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Leadership and Ministry in the Church-as-Family

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An ecclesiology that does justice to the African situation remains one of the most pressing tasks of theology in Africa[1].

INTRODUCTION

The 1994 *Special Assembly of Synod of Bishops for Africa* made a fundamental option for the model of church-as-family. According to the Synod, this model of Church is to be the "guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa"[2]. The enthusiasm generated by this option has since subsided, as theologians, pastors and clergy attempt to imagine and formulate the practical implications of this fundamental option for church-as-family in Africa[3]. The general concern is to elaborate in theory and practice a viable African ecclesiology that responds to this fundamental option for the church-as-family. For, "To qualify this option as *fundamental* is to affirm at the same time

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[1] BENEZET BUJO, "On the Road Toward an African Ecclesiology: Reflections on the Synod", in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, compiled and edited by the Africa Faith & Justice Network under the direction of Maura Browne, SND (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), 150. My italics.

[2] JOHN PAUL II, *The Church in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications, 1995), n. 63.

[3] For more detailed theological discussions of this model see ELOCHUKWU UZUKWU, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Chruches* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996); E. OROBATOR, "The Church in Dialogue as the Family of God", in *What Happened at the African Synod?* Ed. Cecil McGarry (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications, 1995), 33-50; JOSEPH HEALEY and DONALD SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications, 1996), 104-167.

that it is to become an integral framework of our understanding of the church, such that whenever we think of the church, we express its meaning in our lives as family"[4].

What is beginning to emerge is the clear realisation that this model poses some serious challenges to the prevailing, orthodox way of *being* church in Africa. These challenges cannot be ignored if the Synod's hope of renewal of the church in Africa is to become real. This is not the place to examine all the challenges, questions, and conflicts associated with this model of church. Nevertheless, one area of such ecclesiological investigation concerns the model of leadership and ministry implied in this notion of church-as-family. If one concedes that the church is family.

> How can the present perception of the laity as inferior helpers of the ordained ministers find justification in the church-as-family, where all co-members share an equal responsibility for its growth?
> What, then, is the role of the priest in the family of God's people? Is he to be treated and related to as an animator and facilitator [?]; a solitary collaborator with the family-of-God, like other co-members of the same family? Or is he a man of authority, a 'father figure?'
> What is the role of the bishop? Is he a hierarchical and ecclesiastical administrator or an 'elder brother', a servant of the family-of-God, upon whom devolves the task of coordinating the different charisms and roles in the church-as-family?[5].

Given the importance of these questions and challenges what follows is an attempt, first, to evaluate the prevailing and dominant manner of exercising leadership, authority and ministry in the church in Africa. Secondly, it is also an examination of some alternative models and practices relating to the exercise of leadership and ministry in the new model of church-as-family. For this second task, it will be important to take some

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[4] OROBATOR, "The Church in Dialogue as the Family of God", 34.
[5] *Ibid,* 40.

aspects and elements of African tradition and culture into consideration, especially as these have been outlined by contemporary African ecclesiologists. This approach squares well with the current renewed interests in questions of inculturation that were generated by the Synod[6]. The following discussion will concentrate primarily on the role of the priest vis-à-vis the laity and, by extension, also affect the bishops and other positions of leadership in the African Church. Though not much has been written on this subject in this post-synodal period, the limited materials available give cause for hope in rethinking the model of leadership and ministry in the church-as-family.

CLERICALISM IN THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

In dealing with the question of clericalism as it affects the church in Africa, one must not forget that this African church is what some theologians customarily refer to as a 'mission' church. This implies that its history and development are still largely conditioned by models, structures and patterns of leadership and ministry inherited from missionaries of the colonial era. One such legacy from the missionaries is the phenomenon of clericalism. Many examples of how this development occurred abound in the history of Christianity in Africa, but the following explanation seems most probable.

