

**Pastoral Office and Sacrificing Priesthood:
Towards Reconciliation in Concepts of
Presbyteral/Episcopal Ministry**

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Questions of ministerial order continue to be neuralgic for the Ecumenical Movement. At the moment, the primary focus is on the question of the ordination of women to the presbyterate and episcopate. However, below the surface, other questions lurk. There are as yet unresolved tensions between the results of different bilateral dialogues. The purpose of this article is to offer some reconciling perspectives on presbyteral and, to a lesser extent, episcopal ministry, from a primarily Methodist perspective. I believe that, concealed within our tradition, there are reconciling insights that we might contribute to the common quest. As my title suggests, I hope to show that the traditional conservative Catholic concept of 'sacrificing priesthood' and the traditional Wesleyan one of 'pastoral office' are nothing like as incompatible as both Roman Catholics and Wesleyans would once have regarded them as being.

I have linked together presbyteral and episcopal ministries since I do not believe that it is possible to consider either in isolation from the other. It is now widely agreed that until well into the second century the terms were interchangeable in many churches, and that the monarchical episcopate probably emerged only gradually out of a collegial presbyterate. For centuries there was theological controversy in the Western 'catholic' tradition as to whether the presbyter or the bishop should be seen as possessing the fullness of priesthood, with the bishop perhaps being only a presbyter with additional jurisdiction. There appear to have been many occasions when

presbyters exercised powers of ordination to the presbyterate, and these not just confined to the earliest of periods.¹ In the Scandinavian Lutheran tradition for a long time the emphasis was on continuity in the presbyterate rather than the episcopate. Similarly, American Methodists practised episcopacy, but tended to see bishops as members of the presbyteral order with additional authority. Clearly, there is a common element to presbyteral and episcopal ministry, even where the orders are very precisely distinguished. Both are concerned with the oversight or *episcopate* of local churches, albeit one normally at the much wider level of diocese or area, and the other at the level of one or more congregations or parishes. Both are concerned with the transmission of the faith and the linking of the local church with the wider church; indeed, I would argue that the primary function of both bishops and presbyters is as representative link persons, maintaining bonds of *koinonia* within and between local churches. It is from this fundamental perspective that we must review and seek to integrate and reconcile such traditional Protestant concepts as 'pastoral office' and such traditional Catholic ones as 'sacrificing priesthood'. It is from this perspective also that we can review such questions as whether presbyteral ministry is to be seen as purely functional or whether it has a vital ontological dimension, and whether it is to be seen primarily as a gift to the Church from above or is to be seen as arising from within the Church. I would contend, in the spirit of John Zizioulas, that ministry is primarily relational, and therefore transcends the polarities just mentioned, and so long championed by certain

¹ See, for example, *Eucharist and Ministry*, Volume IV, *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, edited by Paul C Empsie and T Austin Murphy (Augsburg Press, 1979), pp 195-8, 216ff, 221ff.

erstwhile Catholic or Protestant controversialists.² Presbyteral and episcopal ministry can be understood only within the context of the Church as *koinonia*, as circulation of love, as partnership of ministry and laity. The mutuality of Father and Son has always been seen as model and inspiration of unity within the Church, 'that they may be one as thou, Father, and I are one', but the mutuality model has rarely been related to the question of relationship of ministerial order to the whole people of God as such. Ignatius of Antioch saw the obedience of Christ to the Father as the model for obedience to the episcopate, but he did not use the obverse Johannine statement, 'the Father has given all things into my hands', as an indication of the way in which the ministry should be related to the laity. In the situation of the pilgrim church, in which people are progressively growing into 'the full stature of the mature manhood of Christ', the ministry of *episcopate* or oversight of the people of God remains essential, yet there is a sense in which it should always tend towards its own eschatological redundancy. George Findlay makes this point in his classical commentary on Ephesians. In the eschaton, the work of the ministry will be superseded as a result of the arrival at the maturity of the full humanity of Christ of the whole of the people of God. This parallels the cessation of the sacraments at the return of Christ. The Great Shepherd will present the Church pure, without spot and wrinkle to Himself, and will then prepare to yield up His finished work to the Father.³ In the meantime, however, the work of the ministry remains essential to the building of *koinonia* in the Church.

² J Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press/Darton, Longman and Todd, 1985), especially pp 209-224.

³ Ephesians 5:27 and 1 Corinthians 15:28. For Findlay's comments, see G Findlay, 'The Epistle to the Ephesians', in *Expositor's Bible* (London, 1901), pp 375-9.

