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Notes on Pastoral Ministry

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'And some, pastors . . .' (Eph. 4: 11)

Recent discussion in the pages of *Letters of Interest* and *Calling* in North America, and *The Witness* and *CBRFJ* in Great Britain, indicate that a topic of keen concern to Christians in these days is the pastoral ministry in the assemblies. Attention is particularly called to articles by Dr. Stephen Short¹ of England, John Williams,² presently of Detroit, and Will Wilding³ of Vancouver, B.C. Also of interest is a *CBRFJ* viii.⁴

The Problem Stated

The dilemma is represented as a two-horned one. The first part is allegorized in *CBRFJ* by the 'hungry sheep, who, having looked up and not been fed, has gone elsewhere'. The second is likewise pictured by 'the shepherd constantly thwarted in his attempts to feed the hungry sheep'.⁵ John Williams states the problem lies 'not in the realm of doctrine or desire, but in our practical application of unchanging Biblical principles'.⁶ Will Wilding in turn suggests that the problem in its essence 'is the denial of the operation of the sovereign Holy Spirit'.⁷ Perhaps it is legitimate to say that this latter expression lies close to the heart of the problem, but in its complication it leads to the practical failures as stated by Williams. The problem we then face is the failure, in many respects, of an effective teaching or shepherding ministry within local assemblies. We hasten to add that there are, of course, many assemblies, perhaps more than we dare hope, where these lacks do not in fact, exist, and where God is blessing the faithful labours of shepherds and teachers amongst the flock.

The Solution Stated

It has been suggested that the solution to the above stated problem rests in the persons of men equipped for a pastoral ministry who can be prayerfully invited by elders of a local assembly to come among them to carry out these lagging responsibilities. It is said that we have overlooked a basic element of God's plan for a local church in the pastoral ministry.⁸ On the contrary, it has been stated that the solution does not lie in this realm at all. Since the problem is the denial of the operation of the Holy Spirit, the solution lies in the readiness of those presently responsible as pastors and elders to recognize the prior claim of God on their lives. These will then 'come forth to the people with a humble, confident realization that all that God the Holy Spirit has given will be used for the blessing of the church and the honour of God'.⁹

A Look at the Problem

We should first ask—is there indeed a problem? What are the evidences? To some it would appear that a straw man has been created by vested interests. These interests might be variously identified as elders who feel they cannot bear the burden of ministry alone, or young men who are concerned for a full-time resident ministry in exercise of their own gifts. In fact, it is probable that both of these interests are present. They are not necessarily wrong interests, though it must be noted that they can be aroused by proper or improper motives, such as an elder's preoccupation with business affairs in private life, or a young man's undue concern for security or desire for conformity to contemporary church patterns.

We might look at some of the evidences of the existence of the problem. First, is the apparent lack among many young people of knowledge of factual content of the Scriptures. This is mentioned totally apart from any observation about their understanding of such facts as they do possess. Unless this charge be accused as baseless, it is founded on the results of some very rudimentary examinations written by teenage young people from several sections of the United States and also, presumably, from a cross section of assembly families. Most had been active in Sunday Schools and summer Bible camps for a good number of years. The scope of questions included naming the first five books of the Old Testament, naming the synoptic Gospels, who was the author of Acts, etc. The results were, on the average, quite poor. Admittedly there are other factors in interpreting these results. Not least is the lack of Bible study in the home, but in any event there is a definite indication of lack of effective teaching and stimulation to study, which in some measure must be laid at the assembly doorstep.

