

A close-up, low-angle shot of the spine of an antique book. The spine is made of dark, heavily worn leather with visible cracks and texture. It features several horizontal gold-tooled bands. The words "Holy Bible" are written in a gold, Gothic-style script across the upper portion of the spine. The lighting is dramatic, coming from the side, highlighting the texture of the leather and the metallic sheen of the gold tooling. The background is dark and out of focus.

Holy Bible

# MINISTRY BY THE BOOK

*New Testament Patterns for Pastoral Leadership*

DEREK TIDBALL

# The New Testament writers advocate or implicitly commend a number of models for ministry.

Each of these is shaped by the particular needs of particular churches, as well as the backgrounds, ambitions and passions of the authors. From this multiplicity of models, can a biblical approach to pastoral leadership be found to address a contemporary context?

The “models of permission” on offer in this survey enable a freer approach to the way ministry is conducted. Tidball challenges the stunted understanding of ministry that often characterizes churches today, and encourages those for whom a single, rigid ministry approach simply does not fit.

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*“Derek Tidball’s Ministry by the Book is a wonderful contribution to pastors who want to take the New Testament seriously theologically and practically. The author contends that ‘the New Testament writers set before us a number of models of ministry, each one of which is shaped by the needs of the church they were serving. . . . Each New Testament book has a lot to say about pastoral leadership.’ It is to this end that working pastors will find this book most valuable.”*

CRAIG LOSCALZO, SENIOR PASTOR, IMMANUEL BAPTIST CHURCH, LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY

*“This unique book combines significant New Testament theology with great pastoral sensitivity. It helpfully navigates the questions of unity and diversity in the New Testament presentation of pastoral ministry.”*

STEVE ROY, TRINITY EVANGELICAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

*“Many churches and pastors tend to be rigidly model-orientated, even emerging churches. Tidball offers ‘models of permission’ that enable a freer approach to ministry and the way it is conducted. He provides a refreshingly ‘multicolored not monochrome’ picture of ministry.”*

ROSS HASTINGS, REGENT COLLEGE, VANCOUVER

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Dedicated to  
my friends

Sam Abramian, Simon Cragg, Andy Partington, Rhys Stenner

the next generation in ministry whom  
it has been my privilege to mentor.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

1QSa	<i>Rule of the Congregation</i>
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BCL	Biblical Classics Library
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>DJG</i>	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> , ed. J. B. Green and S. McKnight (Downers Grove: IVP; Leicester: IVP, 1992)
<i>DLNT</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i> , ed. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (Downers Grove: IVP; Leicester: IVP, 1997)
<i>DPL</i>	<i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> , ed. G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove: IVP; Leicester: IVP, 1993)
<i>ERT</i>	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JPTSup	Journal of Pentecostal Theology: Supplement Series
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>

JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
NCB	New Century Bible
NDCEPT	<i>New International Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology</i> , ed. D. J. Atkinson and D. H. Field (Leicester: IVP; Downers Grove: IVP, 1995)
NIB	The New Interpreters' Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIDNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , ed. C. Brown, 3 vols. (Paternoster: Exeter, 1975, 1976, 1978)
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NLCNT	New London Commentary on the New Testament Series
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NPNF <sup>1</sup>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 1
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
NTG	New Testament Guides
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra pagina
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
TBC	Torch Bible Commentaries
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, tr. G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76)
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

## INTRODUCTION

'Oh nol' said a colleague when he asked me the title of this book. *'Ministry by the Book'* sounds as if you are going to write a "how to" book on ministry; you know, like how to do ministry in six simple steps as if it's the same as cooking a McDonald's hamburger. And if that's not it, it sounds like you're wanting to tie people down and control them. The Book says . . . , so you must do it this way.' Ironically, neither of these is remotely true; quite the reverse, in fact. This book seeks to open up the imagination about ministry, not to close a discussion down. It seeks to sketch several models of ministry, all of which have their origin in the New Testament, and challenge the stunted understanding of ministry that so often characterizes our churches today. I hope it provides a number of 'models of permission' that enable a freer approach to ministry and the way it is conducted, and provides encouragement for those who don't fit the 'McDonaldized' version of ministry so common today.