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[6] See, for example, the following discussions of inculturation as it relates directly or indirectly to issues raised at the African Synod: JAMES C. OKOYE, "The Special Assembly for Africa and Inculturation", *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 275-285; PETER K. SARPONG, "Inculturation (The Asante Model)", *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 287-304; PETER K. SARPONG, "Libation and Inculturation in Africa", *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 305-335; CESARE GIRAUDO, "*Inculturer la liturgie: le défi des Églises du Tiers Monde au seuil du troisième Millenaire*" *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 337-366; METENA M'NTEBA, "Inculturation in the 'Third Church': God's Pentecost or Cultural Revenge?" *Concilium* 1 (1992): 129-146; PETER SCHINELLER, "Inculturation: A difficult and Delicate Task", *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20, no. 3 (July 1996): 109-112; NAZAIRE ABENG, "*La pastorale de la famille - l'inculturation - l'ecclesiologie après le Synode des Eveques pour l'Afrique*", *Revue Africaine de Théologie* 18, no. 35 (Avril 1994): 56-62. Some of the issues relating to leadership and authority in the African conception of church have also been raised in my "Perspectives and trends in Contemporary African Ecclesiology", *Studia Missionalia* 45 (1996): 267-281.

Without necessarily seeking to pick a quarrel with the past, one can still recall the widespread practice, under differing circumstances in Africa, of mission "houses", "villages", or "colonies", which were run as "little Christian state [s]"; where missionary priests, especially Catholic clergy, held absolute sway over the details of life and behaviour of African converts[7]. As Father Broghero, a Catholic missionary at Whydah (Benin), remarked in 1863:

> If the missionaries were to gather together in these places a small Christian population and if they [missionaries] were to be the directors of the temporal as well as the spiritual affairs of the community, they would soon form a little Christian state which would become the example and the refuge of the scattered flock[8].

This is what the missionaries did in many places. This approach by which missionary clergy acted as "directors" of temporal and spiritual affairs of the community, the church, has left an indelible imprint on the conception and exercise of leadership in the Church in Africa.

African theologians are unanimous in their observation that the church in Africa continues to be confronted by the serious problem of clericalism as a missionary inheritance. Reflecting on the same problem, Nigerian theologian Elochukwu Uzukwu notes that:

> The church in Africa inherited this pattern of clericalism from the missionaries, who, naturally, communicated the post-Tridentine image of the church. The training of the clergy did not permit any questioning of such structures. In fact, our bishops and priests have no evident interest in changing the status quo in this church which is 'essentially an *unequal* society' made up of those who 'occupy a

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[7] For a detailed and excellent study of this phenomenon see J.F. ADE AJAYI, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longmans, 1965), 90-124; ADRIAN HASTINGS, *The Church in Africa 1450-1950*, Oxford History of the Christian Church, eds. Henry and Owen Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 1996), 197-221.

[8] Quoted in AJAYI, *Christian Missions in Nigeria*, 114.

rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful'... The privileged clergy are the principal beneficiaries[9].

Uzukwu further provides an awry example of clericalism (episcopalism) when he cites the case of a Nigerian bishop addressing an audience of senior seminarians in the following term: "We [bishops] are the church, you are not the church; the church speaks, you listen; we talk, you do listening; we give directives, you obey; you are there, we are here; we send you, you go!"[10]

Benzet Bujo, a Zairian theologian, carries the argument a little further and aptly labels the problem "a kind of cancerous growth" which poses a dangerous threat to the life of the church in Africa[11]. "A priest or a bishop", he argues, "can turn into a lifelong oppressor of the ecclesial community, effectively dechristianizing it. Priests and bishops behave like persons who cannot be corrected 'from below', since their very vices and mistakes are presented as 'holiness' and offered to the people as virtues to be imitated!"[12].

A truly African church cannot be imagined or constructed in a situation of ingrained clericalism. Therefore, if the church in Africa is to be rethought or renewed along the lines of the family analogy, the structures of leadership and authority must equally be subjected to a radical reassessment. Quite clearly, the model of church-as-family, when properly understood and applied, radically negates the practice of clericalism. Therefore, Bujo notes: "A Church that proceeds from the idea of community and family can no longer tolerate anonymous power structures in its bosom"[13].

