

FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME?

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Introduction

The word ministry simply means service. The New Testament always envisages ministries in the setting of the body, that is to say in a plurality of differing and complementary functions. Jesus encompassed the three principal offices of the old covenant: priest, prophet and king, and through his Spirit he confers these on all believers who are now priests, prophets and kings (Acts 2:17-18; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

Under the new covenant, there are thus no longer priests who become the intermediaries between God and men; rather, all are priests with no distinction between officers and ordinary members of the church, clergy and laity, serving and served. All true believers, members of the body of Christ, have also received one or more gifts for general usefulness (1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10) and are thus called to exercise a ministry within the local church.

This doctrine of the 'universal priesthood' of believers, to which the Reformers paid lip service, has been applied by the Brethren from the beginning of their history. The spiritual and numerical growth of our churches is linked to our ability to mobilize the gifts received by the greatest possible number of our members in the service of God and others. The primary task of the elders is to identify and recruit fellow-workers by engaging them in a multiplicity of useful jobs. At the same time, they have to train and develop them 'for the work of the ministry' (Eph. 4:12), that is to say in the achievement of their service for the body.

As well as the all-person ministry, the New Testament mentions ministries specially directed towards the establishment of churches—

apostles and evangelists; for edification—prophets and teachers; for guidance—elders or bishops; pastors, leaders and chairmen for oversight; and deacons, male and female, and widows for undertaking various practical tasks.

The church recognizes the validity of the gifts exercised within it by formally conferring upon those so gifted an official approval of their ministries acknowledged by all. The two local ministries most often cited are those of elder and deacon. They are chosen by the church on the basis of their spiritual, personal, family and social qualifications and of the gifts which they have been able to show in the life of the church. They exercise their functions collegially with the authority of Christ, whether they are full- or part-time.

Forms of pastoral ministry: full-time or non-professional?

All the historic churches and most of the gathered churches have a full-time pastoral ministry. Brethren churches of Anglo-Saxon origin have usually rejected this form of ministry. A certain number of them are beginning to adopt it. The majority of the Swiss-romande assemblies have returned to this style which was that of the dissident assemblies arising from the Geneva revival before the teaching of J. N. Darby had deeply affected them.

What are the respective advantages of a full-time ministry and a non-professional, part-time ministry?

The advantages of a full-time pastoral ministry

Availability

The FTW is able to devote the whole of his working day to the Lord's work in the church. In the secular world, professional demands become more and more exacting, with the result that few have the time needed for thorough preparation of addresses and Bible studies, or for teaching the various types of church members (such as children, youth, new converts, young marrieds and future elders). Visits are also needed to those who are ill, older people, backsliders etc. Meetings have to be held, outside contacts established and administrative tasks accomplished. A full-time pastor will always be available for those seeking counsel, those who need urgent help during the course of the day, for work on behalf of the church, for committee meetings, funerals, marriages etc.

Qualified teaching

Those who have learned their work from competent teachers will provide a service of better quality than a 'handy-man'. This principle is true in all

fields. Education, whether biblical or secular, is no exception to the rule. To be able to provide Christians and their children with useful learning, such 'teachers' should spend much time in studying the Word of God and in developing a systematic plan for teaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) to the different age groups and varied categories of members.

In order to ensure a thorough preaching and teaching ministry, well structured and adapted to the needs of the hearers, time must be devoted to meditating on the Word, to prayer, to setting ideas in order, to illustrating them etc. Those who wish to accomplish this ministry seriously will spend long hours over and above immediate preparation. This expenditure of time is hard to reconcile with the demands of most secular jobs. If qualified teaching is desired, it will be necessary to consider releasing the teacher from his professional obligations.

Paul anticipated the need for the financial support of elders responsible for teaching and preaching. He laid down that 'anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things (or 'share a part of his goods') with his instructor' (Gal. 6:6); 'those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel' (1 Cor. 9:14); 'the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour (or 'double remuneration'), especially those who work (or 'labour') in preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the corn" and "The worker deserves his wages"' (1 Tim. 5:17-18). In another place, Paul uses the same quotation to support the right of apostles to be maintained by the churches, which he is discussing in the preceding verses (1 Cor. 9:9).

