry, that of overseeing and coordinating and judging these particular ministries. This other ministry belongs to the pope and bishops and has all the virtues as well as the blind spots of a given historical period. Ministry like the Church itself is mystery and grace, God's selfcommunication in the Incarnation continued in human history, but in spite of this (perhaps better, because of this) it has its cultural and sociological and human determinants. The influence of tridentine and post-tridentine legislation was to discourage any positive development of religious life. Canon law, like other law, tends to mirror current views and prejudices. From this distance in time one is perhaps tempted to feel raging anger against the church authorities of that time and against the 'sacred canons' through which they blighted Mary Ward's great project. But one should really feel anger against the whole Church of the period, because the ecclesiastical legislation which blocked Mary Ward did to a large extent reflect the then popular sentiment about what religious women should be and how they should behave. Mary Ward reveals the limitations of the Church in her own age and the limitations of the age itself.

This tragedy of Mary Ward and her attempt to found a new form of ministry in the Church can be viewed from different standpoints. One can attribute it simply to the regrettable limi-

tations of human history. In the dialectical movement of church history Mary Ward came at the worst possible moment in that movement. From Trent onwards the Church was putting overwhelming emphasis on authority, stability and order. Mary Ward was crucified by the movement of history. One could try to explain Mary Ward's tragedy in cultural terms. The Church and the forms of ministry it will admit are always culturally conditioned. The Church is never simply pure revelation. The Church's self-understanding is always dependent to some extent on the degree of selfunderstanding which men and women of the time have. Perhaps the Church is tempted at times to claim that it draws all its teaching and regulations from revelation. The Church should recognize its dependence on other sources as well, on culture and on the human sciences. There is no such thing as 'ministry in general'. Ministry is always something specific in specific historical circumstances, and historical circumstances and our knowledge of these are always shifting—according to, for example, what women are capable of. We have no insight into what the full potential of men and women is. The obstacles placed by the Church in the way of Mary Ward and her companions were not really to do with revelation. The true nature of these obstacles is to be accounted for and can be illumined by the revelations of the modern human sciences such as sociology and psychology. No doubt psychologists and sociologists would have much to tell us about the image of woman then held by the ecclesiastical men who determined her life. They would have no difficulty in uncovering the characteristic defences of a strongly masculine society.

But the deepest explanation of Mary Ward's tragedy is to be found in the Church as mystery, sharing in the mystery of Christ, in the mystery of his suffering, death and resurrection. We may be tempted to criticize the Church in the past for its appalling blindness, for crucifying those whose only wish was to serve, but this may be failing to understand the human conditions and limitations under which we all labour-including the Church. We are called upon to accept our creaturehood and its poverty. We are creatures of history with all the heavy limitations which history imposes on us. Every historical era has its blindness, and we carry the burden of this; we do and suffer the harm which is the result of this. Mary Ward's greatness is her acceptance of her own creaturehood, her acceptance of the painfully cramping limitations of her own historical period. She was joined to Christ in his acceptance of his own creaturely poverty. Jesus too failed because of the historical forces that opposed him, a combination of jewish fanaticism and roman pragmatism. Her greatness was her refusal

to escape from history, her refusal to pretend that history does not matter. She had total trust in God, the Lord of history.

What I am trying to bring out is that the particular forms which ministry takes are time-bound and contingent. The history of the Church witnesses not only to a great variety in the forms and types of ministry but also to flux and mutation. For example, the office of deacon flourished in the early Church, then died out for centuries and was revived only after the Second Vatican Council. There is only one mission in the Church, the prolongation into history of Christ's mission, but ministries are not only many but fluctuating and contingent. The Church is free within very broad limits set by the gospel and tradition to devise forms of ministry which perpetuate for new generations the apostolic witness in preaching, teaching, charity and ways of sanctifying life, forms of ministry appropriate for each new age and culture.

The central ministry

If this is so, perhaps we need to take a look at our own period of history and the cultural shift which we find there. The appropriate ministries of our own time will have to meet the new self-understanding which the contemporary Church, along with contemporary women and men, has come to. The new ministries will also have to meet the new problems arising out of cultural shift. And in fact there has been the most amazing expansion of ministry in our time, an expansion both in the number of people ministering and in the range, number and type of specialized ministries. There have been new specialized ministries to marriage, social justice, the sick, the marginalized, the alienated, ministries of healing and teaching. There has been an explosion of ministries. We might note in passing another factor in choosing ministries. Any change of ministry will be particularly painful and disorientating for a congregation which has had a successful recent past, just before the cultural shift took place.