The remarkable growth of the church is primarily to be accounted for in terms of the purposes of God and the power of his Spirit. These, however, were accomplished and channelled through the leaders he gave as gifts to his fledgling church (Eph. 4:11-13). Throughout history God has provided societies with leaders, even if they have fulfilled their calling in different ways and through various forms and structures of authority. To leave people without leadership is not, in the biblical world view, a sign of a mature democracy (for even a democracy needs to be led) but a symbol of anarchy (Judg. 17:6; 18:1;

19:1; 21:25). Within Israel there were a variety of people who led. There were prophets, priests and kings, together with wise men and elders, who provided each other with the necessary checks and balances to stem the temptations of status spawn. And what God has done for the good of Israel he equally does for the good of the church by providing her with a variety of ministers.

Those who read on will quickly grasp that I believe biblical ministry to be multicoloured, not monochrome. Even so, it is fair to say that this book does not use the term 'ministry' in its widest sense. By ministry I primarily have so-called, full-time or professional ministry in mind, although the substance of the book is far from irrelevant to others who exercise ministry on a more occasional basis. Ministry embraces more than we are concerned with here, but not less. I also tend to use the terms 'ministry', 'leadership' or 'pastoral leadership' as interchangeable. I recognize that there are other forms of leadership, such as 'mission leadership' (although pastoral leadership should be missional!), or 'organizational leadership'. But the aspects of the New Testament that concern us here are about pastoral leadership within local churches or groups of churches. And an appropriate word for that is 'ministry'.

My contention is that the New Testament writers set before us a number of models of ministry, each one of which is shaped by the needs of the church they were serving and, no doubt, by their own individual personalities and interests as well. Each New Testament book has a lot to say about pastoral leadership, even if it is not all transparent on the surface. Each book, with the exception of Paul's writings, will be examined in turn to see what form of ministry is advocated and why. (Rather than looking at each of Paul's letters separately, they will be considered in three groups where three different patterns of leadership are evident.) The needs Matthew was addressing were not the same as those addressed by Luke, nor Jude, nor John in Revelation. And Matthew and Luke, as well as Peter, James and Paul, were all wired up by God in different ways. They all bring to bear their own backgrounds, ambitions and passions to what they have to say about ministry. The context combined with the person of the writer gives rise to different conceptions of ministry, all under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As a result we discover the varying contours of New Testament pastoral leadership, a genuine diversity that finds its unity in Christ and his gospel.

It has long been popular in the field of New Testament studies to argue that the early church was not a tight, homogeneous organization where every church cloned every other church in its worship, doctrinal emphasis or structure. James Dunn, for example, gave a full exposition of this position when he

argued that within the New Testament one can identify four separate strands of Jewish, Hellenistic or Apocalyptic Christianity and Early Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Each of these gave rise to different forms of leadership, all of which found their unity in Christ, who serves as 'the essential focus of authority' and 'the pattern of ministry'.<sup>2</sup> Those who adopt this position also tend to argue that within the New Testament, ministry follows a trajectory, perhaps even an inevitable one, which largely results in a concern for proper order and doctrinal orthodoxy and that this leads to the concept of monarchical episcopacy developed by Ignatius.

While, on the one hand, I would want to argue that their unity was far more extensive than Dunn's conclusion would suggest, especially in terms of what they believed,<sup>3</sup> on the other hand, I would want to argue that the division of the early church into four strands short-circuits an understanding of ministry in the New Testament. There is much greater variety of style and focus in ministry than this scheme allows. All ministry is about continuing the work (and works) of Jesus and teaching people to live under his rule, in his kingdom, and in accordance with his truth. It is, in Dunn's words, 'Jesus pursuing his ministry by proxy'.<sup>4</sup> How that ministry is expressed, however, depends very much on the context in which ministry is exercised and who is exercising it. God gives appropriate leadership for the need of the hour. A best-fit approach is evident whereby the need of the church is matched by the particular gift and perspective of the leader.

An in-depth review of the books of the New Testament on ministry will lead to a far richer understanding of the multivariied forms of ministry than is customary among most churches today. It can prove a very releasing exercise for many pastors who struggle to fit into a current ecclesiastical mould even when they know their gifts do not quite match it, helping them to play to their strengths. It can prove a very salutary exercise for church authorities, whether national or local, who have attempted to compress the variety of God's gifts into a dull uniformity. It can demonstrate to us why some ministers are more

1. James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster; London: SCM, 1977).

2. Ibid., p. 123; see pp. 103-123.

3. See D. A. Carson, 'Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology', in D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (eds.), *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), pp. 65-95. Carson argues that the diversity reflects different pastoral concerns rather than different creedal positions.

4. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p. 106.



effective in some situations than in others. It can lead us to ask what the need of the hour is.

