

# **POWER FOR GOD'S SAKE**

**Power and abuse in the local church**  
**Paul Beasley-Murray**



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**Power and Abuse in the Local Church**

**by Paul Beasley-Murray**

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## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to Ian Ainsworth-Smith, Martin & Angela Wake, Margaret Magdalen, Morgan Derham, Margaret Bowker, with gratitude for their support.

## **CONTENTS**

### **Acknowledgements**

### **Foreword by Martyn Percy**

- 1. Power abuse in the church: facing up to the dangerous reality**
- 2. Power in today's church: gathering the data**
- 3. Power grid: analysing the context**
- 4. Power games: examining perceptions and experiences**
- 5. Power dimensions: sizing-up models**
- 6. Power incarnate: learning from the life of Jesus**
- 7. Power for the people: handling power with care**
- 8. Some final thoughts**

### **Bibliography**

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## FOREWORD

We all have experiences of power in one way or another. Language, concepts and encounters with power are a part of everyday life. Some may wield power, others may find themselves under it; some may think they know what the power of the church is, or claim to know the power of God directly. Can any book look at something that is so often taken for granted, and illuminate the subject? Indeed, what would a study of power tell us about ourselves, our theology, the religion to which we might subscribe, or to the one from which we readily flee.

Putting the issue in perspective, we can see how important the issue is when we turn to politics. Within a few days of taking office, Tony Blair was being accused by the Opposition of having become ‘power-mad’. The occasion for the accusation was his transformation of Prime Minister’s question time. The reactions ranged from allegations of arrogance to amateur diagnoses of megalomania. To be sure, the change in format of Prime Minister’s question time appears to have been achieved with the minimum of consultation. Those who revelled in the ‘bear pit’ atmosphere of the House of Commons on Tuesdays and Thursdays would now have less baying to do. The media, who fed off these regular and occasionally salutary encounters, were quick to express their reservations.

Yet behind this ‘story’ lies a deep and serious issue over the nature and exercise of power. The reduction in the number of ‘open season’ encounters a Prime Minister was now subject to in the Commons was seen by some as a retreat from democracy. Others felt that it represented a lack of accountability. From a different perspective, the Prime Minister’s question time was viewed by others as near pure theatre, and the time given over to the sessions was actually trivializing the parliamentary process. In other words, too much accountability over so many issues was actually obstructing governance and the overall effectiveness of a democratic programme.

Churches and their leaders are not immune from these dynamics, and Paul Beasley-Murray’s timely book explores the relationship between the power in churches and those who wield it. There is much food for thought here. What kind of ‘power model’ does Jesus connote to the would-be church leader? If a church is absolutist in its testimony to the power of God, does it follow that in its ecclesial formation the maxim ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely’ will eventually describe the leadership. How can churches be empowered by individuals without being overpowered by the same? What forms of theological and practical discernment can be brought to bear on the issues of power?

This book sets out to discuss the diversity and digressions of power from a first-hand perspective, but backed by some empirical research. This book focuses on the church, or rather churches, as the title – *Power for God’s Sake* – is intended to convey the point that there is not just one ‘church’ to discuss in relation to power. Different ecclesial bodies handle power in different ways, and the powers themselves encountered therein are often quite different. Yet all churches are subject to that subtle relationship between human controls and the divine mandates from which they are said to come. Power is something that is necessarily used and sometimes abused, in all churches.

There is nothing remarkable about these observations. Power in the church is both medicine and poison. The key to its rightful deployment depends on discernment, diagnosis, and

dosage. In its relationship to authority, order, charisma or revelation the identity and concept of 'power' is often lost in a confusing disarray of side-effects. Paul Beasley-Murray's book is a helpful corrective here, and it brings us back to one of the most fundamental and central themes in the Christian life. Without power there is no church, no witness, and nothing to witness to. Yet there is an irony here for the Christian, for the one who stands at the centre of all power demonstrated this by abrogating power, 'giving himself up to death'. So this is a necessarily sensitive and costly book to write, and to read. It is a call for the discernment and dispersal of power, for its redistribution, and for the naming of false and abusive powers. At the same time, it is not naive, and recognizes that ecclesial communities function with and for power – for God's sake.

An extraordinary feature of life in the late twentieth century is the amount of power that individuals can exert over one another. The nature of power often hides this. An apparently harmless and potentially empowering exercise such as a staff appraisal can quickly become disempowering through an indifferent assessment. The inability to listen to new and constructive ideas or consult with fellow workers can perplex and bewilder a work-force. Equally, power vacuums can create manifold problems, sometimes resulting in more serious difficulties than might arise from a single abusive manager. In political and ecclesial situations, it is sometimes better to have the devil you know rather than the seven you don't (Matthew 12.43-45).

All leaders in churches bear a serious responsibility here, and a charge. Beyond the immediate tasks of priesthood, pastoring, ministering or management, there has to be some reckoning with the revelation of God's power in Jesus Christ. This is sometimes in word and in deed – quite compelling. Yet it is never constraining in the sense that no-one is forced to have faith because of an encounter, or because of what they have witnessed. One of the intriguing features of Jesus' ministry and his handling of power is that people are given the space to respond at their own pace and in their own way. Indeed, such is God's respect for the created order and humanity that we are even allowed to reject Jesus, and to divest him of the most basic and precious power of all, namely life itself. So Jesus is both a testament to the power of God and also to the willingness of God to give up power. God does not coerce people, because domination is alien to love. The kind of power God offers and seeks is one that comes through relationality, in which God gives us the space to participate in his life, just as we are, to give him the space that he may participate in ours.

This is why leaders must stay in touch with those who have been called or chosen to lead. A sense of detachment and superiority is a failure of power, and a corruption of authority. Equally leaders must not become isolated from reality, but rather immersed in it, so that the exercise of power is always relevant and rightful. Power, when exercised, must give space and the possibility for an appropriate response in order that relationships can flourish. Power that does not empower and produce dialogue is on the path to totalitarianism.

Outside the town of Lewes in ~Sussex there is a monument built to commemorate Simon de Montfort and his victory over Henry III that laid the foundation for the first parliament in this country. On it is the following inscription: 'Law is like fire, for it lights as truth, warms as charity, burns as zeal. With these virtues as his guide, the king will rule well'. Some kind of rule may well be necessary in all churches, at least until the true kingdom comes. In the meantime, truth, charity, warmth and zeal – these remain the true antidotes to the perils of power.

Dr Martyn Percy was formerly Chaplain and Director of Theology and Religious Studies at Christ's College, Cambridge. He is now Director of the Lincoln Institute for the Study of Religion and Science, University of Sheffield.

## CHAPTER 1. POWER ABUSE IN THE CHURCH: FACING UP TO THE DANGEROUS REALITY

### 1. *Dishonesty in high places*

"Churches can be cockpits of conflict; deeply neurotic places where people play power games and deny the reality of their own circumstances. I have witnessed these things and been part of the strange collusion that allows churches to be extremely dishonest places"<sup>1</sup>.

Christian people suffer from a considerable degree of naivety, if not self-inflicted blindness. We know that power games are a reality in the world of politics and in the world of business, but we do not want to accept that they are also a reality in the church. Yet why should the church in this respect be any different from the world? If all the other sins of the "flesh" are to be found in the church, then why not this one? Any intelligent reading of the New Testament would reveal that there were power struggles right from the beginning of the life of the early church. One recalls not only James and John, anxious to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus in his glory, but also the Judaizers who wanted to impose their way of doing church on the Gentile converts, the bickering factions at Corinth.... It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that within every strand of the New Testament we can find evidence of power struggles affecting the life of God's people. Yet time and again we seem to close our eyes to this underlying reality, and many of us seem to prefer to live with an "ideal" picture of the church.

### 2. *Power in the raw*

Of course there are overt and organised power struggles in churches, which hit the national headlines, and which are therefore recognised by all and sundry.

In the North American scene one such public power struggle took place in the early 1990s at First Baptist Church Dallas, described by some as the most influential church in America. *Too Great a Temptation: The Seductive Power of America's Super Church* is the title of the book Joel Gregory wrote after his losing the battle with W.A. Criswell. It's a searingly honest and painful account, revealing the power, the politics and the hypocrisy which not only plagued that church, but which plague many others too. The book's concluding six pages should be compulsory reading for all church leaders, both ordained and unordained. From his own bitter experience Gregory came to see that

"The church... is an institution divine in its original foundation but tethered to this celestial ball by every frailty to which humans are subject. Covetousness, littleness, jealousy, lust for power, ego, sacrilege, and a hundred other demons all lurk within the hallways...

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Holloway in *Churches And How To Survive Them* (HarperCollins, London 1994) by Richard Holloway & Brice Avery, xiv.



The church on earth at its best is a crippled institution that God may elect to use for His purposes. The divinization of the church in an egotistic triumphalism denigrates the very purpose for which it is founded. After all, its founder died on the cross between two felons. Out of his weakness came strength and out of His death came life. Humanity does not consider Jesus Christ its centerpiece because he behaved like the CEO of a gigantic ecclesiastical corporation. He washed the feet of others; He did not trample them under His own in the name of God"<sup>2</sup>.

In Britain probably the most well-known power struggle has been the fight between the Dean, Brandon Jackson, and the Canons of Lincoln Cathedral. Time and again this ongoing battle hit the national headlines. Significantly this long-running saga, apparently resolved with the resignation of Brandon Jackson in the summer of 1997, had roots which go way beyond the loss-making exhibition of the Cathedral's copy of the Magna Carta in Australia in 1988. According to the official report of Brian Thorne and Kathleen Baker, who were brought in by the Bishop of Lincoln to act as mediators between the protagonists, the conflict, marked by "the presence of fear and rage within the group and of a sense of intolerable pain", actually has its roots in the distant past. The report speaks of historic myths and "powerful unconscious forces at work" and says: "These basic assumptions have probably permeated the Lincoln environment for centuries and they operate in complete opposition to the spirit of the cathedral statutes, which require collegiality and co-operation based on an atmosphere of trust".<sup>3</sup>

Here we have a salutary reminder that unless major power struggles are properly dealt with, the seeds of their destructiveness may spill over from one generation to another. To put it in different terms, institutional 'viruses', as it were, can develop, with the result that although the players may change, the struggle does not. Hence the phenomenon, seen in certain local churches, whereby one minister after another leaves that church in unhappy circumstances. There is an abusive corporate mind-set (heart-set?) which desperately needs attention.

But to return to First Baptist, Dallas, and Lincoln Cathedral. Although these churches may be exceptional in the way in which the clerical wrangling has been made so damagingly public, the infighting itself is not so exceptional. Struggles for power and influence are the bread-and-butter diet of many a church, even though such struggles carry pious labels.

Not all power games, of course, involve power struggles between ordained ministers. Power struggles take place at various levels. For instance, in some churches ministers are pawns in the hands of their church boards. Gerald Coates, the leader of the 'Pioneer' group of 'New' churches, once caricatured the life of many a Baptist church when he wrote: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you- resist the deacons and they will fly at you"<sup>4</sup>. As another wit put it, "Deacons can make even Herod look compassionate"!

Sometimes ministers become the victims of a small but powerful faction within the church. One example of Anglican in-fighting which hit the national press was the power struggle between clergy and laity at Selby Abbey, which brought about the resignation of three vicars within six years. A former Vicar of Selby, Rev Peter Dodd, said: "At Selby Abbey there is a

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<sup>2</sup> Joel Gregory, *Too Great A Temptation* (The Summit Group, Fort Worth, Texas, 1994) 324.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, Saturday 30th November 1991

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Coates, *What On Earth Is This Kingdom?* (Kingsway, Eastbourne 1983)

tiny minority who would appear to be twisting how they would define the will of God to achieve their own personal ends and desire for status. There is a vociferous, small group within the Abbey who are determined to have their own way at whatever personal cost to the vicar".<sup>5</sup> This Anglican example of clergy victimisation can be paralleled many times over in any and every denomination. The only difference between Selby Abbey and other churches is the high profile it received.

On other occasions it is not the ministers who are abused, but the members of the church who are abused. They are abused in the sense that power is perverted, people are manipulated, families are divided, and casualties abound. An unhealthy dependence of members on the leadership develops and ultimately creates total spiritual confusion in their lives. The leaders of such churches so mesmerise their followers that, for a while at least, their leadership is accepted without question. One thinks for instance of the People's Temple led by Jim Jones, who was responsible for the suicide and murder of some 900 of his members in Jonestown, Guyana; or of the Branch Davidians led by David Koresh, many of whose adherents died in the siege of Waco in 1993. However, such abuses of power are also to be found in more orthodox churches.

Some of the more charismatic community churches have been particularly prone to authoritarian leadership, manipulation, excessive discipline and spiritual intimidation<sup>6</sup>. An early membership handbook emanating from the "Harvestime" Restoration group of churches based in Bradford, put submission to the leaders of the church on the same level as submission to God. In this handbook Hebrews 13.17 with its injunction to "obey your leaders and submit to them" was paralleled with James 4.7 with its call to Christians to "submit" themselves "to God", with the impression being even that there is little difference between "submission" to the elders and "submission" to God<sup>7</sup>. But there is a difference, of course. Human leaders are fallible, but God is infallible.

As far as more main-line churches are concerned, one can point to the spell-binding power exercised by the Rev Chris Brain, the Sheffield vicar who in 1986 set up the rave-style "Nine O'Clock Service" until after revelations of a wide-ranging abuse he was removed from his post in 1995. According to Roland Howard, "Brain's manipulative techniques with those he was close to were astounding. He had the ability to create slavish dependence even with the strongest, best-balanced and most intelligent people...He oozed charisma, and his jaw-dropping service conferred an aura of mystery and power".<sup>8</sup>

Sadly, time and again power has been misused and people have been abused in Christian churches and institutions. The travesty is that power has been exercised as though it were for God's sake, even although the real underlying issues may have had nothing to do with God himself. (To be fair, it is not only Christians who have been guilty of acting out of false motives. Members of the helping professions in general can likewise be unconsciously motivated by a lust for power, while appearing to operate under a cloak of objective and

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<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, Friday July 12th 1996

<sup>6</sup> See Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids 1992).

<sup>7</sup> *Belonging To An Anointed Body* (privately printed, no date) 20

<sup>8</sup> Roland Howard, "The Raving Reverence", *Sunday Times Magazine* 25th August 1996. See also Roland Howard, *The Rise And Fall Of The Nine O'Clock Service* (Cassell, London 1996).

moral rectitude<sup>9</sup>.) To make matters worse, because Christian faith is a matter of life and death, there is often a peculiar intensity surrounding power and power struggles in the church. The bitterness of Christian in-fighting is to be experienced to be believed. Would that God could at times be left outside the situation!

Many have been deeply wounded. The wounds have been so deep and the pain so intense that large numbers have left the church altogether. Indeed, it is not simply those who have been abused who have left, but also those who have seen friends and loved ones abused. This experience of the abuse of power in the church has been so devastating that many have given up on God altogether. Others may still retain their faith in God, but although they may not have given up on God, they most certainly have given up on his people. And who would blame them? In the words of one placard: "Those who make it hardest to be a Christian in this world are often the other Christians".

Furthermore, such power games within the church have all too often seriously hindered the church in its mission and growth. According to Lyle Schaller, a distinguished American church growth consultant, in the USA

"On any given day in perhaps three-quarters of all churches the ministry of that congregation is reduced significantly as a result of non-productive conflict. In perhaps one fourth of all churches that internal conflict is so sufficiently severe that it must be reduced before the parish can redirect its energies and resources towards formulating new goals and expanding its ministry"<sup>10</sup>.

Indeed, the mission of the church is not just affected by mis-directed and mis-spent energy. The very fact that power games are being played is a negative witness in itself to those outside the church. Warring and abusive factions in the church undermine the credibility of the Christian faith.

Power for God's sake is a serious problem. It is a serious problem not just in a few isolated spots, but in the church as a whole. Carol McCarthy, an experienced Baptist minister now working within London's inner-city, is surely right when she wrote:

"I would say that in these days, the big unrecognised temptation in the Church is power.... Power is alluring and addictive and some of those who are most susceptible are those most devout and faithful in church work. Once you have had a place in the Church, you can't do without it; once you have had influence, it's hard to withdraw. Those who fain would serve God best may be most deeply wounded. Unless we recognise this and face up to it, life in our churches may be stifled. I don't describe this as a sin but a temptation for those who are tempted to hold on to power, but certainly didn't begin their service with that motivation. Power is captivating and we must wake up to it"<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> See Adolf Guggenbuehl-Craig, *Power In The Helping Professions* (Spring Publications, Dallas, Texas 1971).

<sup>10</sup> Lyle E. Schaller in the Foreword to *Leadership And Conflict* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 1982) by Speed Leas.

<sup>11</sup> Carol McCarthy, "Ministry In The Local Church", *Baptist Ministers Journal* 250 (April 1955) 16

### 3. *The psycho-dynamics of power*

The insidious nature of the abuse of power in church life is well illustrated in a powerfully perceptive personal communication sent to me by Carol Bulkeley. Both because she is not a minister as also because of her training in psycho-dynamics, her reflections bring out a dimension of the abuse of power not always fully appreciated by those in church leadership. Although somewhat lengthy, with her permission I reproduce the communication in full:

"The most damaging abuse of power is that which happens unconsciously, whereby those misappropriating the power may well be unaware of their actions or of the repercussions. No one is immune - indeed, quite often it is those who are most well-meaning and concerned for others who fall prey because it is a learnt pattern developed from the primary care-givers around them in their formative years: i.e. the authority figures that made up their childhood in the home, church and school. These are the impressionable foundational years when we absorb unquestioningly the attitudes of those around us, incorporate them into our belief system and only later are able to challenge, review, and reframe if necessary. The difficulty for many of us is that abusive patterns of relating feel 'normal' because, of course, in the world in which we developed that *was* normal. If such patterns begin to work against us rather than for us, then major rethinking has to happen. The process of challenge and change is demanding and difficult, but opens up vistas of unimagined beauty and joy in relationship, all of which ease the pain involved.

"At the heart of all abuse is the misuse of power. It is about relating in ways which in some way diminish the other, rendering them to some degree impotent and powerless. It is about manipulation and control, whereby we have a strong unconscious investment in needing others to share our beliefs. It becomes irrational and important to us that others share and adopt our view - otherwise our defence is threatened and insecurity abounds. We may acknowledge at an intellectual level that difference within the church is a healthy and enriching dynamic, and yet at an emotional level this can feel immensely threatening. The danger for any with positions of power within the church is that it will consciously or otherwise be misused. Few would ever want to - yet it happens.

"One of the most subtle and damaging abuses of power is to discourage the thinking capacity within the flock. After all, where there is free thought, anything might happen! It happens through people being told what is acceptable and what isn't, and any errant sheep that deviate by being different soon know they've stepped out of line. Of course it has to be recognised that sheep that stay together, meekly following one another, are very much easier to shepherd, but in the process they lose their individuality. This poses a real dilemma for shepherd and sheep alike. Living under the constraints of control can feel stifling and inhibiting, yet total freedom produces mayhem. Maybe Jesus shows us the way, leading us as he did by love which respected the other and the decisions they chose to make, some of which must have grieved his heart.

"Respect is a missing ingredient where the abuse of power is operating - respect for the worth of another and their right to their opinion. Children who have never been allowed or encouraged to think become robots: i.e. they are obedient compliant

children who do whatever they are told out of fear of losing the acceptance they crave, but who in the process lose the capacity to think. They become incapable of making any decisions for fear of getting it wrong, because they've never been allowed or encouraged to - with the result that their own unique potential gets buried deep inside them, lost to themselves and the world at large. These people as adults panic when asked what *their* opinion is - they honestly do not know, because they've lost the capacity to form an opinion.

"Churches - sadly - seem to attract adult-children, searching for a community that feels "safe" because it replicates the atmosphere of their childhood. All the while they are being told what to do, what's acceptable and what isn't, they feel very safe and secure... until through the preaching and teaching they begin to grow up and begin to think. Then the fun really begins! It works both ways - those that want to remain emotionally "children" feel very threatened as soon as change of any kind is in the air or as soon as they have to make a decision. Equally those that develop in maturity no longer wish to be treated like children, being told what to do etc. My own view is that we need to lean on the side of encouraging growth and 'hold' the anxieties and fears that growth involves. Hence the importance for people to feel their opinion is valued. Only then do they grow in confidence sufficiently to eventually enable them to take a few risks. We have to create an atmosphere of safety and total acceptance, whereby people will sense at a deep level that their opinion is authentic. Where this is a new experience for some, the fear attached to the vulnerability attached to taking that risk is enormous and cannot be over-estimated. For many the church family may be the first place where they learn "It's OK to be me". That is an immense privilege for us, but also an awesome responsibility, to ensure that we don't undermine them. We may not again be given another opportunity to undo the damage. This is after all the unconditional love God extends to us and which we should mirror, but because all of us to a greater or lesser degree grew up never really believing it, it takes us the rest of our lives to get beyond our intellect into our heart and then live in accordance with it.

"Very often the abuse of power is seen in only its overt context as physical violence or obvious sexual abuse. Damaging though these manifestations are, in some respects they are less destructive in the sense that they are obvious and recognisable, and if the individuals concerned are able to acknowledge and ask for help, a healing process can be set in motion. However, covert forms of abuse are particularly destructive and damaging, undermining people's integrity and self-worth, causing them to doubt their own reality and perceptions, causing them to deny the validity of their own feelings and insights. Power abuse within the church is like a cancer that devours healthy cells, causing a sickness which if not treated will be 'nigh unto death'. It is a serious problem in any community from the cradle to the grave, which needs to be addressed in the first place through raising the awareness. Otherwise we are perpetually sick communities that are a denial of the life in all its fullness that Jesus embodied. Churches are forever trying to proclaim 'the Good News' - until its members live it and experience it, there's little hope of anyone else believing it.

