

REDISCOVERING PASTORAL MINISTRY¹

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Current unbiblical changes beginning to overtake the church could injuriously mark the 21st century church if they continue unchecked. A growing number of respected evangelicals believe that the contemporary redirection of the church toward being less biblical and more acceptable to society will ultimately lead to a Christ-condemned church. However, by using Scripture to answer the questions "What is a pastor to be and do?" and "How can contemporary ministry be shaped by biblical mandates?", the church can be revived and obediently realign herself with God's revealed purposes for the bride of Christ. In this manner, it is possible to achieve a biblically balanced, complementing relationship between understanding God's will for the church, engaging in relevant pastoral ministry, and preparing a new generation of pastors for ministry as outlined by God's Word.

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"Crossroads." "Transition." "Crisis." "Uncertainty." "Restlessness." These unsettling words express the pessimistic perception voiced by many evangelicals regarding the immediate state of the church and pastoral ministry. Few would disagree that a call for redirection has come to the evangelical church as the twenty-first century rapidly approaches. However, there is no current consensus on which route the church should take to get back on track.

Consider, for example, John Seel's 1992 survey of twenty-five prominent evangelical leaders.² The leaders expressed their less-than-optimistic views on the general state of American evangelicalism at the end of the twentieth century. Eight dominant themes emerged from their responses:

¹This essay in a slightly different form appears in the forthcoming volume *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry* (Dallas: Word, 1995) 3-18.

²John Seel, *The Evangelical Forfeit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 48-65.

1. Uncertain identity—A widespread confusion over what defines an evangelical.
2. Institutional disenchantment—A perceived ministry ineffectiveness and irrelevance.
3. Lack of leadership—A lament over the paucity of leadership in the church.
4. Pessimistic about the future—A belief that the future of evangelicalism hangs in the balance.
5. Growth up, impact down—A confusing paradox without immediate clear explanations.
6. Cultural isolation—A complete arrival of the post-Christian era.
7. Political and methodological response provides the solution—A drift toward unbiblical approaches to ministry.
8. Shift from truth-orientation to market-response ministry—A redirection away from the eternal towards the temporal in order to be viewed as relevant.

David F. Wells has reached essentially the same conclusion:

I have written this book because, like the students who participated in our survey, I believe the vision of the evangelical church is now clouded, its internal life greatly weakened, its future very uncertain, and I want something better for it. I want the evangelical church to be *the church*. I want it to embody a vibrant spirituality. I want the church to be an alternative to post-modern culture, not a mere echo of it. I want a church that is bold to be different and unafraid to be faithful, a church that is interested in something better than using slick marketing techniques to swell the numbers of warm bodies occupying sanctuaries, a church that reflects an integral and undiminished confidence in the power of God's Word, a church that can find in the midst of our present cultural breakdown the opportunity to be God's people in a world that has abandoned God.

To be the church in this way, it is also going to have to find in the coming generation leaders who exemplify this hope for its future and who will devote themselves to seeing it realized. To lead the church in the way that it needs to be led, they will have to rise above the internal politics of the evangelical world and refuse to accept the status quo where that no longer serves the vital interests of the kingdom of God. They will have to decline to spend themselves in the building of their own private kingdoms and refuse to be intimidated into giving the church less and other than what it needs. Instead, they will have to begin to build afresh, in cogently biblical ways, among the decaying structures that now clutter the evangelical landscape. To succeed, they

will have to be people of large vision, people of courage, people who have learned again what it means to live by the Word of God, and, most importantly, what it means to live before the holy God of that Word.³

The Master's Seminary acknowledges these alarming trends, believing that decisions made in this decade will reshape the American evangelical church for much of the century to come. Thus, the future direction of the contemporary church is a legitimate pre-eminent consideration. Unquestionably, the late twentieth-century church faces a defining moment.⁴ The real contrast in competing ministry models, however, is not the "traditional" versus the "contemporary," but rather the *scriptural* compared to the *unscriptural*.

THE MOMENT OF DECISION

Having arrived at the proverbial "fork in the road," evangelicals must decide between two alternatives. The first is an approach to ministry that is characteristically, but not necessarily exclusively, need-based, man-centered, consumer-driven, and culturally defined. These emphases generally depend on and change with the latest directions in the behavioral sciences, which after attempted integration as alleged co-equals with Scripture, supposedly provide a scientifically validated, relevant ministry for our contemporary computer/media-oriented society.