Competence

This flows from gifts, from training and from experience. In the case of training, to be able to commit several years to the deeper study of the Word of God and to prepare oneself for the different aspects of the ministry is a privilege—unfortunately not at the disposal of all members of a church. Experience comes with practice; the pastor who can preach several sermons each week will master this technique more rapidly than the occasional preacher.

The same considerations apply in relation to caring, to counselling baptismal candidates, those about to marry and believers in difficulty. Our century has taught us the dangers of amateurism. Highly qualified specialists are called for in every field. Furthermore, a church with a full-time pastor inspires more confidence in the minds of our contemporaries than a church led by 'lay persons'.

Co-ordination and training

According to Ephesians 4:11, the pastor-teacher, like the apostle, the

prophet and the evangelist, has above all a role of co-ordinator and trainer. He is there to prepare members for the exercise of their ministry and to develop their ability to do so as well as possible. The verb *katartizo* means to put in order, to make ready for service, complete, prepare for work. This implies, on the one hand, an organization of the different services and, on the other, the training of members in the exercise of their gift. Organization calls for much reflection—as well as a clear mind—and for time. The many aspects of member training (biblical, techniques, pedagogy) also demand competence and available time.

N. Summerton writes in *Leadership in the Churches*: 'The practical experience of many local churches today is to define the main function of the paid worker as a task of identifying, encouraging, developing and organising the deployment of all the charismatic gifts of the whole congregation, so that the church begins gradually to function in the manner which the New Testament suggests to us.' Gibbs and Morton in *God's Frozen People* affirm: 'The training of the laity constitutes the basic development on which the future of the Church depends; the training of pastors should be conceived towards this end and in its service.'

Continuity

A competent man with stimulating qualities will be a long-term asset to his church. Firm leadership, concentrated in one person's hand, assures continuity in the execution of a programme, in teaching and in the development of different activities. If one man is responsible for the preaching ministry, he can teach systematically the different aspects of Christian doctrine and handle a Bible book, expounding it chapter by chapter, in order to feed the members of his church in a balanced, rounded and solid way. This kind of continuity is hard to ensure when several preachers share the task; it is impossible when preaching depends on visitors or itinerant preachers who know little of the real needs of any given church and can only rarely follow up their teaching by personal contacts.

Contribution from outside

In the early churches, elders were chosen from the members of the local fellowship. However, we also see Timothy established for a time at Ephesus, where the church had already been in existence for several years (1 Tim. 1:3) to help the fellowship cope with a difficult situation. A 'neutral' person coming from outside of the local oversight can bring very real assistance in solving longstanding problems in which friendship and family links among church members prevent their correct resolution by local leaders. In the case of such difficulties, elders should not hesitate to call on qualified and neutral persons capable of giving an objective view on

conflicts which are interminable because no one dares take an initiative which might upset someone else.

Again, an experienced pastor in church leadership can make many proposals which could lead to the renewal of a fellowship's life.

The advantages of a non-professional pastoral ministry.

Those who hesitate to commit themselves to a full-time pastor do not lack arguments in favour of a non-professional ministry. It is said by them to hold a number of advantages.

Avoids the danger of clericalism

Clericalism arises from a distinction between clerics and laity; and the pastor, in current thinking, is part of the clergy. He appears with catholic ecclesiastics and Jewish rabbis in official listings. He has studied theology and received ordination with special privileges and powers. It is he who administers the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; who conducts marriage services, confirmations and funerals; and who goes to pray with the ill and the dying. For the most part, people today draw little distinction between the pastor of a gathered church and that of an institutional one.

This ambiguity arises from the fact that our contemporaries use the term pastor in its sociological sense. Believers may have restored its biblical meaning, but they allow themselves to be influenced in their practical definition of the duties of a pastor by all that the members of 'mainline' churches expect of their spiritual director. All this gives rise to a certain mismatch between the pastor's understanding of his work and that which the members hold about his obligations. The gap between the minister and the ordinary folk that is clericalism is often widened by the exemption of the minister from ordinary professional duties. The FTW lives in a world apart where he can freely control his time. Again, professional life is a discipline from which the spiritual life benefits. It calls for discipline in the use of time and provides practice in taking on responsibility, attacking problems, deferring to masters, communicating with people, knowing their day-to-day problems, being involved in their interests and collaborating with others. This is often a hard school, but it produces fruits which remain in the form of valuable skills.