"I suppose a pertinent question church communities need to ask of themselves is: "Does my experience of God *feel* like Good News? or does it have more of a feel of a prison sentence about it? and if so does this say something about God and his demands, or is it more about my perception of God? Does my faith liberate, energise

and release me, or does it screw me up?" Where faith constricts and binds and paralyses, we need to ask ourselves: "Who's controlling me - God or others?" So often it seems people are not in fear of God - it's what *others* will think and that seems endemic in the church.

"The abuse of power is about divesting others of their power. It is about situations which *seem* to provide no choice. Fear and anger will always be around where power abuse is operating and in that climate conditions for personal growth are severely limited. Power abuse, because it robs people of their power to some degree, will to the same degree render people impotent. In bald terms this reduces them to robot-status - which makes for easy shepherding but lonely leadership".

#### 4. *The 'power' project*

Power is a very real issue church. What's more, it is a dangerous issue in the church, precisely because it is all too often unrecognised. It is this conviction which provides the motivation for the writing of this book. Initially I thought that I might detail some of my own experiences of the abuse of power. Some of them are pretty hair-raising! However, fascinating as personal and anecdotal experience may be, there are always dangers in generalising from such experiences.

I looked around to see what people had written on the subject. I thought that I might be able to interact with some of the pertinent literature. To my amazement, within the British scene at least, there was virtually nothing.

In 1986 *The Religion of Power*, a highly readable paperback by Cheryl Forbes, hit the British Christian book shops, but this was in fact a British reprint of an American book first published in 1983<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, although highly relevant, its primary focus was not on the local church.

In 1983 *Freedom and Discipleship: Your Church and your personal decisions* by Jerram Barrs was published, but the focus here was on church discipline and "heavy shepherding", and it was concerned primarily with the abuse of power within the renewal movement<sup>13</sup>.

In 1996 Martyn Percy's *Words, Wonders and Power* appeared, but this masterly review of contemporary Christian fundamentalism and revivalism is primarily an analysis of the Wimber phenomenon<sup>14</sup>. Martyn Percy's most recent contribution to the subject of power has been a collection of essays published in 1997 and entitled

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<sup>12</sup> *The Religion Of Power* published in the UK by Marc Europe of Bromley, Kent, was originally published in 1983 by the American publishing house Zondervan.

<sup>13</sup> Jerram Barrs, *Freedom and Discipleship: Your Church And Your Personal Decisions* (IVP, Leicester 1983). In the USA the title was changed to *Shepherd And Sheep: A Biblical View Of Leading And Following* (IVP, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders And Power: Understanding Contemporary Christian Fundamentalism And Revivalism* (SPCK, London 1996).

*Power And The Church*<sup>15</sup>, but again the focus has been particular on fundamentalist and charismatic groups.

In terms of mainline British local church life, there seemed to be nothing on the use and abuse of power in the local church.

This finding was reinforced after spending a number of days in the summer of 1995 combing the resources of the Cambridge University Library. It became clear that this is virgin territory as far as Britain is concerned. No serious work has been done in this area.

In the light of all this I realised that if I were to make a contribution in this area I would need to assemble my own hard data. Instead of relying on my own experience, I somehow I needed to be able to draw upon the experiences of others. Hence the resulting power survey.

For, interesting as personal and anecdotal experience may be, there is no substitute for the gathering of hard data. Only on the basis of such evidence can one begin to make generalisations regarding the use and abuse of power in church life. However, if I wanted hard data, then I would have to obtain it at first hand.

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<sup>15</sup> Martyn Percy, *Power And The Church: Ecclesiology In An Age Of Transition* (SPCK, London 1997).

## CHAPTER 2. POWER IN TODAY'S CHURCH: GATHERING THE DATA

### 1. *Responses to the survey proposal*

In the summer of 1995 I sent letters to a number of academics seeking their advice on how I might go around gaining the hard data I needed for my research. I wrote:

"The longer I am in ministry the more convinced I am that time and again local churches (as indeed Christian institutions!) are engaged in power struggles. On the one hand, there are ministers who are abusing their power, whether in the way in which they exercise leadership within the congregation as a whole, or in the way in which they abuse trust in terms of their relationships with children and/or members of the opposite sex. On the other hand, many ministers are abused by their congregations - hence the increasing number of enforced terminations of ministry in the Free Churches. However, it is not just a matter of ministers v congregations. Local churches are made up of diverse power groups - for example, deacons on the one hand, and AAEOs (Angry Alienated Ex-Old Leaders) on the other hand - as also of individual power-brokers.

I believe that there is room for a major contribution in this area. As far as I am aware, very little in this country has been written on the subject of power within the church.

In the absence of any hard data I am proposing to conduct a survey of ministers and other representative "lay" church leaders on the basis of a detailed questionnaire. In this survey I hope to take a wide-ranging look at the use and abuse of power in local church life by examining the attitudes of both ministers and churches toward the use of power. I intend to probe such areas as ministerial ambition, the understandings and expectations in ministry with corresponding understandings of success and failure, personality and leadership styles, the relationship between power and authority, the various types of power, structures of power and authority, the various types of power, structures of accountability, the process of change, the handling of conflict and conflict resolution, the degree of honesty and openness in relationships, and the abuses of power by ministers and churches.

Although some years ago I did a survey of 350 English Baptist churches testing out some American hypotheses relating to church growth, I am conscious that on this occasion I would be dealing not so much with "facts" as with "attitudes". This in turn would therefore necessitate a good deal of care in framing the right questions.

It is at this point that I would seek your advice. First of all, are there issues you feel I would need to look at which I do not appear to have thought of? Indeed, are there books and/or articles which you feel I should read at this early stage? Secondly, is there any competent sociologist you could point me to, who is used to drafting questionnaires and who would be sympathetic to the area I propose to investigate? Clearly some understanding of church life would be necessary. Thirdly, would you be aware of any funds into which I might be able to tap to cover some of the costs involved in this project?"



Most of the replies I received were encouraging, in the sense that they all acknowledged that here was an area of interest and of concern. For example, one principal of a theological college wrote: "Recent conversations with people suggest to me that there is an urgent need to explore the issue further". "The project that you have in mind sounds an intriguing one" replied a Cambridge don.

A senior academic whose expertise includes the sociology of religion likewise strongly supported my engaging in this area of proposed research: "The questions you raise are very crucial ones for churches - and yet seldom discussed for obvious reasons. I suspect that as churchgoing continues to decline in Britain so some of the more dysfunctional sides of those few who do still go to church will become more apparent. A rather depressing thought... I am sure that research in this area should be done, but I suspect that many churches will be very suspicious of it"

A distinguished American church growth consultant to whom I had also written, replied at some length:

"I can only be supportive of any efforts you would make about dishonest uses and abuses of power within congregational systems. Within the past ten days I have been privileged to be a consultant within two larger congregational systems, where power was clearly being abused. The brunt of the abuse was the senior pastor.

The first was a Jewish synagogue... where I spent a week covering and dehumanizing the thrust of power. Both the senior rabbi and his associate had been in the congregation about ten years. At this juncture in their history, the persons in power positions on the executive committee of their Board of Trustees decided they had a distinct liking for the associate Rabbi and a distinct dislike for the senior Rabbi. To be sure, the senior Rabbi is not without fault, and has certainly shot himself in the foot and during some very key times. Nonetheless, I found him to be a very talented, capable and committed Rabbi. It is my sense of things, that had I not intervened in this week, that he would have been out of there within six months. Even with this timely intervention, it is touch and go whether he will be able to sustain his ministry in that place.

Similarly, I was involved for two days in a large Lutheran congregation... This situation also involved a capable senior and associate pastor. The associate, being female, was placing some clear pressure on the senior pastor, wanting more elbow room for an expanded ministry. The senior pastor, male, had just endured a series of crises in his personal life. I believe this caused him to be quite scattered, resulting in some key mistakes he made in his ministry related to last minute efforts he made in trying to press forward some of his agenda. Once again, the executive committee of the board, a group of highly capable business administrators, found themselves dealing with this situation by moving into the pastor's territory and actually assuming responsibility for some of the day-to-day operations of the congregation. As a group of power people, they clearly intimidated the senior pastor, who felt himself back down, one side from the female associate and from the other side to an aggressive administrative board. I discovered that the whole church council were also miffed at the way in which the executive council had moved in and made decisions on behalf of the congregation, squeezing out the pastor. Also the church council members would

not admit that there was a power struggle going on between the senior pastor and the executive committee. All this was having a great emotional impact on the pastor, who was acting out in even more strange ways.

I believe it goes without saying that whenever you have more than three people in some kind of intentional community, you are going to have a political community, hence, power dynamics. I hope your research and book would acknowledge this, then take it a step further to the clear abuses that can take place within religious systems. I would concur that there are some clergy who simply through the power of their persona and their position abuse lay people".

Unfortunately, when it came to practicalities, little help was on hand from most of those to whom I had written. Certainly no money was on offer!

## 2. *The involvement of Linda Jones and Partners*

It was at this point that I encountered a piece of good fortune. One of my church members - Bert Thrift - indicated that he was willing and interested in assisting me in my research. This offer of help proved to be of crucial importance. For although Bert Thrift had no academic expertise in the area of my proposed research, he is a qualified statistician, a Member of the Market Research Society, and had for many years run a highly successful market research business of his own. What's more he is semi-retired and therefore had time to offer. Here was an ideal person to help me conduct my research on a scientific basis.

As I shared my ideas and my enthusiasm, Bert Thrift realised that we needed further help. As a result he introduced me to his daughter-in-law, Linda Jones, who runs her own independent market research firm - Linda Jones and Partners - registered by the Market Research Society and based in Orford, near Woodbridge, in Suffolk.

As I alluded in my letter of enquiry cited above, over 25 years ago, together with Alan Wilkinson, then Administrator of the Manchester Business School, I had been involved in a major questionnaire-based survey of over 350 English Baptist Churches, in which we had sought to test out some American hypotheses regarding church growth<sup>16</sup>. Although in many ways a most complicated exercise, in which we had used what was then the largest computer in the North West of England to gather together a vast amount of statistical information, this church growth research now seemed relatively straight-forward compared to what we wanted to do now. For in the late 1970s Alan Wilkinson and I had been dealing primarily with numbers, whereas now my research into power involved attitudes.

Is it possible to conduct an investigation of people's attitudes on the basis of a questionnaire-based survey? Bert Thrift and Linda Jones believed it was. So with their encouragement I went ahead and produced a long list of questions which I wanted to ask. Bert Thrift and Linda Jones took these questions and turned them into a professional questionnaire.

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<sup>16</sup> This survey was later written up and published by the Bible Society in 1980 under the title *Turning The Tide: An assessment of Baptist Church Growth in England*.

### 3. *The pilot survey*

However, before, such a questionnaire could be circulated, it needed first to be tested, to discover if we were indeed asking the right questions. So in the autumn of 1995 Linda conducted a pilot survey of five ministers - two young Anglicans, and three senior Free Church ministers (two Baptists and one Methodist. The survey should also have included a URC minister, but because of the pressure of his other commitments, he dropped by the wayside). The pilot survey involved sending each of the ministers the draft questionnaire, which was then followed up by Linda with a personal in-depth interview of each minister.

The results of the survey were fascinating. In her report Linda Jones wrote:

"It is fair to say that all respondents seem to be in agreement that power is a problem in the church, and can cite many examples of themselves being at the *receiving* end of power abuse, either from the congregation, the deacons/officials or indeed the hierarchy above them.

What they are less able to recognise is their own abuses of power. Some appreciate that they have probably overstepped the mark in the past, but feel they can justify this as it was for 'the good of the church' rather than their own personal ends. Others feel that their church needs a strong leader, and as such it is more difficult to draw the line between where leadership ends and power begins".

On the basis of this pilot survey the questionnaire was revised. In particular, we sought to sharpen up some of the questions to help respondents recognise and confront issues. Clearly all this took time - not least because all of us had other commitments to see to. So it was not until the spring of 1996 that we were in a position to send out the revised questionnaire.

In the process of redrafting and revising the questionnaire we naturally found ourselves adding questions we wanted to ask, but also we found ourselves having to remove questions. It was not an easy task making the final selection. Ideally we would have liked to have asked twice, if not three times, as many questions as we actually asked. However, we were constrained by costs of postage and printing, and perhaps even more by the probability that the longer the questionnaire, the less likely people would be to fill in and return the questionnaire.

### 4. *The Richard Baxter Institute For Ministry*

But to whom should the questionnaire be sent out? Ideally it would have been great to have sent out the questionnaire to every minister in every denomination. But where would the funds have come for such an exercise? The solution we arrived at was to take as a sample the mailing list of the Richard Baxter Institute For Ministry (RBIM)<sup>17</sup>.

Richard Baxter, from whom the RBIM draws its inspiration, exercised a remarkably fruitful ministry in Kidderminster during the heady days of the Civil War and of the Restoration. He

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<sup>17</sup> The Richard Baxter of Institute for Ministry has since been renamed as Ministry Today UK

is best known for his book, *The Reformed Pastor*, which although published in 1656, remains a classic textbook for Christian ministry. It is perhaps worth noting that the term 'reformed' was not a theological label - Baxter was a man with broad sympathies and was above all concerned for spiritual 'renewal'. With great insight he once wrote: "All churches either rise or fall as the ministry doth rise or fall - not in riches or worldly grandeur, but in knowledge, zeal, and ability for their work". Or, rephrasing the sentiments in modern language: 'The key to the health and growth of the churches is its leaders'.

The RBIM, founded only in 1995, is an interdenominational organisation with members from all the non-Roman mainline denominations. The aim of the RBIM is "to promote excellence in the practice of ministry, enabling ministers and pastoral leaders to become increasingly effective in the mission to which Christ has called them". Along with regular day conferences, in conjunction with the Bible Society it also publishes three times a year a journal, entitled *Ministry Today*<sup>18</sup>.

It so happens that I am the Chairman of the RBIM. It therefore was not too difficult to gain the permission of the Board of Trustees to give me access to the mailing list.

Although we recognised that there was a danger of a bias in such a self-selecting sample, nonetheless we felt that RBIM members, as ministers interested in the practise of ministry, might perhaps be more likely to be open and self-aware than other ministers, and might therefore be more willing to complete and return the questionnaires.

#### 4.1 *The question of confidentiality*

In order to encourage respondents to be open in their replies, confidentiality needed to be guaranteed. The survey was therefore formally commissioned by the RBIM Board of Trustees and carried out by Linda Jones and Partners of Orford. It was agreed that although I had originally commissioned the survey, I would not in fact see any of the returned questionnaires. Rather I would see only the statistical data as presented to me by Linda Jones and Partners. On the basis of this agreement Linda was therefore able to write the following in the letter which accompanied the questionnaires:

"We have been commissioned by the Richard Baxter Institute For Ministry to conduct a survey on leadership styles in the local church....

The immediate purpose of this research is to examine how ministers exercise leadership in their churches, and in particular to explore how they handle issues such as conflict and power in their day-to-day church life. Through theological reflection on the data gained, the intention is then to develop models for the use of power and authority which are rooted in the Biblical pattern for the people of God living their life together. In other words, the overall objective of this project is essentially practical and hopefully will benefit both churches and leaders, enabling them to engage more effectively in their ministry and mission. We anticipate the results of the

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<sup>18</sup> For more information about Ministry Today UK (formerly the Richard Baxter Institute For Ministry) see [www.ministrytoday.org.uk](http://www.ministrytoday.org.uk)

research will eventually be published - in the first place in *Ministry Today*, but also possibly in book form.

We believe this to be a very valuable survey and would greatly appreciate your co-operation. Can we assure you that your answers will be treated in strictest confidence, in accordance with the Market Research Society's Code of conduct. This means that no information that could identify you will be passed on to the commissioner of the survey - only the results of the survey as a whole"

#### 4.2 *The sample*

The sample mailed comprised 231 ministers in pastoral charge who were members of the RBIM. However, because we were conscious that our sample ran the risk of being somewhat small, we also included a further ministerial questionnaire in the mailing, in the hope that RBIM members might be willing to pass them on to a ministerial colleague. Furthermore, because, we believed it was not sufficient to simply send the questionnaire to ministers, we also included in our mailing a similar questionnaire to be filled in by two representative "lay" leaders of the minister's choosing (e.g. church warden, church secretary, church treasurer etc).

Each of the 231 ministers comprising the initial sample was therefore mailed a package consisting of three large envelopes containing the following:

Envelope I: Letter of explanation, the questionnaire, and a stamped addressed return envelope.

Envelope II: A second explanatory letter, two questionnaires (each with their own stamped addressed return envelope) to pass on to two of the officers in their church. These questionnaires were similar to the main questionnaire, but amended where necessary.

Envelope III: This envelope contained a further set of material found in Envelope I for the ministerial members of the RBIM to pass on to another colleague in another church in their area.

The questionnaires were sent out on 27th March 1996, and reminders were sent to non-respondent RBIM members on 18th April and 9th May. The survey was closed down at the end of May 1996.

#### 4.3 *Response*

Of the 231 ministers who were members of the RBIM, 116 ministers (50% of the sample) returned a questionnaire in full.

(A further 35 ministers who were members of the RBIM (15% of the sample) replied without completing the questionnaire: Of these ministers, 6 simply returned the blank questionnaire. The others gave various reasons for non-completion: lack of time (14); dislike of some of the questions (7); illness (3); another minister in the church had returned a questionnaire (2); only

been at church a short time (2); retired (1).

In other words, of the 231 ministers in the RBIM sample, 151 (65%) responded in one way or another. By comparison with other questionnaire-based postal surveys, this was a good response.

In addition a further 25 ministers, not members of the RBIM, responded, which brought the total sample of ministers in the survey up to 141.

As far as church officials were concerned, 120 replied. However, since we excluded from the survey officials whose minister had not responded, this gave us a sample figure of 112 church officials.

#### *4.4 The data gained*

Before examining the data, two points need to be made clear. First, that although the vast majority of respondents completed the questionnaire in great detail, there were inevitably those who did not answer every question. This explains why the percentages do not quite add up to 100%. Secondly, although I am responsible for the interpretation of the data, nonetheless Linda Jones and Partners have made certain that I have not misinterpreted the data provided.

## CHAPTER THREE: POWER GRID - ANALYSING THE CONTEXT

A grid may be defined as a supportive framework. In this chapter we shall examine in detail the framework of church life within which "power games" are played. The "power games" themselves are treated in chapter four. It has to be admitted that some of the analysis is not immediately relevant to my theme. Nonetheless, in view of the dearth of hard data about ministry in general, material has been included which is of more general interest to ministry. Even so, the general focus remains on the issue of power.

### 1. Classification Data

At the outset both questionnaires sought to gain some basic information regarding both the respondents and their churches.

#### 1.1 The Church

##### *Denomination*

Baptist churches	40%
Anglican	20%
URC/Congregational	20%
Methodist	8%
"Independents"	3%
"Other"	9%

In denominational terms this is not a representative survey. To a very large extent it focusses on the Free Churches - not surprisingly in so far as the RBIM had its initial roots in Baptist church life. Yet in the UK there are more Anglican clergy (13,543) than Free Church (11,251)<sup>19</sup>. In addition some 9000 Roman Catholic clergy are not all represented.

##### *Size of church*

Up to 150 people at Sunday service	67%
Over 150 people at Sunday service	32%

Because of our limited statistical base, we have found it convenient to use 150 as the cut-off point to distinguish between smaller and larger churches. We accept that in a wider context this distinction may be somewhat misleading. In a British context, for instance, a small church is normally classed as a church with a Sunday congregation of less than 50. In England some 36% of all churches have a weekly adult attendance of 50 or less.

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<sup>19</sup> *UK Christian Handbook 1996/1997 edition* (Christian Research, London SE9 2TZ) 240

### *Number of churches*

Ministers with pastoral oversight of just one church	65%
Pastoral responsibility for two churches	16%
Pastoral responsibility for three churches	6%
Pastoral responsibility for four churches	6%
Pastoral responsibility for five churches or more	4%

Most ministers had pastoral oversight of just one church. Nonetheless a considerable number had oversight of one or more churches.

### *Social class*

Churches mainly made up of manual/working class people	18%
Churches mainly made up of academic/professional people	33%
Churches equally divided between the two above groups	47%

The American church growth specialist, Peter Wagner, maintains that working class congregations mostly prefer strong leadership. However, we were not able to test this hypothesis.

We were able to test the occupation of the church officials. On the basis of an analysis of their returns, the church officials fitted into the following socio-economic groupings:

Class A	8%
Class B	26%
Class C1	23%
Class C2	3%
Class D	4%
Class E	4%

32% of church officials gave no information on this point: age analysis suggests this would largely have been because the respondents had retired. Nonetheless on the basis of the returns we can say that on socio-economic grounds the church officials did not exactly match their churches. Probably ministers tend to be more representative of their congregations, if the *Sunday Times* is right in describing the clergy as "middle-class men living in upper-class houses on a working-class income"<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand, the formal theological college education received by the vast majority of ministers probably alienates from the manual/working class even those ministers who had similar roots.

