

Hierarchy and Holiness

by Major Harold Hill

Remember those cartoons where you are invited to *Spot the Difference*? Here's one.

Spot the differences...



We hear of Pope Francis deserting the luxurious Papal apartments to hang out in a sort of boarding house for priests, scooting round Rome in a little old Ford Fiesta instead of using an armour-plated Mercedes, laying aside ornate vestments and handmade red shoes in favour of a simple cassock and his old scuffs. He's sending signals.

We're used to receiving and interpreting such signals. I remember in my callow youth asking the formidable Commissioner Robert A. Hoggard whether he didn't think his snazzy new 1952 Plymouth Cranbrook was a little too flash for the Salvation Army to be seen going about it? (I do not know where I got *that* idea from!)

1952 Plymouth Cranbrook



He replied, "Oh, no, not at all. Where I come from [USA Western territory], this is a Lieutenant's car. Commissioners drive *Cadillacs!*"

1952 Cadillac Fleetwood "75"



Then when I went to London in 1970 I noticed that whereas a mere Commissioner drove an Austin 1100, the Chief of the Staff drove an Austin 1800, and the General was driven about in an Austin 3 litre.



Years later in the USA Salvation Army National Archives I read the correspondence between a Territorial Commander and a Lieutenant who was threatened with dismissal and was eventually sacked because he wouldn't dispose of his Oldsmobile (I think it was), deemed *not* to be a "Lieutenant's car". I kid you not. (Perhaps there was another back-story.)

1977 Oldsmobile Cutlass



They were all signals. What these examples signalled was "hierarchy". The difficulty I found lay in reconciling those signals with Jesus' words, "That is the way the VIPs and Celebrities of this earth go on... Don't be like that!"¹ All this may be juvenile taking of the mickey, but what was signalled was no light matter. My subject, for which I am indebted to Caroline, is *Hierarchy* and *Holiness*. I need to talk about each in turn, and then about both together.

Hierarchy

Firstly, we're familiar with the concept of *Hierarchy*. A pyramid, with the broad base of plebs at the bottom, rises through more restricted levels of middle-management, to the solitary splendour of the occupant of the apex. In his study of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, C.S. Lewis explains how pre-modern society was quite unambiguously and unapologetically structured hierarchically. It wasn't considered just a convenient and effective way of constructing work relationships; it was seen as inherent in nature. Lewis wrote,

Degrees of value are objectively present in the universe. Everything except God has some natural superior. The goodness, happiness and dignity of every being consists in obeying its natural superior and ruling its natural inferiors... Aristotle tells us that to rule and to be ruled are things according to nature. The soul is the natural ruler of

¹ Matthew 20: 25-6.

the body, the male of the female, reason of passion. Slavery is justified because some men are to other men as souls are to bodies (*Politics*, 1, 5).²

Now I'm not about to argue the anarchist or Leveller converse, that Jack's as good as his master, but need to remind you that our whole clerical system in the church derives from this hierarchical conception of reality, which we no longer take for granted today. The early church was relatively egalitarian. It had leaders but no priests. Over its first few centuries, as it institutionalised, it accommodated to traditional religious expectations, to hierarchical society and to the Roman state.³ The Church took on characteristics incompatible with its founding vision of free and equal citizens in the Kingdom of Heaven (rather like Israel's earlier ideal of being a nation of kings and priests).⁴

When society becomes too unequal and is at risk of breaking down, Christianity seems to rediscover its roots and new groups with a greater emphasis on internal equality are formed.⁵ Thus renewal in the Church often coincides with disruption in society as whole, or dissatisfaction of marginalised groups. Both the Christian Mission and the 614 movement started in the slums. Further, nearly all sectarian movements including and from the early church on – monasticism, the mendicant orders of friars, the Waldensians, the reformation churches and sects, the Methodists and the Pentecostals, have begun as "lay" movements, acknowledging little distinction of status between leaders and led, but nearly all have ended up controlled by priestly hierarchies, whether so called or not. The more institutionalised the body becomes, the greater degree of clericalisation and "hierarchisation" likely.

