

Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church,
Steven Croft (DLT, revised edition 2008)

This is not a new book, but a new edition – or to be honest, the same book as was published in 1999, with an additional chapter. But this new edition provides an opportunity for a review of this valuable book. *Ministry in Three Dimensions* is addressed primarily to an Anglican (and British) context, though those from other denominations interested in leadership would find much of value in it.

One of the strengths of the book is a section on a biblical theology of leadership, which explores material from both the Old and New Testaments. This leads on to opening up the heart of the book, the ‘three dimensions’: diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal ministries. To my mind, Croft is one of the few writers on ministry to confront the lack of uniform pattern of ministry that emerges in the New Testament writings, and also to propose a convincing way of understanding them today which does justice to the three ‘dimensions’.

He argues that ‘we have in the three dimensions *diakonos*, *presbyteros* and *episcopos* something of a distillation of important insights about Christian ministry and leadership, rooted in Scripture and drawing from a rich tradition in Church history from which we can begin to build a new understanding of ordained ministry.’ Ordained ministry (the ministry of a ‘vicar’) is no longer one-dimensional, and Croft suggests that these three dimensions can help us to understand both that traditionally ‘presbyteral’ dimension, and how in fact the Anglican orders of bishop, priest and deacon all involve aspects of the three ‘dimensions’.

Parts two, three and four of the book then unpack *diakonia*, *presbyter* and *episcopos*, with sections on the scriptural origin of each term, the historical dimension, and how the ministry is exercised in the Church today. In Croft’s understanding, the first dimension is primarily a ministry of service; the second of service of the Word, and of sacraments and prayer; and the third of vision, unity, enabling, and watching over self and others.

The new final chapter addresses two issues: developments in the understanding of ministry, in particular the emergence of fresh expressions of church and pioneer ministry – something Croft has been closely involved in for the last five years; and connections between episcopos and recent thinking on leadership. He includes a section on the criteria for ‘Ordained Pioneer Ministry’, and explores where this new focus of ministry may fit into the ‘three dimensions’ model. He then revisits his chapters on *episcopos*, starting from Paul’s words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28: ‘Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you *episcopoi*’.

And his conclusion? ‘The calling of all the ordained is to ministry in three dimensions.’

Steven Croft has recently become Bishop of Sheffield. He was previously Warden of Cranmer Hall, and then Archbishops’ Missioner and Team Leader of Fresh Expressions. I can remember how as a curate, keen to grow members of my congregation as disciples and leaders, I found a couple of his early books immensely thought-provoking and useful, and he has gained a reputation for clear and original thinking, teamed with practical relevance. This book would be of value to anyone exploring ordained ministry, and to church leaders who want to step back and reflect on their own ministry.

Rosie Ward, © CPAS 2009

Protestant churches have historically viewed the Bible as the ultimate authority in church debates (the doctrine of sola scriptura), as such the debate over women's eligibility for such offices normally centers around interpretation of certain Biblical passages relating to teaching and leadership roles. Increasingly however, supporters of women in ministry argue that the Biblical passages used to argue against women's ordination might be read differently when more understanding of the unique historical context of each passage is available.[1] They further argue that the New Testament shows that women did exercise certain ministries in the apostolic Church (e.g., Acts 21:9, Acts 18:18, Romans 16:1-4, Romans 16:7; 1 Cor. 16:19, Philippians 4:2-3, and John 20:1-18. Start by marking "Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church" as Want to Read: Want to Read saving! Want to Read. The author uses a three-stranded approach to ordained leadership: service, eldership and oversight, tracing them through the Old and New Testaments and throughout Christian history. With insight on the present day situation, he provides a model for ministry which is relevant across all denominations. Get A Copy. Amazon. 3 See my own Ministry in Three Dimensions, Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church, DLT 1999, pp. 48ff; Cranfield comments that it is "virtually certain" that Phoebe is being formally described as a deacon (Romans, p 781). 4 John N. Collins, Diakonia, Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources, OUP, 1990. The book is, unfortunately, out of print and hard to obtain. It is concisely summarised in his recent and shorter Deacons and the Church, Gracewing, 2002 and in the House of Bishops report, For Such A Time As This "A Renewed Diaconate in the Church of England, pp 32f. 5 See the commentaries