### *Theological Position*

The theological position of the churches varied, although the majority were clearly in the evangelical tradition. Such a response is unrepresentative of British churches in general. The Evangelical Alliance, for instance, reckons to speak on behalf of only some 4000

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<sup>20</sup> *Sunday Times*, 25 November 1984



churches<sup>21</sup>. The preponderance of Evangelical churches in this survey therefore betrays the roots of the Richard Baxter Institute For Ministry.

The responses were a little confusing in so far as respondents were allowed to tick more than one box - not least because some were responsible for more than one church. The responses were as follows:

75%	Evangelical
40%	Middle of the Road
33%	Charismatic
12%	Liberal
6%	Fundamentalist
2%	Catholic.

## 1.2 The Minister

### *Sex*

Men	97%
Women	3%

The vast majority of ministers were male - in line with the inbuilt male bias still present in ordained Christian ministry.

It would be an interesting exercise to compare the way in which women handle the power issue in comparison with men. Women tend to be much more perceptive and are often able to exercise their ministry much more effectively than many men. They are also better at making and developing relationships. Lyle Schaller maintains that "women pastors make changes faster with less resistance; they are generally over-achievers and nurturers; men don't easily say to a woman 'that's a dumb idea'"<sup>22</sup>.

### *Age*

Ministers under 45	45%
Ministers over 45	45%

Although an earlier survey had revealed that churches with ministers aged between 30 and 39 showed a strong bias toward growth<sup>23</sup>, in this present study age did not seem to be a very significant factor. Being myself in my fifties, I would like to believe that age brings wisdom. On the other hand, age does not inevitably bring increased. For learning to take place, there must be a good deal of personal reflection. A cause of concern is that reflection on ministerial practice, as also in-service training, tend to be optional extras taken up by only a minority of ministers. Whereas in most professions today in-service training is a necessity,

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<sup>21</sup> Strictly speaking, as at June 1996, only 2887 individual churches are in membership with the Evangelical Alliance.

<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately I have not been able to find the original source of this remark.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Beasley-Murray & Alan Wilkinson, *Turning The Tide* 32.

most ministers are not engaged in updating their personal and professional skills. In addition, where continuing education does occur, it often revolves around the traditional theological disciplines. It follows that in this respect one can learn very little from a minister's age. Older ministers inevitably are more experienced, but how much they may have learnt from their experience may sometimes be open to question. Younger ministers inevitably have more energy, but whether the energy is always rightly channelled may again be open to question.

### *Marital status*

Married	96%
Single	2%
Divorced	1%
Widowed	0

Although an increasing proportion of the population are divorced, this is not reflected in ministry. In one sense this is commendable. One would not want ministers to reflect the national divorce statistics. On the other hand, does this survey contain an unduly low percentage of the divorced or separated in ministry?<sup>24</sup> Perhaps this in part reflects the theological bias of the churches in the survey.

As far as single clergy are concerned, in the more evangelical churches, if not generally, there tends to be a bias against those who are not married, and in particular against single men. Most churches, when seeking a minister, want a married man with 2.4 children. Single women are by and large acceptable. Sadly the sexuality of single men is often regarded with suspicion. What amounts to a "dearth" of single ministers means that ministry - and therefore often the emphases of ministry - is quite unrepresentative of Britain as a whole, where out of some 46 million people over 16, nearly 17 million are single - that's 36%. Indeed, the ministry is often unrepresentative of the church. The Evangelical Alliance found that about 35% of adults in churches were single; only a little less than the national figure for the whole population.<sup>25</sup>

### *Spouses*

Spouses with a regular paid job	49%
Spouses without a regular paid job	46%

As one might expect, for age 45+ this figure rose to 54% at work, and 43% not at work.

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<sup>24</sup> There appear to be no overall national statistics with regard to the breakdown of clergy marriages. Mary Kirk and Tom Leary in *Holy Matrimony? An Exploration Of Marriage And Ministry* (Lynx, Oxford 1994)13-16 suggest that clergy marital breakdown is very much on the increase. The quote Pam Dawson, secretary of Broken Rites, the association for divorced and separated clergy wives, who said that in their first year (1983) they had twenty-eight inquiries, building up to around fifty per year.

<sup>25</sup> *Belonging: A Resource For The Christian Family* (Baptist Union, Didcot 1994) 42.

In comparison with the rest of the population the figure of those not at work is fairly high. Is there still a pressure in some churches for the minister's wife to fulfil the role of an unpaid curate? The survey would suggest that this could be so. For example 46% reported that their wife has a recognised role in the church. The role varied enormously.

Church role of wife: .

leader of toddler or pre-school group	6%,
Sunday School teacher or youth leader	6%
secretary or administrator	4%
member of a singing or music group	4%
leader of a women's group	2%.
"other"	17%

The figure of 2% leading a women's group certainly stands on its head the traditional picture of the minister's wife!

### *Finance and spouses*

In spite of the Apostle Paul's teaching that "leaders should be considered worthy of receiving double pay, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (1 Timothy 3.17 GNB), the financial rewards of ministry are limited. 36% of ministers in the survey earned less than £12,500, and only 12% earned over £15,000. Only one minister earned more than £20,000 - and he was a Baptist! Although the general salary figures should probably be adjusted upwards by at least some £2500+, in so far as 74% of ministers live in rent free accommodation; nonetheless the resulting figures are certainly not over generous.

Although the question of financial remuneration was not developed, for many ministers - and their spouses - this is a real issue. Traditionally ministers receive a "stipend" as over against a "salary" - the distinction being that a "stipend" is an "allowance" providing sufficient money for the needs of a minister, as distinct from giving a "reward" for services rendered. This distinction may well be fair if it simply concerns a single person, but what if it involves a family too? To what extent is it fair or right to expect the minister's family to share in the ministerial calling? It has not been unknown for ministers to be told that they should set an example of "holy poverty" - but should this include families too?

The issue of financial remuneration becomes even more acute in churches where the minister's salary is fixed not by some central body, but rather by the local church itself. For many ministers and their spouses this creates a real sense of powerlessness, in so as their welfare is being decided by others - in the church's discussion there is normally nobody with a specific brief to represent their interests. Time and again the discussion revolves around what the church feels it can afford to pay, rather than what might be fair and just.

Linked with the issue of salary is also the issue of housing. Traditionally ministers have been expected to live in tied accommodation, whether it be a manse or vicarage. However, many ministers - and particularly spouses - resent this provision. They do not wish to be dependent upon the church. Indeed, this dependency creates within them a sense of

unwished-for "powerlessness"<sup>26</sup>.

Such a situation might have expected to act as a strong financial incentive for wives to go out to work, let alone to fulfil themselves in a career of one kind or another. But in fact, just under half (49%) of all spouses in the survey had a regular paid job. The percentages changed a little when age factors were born in mind: 54% of spouses over 45 had a paid job as over against 41% of those under 45.

#### *Length of time in ministry and in present church*

In ministry for more than 15 years:	45%
In their present church for more than 5 years	46%.

Since entrants to ministry tend to be no longer in their early twenties, the first figure is probably par for the course in a survey where 55% are over 45.

For any pastors worth their salt, such pastoral longevity should certainly consolidate their position ('power') in the church. For the longer ministers are involved in people's lives, the more opportunity there is for bonds of love and affection to be developed and strengthened. The more pastors are perceived to love and care for their people, the greater their authority is. Such authority ('power') by definition cannot be present in the opening chapter of a pastor's ministry.

As an aside we may note that in church growth terms pastoral longevity is also a good sign, for as the earlier survey confirmed, a bias toward growth only tends to appear after a minister has been some five years in a church<sup>27</sup>.

British ministers tend to stay longer in their churches than their American cousins. In the Southern Baptist Convention of the USA, for example, pastors move on the average of every 18-20 months. In part this is because of the large number of "bi-vocational" ministers in rural areas, who carry on a fulltime job along with their pastoral work. However, in part this may also be because so many Southern Baptist pastors seem to get either "pushed out" or "fired". In 1985 it was reported that every month 116 Southern Baptist churches sever relationships through involuntary termination. Yet it is not just Southern Baptists who change churches fairly frequently. George Barna reports that during the past decade the average tenure of senior American pastors has dropped to about four years from seven: he attributes this to "the numbers-crazed, upwardly mobile mentality that plagues the pastorate"<sup>28</sup>.

In both North America and in Britain a long-term pastorate is normally classed as over 10 years. In this survey 16% fell into that category. Interestingly as far as their predecessors were concerned, 27% had ministered for over 10 years in the church currently in question, with 33% having ministered for some 6-10 years.

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<sup>26</sup> See Alistair Ross, *Evangelicals In Exile* (Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1997) 133.

<sup>27</sup> *Turning The Tide* 33,34

<sup>28</sup> George Barna, *Today's Pastors* (Regal, Ventura, California 1993) 36,37

### *Duration of interregnum*

Under one year		45%
One to two years	17%	
Over two years		12%

Since a large percentage did not reply to the question relating to length of interregnum between themselves and their predecessors, it is difficult to know how significant the answers were of those who did reply. As a rule of thumb it is often said that the interregnum should be as many months long as the years of the previous ministry. The fact is that churches need sufficient time to "grieve" before they appoint a successor. This can be particularly true where the previous ministry was of any substantial length (e.g. 15 years or more). If that time is not given, then it may not be easy for the new minister to capture the affection of his or her new congregation, particularly where the predecessor was much loved.

### *Security of tenure*

Three months notice	16%
Six months notice	11%
Nine months notice	23%
Twelve months notice	4%
Unspecified	23%
Freehold	18% (mainly Anglican)

In comparison with most jobs ministers would appear to be very fortunate as far as their security of tenure is concerned. On the other hand, in the sight of the law all ministers are self-employed and therefore they cannot claim against the church for unfair dismissal. Further, although there is not a large number of unemployed ministers, the gaining of a new "job" for a minister is generally speaking much slower than in the secular world (in part this is because in most churches the whole church is involved in some aspect of the "selection") - among Baptists, for instance, it is taking most ministers a year to move. Furthermore, by comparison with the secular world, the gaining of a new church almost always involves a geographical move. This in turn involves a considerable upheaval for the family. By contrast, most church members do not work in tied accommodation. If they change jobs, it is often possible for them to remain in the same house. Furthermore, whilst not underestimating the emotional wrench sometimes experienced when members leave a church as a result of a power struggle, unlike ministers and their families, their lives are not turned upside down as a result of that church move.

In other words, if there is a power struggle within a church, the minister is in a much weaker position than is sometimes assumed.

### *Alone or with others?*

Exercising a solo ministry	62%
Senior ministers with at least one other colleague	25%
Assistant/associate/curate	9%

Although in the Anglican Church there is an increasing tendency - in some dioceses at least - for clergy to work in teams, most ministers still work on their own. This is one of the increasing peculiarities of ministry. Few people outside the church work on their own. Whereas in the past certain "professional" people used to run a one-person practice (e.g. doctors, dentists, accountants) this is much less the case today. Ministry, as we shall see again later, is a very lonely profession.

Where power struggles take place, this form of isolation can often militate against the minister. As the one paid member of staff, the minister can be very vulnerable.

The solo nature of ministry is further underlined by the fact that only 29% of ministers had the services of a full- or part-time church administrator. One might have thought that this 29% more or less equated to the 31% who had over 200 people at worship on a Sunday, but further investigation revealed that this was not the case. Only some 60% of larger churches had a church administrator - as compared to some 20% of smaller churches. Interestingly, of the five largest churches, with congregations of 400-500, three had a church administrator, while two did not.

It would appear that in most churches the church administrator is a part-time appointment, for only 13% listed an administrator or a secretary as a member of their church staff. Indeed, if one combines caretakers (9%) with cleaners (8%) who are regarded as members of church staff, then the statistics would indicate that churches tend to put more emphasis on cleanliness rather than efficiency. This lack of professionalism is probably evidenced in the fact that 74% of ministers usually work from home as distinct from 23% who usually work in a church office (this figure rises to 36% of ministers in larger churches).

### *Theological agreement*

As would be expected, theologically the ministers mostly reflected the theological position of their churches. Again the responses are a little misleading in so far as more than one position could be ticked: e.g.

Evangelical	57%	
Charismatic	20%	
Middle of the Road	17%	
Liberal		10%
Catholic	4%	
Fundamentalist		1%

On the broader question of values, 6% said that they totally shared common values, 88% "for the most part", and only 5% felt that they did not fit at all.

### 1.3 Church Officials

Church secretaries	35%
Church wardens	31%
Church treasurers	22%

Although men predominated (62%), there was a good proportion of women (38%) too. The officials tended to be a little older than the ministers: e.g. only 35% were under 45, 30% were between 45 and 54, while 33% were over 55.

A good deal of experience was represented by the officials:

30% had been in their present church for 11-20 years,  
27% for 21-30 years  
17% for more than 30 years.

In terms of Christian service 50% of the church officials had held their present office for more than four years, with 74% having held other offices in the church. Interestingly as many as 80% of these church officials had belonged to another church, and of these 50% had held office in another church.

Theologically the officials reflected for the most part the theological position of their ministers.

### 1.4 Church Growth

*A measure of success?*

The vast majority of ministers felt that at least to some extent the church measured their success in terms of church growth. Only 19% of ministers felt there was no correlation - a number which reduced to 11% of ministers with churches where over 150 were at Sunday service. However, the number increased to 33% of ministers who deemed themselves to be theologically Middle of the Road.

Certainly in evangelical church circles "successful" ministries are to a large extent predicated on the ability of a pastor to grow a church. In the past it was sufficient for a pastor to be "faithful"; today many pastors feel the call is to be "successful". This call can prove to be incredibly stressful. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly common for ministers to be asked to leave their churches on the grounds that they are "not producing the goods". The market economy has affected the life of the church as well as the life of the world.

This call to be "successful" can also be very unfair. For church growth is a complex issue. Although ministers have a key role to play, so too do members. If the members are not prepared to move out of the comfort zones of their established patterns of church life, there is very little the minister can do. Likewise the minister is "powerless" to reverse sociological change, which in turn may have a seriously negative impact upon the life of the church.

### *Growth patterns*

One fascinating detail revealed by the survey is the positive bias toward church growth caused by the arrival of the respondent minister.

Before the arrival of the present minister,

2% growing strongly,  
17% growing slowly,  
52% holding their own  
26% declining.

Since the arrival of the respondent minister:

8% growing strongly  
55% growing slowly  
31% holding their own  
6% declining.

Asked about future prospects for growth, 9% thought them to be excellent, 51% deem good, 30% fair, and only 5% poor. If these statistics were to be true of the whole country, then the fortunes of the Christian church would have been well and truly reversed.

These replies indicate a very positive frame of mind on the part of the ministers - although it could be argued that this is just another example of ministers feeling pressurised to believe or to state that their churches are growing, since it is something on which they are judged.

This same apparent positive frame of mind was also reflected by ministers who had considered moving out of ministry as also by ministers who had experienced major conflict in ministry.

Ministers are proverbially the worst counters when it comes to telling how many were at church the previous Sunday. As one wag put it, ministers tend to count legs rather than heads! Even if the ministers were accurate in their assessment of increased growth, these figures do not alas indicate that their churches have been necessarily any more effective in their mission. There is, for instance, a world of a difference between transfer growth and conversion growth.



## 2. The Nature of Ministry

### 2.1 Satisfaction in ministry

Overall there appears to be a good deal of satisfaction in ministry:

- 29% very satisfied
- 57% satisfied
- 11% not really satisfied
- 4% not at all satisfied

The degree of satisfaction was underlined by the responses to a further question: "Has pastoring this church increased your passion for ministry?"

- 40% definitely
- 40% to some extent
- 18% no (perhaps significantly this rose to 26% for those over 45).

These responses are somewhat surprising. For other research has indicated that a much larger proportion of ministers are either burnt-out or disillusioned. Roy Oswald, admittedly reporting of the American scene, wrote:

"17% - one out of five - clergy are burned out. This does not imply that they are inactive in parish ministry. They are still able to perform their pastoral functions with skill and concern. The difficulty is that they have lost their zest and enthusiasm for ministry"<sup>29</sup>.

Within a British context, H.A. Eadie reported that in his survey of eighty-five Scottish ministers, 68.2% had experienced psychiatric disorders, neurotic problems, personality difficulties and emotional stress of sufficient intensity to require absence from work<sup>30</sup>.

On reflection, this may well be one more instance of where our particular sample of ministers is biased. On the whole, one would not expect burnt-out or disillusioned ministers to be members of the Richard Baxter Institute For Ministry. RBIM members tend to be the enthusiasts for ministry.

#### *Tempted to move out of ministry?*

For many ministers in our sample ministry has not entirely been a bed of roses. 44% said that they had thought of moving out of ministry. This is a large number: over four out of ten ministers have considered giving up. Significantly this 44% is not made up just of the "dissatisfied" lobby - 40% of those who declared themselves satisfied in ministry had considered moving out of ministry.

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<sup>29</sup> Roy Oswald, *Clergy Burnout* (Alban Institute, Bethesda 1982) 12

<sup>30</sup> HA Eadie, "Health of Scottish Clergymen", *Contact* (Winter 1972) 41

Equally significantly is that the proportion of ministers who have considered leaving ministry moves up to 59% of ministers under 45. This is highly disturbing. The pressures of ministry appear to be increasing.

The reasons were given for considering moving out of ministry:

The chief cause appeared to be power struggles of one kind or another. Ministers spoke of "church politics and power", "wrangles", "struggles", "difficulties", "problems", "conflict with the leadership", "a major split", "the pain inflicted by Christians" "open hostility especially as a woman" "total resistance to change, however small, however gentle"

Associated with such power struggles, another reason frequently given was "frustration", and the inability to get anywhere. Comments included "not making much worthwhile headway in congregation", "feeling ineffective", "despair" "sense of failure" "lethargy of members of the church at times" "tears".

A third factor constantly mentioned was the "pressure" of pastoral ministry. Such expressions as "the holy rat race", "pressure on family life", "high expectations" "pressure to perform" were found. Likewise mention was several times made of "long hours" having to be worked.

Another major factor, although not mentioned quite as often as the three issues of power struggles and pressure, was finance. One minister spoke of "having to draw social benefit". Another wrote: "I will be leaving the church on 28th April. The church cannot and will not afford my stipend".

Not surprisingly several referred to disillusionment, whether "with Christians in the church" or "with the institutional structures of the church"

A number too spoke of having suffered from depression and burnout.

A few mentioned "the grind of administration"; "ministry is now management/paper-pushing and I've no managerial training".

Interestingly only one person said that he had considered leaving ministry due to "some questioning of basic faith". In this survey at least, ministers do not appear to be experiencing crises of faith - or if they are, then they did not feel able to acknowledge the crisis.

Of those who said they had never thought of moving out of ministry, the overwhelming majority attributed their remaining in ministry to the call of God. as a result of which they felt they had no choice. "Ministry is my life calling"; "I feel I am doing what God has called me to do"; "I believe it's where the Lord wants me to be".

Some also mentioned job satisfaction and a sense of the "worthwhile nature" of what they were doing. "Fulfilment" "No other work is so privileged and rich in human/divine activity". Others felt that in this ministerial role they could best use their gifts and serve God. One respondent spoke of the "freedom and variety" encountered in ministry. Another of the

"opportunities" for ministry. Yet another of "the challenge of meeting such a diverse group of people, and doing this in the name of Christ". "It is what I want to do".

The only discordant note came from the minister who wrote: "Not otherwise qualified and do not have another house or sufficient money to buy one". Actually, there is a good deal of generalised truth in this remark. There was a time, for instance, when it was relatively easy for ministers to move into teaching or into social work. But the job-market has changed. Ministers increasingly feel themselves powerless to find another job. The result is that some remain in ministry for the sake of their monthly pay-packet. They have lost their sense of call as also their motivation for ministry - and yet they feel themselves trapped. The fact that this phenomenon was not revealed in this survey is probably due to the bias of the sample - members of RBIM tend to be motivated ministers.

## 2.2 *Ministry and the family*

*"Has pastoring this church has been difficult on your family?"*

23%	definitely (rising to 33% of those in larger churches)
49%	to some extent.
26%	no

It would have been interesting if ministers' wives had answered this question - the likelihood is that the figures would have been higher. The fact is that the pressures faced by most ministerial families are considerably higher than other domestic set-ups. The phenomenon, for instance, of having to live in a kind of goldfish bowl, where the life of the pastor and of the pastor's family is continually on display, can be highly stressful. Although admittedly some of the stresses can be self-imposed, they can also be imposed by the church too.

One Anglican bishop listed the following factors which combine to distinguish clergy families from others:

- tied housing and fixed-term appointments
- few resources
- moral standards
- public image to keep up
- expectations of ideal family
- ill-defined boundaries between work and home life
- doing the Lord's work - spouses compete with God
- coyness about using counselling agencies when difficulties occur<sup>31</sup>.

It is interesting to compare the responses of our survey with Barna's survey of American pastors. In his survey to precisely the same question Barna received the following answers:

11%	very true
38%	somewhat true
33%	not too true
8%	not at all true.

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<sup>31</sup> Cited in Kirk & Leary, *Holy Matrimony?* 39,40

I.e. in the American survey one out of 10 admitted that their family has suffered greatly as a result of current church ministry<sup>32</sup>. In our British survey the proportion is much higher. Here is a cause for concern. The damage being done to ministers' children is considerable. Here is a form of power abuse on the part of the church, no doubt unintentional, which can have devastating results.

### 2.3 *Ministry and ambition*

*"Would you hope to move on to a larger church?"*

11%	Definitely
23%	To some extent
58%	No

The reason for not wanting to move on to a larger church may be that most of them (49% of the total number of ministers) did not feel they could accomplish more in another church.