Nevertheless, it is a false dichotomy to think of it as coming either from 'below', as in some classical independent ecclesiology, or from 'above', as in much traditional 'catholic' ecclesiology. The ministry is constituted alongside and only in relation to the Church.⁴ As a contemporary French Catholic ecclesiologist puts it, 'We must replace the opposition ministry-laity with a model of communion where the people of God is the interior developing reality in which are situated the differing ministries'.⁵ There is, perhaps, a sense in which the simultaneous emergence of church and ministry mirrors the coeternity of the persons of the Trinity. The ministry is the gift of the third person of the Trinity to the Church, but its relationship with the laity is modelled after the relationship of the first two persons. As a relationship within the Church, part of God's plan from all eternity, the relationship of ministry and people is one that transcends all ordinary human categories of priority, precedence and derivation. It is inappropriate to use the metaphors and analogies derived from civil government that have sometimes been used in ecclesiological controversies, both by those calling for the 'democratic rights' of the laity, and those, seeking, on the other hand, to uphold the authority of the ministry. The church is founded on relationships established by the New Covenant. These are based, not on 'natural rights', but on mutual deference and submission in love, partnerships in giving and receiving that, however imperfectly, mirror those of the Trinity, a *theologoumenon* adduced in *Called to Love and Praise*. One can also argue that such an ecclesiology is also implicit in the recent Catholic-Methodist dialogue on the Apostolic tradition, where it is argued that God's confidence in the Church

⁴ I have explored this further in my article 'Some Reflections on Apostolicity', *One in Christ*, 1995/3, pp 237-50.

⁵ J Rigal, *L'ecclesiologie de communion*, (Paris, 1997), p 376f.

matches the essential nature of his free self-communication to the world.⁶

Much depends, also, on how we see the 'balance', as it were, of the aspects of presbyteral ministry. One can argue that within the totality of episcopal/presbyteral ministry, there is an essential, interrelated triangle of functions, which one may designate as oversight, sacramental (especially in terms of eucharistic presidency) and teaching. It is interesting that Wesley regarded the function of oversight as primarily defining the ministry. Later, the Wesleyan preachers, who were charged with an extraordinary ministry of preaching and oversight of the souls commended to their care, argued from this to the appropriateness of their administering the sacraments, as an essential adjunct to their pastoral role.⁷ It is also significant that Wesley sought a balanced understanding of the pastoral office that made it neither the creature of congregations nor lord over the Church. He emphasised both the God-given authority of the pastoral office and yet the voluntary submission of the Methodist people to their pastors.⁸ Wesley did not attempt to give the sort of rationale to this mutuality that I have outlined above. However, as with connexionalism, he hit on a sense of theological balance of great creative potential for ecumenical reception. Sadly the conflicts in early nineteenth century Methodism resulted eventually in the valid aspects of Wesleyan teaching being forgotten as an *hereditas damnosa* at exactly the time when they could

⁶ See *Called to Love and Praise* (Methodist Publishing House, 1995), para 2.1.9 and *The Apostolic Tradition: Report of Fifth Series of Roman Catholic-Methodist Dialogue* (Methodist Publishing House, 1991), para 15.

⁷ J Bowmer, *Pastor and People* (Epworth, 1975), is the standard authority on the Wesleyan doctrine of the ministry between 1791 and 1858.

⁸ Bowmer, op cit, p 200f.

have been ecumenically helpful. People like James Rigg, who in the aftermath of the Disruption, strove for reform and a new balance that should safeguard the essentials of the old teaching while recognising the just and proper role of the laity as partners in the Church, have tended to be forgotten.⁹

Behind the malaise of late nineteenth century Methodism, in which so much ecclesiological thinking was dictated by negative reaction both to the earlier hubris of some Wesleyan leaders, and to the external threat of the Oxford Movement, lay a fundamental failure in ecclesiology that affected all the major western churches. Ecclesiological thought tended to follow dry and distorted theories of the ministry. A certain sort of 'catholic', 'Anglo' or 'Roman', talked as if the existence of the Church depended solely on a certain type of ministerial succession. Some Free Churchmen, by contrast, tended to see the minister purely as evangelist, and the Church purely as an association of believers, with no real corporate destiny, as sign, to live out. Reaction against certain concepts of ministry, usually misunderstood, rebounded onto ecclesiology. It has been not altogether unfairly observed that those churches that tend to emphasise the 'priesthood of all believers' in such a way as to exclude any sense of a special ministerial priesthood, tend to end in practice with the priesthood of nobody, and the Church no longer conceived of as a corporate royal priesthood.¹⁰ We pay a heavy price for our theological distortions in separation. A vital, and often overlooked

⁹ James H Rigg, *The Connexional Economy of Wesleyan Methodism*, second edition (1879), contains a final chapter on this. See also the standard biography of Rigg by J Telford, *The Life of James Harrison Rigg* (1909), pp 272-80.