Recent years have witnessed ministry undergoing rapid changes and facing immense challenges. Various attempts to answer the discontent many feel about ministry in this period of change have been made. While the Lima Report of the World Council of Churches,<sup>5</sup> reasserted a classic view of ministry as priestly and a threefold order of bishops, priests and deacons, others have moved far away from such concerns. One group have emphasized the need for leadership that learns from and imitates the role of the Chief Executive Officer in business. Another group have stressed the need to be counsellors or spiritual directors. Yet another have essentially viewed leaders through a charismatic filter and stressed that leaders are a channel for the Holy Spirit. Yet others, feeling the barrenness of the spiritual desert, have put a premium on the cultivation of inner spirituality. Still others have argued that the primary problem of the church is its introversion and said that leaders should be looked to for a prophetic engagement with society.

To seek to address the current ills of ministry without anchoring our discussions within the New Testament runs the risk of the ship of the church being cast adrift on the tides of opposition that surround it even more than it is at present. Aspects of many of the above models may be seen in the various writings of the New Testament. But, far from merely endorsing our prejudged views of the need of ministry, the New Testament will correct our models, move us beyond superficial understandings of them, and introduce us to models we may not have thought about but that may prove essential to our situation. The New Testament must be normative in our thinking about ministry but, if we are true to it, it will not prove reactionary and restrictive.

Factions within the Corinthian church behaved in the way many of us find natural. Each championed a particular form of leadership and doubted the validity of the ministry of those who did not live up to their expectations. Paul denounced them for thinking according to the standards of their age, rather than as Christians should. He pointed out to them that they were making choices where choice was unnecessary. 'No more boasting', he wrote, 'about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas . . .' (1 Cor. 3:21-22). Similarly, we need not choose between the variety of models of ministry presented in the New Testament but rather rejoice that God has given

5. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

such a rich diversity and look to encourage people who are different from us to use their calling to the full and as appropriate in different situations.

So, let us follow the contours of New Testament ministry rather than flatten everything out into a smooth path, which like a straight and uninteresting motorway runs the danger of the driver falling asleep through sheer boredom. And let us not worry about how it all fits together till our final chapter.

I want to thank so many people who have contributed to the writing of this book. It had its origins in the Swetland Lectures at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary I was privileged to give in 2004 under the title of 'Gospel Ministry'. I am grateful to Dr Ken Swetland for the invitation and to friends at Gordon-Conwell for their generous hospitality. The lectures were developed further for an intensive pastoral school in Maleny College, Brisbane, in 2005. I am grateful on that occasion not only for the welcome of the college but also for the warm hospitality of Brisbane Baptist Tabernacle as they celebrated their hundred and fiftieth Church Anniversary.

The Board of London School of Theology granted me sabbatical leave in 2007-8 during which this book was written. I have enjoyed discussions with a number of colleagues over lunch. Also the bookshop guys, Phil Groom and Nick Aston, as well as the librarian, Alan Linfield, are to be thanked for getting books at short notice. I owe a great debt to Jenny Aston, once again, who has been my personal assistant for several years, and particularly for her editorial skills. Dr Steve Walton and the Revd Ali Walton read the manuscript with their usual thoroughness and I am thankful for their comments. Simon Cragg similarly read the early chapters and offered helpful comments. I, of course, take full responsibility for what is published here. Nick Gatzke composed the indexes shortly after he had submitted his own PhD, which it was my delight to supervise - a work of extraordinary kindness indeed. I am also very glad to work with Phil Duce again, the editor responsible at IVP, and especially for his encouragement and swift responses.

As always, I am so grateful for the wonderful support of my wife, Dianne, and of my son, Richard, while I have been scribbling again.

Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that the Lord Jesus and God the Father would 'encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word' (2 Thess. 2:17). My prayer is that the reading of this book will do the same, especially to those who labour hard daily in the tasks of ministry.

## 15. UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY

Our examination of the contours of New Testament ministry has the danger of leaving us with an appreciation of its diversity and detail but little appreciation of the unity of the whole. Are there fourteen different models of ministry in the New Testament (other writers could doubtless identify several more) from which we can pick and choose? Can we justify our negligence of some aspects of what is expected of ministry on the basis that we are called to fulfil the model found in Matthew or Jude, but not that of Mark or Luke? If there are these diverse models of ministry, is it not reasonable to ask if there is not an equal diversity of gospels that lie behind them? Is the New Testament even more fragmented than recent New Testament scholarship (represented by James Dunn's categorization of early Christianity into four distinct groups of Jewish Christianity, Hellenistic Christianity, Apocalyptic Christianity and Early Catholicism) has proposed? Should there not be many more streams of early Christianity identified than these?

