



**New College  
University of Edinburgh**

**M.Th. in Ministry**

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## **Theology of Ministry**

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**The Revd. Gareth J. M. Saunders © 1998 - 2001**

**[gareth@gareth-and-jane-saunders.co.uk](mailto:gareth@gareth-and-jane-saunders.co.uk)**

**<http://www.gareth-and-jane-saunders.co.uk/academic.htm>**

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## **Aim**

It is my intention in this paper to outline and analyse my theology of ministry. By theology of ministry I simply mean, what I understand ministry to be about, and more specifically what I understand about the ministry to which I believe God has called me.

## **Outline**

This is an essay in two parts. The first part outlines what my basic theology of ministry is. It looks at the postmodern world in which we live and the challenge that it, and its worldview presents for contemporary ministry. It examines what 'ministry' means to me, and focuses on the life of prayer and being attentive to God as the essential components of what it means to me, to be a priest. It concludes with a brief examination of what it means to allow others to enter into my brokenness and failure as a human being, as a model for ministry.

For some of the work I have drawn on previous papers I have written on the subjects of worldview and ministry, and spiritual direction as a model for ministry, which I feel sum up a lot of my thoughts on my views of Christian ministry.

In the second section, I identify some of the themes raised in part one as they have been worked out in my life. Given the limitations of this paper I have identified three specific strands, entitled Pain, Loving the Broken and Grief, in which I explore something of my experience of my childhood, my experiences working in a homeless hostel in London and the illness and death of my father and how that affected me. Each section is preceded by a passage from Kahlil Gibran's mystical work *The Prophet*, which symbolises some of what I want to discuss in that section. I am attracted to both the use of the symbolic, and to the postmodern use of collage and so the inclusion of *The Prophet* is an attempt to combine both of these elements.

## **my theology of ministry**

## **A Calling**

My calling to Christian ministry came when I was baptised. My calling to the priesthood came when I was nine years old.

I don't remember what day it was. Or whether the meteorologists had correctly predicted rain, wind or sunshine, chill or warmth. In many ways it was an ordinary day. But then most ordinary days are uniquely special.

The front door burst open - the handle more flicked than turned - and a whirlwind of a child tore in, shedding his satchel and coat on his way to the kitchen. The recoiling door slammed firmly shut. It was lunchtime - one of the three-hundred and sixty-five that A.D. 1981 was offering that year - and I had just arrived home from Knowepark primary school; I was a nine year old Scottish schoolboy - a Borderer - and this was the day that I recognised my calling to the priesthood, and told someone about it.

"Mum," I said.

"Mmm-Hmm," she acknowledged, while clearing away the dishes.

"I don't want to be a doctor any more. I want to be a minister and heal the whole person."

I don't remember what her reaction was - though it wasn't bad - and I went back to school. My calling was a part of the everyday - nothing dramatic, nothing special - God had spoken and I had listened.

## Postmodern Heresy and Worldview

"The exercise of choice (Latin, *haeresis*) in religious doctrine has posed a problem in Christianity since the days of the apostles," writes Ronald Finucane (*The History of Christianity*, p. 314). This postmodern age is a time of incessant choosing. The challenge now, according to Jencks,

"is to choose and combine traditions selectively, to *elect* (as the verb of eclecticism would have it) those aspects from the past and present which appear most relevant for the job in hand. The resultant creation, if successful, will be a striking synthesis of traditions; if unsuccessful, a smorgasbord." (Jencks, "What is Post-Modernism", in Anderson, p.27)

There is no longer a belief in a universal objective worldview (has there ever really been one?). "Reality isn't what it used to be" (Kvale, "Themes of Postmodernity" in Anderson, p.19). Life is defined by what it has ceased to be: *postmodern*; and this postmodern world is an eclectic, collage of perspectives. Time, space and order are simultaneously questioned - gone are meta-narratives of legitimation, binned is the symbolic. Superficial image and appearance are now everything - the focus is on the linguistic and social construction of reality (Kvale, "Themes in Postmodernity", in Anderson, p.21). And here I am, a Christian, a supposed guardian of the 'traditional', a seer of metaphysical reality caught in the middle of this new cultural soup. Am I that different to everybody else? I too have been exposed to all sorts of different cultures and perspectives: I have met Australian Aborigines, I have worshipped with Eastern Orthodox Christians, I can communicate with family-members on the other side of the Atlantic via telephone or the internet and in fractions of a second receive a reply. I have more choice about what I read, see, visit or think than has ever been available in the history of humankind. I am a subscriber to a number of cultures, simply on account of my being born in Scotland in the late twentieth-century. I am a Borderer; I am Scottish; I am British; I am European; I am a Westerner; I am a Christian; I am a Scottish Episcopalian; I am an ordinand; a student; a theologian; a musician; a tenant, and a myriad of other labels besides. Each culture implies a slightly different worldview and identity, and an accompanying set of beliefs and customs. I seamlessly move from one to the other, sometimes many times in the same day, but am still recognisably the same person.