Age did not appear to be significant. Indeed, of those under 45 only 8% said they "definitely" hoped to move on to a larger church, although some 37% said that they hoped "to some extent".

Where a difference did emerge was where ministers had classed themselves as being "not very" or "not at all" powerful. 76% of these less powerful ministers said that they did not want to move on to a larger church. Correspondingly, of those who thought of themselves as "very" or "moderately" powerful as people, 15% said they "definitely" wanted to move to a larger church, and 28% said "to some extent". Overall, however, the drive to move on to bigger and better churches does not seem to be so widespread as some have appeared to suggest.

*"Do you feel you could accomplish more in another church?"*

12%	Definitely
32%	To some extent.
49%	No

The only significant variation was amongst those who said they were enjoying their current ministry "quite a lot": 14% said they definitely could accomplish more elsewhere and 41% to some extent, with only 39% saying "No".

Not surprisingly of those who were enjoying ministry "a lot", only 6% said they definitely could accomplish more elsewhere, with another 25% saying "to some extent": 61% of them felt they could not accomplish more.

Overall most ministers feel that they are being fulfilled in their present church. This is

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<sup>32</sup> Barna, *Today's Pastors* 61-63

surely a good sign and might be understood as meaning that God has truly called them to their present place of service!

Yet in spite of that sense of fulfilment only 32% felt their gifts were being fully used in their present church. This surely is a cause for concern, even though a further 49% felt their gifts were being used to some extent. One wonders if these ministers have ever shared their frustration with their churches. Is it significant that of those ministers who described themselves as "charismatic" 46% said they felt their gifts were being fully used in the church? The only group to score higher was composed of those enjoying ministry a lot: 51% said they felt their gifts were definitely being fully used, with a further 41% saying "to some extent".

Even though most ministers did not want to move on to a larger church, only 10% did not feel they did not have the capacity to pastor a bigger church. On average, 48% believed they definitely had the necessary gifts, with a further 34% believing "to some extent". Not surprisingly the differences were particularly evident between those who categorised themselves as "very" or "moderately" powerful people and those who saw themselves as "not very" or "not at all" powerful people: 58% of the former believed they definitely had the capacity over against 24% of the latter; while only 6% of the former said they did not believe they had the capacity. Overall, rightly or wrongly, most ministers seem to have a fairly good opinion of their capabilities.

The majority of ministers (60%) said that they would not like - or have liked - to be a bishop-figure. There was a clear difference, however, between smaller and larger churches. 68% of ministers in smaller churches said "No" compared to only 44% of ministers in larger churches. Of those ministering in larger churches 13% said they would definitely like (or have liked) such ecclesiastical preferment, with another 33% saying they would like (or have liked) such preferment "to some extent". Overall, most ministers did not seem interested in ecclesiastical preferment. Indeed, of those under 45 only 6% said they were definitely interested: for them there seemed to be little allure in any power or prestige which might belong to an episcopal office. Maybe in comparison with day-to-day life such positions seemed - and probably are - dull and unattractive.

Does all this mean, therefore, that ministers are not generally ambitious? Robert Schnase, a Methodist minister working in Texas, claims that "Most pastors would not want their peers to describe them as ambitious. They might appreciate being called energetic, hard-working, effective, or competent, but ambitious stirrings are downplayed, forbidden, hidden from public view. On the other hand, most pastors would not enjoy being described as unambitious. The word brings to mind laziness and ineffectiveness"<sup>33</sup>.

In our survey a good number admitted to being ambitious:

13%	very ambitious
48%	fairly ambitious
29%	not very ambitious
9%	not at all ambitious.

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Schnase, *Ambition In Ministry/ Our spiritual struggle with success, achievement and competition* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 1993) 18

One or two clearly felt it wrong to be ambitious: "Ambition should not be relevant in Christian ministry", wrote one. "Servanthood and ambition are somewhat contradictory". Another stated: "I am not interested in the demand for money, numbers and results, now defining 'successful' ministry".

The two most ambitious groups appeared to be, on the one hand, those who saw themselves as charismatic, and on the other hand the Baptists: 23% of both groups described themselves as very ambitious! As one would expect, the least ambitious were those who described themselves as "not very" or "not at all" powerful: 24% said they were not at all ambitious. In general terms, however, the majority of ministers (61%) are ambitious to some degree.

### *The positives and negatives of ministerial ambition*

A significant number of ministers see ambition as having had a positive role in their ministry:

12% very positively  
26% fairly positively.

Many examples were given of how ambition had been a positive force for good.

- A large number of these examples centred around the way in which ambition had encouraged "excellence" and "higher standards" in ministry with a corresponding desire to be "the best we can be".
- Ambition for others "leads to my being stretched & taking initiatives" "I want to press on to 'greater things'. Several said that ambition has caused them to become more "imaginative" and to be prepared "to take risks".
- Ambition leads others to want to become more "professional", which in turn leads to the seeking of "training opportunities".
- Some mentioned how ambition has led them to become more "forward looking" and in turn caused them to "set achievable, measurable & specific goals".
- Several spoke of how ambition had motivated them to "work harder". "It has been a powerful emotion to motivate study, discipline and professionalism".
- One spoke of how personal ambition had affected the life of the church in general: "it spreads enthusiasm into the life of the church"

Very few ministers said they felt ambition had affected their ministry negatively:

2% fairly negatively  
1% very negatively.

On the other hand, when asked to give examples of how ambition had impacted their ministry negatively, a large number of examples were given. There was repeated reference to how ambition caused them to become "driven" and to impose "unnecessary pressure on self". Ambition leads to the "danger of aiming for perfection"; "creating unrealistic targets & expectations".

To a large extent ambition appears to be linked with church growth: "I sometimes push for numbers rather than disciples". Several spoke of tending to "measure my effectiveness by

numerical growth", with the result that when church growth does not take place they begin to doubt their own effectiveness. Ambition may lead to ministers looking for "a better future rather than seeking God where they are"

### *Ministry and competition*

Linked with ambition is often a sense of competitiveness.

17% very competitive  
40% competitive  
8% not at all competitive.

Clearly the majority of ministers are competitive. Ministers in larger churches seemed to be the most competitive: 27% of such ministers said they were very competitive, and 38% said they were quite competitive. Possibly this higher percentage is a partial reflection of the North American scene of which Darius Salter writes: "The successful pastor is highly competitive and would rather fight an uphill battle rather than coast downhill... He loves new challenges and does not mind attempting the novel or unusual"<sup>34</sup>.

### *"With whom are you competing"*

52% did not specify with whom they felt they were competing  
21% with themselves  
9% with ministers in other churches  
9% with an "ideal" or "key value".

Variations on the overall norm were provided by ministers under forty-five, 35% of whom said they were competing with themselves and 12% with ministers in other churches. Furthermore 13% of ministers in larger churches and 18% of charismatics said they felt they were competing with ministers in other churches.

Personal experience of ministers' fraternalism would have led one to anticipate that the figures of those competing with other ministers would have been greatly higher for every group! Envy is generally reckoned to be one of the cardinal sins of ministry. Ministers constantly compare themselves with one another. If this is so, then why did most of those ministers claiming to be competitive fail to say with whom they were competing? Was it because they did not like to own up to this darker side of themselves?

### *Professional goals*

#### *"What professional goals do you have?"*

This particular question was answered in several ways. Typical of one type of response were: "None - except to maintain a sense of integrity in ministry and earn my stipend" and "To

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<sup>34</sup> Darius Salter, *What Really Happens In Ministry* 24

remain in pastoral ministry". Similarly, perhaps, a number spoke of their desire "to be faithful"

Many spoke of the development of particular skills and competencies: e.g. "To be a more effective leader, especially in the role of facilitator - getting the best out of others"; to improve my preaching and my teaching"; to be competent at leading worship, pastoral care & administration"; to be effective in evangelism"; "to structure time more efficiently"; "to develop management, communication and counselling skills".

Some spoke more generally of their desire to grow and reach their full potential. Others wanted more "professional training"; "to have a formal professional qualification in counselling and training". Several said they were possibly interested in gaining a Masters Degree. One wanted "to gain a PhD and write more books & articles"

Several were interested in developing a "wider ministry" beyond the local church

On the whole one has to admit that the goals were remarkably unspecific. With a few exceptions, the goals were far from being measurable in any way, with the result that it would be difficult to know when, if ever, such goals were achieved! Indeed, the ministers who answered that they had no professional goals were probably being more honest than those who appeared to have been completely vague. The disturbing overall conclusion to be drawn is that most ministers have neither the ability nor the skill to formalise more concrete goals.

### *Personal goals*

- The personal goals of many had to do with their relationship with God: e.g. "to know God better"; "to become more like Christ"; "greater holiness"
- Very few related their personal goals to any sense of growth and development as a person.
- Many spoke of their desire to "be a good husband and father": One spoke of his ambition to "survive teenagers", another of his ambition "to enjoy my grandchildren".
- Others wanted to develop more time for their hobbies and leisure activities, whether it be in terms of travelling, driving a racing car, playing the clarinet, or generally keeping fit.
- A few wanted to write: e.g. in the area of gerontology and ecclesiastical history. One wanted to "write the story of my life & ministry from an anonymous standpoint".
- Several were looking forward to retirement.
- With hopefully tongue in cheek: "at this stage survival", "to remain sane". "To withdraw completely from church life", however, did not sound amusing.
- Perhaps equally sadly, some simply stated: "None". They had no personal goals.

### *Managing Time*

Unlike most people, ministers have no set hours of work. Theirs is not a nine to five job. In theory they are on duty twenty-four hours a day. Many ministers are only formally given one day off a week. It is left to them as to how they shape their working week. Some find it incredibly hard to be self-disciplined: hence the notorious number of workaholics in the ranks of the ministry.



Certainly in this survey ministers reckon themselves to be hardworking. On average, ministers in this survey reckoned that they work 64.3 hours per week. When one remembers that this is an average, then clearly some must be working very hard indeed.

In terms of activities, ministers were asked to list the number of hours they worked on average in each category. The following averages ensued:

	<i>Hours</i>
Sermon preparation/preaching	7.5
Visiting - building & maintaining meaningful relationships	7.5
Administration	6.5
Prayer & meditation	6.2
Worship preparation/leading worship	5.7
Study	5.6
Committees	5.3
Community involvement/social action	4.3
Discipling/nurturing	4.2
Counselling	4.1
Enabling/involving laity in ministry	4.1
Evangelism	3.3

An enormous amount of time appears to be devoted to the Sunday services, which if one includes preparation and study amounts to almost 19 hours. Maintaining the organisational life of the church (administration and committees) amounts to almost 12 hours. Pastoral care, as represented by counselling and visiting, amounts to 11.6 hours. Mission as represented by community involvement and evangelism amounts to 8.6 hours. While investing in the lives of others, hopefully with a view to their being involved in Christian service (discipling and enabling) amounts to just over 8 hours. Is this a right use of a minister's time? Would churches tend to grow more if less time was given to preparing for Sunday services (e.g. by doing away with the evening service)? Would churches benefit if ministers were largely relieved from their administrative and organisational functions, and instead were able to devote more time to helping their members be involved in ministry and mission?

### *The joys of ministry*

Ministers were also asked to list on a scale of 0 (the minimum) - 10 (the = maximum) to give their enjoyment rating. It will be seen that the ratio of hours worked to the enjoyment factor varies considerably.

	Hours	Enjoyment rating
Sermon preparation/preaching	7.5	7.9
Worship preparation/leading worship	5.7	7.5
Discipling/nurturing	4.2	7.5
Study	5.6	7.4
Enabling/involving laity in ministry	4.1	7.2
Prayer & meditation	6.2	7.1
Visiting - building & maintaining meaningful relationships	7.5	7.1
Evangelism	3.3	6.8
Counselling	4.1	6.4
Community involvement/social action	4.3	5.9
Administration	6.5	4.7
Committees	5.3	4.6

The greatest joy of most ministers is preaching and the associated sermon preparation. Study comes also high up the list. They also greatly enjoy discipling/nurturing and leading/preparing for worship, as also their time for prayer and meditation. Visiting/building and maintaining meaningful relationships also scores well.

#### *Problems and frustrations of ministry*

In terms of major problems or frustrations encountered in ministry, ministers were asked to rate on a score of 0 (minimum) to 10 (maximum) the following issues, which received the following averages:

Issue	Rating
How to do effective outreach	6.3
Lack of commitment on part of members	5.9
Low level of spiritual maturity of people	5.9
Gaining greater involvement by members	5.9
Implementing change	5.8
Administration	5.2
Church politics	5.0
Developing a sense of community within the congregation	4.6
Relational difficulties among members of the congregation	4.5
Relational difficulties between leaders and the congregation	3.9
Relational difficulties between leaders	3.8
Counselling	3.8

Averages, however, can be misleading. An analysis of those who rated their problems or frustrations at the higher end of the scale (7-10) revealed the following percentages:

	<i>Average</i>	<i>Scale 7-10</i>	<i>Scale 8-10</i>	<i>Scale 9-10</i>
How to do effective outreach	6.3	46%	34%	18%
Lack of commitment	5.9	41%	20%	7%
Low level of spiritual maturity	5.9	38%	20%	7%
Gaining greater involvement	5.9	40%	21%	8%
Implementing change	5.8	42%	26%	10%
Administration	5.2	28%	19%	12%
Church politics	5.0	33%	20%	14%
Developing a sense of community	4.6	21%	11%	3%
Difficulties among members	4.5	21%	12%	7%
Difficulties - leaders & congregation	3.9	17%	12%	7%
Difficulties between leaders	3.8	16%	12%	8%
Counselling	3.8	13%	7%	1%

Significantly, for one in five ministers church politics (i.e. power games) is one of the key problems - indeed, 14% of ministers rate it at either a 9 or 10 on the scale of 0-10.

For ministers of larger churches problems related to power are even more acute (NB we have printed in bold where there is an increase in perception of difficulty):

	<i>Average</i>	<i>Scale 7-10</i>	<i>Scale 8-10</i>	<i>Scale 9-10</i>
How to do effective outreach	6.3	35%	26%	6%
Implementing change	<b>6.1</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Lack of commitment	5.9	36%	15%	4%
Low level of spiritual maturity	5.7	33%	17%	4%
Gaining greater involvement	5.7	35%	11%	2%
Church politics	<b>5.5</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>22%</b>	13%
Developing a sense of community	<b>5.2</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>19%</b>	2%
Administration	5.1	26%	17%	<b>13%</b>
Difficulties among members	<b>4.8</b>	<b>29%</b>	11%	4%
Difficulties - leaders & congregation	<b>4.6</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>8%</b>
Counselling	<b>4.4</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>2%</b>
Difficulties between leaders	<b>4.1</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>16%</b>	7%

The task of implementing change poses more of a problem. For not only has the implementation moved up from fifth position to second position on the scale of averages, for almost half the ministers of larger churches (49%) the implementation of change is now ranked as high as 7-10 on the scale of difficulty. Almost as many (40%) rank church politics as between 7-10 on the scale of difficulty.

It is interesting to compare our results with a table of results produced by Barna's survey<sup>35</sup>. Barna found that the major difficulties and frustrations of senior American pastors were as follows:

Lack of laity commitment	30%
Handling financial & administrative duties	13%
How to do effective outreach	12%
Implementing change	10%
Counselling	9%
Developing community within the congregation	8%
The low level of spiritual maturity of people	8%
Gaining greater leadership involvement by the laity	7%
Church politics	4%
Relational difficulties	4%

In our British survey issues such as change and church politics posed far more problems than they apparently do in American. That gives food for thought!

### 3. Leadership styles

#### 3.1 *Personality*

The first question we asked in this section asked the ministers to name their personality type:

27%	high-key aggressive
69%	low-key, laid back.

The figures change quite markedly when we compare ministers of smaller with larger churches. The percentage of ministers in smaller churches (i.e. up to 150 at Sunday service) seeing themselves as "high-key, aggressive" dropped to 20%, while those seeing themselves as "low-key, laid-back" rose to 77%. On the other hand, the percentage of ministers in larger churches who saw themselves as "high-key, aggressive" rose to 42%, with only 53% seeing themselves as "low-key, laid-back".

Possibly the linking of the term "aggressive" to "high-key" was unfortunate. The word "aggressive" tends to have negative implications. But "high-key" personality-types are not necessarily any worse than "low-key" types. Indeed, God often uses dynamic and vibrant personalities to be very effective leaders. And yet, as with all personalities, there is this possible shadow-side.

#### 3.2 *Leadership style*

Again there was a noticeable difference of response between ministers of smaller and larger churches.

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<sup>35</sup> George Barna, *Today's Pastors* 66

	All ministers	Smaller	Larger	[Church officials perception of ministers]
Autocratic	3%	4%	0%	11%
Persuasive	32%	26%	44%	36%
Consultative	44%	48%	36%	36%
Participative	21%	21%	20%	17%

In larger churches there is less consultation and more persuasion!

When church officials were asked to describe the leadership styles of their ministers (and here there was no distinction between smaller or larger churches), a slightly different picture emerged:

Autocratic	11%
Persuasive	36%
Consultative	36%
Participative	17%

From the perspective of church officials a good deal more ministers are autocratic and persuasive in style.

A similar difference in perception between ministers and church officials is to be found in the response to the question: "Do you (does your minister) more often try to help people say what they think or say what you (your minister) thinks right away?"

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
Help people say what they think	86%	70%
Say what they think right away	11%	22%

Although the majority of ministers appear to be good listeners, nonetheless church officials view one in five ministers as being fairly directive in their approach.

### *Leaders or managers?*

By and large ministers see themselves as leaders of people (67% - rising to 71% for ministers of larger churches) rather than managers of a process (28% - reducing to 24% for ministers of larger churches). And thank God they do! Because in a voluntary organisation like a church, leadership which concentrates on people, is always more important than management, which focusses on the activity of a process. Bruce Reed puts it this way:

"In a 'socio-psychological' system, where people are the throughput in a 'socio-technical system' (the throughputs are material not human) leadership is of special importance, but because churches are voluntary where the through-put themselves provide many human and material resources, leadership is even of more importance"<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> Bruce Reed, *The Dynamics Of Religion* (Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1978) 165,166

## *Vision*

The vast majority of ministers (87%) claimed to have a clear sense of vision for the life of their church - and this was confirmed by the church officials (83%)

Yet when asked to produce a brief statement of their vision, the vision statements seemed to be more of a general mission statement: e.g.

"To encourage each other as we share God's love and gifts in order to build up his church and proclaim the good news of Christ"  
"To be the body of Christ in our community"

With two exceptions the nearest the many vision statements (and only a selection have been quoted above) came to being specific were the following three:

"To become a 21st century-related post-modern missionary congregation"  
"To develop a city-centre ministry"  
"To respond to goals currently agreed by PCC"

There were only two ministers who seemed to have developed a specific vision for their present ministry. The first spoke of his desire to "see the church move forward in appointing my successor, whilst keeping its focus on growth and service". The second referred to a "building scheme", which involved "opening these doors of the church seven days a week".

This general vagueness should be another cause for concern. If ministers do not have a clear sense of where they believe God wishes them to lead the church, then their churches are likely to make little progress. It is vision which gives direction, which in turn ensures that the energies of the church are rightly harnessed as the church seeks to fulfil its mission. The difference between vision and mission, is that mission refers to the common calling of the church of God at large, whereas vision refers to the way in which that mission may be implemented in a particular church.

## *Mission and mission statements*

Related to vision is the developing of a "mission statement" for the church. Some 52% of both ministers and church officials agree that their church has a mission statement. On the one hand that is bad news: it means that just under half of the churches do not have an agreed goal at which they are seeking to aim. Yet on reflection it may in fact be very encouraging that over half the churches in question have in fact sought to encapsulate their vision for ministry into an agreed form of words. On the whole, however, it tends to be the larger churches (69%) rather than the smaller churches (44%) which have developed such a statement.

Some were just too vague: e.g.

"To bring glory to God on earth as in heaven"  
"To be an agent for the growth of the Kingdom of God!"  
"To serve Christ in the locality and in the world"

Some of the statements were delightfully snappy: e.g.

"To know Christ and make Christ known"

"To make the power and love of Jesus known"

"Strong enough to care, strong enough to share"

"To go Christ's way and make disciples"

"Telling the story and living the life"

Words, however, are not enough. Mission statements have to be owned by the church if they are to be put into action. It is all very well having some snappy phrase on the church letter-head or notice-sheet, but until it percolates into the minds and hearts of the church as a whole, it is of little use.

Of those who have developed mission statements, the implications are that in around half of these churches the mission statement has been firmly rooted into the life of the church. For 46% of ministers (50% of church officials) believe that for the most part their church fulfils that mission. If so, then this means that a quarter of the churches in our survey must really be performing well! .

### *Church agenda*

To what extent, however, do church agendas reflect such mission statements? Perhaps not surprisingly churches find it difficult to put ideals into action.

11% of ministers (but 19% of church officials) said that three quarters of the agenda of their church meetings revolves around issues of mission, while only one quarter revolves around issues of maintenance such as finance and fabric.

Perhaps more realistically 53% of ministers (46% of church officials) said that half the agenda revolves around issues of mission, with the other half around issues of maintenance.

More depressingly, a further 31% of ministers (and of church officials) said that only one quarter of the agenda revolves around issues of mission, with three-quarters revolving around maintenance.

The 1% of churches where the agenda totally revolved around mission was balanced by the 1% where the agenda totally revolved around maintenance!