¹⁰ I am thinking of a particular talk I heard given by the Revd Dr John Newton to a circuit rally, in the course of which he pleaded for a recovery of a true sense of the priesthood of all believers.

aspect of the discipline of ecumenism, is the need for all churches to purify their traditions, in the light of the witness of others, from such distortions.

It is, however, when we see the Church as *koinonia*, when we see it as an essentially pastoral and priestly body that we can set both the traditional protestant emphasis on 'pastoral office' and the catholic one on 'sacrificing priesthood' in their proper context. We can set the declaration of the Deed of Union of British Methodism of 1932 in its proper context, when it talks of the ministry as 'possessing no exclusive title to the cure of souls' and of the ministry as having 'no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord's people'.¹¹ The Deed of Union in no way means that there is not a special ministerial order within the Church. It uses a biblical term for *episcopate* to denote this function, when it calls ordained ministers 'stewards in the household of faith'.¹² What it does say is that ministry is not a *charism* detachable from the Church, but that it exists only in relationship to it. There is an inherent link between the representative, focussing ministry to which presbyters and bishops are called and ordained, and the ministry of the whole Church. Vatican II teaches that there is such a relationship between the priesthood of the laity and that of presbyters and bishops.¹³ One might say that the latter, special ministry both focuses and enables the ministry of the whole body to discharge its

¹¹ 'Deed of Union', quoted on p 829 of G Thompson Brake, *Policy and Politics in British Methodism* (Edsall, 1984). Though it can be argued that the Deed of Union leans strongly towards a view of ministry that emphasises its emergence from 'below', this is to an extent balanced by the emphasis in the 1937 statement of the Methodist Conference on the 'Nature of the Christian Church', which does emphasise ministry as a gift to the Church. See *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order 1933-83* (Methodist Publishing House, 1984), p 27.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Constitution on the Church*, ch 10.

mission. That ministry is about enablement of the whole Church is fundamental teaching from the time of the writer of Ephesians onwards. It applies equally to ordained ministers of oversight and to charismatically endowed individuals who exercise specific ministries within particular congregations.¹⁴ Presbyteral/episcopal ministry is both functional and ontological in the sense that the person ordained to these ministries **has a task and is a sign**. The concept of the indelibility of orders is linked to the latter concept. Even churches which, like British Methodism, have not traditionally used such language, regard ordination as irrepeatable (a minister 'reinstated' in the Connexion after 'leaving' the ministry for a time is not reordained).¹⁵

It is interesting to note the similarity of some Wesleyan and Anglican thinking on this subject at the beginning of this century. George Findlay, a Wesleyan biblical scholar and ecclesiologist, developed the concept of the 'representative person' to explain the essential function of the ministry as he perceived it. He emphasised the way in which the Church called out certain of its members to bear a particular responsibility for the maintenance of true *koinonia* and pastoral care within the Church. He saw such people as focusing the total ministry of the Church, while sharing it with others. This theology powerfully influenced the Deed of Union and later Methodist statements on ordination.¹⁶ R.C. Moberly, from a distinctively 'catholic' Anglican viewpoint, developed a similar representative theology of the ministerial priesthood *vis à vis* the total priestly Body of Christ. Moberly emphasised the priestly nature of the Church far more than Findlay, a phenomenon

that can be explained in terms of Wesleyan overreaction against the teaching of the Tractarians. A key statement by Moberly on ministerial 'representativeness' deserves to be quoted in full:

The Christian ministry is not a substituted intermediary - still less an atoning mediator between God and lay people; but it is rather the representative organ of the whole body, in the exercise of prerogatives and powers that belong to the body as a whole. It is ministerially empowered to wield, as the Body's organic representative, the powers which belong to the body, but which the body cannot exercise except through its own organs duly fitted for that purpose. When it is duly done by Christian ministers, it is not so much that they do it, in the stead, or for the sake of the whole; but rather that the whole does it by them and through them.