My task here, to write a theology of ministry, is an interesting one given this understanding of the world in which I find myself living. It occurs to me that this is a question probably I would not have expected to be asked had I been an ordinand in the Scottish Church a couple

of hundred years ago. I would have been told by the Church what ministry was about, and I'd have gone ahead and done it. There would have been no room for choice; choice leads to division, I would have been told. Isn't that what history demonstrates, after all? For example, the choice about what model of hierarchical administration the Church in Scotland should adopt led to a split in the eighteenth century which has still not been healed: Episcopalians, on the one hand, and Presbyterians, on the other, which itself subdivided again and again. So, am I already a heretic? As an Anglican I am already part of an heretical movement, broken away from the orthodox Roman Catholic church at the direction of King Henry VIII. As an Anglo-Catholic Charismatic-Evangelical I have already made choices about how to worship God, about the words I prefer to use in talking about God, in the styles and models of ministry that fit with my own particular view of the world. In many ways I am already a heretic - a chooser.

We are standing at a junction in world history, and it is both a rather daunting but exciting place to be standing, a conclusion that Walter Truett Anderson shares:

"This time is, for all its jangle, complexity and dissonance, a moment of great beauty and opportunity. We glimpse new ways of thinking about ourselves, new possibilities for coexisting with others - even profoundly different others. We begin to feel a sense of ownership of our worldviews and identities. My own feeling about this time is a hopeful one. I believe that such works as these, taken together, do more than describe the world in terms of what it has just now ceased to be. They also help us to understand the world in terms of what it is struggling to become." (Anderson, p.11)

What is the world struggling to become? Perhaps this is *the* question of ministry. Perhaps if we know where we are supposed to be heading we can make an educated guess at which direction in which to head.

### **Worldview boundaries**

Human beings stand on the boundary between the physical world and the spiritual. Generally, however, most of the population are aware only of the physical - this is certainly true in the Enlightened, Modern era, where we believe that we can understand and manipulate the world using the 'serious' tools acquired in the scientific and philosophical fields. Religion and spirituality, as a consequence are relegated to the realms of the private and non-serious, regarded as mere stories and offered no serious contribution in the debate of the world's origin, and how it progresses. In the post-modern era this is changing. People are becoming

more aware of this boundary between the physical and spiritual, as they realise that the 'serious' disciplines of science and philosophy cannot account for all that they see and feel, and that technological and cultural advancement are unable to stop suffering and death. The Church has long been aware of this boundary.

Historically the church has aligned itself into two camps depending on how it views its position on the boundary line, how it manages this boundary. On the one hand we have what I refer to as the Graeco-Roman worldview, of which Augustine of Hippo was a strong proponent, which sees the world as divided strictly between good and evil, sacred and secular, spiritual and material. The church is seen as the custodian of the sacred. God calls adherents and converts to renounce the world and enter the church. God is found in the church and not in the world. This is epitomised in the model of the medieval monastery. On the other hand we have what I refer to as the Celtic worldview, which also has strong parallels in the spirituality of the Eastern Orthodox church:

"All the evidence points to the fact that the Celts were thoroughly orthodox, but their theology was akin to that of the Eastern Church... rather than that of the Augustinian model, which had been so persuasive in Rome and which made all before it seem rather old-fashioned and incoherent." (Finney, p.126)

In this view God is seen at work *in* the world. It is affirmed that although the creation is subject to sin, it is also capable of liberation. In other words, renouncing one's sins does not also require one to renounce the world. As Sheldrake reminds us "the Celts ... took very seriously that we can and should enjoy the things of God. The most tangible gift is the created world around us." (Sheldrake, p.81)

I suspect that my theology draws on elements of both worldviews, but it rests most comfortably in the latter, the Celtic opinion. If as the Celts believed, "the boundaries between this material world and that other world were all around people [and] human beings live permanently in a world that is a boundary place." (Sheldrake, p.46) then people outside the Church also have access to these boundaries. The problem for most people is that they do not realise that they are there. Our task as ministers then is to recognise and make explicit these boundaries and name them, not by decoding the world, unpacking and dusting down the philosophical formulae which neatly explains the world and God's involvement in a systematic way, but by introducing people to the living Lord Jesus who is alive and at work

in the world, through the Holy Spirit, and most explicitly in the life and work of the Church. This requires us to understand the language and culture of the world, to become familiar with what the world regards as important and show how their stories fit into the story of the world as made clear in the life of Jesus Christ. It also requires us as a Church to be aware of where God is at work in the world, through literature, art, philosophy and the lives of ordinary people to inspire and prompt the Church to be what it is called to be: to be the Church, to be something against which the world strikes hard which is an alternative to what the world offers. It encourages us, as Elizabeth Templeton says to recognise "the freshness and immediacy of theological truth in the world's own language". (Templeton, p.7)

## **What is ministry?**

Ministry, I believe, is something to which all Christians are called; it is not the sole property of the ordained cleric. The Church is the Body of Christ here on earth, commissioned by Jesus to continue the work that he began. Prior to his ascension, Jesus said to his disciples:

"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. <sup>16</sup> The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. <sup>17</sup> And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; <sup>18</sup> they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover." (St. Mark 16<sup>15-18</sup>)

*All* were called to proclaim the good news to the *whole* of creation. As Jesus shared his ministry with his disciples, so we are all to share in Christ's ministry. We are called to be servants of each other, as Christ was a servant of God to humankind. There is no hierarchy in the Church, though we seem to have assumed one. The situation is not that the ordained clergy dish out ministry to the laity who passively receive it, although this is a model which is often thrust upon the ordained minister, who colludes with it - it is flattering after all to be thought of as needed. Rather, the laity are the ministers - the people commissioned to proclaim the good news to the nations, heal the sick, cast out demons and speak in new tongues - and the clergy are the ministers to the ministers. This is summed up in a prayer by the Methodist church in Singapore.

