

having a prophetic and political dimension. The good manager is thus a pastor. One cannot exist effectively without the other.

Self-giving is the root of pastoral care

Pastoral care requires the gift of the self. However important and excellent an individual bishop's contributions to the mission and ministry of the church in other areas, they are hollow in their effects if they are divorced from an intense and compassionate face to face pastoral engagement with individuals and groups, "in their minute particulars". This is where the struggle for justice must be earthed, in the costliness of minute-by-minute loving regard. In the same way, that minute-by-minute loving regard must always be contextualised and not divorced from the need to change and challenge those unjust structures which trap individuals in poverty, inequality and discrimination. Pastoral care is about the joining together of both in a seamless whole - for that is the work of love. Ultimately we shall only be judged by the quality of our pastoral care because pastoral care is the tangible expression and outworking of love. St John of the Cross, following St Paul, was in no doubt about the non-negotiable nature of this most excellent of gifts: the only question we shall be asked at the end of our earthly life is "How much have we opened ourselves to love?"

FINDING LOST SHEPHERDS

Paul Beasley-Murray

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Too many shepherds are in danger of being lost

In a survey of leaders of Evangelical Alliance churches, conducted in 1999/2000, it was discovered that "Two out of every five pastors feel overwhelmed by pastoral care demands and over half have considered leaving the ministry". The report's authors went on to comment: "The fact that 53% of pastors have considered leaving the ministry should be a matter of considerable concern, given the view that many others may already have left" .

In a survey of subscribers to *Ministry Today*, conducted in 1996, a slightly lower figure of 44% said that they had thought of moving out of ministry. However, the proportion of ministers under the age of 45 who had considered leaving ministry moved up to 59%.

To quote the introduction to the EA survey: “Paul says to Timothy ‘To aspire to leadership is an honourable ambition’ (1 Tim 3.1 NEB), but it is not easy. Caring for souls in today’s fast moving and complex world is hard work” Many are finding it tough to respond to the call to shepherd God’s people. Many appear to be losing their way.

Currently I am a ‘lurker’ on a web discussion group for “Bruised and Abused Leaders in Ministry” (BALM). It is heart-rending to read some of the postings. To quote just one recent message:

“My name is Tim and I would like to introduce myself to the BALM community. Less than four short years ago I left theological training - full of vision, enthusiasm and a desire to serve the Lord - now I am broken and unable to lead a church (having great difficulty even to attend), having been subjected to abuse that I never dreamed possible among so-called Christians. Folk who have a degree of understanding of the situation we (my wife and I) endured, often ask ‘How are you?’ I reply, ‘Which part of me do you mean?’ The professional part of me can put on a good show. Other parts of me are broken, trying desperately to make sense of what we have gone through, while other parts are in serious debate and reflection about this thing called Church. As you can see I’m still very muddled. As I often say to my wife, ‘I’ve lost the plot’!! But I hope I’m still searching, trying to make sense of what we have been through and find God again’.”

Ministry is tough and appears to be getting even tougher. I find it interesting that when the Richard Baxter Institute for Ministry was first founded in 1994, we stated: “The aim of the RBIM is to promote excellence in the practice of ministry enabling ministers and pastoral leaders to become increasingly effective in the mission to which Christ has called them”. However, since then we have reworked our aim. For we have discovered that for many ministers now survival, and not excellence, is the name of the game. So now: “The aim of the RBIM is to provide a supportive resource for all in pastoral leadership so that they may not only survive, but also grow and develop, becoming more effective in the ministry to which Christ has called them”.

How then do we respond when so many pastors find it difficult to withstand the pressures of ministry, when so many shepherds seem to lose the way?

Coping strategies and support systems

One way forward is to list a variety of helpful strategies and support systems. We could for instance talk of the need for pastors to look after themselves by taking adequate time off. To be a person of compassion, for instance, is not necessarily to be strung out by every human need that comes along. We could talk of the duty of pastors to keep fit. We could also talk about such things as stress management courses and Ministry Today conferences, appraisals and supervision, counselling and work consultancy, spiritual direction and friendships outside the church. All of these are helpful and all of them are to be taken seriously.