Bryan Wilson sums up:

What does appear is that the dissenting movements of Protestantism, which were lay movements, or movements which gave greater place to laymen than the traditional churches had ever conceded, pass, over the course of time, under the control of full-time religious specialists... Over time, movements which rebel against religious specialization, against clerical privilege and control, gradually come again under the control of a clerical class... Professionalism is a part of the wider social process of secular society, and so even in anti-clerical movements professionals re-emerge. Their real power, when they do re-emerge, however, is in their administrative control and the fact of their full-time involvement, and not in their liturgical functions, although these will be regarded as the activity for which their authority is legitimated.⁶

² C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London: Oxford University Press, [1942] 1960) 72-3.

³ A comprehensive account of the process is found in Colin Bulley, *The Priesthood of Some Believers: Developments from the General to the Special Priesthood in Christian Literature in the First Three Centuries* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

⁴ Exodus 19:6; Revelation 1:6; 5:10.

⁵ The egalitarian vision remained, in David Martin's terms, "a store of explosive materials capable of fissionable contact with social fragmentation" so that "schism is inevitable and rooted in the nature of Christianity itself as well as in the nature of society." David Martin, *Reflections on Sociology and Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) 42-3.

⁶ Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: C.A. Watts, 1966) 136.

Religious authorities usually claim some “spiritual” legitimation for their human behaviour. For example, in the church there grew up a tradition that ordination indelibly and irreversibly changes a person’s essential, ontological character, just as baptism (or conversion, in the Evangelical tradition) is believed to do. The second Vatican council stood in a tradition stretching back to Augustine of Hippo (who died almost 400 years after Jesus) when it asserted that

The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood... differ essentially and not only in degree.⁷

Others deny that. Emil Brunner says that

All minister, and nowhere is to be perceived a separation or even merely a distinction between those who do and those who do not minister... There exists in the Ecclesia a universal duty and right of service, a universal readiness to serve and at the same time the greatest possible differentiation of functions.⁸

Nevertheless, whether we hold that clergy are essentially different from lesser mortals or we claim to believe in equality, the end result is often the same. Miroslav Volf noted that even in the contemporary unstructured house church movement:

“A strongly hierarchical, informal system of paternal relations often develops between the congregation and the charismatic delegates from the ascended Christ.”⁹

Whether in the Exclusive Brethren or the “Shepherding” movement, you know who is the boss. Having clerics does not necessarily involve clericalism. Not having clerics does not necessarily mean clericalism can be avoided. Office itself, formal or informal, inevitably confers power and power offers at least possibility of those who exercise it “tyrannising over those allotted to [their] care”.¹⁰ (Peter was aware of the danger!)

In Walter Brueggemann’s *Prophetic Imagination*, the alternative, prophetic community of Moses is contrasted with the “royal consciousness” of Egyptian Empire. Within 250 years of the Exodus from Egypt, the establishment of Solomon’s Empire represented the rejection of that free association of Israelites and a return to structures of oppression.¹¹ In the same way, the process of institutionalisation and clericalisation in the church can be seen as a successful reconquest of the new community by the old structures of domination and power. These in turn may be subverted in due course by renewed egalitarianism.

⁷ “Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, Article 10” in Austin Flannery (Ed.) *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville Min: Liturgical Press, 1975) 361.

⁸ Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth, 1953) 50.

⁹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church in the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998) 237.

¹⁰ 1 Peter 5:3.

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2nd edn 2001) 23.

My argument is that the Salvation Army's own development conforms to this general pattern. I won't rehearse tonight the steps by which this came about – you can read my book if you want the details; Salvationist Supplies still has some copies!¹² I'll say just one thing: The Salvation Army doesn't accept that becoming a priest or a bishop (or, officer or an officer holding "conferred-rank") alters your Christian "character", but in practice it behaves as if it did. The most recent expression of the Army's clericalisation is found in the adoption of "ordination" by General Arnold Brown in 1978. Ordination came about originally because of the Church's adoption of the concept of "ordo", the class structure of the Roman Empire. The Army doesn't endorse that, so why play dress ups?