Yet, as some African theologians have correctly pointed out, the family model is like a "double-edged" sword: it can be

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[9] UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 120.
[10] *Ibid*, 121
[11] BENEZET BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1992), 98. In the words of one African bishop: "This disease (clericalism) is incurable". UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 120.
[12] BUJO, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 98.
[13] BENEZET BUJO, "On the Road Toward an African Ecclesiology", 147.

used to generate a model of collaborative and participatory ministry, and also to reinforce the existing structures of clericalism and exclusive ecclesial relationships[14]. Therefore, in elaborating models of leadership that are compatible with the idea of church-as-family utmost caution and prudence are an absolute requirement. Ugandan theologian John Mary Waliggo states emphatically that the idea of family in Africa needs to be "liberated" before it can be used as reference for understanding the church-as-family. As he puts it:

> ... the African family, whether traditional or contemporary, is still very hierarchical. The father figure is still much feared by the other members of the family. The wife is not yet given the full rights of equality... Therefore, when Church-as-family model is recommended, it is important to agree that this does *not* mean any of the families that are not yet fully liberated. We must create a vision of an African family where equality is guaranteed, clear sharing of responsibility is accepted, the clear option for the disadvantaged members is made, and deadly tensions are eliminated. The theology of the Church-as-family is a double-edged sword. It can be profitably used but it may also lead to benign paternalism. We must be careful not to end up again with a pyramid structure of the Church instead of the circular one of communion[15].

In a church still accustomed to clericalism such concern as Waliggo expresses could still send sceptics and opponents of

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[14] Certain conceptions and organisation of African families are still exclusive and inward-looking. The church-as-family model attempts to reverse this trend. See JOHN MARY WALIGGO, "'Synod of Hope' at a Time of Crisis in Africa", in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, compiled and edited by the Africa Faith & Justice Network under the direction of Maura Browne, SND (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), 208; SARPONG, "Inculturation (The Asante Model)", 293-294; LAURENTI MAGESA, "The Future of the African Synod", in Africa Faith and Justice Network, *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, 168; PETER K. SARPONG. "Conclusion", in Africa Faith and Justice Nework, *The African Synod: Documents, Relfections, Perspectives*, 224-225; *Elenchus Finalis Propositionum: Final List of Propositions* (Vatican City: 1994. Reserved document), no. 8; *Nuntius: Message of the Synod* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1994), nos. 27-28.
[15] WALIGGO, "'Synod of Hope' at a Time of Crisis in Africa", 208.

this call for reevaluation into paroxysms of protestation. Yet, it cannot be denied that Waliggo, besides echoing the concern of African theologians that "a correct understanding of the community and family" is crucial to an authentically African ecclesiology[16], provides a very crucial insight on elaborating useful and workable alternative models of leadership and ministry in the church-as-family. What would elements of these alternative models involve?

MODELS OF LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH-AS-FAMILY

Before attempting to discuss alternative models of leadership and ministry in the church-as-family two relevant points need to be noted. First, the aim of this discussion is not to denigrate the institution of priesthood. Nor is it, secondly, a question of replacing the priest as leader of the community by the laity, and, therefore, to create another authoritarian structure that could be termed 'laitocracy'. Rather, the following discussion will deal more with the 'how' of leadership, primarily with the view of expanding the present structure and conception of leadership and ministry in order to fit an African church conceived as family. This idea and process of expansion will be explored with the help of two useful notions: palaver and charism.

AFRICAN PALAVER MODEL

Recently the notion of 'African palaver' is finding its way into theological discussions as a useful category for elaborating an African model for exercising leadership[17]. As a term it still recalls the earlier bias of Western anthropologists, ethnologists,

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[16] BUJO, "On the Road Toward an African Ecclesiology", 140.
[17] A leading African theological and cultural review, *Telema*, regularly features theological and cultural discussions under the rubric *'palabre africaine'*.

and philosophers. For many of these latter, palaver (or *palabre* in French) carried the negative denotation of *"conference avec un chef noir, ou de Noirs entre eux"*, *"longue et ennuyeuse"*, *"et de façon oiseuse"*[18]. This is how 'palaver' was understood by Europeans who came to Africa, especially during the colonial era. Yet, as a social phenomenon, "African palaver should not be confused with interminable, time-consuming, endless, aimless, useless discussion!"[19].