The Christian Priest does not offer an atoning sacrifice on behalf of the Church: it is rather the Church through his act that not so much 'offers an atonement' as 'is identified upon earth with the one heavenly offering of the atonement of Christ'.¹⁷

In beginning with his assertion, 'The Christian ministry is not a substituted intermediary', Moberley addressed the key concern of evangelicals, Anglican as well as Free Church, that the ministry should not be seen as barring the access of the believer to the Father in the Spirit. Almost every late nineteenth century Wesleyan repudiation of 'ministerial priesthood' seems to be based on the evangelical misconception that priesthood was, to use Moberley's phrase a 'substituted intermediary', barring the spiritual access of the believer to God. It is also interesting

¹⁴ Ephesians 4:12.

¹⁵ *Called To Love and Praise*, para 4.5.11.

¹⁶ *History of British Methodism*, edited by Rupert E Davies, A Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp, 4 volumes (Epworth, 1983), III, pp 336-8.

¹⁷ R Moberly, *Ministerial Priesthood* (J Murray, 1899), p 242.

to contrast with Moberly's statement the much later (1974) British Methodist statement on Ordination:

as a perpetual reminder of this calling and as a means of being obedient to it the Church sets apart men and women, specially called, in ordination. In their office the calling of the whole Church is focused and represented, and it is their responsibility as representative persons to lead the people to share with them in that calling. In this sense they are the sign of the presence and ministry of Christ in the Church, and through the Church to the world.¹⁸

It will be seen that the relationship between Moberly's theology and that of the Methodist Conference in 1974 is very close. Both point to the representatively functional and ontologically 'sign' nature of presbyteral ministry. The presbyteral minister is a focusing sign of the total 'sign' nature of the entire body. He or she is neither above it nor beneath it, but within it in a special position of sign/leadership in which the entire body can recognise its calling as essentially focused. In terms of the theology of the Church as sign of the kingdom or primordial sacrament, one can see the ordained ministry as 'sign within the more general sign of the Church'. That this more recent thinking is consistent with the Apostolic Tradition of the Church can be seen in the fruits of Tillard's research into early episcopacy, which leads him to emphasise the position of the bishop as one who is chosen for leadership by his people precisely because in him they can discern the same apostolic faith that they share with the rest of the Church.¹⁹ Many early and later ordination rites include the axiological

¹⁸ *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order*, p 136.

¹⁹ J Tillard, *Church of Churches* (Michael Glazier, 1987), especially pp 175-83 and 190-196.

acclamation of the people, who signify thereby their concurrence in the ordination of one who is received not merely as doctrinally orthodox, but as one who also has the essential faithfulness for the task, and also what Methodists would call 'the gifts and graces for our work'.²⁰ The bishop now has the task of preserving and handing on that faith in its integrity, and of acting as an essential link person with the other local churches of his time and with the Church of the past and the future. One can even talk of a sort of mutual indwelling of pastor and people. Both support each other in the maintenance of the integrity of the faith. The pastor is chosen as it were both from 'below' and 'above'. Chosen by his or her people, he or she is recognised by the wider Church and receives the sign of ordination by which he or she is incorporated into the universal presbyterate or episcopate. The gift of the Spirit is invoked, and so ministry can be seen as coming both from 'above' and 'below'. The whole action of constituting such a minister takes place within the total *koinonia* of the Church, within which the Spirit of God dwells. It is better, perhaps, to eschew such secular-hierarchical spatial metaphors and speak instead the language of love. The ministry is established in relationship in the circulation of Trinitarian love, part of the overflow of which is the stream of the life of the Church of God. W. B. Pope, the great Wesleyan systematic theologian, talks of the authority of the pastoral office as coming, in one sense, from God, in another from the corporate priesthood of the whole church which lodges 'in a certain sense with its ministers' 'all that the Church has received as a corporate body from its Head'. The Pastoral Office, in a very real sense, is the gift

²⁰ Eg, the British Methodist ordination rite in *The Methodist Service Book* (Methodist Publishing House, 1975), p G7.

of God to the Church and the responding gift of authority and representation to its ministers by the Church.²¹