In this final chapter I seek to bring the diversity into some sense of harmony by examining the implications of the previous chapters from four distinct angles, before a brief concluding comment on the essential core of ministry.

### What are the implications for the unity of the New Testament?

The relationship between the models of ministry I have presented needs clarifying. Several false relationships need to be ruled out. They are neither mutually exclusive nor in conflict with each other. There is no room for competition between them; none is superior and none inferior. All are relevant, even if some especially come to the fore in particular situations and according to the specific needs of the church of the time. Paul pointed out to the Corinthians how foolish they were to divide over the people God had sent to lead them and how unnecessary it was. 'So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God' (1 Cor. 3:21–23). Given our insecurities we often wish to claim our style of ministry as superior, or even the only legitimate way of ministry. If we are not so foolish as to claim that, because none of us is yet perfect, we often engage in a competitive game with colleagues in ministry where we send out subtle signals that the way we undertake ministry is really better than theirs. But we would do well to heed Paul's exhortation.

The models of ministry stand in a complementary relationship with each other. Although each has a distinct emphasis, a number clearly overlap. Several, for example, emphasize the importance of teaching, even if Matthew, Paul and James each has a different perspective to contribute on teaching. While some, like the model presented by Mark or in Revelation, appear to be at the sharp end of spiritual conflict, they are all involved in spiritual warfare. If some, like Jude or John's letters, vigorously expose heresy, all are concerned about apostolic doctrine. They belong together and together make a complete picture.

What then explains the difference between them? In a critique of James Dunn's *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, Don Carson proposes a more satisfactory way of 'preserving the unity of the New Testament while recognizing its diversity' than the minimalist approach Dunn adopts.<sup>1</sup> Carson's essay is not directed to Dunn's comments on ministry, but what he writes about the New Testament documents generally applies as much to that as to anything. Of the seven reflections he offers on harmonizing the New Testament, two are of special relevance to us. They are:

1. D. A. Carson, 'Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology', in D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (eds.), *Scripture and Truth* (Leicester: IVP, 1983), pp. 65–95.

*The diversity in the New Testament very often reflects diverse pastoral concerns, with no implications whatsoever of a different creedal structure.*

*The diversity in the New Testament documents very often reflects the diverse personal interests and idiosyncratic styles of the individual writers.<sup>2</sup>*

The former of these principles gives due recognition to the occasional nature of the New Testament documents. They were rooted in the real pastoral needs of the original churches to which they were addressed. They were not systematic theological works, written in a vacuum and in the abstract. The second principle recognizes the role of the individual authors, which is evident from the distinct style, language, interests and emphases found in the document. There is no need for them simply to repeat each other, or for them all to comment on everything. It should be remarked that this emphasis on personality is not without limits. It does not extend to them creating different gospels from each other, but rather to their personal inclinations being used of God to express the one gospel.<sup>3</sup> Neither of these principles detracts from the New Testament as inspired by the Holy Spirit. What they offer is a living document that demonstrates how leaders exercised pastoral ministry in the day-to-day realities of the early church.

Accepting that there is diversity and, for good reasons, what about unity? In spite of the claim that they are complementary, are the models of ministry, in reality, so fragmented that there is little in common between them? If so, should we expect a church and ministry so diverse that they verge on the point of incoherence? Dunn argues that the four streams of church he has identified found their unity in Christ and, in particular, 'on the unity between Jesus the man and Jesus the exalted one'.<sup>4</sup> Otherwise, he concludes, '*there was no single normative form of Christianity in the first century*'.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps the picture of the contours of ministry I have drawn adds to the impression of fragmentation.

Dunn's verdict is highly questionable. If the Bible does present early Christianity as a jigsaw of diverse pieces, they together provide a coherent and

2. Ibid., pp. 86, 89; italics his.

3. See discussion in Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1981), pp. 37-40.

4. James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster; London: SCM, 1977), p. 37. For fuller argument, see pp. 369-372.

