

COUNTING FOR SOMETHING?

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The other Sunday we were singing 'I want to serve the purpose of God in my generation'. The words are ambitious, and all the more so as each verse contains the statement: "I want to give my life for something that'll last for ever".

As I sang this song, I was impressed again by the underlying desire for significance in the kingdom of God. And there is nothing wrong with that. There is a place for wholesome ambition. The Apostle Paul was ambitious "to proclaim the Good News in places where Christ has not been heard" (Rom 15.20), and so planned to go to Spain (Rom 15.20). William Carey had similar ambition: 'Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God', he said.

As a young man I too was ambitious for Christ. I wanted to live my life for Christ. In the words of my baptismal text: "If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die" (Rom 14.8). And so by the age of 25 I was ordained, and for the last 35 years I have sought to serve Christ as a minister of the Gospel.

Clearly, there are other ways of serving Christ. Thank God for the many Christians who act as salt and light in their places of work. However, I cannot understand why today so few themselves for ministry in their early twenties. Why is it that the average age of ordination is around the late thirties mark? Forgive me for being provocative, but why do people take such a long time to hear the call to ministry. Where is the passion for Christ which caused so many of us thirty, forty, or indeed fifty years ago to offer ourselves as young people for training for Christian ministry?

Although I still retain that ambition to make my life count for something, there are times when I am overcome by self-doubt. Listening, for instance, to Rick Warren at Birmingham tell of the thousands he has baptised, I felt an 'also-ran'. Indeed, as that other Sunday I was singing, "I want to give my life for something that'll last forever", I thought: 'What, if anything, has there been in my ministry which will last for ever?'. In the light of eternity, all my so-called 'achievements' will be as nothing. For "we are like weeds that sprout in the morning, that grow and burst into bloom, then dry up and die in the evening" (Ps 90.3,4). But then another thought came: did not Jesus say that even just the giving of a cup of water will receive its reward (see Mark 9.41)?

I believe that it is right for us to want our lives to count for something. But ultimately our worth is not determined by what we do – for we are at best 'unworthy' servants (Lk 17.10). Rather our worth rather is determined by the love of Christ. To paraphrase George Macleod, the only reason we have individual significance is that Christ died for us!