Another line of evidence might be adduced from a series of letters published in CBRFJ viii. Each was entitled 'Why I left the Brethren', and some of the answers are illuminating. As one brother states:

' . . . the ministry, . . . given by men who cannot know the particular needs of the church, who are rarely given sufficient time for adequate treatment of the major Biblical themes, and, alas, sometimes by men whose qualifications as teachers are by no means apparent, . . . is often superficial, restricted to a small number of themes or Scripture passages, and irrelevant to the particular needs of the church. The most depressing feature of all is that no one seems to accept responsibility for what is taught in the assembly. Theoretically, the elders are ultimately responsible, but they seem so often to leave everything to the visiting speakers'.¹⁰

Another writes:

' . . . I tested the ground as thoroughly as I could as to the possibility of a settled ministry among Brethren. The nearest I could get to this was an assembly who were considering having a pastor who would do one-third of the preaching. Such an arrangement seemed quite impractical. One would have had to have been ministering away so much that pastoral contact would have been

minimal, and this problem was surpassed by the impossibility of pursuing the consecutive ministry of the Word which is a great lack in the assemblies today . . .¹¹

The letters cited are not quoted with approbation of the writers' particular points of view, but with the feeling that some of the comments are directed at very sensitive problem areas. By citing them it is not implied that they reflect conditions in all assemblies. Yet, is there not some response in our own reflection, which leads us to believe the problem does exist in larger measure than we have been willing to admit?

Another aspect of the problem is highlighted by the following extract from a letter in the same publication:

'During the twenty years or so that I moved in assembly circles, it has been my misfortune to find an autocrat dominating the meeting, as a rule; generally one who elbowed his way on to the oversight during the difficult period of the Second World War. During the passing of the years he has succeeded in getting yes-men alongside him, for to my amazement there seems to exist little difficulty in his way to do according to his wishes'.¹²

Do we have a problem, one not of inconsiderable proportions, among assemblies today? It seems to the writer that we must answer the question in the positive. The nature of this problem is such, that if avoided, it will simply grow larger. It strikes at the very roots of those groups who gather to Christ in the pattern as found, we believe, in the New Testament.

Has the problem been stated accurately? The three sources cited earlier have all defined the problem from a different vantage. Will Wilding has looked from the vantage point of the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. This seems to be the place to start. There has been a denial of operation of the Spirit of God in the life of the local church. Where He has been grieved, blessing has been withdrawn and only the barrenness of man-made activity remains. John Williams has noted that the failure lies in the practical application of Biblical principles which we claim to observe. We have failed to make our faith and fellowship a living vital force in the Christian community.¹³ This failure is inherent in the prior failure to recognize that only in submissive willingness to be used as instruments of the Holy Spirit can there be the demonstration of Spirit-filled lives. Only such willingness can lead to effective teaching and shepherding.

Now we must ask another question. Granted the problem has been recognized and more or less defined. If we are to find a solution, we must first understand some of the factors which lie behind the evidences we see.

The first factor to be mentioned is an *historical* one, cited by Prof. F. F. Bruce of Manchester. He states ' . . . There has been the powerful influence of the Darbyite doctrine of the ruin of the church, which excludes the possibility of reproducing primitive church order today, and therefore of an eldership according to the New Testament pattern'.¹⁴ Darby's views on this matter were controverted in his own day, especially by a Swiss Christian by name of August Rochat.¹⁵ However, his wide influence has led to a fluidity of local church government, such that where in principle

all were responsible, in fact no one was responsible. It follows that every area of church life suffers, including the pastoral and teaching ministries.

The second factor is an *economic* one. It may possibly be more pertinent to the British than the North American situation. It has been suggested that the present generation of spiritual leadership has fewer men of independent means, who can give their time to the ministry of the Word. It may be true that an earlier day produced more men of independent means who gave themselves to the ministry of the Word. We live in days when it becomes increasingly difficult to attain such financial independence. However, it is to be suspected that if indeed this is a significant factor in our problems, it simply indicates that the presence of such godly men in the past has been abused by God's people so that they have never gained a proper sense of responsibility in the matter of physical and spiritual support of ministering brethren.

