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# NO KIND SHEPHERD?

*by Donald English*

Few of Charles Wesley's hymns have more relevance to the present-day church situation than the one from which our title is taken.<sup>1</sup> Wesley's compassionate description of the lost masses leads him to make a plea for the provision of Christ-like pastors and preachers. Evidence from the

agendas of ecclesiastical assemblies, contents of religious journals, and titles of some recent books, suggests that the problem of ensuring "an adequate and effective ministry" is causing concern in both older and younger churches. In addition to the interest created by uneasiness about ministerial numbers and standards, the tendency of much ecumenical discussion has been to focus attention on the nature and importance of the ministry. Planned surveys of ministerial man-power are becoming more numerous. All this reflects the seriousness of the situation, and provides opportunity for consideration of the various problems associated with ministerial recruitment, selection and training. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to some of the difficulties connected with ministerial recruitment, and to suggest ways in which such difficulties can be dealt with in the realm of our doctrinal teaching and preaching.

#### WIDER EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

This wholly desirable feature of our life, accentuated in most societies during the past half-century, has undoubtedly had the effect of reducing the number of candidates for the ministry from a certain educational group.

Whether this involves free universal education as far as university, or simply increased opportunity for primary and secondary education, the result is the same. An intelligent boy is now provided with an alternative (and sometimes superior) form of intellectual training without even having to consider the possibility of

training for the ministry. To say this is not to question the motives of those who trained for the ministry in earlier days. God is the Lord of all life, and those who seek to do His will find that He leads through all the varied experiences and situations of life. In any case motive is not easily categorized and assessed in matters of this kind. But the fact remains that for men in past days, training for the ministry was often the only means of obtaining further education, and this is not so today. Moreover, where any extensive welfare state or scholarship system operates, a young man finds himself involved in such a system from quite an early age, and the further he proceeds with his education the more he feels obliged to repay his country, county or village, by performing professional secular service to the community. Some scholarship-providing bodies make this requirement quite clear. One suspects, therefore, that many young men undergoing advanced training have not dared even to allow themselves to consider the challenge of the ministerial calling because they are already launched upon a course which is intended to be financially and socially rewarding.

This obstacle to the flow of candidates into the ministry would perhaps not be so great were it not for a recent development in Christian thought. This is the emphasis upon lay Christian service as a valid Christian vocation. The idea is not a new one, but the attention given to it seems to be increasing. As awareness of the needs of under-developed parts of the world increased, the demands for professional people has increased. Who

better to answer such a call than Christian laymen? The Church is right to encourage such a response, but it must also be aware that those who are going to such work include many potential ministers who will not now become ministers.

These two wholly desirable results of modern educational development have thus lead to a situation in which all careers undertaken by Christians are elevated to the area of "vocation". This is excellent, but it raises the question: "Is the ministry at the same level as every other calling, or is it in a category of its own?"

#### IS CHRISTIANITY RELEVANT?

This heading introduces a far less welcome obstacle to the work of ministerial recruitment; namely, the feeling that religion – and in some countries specifically Christian religion – does not really belong to our modern way of life. The "God of the Gaps" is being excluded from His world, not by the philosophies of scientists, but by intoxication with the products of their research. In this setting, (and the "lust for things" which is the essence of materialism can be as strong in under-developed countries as in prosperous ones), many people are questioning the relevance of the Christian teaching about God, and even of spiritual values at all. Such doubts, if expressed in terms of some humanistic approach, can be very attractive to the thoughtful young man who is bewildered by the complexity of the world's problems. When the atmosphere in which such young people do their thinking is so thickly permeated with materialistic pressures;

in literature, entertainment and conversation, it is hardly surprising if young Christians hesitate before offering for the ministry. To belong to a body whose value is questioned is one thing: to spend one's life in its service is another.