Properly understood, African palaver is both an event and a process of communal dialogue whose central meaning revolves around the idea and experience of *participation*. The Ki-Swahili equivalent *baraza*, means an open, public forum, where all members of the community participate in the discussion and resolution of issues affecting the entire community; where reconciliation is actively sought, achieved and experienced through a communal rather than an individual process. The idea of participation directly refers to a dialogue that is expansive, and it is deeply rooted in the African world-view. Kofi Appiah Kubi correctly asserts that: "For an African the centre of life is not achievement but participation"[20]. In concrete life this translates as participation in the myriad processes and events relating to and determining the entire life of the community: "African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village"[21].

In relation to the model of church-as-family, this notion of palaver expresses a community of "relationships and widening circles of participation"[22]. Here, there is no room for the leader to monopolise the process. Nor does the leader restrict the right of any given member to participate in the life of the community. The usefulness of this model becomes apparent

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[18] *Lexis: Dictionnaire de la Langue française* (1975), s.v. *"Palabre"*.

[19] UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 128.

[20] Quoted in Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 116.

[21] JOHN PAUL II, *The Church in Africa*, no. 43; see also Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 125 ff.

[22] HEALEY and SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 123.

when applied to the model of church-as-family. To be sure, it counteracts the exercise of power which allows priests to dominate, because, as Uzukwu observes, "The laity do not simply want to observe what the clergy are doing; rather, they want to *participate* and make their contribution to the upbuilding of the church-community"[23]. The areas covered by this idea of participation include all aspects of the church's life: liturgy and worship, teaching, ministry, decision-making, planning, organising, etc.

The two leading African ecclesiologists who have retrieved and developed this palaver process are unanimous in their appraisal of its proper bearing and cardinal importance in what concerns the style of leadership in the church-as-family. Uzukwu argues that the African palaver basically implies "the liberation of speech at all levels of the community in order to come close to the Word which is too large for an individual mouth, the Word which saves and heals"[24]. Bujo holds a similar opinion:

> According to the Black palaver model, the word cannot be interpreted by some central authority but only by a community, that is, in the process of listening to one another. For in speaking and listening with and to each other, it is possible to repulse a fatal word and to confirm a life-promoting one, and to receive it into the service of the ecclesial community[25].

Applied to the church-as-family, this process means that the specific function of the ordained minister in the palaver process is that of a coordinator. In concrete terms, upon him devolves the task of coordinating and facilitating the palaver process without monopolising it or suppressing the specific contribution that each member of the community brings to the life of the church-as-family. This can happen by keeping all channels of palaver open: community meetings and open consultations, participatory pastoral planning and deliberations – all of which aim charting

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[23] UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 105. My italics.
[24] *Ibid.*, 128.
[25] BUJO, "On the Road Toward an African Ecclesiology", 148.

the course and pattern of the entire community's life. In this manner he exercise not a "solitary authority" but "authority in concert with the community of all believers" in everything that concerns the life of the church-as-family[26].

Uzukwu has also developed a useful metaphor in relation to the style and exercise of leadership roles in the church-as-family. It is based on the "Manja Paradigm". He observes that:

> Among the Manja of Central African Republic the totem for the chief is the rabbit because the unobtrusive animal has 'large ears'... The Manja underline listening as the most dominant characteristic of the chief. His 'large ears' bring him close to God, ancestors, and divinities and close to the conversation taking place in the community[27].

One vivid example of how this works in a traditional African community comes from a scene in an African novel, *Things Fall Apart*. Faced with a tragic event of the murder of a member of the clan the entire clan meets to decide on an appropriate course of action:

> "...[I]n all the nine villages of Umuofia a town crier with his *ogene* [gong] asked every man to be present tomorrow morning... In the morning the market place was full... Many others spoke, and at the end it was decided to follow the normal course of action"[28].

The central point of this example from folklore pertains to what has been referred to as equal participation by all in deciding matters that affect the community. But the indication in this example that the women of the village were not included in the gathering further demonstrates the point that was raised earlier – and which will be taken up again in this essay – concerning the need to be critical when drawing upon

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[26] Ibid. See also BOKA DI MPASI LONDI, *"Le prêtre face aux défis de la 'Nouvelle évangelisation'"*, Telema 2 (1994): 38-39; OROBATOR, "Perspectives and Trends", 274-276.