This is not saying we need no structure. Any human society needs some form of order to avoid falling into either anarchy or tyranny. A society called into being around some founding vision requires some means of maintaining what in the church is called "apostolicity" – authenticity derived from faithfulness to a founding vision. That is part of the role of leadership, which a hierarchy can provide. The danger with leadership, however, is that rather than being merely a means of maintaining authenticity, it can come to identify itself as central to it, the means becoming the end. That is clericalisation. That is the shadow side of hierarchy.

Holiness

Now, leaving Hierarchy for the present, what about *Holiness*? When I was growing up it was never explicitly stated but somehow assumed quite widely that holiness was a matter of personal morality, spirituality, piety and general "niceness". It tended to be regarded as a field for the spiritually athletic, the virtuosi, rather than the general run-of-the-mill Christian like me. It was an advanced degree, an honours course, to which a few went on after getting their BA, or Born Again. Wesleyan Holiness, our traditional take on the subject, has lost credibility over the years, partly through being inadequately taught. The result, to adapt G.K. Chesterton, was that rather than being tried and found too hard, it was thought too hard and not tried. Put to one side the tedious "shibboleth-sibboleth" debate about "crisis" and/or "process" aspect of Holiness – I'm not concerned with that!

Holiness has suffered, amongst other things, from an unbalanced, individualistic interpretation of the gospel. In our Evangelical tradition Salvation, which includes holiness, was about *me*, getting *me* saved and sanctified and going to heaven. When we read that holiness is "the revealing of Christ's own character in the life of the believer",¹³ that's true, but it's not the whole truth. That's still about *me*. In western countries, that individualistic focus of our mindset was intensified in the later twentieth century under the influence of New Right economics when our whole society took a turn away from social responsibility and towards the sanctification of individual greed as the driving force of society, with the excuse that by a process of trickle-down, all boats would rise on the flood-tide of prosperity. That hasn't just changed our economic

¹² Harold Hill, *Leadership in the Salvation Army: a case study in clericalisation* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006).

¹³ Frederick Coutts, *The Splendour of Holiness* (London: Salvation Army, 1983) 41.

arrangements; it has increasingly permeated our world-view. It didn't alter our doctrine of holiness; it merely completed the total skewing of our perception of what holiness involved. That is, that it was just a matter for the individual.

We glibly dismiss the people of Jesus' day as preoccupied with his setting up an earthly Kingdom, whereas his Kingdom was "not of this world". We, with the benefit of hindsight, know so much better than they did what he was on about. Yes? No, not entirely.

If we read Jesus without our inherited spectacles of individualism, we notice that a *lot* of what he talked about was *not* about the saving and sanctifying of the individual as an end in itself but about redeeming society as a whole. He came preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, which wasn't pie in the sky for me when I die, but the redemption of *this* world so that it would more closely resemble how God intended it to be. "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven," is what he taught us to pray. A renewed emphasis on social justice is a rediscovery of this dimension of holiness; embraced by many, while many others regard it as a distraction from the real spiritual business of saving souls.

Salvation, of which holiness is a subset, part of a continuum, is about *Shalom*: wholeness, peace, well-being, and *righteousness* – which did not mean being goody-goody two-shoes, but meant being in a *right relationship* with ourselves, with others and with God. Which is why John Wesley exclaimed, against the notion of the solitary seeking of perfection, that, "there is no holiness but *social* holiness." Christianity is a team sport, not a narcissistic individual hobby like body-building.