We could also talk of the need for bishops and provincial moderators, area superintendents and district chairmen to take more seriously the task of looking after those in their care. The Anglican Chris Edmondson, for instance, ends his Grove Booklet on “sustaining healthy ministry” with the following “dream”:⁴

“I dream of a church in which

- * Every clergyperson has a ‘safe place’ where they can be listened to and prayed for on a regular basis;
- * Professional supervision/work consultancy/mentoring is regularly available (perhaps every 6-8 weeks) and paid for by the diocese and local church;
- * Every clergyperson is actively encouraged to seek a spiritual director;
- * There is appropriately tailored CME with particular input on teamwork and collaborative ministry for laity and clergy together, courses being regularly available in or shared between dioceses;
- * Good practice is learned from other organisations with experience in volunteering and the support of paid workers in a volunteer-intensive organisation;
- * Sabbaticals are available for all clergy every 7 to 10 years, with the expectation of them being taken up unless there is good reason otherwise;
- * Personal and ministerial reviews for all clergy take place on a regular basis (at least once a year);
- * Regular pastoral care for clergy, their spouses and families is made available and accessible;

* Clergy, in addition to a day off each week and an annual retreat, are encouraged to have at least half a day personal review time each week and monthly study and thinking days;

* At least every 5 to 7 years there is the opportunity for clergy to attend a 'Stages of Ministry' conference".

The need to re-discover the nature of pastoral ministry

However, there is a more fundamental issue to be tackled, and that is to rediscover the true nature of pastoral ministry. I believe that one of the reasons why so many shepherds have lost the way is that they have often entered ministry rosy-eyed, with unrealistic expectations of what their calling is all about.

It is, for instance, right and proper for ordinands to have dreams of doing great things for God, but those dreams alone will not sustain ministry, for there are times when those dreams will be shattered. In this respect one of the unrealistic pressures, which is often as much self-imposed as imposed by others, is the pressure to 'succeed' in ministry. Yet success in worldly terms is not the ultimate yardstick of ministry. As a minister of an older generation once commented to me, "When I and my contemporaries were called to ministry, we were very conscious of those verses which follow the call of Isaiah and which speak of the, at times, unresponsive nature of the people of God". Although he had what many would term a 'successful' ministry, the desire to be faithful rather than fruitful had clearly been the first priority.

Gordon Bridger made a similar point when commenting on the re-commissioning of Peter: "Love for Christ is the only motive that will keep the Christian disciple faithful to Christ, whatever the circumstances. It is not enough to want to be successful, or want to do good in the world, or to leave the world a better place. We can easily be disillusioned if that is our motive for Christian service. Jesus wants to make sure we love him".

Not only do many ordinands have a false expectation of their call, they often also have a false expectation of the people they are to serve. The fact is that the sheep in their care will not always be loving and cuddlesome, but rather, like the sheep on the hills, they can be dirty and pest-ridden, silly and stupid. Sin is as much present in the church as without. Ministry is tough, precisely because in spite of all the many wonderful sermons preached people will continue to go their own selfish and loveless way. There

are times when reason might well say: “Throw the towel in. Go back to a steady job which does not demand every hour which God gives, which does not leave you to the mercy of people’s fanciful whims and unrealistic expectations”. But has ministry ever been a reasonable calling?

Confusing ministry with paid employment

Another false expectation is to regard the pastoral ministry as a job. The fact is that it is not a job - it is a calling. To confuse a calling with a job leads to confusion. In this respect I came across some helpful words of Derek Tidball:

“The road of the job description is one which is being travelled frequently today in secular business and the professions. It is not surprising therefore that it is being adopted as a practice in the church. But, as with all practices adopted from the world, spiritual discernment is needed. It does not seem to occur to many church leaders that it may not always be for the good of the church that good business practice be transferred over. The fundamental problem with it, I believe, is this: the work of the pastor is a calling, not a career. It arises out of a covenant relationship and not a contractual one. The road of the job description, unfortunately, encourages a career mentality and a contractual perspective in pastor and people alike”.