[27] UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 127.

[28] CHINUA ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1983), 14-15.

the resources of traditional African notions of the family. Furthermore, Healey and Sybertz's observation gyves well with the above example: "Traditionally, Africans will talk and talk under the *palaver tree* until they agreed on a common solution or an equitable compromise"[29]. Evidently, there is no room in this process for monopoly or the manipulation of members.

The African notion of wisdom further enriches this palaver paradigm of leadership in the church-as-family. In Africa, wisdom is generally associated with the elders. One can point to the examples of this in some African proverbs: "What the young person sees from the top of a palm-tree the old person can see even while lying on a bamboo bed", "Achievement is valued but age is revered", "The young bird does not crow until it hears the old ones". Nonetheless, other examples exist of African proverbs which suggest that wisdom be not the exclusive preserve of the old: "As the elder grows so does the child", "An old person may see the top of the shelf, but his or her hand cannot pass through the neck of a gourd (only the child's hands can), "A child who has washed his or her hands clean can sit and eat with the elders", "The stick even of a child helps the adult across".

The point of this argument is that this reference to the concept of wisdom widens the process of participation in the life of the church-as-family rather than narrows it. The fact that the priest is called an elder (*presbyteros*) in Africa should not necessarily amount to a consolidation of clericalism. The crucial element of wisdom is that one is capable of uttering the word that "holds the community together"[30]. This function extends to all members of the church-as-family, old and young alike. It is not restricted to the privileged few – the clergy. It is an undeniable fact that

> [E]ven non-ordained men and women play an irreplaceable role in the life of the Church. By their baptism they participate in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. As baptised men and women they have died with Christ and have

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[29] HEALEY and SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 350.
[30] BUJO, "On the Road Toward an African Ecclesiology", 147.

risen with him. They have 'put on' wisdom and received the spirit of God to the benefit of the one community of the Church... This is the reason they must have a share in the council of elders in parish and diocesan palavers[31].

Thus the lay men and women who *are* equally the church-as-family, because of their God-given wisdom, possess the right of equal participation in the life of the community. As Bujo remarks: "[T]hey are often more experienced than their pastor, who perhaps disposes of great knowledge without much practical experience and wisdom"[32].

CHARISMS OF MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH-AS-FAMILY

It is not the aim of this paper to rehash the voluminous theological discussion centered on the precise nature and meaning of the Pauline notion of charism, and the corresponding charismatic structure of the church[33]. For the purpose of this paper, it will suffice to state quite plainly two definitions of this term which capture its profound essence. Hans Küng defines the Pauline understanding of charism as: "*The call of God, addressed to an individual, to a particular ministry in the community, which brings with it the ability to fulfil that ministry*"[34]. Leonardo Boff's definition is essentially identical: "A charism is a manifestation of the Spirit's presence in the members of the community, causing everything that they are and do to be done and ordered for the good of all"[35]. There is one element that is common to both definitions. It is the idea that

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[31] *Ibid.*, 144-145.

[32] *Ibid.*, 146.

[33] The following studies of this notion of charism remain valid for contemporary theological discussion: YVES CONGAR, *Lay People in the Church: A study for a Theology of the Laity*, trans. Donald Attwatter (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1957), 258-308; HANS KÜNG, *The Church*, trans. Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 150-203; LEONARDO BOFF, *The Church: Charism and Power*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 154-164; JÜRGEN MOLTMANN, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 291-314.

[34] KÜNG, *The Church*, 188.

[35] BOFF. *The Church*, 158; see also CONGAR, *Lay People in the Church*, 284.

the whole community is the beneficiary of particular charisms bestowed on its members. For this reason, it is not enough for a particular charism to be attributed to God both as its source and ultimate end: A true charism must be "of service to the community, a service that is disinterested and selfless"[36].

The specifically Christian context or framework of these definitions and discussions of charism notwithstanding, one must concede that the notion of 'charism' as a gift bestowed in view of the community's upbuilding is something that is undeniably native to African tradition and culture. In Africa, there exist many functions and offices in the community which derive from a special vocation, commission or possession by the spirits of the gods, the deities, divinities or ancestors[37].