5. Ibid., p. 373; italics his.

complete picture and 'all belong to the same puzzle'.<sup>6</sup> There is much more unity to be discovered between the New Testament writers than Dunn's verdict suggests. Donald Guthrie is surely right when he writes:

The idea of unity relates to the conviction that there is only one gospel which the NT presents. There is simply no evidence to show that there were many gospels. In view of this our understanding of diversity must work within the limits of this gospel. Variations in the method of presentation there certainly are, but these may be classed as diversities only in the sense of variations in the expression of the same fundamental gospel. If diversity is used in the sense of contradiction, it is difficult to see how this can be maintained without calling in question the basic gospel. Undoubtedly, different writers will vary their expression according to the different purposes they have in mind. That is to be expected; but this is very different from the theory that there was no general agreement about the basic truths, no idea of orthodoxy to set over against heresy.<sup>7</sup>

If Guthrie is right, as I believe he is, this has implications for the diversity of ministry we have been exploring. The diversity finds its unity in the gospel itself and is always limited by that gospel. However varied their approach, New Testament ministers are always concerned to let the one gospel of Jesus Christ have its full impact in people's lives. And their method, language and tactics conform to that gospel. They do not, therefore, use the human weapons of wisdom, cunning, power or violence to make the gospel known. They minister as servants of Jesus Christ.

We should ask if these models are normative or only illustrative? In other words, should ministry today conform to one or another of these models or might there be new models of ministry we should be creating? Some recent pastoral theologians have been concerned to construct new metaphors of ministry, and in some cases the metaphors soon metamorphose into models.<sup>8</sup> I think, for example, particularly of the argument that contemporary ministry should fit the model of the professional or the manager. There is certainly

6. The metaphor is Carson's, 'Unity and Diversity', pp. 81-82.

7. Guthrie, *Theology*, p. 59.

8. See Ian Bunting, *Models of Ministry: Managing the Church Today*, Grove Pastoral Series 54 (Cambridge: Grove, 1993); Donald Messer, *Contemporary Images of Christian Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989); W. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), pp. 56-69. See brief discussion in D. Tidball, *Builders and Fools: Leadership the Bible Way* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), pp. 10-15.

value in contemporary images and to envisage new models is both legitimate and to be expected, given the improvisation theme mentioned earlier. We should therefore be concerned to think about fresh models of ministry today. Yet contemporary models should not contradict any of the key features of New Testament ministry. A model that is hierarchical, authoritarian, abusive, singular or exalts personality, or any model that exalts tasks to the exclusion of relationship, or growth to the exclusion of truth, would not be legitimate.

Contemporary models often seem to suffer from being more rooted in culture than in Christ. Unlike the models Paul used, they have not often been as radically transformed by the gospel as his were. Rooting ourselves in New Testament models avoids that error and provides a measure of safety. The New Testament, though set in its own cultural context, provides us with both a normative and a sufficient set of models of ministry. They are normative because they come from Christ and his apostles and define the essential nature and parameters of ministry. They are sufficient because they cover such a range of situations and such a variety of approaches that they cover whatever the church today might face.

There is, then, unity as well as diversity among the complementary models of ministry to be found within the New Testament. They serve as normative for ministry today and, while we should exercise our imagination to devise new metaphors and models for contemporary ministry, it is perilous if we cut loose from our New Testament moorings and, equally, ridiculous if we substitute the richness and depth of New Testament teaching for our own superficial understandings.

#### What are the implications for the individual minister?

Confronted by the diversity of models of ministry, what are individual pastors to do? Are they, on the one hand, to say that that was all very well but today the church demands a bit of everything and they cannot afford to specialize? Or are they, on the other hand, to argue that the New Testament provides a pattern for contemporary ministry that encourages pastors to pursue a specific aspect of ministry rather than fulfil a general calling and the church should be radical in following the New Testament pattern? The former may lead to frustration, as pastors are required to fulfil a range of responsibilities for which they do not feel particularly gifted or trained. The latter can easily lead to misunderstanding on the part of church members who wonder why their pastor is exercising ministry so narrowly?

The answer to the straightforward question 'What is an individual pastor to do?' must take a number of issues into consideration.

Recent tradition has tended to view the pastor as a general practitioner. Although pastors are ordained to be 'ministers of the word and sacrament'<sup>9</sup> (the wording varies according to the denomination they serve) and, although selection committees may focus on the ordinand's ability as a pastor and preacher, hence officially giving some priority to those tasks, the truth is that pastoral leaders in the church have been expected to fulfil a wide variety of roles. The pastor is expected to be not only pastor and preacher but also a priestly liturgist, children's friend, biblical interpreter, business administrator, programme organizer, moral guide, denominational servant, ecclesiastical representative, ecumenical advocate, community organizer, social activist, gospel evangelist, prophetic voice and increasingly a media personality as well. It is unsurprising that with such an open-ended and unstructured role, a significant proportion of ministers face disillusion and burnout at some stage in their ministry.