The third factor is submitted by the writer as one of a *cultural* character, with heavy undertones of spiritual prodigality on the part of a generation of leadership within local assemblies. The post-war generation is sometimes called the 'lost' or 'lonely' generation. There is a reluctance to identify with others or sometimes even with oneself! Explanations are manifold, including the insecurities of a world enmeshed in cold war tensions, the threatening presence of 'the bomb', the breakdown of the institution of the home with the attendant collapse of discipline, and the general moral laxity of an affluent society. This theme is poignantly expressed in the current 'manifesto' of American University intellectuals entitled *The Triple Revolution*. This document, published in 1964, outlines the current revolution taking place in the industrial, social and military worlds. It then suggests a course of legislative action, leading to a 'right to income' clause. This would guarantee to every man the inalienable right to an income regardless of ability or inclination to work. It is stated that the further objective of this action is to provide more leisure for education. Education, we are told, encourages persons relating to 'persons' rather than to 'things'.¹⁶ This then is the heart of the motivation for such an approach. We live in an age when youth find it difficult to relate to others. We must restructure society so as to provide opportunity to become 'unlost', that is, 'newly related' to other people, a basic need of every human being.

Harry Blamires, in a work entitled *The Christian Mind*, develops the thought that the Christian today does not consistently carry his distinctive Christian outlook into the world in which he lives. He states that in fact there is no longer a Christian mind.¹⁷ The mind has been fully secularized. While the Christian meets for worship with a distinct group, he is in reality fully a part of the secular world as described by Vance Packer¹⁸ and W. H. Whyte¹⁹. Is it not to be suspected then, that the Christian also carries into the assembly of God's people, in a reverse though analogous manner, the attitudes described above with reference to interpersonal relationships?

Can we find instruction in the present situation? Is it possible that the 'lost generation', including Christians, has inherited from a preceding

generation a grand scepticism of the world in which we live, of moral and spiritual values to which we hold, and of the need or means to trust or help another person? Are not these latter elements particularly significant in the pastoral and teaching ministries? This preceding generation is the one from which the major teaching and pastoral care should be coming in this day. One cannot pastor nor be pastored, teach nor be taught, who is not first willing to be intimately related to another person's joys and sorrows, loves and hates, excesses and wants. This is something of the full measure of Christian fellowship and apart from it all must suffer. Are we living in a day when a whole generation, which has lived through two global wars, has been hardened into a measure of cynicism which permeates even to the heart of the church? Have men found themselves separated from their contemporaries by experiences of war and never succeeded in retaking their place in the structure of their world, including the local assembly? Perhaps this thesis would account for the many individuals, contemporary with present assembly leadership, who have never developed a gift of ministry of the Word or of pastoral responsibility. If so, this would account for the present critical lack of sound teaching and warm pastoral ministry, so desperately required for the ongoing life and vitality of assemblies of the Lord's people. Might this not also account for the prominent existence of the so called 'autocrat'—who elbowed his way on to the oversight during World War II? It cannot be denied the Diotrephes spirit is easily aroused (3 John 9-10). However, has it not been also the case, that many a sincere and godly man found himself alone in real concern for an oversight? Especially would this be likely during the time of which we speak. As the years pass, it is not unnatural to consider this elder as the voice to which we listen. The danger is then compounded by the failure of other gifted men to take their place in the ranks of spiritual leadership. It is true that the Diotrephes spirit is to be judged in no uncertain terms, and is often found in a leader with little gift who feels compelled to suppress other gifts. But at the same time it leaves one wondering what responsibility rests with those who have failed to assume their place and thus allowed such a condition to develop.

Will Wilding suggests, on well documented authority, that the failure to advance on the part of assemblies is not a problem peculiar to this portion of evangelical Christianity alone. It should be observed that the weakness in the area of teaching and pastoral ministry is likewise a problem of concern to most bodies of Christians. For example, the writer is acquainted with one small Baptist denomination which claims a shortage of fifty men just to fill empty pulpits of existing churches. Carl H. Henry, in a recent issue of *Christianity Today*, cites in relation to general doctrinal instability in Christian training, the noteworthy 'decline of Ministerial candidates'.²⁰ Furthermore, it has recently been stated by the Chief of Chaplains of the U.S. Army, that apart from a few prominent bodies of Christians, nearly all quotas for military chaplains in the Armed Forces are being unmet by their respective groups.²¹ What do these facts contribute to our understanding of the problem under discussion and to solutions suggested?