#### 4. Ministerial accountability

*To whom are ministers accountable?*

Responses to questions relating to ministerial accountability were extremely varied. This was true even of the 57 Baptist ministers, all of whom one might suppose would be working within a similar framework. The responses of church officials were equally varied on this question.

If anything, there was a tendency on the part of the church officials to view the ministers as being slightly more godly than the ministers actually perceived themselves to be: e.g.

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
Accountable to God	6%	17%
Accountable to self/no one	15%	4%
Accountable to church	30%	45%
Accountable to deacons/ elders/PCC/leaders	42%	45%

Unfortunately we did not ask respondents to spell out what they meant by accountability. Generally speaking, accountability appears to be a myth. Ministers by and large have few restrictions put upon them. Put crudely, provided they "pay the rent" by conducting the services and by visiting some of the key members of the church, they can often get away with "blue murder" if they wish. To be fair, few ministers would ever approach their ministry in this way. On the other hand, George Barna's observations of the American scene are equally true of the British scene: ""We essentially do not have an intelligent and reliable means of holding pastors accountable to perform as leaders of the flock. Beyond being in the pulpit a specified number of times, conducting himself properly with members of the congregation and managing staff and meetings as they occur, few standards exist by which the pastor's performance is examined"<sup>37</sup>. This surely is not good, neither for the minister nor for the church. This lack of accountability is tantamount to an invitation to the abuse of power.

#### *Job description*

In any other context accountability would involve having a meaningful job description. However, 77% of ministers said they had no formal job description. Interestingly 27% of church officials said they did not know if their minister had a job description! But how can one give account of one's ministry, where there are no agreed expectations? There seems to be a groundless assumption that everybody knows what a minister's job is about, whereas in fact the truth is the very reverse. Indeed, even ministers themselves seem to be uncertain of what their role is<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> George Barna, *Today's Pastors* 146

<sup>38</sup> See Paul Beasley-Murray, *Pastors Under Pressure* (Kingsway, Eastbourne 1989) 33,34



## *Appraisal*

It was somewhat surprisingly to find that as many as 36% of ministers said they underwent regular appraisal. This is surprising, since one might well question how appraisal is possible where there is no job description.

Rather unexpected was the fact that a greater percentage of ministers in smaller churches underwent appraisal than ministers in larger churches. One might have thought that the ministers of larger churches would have been a little more business-like. As it is, as many as 71% of ministers of larger churches underwent no regular appraisal, as distinct from 60% of ministers of smaller churches.

But generally speaking, most ministers, whether in smaller or larger churches, do not undergo regular appraisal. Here again is a cause for concern. It is true that many ministers are not keen on the idea of being held to account. On the other hand, Jesus has a lot to say about the need for his followers to be good managers ("stewards"). There is a place for sitting down and asking searching questions about ministry.

Unfortunately ministers can be too jealous of their independency. Although the House of Lords in its ruling of 1986 *Davies v Presbyterian Church of Wales* may be correct in stating that a pastor's "duties are defined and his activities are dictated not by contract but by conscience", nonetheless there is something to be said for ministers having to give an account of their ministry to the church. Such a giving of an account need not be threatening, but liberating. One of the chief benefits of appraisal for me is that I feel that my fellow leaders can understand more clearly how I perceive my calling, and how I struggle to fulfil that calling.

The frequency of appraisal varied a good deal.

13%	annually
5%	six monthly or less .
2%	every 18 months
7%	every two or three years
67%	every three to five years

From personal experience I question the value of being appraised only now and again. As one committed to annual appraisal I have found it very helpful to think through my own personal ministry goals for the coming year - doing it with others has brought an extra degree of realism which otherwise I might not have had (the setting of too ambitious goals can prove disheartening). A further very positive benefit is my fellow leaders use appraisal as an occasion to express their appreciation for my efforts. It's good to hear that appreciation not just every two or three years, but on an annual basis! Yet another benefit is that within the appraisal process there is a safe place to bring up some of one's frustrations about ministry. Again I have found it helpful to do so on an annual basis<sup>39</sup>.

Appraisals, however, are not necessarily conducted by one's fellow leaders. Indeed, in the

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<sup>39</sup> See Paul Beasley-Murray, "A British experience of appraisal", *Ministry Today* 8 (Feb 1997) 24-28.

survey only 6% have them done by church leaders such as deacons, elders, or church officers. Others, presumably Anglicans, were appraised by the bishop or archdeacon (8%). Yet others were appraised by their peers (2%) or by a ministerial support team (3%). Self-appraisal - favoured by Methodists - was the case for 4% of ministers.

*Regular meetings with outside "consultants"*

- 19% meet regularly with a spiritual director
- 13% meet regularly with a supervisor
- 4% meet regularly with a therapist
- 7% meet regularly with a work consultant

Many ministers have little external support. Those who do have such support tend to be ministers of larger churches: e.g.

- 29% (as over against 15% of smaller churches) meet with a spiritual director.
- 22% (as over against 9% of smaller churches) meet with a supervisor
- 7% (as over against 3% of smaller churches) meet with a therapist

The exception here is that 8% of ministers of smaller churches meet with a work consultant as distinct from 4% of ministers of larger churches: however, we are dealing with such small figures, that statistically these figures have little significance.

The overall thrust of all these figures indicates that most ministers are on their own as far as their job is concerned. Meaningful external support, which involves some form of real accountability, is lacking.

Here is yet another major cause for concern. In almost any other caring profession supervision is the norm - indeed, in the counselling profession people are not recognised as qualified nor are they allowed to work with "clients" unless they are in supervision. Yet ministers are able to counsel people "willy-nilly". Although supervision is no guarantee that abuse of one kind or another will not take place, nonetheless it does provide opportunities on a regular basis for carers to reflect on their handling of their "clients". In turn this enables them to become more aware -both of themselves as also of the dynamics of the relationship involved. Where there is supervision, the risks for abuse are lessened.

Similarly, meeting with a spiritual director on a regular basis can be of great help, not least in dealing with this issue of the abuse of power. For where there is real honesty and openness on the part of the minister, and skill and perception on the part of the spiritual director, not only actions but also motives can be ruthlessly examined from a spiritual perspective. On one's own it is easy to deceive oneself - but in the presence of a godly man or woman such deceit can often be laid bare. But spiritual direction involves more than self-examination; it also offers a way of finding resources in God for the business of daily living. And how those resources are needed in ministry - not least when one is at the receiving end of abuse!

Therapy too can prove supportive. In some circles therapy is just a fad - just like colonic irrigation! However, rightly understood therapy offers an opportunity for people to deal with the hurts and buffetings of life. Sadly, hurts and buffetings can often be a daily experience

as far as ministry is concerned – although admittedly, not all the time, thank God! And yet there are times in ministry when life becomes rough and ministers find themselves the losers in power struggles of one kind or another. Mugging is not only to be found on inner-city streets; it has taken place, at least on an emotional basis, in many a church. At such a time to seek therapy is not to follow one of the fashions of the day; it is just common-sense. Needless to say, therapy is more than simply massaging bruised feelings - it also presents an opportunity to explore one's feelings. In so doing, one may discover not simply healing, but also a degree of self-awareness, which in turn can throw a spotlight onto issues of power and of accountability.

In a profession where most ministers work on their own, work consultants can be helpful in bringing perspective and advice to the tasks in hand. It is, for instance, easy for ministers to abuse their position through lack of balance. Work-consultants can not only point to resources, but also can provide a form of 'quality-control' in ministry.

All these varieties of external "consultancy" offer forms of support. And support is vital amidst the vortex of human emotions and ambitions to be found in many a church. But these systems of external "consultancy" can also offer opportunities for self-examination and self-awareness. This too is a vital contribution if ministers are not to unduly impose themselves on their people. The fact is that our motivation for helping people is not always as selfless as it may appear. As Adolf Guggenbuehl-Craig rightly points out, "No one can act out of exclusively pure motives. Even the noblest deeds are based on pure and impure, light and dark motivations"<sup>40</sup>. Similarly Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet answer the question "Why be a helper? Not only by acknowledging that "for most of us the answer would include the wish to care, to cure, to heal", but also that "Alongside this, however, may be the hidden need for power, both in surrounding oneself with people worse off, and being able to direct parts of the lives of the people who need help"<sup>41</sup>. There is what psychologists call the "power shadow". It is vital that all who deal with people - and not least ministers - become aware of their vulnerability in this area. For ministers to turn to external consultants for help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of integrity.

### *Support groups*

Some 26% of all ministers volunteered that they have access to some other kind of support group (e.g. fraternal or peer group). However, one might well question how meaningful such support is. Fraternal groups are often seed-beds of jealousy, and are usually the last place where most ministers would wish to make themselves vulnerable by being real and honest about themselves or the difficulties that they face. Support groups made up of friends who are committed to one another can prove to be much more helpful. Yet, although such groups may offer such things as safety and confidentiality, release and appreciation, they rarely offer much in terms of self-awareness or in terms of accountability.

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<sup>40</sup> Adolf Guggenbuehl-Craig, *Power In The Helping Professions* 10,11

<sup>41</sup> Peter Hawkins & Robert Shohet, *Supervision In the Helping Professions* (Open University Press, Milton Keynes 1989) 11.

## 5. Relationships in the church

Generally speaking the relationships of ministers with their churches seem to be very good.

### *Ministers' relationships with church staff*

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
very good	40%	55%
quite good	20%	21%
satisfactory	5%	7%
not very good	1%	4%
not at all good	1%	0

Understandably a large number of respondents (33%) were not able to comment on the relationship of their minister with the church staff, for the simple reason that many churches are not in the financial position to be able to appoint anybody beyond the minister.

On what is thus an admittedly smaller statistical base, the relationships seemed to change slightly for the worse when relationships were rated with ministerial colleagues who formed part of the church staff:

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
very good	21%	21%
quite good	14%	10%
satisfactory	2%	6%
not very good	3%	1%
not at all good		2%

These figures confirm observations from other surveys that ministers are not the best of team players as far as their colleagues are concerned. Indeed, as we shall see from the later section on conflict, relationships do often break down between ministers working together in the same church. In part this may be because most ministers look forward to being a "number one" - there are few long-term "number twos" in ministry. Curacies as also most "assistantships" are training posts. The norm is for ministers to be in pastoral charge. True, occasionally one comes across genuine "associate" pastors (as distinct from "assistant" ministers who for reasons of status often prefer to be called "associates") who have already had experience of being in pastoral charge and have now opted to become part of a ministerial team. But such "associates" are very much the exception. Ministers generally find it difficult to play the "second fiddle". They expect to be "prima donnas". For many, therefore, it is natural to exercise power.

### *Minister's' relationships with lay leaders*

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
very good	50%	56%
quite good	38%	29%
satisfactory	5%	6%
not very good	2%	4%

Relationships between ministers and their lay leaders appear to be a little better than relationships between ministers.

*Ministers' relationships with the church in general*

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
Very good	38%	46%
Quite good	51%	38%
Satisfactory	9%	12%
Not very well		4%

As one might expect, the relationship between ministers and the church in general was not quite so warm as the relationship between ministers and leaders. Church officials were perhaps a little more generous in their estimation. This was true too when it came to rating other attributes of their ministers.

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
Minister's gentleness/compassion		
Very much	28%	
To some extent	60%	88%
Minister's approachability		
Very much	40%	54%
To some extent	55%	34%
Minister's popularity		
Very much	22%	46%
To some extent	65%	38%

*Friends*

In spite of such popularity ministers feel they have few friends in the church

- 40% no close friends (31% under 45; 51% over 45)
- 26% no more than five close friends
- 9% no more than two close friends

Clearly many ministers are lonely people. The priest, wrote Henri Nouwen, in

"being friendly to everybody, very often has no friends himself. Always consulting and giving advice, he often has nobody to go to with his own pains and problems... [So] looking for acceptance, he tends to cling to his own counselees... He spends long hours with them, more to fulfil his own desires than theirs. The paradox is that he who is taught to love everybody, in reality finds himself without any friends"<sup>42</sup>

Although Nouwen was referring primarily to Roman Catholic clergy, the sense of loneliness of ministers is not restricted to any one denomination. Indeed, until very recently it was

<sup>42</sup> Henri Nouwen, quoted by Rowland Croucher, *Renewal In the Pastorate* (an unpublished D.Min. Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena 1983) 23.

standard teaching at many a theological college that pastors should not have friends in the parish, lest they be perceived as having favourites.

### *Openness*

On the whole relationships between ministers and their people are not as honest as they might be.

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
Very able to speak the truth in love	27%	39%
Very able to receive criticism,	15%	13%
Very able to express anger	5%	13%
Very able to publicly disagree with others	15%	38%
People very able to disagree with minister	18%	21%
Very much enjoy the clash of ideas	10%	12%
Never sweep issues under the carpet	21%	32%
Very much tend to confront people on issues	5%	15%

The result is that only 13% of ministers (church officials: 28%) think that the church is very open and honest; furthermore ministers believe that only 12% of their people believe that they are open and honest (church officials: 28%).

It is true that all these figures greatly improve when we include the responses characterised by the phrase "to some extent". Nonetheless the picture emerges of a host of fairly superficial communities. Until conflict of one kind or another erupts, church people tend to be polite to one another, but not real with one another. The odds are that if church people learnt to be more real with one another, conflicts would tend to be less devastating. As it is pressure builds up beneath the surface, with the result that feelings only emerge when they are at bursting point.

### *Ministers' popularity*

	MINISTERS	CHURCH OFFICIALS
very popular	22%	46%
quite popular	62%	38%

On the whole ministers thought of themselves as being popular in the church - indeed 37% those who said they enjoy ministry a lot thought they were very popular! Church officials tended to be much more positive in the evaluation of their ministers. On the other hand 3% of church officials said their minister was not very popular, and 1% said their minister was not at all popular. No ministers put themselves in these last two categories!

### *Objections to appointment?*

Although 77% of ministers (84% of church officials) said that there had been no strong objections to their appointment, 13% of ministers (and 11% of church officials) admitted there had been.

## 6. Relationships With The Opposite Sex

Sexual abuse by Christian leaders is a major issue, both in North America and now increasingly in the United Kingdom. So we asked some questions about relationships with the opposite sex<sup>43</sup>.

### *Guidelines*

Just over half of the ministers (52%) said they had special guidelines in dealing with members of the opposite sex<sup>44</sup>:

- 26% would not see members of the opposite sex on their own
- 13% would always have somebody else around
- 8% would avoid any kind of physical contact..

But in actual practise, when it actually comes to counselling members of the opposite sex on their own, it is clear that not all ministers have followed their guidelines:

- 11% often
- 44% sometimes
- 32% rarely.
- 12% never .

### *Touching and hugging*

- 20% (38% of charismatics) often touched and hugged
- 44% sometimes
- 28% rarely.
- 8% never (4% under 45; 14% over 45)

### *Temptation and sexual misbehaviour*

Significantly just over half (54%) of ministers felt they were particularly vulnerable to sexual temptation (11% much more than anybody else; 43% a bit more than anybody else).

When asked if had been in ministry they had ever been tempted to do anything with anyone (not their spouse!) that they felt was sexually inappropriate, a number admitted that they had indeed been tempted:

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<sup>43</sup> A more detailed consideration of sexual abuse and Christian counselling in Britain is to be found in an unpublished MSc dissertation by Patricia Fouque: *The Power Dimension Of Counselling: The Impact of Christian Biblical Counselling On Survivors Of Sexual Abuse* (The Roehampton Institute of Higher Education, Dept of Psychology, University of Surrey 1993). A major American work in this area is *The Abuse Of Power: A Theological Problem* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 1991) by James Newton Poling.

<sup>44</sup> In 1991 the Methodists published *Some Elements of Pastoral Practice*, a brief discussion document by Brian E.Beck.

1% often  
19% sometimes  
34% rarely  
44% never

Sadly, a number too had succumbed to such temptation:

7% sometimes  
14% rarely

Here is surely a cause for concern, and all the more so if one bears in mind the probability that most ministers would have found it difficult to answer this question with real honesty. Sexual abuse in ministry is a problem. What is more, it must be remembered that we are here dealing with ministers still in ministry. There are many more ministers guilty of sexual abuse who have had to resign from ministry<sup>45</sup>.

The figures produced in this survey, while less detailed, are not significantly different from a North American survey of 300 pastors<sup>46</sup>.

23% since they had been in local church ministry had done something with someone (not their spouse) that they felt was sexually inappropriate.  
12% had had sexual intercourse with someone other than their spouse  
18% had participated in other forms of sexual contact with someone other than their spouse: e.g. passionate kissing, fondling, mutual masturbation.  
Only 4% said they were found out.

One major difference, however, is that 70% of those American pastors surveyed said that they thought that pastors are particularly vulnerable. It could be that the Americans are in this respect more realistic than the British.

As for the Roman Catholic Church, in a recent book Richard Sipe estimated that at any one time 20% of priests are involved in a sexual relationship with a woman - marked by a certain stability - or involved in a more or less identifiable pattern of sexual relationships<sup>47</sup>. He went on to quote the reflection of the German theologian Romano Guardini: "The church is the cross on which Christ is crucified daily"<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately there are no detailed statistics of the extent of sexual abuse by ministers in the UK. The 1992 Safety Net survey of adult Christian survivors of sexual abuse found that 31% of those perpetrating the abuse were practising Christians, and 10% were leaders or clergy. So Patricia Fouque, "Abuse In Ministry", *Ministry Today* 10 (June 1997) 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Leadership IX* (Winter 1988) 12

<sup>47</sup> A.W.Richard Sipe, *Sex, Priests And Power: Anatomy Of A Crisis* (Cassell, London 1995) 72

<sup>48</sup> Sipe, *Sex Priests And Power* 181



### *Dealing with sexual temptation*

First, there needs to be recognition of the peculiar vulnerability present to both parties in the pastoral counselling situation. In a secular context friendship between the counsellor and the client is well nigh taboo. However, in a church context friendship is far from unethical - indeed, the client may well be a member well known to the ministers. Pastoral counselling tends to lack the distance of secular counselling. All the more need therefore for boundaries to be set and maintained!

Secondly, it needs to be recognised that where abuse takes place within a pastoral relationship, the pastor is always the abuser and never the victim. "The pastor, preacher, father or mother in God is always in a position of power in relation to the seeker for help"<sup>49</sup>. Hence the importance for ministers to establish guidelines which may offer them protection from, for instance, those who seek to love God through the minister who has made God real to them.

One important guideline could, for instance, include establishing a set number of times one would see a person of the opposite sex before referring them on. Referring people on is not failure; it often is a mark of pastoral wisdom. Other guidelines may include never seeing a person of the opposite sex without the knowledge of someone else - and ensuring that the person seeking help is also aware that the pastoral encounter in this sense is not entirely private. Needless to say, this area of counselling people of the opposite sex is one instance where supervision can be helpful. Supervision offers the possibility of ministers not only with how they handle the presenting problem of the person seeking help, but also of how they handle the issue of their own sexuality. Furthermore, a supervisor is also more able to see and confront personal blind spots in the minister.

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<sup>49</sup> Malcolm Goodspeed, "Eros: Icon Or Idol? A Minister's Sexuality In Practice", *Ministry Today* 6 (February 1996) 31.

## CHAPTER 4. POWER GAMES - EXAMINING PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES

Having examined the 'power grid' in participating churches, we now turn to 'power games' - perceptions and experiences of power in the church.

In order to determine people's attitudes toward power respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with two groups of statements, the first group relating in a general way to power in the church, the second relating power specifically to pastoral leadership

### 1 Perceptions of power in the church

#### 1. "God wants us to be powerful because there is a lot God wants us to do"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	16%	26%	21%	18%
OFFICIALS	28%	29%	14%	6%

The majority of church officials appear to be happy to work with powerful leaders!

The statement is in fact a quotation from Roy Oswald:

"Does God want us to be powerful or not? I contend that God does want us to be powerful. All of us are called in unique ways to be effective. There is no particular virtue in being impotent or ineffective. In order to be effective we need to be powerful. There is no way around this. If power is the ability to get something done, then we all are going to need lots of power, because there is a lot God wants us to do"<sup>50</sup>.

Oswald recognises that such power needs to be used "with fear and trembling". But he maintains that for leaders not to use the power available to them is to be like the foolish servant in the parable, who buried his master's talent until his master returned.

Roy Oswald's comments on power are typical of other North American Christian leaders. For example, Peter Wagner, the American church growth 'guru', in underlining the fact that "strong pastoral leaders" are the first vital sign of a healthy, growing church, went on to say: "Pastor, you should be the spark plug!...Pastor, don't be afraid of your power"<sup>51</sup>. Calvin Miller, in his introduction to the seminary textbook *The Empowered Leader* declares: "If God has called you to lead, do so! All leadership is strong. Weak leadership is no leadership... Lead with power or do not call yourself a leader"<sup>52</sup>. Miller then goes on throughout his book to speak of "power leadership" and "power leaders". Unfortunately such statements, without

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<sup>50</sup> Roy Oswald, *Power Analysis Of A Congregation 2*

<sup>51</sup> See Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Regal, Glendale, California 1976) 55-68.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin Miller, *The Empowered Leader* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville 1995) x,xi.

being qualified, can be quite misleading. They can easily encourage the abuse of power.

## 2. "Power is not a dirty word"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	19%	35%	8%	16%
OFFICIALS	15%	38%	4%	13%

A bare majority of ministers believe that "power is not a dirty word".

Once again Roy Oswald is the source of this quotation. "Power", he wrote, "is not a dirty word. Power is the ability to mobilize resources, to be effective towards specific ends. In and of itself power is neither good nor evil"<sup>53</sup>.