It may be argued, by the way, that an elder in the early church would quite naturally have undertaken all these responsibilities. But that is questionable. Several of the current demands are recent inventions, such as that of ecumenical advocate, denominational servant, media personality and even children's friend.<sup>10</sup> But even if it were true that the early church elders had to undertake a wide range of tasks, the scale on which they functioned as the leader of a household church in towns that were small compared to ours makes their task qualitatively, not just quantitatively, different. Ministering in the context of a highly organized, densely networked, bureaucratized society, drenched in the demands of instant and frequent communication, is very different from ministering in the context of small-scale communities.

9. E. Earle Ellis is right to draw attention to the fact that the New Testament does not speak in these terms, but 'the later church removed the administration of the sacraments, together with the ministries of the Word, from a congregational context to the exclusive control of a clerical and priestly class' (*Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Exeter: Paternoster, 1989], p. 121; see also p. 101).

10. By 'children's friend' I mean not only someone who enjoys a good relationship with children but one who is expected to be gifted in doing 'the children's talk', run 'family services' or organize 'holiday clubs'. It is only in recent history that children have been considered a separate class of human being who demand the concentrated attention they now receive. The early church would have included them in mainline activities rather than catering for them separately.

It may be inevitable that the pastor of a local church has to operate as something of a general practitioner, if only for the reason that most church communities are not large enough to support specialists. The pastor is often the only full-time staff member in a church and people therefore naturally turn to him or her first of all for assistance. It is unrealistic for people to enter contemporary ministry thinking they are able to minister exclusively on the lines of one of the specialized models of ministry found in the New Testament. Nonetheless, pastors may be helped if they have an understanding of their primary calling.<sup>11</sup> They can then, in consultation with their churches and without neglecting their overall responsibilities, begin to shape their ministry accordingly. They can organize their time appropriately, giving quality time to what is their uppermost calling. They can gather around them others who can complement them, assisting them with aspects of their work that are not their priority. It is foolish to dissipate a special gift in the pursuit of some vague and general goal. Many of us need to recover our primary sense of vocation from the layers of doing a lot of things just to keep religious consumers happy. If we do not, as Eugene Peterson has inimitably put it, 'before we realize what has happened, the mystery and love and majesty of God, to say nothing of the tender and delicate subtleties of souls, are obliterated by the noise and frenzy of the religious marketplace'.<sup>12</sup>

It may be helpful to look at it this way. Some make a helpful distinction between possessing a spiritual gift and having responsibility for a corresponding role. To illustrate: I may have the gift of an evangelist but all Christians are called upon to be witnesses; I may be a pastor but every Christian is called to care; I may not have the gift of giving but I have a responsibility to contribute to 'the collection' on a regular basis. Relating this to the work of a contemporary pastor, we may say that a pastor may have particular gifts and strengths within ministry that he or she should be permitted to devote their energies to. But even so, this does not exempt them from fulfilling other roles reasonably expected of a pastor. It is a question of proportion, shape, priorities and emphasis.

The truth is, pastors are often their own worst enemies and while protesting about the range of responsibilities laid on them are often very reluctant to release any part of their work to others. They feel they need to be 'superman' or 'superwoman' and do not want to be considered a failure in the eyes of

11. The same is true for volunteers who serve in the church.

12. Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 173.

others because they have not done everything. Others, however, are not always as reluctant to undertake that work as pastors fear. More honest conversation between pastoral leaders and congregations about their particular gifts and calling as well as the demands and pressures of the task often yields understanding and practical response.

Recent developments in the UK health service may prove a useful model for churches considering the shape of ministry. Although family doctors are still general practitioners of medicine, there is increasing recognition of the need to permit even general practitioners to specialize somewhat and to be helped in their role by a range of other staff, or external colleagues, who offer specialized support. Churches should be encouraged not to see every minister as possessing all the gifts within himself or herself but as being able to make a vital contribution in particular ways, according to the needs of the hour, supplemented by others who will take responsibility for other aspects of ministry. I know, for example, a gifted pastor who was a great people-person, a wise spiritual guide and not a bad preacher. His church, however, expected him, by virtue of his office, to chair every business meeting and be the up-front leader of all its community events even though he was not gifted in these areas. When I sat at his desk one Sunday afternoon, preparing for my evening preach, I saw how deep his frustration was as he had doodled more than once on his blotter, 'I hate this job.' Not long after, he left the ministry and the church lost a good pastor. Years later, a place was found for him on a team where he was not expected to do everything. In the current context, churches should be encouraged to think again about what they expect their ministers to achieve.