At the personal and interpersonal level, holiness is expressed in what William Temple described as the "true test of worship": "not whether it makes us feel better or more holy or more at peace... [but] what it does to our lives; whether it makes us more unselfish, more easy to live with, more efficient in our work." That is "becoming more like Jesus". At the macro-level, a concern for social justice is integral to a concern for personal holiness; it is making the earth more like heaven. I cannot be holy and still content that others suffer injustice. At Finney's campaign meetings 150 years ago, seekers were directed from the "Mourners' Bench", either to the table at which they could sign up to the anti-slavery campaign, or to the table at which they could sign up to work for female emancipation and women's rights. And if they were unwilling to do either, they were sent back to their seats: it was not believed that they'd made a real decision to follow Christ.

So the polarisation we frequently encounter, between "saving souls" and "serving suffering humanity", as though either one of these were more central, a loftier aim, and the other merely optional window-dressing, is a false dichotomy. As William Booth put it, there needs to be "Salvation for Both Worlds".¹⁴ Birds do not fly far on one wing only.

¹⁴ William Booth, "Salvation for Both Worlds", *All the World*, 5 (January 1889) 1-6, reprinted in Andrew M. Eason and Roger J. Green (Editors), *Boundless Salvation: the shorter writings of William Booth* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012) 51-9.

If we want biblical underpinnings of this argument we need look no further than Jesus' summary of the great commandments – to love God, and to love our neighbour as ourselves.¹⁵ He said the second was “like the first”; it wasn't a minor, optional extra.

Hierarchy and Holiness?

Hierarchy is a way of structuring relationships; holiness is to do with the nature of those relationships. One is to do with form; the other is to do with essence. So the question needs to be asked, how holiness may be expressed in socially just relationships. Can our institutional structure, our hierarchy, facilitate loving behaviour, by all involved, so that we love all our associates, both those in authority over us and those subordinate to us, as we love ourselves? This is at the heart of the question of what holiness has to do with hierarchy.

I suggest that that the hierarchy created by clericalisation is a form which can make its imprint on the essence instead of the essence being expressed in the form. That's a very sweeping generalisation and therefore only partly true, but let's tease out the tension between hierarchy and holiness. Firstly, the hierarchical structure which clericalism has created can foster a spirit incompatible with “servanthood” Jesus modelled and taught; it can undermine relational holiness and so threaten the kind of community Jesus calls together. Secondly, by concentrating power and influence in the hands of minority, clericalisation can disempower the majority of members of Church. That can co-exist with patronising the brethren but not with loving the brethren. It can therefore diminish the Church's effectiveness in mission.

Of the first adverse effect, you could supply your own examples, but if it's any help, Bramwell Booth was aware of the danger long back. In 1894 he was complaining that “the D.O.'s [Divisional Officers] are often much more separate from their F.O.'s [Field Officers] than they ought to be. Class and caste grows with the growth of the military idea. Needs watching.”¹⁶ Thirty years later he was still anxious about Divisional and Territorial leaders in that “they are open to special dangers in that they rise and grow powerful and sink into a kind of opulence...”¹⁷ (Unhappily, Captains are just as prone to this as Colonels.) General Albert Orsborn acknowledged to the 1949 Commissioners' Conference that

dissatisfaction and decline... is blamed on our system of ranks, promotions, positions and differing salaries and retirements... that it has created envy and kindred evils and developed sycophancy, ingratiating, “wire-pulling”, favouritism, etc... It is a sad reflection that we are in character, in spirituality, unable to meet the strain of our own system.¹⁸

¹⁵ Luke 10: 27.

¹⁶ W. Bramwell Booth, letter of October 1894, in Catherine Bramwell Booth, *Bramwell Booth* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1932) 218.

¹⁷ W. Bramwell Booth, letter to his wife, 27 April 1924, in Catherine Bramwell Booth, *Bramwell Booth*, 437.

¹⁸ General Eric Wickberg, “Movements for Reform” (Address at the 1971 International Conference of Leaders) Minutes, 9.

Koinonia and just social relationships are difficult to maintain within that system. All of which is to say that it is in the nature of systems to get in the way of the reason they exist. If the doctrine of holiness is not lived as well as talked about, human nature will take its course, and a system which actually encourages it to do so, as ours tends to, requires extra vigilance.