The second option features a redemptively centered, God-focused, biblically defined, and scripturally prioritized ministry. The Master's Seminary champions this latter model which looks to the sufficiency of Scripture as the revelation of past, present, and future works of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit which have the utmost relevance—now and forever. The church must look

³David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 214-15; cf. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "The Evils of the Present Time" in *An All-Round Ministry* (reprint, Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1983) 282-314.

⁴Four of the top five books in *Christianity Today's* "Reader's Choice" Book-of-the-Year survey addressed these issues with a strong call for a return to a God-centered, biblically based ministry ("1994 Book Awards," *Christianity Today* 38/4 [April 4, 1994]:39). These four books are Charles Colson, *The Body* (Dallas: Word, 1992); David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); John F. MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993); Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity In Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993).

to the Scriptures and address the challenge of "Shaping Contemporary Ministry with Biblical Mandates."

Arguably, no time in church history has more closely approximated the first-century beginnings of the church than now. Our ancient brethren faced a pagan, pre-Christian, and pre-modern culture. Similarly, the contemporary church encounters a pagan, post-Christian, and post-modern world. The essential biblical model of ministry of the first century has never been more appropriate than it is today.

This essay attempts to balance the tensions between temporal and eternal considerations and between divine and human factors in ministry. God's character, God's revelation, and God's will have not changed, although time and culture have. How should a balanced ministry reconcile the two sides? We reason that the timeless should define any particular moment in time, not the reverse. Christ has been and will remain the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4), the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), and the Great Shepherd (Heb 13:20). Pastors will always be His under-shepherds and laborers in the church which He purchased with His own precious blood (Acts 20:28) and continues to build (Matt 16:18).

Pastors assume a huge responsibility when they accept the overwhelming task of exhorting and reproving on Christ's behalf (Tit 1:9). Paul's word about this stewardship to the Corinthian church almost two thousand years ago is sobering:

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God (1 Cor 4:1-5).

The late twentieth-century church in general and pastors in particular face the following very crucial questions. What is the pastor to be and do? How should the church respond to a rapidly changing culture? What does God consider relevant? How concerned is Christ with the traditional and/or the contemporary? Are the Scriptures an adequate basis of ministry today? What are a pastor's ministry priori-

ties? Under whose authority does a pastor stand? How shall we distinguish between the God-called pastor and the counterfeit? Who defines the need for ministry—God or men? What direction does Christ want for His church in the twenty-first century? And foremost of all, when we stand before the Lord of glory and give account of our stewardship, "What will we say?" and, far more importantly, "What will He say?"

We submit that God will use His Word as the benchmark by which He commends or condemns our labors in His church. He will not inquire whether a ministry was "traditional" or "contemporary," but will ask, "Was it biblical?" Our ministry will either be in accord with His will or contrary to it. This Scripture expresses Christ's reference point for rightly building the church. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

THE CHURCH ON THE WRONG WAY

We could reasonably expect that after two thousand years of existence, the church should know and understand exactly what God intended her to be. Yet just the opposite seems to be true.⁵

It appears that the way of religion in American culture has become the way of the church—a wrong way. Jeffery Sheler concludes that culture is having its sway with Christianity instead of Christianity having a more decided influence on culture:

The social critics among us, and the consciences within us, increasingly wonder if we have lost our moral compass and forsaken our spiritual heritage. Yale professor Stephen Carter, in his recent book, *The Culture of Disbelief*, blames this cultural decay on what he believes has been a growing exclusion of religion from public life. "We have pressed the religiously faithful . . . to act as though their faith does not matter,"

⁵This confusion is not as apparent when one reads standard theology offerings or specific volumes dealing with the theology of the church, such as Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1974); Alfred F. Kuen, *I Will Build My Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1971); John MacArthur Jr., *Body Dynamics* (Wheaton: Victor, 1982); Earl D. Radmacher, *What the Church is All About* (Chicago: Moody, 1978). The problem arises in volumes that deal with translating one's theology into contemporary practices in the church or in those that ignore Scripture when establishing practices in the church.