### **Called to something smaller**

We are not ordaining you to ministry; that happened at your baptism.

We are not ordaining you to be a caring person; you are already called to that.

We are not ordaining you to serve the Church in committees, activities, organisation; that is already implied in your membership.

We are not ordaining you to become involved in social issues, ecology, race, politics, revolution, for that is laid upon every Christian.

We are ordaining you to something smaller and less spectacular: to read and interpret those sacred stories of our community, so that they speak a word to people today; to remember and practise those rituals and rights of meaning that in their poetry address man at the level where change operates; to foster in community through word and sacrament that encounter with truth which will

set men and women free to minister as the body of Christ.

We are ordaining you to the ministry of the word and sacraments and pastoral care.

God grant you grace not to betray but uphold it, not to deny but affirm it, through  
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Methodist Church in Singapore  
[from Donald Hilton, *Liturgy of Life*, National Christian  
Education Council, 1991 ISBN 0-7197-0760-9]

Clerics are ordained to something smaller and less spectacular. Clerics are not superheroes - they are not even ordinary heroes - they are called to live authentic human lives in relationship with God; they are fundamentally called to be human - fully human, as Christ was.

## Priesthood

I believe that priests are called primarily to pray, read and interpret the holy scriptures and exercise spiritual direction (cf. Called to something smaller). I believe that that is part of what I have been called, by God, to do. My preparation for this, then, involves, not learning simply learning the disciplines of academic theology, or understanding new techniques of church management, but simply the ability to *listen*. In order to be faithful to Christ, both the priest (and congregation) need to be attentive to the voice of God in the here and now, in the nitty-gritty of everyday life. If this is learned while in priestly formation, it will be taken into the parish, and into the world.

The priest, I believe needs to be a man or woman of prayer, first and foremost; priesthood is not about being a religious shopkeeper, as Eugene Peterson puts it (*Working the Angles*), it is about something quieter. He or she needs to have the discipline of prayer, not just a repetitive repetition of the daily office but a regular and disciplined waiting in the presence of God, being transformed into the likeness of Christ. This is a discipline which needs to be developed long before he or she dons their first dog-collar - as Revd Canon Gianfranco Tellini, member of the Scottish Episcopal Church's Liturgy Committee says, "If you are not a priest when you walk down the aisle to be ordained you won't be one when you walk back." - and does not stop once ordained. Christianity is a lifelong process of transformation into the likeness of Christ.

One of the first and most influential books I have read on priesthood was by Michael Hollings. In his book *Living Priesthood* he devotes the whole of his second chapter to "Priest: Person of Prayer". In it he writes:

"...the centre and core of the whole priestly life is the relationship with God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I mean that this relationship is to be so deep, strong and all-pervading that it is the very pulse, life-blood, heart of his whole being. Without it, he is empty, a functionary only, wrongly balanced and so ineffective.

To this you could say - Yes, but that is what every Christian should be, where every Christian should have his life centred. And I would agree with you, and say that this is why all baptised are to a lesser degree or in a lesser kind of priesthood. And I would sing many an Alleluia if we could find this attitude in the average Christian....

...Because life is what the human being is all about, the old cliché that "holiness is wholeness" fits well, and is deeply true. That the whole man should be taken up in priesthood is self-evident, because THE priest is Jesus Christ, and our

share of priesthood takes its origin from him. He was entirely given up to the will of his Father, ...For the priest God must be central to his whole being. God's will is the priest's touchstone; God's love is his driving force and inspiration through the gift of the Spirit; his greatest desire is to be so one with God that it is God who lives and loves through him and so does the work. Once this centrality is lost, once another love or interest purges God to the periphery, the whole balance and texture of priestly life is altered. It could be said that he had not only lost direction but lost the "essence" of priesthood. Yet today how often the average priest sees his life in pastoral terms. His work for God is immediately in visiting, meetings, administration. He is fully, and generally energetically, engaged from morning till night on "the things of God", with very little time for God himself, because "someone had to do them". Prayer is fitted in as and when possible so as not to interfere with the business of life. Such priests are good men, hard working men. They are devoted to their parishes and their parishioners. They are doing their very best for them.

The sad fact is that the weight of work has thrown them off balance. The priest is nobody, has no power, is empty no matter how hard he works, if he is not given over to God in the Spirit... [My] thesis is simply the need to allow God the first place in the mind, heart and strength of the priest." (Hollings, *Living Priesthood*, p.43-45)

Not only does Hollings reinforce the centrality of the spiritual life of prayer to the life of the priest, he also makes the important point that the ministry of the clergy and that of the laity are inextricably connected. Remember, the clergy are ministers to the ministers. My task then, as a priest, is not to *run* a church, as though it was a business or club but to be obedient and attentive to God. There is no concern for what might be regarded as a successful church. Eugene Peterson is clear in his view of this:

"The biblical fact is that there are no successful churches. There are, instead, communities of sinners, gathered before God week after week in towns and villages all over the world. The Holy Spirit gathers them and does his work in them. In these communities of sinners, one of the sinners is called pastor and given a designated responsibility in the community. The pastor's responsibility is to keep the community attentive to God." (Peterson, *Working the Angles*, p.2)