Independence

Paul greatly valued his privilege of preaching the gospel freely (without surrendering his right to receive payment, 1 Cor. 9:15-18), depending not on man but on the Lord. This independence allowed him to declare the whole counsel of God without asking whether it pleased his hearers and

supporters. Many FTWs behave similarly and are not intimidated by the possible reactions of the members to the teaching of truths which might displease them.

However, it takes a great deal of faith and courage to brave the displeasure of those who are maintaining you when your material situation is precarious. The pastor who undertakes his ministry on a voluntary basis enjoys a much greater liberty.

Sharing of tasks

If no one is paid to undertake essential jobs, it is necessary that someone assumes them. The absence of a FTW is a strong stimulus for voluntary activity. The church cannot exist unless each member is ready to make the sacrifices which voluntary ministries impose on them.

Witness

Professional life provides a wonderful opportunity—and a good school—for witness. We have ready-made relations with those who observe our lives every day.

Rational management of financial resources

In order that the Lord's servants might 'live by faith', others must 'give by faith'. Thus in breaking new ground in missions overseas or in our own dechristianised land, we need people who can undertake pioneer work full-time. Since the resources of a church are limited, for each FTW maintained at home there will be one less elsewhere. So the question for each church is: where will our support be most useful and where is it indispensable?

We have learned through experience that a church without a professional pastor can devote up to 80% of its resources to missions.

Avoids a monarchical pastorate

When a church appoints a full-time pastor, he will tend to remain in this post until the size of the church exceeds his capacity to serve. The church will then revert to the classical plan which has prevailed since the second century of the Christian era. In the earliest days of the church, there were always several elders or bishops in one congregation. If a church elects one full-time pastor it will be difficult, after two or three generations, to return to the biblical model. 'A full-time ministry involves certain risks for the fellowship, especially on a long term basis. The availability of time and an adequate training leads to a competence which has also an opposite effect; there is a temptation to concentrate responsibilities and decision-making power in one person because he appears to be more capable than others.' (J. Blandenier, *Semailles et Moisson*, March 1981)

Can one reconcile the advantages of the two forms?

The advantages in both cases are real and important. For this reason we should look for the possibility of bringing the positive elements of both options together, while avoiding the corresponding disadvantages.

How can the advantages of a pastored church be secured in a church without a full-time pastor?

Availability of the full-time pastor can partially be compensated for by the involvement of a larger number of people and by elders and deacons devoting all of their available time to the service of the church. The one problem that remains is that of availability at any time of day. Only if the church can use the capabilities of retired folk will this be solved.

Teaching This problem can be resolved by dividing the preaching and other forms of teaching among a certain number of men released from other forms of service. None need preach more than once a month or every two months. This will allow him time to renew himself personally, to profit from the addresses of his brethren and to prepare his own seriously. This is the kind of diversity which we find in the pages of the New Testament.

Competence This will be acquired by a genuine course of training for all who show some disposition for a ministry within the church, and by putting to work those with these capabilities within limited groups.

Similar training could be undertaken—possibly with a group of those interested from several churches—on such topics as caring ministry, marriage counselling, organizing youth work, Sunday school classes, children's clubs and pioneer evangelism.

Co-ordination and training It is possible to share these tasks among several people, provided the church possesses enough mature and competent believers. In a small church, co-ordination is less complex. Training standards can be maintained by brethren undertaking theological studies and then returning to their employment, or by agreement between several churches. Theological education by extension is the best training method for church members engaged in secular jobs or in family life.

Continuity This can be ensured by a systematic plan for preaching and Bible study to which the various preachers conform. Continuity in leadership can be safeguarded by a sensible organization of the body of elders and deacons.

How can the advantages of a non-professional ministry be secured in a pastored church?

The danger of *clericalism* can be avoided by means of sharing out both spiritual and material tasks among all those who have received the appropriate gifts and who are walking in the Spirit. The pastor is only one

elder among others; he is simply more available and perhaps more able in some aspects of the work. This implies that the pastor is to encourage those whom the Lord has endowed for a ministry to take up various preaching tasks, and to train them so that they can ultimately do as well as himself. He will oversee a scheme of rotating all the pastoral activities among the elders, such as presiding at the Lord's Supper, conducting baptisms, chairing meetings of members, of elders and of deacons, and being responsible for external relations of the church. Otherwise, in spite of his protestations of equality with his brethren, his acts will speak louder than his words.