To be fair, the kind of power Oswald has in mind is the power to empower others: "The more I empower others, the more powerful everyone in my system is, and the more powerful I become"<sup>54</sup>. The emphasis, however, needs to be on the empowerment of others. This naturally leads us on to the third statement.

## 3. "The exercise of power can only be justified in the interests of empowering others"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	30%	35%	5%	20%
OFFICIALS	18%	35%	6%	9%

More ministers - and to a slightly lesser extent - most church officials were positive in the use of power to empower others.

This statement is a slight adaptation of some words of Robert Runcie, the former Archbishop of Canterbury: "The exercise of power can only be justified in the interests of empowering Christian men and women to be what God wants them to be"<sup>55</sup>.

Runcie in fact dislikes the use of the word "power". He much prefers the term "authority", which for him is a form of legitimate power which always has the good of others in view.

"Authority", he writes, "can enable us to grow... Authority far from being a necessary evil, is a good concerned to channel, harmonise and thus maximise human riches... While a string quartet can operate by itself, the richer the variety of instrumentalists you assemble for music-making, the greater the need for a conductor to weld all those excellences into an orchestra"<sup>56</sup>.

Runcie is not alone in preferring to speak of authority rather than of power. The philosopher

<sup>53</sup> Roy Oswald, *Power Analysis Of A Congregation* 3

<sup>54</sup> Roy Oswald, *Power Analysis* 4

<sup>55</sup> Robert Runcie, *Authority In Crisis* 27

<sup>56</sup> Robert Runcie, *Authority In Crisis* 17,18

John Skinner, for instance, likewise preferred to contrast "legitimate power" with "coercive power". He regarded "authority" as basically being a tool to nurture others. He pointed out that the Latin verb "*augere*", which means "to increase, to cause to grow, to fertilize, to make fertile, to strengthen, to increase or to enlarge" is the verb root of the noun "*auctoritas*", from which we gain our word authority<sup>57</sup>.

4. "*Power is like saltwater: the more you drink the thirstier you become*"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree	
MINISTERS	22%	38%	5%	20%	
OFFICIALS	17%	14%	10%		13%

Almost two thirds of ministers were in agreement with this proposition taken from an essay by Charles Colson<sup>58</sup>.

A former advisor to President Nixon, who was subsequently jailed for his involvement in the Watergate conspiracy, Colson wrote very much out of his own personal experience. He found that "although power may begin as a means to an end, it soon becomes the end itself"<sup>59</sup>. Elsewhere he wrote:

"The lure of power can separate the most resolute of Christians from the true nature of Christian leadership, which is service to others... Nothing distinguishes the kingdoms of man from the kingdom of God more than their diametrically opposed views of the exercise of power. One seeks to control people, the other to serve people; one promotes self, the other prostrates self; one seeks prestige and position, the other lifts up the lowly and despised"<sup>60</sup>.

5. "*Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, and this is especially true of religion*"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	39%	32%	4%	11%
OFFICIALS	24%	32%	14%	11%

Ministers perhaps more than church officials appear to appreciate the dangers of power in the church. It was Lord Acton who wrote that "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely"<sup>61</sup> However, it is Richard Foster who particularly links the corrupting nature of power to religion<sup>62</sup>. He explains the peculiarly corrupt nature of religious power by pointing to the danger of people equating their opinions with God. As we have already seen

<sup>57</sup> John E. Skinner, "Ideology, Authority And Faith" 33-35 in *Authority In the Anglican Communion* (Anglican Book Centre, Toronto 1987) edited by S.W. Sykes.

<sup>58</sup> Charles Colson, "The Power Illusion" 27 in *Power Religion* ed by M.S. Horton

<sup>59</sup> Charles Colson "The Power Illusion" 26

<sup>60</sup> Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids 1987) 272

<sup>61</sup> Lord Acton in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton 3rd April 1887.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Foster, *Money, Sex And Power* 178

above, nothing is more dangerous or devilish than when people bring God onto their side. The religious dimension to power has about it an intensity not found elsewhere. It adds a sense of self-righteousness which is not open to reason from elsewhere. It is precisely because Christians involve God in their power struggles, that causes these struggles to often be more vicious than ever they might be in the wider world. For if God is on my side, then the Devil must be on your side. The struggle becomes a battle to the death between good and evil. But as Foster says: "Jesus Christ alone is always right. The rest of us must recognize our own foibles and frailties and seek to learn from the correction of others"<sup>63</sup> ...

6. "Resorting to piety is a power play peculiar to Christians"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	18%	32%	12%	13%
OFFICIALS	8%	16%	25%	13%

A far greater proportion of ministers as over against church officials assented to this proposition. Does their experience - perhaps even their knowledge of themselves - make ministers more aware of power disguised as piety?

This statement is from *The Religion of Power* by Cheryl Forbes. She continues: "It is manipulation at its worst - and best, since it nearly always succeeds"<sup>64</sup>. She is surely right. It is much more difficult to disagree with a personal opinion than to disagree with a word from God. The statement, for instance, "God has led me to tell you that...." carries with it tremendous power. True, Paul told the Corinthian church that the gift of discernment should always be exercised along with the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 12). However, many Christians seem to find it difficult to exercise their mental faculties.

Apparent piety can indeed be a smokescreen for quite impious motives. Cambridge's Starbridge Professor, Fraser Watts, makes a similar point, but in a slightly different way when he writes: "There are perhaps few things more distasteful than power-struggles in the Church being waged under the camouflage of theological disagreements"<sup>65</sup>. Would that church people could be more honest - with themselves and with others!

7. "The exercise of power always implies coercion and violence"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	5%	16%	44%	21%
OFFICIALS	4%	7%	47%	21%

The majority of respondents were not prepared to view power in a totally negative light.

Here we have to do with yet another quotation from Cheryl Forbes<sup>66</sup>. To be fair, the

<sup>63</sup> Richard Foster, *Money, Sex And Power* 179

<sup>64</sup> Cheryl Forbes, *The Religion Of Power* 20

<sup>65</sup> Fraser Watts, "Enabling Authority: A Psychological Approach", *Modern Churchman*, New Series 33.2 (1991) 15

<sup>66</sup> Cheryl Forbes, *The Religion of Power* 85

sentence taken out of context is probably a little bit misleading for Forbes constantly contrasts the exercise of authority with the exercise of power.

"*Power* means insistence on what we want for no other reason than that we want it; it means making other people follow us despite their own wishes. Power is assumed, insensitive, dehumanising, and ultimately destructive. *Authority*, on the other hand, is positive, and usually involves a right which has been conferred within strictly controlled bounds"<sup>67</sup>.

Clearly if power is illegitimate in nature, then it is open to coercion and violence. It all depends on what one means by "power".

8. "*Power is a serious problem in the church today*"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	18%	39%	8%	11%
OFFICIALS	9%	21%	10%	21%

The majority of ministers agreed with this proposition - but not so the church officials. Maybe again the ministers were being more honest about themselves, while the church officials were giving their ministers the benefit of the doubt.

Actually the original form of this statement was: "Power is **the** most serious problem in Christianity today"<sup>68</sup>. These words of Ted Engstrom repeatedly find an echo in one form or another.

"The religion of Babylon (i.e. the religion of violence)...is thriving as never before in every sector of contemporary American life, even in our synagogues and churches"<sup>69</sup>.

"All the errors and misfortunes of the church are closely bound up with the curse of power"<sup>70</sup>.

"When God looks at our world, God weeps. God weeps because the lust for power has entrapped and corrupted the human spirit... The most insidious, divisive, and wounding power is the power used in the service of God".<sup>71</sup>

The fact that the misuse and abuse of power may not always be as blatant in Britain as in North America does not make it any less of a problem. Indeed, it is precisely the fact that it is not always recognised which makes it so dangerous.

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<sup>67</sup> Cheryl Forbes, *The Religion Of Power* 84

<sup>68</sup> Quoted by Cheryl Forbes, *The Religion of Power* 89

<sup>69</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging The Powers*, 13

<sup>70</sup> Paul Tournier, *The Violence Inside* 152

<sup>71</sup> Henri Nouwen, *The Path Of Power* (Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1995), 8,13

## 2. Perceptions of power in leadership

Here is another series of statements to which ministers and church officials were asked to respond:

### 1. "Ministers exercise too much power"

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	7%	35%	5%	20%
OFFICIALS	4%	21%	14%	22%

A marked difference between ministers and church officials emerged. Is this a case of ministers being more self-aware? Or is it a case of many church officials feeling happy to work with powerful ministers?

So much depends upon one's definition of power. Some ministers have abrogated their leadership powers. They find it so much more comfortable to "go with the flow". And, of course, that is true. To take the initiative, to be a change-agent, is an uncomfortable experience. The moment leaders raise their heads above the parapet they become the target for snipers. Some ministers have undoubtedly opted out and fulfilled rather the role of "chaplains" to the flock. Would that they exercised power!

On the other hand, others have gone for 'over-kill'. Although Protestant churches have since the Reformation decried the power of the Pope, there have been many little popes in not least the most Protestant of Protestant churches. Some of the "newer" churches have introduced "heavy shepherding" practices which appear to be based far more on the life of David than the life of Jesus.

Generalisations, therefore, are difficult. It all depends...! One thing is certain, ministers have not sufficiently empowered others. They have insufficiently encouraged the ministry of all believers. The second statement highlights this issue:

### 2. "Ministers need to delegate more"

	Strongly agree	Agree slightly	Disagree slightly
MINISTERS	49%	39%	1%
OFFICIALS	30%	45%	3%

Not surprisingly there was general agreement that ministers need to delegate more. However, there was some evidence to suggest that ministers do not always practise what they preach as far as delegation is concerned. For the perceptions of how much the ministers actually delegated varied:

	A lot	Quite a lot	A moderate amount
MINISTERS	8%	33%	49%
OFFICIALS	5%	33%	40%

3. *"Ministers need to be people-orientated, not goal-orientated"*

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	33%	27%	1%	16%
OFFICIALS	38%	32%	1%	7%
MINISTERS of larger churches	22%	27%	0%	22%

There is significant divergence of view between church officials and ministers - and in particular between church officials and ministers of larger churches.

4. *"Pastoral leadership is non-coercive"*

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	35%	33%	0	17%
OFFICIALS	32%	28%	2%	13%

The words of the John Stuart Mill, the 19th century English philosopher, are very apposite: "The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant"<sup>72</sup>.

True pastoral leadership is always servant leadership: i.e. leadership based on the pattern of Jesus, the Servant King. Such servant-leadership can never be from 'above', it must always be from below'. This is brought out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16.15-16: "Now brothers and sisters, you know that members of the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people..." Submission always goes hand in hand with service.

Pastoral leadership must always respect the conscience of another. It should never force another to do something over which they are basically unhappy. In this context the words of 1 Peter 5.3 are very relevant: "Do not lord it over those in your charge".

Pastoral leadership is not based on the power of force, but rather upon the power of love. In the oft-quoted words of Napoleon: "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded great empire; but upon what did the creations of our genius depend? upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for him". The fact is that where people feel themselves loved, time and again they will follow. "Whom you would change", said Martin Luther King, "you must first love".

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<sup>72</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859) chapter 1



5. *"Personal growth is more important than church growth"*

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	14%	30%	5%	20%
OFFICIALS	23%	22%	9%	10%

A large minority - but a minority nonetheless - agreed that personal growth is more important than church growth. On the other hand a significant number disagreed.

In this case those who neither agreed nor disagreed are surely right. Personal growth and church growth go hand in hand. They are the two sides of the one coin. In the Great Commission Jesus commands us to "make disciples". Such disciple-making includes both quantitative ("baptising") and qualitative ("teaching") growth. The task of any minister is to ensure that an "all-round" ministry is exercised in this respect.

6. *"Ministers have a God-given authority to lead"*

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	41%	38%	2%	6%
OFFICIALS	44%	36%	3%	7%

This proposition prompted general agreement. .

7. *"Churches benefit from strong leadership"*

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	42%	40%	0	5%
OFFICIALS	44%	36%	0	%

Churches without strong leadership tend to self-destruct. This is because in any given church there are always a variety of human emotions and ambitions that move not far beneath the surface. The task of the leader to ensure that the church is driven by the wind of God's Spirit, and not deflected by the currents below. The good leader works as a senior partner with other leaders to achieve the mission of the church, build the church together as a team in order to enable it to fulfil that mission, and at the same time meet the needs of individuals within the church<sup>73</sup>. The respondents in this survey realised a basic fact that church doesn't just happen. The church is only able to live up to its calling as gifts of leadership are exercised.

8. *"The key to church growth is leadership"*

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	30%	40%	11%	1%
OFFICIALS	35%	34%	6%	4%

Here also ministers and church officials were in general agreement, although some ministers

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<sup>73</sup> The basis these of *Dynamic Leadership* by Paul Beasley-Murray

disagreed strongly. Nevertheless, as Peter Wagner has shown, the key to a healthy growing church is strong pastoral leadership. The first of the "vital signs" he identifies is "a pastor who is a possibility thinker and whose dynamic leadership has been used to catalyze the entire church into action for growth"<sup>74</sup>. The truth of what Wagner says from a North American viewpoint has been confirmed for the UK scene<sup>75</sup>. All growing churches have strong leadership.

9. *"Ministers should not be afraid to use their power"*

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	13%	40%	21%	15%
OFFICIALS	15%	37%	12%	4%

Ministers and officials agree in registering somewhat cautious approval to this proposition. A significant minority of ministers, however, are unhappy about it.

10. *"Good pastoral leadership is directive"*

	Strongly agree	Slightly agree	Strongly disagree	Slightly disagree
MINISTERS	18%	25%	9%	28%
OFFICIALS	27%	29%	4%	16%

Here again caution is in evidence - certainly from the ministers. Church officials seem more inclined to give their ministers the benefit of the doubt.

**3. Power exercised in the church**

How is power exercised? Martha Stortz, an American theologian, has suggested that there are three different dimensions of ministerial power

- power "over" - or co-ercive power
- power "within" - charismatic power
- power "with" - co-active power

She sees these various dimensions of power reflecting the Trinity, equating "power over" with God the Father, "power within" with God the Spirit, and "power with" with God the Son:

"A God who creates, judges, and preserves is also a God who is with us in the incarnation. This person of God informs how one exercises 'power over'. A God who sustains, surprises, reveals is also a God who enables and requires the kind of discernment necessary to distinguishing how one exercises 'power within'. A God with us, 'Emmanuel'. who befriends, comforts, and challenges, is also a God who

<sup>74</sup> Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* 55-68

<sup>75</sup> Paul Beasley-Murray & Alan Wilkinson, *Turning The Tide* 31-37

shows us how to befriend one another. This person of God informs how one exercises 'power with'<sup>76</sup>.

On this analysis, no one leadership style is more of God than another. Furthermore, each leadership style is open to abuse. Everything depends on how leaders exercise their power "over" others, how they discipline power "within", and how they share power "with" friends in ministry.

It was this analysis which in part lay behind the question: "*How do you mostly tend to exercise power? Is it 'over' people as you give a strong lead? Is it 'within' the church by the inspiration of your personality? Or is it 'with' people as you in turn empower them?*"

	MINISTERS	OFFICIALS
"Over" people	4%	13%
"Within" the church	46%	44%
"With" people	47%	38%

Although there is a general recognition that ministers have a God-given authority to lead, the response suggests that many ministers are rightly circumspect in how they exercise that power. The majority felt that they either exercised power "within" the church by the inspiration of their personality or "with" people as they in turn empower them. However, according to church officials their ministers are stronger leaders than they realise!

Among the various categories of ministers, the charismatics scored the highest with 8% of ministers who tend to exercise power "over" people. There appeared to be a clear emphasis of degree between ministers of smaller and larger churches: 43% of ministers in smaller churches said they tended to lead "within" the church by inspiration as over against 51% of ministers of larger churches; while 52% of ministers of smaller churches tend to exercise power "with" people in turn to empower them as over against 38% of ministers of larger churches.

### 3.1 *The abuse of power*

We then sought to test rather more precisely how ministers exercise their power by asking a series of eight fairly specific questions relating to the abuse of ministerial power.

"To what extent have you been involved in -

1. imposing your own style of worship?
2. using your sexuality to help you get your own way?
3. being manipulative in church meetings in order to get your own way?
4. not providing a lead when it is needed?
5. pushing through a course of action that was unpopular?
6. playing on the guilt of members of the congregation?
7. 'hiding behind God' in order to get your own way?
8. intimidating weaker people into a course of action?

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<sup>76</sup> Martha Ellen Stortz, *Pastor Power* (Abingdon, Nashville 1993) 42.

MINISTERS (OFFICIALS)	Very often	Fairly Often	Rarely	Never
Imposed worship style	8% (15%)	46% (42%)	37% (31%)	8% (10%)
Used sexuality	0 (1%)	1% (2%)	23% (17%)	74% (78%)
Manipulated meetings	0 (4%)	9% (11%)	56% (42%)	35% (42%)
Given no lead	1% (2%)	26% (13%)	61% (48%)	8% (34%)
Forced course of action	0 (0)	13% (9%)	72% (50%)	13% (37%)
Played on guilt	0 (1%)	2% (4%)	40% (24%)	57% (66%)
Hid behind God	0 (1%)	2% (8%)	30% (6%)	64% (80%)
Intimidated weak	0 (0)	1% (6%)	26% (15%)	72% (75%)

As one would expect, most ministers tend to give very direct leadership in the area of worship. More than a quarter of ministers admitted to often failing to provide a lead when it was needed, although then, church officials tend to view their ministers in a more kindly light. A not insignificant number of ministers admitted to fairly often pushing through a course of action that was unpopular, although again, church officials tend to be more kindly disposed as far as evaluating the actions of their ministers is concerned. Or is it that their ministers are more realistic?

By contrast church officials felt that ministers more often manipulated church meetings than the ministers were willing to admit!

The percentage of ministers admitting having often abused their power in other ways decreased dramatically, although a far from insignificant number of ministers admitted that at times they had played on the guilt of their members (42%), had 'hidden behind God' in order to get their own way (32%), had intimidated weaker people (27%), and had used their sexuality to get their own way (24%).

These statistics become even more disturbing once one recognises that they probably do not tell the whole truth. The true number of ministers involved in major abuse is likely to be considerably higher. The lower figures in the survey may be due in part because some ministers may be lacking in self-awareness, and in part too because some may be unwilling to face up to their misuse of power.

### 3.2 *Where does power lie in the church?*

So far we have been focussing primarily on the power of the minister, and yet power does not reside in the minister alone. Indeed, according to the responses received, in most churches it is not the minister who has most power, but rather the group of leaders represented by such terms as the elders, the deacons, the PCC. The responses indicated that generally power is exerted by the following people in this descending order of strength:

1. Elders/Deacons/PCC
2. The Minister
3. The Holy Spirit (!)
4. The Congregation/Church Meeting
5. Older established families in the church
6. Former Leaders

However we analysed the questionnaires - whether it be responses from all the ministers, responses from ministers of smaller churches, responses from ministers of larger churches, responses of church officials - the order of strength was always the same. The only exception was the Baptists who put the Church Meeting on a par with the Holy Spirit!

This assessment of where power lies contrasts somewhat starkly with the American scene. Darius Salter again:

"When we asked the pastors who wielded the most power within their churches, 18% noted the board, 7% the congregation, but 67% saw themselves as having the most decision-making power in their churches. Whether they do or not isn't the issue. The greatest portion of these pastors think and act as if the power of destiny *is* in their hands"<sup>77</sup>.

The relative unimportance attached to "former leaders" may be a little surprising. In many churches "former leaders" can at times be a fairly powerful lobby. Lyle Schaller refers to them as the AAEO Club: i.e. the Angry Alienated Ex-Old Leaders:

"While their numbers rarely exceed one or two or three %, the members of this informal 'club' (it usually meets without prior announcement in a member's home) often can be highly vocal in articulating their unhappiness with the growing sea of strange faces they see around them in church".<sup>78</sup>

It can be difficult for older members to give up the reins of power. Some of them have been so used to being at the centre of "power" in church life, that they resent feeling marginalised. Lacking in grace, they sometimes still seek to control the life of the church, even although they no longer have any formal position. It can take a degree of strength on the part of the present leaders not to be bullied or intimidated by such AAEOs.

### 3.3 *Where does the minister's power lie?*

Another fascinating ordering occurred in response to the question where the minister's focal point of authority in the church lay.

	Ministers	Officials
1. The minister's calling from God	76%	75%
2. The minister's position	68%	75%
3. The minister's expertise	42%	51%
4. The minister's personal charisma	28%	32%

In other words, for ministers and church officials alike, the prime focus of authority are the minister's calling and position - two "givens" which every minister shares. Personal qualities seemed to be of less significance. Interestingly, even charismatic ministers listed the minister's personal charisma in fourth place!

The importance of the minister's call cannot be overemphasised. Time and again it is this

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<sup>77</sup> Darius Salter, *What Really Happens In Ministry* 27

<sup>78</sup> Lyle Schaller, *The Pastor And The People* 165

sense of call which sustains ministers through some of the most difficult of times. It was, as we have seen, their sense of call which caused many ministers not to leave the ministry. From this perspective the sense of call is good and positive.