But of all these many ministries there is one which seems to be the central ministry. It is hard to find a completely suitable title for it. It has been traditionally known as spiritual direction. 'Soulfriend' is another description. It has affinities with another ministry which in the jesuit Constitutions is known as 'spiritual conversation'. It is a ministry which seeks to facilitate the personal encounter of another human being with God. Its task is to help people experience God's action and respond to him. Personal encounter with the living God must be the central event and purpose of every christian life. Every other form of ministry must in some way be related to, and have this as, the ultimate aim,

whether it be nursing the sick, teaching or organizing a campaign against nuclear weapons. Likewise the more people share in this experience of personal encounter with God the more effectively they will be able to carry out these other ministries. In the last thirteen or fourteen years this ministry has become widespread. Not only are more people looking for spiritual direction but more people also and of more varied backgrounds are giving such spiritual direction. Training programmes and training centres have been set up. The giving of spiritual direction was once largely the preserve of priests. But no longer so, and thank goodness. For giving spiritual direction ordination is neither needed nor sufficient. Priests in the past were chosen for this ministry because they were seen as the spiritual leaders of the community, but they are not always the most suited to this ministry. They are often underdeveloped as human beings. They are sometimes distant in their relationships, and they sometimes seem neither to have appropriated any experience of a loving God nor to be capable of articulating any deep level of religious faith. On the other hand many religious sisters and many lay people have and can. What a directee does in this ministry is to communicate with another member of the believing community something of her or his relationship with God, and so enter into dialogue with the believing community in and through its representative, the director. The director provides an opportunity for the directee to look at her or his relationship with the Lord and identify and learn to deal with whatever illusions are to be found there. Spiritual direction is not a piece of individualism or isolationism. Instead of relating to the faith-community in a relatively external and superficial manner. as so often happens, the directee now meets that faith-community at some spiritual depth through a deeper than usual sharing with a representative of the community.

This amazing expansion of spiritual direction as a ministry points to a cultural shift. The explanation seems to be that there has been a breakdown of institutional faith and often of community itself. The believer is thrown back on his or her own faith resources. The breakdown of institutional faith leads to a greater need of a personal faith, to one's own discovery of God and the gospel. Church-belonging for many seems no longer the way to God. What such people need is an opportunity, often in a one-to-one situation, to explore the roots of their discontent, to make a personal discovery, to identify the deep personal values they already have and by which they live, and to go further with these. We have moved from a culture of obedience and intellectualism into a culture of experience and personal appropriation.

Modern men and women have rediscovered the subjective element in human life. The need to come to terms with subjectivity is universally recognized. As so often happens, the thrust came from the secular world, from Freud and others, but it awakened the Church to its own rich tradition in this matter. It has led many Jesuits to rediscover the full meaning of an apostolate very dear to the heart of St Ignatius—the apostolate of 'spiritual conversation'. The Society of Jesus was born out of 'spiritual conversation' or dialogue. A group of men came together and shared their hopes and aspirations. It was a faith-experience. In this sharing of their faith they found unity of purpose and the way forward. All human life is relational, is lived out in dialogue, dialogue with others, with oneself, with God. What matters is the depth and quality of this dialogue. To help people deepen this dialogue and improve its quality must be the central ministry. It is important to emphasize the centrality of this particular ministry because of the almost inveterate tendency of ministering people to inculcate truth, to emphasize a verbalized and institutionalized Christianity. In the Third Plan Mary Ward, in specifying some of the apostolates her Institute should carry out, mentions: '... reconciling those estranged from the Church . . .' This is not done most effectively by straightforward preaching or apologetics. It requires that those estranged have their goodness recognized and affirmed, that they come to see the truth and value of so much they are fighting for, to see that they may have good reasons for being estranged from the Church. Perhaps what they are looking for is a different experience of Church.

It is impressive to see how much Mary Ward stresses the Institute's apostolate to those whom we would now describe as the marginalized or alienated. Not only reconciling those estranged from the Church, but also assisting and serving 'prisoners', is specifically mentioned. The members of the Institute are also to 'seek out women of doubtful lives'. These are all apostolates where personal dialogue or 'spiritual conversation' is called for. The person ministering must be aware of the Spirit of God present in every woman and man trying to express itself in certain human values tenaciously held though buried perhaps under mounds of rubbish. One must be able to hear what the Spirit is still trying to utter in a depressing human situation, and help the person herself to hear and recognize the voice of that Spirit. The sacramental life of the Church may have long since been abandoned but the Spirit is still alive and active, perhaps speaking more authentically for having abandoned what might have been nothing but an infantile dependence on external signs. The sacramental life of the

Church may be confined but the realm of the Spirit knows no bounds. The Spirit is present everywhere. Perhaps in the past the Church over-emphasized the sacraments and under-emphasized the part played by the Spirit. It is not self-evident that the session of spiritual direction (or 'spiritual conversation') is less grace-filled than a sacramental event. It is not immediately obvious that one who struggles in prayer with her failure in life and tries to see a meaning in it is less deeply involved in the paschal mystery than one who attends the sacramental expression of this. This apostolate of conversation, helping people to get in touch with their deepest and truest selves, enables them to listen to God's interior word. 'The members of this Institute . . . shall also undertake any other ministry of the word of God'. Whatever other ministry the Institute undertakes, this ministry of faith dialogue, 'spiritual conversation', spiritual direction, must be at the heart of it. Every other ministry must in some way relate to facilitating the believer's personal relationship with God.