The sense of irrelevance attaching to Christianity is not limited to more developed countries. In others it takes a different form, but it is powerful for all that. Even though materialism has not yet asserted itself in areas where people may still be spoken of as "naturally religious", Christianity may still appear irrelevant because it is brought across the seas, still bearing very strong marks of the culture from which it has come. Thus it may well formulate the questions wrongly, and express the answers in an irrelevant way. The tendency for many African Christians (for example) to retain links with their traditional religion for times of special need illustrates the degree to which the Christian Church seems irrelevant to them, in some measure at least.

If one adds to these two manifestations of the problem the fact that many Christians neglect daily prayer and Bible study, family prayers, grace before meals and Sunday observance, one is forced to ask whether the church has really applied itself sufficiently to the task of demonstrating its total relevance to the present age. Until this is done we shall have potential ministerial candidates in a continual state of uncertainty.

#### ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PRESSURES

The pressures being exerted against ministerial candidature, however, are

far greater than this, and they seem to operate in whichever society one considers. There is what might be called *communal* pressure exerted by the country, county, village or association which "pays the piper" where education is concerned, and expects to "call the tune" when career is discussed. There is also *occupational* pressure from business firms which give financial aid for training with the definite understanding that the trainee will return to their employ at the end of the training. More serious is *status* pressure. The desire to "be someone", often encouraged by relatives and friends who will share some of the glory, does not in most cases favour a ministerial career.

In newly developing countries this passion for status is a result of the disintegrating effect which western civilisation has had upon the village and tribal community life. There, each person had his place, and felt reasonably secure in it. The loosening of the ties which bound the society together has now created a situation in which many people are no longer sure of their status in society, for the religious, social and economic structure which assured it has been weakened. In this situation the desire for status is understandable. The strongest challenge, however, comes from *family* pressure. Nor is this limited to non-Christian homes. The opposition to the idea of offering for the ministry does not need an anti-Christian basis. It is more powerful when rooted in a genuine desire that the young man in question should "reap the benefits" of all his hard work in the educational sphere, or in trade training. As he is not considered

likely to do so in the ministry, those who oppose him in the plan feel that they are protecting his own interests. This is the most difficult kind of obstacle to face, the more so if the family in question has denied itself in order to give the son a chance to be educated.

The strength of these pressures lies in the fact that many of them spring from highly commendable motives. Yet their success will keep good men out of the ministry. The question here is whether the Church is really helping men who face this kind of problem or whether our preaching and teaching leave it virtually untouched.

#### UNCERTAINTY ABOUT A CALL

The foregoing problems may seem to relate chiefly to a certain educational group. This is quite deliberate, for it is this group which seems not to be producing the number of candidates which the church expects from its ranks. Our next problem, however, is one which faces potential candidates from any background, and is sometimes more severe for those who are not facing any opposition to their candidature. This is the vexed question of what really constitutes a genuine call. The usual quotation marks are being deliberately omitted. We rejoice that our forefathers established the fact that a man should be called of God to the ministry, and this article certainly does not aim to refute this.<sup>3</sup> Yet we may perhaps be pardoned if our joy is somewhat clouded by the fact that the emphasis on a call has often led to a definition of the meaning which is too narrow. This narrowness seems to stem from

an overemphasis on three elements of a call; the supernatural, the individual and the emotional. Few will question the presence of the *supernatural* in the divine call, but this must not be interpreted to mean that God must call men into the ministry without the help of human agencies, or that this call will almost certainly be against the man's will. If we do, people think of guidance either as waiting passively and very apprehensively for an unforgettable call, or press on with the set intention of keeping out of the ministry if they possibly can. In practice, one meets very few ministers whose call was very dramatic, compelling and unusual. Again, the *individual* element is obviously of tremendous importance. Clearly, other people's convictions about my call are not likely to sustain my ministry. But this need not mean that others are unable to help me to respond to a call, or even to help me first to discern it. Yet many young men have hesitated for years, often in considerable anguish, because they were not sure in this matter, while their Christian brethren were reluctant to give help for fear of interfering in a personal matter. When a man is anxious he is often decreasingly able to reach a decision, and if his brethren recognize his gifts better than he does, reluctance to help is in danger of becoming a denial of Christian fellowship. How would Paul have fared if Ananias had taken such a view? The *emotional* element has also received a rigid interpretation. As a Methodist the present writer has no wish at all to deny the essential place of emotion in religion. Yet history provides adequate illustration of the danger of elevating emotion at the