He goes on a little later: “Pastoral ministry... is essentially about relationships, not about contracts.... The failure to understand this has been the reason, I believe, for the inability of a number of younger ministers to sustain ministry after a few years. Dissatisfaction with ministry often develops early. But this is not surprising if it is entered with wrong expectations. If either the fledgling pastor or the calling church pretends it can be approached like any other job, then it is not surprising if disappointment quickly follows., We can do no service to anyone by pretending the pastoral ministry can ever be like a nine-to-five job. By its nature it is different”.

In other words, what is needed, according to Tidball, is “a rediscovery of a sense of pastoral vocation”.

Looking to Jesus

How do we recover such a sense of pastoral vocation? Surely we begin with Jesus, the ‘Great Shepherd of the Sheep’. When I was a

teenager we used to sing the chorus: “When the road is rough and steep, fix your eyes upon Jesus”. Not all chorus theology is sound, but that one certainly is! In tough times we need to look to Jesus, and not to the models of ministry provided by Spring Harvest.

Look to Jesus, for he is the one who will sustain us in ministry. In the words of the writer to the Hebrews: “Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed - that exhilarating finish in and with God - he could put up with anything along the way: cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honour, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!” (Hebs 12.2-4 *The Message*). It has been suggested that the very use of the name ‘Jesus’ here - as distinct from a title such as ‘Christ’ or ‘Lord’ - should encourage us in the first place to look at the life of Jesus. “The use of the simple personal name ‘Jesus’ shows that the accent is upon his humanity, and especially his endurance of pain, humiliation and the disgrace of the cross”. Jesus, in the very way in which he lived life, has set us a pattern for our living, and not least for our ministry. The fact is that Jesus knew what it was like to be misunderstood. Jesus knew what it was like to experience opposition. Jesus knew what it was like to be rejected. There is nothing which we have to endure, which Jesus has not already endured.

Pastoral ministry is a costly calling

As shepherds, we are but ‘under-shepherds’ of the “Great Shepherd” (Hebs 13.20; see also 1 Pet 5.4 “the chief shepherd”). It is the one who said “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” who is our ultimate model. In other words, pastoral ministry by definition is a costly calling, for, unlike the hired hand, who, when he sees the wolf coming, “leaves the sheep and runs away - and the wolf snatches them and scatters them” (John 10.12), the good shepherd, says Jesus, stays by his post, even if it involves the cost of his own life. The good shepherd is not motivated by self-interest, whether it be a wage-packet or self-preservation, but rather by concern for the sheep.

Although times have changed, the costliness of the call has not. It remains at the heart of pastoral ministry. The sacrifices of time and energy, of reputation and reward, are ‘par’ for the course. To

quote Derek Tidball again: “Some seek a ministry without cost. But it is a sheer illusion to imagine that anyone could ever pastor in the image of the good shepherd and avoid any cost. Cost is inherent in the role. The costs of working long and unsociable hours, of being vulnerable, of being weak, of facing criticism, of being lonely, of being drained by people. Ministry takes it out of you.... Paying the cost is a sign of being an authentic shepherd”.

There have been times when I have wished Jesus were not my model for ministry. There have been times when I do not want to take up my cross and follow the Crucified. It is all too painful. I want success, I want glory. But the words of the old Negro spiritual are true: “You cannot wear the crown if you do not bear the cross”. Jesus calls us to follow him. Thank God, we do not have to follow afar - for to change the metaphor, he invites to us take his yoke upon us, to experience his strength in dealing with the burdens of ministry.

William Temple, at his enthronement as Bishop of Manchester, said: “I come as a learner, with no policy to advocate, no plan already formed to follow. But I come with one burning desire: it is that in all our activities, sacred and secular and ecclesiastical and social, we should help each other fix our eyes on Jesus, making him our only guide.” True, William Temple was not speaking specifically to ministers, but we can surely apply it to ministers.

Looking to Paul

Jesus is clearly the primary model of ministry. However, when ministry is tough, I have found it helpful to look at that other model for ministry, the apostle Paul.