Carter argues.⁶

Francis Schaeffer called this phenomenon "the great evangelical disaster." He succinctly summarized the situation:

Here is the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—namely *accommodation*: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age. First, there has been accommodation on Scripture, so that many who call themselves evangelicals hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches—truth not only in religious matters but in the areas of science and history and morality. As part of this, many evangelicals are now accepting the higher critical methods in the study of the Bible. Remember, it was these same methods which destroyed the authority of the Bible for the Protestant church in Germany in the last century, and which have destroyed the Bible for the liberal in our own country from the beginning of the century. And second, there has been accommodation on the issues, with no clear stand being taken even on matters of life and death.⁷

Encouragingly, the recent years have seen an increase of books calling the church back to the primacy of God and Scripture. They strongly warn that the church is slowly, but surely, being culturalized. For example, David F. Wells, the Andrew Mutch Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has recently written a landmark analysis of American

⁶Jeffery L. Sheler, "Spiritual America," *U.S. News and World Report* 116/13 (April 4, 1994):48.

⁷Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984) 37. Also see Harold Lindsell, *The New Paganism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) 211-32, where he asserts that the West is now in a "post-Christian" era of paganism, and then discusses the role of the church in this type of culture. For a decisive analysis of the battle between fundamentalism and liberalism in the early 1900s see J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), provides a historical background to Machen's era. James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), discusses the profile of late 20th-, early 21st-century evangelicalism. For further reading consult John Fea, "American Fundamentalism and Neo-Evangelicalism: A Bibliographic Survey," *Evangelical Journal* 11/1 (Spring 1993):21-30.

evangelicalism in the 1990s in which he notes,

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THEOLOGY from the life of the Church, and the orchestration of that disappearance by some of its leaders, is hard to miss today but, oddly enough, not easy to prove. It is hard to miss in the evangelical world, in the vacuous worship that is so prevalent, for example, in the shift from God to self as the central focus of faith, in the psychologized preaching that follows this shift, in the erosion of its conviction, in its strident pragmatism, in its inability to think incisively about the culture, in its reveling in the irrational.⁸

Wells argues that it was the influential and liberal preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, who popularized the twentieth-century ministry philosophy that begins with man's needs rather than God's will.⁹ He traces the lineage forward to Norman Vincent Peale and then to Robert Schuller.¹⁰ It further appears that Schuller has now significantly influenced Bill Hybels, currently the most visible evangelical proponent of a "church the unchurched" philosophy of ministry.¹¹ In a sense, Fosdick's philosophy of ministry lives on long after his death.

Noted historian George Marsden warns evangelicals of the encroachments of humanism on the church. He concludes that "while fundamentalists and their evangelical heirs have erected doctrinal barriers against theological liberalism, more subtle versions of similar sub-Christian values have infiltrated behind their lines."¹²

John MacArthur sees the church becoming like the world.¹³ In

⁸Wells, *No Place* 95.

⁹Ibid., 178. It is most interesting that Leith Anderson, et. al., *Who's in Charge?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1992) 100, identifies Fosdick as his mentor. Anderson, who is widely read and respected by a large segment of evangelicalism, also points to Fosdick as a preaching model in *A Church for the 21st Century* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1992) 213-14.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Bill Hybels on several occasions has been a prominent speaker at Robert Schuller's institutes for pastors. Like Fosdick, Hybels has a penchant for "needs based" preaching to reach the consumer in the pew as is evident in Bill Hybels, et.al., *Mastering Contemporary Preaching* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1989) 27.

¹²George Marsden, "Secular Humanism Within the Church," *Christianity Today* 30/1 (January 17, 1986):14I-15I. A "Christianity Today Institute" included this article under the title of "In the Next Century: Trends Facing the Church."

¹³John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993). Almost two decades ago, MacArthur wrote of the dangers then facing the church in "Church Faces

a positively provocative fashion, he compares the many similarities between the decline of the church in England during Spurgeon's time a century ago and the faltering American church in our day. MacArthur notes the parallel path and common distinction of spiritual deadness shared by the liberal modernists of a century ago and evangelical pragmatists today. They both have an unhealthy aversion to doctrine.

Os Guinness provides several probing analyses of the modern church and evangelicals.¹⁴ They include *The Gravedigger File*, *No God but God*, and *Dining With the Devil*. In these three works he writes about the secularization of the church, idolatry in the church, and the modern church growth movement, respectively.