expense of the other parts of a man's nature. It must also be recognized that the degree of emotion felt varies from personality to personality. The plea being made here is not that "feeling a call" should be in any way questioned, but rather that the avenues along which conviction of a call may come should not be limited to those which are particularly emotionally charged.

Again we must ask how much our preaching and teaching help people who are facing this kind of problem. So often the kind of call quoted in our speaking is the highly supernatural, individualistic, emotional type, and these always make the most effective testimonies. But is this all that the Bible says about guidance and a call? Does our teaching reflect the whole scriptural picture? Such questions are vital if we are to help the right kind of man to discern the call of God. With questions like this in mind we may now turn to consider some possible solutions to the problems before us.

It is worth noting that the New Testament Epistles, in dealing with the life of the church, follow a consistent pattern of doctrinal foundation followed by practical ethical exhortation. The solution to problems of behaviour lies in the area of belief. Again and again the question of what man should do is answered in terms of what God plans and has done.<sup>4</sup> It is with this problem in mind that the responsibility for helping potential candidates is laid in this article at the feet of those whose task it is to preach Christian doctrine, namely preachers and teachers of the faith.

If we are to provide the help which is needed we must say more about specific doctrines which relate to the practical problems already mentioned.

### THE MINISTRY

This is not the place to attempt to outline the biblical doctrine of the ministry, but certain neglected factors can be mentioned as a guide. If the New Testament speaks of the ministry of the whole church,<sup>5</sup> why do we have professional ministers? Is it simply for the purpose of doing all things "decently and in order",<sup>6</sup> or is there in the New Testament the suggestion of a trained and supported ministry?<sup>7</sup> If such a ministry is necessary, what is its specific task? (How accurate is the popular picture of baptizing, marrying, burying, and working one day in seven?) What kind of characteristics are required of a minister? Perhaps most important of all, how does the minister's role differ from that of the layman? Is there a greater strategic importance attached to being "a specialist in what is the business of every Christian", in being "a shepherd of the shepherds", an "expert in the knowledge of God and in the Christian ministry"?<sup>8</sup> Do these facts place the ministry in a category of its own in relation to all other callings? If so, will anything but the best do for such service? This is not to introduce an element of "first and second class Christianity" into the Church, but merely to show what is God's plan and purpose for the ministry. If our people were told these more frequently, there would be a greater sense of privilege in offering for this calling, and a greater resistance to worldly considerations which hinder.

### GOD AS CREATOR

This second heading may not seem, at first sight, to fit easily into the scheme of our treatment. Yet it is often the neglect of this doctrine and the associated truth that God is the Lord of history, that leads to the idea of the irrelevance of Christianity. This is not to ignore the fact that when a man is truly born again he feels the relevance of the gospel at once. But it is to go a little further and assert that we often neglect to explain to the convert that the Lord he was surrendered to is the Lord of Creation and History, the Maker and Sustainer of all things, intimately concerned with the affairs of the present, and powerful to influence them. It is taken for granted, but not sufficiently expressed. Thus our hearers imagine that the preacher's concern is "the salvation of the soul", but that for help in more mundane matters they must look elsewhere. We must therefore explain what we mean by God as Creator in relation to this present materialistic age; in what sense He is Lord of history, when man seems to be doing just as he pleases, whether this gospel we preach has anything specific to say to the young person wrestling with personal problems, to the young couple beginning a home, to the deeply thoughtful person who is almost overwhelmed by the possibility of nuclear warfare, to the unemployed, the aged and so on. To be an expert in a gospel which speaks to every aspect of modern life will clearly be seen to be the highest of callings, but only if the preachers make it plain.<sup>9</sup>

### STEWARDSHIP

This doctrine has been receiving

more attention in some quarters of late, because of specific stewardship campaigns.