The difficulties that are felt to exist in terms of defining the exact relationship of ministerial priesthood to that of the faithful can disappear in this context. Both the traditional Methodist teaching about the identity of the two types of priesthood, and the teaching of Vatican II and ARCIC on the differences, can be affirmed and held in that paradoxical tension that has to characterise so much Christian theology. All priesthood in the Christian Church is, of course, a participation in that of Christ himself. However, it is not unreasonable to say that the ministry belongs to a 'different realm of the gifts of the Spirit',²² since it is well established within the New Testament itself that there are special charismata given to special people for particular functions, and that these are distinguishable from the general gifts of the Spirit, which are received by all Christians through faith and baptism. There is also a difference in kind, *pace* the teaching of the Deed of Union, which now clearly needs to be understood contextually and to be nuanced, in the sense that the presbyteral ministry is linked to a direct pastoral and representative function which is unique in its scope, even though it is related to the responsibility of every Christian to be a 'Christ' to their neighbour, and to the share that deacons and lay people have in the pastoral work of the Church.²³ This explains the

paradox of the way in which British Methodism can simultaneously talk of the fact that presbyteral ministers have 'no exclusive cure of souls' while at the same time, as in the statement on the Nature of the Christian Church, regarding their ministry as a gift of the Spirit to the Church and essential to its order and *koinonia*.

We have already talked of the importance of a balanced understanding of the three main functions of the presbyterate. It is important now to address their essential interconnectedness and to show that both the terms 'pastoral office' and 'sacrificing priesthood' are capable of reception as alternative ways of describing the same office. The link is already there in the New Testament tradition. It is to be seen most clearly in John 21, in the commissioning of Peter, and in 1 Peter 5. In the first, Peter is commissioned as a pastor, but this is defined in terms of a participation in the example of the Good Shepherd who has already laid down his life for the sheep. In 1 Peter, Peter (or the person who is writing consciously in his name and claiming faithfulness to his tradition) reminds those who are 'under-shepherds' of the Great Shepherd, and who are also defined as presbyters by the man who first receives that office of oversight, of the manner of example and self-denial in which they are to exercise their ministry.²⁴ They are to be 'sacrificing presbyters' by example and calling, 'pastors after thine own heart' as Charles Wesley puts it.²⁵ W. B. Pope speaks interestingly of the sacrificial nature of the Apostolic ministry within the context of the corporate sacrificial priesthood of the whole People of God. Having referred to Paul's injunction to believers in Romans 12 to 'present themselves as living sacrifices', he then speaks of

superintending such pastoral care, nor affect his or her status as the 'representative' person in links of communion with the wider church.

²⁴ John 21:15-19 and 1 Peter 5:1-6.

²⁵ *The Methodist Hymn Book* (London, 1933), 785.

²¹ W B Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology* (London, 1880), Volume 3, p 345.

²² 'ARCIC Statement on Ordination', in *Growth in Agreement*, edited by H Meyer and L Vischer (Paulist Press, 1984), p 82.

²³ The Methodist 'Deed of Union', reacting against the failures of some Wesleyans to affirm fully the lay ministries within the local church, talks of the ministry as having 'no exclusive cure of souls'. The role of class leaders and others in sharing pastoral ministry is to be affirmed, but this does not prejudice either the responsibility of the minister in

Paul's 'Apostolic devotion of his own life as a priestly libation upon the sacrifice of their faith'. There is an implicit, but undeveloped rapprochement here between the two concepts of presbyteral ministry.²⁶

It is in this light that the ministry of eucharistic presidency must be seen. The Eucharist is the act of the whole Church, head and members. It is entirely appropriate that its celebration should be presided over by one who, through presbyteral/episcopal ordination and commitment is called to be a sign and example to the faithful and before the world. The Eucharist is Christ's gift to the Church; it makes, renews and expresses the Church. Since it is by nature the timeless reality of the worship of heaven breaking eschatologically into the midst of the Christian community, it is again appropriate that one or more members of the universal presbyterate, in whom are focussed the essential calling of the Church, should preside at it.²⁷ Their position as 'link persons' and ministers of *koinonia* across time and space also reinforces this.

The teaching ministry of presbyters is also related to their ministry in the service of *koinonia*. As Frances Young has stressed, they were the tradition bearers in the first two centuries of the Church.²⁸ They have a special responsibility for handing on the Tradition, and interpreting it in new contexts. They do not do this independently of the *sensus fidelium*, but in fruitful partnership with it. Their teaching role involves also a listening one, listening to the witness of Scripture, Tradition and the current sense of faith of their local church. Their role is both to stimulate the corporate reflection of the People of God and then to help the people articulate it both for the benefit of the wider

²⁶ Pope, op cit, p 337.

²⁷ This is not to exclude the focussing role of the diaconate in service.

²⁸ Frances Young, *Presbyteral Ministry in the Catholic Tradition* (Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, 1994).