If, moreover, the pastor has worked in a profession before taking up full-time ministry, it will become easier for him to give up the 'Jack-of-all-trades' role and to transpose his learned disciplines into his new estate.

But, as J. Blandenier remarks, 'the best protection against clericalism without doubt is the existence of a living, vigilant church made up of born again believers who are mature, responsible, committed' (*Semailles et Moisson*, March 1981).

Independence To assure this, the FTW needs to remind himself that he depends on God alone. This autonomy partly depends on the way in which the funds provided by the church are passed on to him. If they reach him indirectly by the hands of a council of people responsible to the church for their management, the Lord's servant will feel more free than if they came directly from the offerings into his hands. Whatever method is chosen, the church must ensure that the pastor remains totally free to use the money given to him in whatever way his conscience leads, in the same way as any other Christian. This means that the members give their money *to the Lord* and refrain from judging the way in which the Lord's servant uses that part which is given to him.

Sharing of tasks If, after several years in a church, a pastor still undertakes most of the work, it is often because he prefers to do so—or has not taken the trouble to share out the work. To find capable collaborators and to develop and supervise them is, certainly, an additional task to be added to all the rest, and one that does not yield immediate returns. Sometimes it will be necessary to redo the work himself, or find someone else to do it, or give so much time to supervision that he might as well have done it himself in the first place. But after the second or third attempt, things will improve and he will be able to unload progressively some of the more absorbing tasks and thereby give to others a sense of effective participation in the life of the body. Alongside the regular preaching and teaching, sharing out is the main and most absorbing task of the FTW. It is better to be a good orchestral conductor than a 'one-man band'. A great man, it is said, is not one who does the work of ten men but one who puts ten men to work. That is the primary and specific function of pastors.

Witness If the pastor manages, with God's help, to stimulate the witness of the majority of the church members in their place of work, the overall result will be better than his own witness alone, however exceptional he may be. To train witnesses, to provide them with 'ammunition', to respond to different objectives, is an important and time-consuming task. It will be all the more effective if the pastor has acquired his own experience in previous employment.

Management of financial resources The resources of any one church are, of course, limited, but not the number of workers. If, through the effective ministry of a FTW, the church is able to double or triple itself in size, then the resources will grow in the same proportion and the part given to outside causes will be maintained or even increased. What would be even better, without affecting generosity towards these outside ministries, would be for the church to take on several part- or full-time workers for its various activities.

Monarchical pastorate Here, everything depends on whether having a single pastor in each church is seen as a passing phase or as the final and ideal situation. When a church engages a part- or full-time worker, it would be a good thing to agree at once with the worker and with the whole church that, God willing, this first step is only one phase towards the engagement of several workers released from ordinary employment. Thus the appointed pastor would not gain the impression of a lack of confidence or a breakdown in contract when a co-worker joins him. Thus, right from the start, he would be able to work towards this goal with his eyes open for others who could work with him, initiate them into various activities, and motivate them so that they might possibly leave their job for God's service and dedicate one or two years to training in a Bible school or by extension courses.

In apostolic days, church workers were recruited from the local church. This avoids improprieties such as the 'parachuting' of a pastor into a church which he does not know. If each church arranged for two, three, or even four elders or deacons—male or female—to be released for service in the church on a part- or full-time basis, each could have his clearly defined sphere of responsibility as, say, pastor-teacher, evangelist or administrator. If several elders of a church were prepared to reduce their professional commitment in order to give more time to the church, this would call for a financial contribution to be offered to them to compensate for their shortfall in earnings. Finally, with the progressive lowering of the age of retirement, new possibilities in voluntary service to the church open up. Mature men and women are made available who can bring into the Lord's service an invaluable experience of life and Christian testimony. At the same time, this solves for them one of the thorniest problems linked with the ending of professional work: they can still feel useful in

something. It is in the fields of visitation, caring ministry, secretarial and accountancy work and in co-ordination, that the assistance of experienced Christians is particularly appreciated.

Conclusion

The issue of a professional ministry appears to me to be more a question of circumstances and inner attitudes than of principle. It can enable the church to respond, at one and the same time, to both the biblical model and the demands of today's world. Although not itself a church, the Bible school where I work—like all Bible schools—provides for the churches an example of collegial, full-time ministry which demonstrates that it can work well.