However, everything that is good can also be twisted and used to base ends. According to Larry Ingram, the "call" which involves an experience in which an individual sees him- or herself set aside as God's messenger or God's agent, with responsibility to God in the first place rather than to the church, results in the minister within the "congregational tradition" feeling "an internal pressure to control affairs, which effectively complements the external motivation of being held responsible for the success of the church by the congregation"<sup>79</sup>. Indeed, he later argues that this sense of call results in manipulation. "The more the socialization process confirms the uniqueness of the pastor's calling, the greater is his willingness to manipulate the congregation. A corollary is that pastors with more experience (more confirming experiences) are more willing to engage in manipulative techniques"<sup>80</sup>. Although Ingram's research is based on a study of Southern Baptist pastors in the States, it doesn't take too much insight to realise that there could be parallels in churches in Britain too.

The position of ministers clearly lends itself to the exercise of power. By virtue of their ordination to the Christian ministry in general and by virtue of the church's calling of them to their present office, ministers have been given authority not only to preach and teach, but to lead the people of God out in their mission in the world. Furthermore, in an almost unparalleled manner, ministers are given freedom to enter into people's homes in the course of pastoral care and to have access into their lives. All this power comes from position.

The calling and position of the minister are basic to the minister's authority in the church. That calling and that position can be strengthened both through the minister's professional expertise as also through his personal 'charisma'. It is these two elements which normally account for the greater influence of one minister over against another. The impact of a sermon, for instance, is all the greater if it has been well-researched and well-prepared. But even the most well-written of sermons may lack power if the minister lacks charisma. In the words of Phillipps Brooks, preaching can be defined as "truth through personality". Or as Martyn Lloyd Jones put it, it is "logic on fire". The minister's calling and position are of little worth without the expertise and the personal charisma.

It is therefore surprising that these two sources of authority did not score more - and not least that the minister's personal charisma was ranked as low as it was. For Darius Salter is surely right: "success in ministry" as far as the so-called 'man-in-the-street' is concerned, "is largely predicated on personality"<sup>81</sup>. Similarly Paul Harrison on the basis of his study of the American Free Churches writes: "It is the minister with the dramatic personality who often gains a higher prestige than that which is accorded the official priests of other religious movements"<sup>82</sup>. One explanation for the lower rating of personal 'charisma' in our survey

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<sup>79</sup> Larry C.Ingram, "Notes on pastoral power in the congregational tradition", *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion* XIX.1 (March 1980) 44

<sup>80</sup> Larry C.Ingram, "Leadership, Democracy and Religion: Role Ambiguity among Pastors In Southern Baptist Churches", *Journal For The Scientific Study Of Religion* XX.2 (June 1981) 125.

<sup>81</sup> Darius Salter, *What Really Happens In Ministry* 65

<sup>82</sup> Paul M.Harrison, *Authority and Power in the Free Church Tradition. A Social Case Study*

may be that some ministers may prefer to externalise the focus of their power on the ground that the power is more than justifiable since it is linked in with the demands of the 'job'.

### 3.4 *How powerful are ministers?*

Do ministers really appreciate the power they have - not least the power that is bestowed on them by reason of their call and their position? The answer appears to be that the larger the church the more likely they are to appreciate their power - but not as much as their church officials.

	Very powerful	Moderately powerful
MINISTERS	5%	62%
OFFICIALS	13%	70%
MINISTERS- small churches	4%	58%
MINISTERS - large churches	7%	71%

Ministers are actually often more powerful than either they or their members give credit for. The fact is that Sunday by Sunday ministers are exercising power as they preach. At the very least they are constantly influencing the way in which people think about life. Furthermore, when there are issues at stake, ministers have the opportunity to define those issues in their preaching and to give guidance on how those issues might be resolved. Similarly in an indirect fashion they are exercising power as they lead the worship in the sense that they (as over against their members) are in the "spotlight". The very fact, for instance, that in most churches it is the ministers who preside at the Lord's Table, enhances their prestige. Again, in their ministry of visiting the sick and the bereaved, ministers are often - albeit unconsciously - gaining in power, in the sense that as a result of ministerial support during periods of vulnerability there is often a strong sense of gratitude, if not obligation, toward the minister. Ministers exercise considerable power as a result of their day-to-day ministry. The fact that only 5% of ministers perceive themselves as "very powerful" may simply underline their ambivalent attitude towards power.

### 3.5 *False expectations*

Perhaps as a result of the difference in perception regarding the power of the minister, there was also a marked difference in the way in which ministers and church officials responded to a question about the extent false expectations were put on the minister.

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
MINISTERS	15%	73%	9%
OFFICIALS	8%	54%	30%

Interestingly 93% of ministers under 45 felt particularly under pressure of expectation - 18% to a large extent, and 75% to some extent.

The nature of these false expectations was not spelt out. Ministers are put onto pedestals. Not only are they expected to be good with young people, they are expected to be good with old

people too. They are expected to see to all the needs of the members, but at the same time to develop an effective evangelistic ministry too. In the words of John Harris, "Churches do not hire a pastor, not at first. They hire a knotted tangle of messianic, erotic, parental wishes and hopes dropped crazy-quilt fashion on the shoulders of one finite, limited individual"<sup>83</sup>.

False expectations relate not just to how ministers use their time. Strange as it may seem, they also relate to fact that in our broken society ministers are sometimes seen to be the parent they never had. Edwin Friedman, for example, writes: "Much of the negative and superpositive 'transference' that we receive from members of our congregational family is a direct result of the 'baggage' they failed to leave at home". The result is that ministers automatically attract all kinds of misdirected "heat". Friedman goes on to say that some people either deify or crucify religious leaders. There is often no middle ground<sup>84</sup>.

### 3.6 Ministerial authority

The same difference in perception between ministers and church officials with regard to ministerial power probably accounts too for the difference of response to a question relating to whether the churches give the minister more authority than is actually theirs.

	To a large extent	To some extent	Not at all
MINISTERS	14%	60%	21%
OFFICIALS	7%	45%	44%

In spite of the differences, the majority of both ordained and lay respondents felt that ministers have more authority than is actually theirs. Interestingly the two groups of ministers which felt that they were not given more authority than is their due were the under-45s (27% not at all) and those who enjoy ministry quite a lot (27%).

Unfortunately, the question proved in the end too vague. We do not know what was meant by "too much authority". Is it, for instance, that some ministers are uncomfortable in exercising leadership in the church?

### *Freedom not to follow*

How much freedom do churches have not to follow the lead of their minister?

	A lot	Quite a lot	A moderate amount	Not very much	None at all
MINISTERS	21%	49%	25%	3%	0
OFFICIALS	15%	38%	33%	9%	0

Church officials seem to think that their ministers had more power than they realised. On the basis of the church officials' answers one might well presume that ministers are more than likely to get their own way.

<sup>83</sup> John C.Harris, *Stress, Power & Ministry* 73

<sup>84</sup> Edwin H.Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process In Church & Synagogue* (Guilford Press, New York & London) 1985 quoted in *Leadership* XIV (Winter 1993) 81,82



### 3.7 Ministerial grace

What would happen if a minister felt very strongly that a course of action was of God, but the church felt otherwise?

	Accept their decision	Ignore church's decision
MINISTERS	70%	21%
OFFICIALS	58%	33%

Did some of the church officials respond this way because they have a high opinion of their ministers' godliness - their minister would follow God's leading, whatever? Or did they respond in this way because they felt their ministers could be stubborn?

Three questions sought to probe the ability of ministers to give way gracefully, to handle anger and to handle disappointment. At first sight there appeared to be very little overall difference between the response of the ministers and of the church officials

Give way gracefully	Very able	To some extent
MINISTERS	21%	72%
OFFICIALS	33%	49%
Handle anger	Very able	To some extent
MINISTERS	26%	64%
OFFICIALS	55%	30%
Handle disappointment	Very able	To some extent
MINISTERS	11%	58%
OFFICIALS	25%	54%

It is noticeable that the church officials have a higher opinion of their ministers in terms to being "very able" to give way, and to handle anger and disappointment. Is this because ministers are more realistic with themselves?

## 4. Power experienced in change

If the church in the West is to survive, it must change. This point has vividly been made by William Easum, Director of the Texas-based organisation 21st Century Strategies, who somewhat amusingly likened traditional churches to dinosaurs.

"Congregations whose membership has plateaued or is declining have much in common with dinosaurs. Both have great heritages. Both require enormous amounts of food... Both became endangered species. ... Like the dinosaur they have a voracious appetite. Much of their time, energy, and money is spent foraging for food (for themselves), so that little time is left to feed the unchurched. ....Either their pride or their nearsightedness keeps them from changing the ways they minister to people.... All around are unchurched, hurting people... But many refuse to change their methods and structures to minister to people where they are in ways they can understand. Like the dinosaur, their necks are too stiff or their eyes too near-sighted. Clearly God doesn't care if these congregations survive; but God passionately cares if

they meet the spiritual needs of those God sends their way<sup>85</sup>".

Within a specifically British context a similar point has been made by Kent Professor Robin Gill, who with reference to the Prayer Book version of Ps 102.6 likened traditional churches to the pelicans in St James' Park in central London - peculiar creatures, stranded (in an environment not their own): "Awkward, out of place, angular, with a big mouth but little brain, demanding but inactive". He went on:

"Churches in Britain need to make urgent choices about structure and direction. If they are to cease being pelicans, they need to be much clearer about how they might be effective in present-day Britain. They need to be more single-minded about growth... about how they might reach the nine out of ten people in Britain who seldom or never go to church"<sup>86</sup>.

It is gratifying to note that change has been a major factor in almost every church surveyed. In response to our questions we received a mass of data detailing 484 separate **key** changes which had taken place over the past five years. 91% of ministers gave such details: 4% mentioned one key change; 9% two key changes; 25% three key changes; 28% four key changes; and 26% five key changes. It is possible that details of yet further key changes would have been given, had room been given on the questionnaire!

The nature of the changes varied enormously: To give just a few examples:

Change in worship style	81%
Major redevelopment of buildings	21%
Changed to appearance of buildings	18%
Change in Sunday School work	18%
Introduction of new pastoral groups	18%
Introduction of Alpha courses	15%
Change in time of Sunday services	14%

These responses are encouraging. For change is essential for life and growth. Only in death is there no change. The fact that there has been so much change in the churches represented in this survey augurs well for their future. True, change for change's sake effects little. But change with effective mission in view is always to be welcomed.

The responses underline once again the importance of leadership. For in all the changes the ministers clearly played a key role, and appear to have been responsible for most of them; similarly 'lay' leaders in general (e.g. elders and deacons) appear also to have played a significant role in initiating change. Leaders are almost by definition change-agents.

The fact is that we live in a fast-changing world. The church must constantly be adapting to the world if she is to survive, let alone to flourish. Indeed, adapting is perhaps not the right word. It gives the impression of the church always trying to catch up with where society is.

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<sup>85</sup> *Dancing with Dinosaurs: Ministry In A Hostile And Hurting World* (Abingdon, Nashville 1993)

<sup>86</sup> Robin Gill, *A Vision For Growth: Why Your Church Doesn't Have To Be A Pelican In The Wilderness* 3,7

Ideally, leaders need to become pro-active in their thinking, anticipating the changes which impinge upon our lives. Pastors may not have a monopoly in terms of foresight and insight, but unlike most others they have time for reflecting on current and future trends and in the light of that reflection bringing to the church proposals for change of one kind or another.

Clearly people had not always found change easy. But then do they ever? Change is always uncomfortable - particularly when we may not ourselves have been the initiators of such change. However, 47% of the changes had now been very much owned by the church and 43% to some extent. Only 9% of changes had not really been owned by the church, with a further 2% not at all owned! When we realise that we are here dealing with major change over a relatively short period, these responses are quite encouraging.

## 5. Power experienced in conflict

Where there is so much change, differences of opinion are only to be expected. So too is conflict. 94% of ministers and 91% of church officials felt that some degree of conflict was inevitable in church life. Interestingly 87% of ministers and 76% of church officials said that in their experience conflict could be productive in church life.

The ministers were asked to elaborate on the ways in which, in their experience, conflict could be productive, and almost all did, but in so doing, a number gave provisos such as "if handled positively and sensitively"; "if contained in love"; "if personalities are not involved". The positive side of conflict included the following:

- "It brings things out into the open", revealing not simply hopes and fears, but sometimes "past hurts". It "discloses hidden agendas", as it "gets people to say what they mean face-to-face rather than behind backs". In this way "it reveals what people *do* feel passionate about"
- "It forces people to address and work through the issues", and in so doing "makes people consider other angles, viewpoints & facts and breaks prejudice". It "challenges complacency". As a result "it can lead to better understanding". As minds are sharpened, "ideas and directions emerge or are refined when 'tested' by contrary views".
- Conflict "helps people to feel heard and to own decisions".
- Conflict can also enhance relationships if handled maturely: "if people can be open and honest, it can build confidence in one another".

These ministers are right. Low-level conflict, which focuses on issues rather than upon personalities, can be extremely productive. Disagreement can be very much a sign of life. As Lynn Buzzard says:

"This is especially true if a church has any character of *mission*. If a church is more than just a *koinonia* group - if it in fact is moving *toward* something, then there's going to be debate about what that something is and how we get there and who's going to lead us".<sup>87</sup>

A church with no conflict is a church where nothing is happening. Churches without conflict are probably churches where the ministers are not doing their job in seeking to lead out the

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<sup>87</sup> Lynn Buzzard, "War and Peace in the Local Church", *Leadership* IV.3 (Summer 1983) 21.

people of God in adventurous mission. Lynn Buzzard quotes Saul Alinsky: "Change means movement, and movement means friction, and friction means heat, and heat means conflict. You just can't get the rocket off the ground discreetly and quietly"<sup>88</sup>.

Alternatively churches where there is no conflict are in danger of ceasing to be churches, and instead are running the risk of cultism. When Paul urges the church at Philippi to be "of the same mind" (Phil 2.2), he is not advocating the "group-think" of George Orwell's 1984. The one mind of which Paul was speaking was the mind of Christ, who laid aside all pretensions to power and to glory. Sadly the leaders who urge their followers to be "of one mind" are often more concerned with their "mind" on the matter rather than with Christ's mind - unlike Christ, they are very much into pretensions to power and to glory.

Conflict can therefore be a sign of life and of health in the church. However, there is a world of a difference between low-level and high-level conflict. The former involves disagreement. The latter involves a fight, in which the contestants often don't just want to win - as part of winning they may also want to get rid of the opposition. This kind of conflict benefits no church.

In this respect Bill Hybels, the senior pastor of Willowcreek, Chicago, has some wise words to say: "We expect disagreement, forceful disagreement. So instead of unity, we use the word *community*... The mark of community - true biblical unity - is not the absence of conflict. It is the presence of a reconciling spirit"<sup>89</sup>. The role of leadership is to ensure that conflict does not get out of control - that it is managed productively.

As far as *major* conflict in a church is concerned, just over half (52%) of the ministers said that in the course of their ministerial career they had experienced major conflict in a church of which they were minister. The ministers also judged that 57% of their predecessors in their present church had experienced major conflict. 58% of church officials likewise said that they had experienced major conflict in a church. For some strange reason as many as 80% of church treasurers responding said that they had experienced major conflict. However, in so far as we are dealing with a fairly small sample base (25) this could be just a statistical anomaly.

### 5.1 *Experiences of conflict*

The experiences of conflict were many and varied. The ministers' experiences can be summarised as follows:

- disputes with individuals or groups of individuals
- conflict around particular issues (e.g. buildings)
- breakdown in relationships with lay leaders
- contention about changes in worship - always a contentious issue
- disagreements about the use of church discipline
- conflict with ministerial colleagues
- differences of understanding of ministry (including women in ministry)

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<sup>88</sup> Lynn Buzzard, *Leadership* IV.3 (Summer 1983) 22

<sup>89</sup> Bill Hybels, "Standing in the Crossfire", *Leadership* XIV.1 (Winter 1993) 14.

The church officials' responses did not differ greatly from those of the ministers.

## 5.2 Conflict analysed

The respondents were asked to analyse their experience of conflict, in the sense that they were asked about what did the conflict revolve.

	MINISTERS	OFFICIALS
Minister's leadership style	33%	39%
Minister's values <sup>90</sup>	38%	29%
Minister's competence	13%	17%
Minister's productivity	11%	15%
Other reason	22%	18%

The "other" causes were many and various: e.g. friction between families, the self-appointed authority of a family group, greed, the church's unwillingness to change; an issue not directly to do with the minister.

Again it is interesting to compare these figures with North American research. According to Speed Leas, a leading expert in these matters, in situations where the pastor was involuntarily terminated:

- 46% involved the pastor's interpersonal competence
- In 28% there was significant value conflict
- In 12% the issue was productivity
- In 9% the pastor was physically or mentally ill (most of these were alcoholics)
- Only 6% was bad preaching one of the major causes of termination.

Leas comments: "Often the pastor's leadership becomes the central issue, no matter what people are really fighting over. The pastor will be blamed for taking one side, for not taking a side, or for the fact that others are having conflict"<sup>91</sup>.

The answers to how the conflict had been resolved were revealing

	MINISTERS	OFFICIALS
Conflict resolved thro' compromise	8%	7%
Conflict resolved thro' acceptance of change	28%	22%
Conflict unresolved	23%	34%

This last statistic is a serious one. If one in four, if not one in three, conflicts are unresolved, then surely the mission of the church must be affected?

<sup>90</sup> Values include such things as minister's understanding of mission, worship, and theology

<sup>91</sup> Speed Leas, "Inside Church Fights", *Leadership* X.1 (Winter 1989) 15

### *Members leaving the church*

Bearing in mind that we are dealing with explicitly *major* conflict it is surprising that relatively few members left. Only 38% of ministers (church officials: 42%) said that members had resigned. What is more, in less than 9% of churches (church officials: 6%) had resignations resulting directly from these conflicts totalled more than 6% of the church. Possibly this is why such a relatively high percentage of conflicts have remained unresolved. For the sake of the church's health it would surely be wiser for dissidents to find another spiritual home.

### *Ministers leaving the church*

A not inconsiderable number of ministers, however, have left their churches in unhappy circumstances. Of the ministers responding to the questionnaire around one in six ministers (16%) admitted to having left a church unhappily.

Only 4% admitted to having been actually forced out. In this respect the situation is very different from the USA. There a similar survey in the USA revealed that some 22.8% of pastors had been forced out<sup>92</sup>. In that American survey 43% of forced-out pastors said a "faction" pushed them out, and 71% of those indicated that the faction forcing them out numbered ten or less. It doesn't take many wolfhounds to savage a shepherd! Only 20% of pastors who were forced out said the real reason for their leaving was made known to the entire congregation.

Significantly the figure of those having left in unhappy circumstances rises to 43% of all ministers (church officials: 38%) as far as predecessors in their present church are concerned - indeed to 53% of all Baptist ministers. What is more, 44% of church officials appear to have experienced a minister leaving in unhappy circumstances.

Of those who themselves had experienced major conflict, the most common occasion when conflict had erupted was soon after the honeymoon period had come to an end (32% - as over against 17% of church officials), with around Christmas being the next most common time (13% - but only 3% of church officials). The appointment of a new staff member could also prove a flash point (ministers 11%: church officials 12%).

Of those who had experienced major conflict just over half said that they had been sustained by their fellow-leaders (57%), and by friends inside (54%) and outside (59%) the church. Again one senses a degree of loneliness and isolation here.

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<sup>92</sup> *Leadership* (Winter 1996) 42

### *Unjust treatment*

Many ministers felt that there had been times when they had been unjustly treated, but church officials were not so aware of such treatment. Interestingly, Baptist ministers in particular felt that they had been poorly treated.

	MINISTERS	BAPTIST MINISTERS	OFFICIALS
Unjustly treated by individuals in church	73%	81%	59%
Unjustly treated by deacons/elders	28%	39%	20%
Unjustly treated by church staff	15%	16%	11%

The areas in which ministers had been treated unjustly were varied.

	MINISTERS	OFFICIALS
Unfair criticism behind one's back	57%	47%
Overload of expectation	45%	29%
Verbal attacks in a church meeting	36%	21%
Verbal attacks after a service	35%	26%
Unfair criticism to one's face	34%	26%
Work overload	23%	12%
Sidelined/ganged up on	16%	12%
Forced by influential families	11%	11%
Threats of dismissal	5%	4%
Sexual manipulation	2%	0
Other	8%	5%

### *The expression of anger and the ability to forgive*

In so far as many ministers appear to find it difficult to express their anger, it is perhaps not unexpected that less than a quarter (24%) felt able to express their anger to fellow leaders such as deacons and/or elders. Indeed, only 33% said they were able to make their anger known to their wives.

Perhaps precisely because ministers find it difficult to express anger, it is also not unexpected that a good number of ministers find it difficult to let go and forgive

	MINISTERS	OFFICIALS
To a large extent	56%	31%
To some extent	28%	27%

According to 3% of church officials their ministers have just not been able to forgive. The fact is that there is no true forgiveness where anger is suppressed. Forgiveness by definition is a letting go. When ministers are unable to express their hurt and anger, the consequence normally is that they cannot truly forgive the one who has sinned against them

## 6. *Suffering*

A wide variety of distress has been experienced by ministers as a result of being in ministry. The following table also records church official's awareness of ministers known to them who had suffered as a result of being in ministry.

	MINISTERS	OFFICIALS
stress	92%	80%
hurt	83%	64%
hurt experienced by spouse	76%	45%
sleeping difficulties	57%	31%
abuse of spouse/family	55%	21%
poor health	44%	56%
suicidal thoughts	10%	2%
depression	9%	10%
nightmares	7%	4%

Not surprisingly the church officials were mostly less aware than the ministers themselves, yet even so they were aware of a good number of ministers who had suffered as a result of being in ministry.