## Spiritual Direction

An aspect of the Christian life that I have held in high regard for a long time, as a model for being attentive to God is that of spiritual direction. With its roots in monasticism, spiritual direction is an ascetic activity, that is, it is to do with training. Just as God's activity in the world cannot be divided into sacred and secular, so God's interaction with humankind cannot be separated. There is a temptation to think of spiritual direction as being concerned with the guidance of a person's spiritual activities, as though they can be distinguished from other areas of life. The spiritual director is concerned with the whole person. The spiritual life is not merely to do with our thoughts, passions, or our 'soul', it is to do with our whole being: all that we are. Merton pins this down even further when he writes:

"For the spiritual man (*pneumatikos*) is one whose whole life, in all its aspects and all its activities, has been spiritualized by the action of the Holy Spirit, whether through the sacraments or by personal and interior inspirations. Moreover, spiritual direction is concerned with the whole person not simply as an individual human being, but as a son of God, another Christ, seeking to recover the perfect likeness to God in Christ, and by the Spirit of Christ." (Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation*, p.15)

Spiritual direction takes seriously God's initiative in every situation. It emphasises God's interest and concern in every aspect of life and that spiritual direction is concerned with being attentive to what God is already doing in each facet of a person's life. It requires us to ask What has God already being doing here? What has God begun that I may be involved in continuing? It requires us to work at the centre of things, where we are fully ourselves and where we are at the heart of our relationships, in faith and intimacy. It requires us to just 'be'. Not rushing around being busy, organising and being impressive, 'running a church', but just being ourselves. This is why Suzanne Zuercher says that spiritual direction is for "people who are engaged with their lives" (Zuercher, *Enneagram Companions*, p.7) Spiritual Directors she says are "people who grapple with the hard questions and learn to resist the temptation to settle for easy answers. They grow increasingly comfortable with mystery, their own and that of others, and with what some call fate, other providence. They relax into their body with its strengths and limitations. They attend to their own issues rather than flee from them into those of other people. On the other hand, their growing humble acceptance of themselves in their own humanity brings them closer to others." (Zuercher, *Enneagram Companions*, p.8)

Spiritual direction is not simply something for the elite, or for those who can afford it

(personally I question charging for spiritual direction) it is for all God's children. Neither is it a ministry to be carried out solely by the clergy but by *all* members of the Body of Christ. I suspect a lot of spiritual direction goes on un-noticed without those involved realising that that is what is happening. Spiritual direction takes seriously the Christian quorate that when two or three are gathered together in Jesus' name then God is there in their midst. In fact, many lay people are probably better spiritual directors than their clergy. They notice the obscure, everyday, unimportant parts of people's lives, they take seriously people's requests for prayer.

Spiritual Direction is not, then, about learning a new pastoral technique. It is about 'being'. Spiritual direction as a model for priesthood addresses the questions about pastors being too busy and 'running churches'. It encourages the minister (whether lay or ordained) to lay to rest their busyness and attend to where God is at work in the life of the person in front of them. Peterson sums this up well:

"What is required is that we bring the same disciplined prayer and discerning attentiveness into the commonplaces that we bring to the preparation of lectures and sermons, sharing crises of illness and death, celebrating births and marriages, launching campaigns and stirring up visions. It means putting the full spotlight of prayerful concern on the parts of life that get no other spotlights put on them. Being a spiritual director is bringing the same care and skill and intensity to the ordinary, boring, uneventful parts of our lives that we readily give to the eventful conversions and proclamations." (Peterson, *Working the Angles*, p.159)

It seems to me that the model of spiritual direction: as Peterson says "taking seriously, with a disciplined attention and imagination what others take casually" (Peterson, *Working the Angles*, p.151) is essential for recovering the priest's role and purpose from the clutches of secularization and the pressure of the philosophies who work with the assumption that there is no God. The model of spiritual direction encourages the priest to fully be him or herself, rooted in Jesus Christ. It takes seriously the priest's calling to be fully transformed into the likeness of Christ, as it centres him or her in a life of prayer and attention to God. As such, he or she is released from the burden of trying to successfully run a church or reacting solely to emergencies and crises, rather he or she is free to recognise where God is already at work and build on that.

## Failure and Loneliness

### The Word

A pen appeared, and the god said:  
'Write what it is to be  
man.' And my hand hovered  
long over the bare page.

until there, like footprints  
of the lost traveller, letters  
took shape on the page's  
blankness, and I spelled out

the word 'lonely'. And my hand moved  
to erase it; but the voices  
of all those waiting at life's  
window cried out loud: 'It is true.'

(R.S. Thomas *Laboratories of the Spirit*, 1975)

For years I wrestled with my calling to ordination, I still do, I suppose. Growing up in a town where the majority of young people do not go to church I felt rather out of place. I felt that people did not understand me, or my calling. I was risking everything with God. and it was a long and lonely road that I was travelling, one which would involve me risk giving everything to God, pouring out all that I was so that He could use me: I might decrease so that He might increase. I thought that this was the lot of the ordinand, the life of the ordained cleric. And I believe that I was right. But it is not the whole story, because it is also the lot of the whole of humanity.

Henri Nouwen in *The Wounded Healer* shows that what we often regard as being the most personal of experiences is often the most universal. "When one has the courage to enter where life is experienced as most unique and most private, one touches the soul of the community" (p.38), he writes. Part of the purpose of ministry therefore is two-fold: entering into our own humanness, and articulating that to other people; putting our weakness and vulnerability at the disposal of others. This means getting involved: "It seems necessary to re-establish the basic principle," Nouwen writes, "that no one can help anyone without becoming involved, without entering with his whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded or even destroyed in the process. The beginning and the end of all Christian leadership is to give your life for others." (p.72) "No God can

save us except a suffering God, and ... no man can lead his people except the man who is crushed by its sins." (pp.72f.) This rings true with my experience. Where I have been, the experiences that I have had, the fears felt, joys rejoiced and tears cried, all that has gone into making me 'me' I offer back to God to use, and to others to share in, that they too may become comfortable with their humanness, their brokenness, their imperfection, and in relationship with God journey towards healing and wholeness. Throughout these times I have always had a sense that God is with me, whether I can sense that He is there or not and the subsequent waiting on God has been an important theme in my development as a person, Christian and minister.



