

## **EDITORIAL:**

### **To Jump – Or Not To Jump – On The Bandwagon**

**By Paul Beasley-Murray**

Let's be honest: many of us ministers secretly worship the god of success. We long to be successful in ministry. We long to be pastors of bigger and better churches. We long for the kind of recognition that comes when we are invited to address a Spring Harvest crowd or some major denominational conference. We want to 'make it' in ministry. And once we have 'made it', how difficult it is to stand down from the limelight.

And yet, thank God, there are some who turn their backs on the ministerial rat-race. I have in mind, for instance, one friend who, when I first met him, was a dynamic denominational leader, known through the length and breadth of his native New Zealand; but as I write he is a relatively unknown pastor of a church in Papua New Guinea. A gifted and creative individual, he stepped 'down' because his heart was - and is - in ministry.

When the Toronto 'blessing' first broke out, this friend wrote most perceptively of the way in which many evangelical ministers are forever seeking the latest promise of refreshing, renewal and full churches: "What is happening right now may be a movement of God. But it is not the only one. And I don't believe it is the most important one. Our infatuation with it says more about ourselves and our rather shaky faith in Christ. I simply cannot imagine Jesus getting on a plane and hot-footing it to Toronto with all the poverty and sheer misery in countries like yours and mine - can you?".

He went on to say: "There are two priorities for me. One is to develop a more robust theology that can interact with the secular world. I believe the world needs not a more mindless expression of Christianity, but greater intellectual discipline that can argue and convince a whole new generation of people who have dismissed Christianity and the Bible as a fable. And secondly, I am committed to the vision of the church as a loving community".

I believe my friend is right. The pursuit of the latest band-waggon on which to jump is not only foolish, but also wrong. 'Success' in

ministry is not necessarily to be equated with effectiveness in ministry. Indeed, 'success' can actually sideline us from our real mission.

Hopefully the insights of this issue of *Ministry Today* will provide ministers and Christian leaders with the theological resources to steer away from the many dangerous eddies and whirlpools of contemporary church life. Certainly I found Deans Buchanan's scholarly reflections on ministry today in the light of ministry and suffering in the life of Paul deeply challenging and disturbing. Here is a paradigm for ministry to follow and to draw strength from. Very different in style is Martyn Percy's lively analysis of revivalism in general, and of the Toronto Blessing in particular. His 'Ten Toronto Teasers' should give every charismatically inclined church leader much food for thought. Equally provocative are Andrew Walker's notes on the cultural context of mission. How right he is that all too often we 'mistake in-house entertainment to the faithful for signs of revival for those who have not yet found any faith'. The challenge for those of us at the grass roots is now to find ways and means of putting into practice the ideals he is formulating. This leads on to Part II of Joan King's contribution on the family, with its reminder that Christian faith, if it is to be meaningful in today's society, must relate to the family, and not just to individuals. Readers will no doubt find her practical suggestions very helpful.

So, here we have yet another mind-stretching, heart-provoking, action-stimulating issue of *Ministry Today*. In my admittedly biased opinion, *Ministry Today* offers an unrivalled resource to ministers and Christian leaders. However, we still have a long way to go to make *Ministry Today* and the work of the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry known. Please can we enlist your help in this regard. We very much need all our members to commend RBIM to their friends. If you would find some flyers helpful for distribution, please let us know and we would be delighted to supply them. We would also be happy to consider sending a Board member to speak about the work of RBIM to a meeting of ministers and church leaders - provided it is not in the Outer Hebrides! What a difference it would make if every member of the RBIM were to enlist another member this autumn!

We believe that *Ministry Today* and the conferences we run are already good value. However, we are now in the position to offer an

even better service to RBIM members. In addition to sending members the journal and giving a substantial discount on conferences/consultations, we are prepared to offer free (albeit) limited consultancy facilities to our members. Thus in response to written queries relating to issues arising from the practice of ministry we are more than happy to put members in touch with relevant resource material and/or people. So over to you!

## **MINISTRY & SUFFERING IN THE LIFE OF PAUL**

**By Deans Buchanan**

Like many a church building, the shape of Christian life, and Christian service, is cruciform. Christian ministry, whatever its setting, is a calling to stand under the cross, in the power of the resurrection. There can be no escaping this essential fact - service and suffering are Siamese twins. The life and ministry of Paul the apostle amplifies this truth.

Exploring the theme as a Christian minister is a humbling experience, especially in our generation, in Western society. Persecution and affliction, of the overt and hideous kind, are unfamiliar territory. The literature of martyrdom, ancient and modern, portrays courageous faith of a measure that inspires, disturbs and threatens even the sincerest servant of God. Ernest Best, commenting on Paul's litany of affliction, reacts by saying "that what Paul writes is true, we can observe when we read of those who suffer in pioneer mission areas and in fascist and communist countries. Perhaps we shall only understand it in our own lives when we take our faith more seriously, when we allow it to disturb us more deeply. Then we will know a greater fellowship with others when we support them".<sup>84</sup>

In fact, rather than allow it to disturb us, we trade in the persecution model for the power model. Seduced by the drive for

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<sup>84</sup> Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians* (John Knox Press 1987) 12-13.