If the argument of this book has any merit, then pastors should ask themselves questions in two areas and understand two caveats. The first area is *personal*, including questions such as 'Who am I? What do I see as my particular calling in pastoral leadership? What are my burdens? How has God particularly gifted me? Which model of ministry is a best fit for me?' This will help us to understand our strengths and the distinct contribution we might make to the church. The second area is *contextual*: 'What are the needs of this church at this time? What threats and opportunities is this church facing? What is the context in which this church is called to minister at this time?' Bringing the answers to these two sets of questions together, by asking 'Do I, with my particular gifts, fit this situation?' should provide us with a clear indication of whether we are the right person to minister in this local church at this time or whether we are best to serve elsewhere.

The first caveat is that although we may operate basically in one type of ministry throughout our lives, there may be the need to adapt to the extent that we can. Paul, for example, provides us with a good illustration of his ability to

adapt to the needs of the church as time went on. The ability to change varies according to personality and usually becomes more difficult with age, but we should not be too rigid in our understanding of ourselves. God gives grace according to our needs. The second caveat is that, while clear answers to these questions are helpful, we have to live with the real and not with the ideal, and so some flexibility in applying the answers may well be called for. Specialist calling, for example, will almost certainly need to be fulfilled within the context of being something of a general practitioner.

My hope is that the models of ministry I have set out will liberate people in pastoral leadership. I trust they will function as models of permission for people to be truer to themselves as they are made and called in Christ, rather than their having to conform to an ill-suited mould or a set of expectations imposed by others. Ministry is diverse. But, as always, the theoretical position needs to be applied with wisdom.

### What are the implications for denominational understanding of ministry?

Denominational perspectives on ministry are mostly trapped in history and tradition. Denominations, by their nature, have a tendency to play safe. The living Lord of the church is certainly working through denominational channels but is not confined to them, and is equally working outside them as new forms of church come into being and as existing local churches adapt their leadership structures to meet the needs they face. These often outpace cumbersome institutional structures in recognizing the gifts God is giving for the ministry and mission of the church today, leaving the denominational systems unable to adapt quickly enough to what is happening at ground level.

As one who has been in denominational leadership and who is committed to the value of history, I would hope that the positive benefits denominations have to offer can be preserved. They do offer identity, quality control, resources and support and they do force people out of their localism to look more widely at the church of Christ. But if they are to maintain their service to the church, they need, as Loren Mead has argued, to give up being regulating agencies, making others conform to the centre, and learn to become resourcing agencies, enabling ministry to happen at ground level.<sup>13</sup>

The New Testament shows a great deal of flexibility in the way ministry is

13. Loren Mead, *The Once and Future Church* (Herdon, Va.: St. Alban Institute, 1991).

practised and leadership exercised. It is foolish to replace this responsiveness with rigidity. Rather than encouraging creativity and imagination, denominations have too often sought to make gifted people conform to a ministerial straightjacket. Many a David has been forced to wear Saul's armour (1 Sam. 17:38-39). The painful result is that giants have not been slain and the church has failed to have the impact it could have had.

The early church functioned in stark contrast to this. Denominations need to follow the example of the apostles in Jerusalem who, when confronted with an unauthorized mission among the Greeks in Antioch, sent Barnabas to witness 'what the grace of God had done'. His stance was not one of doubt, criticism or condescension. Rather, 'he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts' (Acts 11:19-24). A similar spirit of generosity needs to be shown to the varied patterns of ministry coming into being today, even while discernment is being exercised. Undoubtedly, this will be uncomfortable and costly. Working with pioneers and people on the margins of our understanding of ministry is not easy.<sup>14</sup> There will inevitably be failures, experiments that do not succeed and risks that do not pay off. But overall it is worth it, as Scripture and history demonstrate.<sup>15</sup>

Denominations also need to pay attention to what is missing from the New Testament with regard to ministry. Ministers are never presented as organizational leaders or directors of busy congregational programmes. Little is said about the method of their appointment and only the vaguest hint is given about the 'terms and conditions' of their position. What we do know is that they can expect to be paid for their services (1 Cor. 9:7-12; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17). There is no emphasis on ordination, even though the laying on of hands was clearly practised. The pastoral leader is not presented as a priest or president at the sacrament. There is no clergy-laity split. Leaders are distinguished from the congregation but remain firmly a part of it and their role in no way detracts from the emphasis on all believers ministering to one another.