The discussion of charisms in African ecclesiology relates to the specific ways in which the circles of participation are broadened to include without exception the contribution of all the members of the church-as-family. Again, it is important to note that this widening of the circles of participation precludes an excessive clerical control, domination or interference which invariably stifles creativity. Consequently, it liberates the valid and meaningful contribution of lay men and women in all aspects of the church's life: "Each baptised Christian is endowed with the gift of the Spirit as the Spirit wills. Each charism is a way of giving internal coherence to each Christian. It is a way of liberating each Christian from being closed within the self, so that he or she may be fully involved in the service of the community"[38].

In the concrete life of the church-as-family the numerous charism translate into different ministries and services which

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[36] BOFF, *The Church*, 161.

[37] See, for example, CYPRIEN MBOKA, "*La valorisation africaine du statut du prêtre*", in *Civilisation noire et Église catholique Colloque d'Abidjan 12-17 Septembre 1977* (Paris: Presence Africaine & Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1978), 221-222; JOHN ONAIYEKAN, "The Priesthood in Owe Traditional Religion", in *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, ed E.A. Ade Adegbola (Nairobi, Kenya: Uzima Press Ltd & Kampala, Uganda: CPH, 1993), 26-54; JOHN MBITI, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2d. ed. Heinemann (London: Heinemann, 1975), 153-164.

[38] UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 108-109.

build up the community. During and after the Sound, ample
references were made to the various ministries particularly
suitable for the church-as-family in Africa. Nevertheless, a
note of caution needs to be raised in this direction. The prefab-
rication of ministries or excessive multiplication of them car-
ries with it the danger of chaos in the ecclesial community.
Such chaos is diametrically opposed to the operations of the
Spirit. The question, in fact, is not what kinds of ministries are
to be created. Rather, "The fundamental issue is whether the
Spirit of God is given full initiative in the assembly of Chris-
tians"[39]. The deciding criterion for the emergence of valid min-
istries should remain the actual situation of the particular com-
munity and the gifted availability of the members to the action
of the Spirit. Like any grace, the gift of charism for ministry
presupposes the actual life of a faith community, which
receives this gift, and for whose benefit a particular ministry is
recognised and exercised.

Examples abound from different parts of Africa of min-
istries recognised and considered beneficial to particular com-
munities in view of their particular situation. In other words,
they respond to the "real and felt needs" of the local church[40].
The list of ministries is as vast as it is rich: witness, presence,
accompaniment, healing, reconciliation, home-visitation, hos-
pitality, conflict resolution, peace-making, catechetics, liturgy,
vocations, development, counselling, stewardship, youth,
community leaders, the word, promotion of life, integration
of widows and widowers...[41]. A living church-as-family, in
which a variety of ministries are recognised and actively pro-
moted, invariably allows lay men and women the space to
adequately explore the depth and richness of their Christian
vocation. The priest is challenged to respect these ministries
and to defer to the competence, giftedness and expertise of the

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[39] *Ibid.*, 124.
[40] OROBATOR, "Perspectives and Trends", 276.
[41] HEALEY and SYBERTZ, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, 122, 194,
307-315, 348-350; OROBATOR, "The Church in Dialogue as the Family of God",
43-44; UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 115, 126-127.

lay members of the community in the exercise of these func-
tions for the good of all.

Before bringing this essay to a close, a brief mention
should be made of the particular position of women in this dis-
cussion of alternative models of leadership and ministry in the
church-as-family. Nor is it out of place to mention the ques-
tion of sacramental ministries for women in the church-as-
family in Africa as a logical implication of this model of
church. It is important to recall that, in general, African tradi-
tional religious practices and belief systems accord distinctive,
official mediatory and leadership roles to women in diverse
circumstances of cultic sacrifices and worshop. Women who
function in their own unchallenged rights as priestesses, female
priests, diviners, healers or under any other appropriate desig-
nation are a usual feature of African traditional religion. In a
genuine spirit of inculturation and authentic dialogue with
African tradition and culture one would concede that such
practices furnish an additional basis for granting women access
to ecclesial leadership and sacramental ministries in the
church-as-family. This is a subject that merits a fuller and more
extensive study.