A Look at the Solution

We come now to a brief examination of the solutions as earlier proposed. It would appear from the presentation that the two positions are mutually exclusive. Is this necessary? The practical advantages of a 'settled pastoral ministry', as outlined by John Williams, are certainly to be desired.²² However, is it not possible to achieve these same advantages through the proper functioning of pastors and teachers as encouraged by Will Wilding? This would apply, at least, to the advantages of consecutive teaching ministry, relevance of teaching to the needs of the congregation, and the ministry of visitation. We wonder if the fourth stated advantage, that of dispelling a public image of oddity on the part of the Brethren is valid.²³ If the ultimate objective is availability and approachability, this too can be achieved by a multiplicity of leadership. While full-time pastors in other fellowships of Christians are seeking ways and means of involving elders in spiritual responsibilities of the local church, we write it off as a 'strange' front and move in the opposite direction.

On the other hand, we suggest it does not do justice to John Williams's argument to say that he implies a 'pastor' would or should carry the full load of consecutive exposition of Scripture and Scriptural doctrines, public ministry and visitation.²⁴ This could well be a logical outcome of a full-time pastoral ministry indiscriminately used. But it does not appear to be Williams's intention that such a man would carry the full load. Rather, he would enter into these ministries, and, in co-operation with elders, seek together to carry them out in a more thorough manner.

At this point we should ask some questions. First, is there Biblical evidence for a full-time resident pastoral ministry? For an answer we suggest the reader carefully examine the Biblical arguments marshalled by Williams and Wilding. For a further exposition of Scripture, relating specifically to the teaching ministry, it would be well worth obtaining a copy of *The Ministry of the Word*, by Stephen S. Short. (This booklet can be obtained from C.B.R.F. Publications at the address shown inside the back cover of this *Journal*.)

An examination of the relevant Scriptures dealt with by the above writers, has led to the persuasion that the Biblical pattern is actually a two-fold one. First we observe the general organization of the local church, where a multiplicity of leadership and gift exist, including those for the pastoral and teaching responsibilities. Along with this, we see evidence of resident, full-time, pastoral-teaching ministries, as in the case of Timothy (I Tim. 1: 3) and Titus (Tit. 1: 5).

An argument brought into the discussion by Dr. Short shows the significance of the function of the Jewish synagogue in the time of Christ.²⁵ Since it appears that the early church was largely patterned after the synagogue, even being called such on one occasion (James 2: 2), it is of value to know something of the workings of this institution of diaspora Judaism. We will simply refer to one aspect of it, which is the liberty of ministry which existed in its meetings. We read often in the Gospels that 'Jesus entered into the synagogue and taught' (Mk. 1: 21, 39; 6: 2). In the Acts

we read that the Apostles also had great liberty in this regard (Acts 9: 20, 13: 5, 17: 17, 19: 8, etc.). Responsibility was divided among the synagogue leadership. Even the Rabbis, being learned teachers of the law, were expected to have a trade which could provide them with the material needs of life, if necessary. The Apostle Paul himself conformed to this pattern, being a tent maker by trade (Acts 18: 3). However, the Apostle did not always feel constrained to seek employment, as at Corinth. Contrariwise, he encouraged Timothy and Titus to give themselves wholly to the work of the Lord in a particular area. This seems to be evidence that this sort of ministry was a part of the early church, and under certain conditions should also pertain today.

What are these conditions? From an analysis of the letters to Timothy and Titus, it would seem that the conditions are related to the inherent difficulties attending the establishing of new local churches. Paul encourages Timothy to 'abide' at Ephesus (I Tim. 1: 3). The work he then exhorts him to accomplish, includes combating false teachers as represented in Ephesus by Hymenaeus and Alexander (I Tim. 1: 18-20), establishing the foundations of sound doctrine (4: 11-16), a word of prophecy (4: 14), and some comments pertaining to the overall administration of the local church (5: 1-6: 21). Likewise in the letter to Titus, Paul gives instruction concerning the rudiments of the natural but sound safeguards in the local church structure of Crete. These include the institution of elders (Titus 1: 5), instruction in sound doctrine (2: 1), proper relationships between individuals distinguished by age, sex, marriage and place in society (2: 2-15), relationship of Christians to the state (3: 1), and manner of dealing with those guilty of teaching false doctrines (3: 10).