The following is a brief account of what I have to give, the experiences that I have had, through which God has brought me and I have been formed by Him into the person I am today. Who I am, and where I have come from cannot be separated from what my ministry is, as my ministry is who I am. I give myself to God, am attentive to him and to those around me and he uses me as he wills.

**my story**

## Pain

And a woman spoke, saying, Tell us of Pain.

And he said:

Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding.

Even as the stone of the fruit must break, that its heart may stand in the sun, so must you know pain.

And could you keep your heart in wonder at the daily miracles of your life, your pain would not seem less wondrous than your joy;

And you would accept the seasons of your heart, even as you have always accepted the seasons that pass over your fields.

And you would watch with serenity through the winters of your grief.

Much of your pain is self-chosen.

It is the bitter potion by which the physician within you heals your sick self.

Therefore trust the physician, and drink his remedy in silence and tranquillity:

For his hand, though heavy and hard, is guided by the tender hand of the Unseen,

And the cup he brings, though it burns your lips, has been fashioned of the clay which the Potter has moistened with His own sacred tears.

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, Pan Books, London, 1991, p.70ff.

I don't recall my childhood as being something which was particularly happy - I remember the pain of growing up. But it *was* a childhood - youngsters these days seem to want to grow up much quicker - and I appreciate some things: climbing trees, building huts, exploring, playing and the like. In learning to be a child, I learned to be an adult.

At primary school I often felt isolated - made to feel different - whether it was because I was tall or overweight, wore spectacles and couldn't fight, or went to church, the reasons seemed to change, and at times no reason seemed necessary. I became quiet and I withdrew into myself - I was often happier on my own, with my thoughts. I made up songs, devised plans, constructed imaginary new worlds within my head, and chatted to God. In Primary 3, I had only a few friends - at times only two or three. Brian and Iain were the other class outcasts - always picked on, always bullied. We stuck together. At first I resented being stuck with Brian and Iain. I wanted to be with the cool and groovy kids, I didn't want to be picked on. I later grew to appreciate them very much. I felt lonely and martyred. I felt that I must be a hero and that one day I would prove them all wrong - that I wasn't the person that they imagined me to be, the person that they would not allow to develop; I still feel a bit like that, that I need to prove something, thought this is slowly being subdued. It was only years later when I was working with the Enneagram, a tool for finding oneself, with my then-Spiritual Director, the Revd. Bill Scott, at St Mary's, Bourne Street that I finally began to understand why I felt like this.

The Enneagram is a way of understanding people. It distinguishes nine types of human personality, labelled ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR, etc., (the word Enneagram comes from the Greek *enneas*, meaning nine) and defines them in a negative way (by reference to a persons compulsion), although they also have positive characteristics. I discovered myself to be a FOUR with a FIVE wing, and really began to understand myself more deeply. The compulsion of FOURS is to avoid being ordinary. They are tragic-romantics, who grow up feeling abandoned, and this sense of personal tragedy makes them feel special as persons. FOURS feel most alive in intensity of emotion; they crave deep feelings. Feelings of pain, sadness, loneliness capture their attention, and they replay time and again the sad aspects of their lives. A positive side of this is that FOURS are compassionate: they know what pain is and what it feels like to be misunderstood or abandoned. FOURS are also very strong on the use of symbolic expression. They are often creative poets, artists, or musicians who try to make the world a more beautiful place. They enjoy being original. (cf. The Enneagram - a journey of self-discovery, Beesing, Nogosek, O'Leary) This understanding of myself has been very helpful in accepting the ministry to which God has called me.

My understanding and use of the Enneagram is thus: The Enneagram is like a cart wheel with nine spokes. We each live on one spoke, as the wheel of life turns we are thrown against the

rim and witness the world from one angle - from our personality type, that is partly determined by how we interact with the world, and it with us. Jesus, as the paradigm of humanity stands at the hub, with equal access to each type of personality. He can be angry, compassionate, helpful, forceful, etc. but is not limited to one type as we are. If our aim in life is to be more Christ-like, in relationship with God, growing to fulfil our potential then we can use the Enneagram to understand ourselves, where we are. It is then a question of discipline that we identify and humbly accept our weaknesses and hand ourselves over more fully to God. In time, through a disciplined life, being attentive to both ourselves and to our God we may become more like Christ.