"Selling Out the House of God?", a recent *Christianity Today* interview of Bill Hybels, illustrates the tensions existing in today's church.¹⁵ The increase of probing, hard questions that pastors want to ask this very visible, "consumer" oriented church pastor about his ministry basis and style occasioned this article. Our fear is that if the next generation takes the path Hybels now travels, it will eventually arrive at the same destination as the modernist movement did earlier this century in America.

Consider this recent warning:

Evangelical pastors and theologians can learn from the mainline experience of placing relevance above truth. We must avoid the lure of novelty and soft sell, which, we are told, will make it easier for moderns to believe. Methods may change, but never the message. . . . We are called to be faithful stewards of a great and reliable theological heritage. We have truths to affirm and errors to avoid. We must not try to make these truths more appealing or user friendly by watering them down. We must guard against a trendy "theological bungee-jumping" that merely entertains the watching crowd.¹⁶

Identity Crisis," *Moody Monthly* 79/6 (February 1979):123-26.

¹⁴Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983); Os Guinness and John Seel, eds., *No God But God* (Chicago: Moody, 1992); Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

¹⁵Michael G. Maudlin and Edward Gilbreath, "Selling Out the House of God?" *Christianity Today* 38/8 (July 18, 1994):20-25. Contrast Hybels' approach with the far more biblical course recommended by Bill Hull, *Can We Save the Evangelical Church?* (Grand Rapids: Baker/Revell, 1993). Douglas D. Webster, *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong With Marketing the Church?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992) provides an insightful analysis of the contemporary church's market orientation.

¹⁶James V. Heidinger II, "Toxic Pluralism," *Christianity Today* 37/4 (April 5, 1993):16-17.

Interestingly, this clear call to a biblically sound ministry does not come from the conservative wing of evangelism. Rather, it is a warning to evangelical churches from one who is attempting to bring revival within the liberal, main-line United Methodist Church. He cautions the church to avoid the "user friendly" route of church ministry because the end is predictable: within a generation or two, churches will lose their spiritual direction and life.

IDENTITY CRISIS

Due to a confusing maze of cultural attractions, the natural corollary to the church's spiritually disastrous detour from the biblical mainstream is a corresponding loss of pastoral identity and consequent debate over how to revise ministerial training. It is not surprising then, as the church succumbs to cultural and secular pressures, that biblically defined pastoral roles and the scripturally oriented content of ministerial training have experienced a serious challenge also.

Pastoral Identity

This confusion is not entirely new to the church. As early as the first century, Paul felt compelled to articulate carefully the role of the pastor. All succeeding generations have experienced this tension too, with the corresponding need to reaffirm the biblical absolutes of ministry. Culbertson and Shippee notice this ongoing tension:

Pastoral theology is for the most part a field without a clear definition: its precise meaning and component parts seem to vary widely from one denomination to the next and from one seminary to the next. The how-to of pastoral care and the component elements in the process of clergy character formation seem to be equally slippery. In all three fields, however, constitutive material seems to be taught either from a strictly scriptural base, or from a base of modern psychological and sociological theory as it has been appropriated by the church, or through a combination of scripture and modern scientific insight but rarely does the teaching of pastoral formation make direct reference to the fascinating history and tradition of the early church.¹⁷

¹⁷Philip L. Culbertson and Arthur Bradford Shippee, *The Pastor: Readings from the Patristic Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) xi.

H. Richard Niebuhr documented the confusion that prevailed during the early and middle twentieth century.¹⁸ Thomas Oden updated the dilemma into the 1980s.¹⁹ He laments that the entire twentieth century has evidenced confusion over the role of the church and the pastor.²⁰ Oden strongly calls for a return to Scripture in order to understand the pastoral office and role:

Scripture provides the primary basis for understanding the pastoral office and its functions. We will treat Scripture as the church's book, rather than as the exclusive turf of the historian or social theorist. Pastoral wisdom has lived out of the key *locus classicus* texts that have enjoyed a rich history of interpretation long before the advent of modern historical research. We are free to learn from and use that research without being handcuffed by some of its reductionist assumptions.