The conditions calling for full-time help in pastoral-teaching responsibilities in the local church then, would seem to be those conditions prevalent in a new or immature testimony where it is necessary to deal with these basic factors. It could conceivably be true that a local church many years old has never matured in these matters, so that the assistance of a Timothy or Titus is needful in bringing about local autonomy of function where the leadership can and does carry on these responsibilities as they should.

The second question we ask concerns historical evidence, within assembly life, of a practical implementation of the pattern we see in the Scriptures. It has been said that we learn from history only the lesson that we don't learn from history. Also we claim to appeal to Scripture alone as our sole authority in doctrine and practice. Nevertheless, we have already called on history to explain a factor in the development of the present state of affairs, namely J. N. Darby's teaching concerning the ruin of the church. It would not seem unfair then, to ask for the witness of a contemporary of Darby's to speak to us his mind concerning the ministry of the Word. The man to whom we turn is Anthony Norris Groves, a man of God, who, while practising the Biblical principles we seek to observe, gave his life to missionary effort in India. After presenting a strong argument for the advantages, and Biblical precedent for Christian workers to be equipped and occupied in a secular employ, he goes on to present the other side in the following quote from his writings:

'I have no question but that those whom God has called to minister should wait on their ministry and give themselves wholly to it . . . recognized pastors and teachers are essential to the good order of all assemblies; and as such are required and commanded of God; . . . though I should not object to meet with those who had them not, if it were the result of the Lord's providence in not giving them any, I should feel quite unable to join personally those who reject them as unnecessary or unscriptural'.²⁶

We might wonder if Groves is not contradicting himself. However, in the context of his total ministry, it would be more charitable to understand him as recognizing the value of a 'witness in the world', by secularly employed Christians, while at the same time clearly stating the necessity of utilizing a full-time pastoral ministry when so supplied in the providence of the Lord. We must assume that, in his opinion, such provision would be sought to meet specific need in the local assembly.

Our third question concerns the contemporary nature of the proposed solutions. We refer here to earlier discussion. Other Christians are asking serious questions as to the effectiveness of the full-time resident pastor. In their case we may not doubt that the problem lies at the opposite extreme from ours. The total responsibility has fallen on one man who is innately unable to bear the burden. However, even if he could, it would not be the sort of ministry to develop the body, since there must be wide development of gift to achieve proper growth in the whole organism. The contemporary emphasis among other Christians would thus encourage us to take careful stock of our situation. The installation of a pastor is not going to be the panacea of all ill. Rather, it could well be simply the 'coup de grace' to the patient. On the other hand, the plea that the presence of a full-time pastor would throttle the liberty of the local assembly and restrict the free ministry of the Holy Spirit in the midst is not valid. Rather, the presence of such an individual could provide the channel of gift through which the Spirit would accomplish His work of developing local gift to the place where this channel were no longer needed. We need to return to a balanced understanding of the Biblical pattern. Here we have found a basis for multiple leadership in the local church along with the utilization of the full-time pastor under certain conditions. It would be understood that the objective of such a ministry would be to continue only until such time as it became apparent that the local shepherds and teachers were indeed carrying the burden.

Some Practical Suggestions

We shall conclude this study with some suggestions of a practical nature:

1. In approaching the problem in the individual assembly, it will be absolutely essential to recognize the flexibility we see in the Biblical pattern. Only elders and full-time workers, who are spiritually sensitive to the needs of the assembly and the leading of the Holy Spirit, will be able to make the proper judgments.