### **Christlike**

I remember, as a child, wondering if I was Christ. So many things seemed to be going wrong, I was being bullied, picked on, rejected and excluded, and I wondered if I was Christ! How would I know? Did Jesus know when he was a boy? It may sound like an oddly bizarre question being pondered by a prepubescent boy, but there was some truth and theological insight in this naïve question. Firstly, it is interesting that at such a young age I identified rejection and being an outcast with Jesus. To me Jesus wasn't your average child's meek and mild Jesus of the baby-in-a-manger fame, or your squeaky-clean, daz-white Caucasian bloke in a beard wandering around doing good, a là Robert Powell in *Jesus of Nazareth*. He was someone who knew what it meant to be hurt and repudiated. This was an important insight, and one which shaped not only my future understanding of ministry, but was also instrumental in helping me get through primary school and the first three years of secondary school with some degree of humour and hope. Secondly, we are all called to be Christs. I identified with the suffering servant character of Jesus Christ as he is portrayed in the four gospels, and I asked the important question: is this what it means to be a Christian? Is this what it means to be like Christ? It was years later that I read Bonhoeffer say that God became man so that man could become man, and another describing the Gospel of St. John in the terms that the Son of God became the Son of Man, so that the Sons of Men could become Sons of God. These were essentially saying the same thing that I had been asking as a child in my attempt to identify with Christ and make some sense of what was happening to me, and understand why God could allow this to happen.

I mentioned that I felt like a martyr, Henri Nouwen in *The Wounded Healer* makes the point that "real martyrdom means a witness that starts with the willingness to cry with those who

cry, laugh with those who laugh, and to make one's own painful and joyful experiences available as sources of clarification and understanding." (Nouwen, p.72) It is this vulnerability and willingness to offer myself to God and to others which shaped my subsequent development, and understanding of to what God was calling me. In many ways my understanding of God, of ministry and of myself are inseparably meshed together, partly as a result of my early calling.

## Loving the Broken

When love beckons to you, follow him,

Though his ways are hard and steep.

And when his wings enfold you yield to him,

Though the sword hidden among his pinions may wound you.

And when he speaks to you believe in him.

Though his voice may shatter your dreams as the north wind lays waste the garden.

For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you. Even as he is for your growth so is he for your pruning.

Even as he ascends to your height and caresses your tenderest branches that quiver in the sun,

So shall he descend to your roots and shake them in their clinging to the earth.

Like sheaves of corn he gathers you unto himself.

He threshes you to make you naked.

He sifts you to free you from your husks.

He grinds you to whiteness.

He kneads you until you are pliant;

And then he assigns you to his sacred fire, that you may become sacred bread for God's sacred feast.

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, Pan Books, London, 1991, p.13

Following my graduation at the University of St. Andrews, I moved home and got a job in the textile mill I'd worked in as a student, during vacations. I'd been told by the Diocesan Director of Ordinands (DDO) and the Bishop that it was unlikely that I'd go straight to Coates Hall (the-then Theological College of the Scottish Episcopal Church), as I had planned. I worked in Selkirk and lived with my parents. In the autumn of 1993 my father had a stroke, my sister was raped and became pregnant and my girlfriend left me. I became depressed and

was so for about 8 months, I think. I also felt that I was in the wrong place - I shouldn't be in a mill working, I should be at Theological College training to be a priest. It took me about a year to realise that I was training to be a priest in the mill! I think that it was only when God brought me to the place where I was content in my job there that he let me go. I was summoned to Edinburgh by the DDO who told me that I'd been disobedient in not leaving Selkirk to go and work in an area of social work involving young people, as he'd recommended. So, I went back to Selkirk and quit. I said to God, "I've tried to look for a suitable job, if you want me in one then you can find me one!"

Needless to say He did and I began to work in a Shaftesbury Homeless Hostel in London less than three months after leaving the mill.

My time in London was very tough, though fulfilling. I arrived in January 1995 quite shy and still rather unconfident in myself and left in September 1997, about 150 serious incidents later, much stronger and decisive. I still can't believe sometimes how confident I am, but that I know that it is the Lord who has brought me here. I am more patient and loving.

I worked in a number of Shaftesbury Society homeless hostels during my three year stay in the capital. What strikes me most is how much of myself I gave. I wore myself out a number of times, almost to the point of nervous breakdown. At the beginning of 1996, over a period of nine days I was involved in over 34 hours of violent incidents, during which the police were called up to six times per night.

On Monday 22 January 1996 the following account is recorded in my journal:

22:51... This has been typical post-violent incident behaviour this evening. I kind of lost grip slightly, on reality, for a while. Nothing serious. I just kind of wander, waver from my usual discipline. It is especially linked to the fact that it all occurred on my nightshift. The boundaries between daytime and night have become blurred and I find myself in a kind of limbo between them.

After eating a copious meal, I watched *Highlander* on video, drifting off to sleep. I was so disoriented and confused when I awoke. It took about five or ten minutes to realise what was going on.

Just over a year later I broke down again, writing, on Saturday 1 February 1997:

21:19... I went back on shift today; my head is still spinning. Part of it is tiredness, the other part is what? frustration, bored of the job, tired of the job, just tired out by the job? I've noticed today that when referring to my feelings I have prefixed a lot of it with "I guess". I feel depressed, but then I pull myself up for a bit, then I sink back

down. It's weird. It's uncomfortable.

I want to feel relaxed and fulfilled. That's the word I have been searching for: 'fulfilled' and inspired! I haven't felt like that for a long time. Not on a regular basis certainly.

When I got home from work today I sat in the lunge with a group of folk watching Inspector Morse. It was a nice escape: Oxford, memories of my own college days at St. Mary's, St. Andrews; summer lanes, and memories of walks without a care in the world. I long for days like those again and I wonder if I shall ever feel them again. London is not nice. It is ugly and dirty; it is big and impersonal. It is a hustling, bustling machine which swallows you up, consumes your beauties and rapes you of your dignity. And we have care of 16+ souls who have been beaten and abused, neglected and ill-treated. We are called to bring love to these people without question, irrespective of whether they love back or not. We are called to give, give, give and not expect repayment. And I have nobody but God to de-stress to, to give to me those things which I really need and for so long I have held back from receiving from God. Surely not, I think, there must be someone here who can give me what I need. But there isn't, there is only me and God. I need to do something about it because I'm empty and I'm out of ideas. Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll doesn't fill me up. I know, I've tried. Well, masturbation, port and rock'n'roll.