Formation for ministry

What Ignatius of Loyola grasped was that all personal growth is relational. It takes place in relation to another, whether that other be another human being (a friend, a spiritual director) or ultimately God. This is true not only for the apostolate but for the religious sister's growth and formation. So one other major determinant in the choice of ministries is the quality and formation of the members of the congregation.

If the religious is to help form mature responsible Christians this has serious implications for the formation (lifelong, not just noviceship) of the religious herself. Perhaps it is no coincidence that strict enclosure for all women religious was enforced at a time when the qualities looked for and stressed in religious life were conformity and dependence, when qualities such as emotional maturity, personal responsibility and power of personal discernment were not the ones looked for. Women were not even allowed to govern themselves. It seems that the idea of a female religious who was living her life out of a profound personal experience of God, who had developed considerable inner strength and power of self-determination and who could therefore move about freely outside the cloister, was almost unimaginable to the culture of that time. The degree of protection which it was felt all women religious needed argues a view of woman as weak and dependent. How different was Mary Ward's vision! To be able to live in an environment hostile to Catholicism, out of touch with one's community and the sacramental life of the Church for long periods of

time: this was how some of Mary Ward's companions lived in seventeenth century England and showed in real life not just in constitutional norms the kind of ministry Mary Ward had in mind for her Institute.

Mary Ward wanted a group of women who could be on the leading edge of the Church's apostolate, who could work in dangerous and confused situations. A monastic or semi-monastic way of life (First Plan) would not seem the most appropriate formation. For such an apostolate one must be always learning personal discernment and personal responsibility, always growing in the power to integrate the events and experiences of one's daily life with one's expanding faith-awareness, always allowing the gospel to throw ever-fresh light on one's life and allowing one's life to give ever-new reality to the gospel. There must be freedom to make choices, to reflect on choices made, both personal and communal. Order and tidiness and safety will not be the high values of such an on-going formation. A degree of chaos and uncertainty and risk will be taken for granted. Reflection on experience will be the method, and there will be continuous need for authentication of one's faith-experience by a fellow believer. Presupposed will be the ability to share at a deep personal level of faith. It means a taste for adventure, for surprise and an ever deeper experience of life. It means flexibility and adaptability, combined with singleness of purpose in living by gospel values. It means a knowledge and appreciation of the contemporary world and all that is good in it as the place where the Incarnation and the paschal mystery continue to be enacted. It will mean the ability to weigh evidence and form a judgment. It will mean the capacity to live with uncertainty, to have a feeling for the provisional nature of human existence, and how our expanding knowledge relativizes so much of our present knowledge and experience. One of the most striking characteristics of Mary Ward was her insistence on personal discernment. She refused to let others dictate—not even church authorities. She clung to her vision. If conformity and dependence had been the characteristics she valued in herself and in others she could have saved herself a great deal of suffering. As it was, she preferred personal discernment and personal responsibility, a personal listening to God's Word and a personal response to that Word.

Community and the relationships established there will be vital for such apostolic formation and such apostolic existence. The part played by community is very much stressed in the new Code of Canon Law. That there can and almost must be a tension between the claims of life in community and the claims of the apostolate almost goes unrecognized. It would be a pity if this were interpreted to mean that such tension should no longer exist, as though the Church had now decided officially that the needs of the community are all that matter and the needs of the apostolate must be entirely subordinated. Ignatius himself was very clear that there would be tension:

The more difficult it is for the members of this congregation to be united with their head and among themselves, since they are so scattered among the faithful and among the unbelievers in diverse regions of the world, the more ought means to be sought for that union . . . 8

'... the more ought means to be sought for that union ...' Ignatius did not have the full or final answer to this problem. It would be an ever-present problem, always needing to be faced afresh. The one-sided emphasis in the new Code has to be balanced by that other principle, also to be found in the Code, that an Institute or Congregation must be faithful to the charism of its foundress or founder. It is quite clear what the charism was both of Mary Ward and Ignatius. If it does not sound too arrogant, a sure guide to Mary Ward's concept of ministry is to consult Ignatius's concept of ministry. Members of apostolic congregations must love and have deep roots in community life but provision can also be made for them to live outside such community when the apostolate calls for this. Unless they can do both they will limit unnecessarily the ministries open to them and which the Church expects them to carry out.

The saints (canonizable as well as canonized) are always ahead of us. We are always trying to catch up with their insights. Nowhere is this more true than in the notion of apostolic spirituality.

NOTES

¹ Spiritual Exercises, para 95, Puhl's translation.

² Spiritual Exercises, para 15, Puhl's translation.

³ Spiritual Exercises, para 175, Puhl's translation.

⁴ Rahner, K.: Theological investigations vol 3 pp 91-104.

⁵ Barry, William and Connolly, William: The practice of spiritual direction.

⁶ Clancy, Thomas: The conversational word of God.

⁷ Rahner, K.: Theological investigations vol 20, pp 148-153.

⁸ Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, ed. George Ganss, part VIII, ch I para 655.