

EDITORIAL

Paul Beasley-Murray

Over the last few years the RBIM Board has been very pleased with the high standard of articles we have been privileged to print in *Ministry Today*. However, we are conscious that we need to work more at earthing our articles in the practice of ministry. To this end, in addition to our longer articles of 3000 words, we are looking for shorter and more practical articles (500 - 2000 words) in which those at the coal-face reflect on some aspect of their ministry. It could involve sharing something that worked - on the other hand, it could involve sharing something that did not work ('failures' in ministry can often be great learning experiences). So, if any of our readers would be prepared to put pen to paper and submit an article to me in my capacity as editor, I would be delighted.

The other appeal for help from the Board relates to broadening the base of RBIM. We want more church leaders to benefit from reading *Ministry Today* and from attending RBIM conferences and consultations. But this will only be possible with more members. We are therefore asking every member to help us in a new recruitment drive by recommending RBIM to a couple of friends each.

Then a word of thanks to all those RBIM members who in Spring 1996 took part in a confidential and detailed survey of "how ministers exercise leadership in their churches, and ... how they handle issues such as conflict and power in day-to-day church life". I am delighted to be able to tell you that this survey of over 250 church leaders forms the basis of my forthcoming book *Power for God's sake: the use and abuse of power in the local church*, to be published by Paternoster Press later this year.

Although a serious piece of research, it contains some headline stuff. For example:

Nine out of ten ministers claim that "churches treat us badly"
Most ministers under 45 have considered giving up their calling
One in six ministers leave their churches in "unhappy circumstances"

One in seven ministers confess to sexual misbehaviour

One in five churches racked by power politics
Accountability in the church is a myth!

Perhaps two paragraphs from my final chapter may be of interest:

"One of my aims in writing this book has been to expose the dangerous reality of power in the church. True, at first sight there appears, for the most part, to be nothing sensational about the abuse of power among God's people. But herein is to be found the danger. If the abuse of power were rampant in every church, then it would be obvious to most, if not to all. However, it is precisely because the abuse of power is less melodramatic and more subtle that many fail to see the problem. Hopefully the problem has now been exposed."

"The problem of abuse of power in the church, however, is compounded by the fact that God is often brought into the issue. This may seem a strange comment, because one might well assume that if God were brought into a problem, then the problem might be solved. And that is true. Where God is brought into a problem and allowed to have his say, as it were, problems do begin to be solved. Sadly in the church God is often brought in to bolster up 'our' side. Like the German army, whose soldiers once wore belts with the words *Gott mit uns* (God with us) we tend to want to use God for our own ends, rather than submit to his purposes. The reality is that when we seek to use God for our own ends, not only do we become blinded to the blasphemy of seeking to use God for our own ends, we also become blind to the weaknesses of our own position. Indeed, not only do we become blind, we become even more arrogant and even more resistant to other ways of looking at things, with the result that there is greater intensity to the power-struggle. With God on our side, the inevitable conclusion is that the other side is doing the Devil's work. As history proves, religious conflicts are the worst".

Hopefully I have whetted the appetites of one or two to read the book for themselves!

An overview

We have our usual pot-pourri. Steven Bradley's article on *Stories and Stress in Ministry* is based on research for a Master's degree and will require careful reading. John Clarke's article on *Rural Evangelism* was commissioned in response to a comment that *Ministry Today* is 'too urban'. We dispute the charge, but are

delighted to have an article from the pen of a distinguished Methodist thinker. Fred Craddock is another distinguished Methodist - preachers will enjoy his comments on *Preaching - the Art*. Stephen Cottrell, who works for the Archbishop of Canterbury's Springboard initiative, contributes a thoughtful piece on the Emmaus programme of evangelism, which forms a useful alternative to Alpha. Finally, for the first time ever we are printing an article anonymously- *Fallen from Grace* is a hard-hitting piece. Married ministers might care to show it to their spouses for comment (letters are always welcome!).

An offer

In conclusion, readers are again reminded that membership of RBIM entitles members to a free, but limited, consultancy service. In response to 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. Please direct all enquiries to me.

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STORIES AND STRESS IN THE MINISTRY

Steve Bradley

This article seeks to question our understanding of stress amongst ministers by consideration of the stories that are told to ministers and by ministers within 'ministerial culture', suggesting that some of these stories may contribute to the existence and maintenance of the high levels of stress and 'burnout' being reported (e.g. Buckland & Earwicker, 1996).

Some Background

Whatever the exact formulation presented, stress is conventionally explained psychologically in terms of balancing between pressures acting upon an individual (both external and internal) and their