In what concerns the alternative model of leadership and
ministry in the church-as-family, besides modelling leadership
and ministry on the experience of "mothering" and "caring",
as some African theologians suggest[42], specific elements of this
model need to be liberated. In other words, no form of dis-
crimination against women (sexism, seclusion, paternalism,
clericalism, patriarchism...) is to be tolerated in the palaver
process or in the exercise of charisms and ministries in the
church-as-family. The slightest manifestation of marginalisa-
tion of women is to be taken as an indication of a flawed or
distorted process of discernment of the Spirit of God at work
in the community: "The listening church model cannot con-
tinue indefinitely to exclude women from ministry if the ears

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[42] UZUKWU, *A Listening Church*, 133-134; BOKA DI MPASI, *"Le prêtre face
aux défis de la 'Nouvelle évangelisation'"*, 39-40.

of the church-community are attentive to the Spirit and to the conversations going on within the community"[43].

The *Message* of the Synod is emphatic in its affirmation of the role women in the church-as-family: "We are convinced that the quality of our Church-as-Family also depends on the quality of our women-folk, be they married or member of institutes of consecrated life"[44]. A similar point is made in the Synod's *Final Propositions*:

> The Synod appreciates the indispensable contribution which African women make to the family, church and society. In many African societies and sometimes even the Church, there are customs, and practices which deprive women of their rights and the respect due them. The Synod deplores this. It is imperative that women be included in appropriate levels of decision making in the Church and that the Church establish ministries for women and intensify efforts toward their formation[45].

Like many other official church declarations, this recommendation is still far from being implemented. One hopes that it does not become a dead formula.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of alternative models of leadership and ministry in the church-as-family is an ongoing process. Many of the issues raised in this essay echo the concerns already raised in the teachings of Vatican Council II. Unfortunately,

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[43] *Ibid.*, 141. See also BERNADETTE MBUY-BEYA, "Women in the Churches in Africa: Possibilities for Presence and Promises", in *The African Synod: Documents, Reflections, Perspectives*, compiled and edited by the Africa Faith & Justice Network under the direction of Maura Browne, SND (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), 175-187.

[44] *Nuntius*, no. 8; see also nos. 65-67, 69-71. The reference to women in the *Nuntius* should be expanded to include also single women in the Church.

[45] *Elenchus Finalis Propositionum*, no. 48. See also John Paul II, *The Church in Africa*, no. 121.

the crucial stage of implementation has been slow. And in many parts of the African church the ills of clericalism and episcopalism show no sign of abating. This study is not an exhaustive treatment of the issues involved. Yet, it furthers the discussion by drawing upon elements from African tradition and culture as they are elaborated in evolving trends in African ecclesiology. The misconception of some of these elements in contemporary Africa in no way invalidates their usefulness. Rather it points to the need to liberate these elements from their narrow conceptions and distortions by modelling the African ecclesial family on Jesus' egalitarian and inclusive vision of the Kingdom. The aim here is to identify a process and delineate certain parameters within which larger issues can be meaningfully discussed. Finally, two key points need to be noted.

As this study suggests, in dealing with the questions of leadership and ministry in the African church, one is confronted with the question of the use of power. Often the exercise of power in the church tends to be modelled on examples of authoritarianism, autocracy and other systems of oppression on the continent. The result is tyranny, injustice, oppression and denial of fundamental human rights even in the church. Thus, a curious inversion of values has crept into church polity and practice. Where the church is supposed to challenge the unjust structures of power in society, ecclesiastical leaders tend to copy some distasteful aspects of the secular exercise of power. To reverse this trend a radical conversion is needed for the church to become a truly vibrant African family.

Secondly, the desired change can surreptitiously come in a disguised form which perpetuates the status quo. In a situation where much of the current discussion (including this one) concerning leadership and ministry in the African church is dominated by the clergy, the result could become a reinforcement of an actually flawed manner of proceeding. One hopes, however, that the theological discussion of leadership and ministry will in due course widen to include lay men and women who are most experienced and qualified to offer both examples and practices of leadership and ministry in the church-as-family.

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