Of course, times have moved on and the fact that churches now live in a

14. The Evangelisation Society once supported William Booth for his work in the East End Mission. Their minutes complained frequently of the way he acted (and spent money) and asked afterwards! But pioneers behave like that and the result was the eventual founding of the Salvation Army.

15. The history of the church in America bears out the value of the work of 'unauthorized' pioneers, as told by R. Finke and R. Stark, *The Churching of America: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992). Similar histories could be written of the church in the UK.



very different culture, which in the Western world is a culture of a bureaucratized and highly legislated state, means that denominations have to operate differently than the groupings of churches did in the New Testament period. Much of what denominations do assists churches and ministers to operate within the current legal framework as far as employment, buildings, finances and so on are concerned. Even so, we have moved too far from our biblical moorings in our views of ministry and need to recover something of its variety, flexibility, responsiveness and priorities of teaching the gospel.

### What are the implications for an ecumenical understanding of ministry?

The ecumenical movement needs to come clean on ministry.<sup>16</sup> In its major statement on ministry, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the World Council of Churches acknowledges several times that there is no single New Testament pattern of ministry. But rather than exploring this further as a paradigm for ministry today (as already mentioned earlier in this book), it argues that 'during the second and third centuries, a threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon became established as the pattern of ordained ministry throughout the Church'.<sup>17</sup> It further acknowledges that down the centuries this threefold pattern has undergone changes as it has adapted to contextual needs. It somewhat grudgingly comments that 'other forms of the ordained ministry have been blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit', but sees these as exceptions and claims that 'nevertheless' the threefold pattern 'may serve today as an expression of . . . unity'.<sup>18</sup>

16. See an important but relatively unknown essay by James Dunn, 'Ministry and the Ministry: The Charismatic Renewal's Challenge to Traditional Ecclesiology', in *The Christ and the Spirit*. Vol. 2: *Pneumatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998), pp. 291-310, where he reviews a number of ecumenical documents and 'requests' the restriction of ministry to 'the ministry' and the traditional concept of ordination in the light not only of the charismatic renewal but New Testament evidence. His more detailed argument in this paper provides much background support for my argument here as well as in earlier chapters.

17. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), clause 19.

18. *Ibid.*, clause 22.

History, of course, cannot be ignored, nor should it be. But why does the ecumenical church take its stance on history and tradition, or rather a partial historical development and one stream of tradition, rather than on Scripture? Why does the document not commend to churches the opportunity of rediscovering something of the dynamism of the forms of New Testament ministry, while at the same time emphasizing the need for ministry to be conducted according to the biblical principles of being gospel-centred, always plural rather than single, contextual and requiring that those who lead the church are people of holiness? Why does it perpetuate an unbiblical view of apostolic succession through the episcopate 'as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church'? Why is this the pattern of ministry to be adopted for any future united church, instead of a pattern whereby diverse ministries are respected and recognized with due humility? And why does it only reluctantly acknowledge that a considerable proportion of the worldwide church does not see ministry in terms of the historic threefold order and that among such churches 'apostolic faith, worship and mission' has continued? After all, it is among these churches that growth is occurring, while most of the historic institutional churches are experiencing decline. A truly ecumenical movement should surely be more inclusive and representative of all churches around the world rather than merely those that have retained the threefold order of ministry.

The New Testament is far more radical in its approach to ministry than any ecumenical statement and that radicalism needs to be rediscovered if the Western church is to recover from the decline it has experienced now for over a century.

### Conclusion

William Willimon writes:

The great ethical danger for clergy is not that we might 'burn out' . . . not that we might lose the energy required to do ministry. Our danger is that we might 'black out,' that is lose consciousness as to why we are here and who we are called to be for Christ and his church.<sup>19</sup>

To be 'a minister of the gospel' is a wonderful calling. We dare not trade in our

19. *Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), p. 21.

birthright because of the pressures of the moment – as Esau did, for a bowl of lentil stew (Gen. 25:29–34).

The New Testament presents us with no blueprint for ministry, but rather sets before us a number of models that reflect the particular emphasis of the writers and the needs of the churches to which they write. In all its diversity, however, there is a clear coherence and unity. Ministry is

about preaching the historic Jesus,  
 who is both Lord and Messiah,  
 in words and action,  
 enabling people to respond to his message,  
 enter his kingdom,  
 and grow in their appreciation of this gospel,  
 its depth and its implications,  
 and grow to maturity in Christ,  
 in the new community of which he is head,  
 whatever circumstances they face,  
 by people who are qualified in gift, understanding and holiness,  
 working together with others,  
 for the glory of God's name.

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