And the second adverse effect, the disempowerment of the many by the exaltation of the few? The American Nazarene sociologist Kenneth E. Crow summed it up: "Loyalty declines when ability to influence decision and policies declines. When institutionalization results in top-down management, one of the consequences is member apathy and withdrawal."¹⁹ Likewise the Indian Jesuit Kurien Kunnumpuram claimed that "the clergy-laity divide and the consequent lack of power-sharing in the Church are largely responsible for the apathy and inertia that one notices in the bulk of the laity today."²⁰ Does our structure likewise disempower the Army's soldiery? The root of disempowerment is a lack of respect for others, and that is, again, evidence of a failure to love one's neighbour as oneself.

It would be difficult to say whether clericalisation had led to a loss of zeal, or loss of zeal had been compensated for by a growing preoccupation with status, or whether each process fed the other. There is a paradox here: the military system, quite apart from the fact that it fitted Booth's autocratic temperament, was designed for rapid response, and is still officially justified in those terms. The Army's first period of rapid growth followed its introduction. It caught the imagination for a time. However the burgeoning of hierarchical and bureaucratic attitudes came to exert a counter-influence. The reason for success contained the seeds of failure. The longer-term effect of autocracy was to lose the loyalty of many of those hitherto enthusiastic, and to deter subsequent generations, more habituated to free thought and democracy, from joining.

Clearly I'm talking about what we may loosely call the "Western" Army. In Africa and India the Army is still expanding rapidly *and* is also extremely rank-conscious! The cultures are different. I do not believe that in *our* culture, our salvation lies in the hair of the dog that bit us. Furthermore, the abuses of power already evident in the third world Army suggest that there will be a reckoning to pay there too. Faced with a flagrant example of such abuse in the past year, a Zimbabwean Salvationist wrote, "The Salvation Army now frightens me... We now know we are waging war against a Monster... Our very own church! Am now very ashamed to wear my uniform and so are many other people."²¹ Such a reaction does not augur well for continued expansion. Unfortunately clericalism is to clergy as water to fish, wherever we live. It's so pervasive we don't recognise it, but as a soldier working at THQ once said to me, "It's in our faces all the time!"

¹⁹ Kenneth E. Crow, "The Church of the Nazarene and O'Dea's Dilemma of Mixed Motivation" (www.nazarene.org/ansr/articles/crow_93.html).

²⁰ Kurien Kunnumpuram, "Beyond the Clergy-Laity Divide" (<http://www.sedos.org/english/kunnumpuram.html>) May 2000.

²¹ Email in my possession.

How may the ill-effects of the hierarchical system be mitigated? That is, how may the essential holiness still be expressed through this form? Leadership is indispensable to the effectiveness of any movement; it's a given. Structure is necessary; it will happen anyway, and it needs continuity, accountability and legitimacy to mitigate the effects of unrestrained personal power. There are two ways the problem can be approached: one is structural, the other attitudinal.

In 2002 the first edition of the Salvation Army's Doctrine Council's publication, *Servants Together*, made the following suggestions for structural change:

What actions does Army administration need to take in order to facilitate servant leadership? Here are some of the important ones:

- Develop non-career-oriented leadership models.
- Dismantle as many forms of officer elitism as possible.
- Continue to find ways to expand participatory decision-making.²²

I believe structural change is essential but none of us is in a position to make it, and you know it's not going to happen. In fact that whole paragraph quoted was deleted from the second, 2008, edition of *Servants Together*. And wherever else the expression "participatory decision-making" was used, that was replaced by "consultative decision-making".²³ Do you draw any conclusions from those excisions? Perhaps none of the structural changes suggested might have made any difference anyway.