Pastoral theology lives out of Scripture. When the pastoral tradition has quoted Scripture, it has viewed it as an authoritative text for shaping both its understanding and its practice of ministry. We do not put Scripture under our examination, according to criteria alien to it, in order to understand ministry. Rather, Scripture examines our prior understandings of ministry. It puts them to the test.²¹

Ministerial Training

Redefining the church inevitably leads to redefining the pastoral role. The latter reorientation then spills over into pastoral training at the seminary level. Predictably, a seemingly endless flood of current literature is calling for radical restructuring of seminary education.

In 1990 *The Atlantic* published a striking general assessment of American seminaries. This comprehensive study concluded,

If they are to succeed, this generation of seminarians must, of course, be educationally and spiritually sound, politically aware, as conversant with demography as they are with morality. They must be sensitive to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, but they must not drive us up still another wall with their convictions. We have been flogged enough; we

¹⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956) 51.

¹⁹Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983).

²⁰*Ibid.*, x-xii.

²¹*Ibid.*, 11.

know our shortcomings. When our future clerics speak, we want to hear powerful yet measured voices bringing out the moral dimension of life, and not only the politics of the left wing of the Democratic Party or the right of the Republican, masquerading as religious belief.

We want them to be people who in some tiny way reflect the mercy and goodness of God we want to know, not only His judgment. We want them to be people who see the goodness in us that we have yet to unleash, the potential within us to transcend our differences. In the end, I think, we are looking for those who will help us find that voice deep within us which is not our own, but calls us to do what is right.²²

"Consumer-appeal" in both ministry and pastoral training clearly marks the conclusion to this quoted article and reflects much of the current literature.

A 1993 study commissioned by seven well-known American seminaries concluded,

The church, in order to maintain relevancy to its constituency, has had to devise new ways of 'doing' ministry or be faced with closing the doors. . . . This report . . . calls for a major restructuring of the seminary—form and function.²³

If we carry the consumer paradigm to its logical conclusion it will be brilliantly consistent with prevailing contemporary theories but sadly unscriptural. In effect it reasons, "What the people want, the church should provide. What the church provides, pastors should be trained to deliver." Taking it one step further, the ultimate result will be that "What pastors are trained to deliver, i.e., what the people want, the church will provide. When the church provides what the people want, people will want more." This will eventually create a virtually unstoppable cause and effect cycle that will render the American

²²Paul Wilkes, "The Hand That Would Shape Our Souls," *The Atlantic* 266/6 (December 1990):59-88.

²³Carolyn Weese, "Standing on The Banks of Tomorrow" (Granada Hills, CA: Multi-Staff Ministries, 1993):3, 53. Other recent pieces include Michael C. Griffith, "Theological Education Need Not Be Irrelevant," *Vox Evangelica* 20 (1990):7-19; Richard Carnes Ness, "The Road Less Traveled; Theological Education and the Quest to Fashion the Seminary of the Twenty-First Century," *The Journal of Institute for Christian Leadership* 20 (Winter 93/94):27-43; Bruce L. Shelly, "The Seminaries' Identity Crisis," *Christianity Today* 37/6 (May 17, 1993):42-44; Timothy C. Morgan and Thomas S. Giles, "Re-Engineering the Seminary," *Christianity Today* 38/12 (October 24, 1994):74-76.

church impotent and thus condemned by Christ.

However, before seminaries capitulate, they should study the history of seminaries and seminary education in America. Notable among many are Andover Seminary and Princeton Seminary, founded in 1807 and 1812, respectively.²⁴ Both started strong with seemingly unshakable biblical foundations, but with time and for various reasons, each succumbed to the demand to go beyond the Scriptures for both their doctrine and their practice. Conservatives agree that they long ago outlived their usefulness to the gospel ministry, because they shifted away from their initial high view of God and the Scriptures.

Any given seminary might effectively change many things to make itself more useful to the church and ultimately the cause of Christ, but its emphasis upon biblical truth as the core of the curriculum should never change. David Dockery, Vice President for Academic Administration at Southern Seminary, recently summed up seminary education for a new century like this:

We want to be able to teach the Scriptures in a creative and relevant way that models for our students that the Bible is normative and authoritative for the contemporary church—for their lives individually and for the church corporately. The Bible is an ancient document that is written to specific people in specific times in specific context. It nevertheless transcends those times and contexts because it is inspired by the Spirit of God, so it is both a divine and human document. It is a time-related document as well as an eternal document. Therefore, it speaks beyond its context and we want faculty who live out of deep commitment to the full truthfulness and complete authority of God's inspired word.