I'm so embarrassed though. Coming before God like this. I guess this is probably the best time to confront the "but I'm and ordinand, I'm meant to be able to cope" lie! I'm a human being, a child of God. God is the only one who can do anything about me. It's a lonely thing, but it has to be done. That sounds really bad; corny, but heck! I know what I mean!"

In my giving everything to God, I gave my all to the young residents in the homeless hostels. The bottom line for working in the hostel was love, my love for God, and my love for the young people. I had a desire to see them whole, freed from the burdens of the past, and healed of the wounds of broken relationships and lives. I was willing to give my life for the live of others, whether that meant working 25 hour shifts (as I did every nine days), or walking into the middle of fights. It meant giving myself to the residents as a resource. I would share with them my weaknesses, though not all of them, and not at the same time. I trusted them with my life, as they did me with theirs. If I was upset, or having a tough day, I would share that with them, and they often would minister to me. I was willing to be vulnerable enough to let them see that good can come out of weakness, that healing takes place by acknowledging the hurt and addressing it, in handing it to God, and allowing other people in to share in the pain.

Of course there is a issue of being sensible: not putting ourselves in risky situations; of being sensible with our time outside of work, in relaxation and sleep; not off-loading one's burdens on clients. But God's ways have been shown to be ones of working through weakness, of a

broken man nailed to a tree. I am willing to risk everything, my health, sanity and well-being for the furtherance of God's kingdom, or proclaiming good news and healing to the poor; and encountering God in the lives and persons of the homeless, and unloved.

## Grief

Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.

And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, 'Joy is greater than sorrow,' and others say, 'Nay, sorrow is the greater.'

But I say to you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.

Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.

When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, Pan Books, London, 1991, p.40f.

On Sunday 4 January 1998 my father died; he was 52. Much of what I have learned about myself, about being human, about God and about ministry has been as a direct result of my father's illness.

On 15 March 1983 ('Beware the Ides of March!') my father collapsed in Nottingham having delivered the Faraday Lecture, with a sub-arachnoid brain haemorrhage. I am not certain of the events or the chronology at this point, I was eleven years old and Dad's time in Nottingham and then Derby seemed an eternity. Mum went down to stay in the Derby Royal Infirmary where Dad had a subsequent two haemorrhages, probably to do with medical negligence, I am told. On a few occasions the hospital staff had to ask my mother if she knew how to change Dad's drip. I think if Mum hadn't been there Dad may have died. Mum's brother and sister-in-law moved over to Selkirk to look after my brother and sister and me.

Dad recovered enough to move to Edinburgh, to the Western General and eventually home. However, the care in Derby had been so bad that they had encouraged an infection in his skull which was so bad that a fist-sized section of his forehead had to be removed, and was replaced about two years later when the infection had cleared (and the infected stitches, neglectfully left in, had been removed). Life at home returned to some kind of normality.

In 1986 we went on holiday to Guernsey; our last holiday as a family. Then my father was made redundant from his job; he subsequently worked for Securicor until his health forbade that. The family finances took a dive from which they have never fully recovered. Things got so bad that at times we were living on a diet of just potatoes.

As the months and years progressed my father's personality and temperament began to deteriorate. Dad understandable became depressed. He also became violent. It was later discovered that he had developed Alzheimer's Disease. As time progressed his mind began to wander, he became more muddled and labile. In 1997, fourteen years after his haemorrhages a rather bright young consultant discovered that his haemorrhages had been caused by an hereditary genetic disease called Poly-Cystic Kidney Disease; he was given a year, at most, left to live. The family were scanned by ultra-sound and it was verified that my younger sister, brother and I had developed PCKD.

During the Christmas and New Year vacations, about six months after the diagnosis of PCKD, I helped my mother and brother nurse my father during the last few days of his life. He died at home of kidney failure.

The period of grief immediately following my father's death was one of the most powerful and painful experiences that I have ever had. During it I was forced to wait, to become passive, to be done to. In it I identified with Jesus as he is portrayed in St. John's Gospel following Judas' handing him over to the authorities (cf. W.H.Vanstone, *The Stature of*

*Waiting*). I was to understand what it means to be ministered to, and to minister to others in my weakness - to be a Wounded Healer. I wrote a great deal during this time about what it felt like, what my reflections were on this mourning bench of sorrow. Below I quote from three extracts:

What is this grief process? I feel for me, I feel a loss. I'm told that Dad is well now, that he is no longer suffering. Is he? When Christ died on the cross did God the Father not mourn his loss? Did he sit up there in heaven emotionless knowing the ending of the play? ...

Why do I play their game? Why do I acknowledge that no words can make me feel better, while believing that the explanations about how I feel, which they so genuinely and sincerely ask me for will somehow allow them to enter this pain and touch it.

"Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.'" (John 20:26)

This story only appears in John's gospel - the gospel at the centre of Vanstone's book *The Stature of Waiting* which has been very influential to me. Touch me and believe! Jesus didn't rebuke Thomas he let him come close and touch him. Understanding doesn't only come through words and spoken language, but also through touch; and touch is a two-way experience. Though one is often active and the other passive in regards who reaches out to whom, there is a certain reciprocal mutuality in the actual act of touching. Thomas touched Jesus, Jesus allowed himself to be touched by Thomas; Thomas was active and Jesus passive. But Jesus gave to Thomas the assurance that it was he, and Thomas received that assurance. I'm sure that Jesus left that encounter with something: it was not an exercise simply to show Thomas up for being a 'doubter', it was not a sighing rebuke: "Well, if you must". But a reaching out to someone whom he loved in a way which bypassed the need for language and intellectual thought, and allowed him in a very small way to share in Christ's experience. I want people to sit with me and in their moments of doubt, moments when they don't believe that I am who I say I am, that I don't hurt the way they think I hurt, to feel my scars, touch the marks. And in their touch I feel their warmth and life....

Even in his illness he was still whole. I never noticed that then. I failed to notice this while he was with us. And yet theologically I somehow believe that he has now fulfilled his potential in wholeness. Surely this *must* involve a new body otherwise caring for your body in this life has no real purpose. Body and soul are intrinsically combined.

What strikes me is that Christ knows what it means to be broken, and it is only through this that, and our entering a relationship with Him that we can hope to be made whole again. I began to reflect on the similarities between my dying father, lying on a bed in my family home, with the Son of God, hanging on a cross in first century Palestine, and the implications that this raised about how I see people, and in particular how I view people who are dying -

that they are living towards death. As my father approached that point of departure, after which we were left to dispose of his dead body, I could see that within that dark, broken and fragile shell was a man who could not simply be dismissed as a dying man. He was whole - he had emptied himself and had handed over his life to God. I asked him only hours before he died whether he was afraid, or worried about how we would cope. He said that he wasn't worried as he had handed us over to God. In his brokenness he was whole. That is the message of the cross, and that is my ministry.

## Conclusion

And an old priest said, Speak to us of Religion.

And he said:

Have I spoke this day of aught else?

Is not religion all deeds and all reflection,

And that which is neither deed nor reflection, but a wonder and a surprise ever springing in the soul, even while the hands hew the stone or tend the loom?

Who can separate his faith from his actions, or his belief from his occupations?

Who can spread his hours before him, saying, 'This for God and this for myself; This for my soul and this other for my body'?

All your hours are wings that beat through space from self to self.

He who wears his mortality but as his best garment were better naked.

The wind and the sun will tear no holes in his skin.

And he who defines his conduct by ethics imprisons his song-bird in a cage.

The feast song comes not through bars and wires.

And he to whom worshipping is a window, to open but also to shut, has not yet visited the house of his soul who windows are from dawn to dawn.

Your daily life is your temple and your religion.

Whenever you enter into it take with you your all.

Take the plough and the forge and the mallet and the lute,

The things you have fashioned in necessity or for delight.

For in reveries you cannot rise above your achievements nor fall lower than your failures.

And take with you all men:

For in adoration you cannot fly higher than their hopes nor humble yourself lower than their despair.

And if you would know God, be not therefore a solver of riddles.

Rather look about you and you shall see Him playing with your children.

And look into space; you shall see Him walking in the cloud, outstretching His arms in the lightning and descending in rain.

You shall see Him smiling in flowers, then rising and waving his hands in trees.

Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, Pan Books, London, 1991, p.103ff.

I look back on my childhood and adolescence and see that God has brought me though alot, at times it has been very difficult, I've been angry, sad, felt misunderstood, been depressed, happy and content and all that, but I am, on the whole, very glad to be the person that God has made me. I am happy to be where I am with God, and where I am in life. I often wish that my father had been well and that I could have had that adult relationship with him that I have with my mother, but other than that I really would not change anything that has happened to me. I am glad of the time given to me to move to London and expand my perspective on life, on myself and on God.

My understanding of ministry has developed and matured over the years. Once I believed that my ministry would be in the area of healing physical ailments and diseases, as though that could be separated from the rest of Christian ministry, as though that was a specialised area. I now see that it is integral to who we are as Christian ministers (and indeed as Christians). I asked the question earlier, what is the world trying to become, and suggested that that might be *the* question of ministry: if we know where we are heading we might be able to judge the direction in which we should face. I think that we are heading in the direction of wholeness, completeness and fulfilling our human potential. But that is only obtainable through the cross, both in the meaning that it is only through the person and relationship with Jesus Christ, but also in the sense that it is through pain and suffering, and offering our brokenness to God. This means, in ministry, encountering people where they are, listening to their stories, being attentive to the voice of God as he is already at work in that situation, being attentive to the voice of the person we are with, and being attentive to our own voice. Through offering our brokenness we may be able to lead that person to the God of hope and new life. This is a broader, more encompassing understanding of healing. As I said

when I was a nine year old schoolboy, I don't want to become a doctor, I want to be a minister and heal the whole person. That may only be possible now that I recognise that I am a broken human being, being made whole in relationship with Jesus Christ. For me, that is my ministry.

Gareth J. M. Saunders

February 1999

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## Marker's Comments

*A deeply personal account of a journey. This is a theology of ministry forged in the fire of experience. It is essentially an account of a spirituality and a journey towards priesthood arising from personal experiences of loss and pain. Academically, the writer draws upon a wide range of writing in the field of spirituality and weaves this material into his own story. A fine piece of work.*

Revd. Dr. David Lyall  
New College, Edinburgh, 1999

Mark awarded: 65%