In 1996 when Commissioner (later General) John Larsson was about to conclude his term as Territorial Commander in New Zealand, he kindly invited me to arrange the annual Executive Officers' Councils as a training seminar. With his approval I engaged Gerard La Rooy, a Heinz-Watties executive and management guru, to lead sessions on "Flatter Structures" in management. By citing awful examples from the realm of business and expressing astonishment at the laughter as the officers recognised the same scenarios as found in the Salvation Army, he led them to consider how the work might be enhanced by flattening out some operations of the hierarchy. Some "participative decision-making" might have been involved. They got as far as drawing up suggestions for change – all pretty minor but likely to improve efficiency – and nominated a working party to continue developing the theme in the coming weeks. Then it all went quiet. After some weeks I asked the Chief Secretary, Hillmon Buckingham, "What happened?" "Ah," he replied, "For the week after the Councils I had a succession of senior officers come to my office saying, 'We might have got a bit carried away with this flatter structures business... I think we should be a bit careful...'" And so we were.

²² *Servants Together* (2002), 121.

²³ A letter to Territorial and Command leaders from the Chief of the Staff, dated 31 July 2008, stated, "...it is the General's wish that all copies of the previous edition be removed from trade department shelves, training college libraries and any other resource centres where copies may reside, and destroyed. Also, in publicizing the revised edition within your territory/command, please encourage your officers and soldiers to purchase this latest edition and to discard any copies they may have of the 2002 edition." Upon being asked about this, Commissioner Dunster wrote further that "The General's request for copies of the first edition to be discarded is simply a matter of practicality and good sense. We do not really want classes of cadets - or others - where some are using the old book and others the new one. That would lead to unnecessary confusion." Letter to Major Kingsley Sampson, dated 19 August 2008.

Even the slightest tinkering with the structure of hierarchies can produce severe symptoms of insecurity.

And the truth is that no structure can ensure that we love our neighbour – whether our senior in the command structure or our subordinate – as ourselves. That leaves our *attitudes*. The 2002 text of *Servants Together* made one other suggestion:

- Teach leaders to be servants by modelling it.²⁴

That was also deleted from the 2008 edition. I guess it was too much like Jesus, or Paul... in a word, subversive. Too often, the mantra “Servant Leadership” is an oxymoron. Servant is as servant does. To model servanthood is the only suggestion most of us can aspire to implement, but it is also the most important. And where opportunity affords, to name and challenge its antithesis, its shadow, which is the abuse of power.

Because *power* is at the heart of the matter. Money, sex and power are said to be the three pitfalls for clergy, but the first two are usually only means to, or expression of, the third. Hans Rudi Weber wrote that “Jesus transforms the love of power into the power of love.”²⁵ Sometimes we get it the wrong way round. Power, like steroids taken by an athlete, may enhance performance but exact a long-term cost.

So the question is whether holiness, both personal holiness (which is being like Jesus) and corporate holiness (which is the application of the principles of social justice to our structural relationships, so that the Body of Christ can be like Jesus), can redeem a hierarchical institution?



Over the years the doctrine of the Trinity has been presented in such a way as to support a hierarchical conception of both God and the Church. Here is a medieval Swedish Gothic representation of the Trinity. You can see who is in charge.

²⁴ *Servants Together* (2002), 121.

²⁵ Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Power, Focus for a Biblical Theology* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1989) 167.

But there is another tradition, of what is termed the perichoretic trinity. Here is an ancient icon. Who is in charge here?

Trinity icon by Andrey Rublev, c. 1400



So, is there a way in which Hierarchy may be Holy? If so, the Hierarchy may not look like we expect. Paradox is involved. Colonel Janet Munn, being interviewed last month, spoke of the paradox in Jesus' combination of humility and boldness (by contrast with the frequently found human combination of arrogance and cowardice). She noted that "Servanthood requires humility; leadership demands boldness."²⁶ Jesus in fact deconstructed leadership along these lines: "I do not call you servants any longer, because a servant does not know what his master is doing.

Instead, I call you friends..."²⁷ Mind-blowing it may be, but he is inviting us to gather round that table. The implications for both hierarchy and holiness are worth considering.

²⁶ You can watch it on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4IPSn8qAG0

²⁷ John 15: 15.