Biblical authority is a much maligned and misunderstood concept in our contemporary world. People ask how can you believe that a book written 2,000 years ago has authority and relevance where we are now? The answer is because of its source. Its source is not just in the prophets and the apostles; it is in God Himself, who has actually breathed out this

²⁴Steven Meyeroff, "Andover Seminary: The Rise and Fall of an Evangelical Institution," *Covenant Seminary Review* 8/2 (Fall 1982):13-24, and Mark A. Noll, "The Princeton Theology," in *The Princeton Theology*, ed. by David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 14-35, present convincing accounts of these two institutions. George C. Fuller, "Practical Theology: The State of the Art," in *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church*, ed. by Harvie M. Conn (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990) 109-28, adds to the discussion.

Word to us to study, to believe, and obey.²⁵

TAKING A BIBLICAL APPROACH

At The Master's Seminary, we unequivocally believe that Paul made an absolute assertion with undeniable implications when he wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). This passage not only teaches a high view of Scripture's authority, but also its sufficiency, especially in formulating ministry plans and priorities. It demands that we begin with God and the Bible rather than man and culture in order to understand God's will in ministry.

The ministry tensions, problems, and questions that our generation faces are not new as these biblical examples indicate. Malachi indicted Israel because they exchanged the glory of God for the way of the culture. Paul confronted the Corinthians and condemned the Laodicean elders. Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned against the proliferation of false shepherds in the OT, as did Peter and Jude in the New.

The contemporary pastor must pay close attention to the lessons of biblical history, for they will surely be repeated in his generation. Therefore when we ask, "What is a pastor to be and do?" we must look to God's Word for answers and not to the latest fads or theories that find their source more in society rather than in Scripture, or primarily in culture not Christ.

To be biblically specific, God has given several defining passages explaining who a pastor is to be and what a pastor is to do, e.g. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:1-5. But perhaps the most explicit books in the NT regarding the work of the ministry are 1 and 2 Thessalonians. A careful analysis of these "pastoral" epistles leads to this basic "ministry description." A pastor's primary activities include:

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| 1. Praying | 1 Thess 1:2-3; 3:9-13 |
| 2. Evangelizing | 1 Thess 1:4-5, 9-10 |
| 3. Equipping | 1 Thess 1:6-8 |
| 4. Defending | 1 Thess 2:1-6 |

²⁵David Dockery, "Ministry and Seminary in a New Century," *The Tie: Southern Seminary* 62/2 (Spring 1994):20-22.

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| 5. | Loving | 1 Thess 2:7-8 |
| 6. | Laboring | 1 Thess 2:9 |
| 7. | Modeling | 1 Thess 2:10 |
| 8. | Leading | 1 Thess 2:10-12 |
| 9. | Feeding | 1 Thess 2:13 |
| 10. | Watching | 1 Thess 3:1-8 |
| 11. | Warning | 1 Thess 4:1-8 |
| 12. | Teaching | 1 Thess 4:9-5:11 |
| 13. | Exhorting | 1 Thess 5:12-24 |
| 14. | Encouraging | 2 Thess 1:3-12 |
| 15. | Correcting | 2 Thess 2:1-12 |
| 16. | Confronting | 2 Thess 3:6, 14 |
| 17. | Rescuing | 2 Thess 3:15. |

Paul exemplifies the *character* of a pastor and how that character relates to ministry *conduct* (1 Thess 2:1-6). He describes the *nature* of pastoral leadership in terms of a mother (2:7-8), a laborer (2:9), a family member (2:10), and a father (2:11-12). Though these texts do not exhaust the subject, they unmistakably point to Scripture as the appropriate source from which to answer contemporary questions about ministry.

Christ's letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2—3 raise the relevant question, "If Christ were to write a letter to the American church in 1995, what would He say?" While this inquiry is purely hypothetical and will not happen because the time of written, divine revelation has passed, the first-century truths of Revelation 2—3 are still applicable to the twentieth-century church because they represent the unchanging mind of Christ in regard to His church. We know what He would *commend* and what He would *condemn*.

The bottom line is simply this: Will we seek to be fruitful in ministry by depending on the power of God's Word (Rom 1:16-17; 1 Cor 1:22-25; 1 Thess 2:13) and God's Spirit (Rom 15:13; 2 Tim 1:8) or on the power of man's wisdom? Consider how Paul instructed the Corinthian church, whose curious preoccupation with their culture paralleled the contemporary evangelical church's comparable fascination:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has

chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:26-31).