In my funeral instructions I have suggested that the text for the address be taken from 2 Cor 4.7: “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this-all surpassing power is from God and not from us”. The fragility of the clay lamps represents the frailty and weakness of those of us who preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in turn our frailty and weakness make a striking contrast with “the all-surpassing power” of God. The clear implication of v.7 is that Paul in his ministry had experienced God’s all-surpassing power. However, contrary to Paul’s charismatic opponents at Corinth, this power had not been displayed in “signs, wonders and miracles”, but rather in trouble, adversity, and difficulty - the same thought Paul will express in 2 Cor 12. It is precisely in

“weakness” that Christ’s resurrection “power” is “made perfect” (12.9: see also 12.10). Christ’s power does not drive out weakness. On the contrary, it only comes to full strength in weakness.

The same thought is probably also found in Phil 3.10 where to “know Christ” is to experience “the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings”. The fact that Paul’s mention of resurrection precedes suffering is a pointer to the fact that this power is experienced in the midst of suffering. In this life death and resurrection, resurrection and death, are not experienced successively, but simultaneously.....

Yes, when life is tough, I find it helpful to reflect upon the ministry of the apostle Paul. Paul knew what it was like to be “hard pressed”, “perplexed”, “persecuted” and “struck down” (2 Cor 4.8-9). Yet Paul was never ‘out for the count’ - in the words of JB Phillips, “we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out”. Paul always managed to get to his feet again, because of the working of God’s resurrection power in his life.

The privilege of ministry

I am conscious that I have perhaps over-stressed the toughness of ministry. Or at least, I have not given a balanced picture of ministry. For the fact is that in spite of the many difficulties I have experienced in ministry, I have never ceased to thank God for the privilege of calling me to be a pastor. I believe that Paul was right when he described “the office of bishop” as “a noble task” (GNB: “an excellent work”) (1 Tim 3.1). It is surely the highest of callings. For all our theology of the laity and of their ministry, we ‘full timers’ are undoubtedly privileged. Pastoral ministry is a ‘gift of God’s grace’ (Eph 3.7). The church has given me the immense privilege of being set free to spend my days in the service of God.

But we are also privileged in being able to serve God with others. I find it right and proper too that Paul when he wrote his letters almost always began on a note of thanksgiving, in which he thanked God not just for the Gospel, but also for the church to which he was writing (see, for instance, Phil 1.3,5). Sometimes we ministers moan about the lack of commitment of our people. But next time you are tempted to moan, just count up the number of people who are serving the church - you will be surprised. We are privileged people in the sense that we head up organisations which

are full of people willing to give many hours of their time, and all for love of the Lord.

Furthermore, we are privileged in that for the most part we are surrounded by people who love us and support us. Unlike social workers who have 'clients' or doctors who have 'patients', we are surrounded by a host of brothers and sisters, who care for us. They care for us not least in that we are at the centre of their prayers.¹¹ We are privileged too in that their homes are open to us. We can call at any time of day or night, and there will be always a welcome. But it is not just the doors of their homes which are open, but also the doors of their hearts. For the most part people are willing to be real and open with their pastors. They allow us to be alongside them, in good times and in bad times.

Unfortunately it is all too easy to lose perspective and to focus just on the negative side of ministry. The fact is that we are also the most privileged of people.

MIXED-UP MEN: THE MALE IDENTITY CRISIS & THE CHURCH

Roy McCloughry

When the women's movement of the 1960's began to make claims about men being oppressive, they could not foresee what the impact of that claim would be on men. Men had run society and it suited them to dominate public life while women held the fort in the private realm of family life. But this idyll was shattered by women claiming that this was not a world in which they wanted to live. If they had the same gifting as men then they wanted the same choices as men.

One of the first things that happened in this process was that women held up a mirror to men and said "This is what we see". This was a powerful thing to do whether it was husbands, fathers or sons who had to look in the mirror. The reasons were that while the world was organised around men it was very difficult for men to see that culture objectively. It takes someone outside a culture to portray it objectively and women now did this for men, making the invisible, visible. The result was that men had to face up to