Although the appeal of these is basically financial in origin, it is quite clear that the challenge to give money for the work of the church has become an effective point of contact for the call to total stewardship. This is an example we can follow. So long as the ministry is considered in terms of a career to be chosen, as compared with others which are more lucrative, this point will be missed. Moreover young men will enter the ministry with a deep sense of how self-denying they have been. This is not the way to set out on this road! In the context of stewardship, however, the picture is an entirely different one. We begin by seeing God as Creator Who gives every good gift to man, and as Redeemer Who can transform and use these gifts to His glory.<sup>10</sup> Now the question becomes not, "What can I get out of it?", but, "How much can I give to *Him*?" A firm grasp of the principle of stewardship is one of the strongest bulwarks against the materialistic pressures of our age.

Further than this, we must speak of stewardship as a costly principle to follow. Here our evangelistic message should be called into question. Even as we preach the gospel of God's love in Christ we make a great mistake if we give the impression that one becomes a Christian for what one will receive. Much strenuous after-care of converts, and much backsliding, would be avoided if preachers had made clear the fact of surrender to Christ as well as forgiveness through

Christ. Jesus repeatedly told His disciples how much it would cost to follow Him.<sup>11</sup> In this increasingly "comfortable" age such a message may not seem to be successful, but it will be faithful and will produce faithful converts.

In addition there is need for us to make plain that our stewardship is to be exercised in relation to need as well as to opportunity. The question is not, "Where could I be of use?", but "Where could I be of most use?" For the simple fact is that we can be easily beguiled into service which is both commendable and second-best. Here the need for lay Christian service can cause a man to justify rejection of the ministry but not if he understands the idea of stewardship in relation to need. As James Denney put it, "There must be great renunciations if there are to be great Christian careers". The gospel message has a Cross in it for both the Saviour and His servant.

### GUIDANCE

One of the results of over-emphasis upon the supernatural, individual and emotional elements in guidance has been the feeling that guidance is such a personal thing that one ought not to preach about it. Let it be admitted at once that there are dangers in the way of the man who speaks on the subject, especially the danger that he will try to force people into the mould of his own experience of guidance. Our Lord's own dealings with people showed how each one is treated as a distinct personality. Yet at the same time there are certain biblical principles and facts of experience which will be of help to all in varying

degrees.<sup>12</sup> Thus the tendency to view man's part in receiving guidance in terms of passive reception of messages must surely, at the very least, be balanced by emphasis upon our part of co-operation in discovering God's will for our lives. Again, our belief in God's foreknowing and predestining work (however we define them) must cause us to give some importance to our past (even pre-conversion) training, when considering our career. In the same way our belief in God as Creator will cause us to lay some emphasis upon the character and gifts which He has seen fit to give us for His service. Our conviction about the reality of the fellowship of believers and the mutual ministry within it will necessitate our seeking advice from wise and trusted fellow Christians who know us. Moreover, our belief that Christ goes through life with us, we in Him and He in us, will make us sensitive to the significance of events both small and large in our lives as we seek His guidance about the future. Finally, those who accept the authority of the Bible in their faith and conduct will find that they must be seeking in God's Word the guiding principles and specific commands they need. All this is not to minimise the work of the Holy Spirit in guidance and calling, but rather to make Christians aware of the rich variety of avenues which He uses in guiding us. It will not be enough for us to exhort our hearers to seek God's will. They wish to know how to do so, and where to do so, and when to do so, and we are supposed to be the experts in these things. All this comes within the context of our doctrinal preaching and its implications.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT

Writers on the subject of the Holy Spirit normally begin by lamenting the lack of material on the subject and of experience of the Person, in the life of the Church. In closing it is necessary simply to refer to two specific areas where this double neglect is apparent. The first is the work of the Holy Spirit in the prayers and deliberations of the Church. Neglect here has caused us to ignore the important part played by the appointed committees of the Church in the selection of candidates. Too often the burden is placed upon the shoulders of the potential candidate only, with insufficient regard for the work of the Spirit through the selection body. But the Bible picture shows individual and Church balancing and confirming or correcting the view each of the other.<sup>13</sup> We need to make this plain.