REDISCOVERING PASTORAL MINISTRY

The Master's Seminary remains convinced that God's Word provides the timeless defining paradigm for the nature and particulars of pastoral ministry. Scripture outlines what God wants a pastor to be and what God wants a pastor to do. Contemporary ministry in any generation needs to be shaped by biblical mandates.

We set before our peers the assertion that Christ must build His church His way (Matt 16:18).²⁶ If we desire to see God-pleasing fruit in our ministry, it must come from planting the good seed of God's Word in the rich soil of diligent pastoral labor according to the Scriptures.

For those who would question the content or conclusions of this essay, please do not misinterpret the discussion above. The statements in this essay are *not* calling for:

- a user *unfriendly* church
- a culturally *ignorant* church
- a seeker *insensitive* church.

We have no desire to "*unchurch the unchurched*" or to promote an irrelevant dinosaur of a church.

On the other hand, neither do we want to substitute the latest theories in sociology and psychology for the truth of Scripture. We do not want to confuse the common sense benefit of demographic statistics and analysis of culture with the far more important understanding of God's will for the church—both for Christians and non-Christians. We ardently desire to let the important consideration—God and His revealed will in Scripture—be the major focus.

A significant segment of evangelical churches and a growing proportion of evangelical literature seem to be distancing themselves from biblical priorities. Unbiblical imbalances among contemporary evangelicals are showing up in growing tendencies toward:

1. Overemphasis on man's reasoning and a corresponding underemphasis on God's revelation in Scripture.

²⁶John MacArthur, Jr., "Building His Church His Way," *Spirit of Revival* 24/1 (April 1994):21-24.

2. Overemphasis on human need as defined by man and a corresponding underemphasis on God's definition of man's need.
3. Overemphasis on earthly relevance and a corresponding underemphasis on spiritual relevance.
4. Overemphasis on the temporal side of life and a corresponding underemphasis on the eternal.
5. Overemphasis on satisfying contemporary culture and a corresponding underemphasis on God's pleasure.

Because of these escalating trends, the church is increasingly in danger of equating religion with Christianity, and making "going to church" equal with salvation. The church increasingly substitutes human power for God's power, and replaces talk that centers on God directly with mere peripheral talk about Him. The church increasingly confuses emotion with worship in Spirit and truth, and looks toward the cleverness of man's words rather than the power of the gospel. If the evangelical church remains on its present course, we fear that by popular demand the next generation may replace true Christianity with an impotent, idolatrous religion as did the ancient churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea.

More could be written on these present dangers and deceptions facing the evangelical church and ministry. However, we conclude by urging all of Christendom, both in America and around the world, to rediscover pastoral ministry as outlined in Scripture. Here you will find ministry that is biblically based, *not* demographically defined; Spirit led, *not* market driven; Christ centered, *not* man directed; and God focused, *not* consumer oriented.

BEING ABOUT THE FATHER'S BUSINESS

As Jesus engaged in His Father's work, so must we. An anonymous writer vividly captured the essence of pastoral stewardship before the Lord with this exhortation to do God's work God's way according to God's Word:

Stick with your work. Do not flinch because the lion roars; do not stop to stone the devil's dogs; do not fool away your time chasing the devil's rabbits. Do your work. Let liars lie, let sectarians quarrel, let critics malign, let enemies accuse, let the devil do his worst; but see to it nothing hinders you from fulfilling with joy the work God has given you.

He has not commanded you to be admired or esteemed. He has never bidden you defend your character. He has not set you at work to

contradict falsehood (about yourself) which Satan's or God's servants may start to peddle, or to track down every rumor that threatens your reputation. If you do these things, you will do nothing else; you will be at work for yourself and not for the Lord.

Keep at your work. Let your aim be as steady as a star. You may be assaulted, wronged, insulted, slandered, wounded and rejected, misunderstood, or assigned impure motives; you may be abused by foes, forsaken by friends, and despised and rejected of men. But see to it with steadfast determination, with unfaltering zeal, that you pursue the great purpose of your life and object of your being until at last you can say, "I have finished the work which *Thou* gavest me to do."