Church and before the world. All this stems from the nature of the Church as 'connected' communion. As Jean Rigal stresses, free and uninhibited communication, mutual encouragement and enrichment, fraternal love, mutual correction, listening and receiving are all of the essence of its catholicity.²⁹

Within the Methodist tradition, the role of the presbyterate in expressing the connexional conciliarity of the Church has always been emphasised. Benjamin Gregory called elders 'impersonations of order' and 'keystones of the arch of unity'.³⁰ Brian Beck argues that 'presbyteral ministers are a sign and instrument of the connexional nature of the Church. They are a representation locally of the *episcopate* of the wider people of God'.³¹ It is precisely because of our connexional ecclesiology that we are able to present a balanced understanding of presbyteral ministry that locates it as sign and special function clearly within the context of the total 'sign-nature' of the whole people of God. It is placed neither above nor below the royal priesthood of all the faithful with which it is integrally related. American Methodism can similarly locate its separated episcopal ministry, while the studies made at the time of the abortive 'Covenanting' Proposals show that there is clear room for a Methodist reception of personalised episcopacy that can locate it clearly within our connexional system and ecclesiology.³²

²⁹ Rigal, op cit, p 68f.

³⁰ Benjamin Gregory, *Holy Catholic Church* (1873), p 103.

³¹ Brian Beck, 'Some Reflections on Connexionalism (2)', *Epworth Review*, 18/3 (September 1991); my emphasis.

³² *Statements of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order*, pp 202-37. For many interesting insights into the way in which our sister American Church understands its connexionalism and the role of elders and bishops within it, see Thomas E Frank, *The Polity, Practice and Mission of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, 1997).

It may be that our connexional consciousness, with its strong emphasis on partnership in mission of the whole people of God will help in the achievement of a new ecumenical consensus on both the presbyterate and its context within the wider ministry of the whole body of Christ. The Reformation controversies did immense damage to a balanced understanding. Roman Catholic teaching became more and more obsessed with the purely sacramental functions of the presbyterate, though it did retain a fuller and more nuanced understanding of episcopal ministry. Its emphasis on special priestly powers tended to reinforce the existing clericalisation of the Church and its resultant sense of separation between clergy and laity. The Reformers quite correctly stressed the teaching and governing functions of presbyters, while, in general, under-stressing the ministry of *koinonia*. The Reformation emphasis of the magisterial reformers on state churches and of radical reformers on gathered congregations helped to undermine the sense of the universality of the Church and its missionary calling. Later liberal Protestant reductionist individualism with its misunderstanding of the priesthood of all believers wrought further havoc. Both Catholics and Protestants moved away from the primitive understanding of the eucharist as the joyful celebration by the **whole** Church of all the acts of redemption. Roman Catholics stressed the 'propitiatory sacrifice', an individual priestly act at which the people of God were observers rather than full participants. The Reformation, with some exceptions amongst Anglicans and Lutherans, moved further and further into a solemn 'memorialism', which largely deprived the people of the eschatological and universal emphases of the primitive eucharist. All these developments had deleterious consequences for the sense of the Church as communion maintained through the vital partnership of ministry and laity, linked across both time and space.

Early Methodism brought with it a eucharistic revival and a revival of primitive church consciousness along with the Evangelical Revival. The revival created a new realisation of the potential and power of charismatic and local 'lay' ministries working in tandem with the ordained ministry. The Wesleyans were never able to achieve in practice the balance that they believed was indicated by Scripture and early Methodist experience alike as the proper norm. They recognised that such a balance depended on the maintenance of a spirit of true harmony in the Church, in which both pastors and people respected each others' vital roles within the fellowship.³³ Whatever their failures both in terms of developing a clear theology of connexionalism and partnership and in translating it into harmonious practice, the classical Wesleyans recognised what was demanded as an ecclesiological consequence of their understanding of the 'catholic' love of God, available for all humankind. Bonds of communion needed to be maintained at all levels of the fellowship. In Britain the presbyterate, in America the bishops and the elders bore the primary responsibility for this. The status of all people as made in the image of God pointed to a culture of mutual respect and partnership.

Perichoretic relationships within the pilgrim Church should mirror those within the Trinity to the extent that is possible with the present aid of the Spirit. The Methodist understanding of the role of presbyteral ministry is, I submit, compatible with the emerging insights of the ecumenical theology of the Church as communion, informed as they are by basic Trinitarian theology. This article has merely scratched the surface of a major theme that merits careful investigation in co-operation with our ecumenical partners.

³³ Gregory, op cit, pp 103, 152-3. 47