2. There must be caution, lest in exercise of our liberty in this matter we actually lose the liberty in a rigid clerical system.
3. According to some, there is a paucity of young men preparing for, or engaged in, the full-time ministry of the Word among the assemblies. If this is true, it is a serious matter. For the pioneer work of evangelism and establishing new local churches, there must be men of God who can give of their time as Timothy and Titus did. They must not only 'do the work of an evangelist' (2 Tim. 4: 5), but as Timothy, must also be equipped to instruct young Christians and give guidance in the raising up of a local church.
4. Among other factors, two things stand out as essentials in the preparation of these men for their task. First, there must be spiritual and academic preparation for a ministry of the Word. This will involve no small amount of effort on the part, not only of the individual himself, but also of praying, spirit-filled elders who can encourage the young man along the way. Secondly, it seems essential that this young man also be equipped with secular training in a field where he could and often would find employ. Not only does this conform to the Biblical pattern, but it is also of immense value in equipping a man to be able to speak in a relevant way to his generation.
5. Parallel with this preparation on the part of young men, there must also be the spiritual and practical preparation on the part of elders in assemblies everywhere. Mr. G. C. D. Howley has written, ' . . . for all our services the finest training ground is the life of the Christian church, sharing the fulness of church life and fellowship . . . '27 It is here that young men will receive their first impetus toward a desire for the things of God, a desire that can lead them on to the place where they become effective in the ministry of the Word. It is here that they must receive encouragement from elder men of God. There must be more men, like Eli of old, who are perceptive to know when God is speaking to young Samuels and who can give wise counsel in that crucial time. It is here that the door of encouragement and opportunity must be opened as the gift flowers. It must be nourished and given opportunity for expression lest it wither. Then it is these godly elder men who will bear the responsibility for directing gift into a place where it contributes to the developing of the Body of Christ in the most effective way. There will be a full-time resident ministry for some, for three months or three years, or longer. For others, it will mean undertaking secular employ in an area where they can enter in a vital way into the work of a local assembly, providing gift for ministry, both teaching and pastoral.
6. The ultimate objective must be to have a corps of young men in this generation who can give themselves, whether full-time or secularly employed, to the service of God's people in teaching-pastoral responsibilities. While many would at first have ministries in presently existing assemblies where there is need, the goal must be that a great number, in due course, would be thrust forward into pioneer work in pro-

claiming the Gospel and teaching new groups of believers who thus form new assemblies. There are encouraging signs of re-awakening interest on the part of young people in the assemblies for missionary labours abroad.²⁸ If we are on the threshold of new expansions in fulfilling the great commission, it is of the utmost importance that we strengthen the foundations at home. Only assemblies of Christians, properly shepherded and nourished in the Word, can maintain the vision and provide the strategic prayer and financial support essential to the carrying forward of the message of the Gospel to the near and far corners of a weary world.

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2. John Williams, "and some, pastors", *Calling Magazine*, Winter 1964.
3. Will Wilding, *Scrutinizing the Pastoral Ministry*, *Calling Magazine*, Summer, 1965.
4. *Why I Left the Brethren*, *Christian Brethren Research Fellowship Journal*, No. 8, June 1965.
5. *CBRF Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
6. John Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
7. Will Wilding, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
8. John Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
9. Will Wilding, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
10. *CBRF Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
11. *CBRF Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
12. *CBRF Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
13. Cf. H. L. Ellison, *The Household Church*, Paternoster Press, 1963, pp. 33-40.
14. F. F. Bruce, (art.) *The Church and its Ministers*, in collection of addresses from the *High Leigh Conference of Brethren*, 1955, p. 46.
15. E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, Pickering & Inglis, 1931, p. 378.
16. *The Triple Revolution*, The Ad Hoc Committee on the Triple Revolution, California, 1964, p. 10.
17. Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind*, S.P.C.K., 1963.
18. Vance Packer, *The Status Seekers*.
19. W. H. Whyte, *The Organization Man*.
20. Carl H. Henry, *A Molder of Modern Theology is Gone*, *Christianity Today*, November 19, 1965, p. 31.
21. Chaplain (Maj. Gen.) Charles Brown, Address comment on occasion of Military Chaplaincy Anniversary, July, 1965.
22. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-22.
23. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
24. See Wilding (*op. cit.*, p. 18) for interpretative comment on Williams's statement (*op. cit.*, p. 15). See also in this regard the *Further Note on Pastors*, *Calling Magazine*, Fall, 1965, p. 26.
25. Stephen S. Short, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
26. E. H. Broadbent, *op. cit.*, p. 360.
27. Cited by Wilding, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
28. See e.g. current issues of *Conflict*, published by *Literature Crusades*, P.O. Box 203, Prospect Park, Illinois.