The other area of neglect of the Spirit, though the neglect is being increasingly remedied in our day, is the work of the Holy Spirit in Revival. It is a sad but true judgment that the lack of sufficient committed spiritual men ready to pay any price in Christ's service is in itself a reflection of the spiritual apathy and ineffectiveness of many of our churches. Even when the apparent prosperity and activity is impressive one is aware of the lack of spiritual depth in the members.

Our age has seen some of the finest organized efforts to put the Church right, but only the reviving work of the Spirit can do that. In a sense, the Church receives the type of ministry it both deserves and produces. Per-

haps our deepest need, therefore, because it lies behind all else that has been said above, is teaching on revival and its challenge to God's people to confess with shame our weakness and need, that He may revive us again.<sup>14</sup> Only as the Spirit takes our preaching of the relevant doctrine and fills it with His power will we have the ministry for which we all long.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Jesus, thy wandering sheep behold". On the nature of the ministry see, among older works, Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* and Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (reprint, Banner of Truth, 1961), especially part I chapters i-iii and v. On modern conditions compare the series of articles on the selection and training of candidates for the ministry in *The Expository Times* 1962-1963, and, for Africa, B. G. M. Sundkles, *The Christian Ministry in Africa*, S. C. M. 1960 and F. G. Welch *Training for the Ministry in East Africa*, East African Association of Theological Colleges, 1963. On the cultural background of R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (Pelican 1958), H. R. Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (Faber 1943) and M. J. Field, *Search for Security* (Ghana - Faber 1960).

<sup>2</sup> "...until Christians can bring to

their minister their sicknesses and their feuds, the sterility of their wives and the rebellion of their sons, with a sure expectation of enlightenment and healing, they will continue to look elsewhere for help". John V. Taylor in *Prism*, July 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Henry's dictum, "The ministry is the best calling and the worst trade on earth" remains true.

<sup>4</sup> A simple illustration of this pattern is the significance of the word "therefore" at the turning point of various Epistles - Rom. 12 : 1; Gal. 5 : 1; Eph. 4 : 1; Phil. 4 : 1; Col. 3 : 5.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 2 : 9.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. 14 : 40.

<sup>7</sup> What are the implications, for example, of the Pastoral Epistles, or of passages like 1 Cor. 9 : 1-18, in this connection?

<sup>8</sup> The quotations are from Frederic Greeves, *Theology and the Cure of Souls*, Epworth 1960, chapter XI, on "The Ministry of the Minister". This is surely one of the major emphases of the very important Christological passage Heb. 1 : 1-4.

<sup>9</sup> For an awareness of this kind of need in the African setting, see J. V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* S. C. M., 1963, and more generally, Paul Abrecht, *The Churches and Rapid Social Change* S. C. M., 1961, and E. S. Fife and A. S. Glasser, *Missions in Crisis*, I. V. F., 1963.

<sup>10</sup> Ex. 31 : 1-11; Daniel 1; Eph. 2 : 1-10 etc.

<sup>11</sup> Lk. 9 : 57-62; 14 : 25-35.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief but very helpful treatment of the principles and their basis in Scripture see O. R. Barclay, *Guidance* I. V. F., 1956.

<sup>13</sup> Acts 15 and Galatians 2 for example.

<sup>14</sup> See Arthur Wallis, *In the Day of Thy Power* C. L. C., 1956, and William Arthur, *The Tongue of Fire* (abridged by J. H. J. Barker) Epworth Press 1956.