In the light of this catalogue of misery it comes as a shock to discover that only 41% of ministers and 36% of church officials believe that "the church makes a lousy mother". Any other institution with such a track record would hardly be commended for its caring qualities. And yet strangely, for all its failings, God's people do care. For although there are those within the church who abuse their leaders, there are others who deeply care for those who have been called to have pastoral charge of them. But should one expect the church to care for its pastors?

John Harris argues that pastors should seek to become autonomous to the point at which they no longer expect their churches to assume responsibility for their lives and well being<sup>93</sup> It is precisely the dependency of pastors on their churches which causes them to be so vulnerable. Harris has a point. On the other hand, does not Paul's teaching on the Church as the Body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12) run directly counter to this emphasis on autonomy? Autonomy may be safer and less vulnerable, but is not "one-anotherness" of the essence of Christian community, a one-anotherness in which we are mutually dependent upon one another as we seek to go the way of Christ?

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<sup>93</sup> John C.Harris, *Stress, Power and Ministry* 128, 129



## 6.1 *Venting one's temper*

On occasion ministers may feel so seriously provoked that they venting their temper.

	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	
Preached aggressively	4%	45%	44%	7%	
Lost temper with church in service	0	1%	15%	82%	
Lost temper with church in church meeting	0	2%	38%	60%	Lost
temper with individual in service	0	2%	12%	84%	
Lost temper with individual in church meeting	0	5%	38%	55%	
Lost temper in one-to-one encounter	0	16%	45%	38%	
Over-zealous in handling church discipline	0	3%	30%	65%	

Church officials on the whole were a little kinder in their evaluation of their ministers. Their responses tended to underplay the wrath of the minister!

Whether all this restraint is a good thing may be open to question. Sometimes emotion needs to be expressed if feelings are to be conveyed. Furthermore, time and again the process of healing is helped and not hindered by the occasional expression of feelings. On the other hand, such feelings need to be discharged appropriately, both in terms of how and with whom. Otherwise innocent people get hurt, especially as the strength and intensity of emotion may well be more about something related to another aspect of the minister's personal agenda.

## 7. **Power in the church - the survey in retrospect**

Amidst the plethora of insights and information concerning ministers and churches in Britain today, one thing in particular has emerged with crystal clarity: power is a serious problem in the church today. At first sight the survey may have a fairly dry academic feel to it, but in fact some of its findings are deeply disturbing and challenging. Indeed, there is headline material here for the national newspaper tabloids. For example:

"Churches treat us badly" say nine out of ten ministers  
Most ministers under 45 have considered giving up their calling  
One in six ministers leave their churches in "unhappy circumstances"  
One in seven ministers confess to sexual misbehaviour  
One in five churches racked by power politics  
The myth of accountability in the church

Headlines can of course be misleading. Inevitably they simplify reality. And yet the pressures of ministry appear to be increasing, with the result that an unacceptable proportion of ministers are considering leaving the ministry. Although there is a good deal of satisfaction in ministry, nonetheless there is a good deal of unhappiness too.

But unhappiness is not just confined to ministers. Many members too must be unhappy. For, as we have seen, ministers are not simply victims of abuse: at times they themselves can be the abusers. They can be manipulative, they can create false guilt, they can intimidate, and

they can 'hide behind God' to get their own way... In these and many other ways too can and do abuse their position, and in so doing abuse others. The upshot is that people feel blamed, responsible, sinful, bewildered, angry and very hurt. Some may leave the church, but many stay.

Where does the root of the problem lie? Why is it that in communities dedicated to the service of the Servant-King power games of one kind or another are such an issue? No doubt the ultimate root is to be found in the sinfulness of the human heart. Egocentricity is alive and well in the church almost as much as in the world. However, a contributing factor to the problem is that many, if not most, people have not thought through the issue of how power is handled in the church. As the survey showed, on the part of both ministers and church officials there is a good deal of uncertainty in their attitudes toward power. Most believe that power is not a dirty word, and yet at the same time they clearly recognise power to be a dangerous force. Most ministers believe that they have a God-given authority to lead, and yet they appear to be unsure as to the nature of that authority. Ministers appear to feel happiest when their use of power is linked to the empowerment of others, and yet the survey reveals that in reality they have a tendency to hold on to power.

From all this we may conclude that church leaders are not a little confused in their thinking. Not surprisingly their leadership is sometimes questionable. In the following chapters of this book we shall look at some models for handling power in the church, and in particular focus on the model presented by Jesus himself. We shall then go on to look at some even more practical ways in which power can be handled in the church.

## CHAPTER 5. POWER DIMENSIONS - SIZING UP MODELS

### 1. *Analyses of power*

There are many ways of analysing and defining power. This chapter examines a few examples, which in their varying ways bring out the multi-faceted nature of power.

The American Centre For Leadership Studies<sup>94</sup> defines leadership as "the process of attempting to influence the behaviour of others" and power "the means by which the leader actionally gains the compliance of the follower(s)". Since leaders cannot automatically influence other people, they must utilize power to succeed in their attempt to exercise influence. Such power may be derived from seven bases:

**Expert power:** the perception that the leader has relevant education, experience, and expertise.

**Information power:** the perceived access to - or possession of - useful information.

**Referent power:** the perceived attractiveness of interacting with the leader.

**Legitimate power:** the perception that it is appropriate for the leader to make decisions due to title, role, or position in the organization.

**Reward power:** the perceived ability to provide things that people would like to have.

**Connection power;** the perceived association of the leader with influential persons or organizations.

**Coercive power:** the perceived ability to provide sanctions, punishment or consequences for not performing. .

A different approach is found in the work of Rollo May. He defined power as "the ability to cause or prevent change" and distinguished five kinds of power<sup>95</sup>:

**Exploitative power:** the most destructive kind of power, which always presupposes violence or the threat of violence.

**Manipulative power:** i.e. power *over* another person

**Competitive power:** i.e. power *against* another. In its negative form it consists of one person going up because his opponent goes down.

**Nutrient power:** i.e. power *for* the other: e.g. teaching

**Integrative power:** i.e. power *with* the other person. My power abets my neighbour's power

Roy Oswald adopted yet another approach, which is particularly helpful when we are seeking to analyse the power of lay leaders within a congregation. He first of all distinguishes power from authority. "Authority", he says, "is granted to people by the system through roles to be occupied. Power relates to individuals' ability to accomplish things outside or over above the authority given to them in roles"<sup>96</sup>. In terms of corporate power within the church, he argues

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<sup>94</sup> *Power Perception Profile*, 1993, published in Europe by Management Learning Resources Ltd, PO Box 28, Carmarthen, SA31 1DT, UK

<sup>95</sup> Rollo May, *Power And Innocence: A Search For The Sources of Violence* (British Edition, Fontana/Collins, Glasgow 1976) 99-110

<sup>96</sup> Roy Oswald, *Power Analysis Of A Congregation* (Alban, Bethesda, Maryland 1981) 7

that there are four currencies of power that are valued highly by most congregations:

**Reputational power** is that power an organization gives to me because of its past experiences with me.

**Coalitional power** is mine when I am perceived as being part of a caucus or support group within the larger system.

**Communicational power** is mine when I have access to important information within a system.

**Structural power** is mine when I occupy a role that is part of the official structure of the parish.

More recently Martyn Percy, building on the theoretical work of the sociologist Stewart Clegg, has sought to analyse the character and framework of religious power in terms of *circuits*<sup>97</sup>. He writes:

"There are certain 'nodal points' or fundaments of belief and practice which conduct and direct the forces or forms of power... These nodal points need orchestrating at times by controllers of power brokers (leaders)"<sup>98</sup>.

On this view power is far more than charisma, important though charisma may be.

"Power is inextricably linked to structure and is represented in the circuits of framework in a number of ways. Power is evidently present as each specified modality of episodic, dispositional and facilitative power. It is also present in the overall flow of action through the circuits of power, the relational articulation which will constitute the calibration of this flow"<sup>99</sup>.

A very different approach is offered by the theologian Walter Wink<sup>100</sup>. Wink draws upon what the Bible calls the "principalities and powers" to explain the spirituality of the life of an institution. These "principalities and powers", sometimes described by the Apostle Paul as the "elemental spirits of the world" (Gal 4.3; Col 2.8,20), are currently fallen powers. Wink uses this model to explain the fallenness of political, economic and cultural institutions. However, this model can equally be applied to churches. Indeed, it is this model which lies behind much of the present fundamentalist thinking about territorial spirits and spiritual warfare<sup>101</sup>. Whatever the terminology used, it cannot be denied that there are within many churches what one might also term "institutional viruses" which seem constantly to undermine the spiritual health of those churches.

This emphasis on the fallenness of institutions is a salutary corrective to the bright-eyed idealism to be found in some of today's "new" churches. However, it is also a reminder to every leader as indeed to every church how easy it is for church life to be manipulated by forces which are hostile to Christ's way.

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<sup>97</sup> Stewart R. Clegg, *Frameworks Of Power* (Sage Publications, London 1989), especially 187-240

<sup>98</sup> Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders And Power* 46

<sup>99</sup> Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders & Power* 50

<sup>100</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging The Powers* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis 1992)

<sup>101</sup> See, for instance, Peter Wagner, *Warfare Prayer* (Regal, Ventura, California 1992)

## 2. *Models of power.*

Analyses of power deal with the theory, but models of power depict power in action. Such practical models are often easier to relate to than many a theoretical analysis. .

Celia Hahn, for instance, of the North American Alban Institute depicts four models for exercising ministerial power by looking at four clergy, each of whom has found a distinct way to shape the role of the ordained leaders<sup>102</sup>:

Jim Adams, rector of a large Washington Episcopalian church, localises his authority in his *authenticity*. His authority comes from being "real", "saying what I really think and feel". "As soon as I have a position, I try to state it calmly as just my opinion. Then I try to detach myself emotionally from my position so that other people can sharpen what they think". In this way he seeks to give others the freedom and respect that he wants for himself.

Dee Crabtree, Senior Minister of a United Church of Christ in Colchester, sees her role as a "*coach*", helping her people "discover the authority of their own lives and possible ministries that they might have". Passionate for the ministry of all God's people, not least beyond the walls of the church, she is convinced that "the only way we can equip the saints is to *honour* them as saints"

Dwight Lundgren, Senior Minister of a Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, sees his role symbolised by his "*robe*" (gown). It stands for his theological training and professional expertise. But paradoxically it also signals that "we're all fools for Christ". He sees himself as "a kind of a court jester", who handles Scripture in such a way that makes his listeners wonder about God and his place in their life. In no way does he seek to dictate another person's pilgrimage.

For Dorothy McMahan, Minister of a Uniting Church in Sydney, Australia, her central understanding of ministry is that of a *priest*. Her ministry "includes being humanly present to the people, staying open to God's grace, and bringing the sacraments to the people... she is a vehicle for the power which comes from beyond her.. She finds her power in pointing to the space where God and people meet"

The strength of Hahn's approach, summarised above, seems to be in the way in which models are personalised. For most of us that is the way in which we tend to live. We model ourselves on others. For some ministers the model they seek to emulate may be a pastor who had a great influence on their lives in their teenage years; for others it may be some "super pastor" of some "mega church" whose ministry has attracted nationwide if not worldwide attention. Models vary. . The question is: do we have the right models? In all four of the models Celia Hahn presents there is truth applicable to every minister. And yet the models, neither individually or corporately, fully satisfy.

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<sup>102</sup> Celia Allison Hahn, "The Paradoxical Authority Of Clergy: Four Stories", *Congregations* July-August 1994 14-18

### 3. *Four models for ministry*

A very different approach is found in the four models for ministry depicted by two thoughtful Southern Baptists, Joe Trull and James Carter<sup>103</sup>.

In the first place, there is the model of the *chief executive officer*. Some ministers aspire to be a spiritual CEO. The primary descriptive word here is "active." "This leader makes things happen, no matter what it takes. Rather than actively doing ministry, this minister will often direct ministry"

Secondly, and related to the first, is the model of the *political dictator*. The primary descriptive word is "authoritative". These ministers are authority figures who "make their desires known to the congregation, often couching these desires in terms of the will of God or the direction that God has revealed to them, and expects them to carry out". In this respect the amusing story is told of a pastor who together with his deacons was accused of running the church: "There's not a word of truth in it", he snorted, "the deacons have nothing to do with it!"

Thirdly, there is the model of the *hired hand*. The primary descriptive word is "passive". Hired-hand type ministers exert little leadership. Instead they are subservient to the church board or to the church as a whole.

Fourthly, there is the preferred model - the model of *Jesus the servant*. The primary descriptive word is "responsive". "The minister who acts as a servant responds to the needs of the people, responds to the directives of God, and responds to the guidance of the Holy Spirit".

At first sight these four models may seem too trite. Expressed in these terms few ministers would do other than to opt for the "preferred" model of Jesus the Servant. And yet if ministers are honest, in practise many of them veer from this Jesus model.

Ministers in larger churches are especially vulnerable to the temptation to adopt the trappings of a CEO. Indeed, at a private consultation for ministers of churches with an active membership of 350 or more most of the ministers agreed that they felt uncomfortable with the term "pastor". They saw themselves as "leaders" whose chief task was to make their churches grow. As leaders they were concerned above all with vision and strategy, not with pastoral care. Certainly pastoral visiting and the knowing of all their members by name did not feature on their agenda. But is there not an imbalance here? Surely even leaders of large churches must have a pastoral heart for their people. Ministry patterned on the life of Jesus is always about serving people - the institution is secondary.

There is a breed of minister - both in small and large churches - which brooks no questioning of their leadership. These charismatic figures, apparently incapable of self-questioning, take over all the decision-making processes of the church. It is surprising how easily a church can be manipulated when the minister dresses up his (and it is almost always 'his') thoughts as a "word from the Lord". Those who disagree with their decisions are quite literally drummed

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<sup>103</sup> Joe E.Trull and James E.Carter, *Ministerial Ethics* (Broadman & Holman, Nashville 1993) 95-98.

out of the church - for they are deemed not just to have disagreed with the pastor, but to all intents and purposes to have disagreed with the Lord himself. In one case, after a couple had dared to question their pastor's leadership with another couple in one particular church, they were visited at night by two elders and told there and then to leave that church. This is surely a form of power-abuse. However strongly leaders may feel that they have discerned the mind of Christ on a particular matter, they must always give people freedom to disagree. Ministers who employ coercive tactics are deceiving themselves that they are serving Christ.

Some of the saddest figures in ministry are the "hired hands". Often as a result of a past experience where their leadership was rejected, their ministry has deteriorated into meeting the needs and expectations of the church - or at least of certain power-brokers in the church. Their ministry is limited to preaching and to pastoral care - they no longer seek to give direction to the church in its mission. They have abdicated their authority and the power inherent in that authority, and have become private chaplains to the flock. Indeed, they have become the abused, rather than the abusers. And at the end of the day the cause of Christ is not served. Ministry is more than serving people - it is in the first place serving God, whose concerns reach way beyond any local church.

#### 4. *The model of Paul*

At many an ordination service the model of ministry which is set before the ordinands is one to be found within the Letters of Paul. The Pastoral Epistles, as the letters to Timothy and Titus have come to be known, are a happy hunting ground for those preaching sermons with ministers in view. So too, for that matter, is 2 Corinthians. It is true that Paul's ministry was 'translocal' and therefore wider than of most ministers, but there is no doubt that Paul saw himself as a pastor. His letters are a clear testimony to his pastoral heart. Indeed, the letters are a product of his pastoral care, for through them Paul exercised a pastoral role toward the churches, which he had founded<sup>104</sup>.

As his letters reveal, Paul was a forceful person, who often expected obedience from the churches in his care (e.g. 2 Cor 10.6; Phil 2.12; Philem 2). His letters are full of instructions on how his readers were to live their lives together (e.g. 1 Cor 11.17,34; 1 Thess 4.2; 2 Thess 3.6-15). However, he told the Corinthians that the "authority" which the Lord had given him was for "building up" the church, and not for "tearing down" (2 Cor 10.8; 13.10: cf 12.19) - for it was only arguments (2 Cor 10.3-5), and not people, which he sought to destroy.

It has often been assumed that Paul based his authority on his calling to be an apostle. However, at no point do we find Paul issuing instructions on the basis of his apostleship. It is much more likely that his sense of authority was derived from his position as the founding-father of his churches<sup>105</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> See Ernest Best, *Paul And His Converts*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1988. Also Paul Beasley-Murray, 'Paul as Pastor' 654-658 in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (IVP, Leicester & Downers Grove, Illinois 1993) edited by G.F. Hawthorne & R.P. Martin.

<sup>105</sup> In this respect it should be born in mind that for Jews and Greeks alike the father relationship was perceived as one of authority. For a Jew to honour one's father inevitably involved obedience (see 2 Kings 16.7: "your servant and your son"). Epictetus declared: "To

But Paul put limits upon his own authority. He much preferred to "appeal (e.g. Rom 12.1; 15.30; 16.17; 1 Cor 1.10; 4.16; 16.16; 2 Cor 5.20; 6.1; 10.1; 13.11; Eph 4.1; Phil 4.2; 1 Thess 2.11; 4.1,10; 5.14; 2 Thess 3.12) rather than to "command", which in turn implies that he preferred not to impose his own will upon the churches, but rather to encourage them to make their own decisions. Hence he wrote to the Corinthians that he did not seek to "lord it over your faith" (2 Cor 1.24); and reminded the Galatians, "You were called to freedom" (Gal 5.13). The churches he founded may have been his spiritual children, but they were no longer babes in Christ. In this respect Paul's model was the parent-adult child, and not the parent-infant child. So although he was clear about the form of discipline which should be exercised at Corinth towards the man committing incest, he preferred that it be the church itself which exercised that discipline (1 Cor 5). Paul did not want his children to be overly dependent upon him. In this particular respect Paul offers a very relevant model to leaders today.

In a recent monograph Anthony Bash has illustrated how Paul's ambassadorial language in 2 Cor 5.20 has nothing to do with power and strength, but rather presupposes weakness, need and dependence. It was in his role as Christ's ambassador that Paul "appealed" to the Corinthians as indeed to others. Bash goes on to show that "appeal was the *primary* way by which Paul chose to generate action and so exercise power". The threats in 2 Cor 13.1-3 were out of character. "The overall impression in II Corinthians is of a man inwardly reflective and aware, conscious that he was accountable to God, not driven by self-aggrandisement; rather he was self-giving, broken and immensely loving"<sup>106</sup>.

In a later article Anthony Bash and Martyn Percy reflect further on Paul's use of this model of ambassador and sees it as a model for Christian ministry today<sup>107</sup>.

"What then is true Christian weakness? It is the powerlessness which arises from choosing to appeal for consent rather than to demand - and to compel - submission. It is the powerlessness which arises from choosing to exercise power other than by force. It is the powerlessness which arises from preferring to be rejected and to suffer than to impose and get one's way. It is also the powerlessness which Paul modelled".

Paul's model of ministry was in fact a reflection of self-emptying (*kenosis*) of Christ depicted in the Christ-hymn of Phil 2.6-11. In the light of this self-emptying - both Paul's and Christ's - Anthony Bash and Martyn Percy helpfully draw the following conclusions for Christian ministry today:

"First, paraenetic appeal on the part of Christian ministers is an *imitatio* of the gospel

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be a son is to regard all one's possessions as the property of the father, to obey the father in all things, never to blame him before anyone, to support him with all one's power (Epictetus, *Diss* II 107). In Roman society a father retained control over his children even after they were married.

<sup>106</sup> Anthony Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ: An Exploration of Ambassadorial Language in the New Testament* (J.C.B.Mohr, Tübingen 1997) 161, 163.

<sup>107</sup> "Wisdom and Weakness in Ministerial Formation: 'Ambassadors' as a Paradigm for the Early Church" to be published *Power And The Church* (SPCK, London 1997) by Martyn Percy.



and of the ministry of Christ. For if God himself in his incarnational form expressed himself to human beings in voluntary self-limitation and appealed to but did not compel, men and women to follow him, then Christian ministers must do the same....

Second, any appeal must be expressed in the form of a genuine appeal and not in fact constitute a weighted or emotionally loaded *diktat*. Failure to do so undermines the right and responsibility of men and women freely to choose and subverts their God-given capacity to do so.

Third, history teaches us that Christian ministers have experienced enormous difficulty in exercising power Christianity. Paraenetic appeal all too often gives way to authoritarian abuse. Not only are frequent personal reflection and self-examination essential but also rigorous supervision by those unconnected with the minister's own situation".

Although Paul's culture and circumstances were very different from ours, nonetheless he still provides a very powerful model for ministry, particularly when it comes to leaders handling power today.

##### 5. *The ultimate model*

Jesus is the ultimate model. Here is self-evident truth - and yet how difficult it sometimes is to live out the self-evident. Time and again ministers, unconsciously no doubt, pattern their ministry more on the latest leadership manual than on Jesus himself. What a difference it would make if Christian leaders were constantly evaluating themselves and their ministry in the light of the example of Jesus!

No Christian preacher would demur that we need to "look to Jesus", but to what extent is Hebrews 12.1-13 actually lived out in Christian ministry, where the emphasis is not on success but on costly faithfulness? The fact is that we want to see the power of Christ's resurrection displayed in our lives and in our churches, but we do not want to share in Christ's sufferings. In the perceptive words of Deans Buchanan: "Rather than allot it to disturb us, we trade in the persecution model for the power model. Seduced by the drive for success, Christian servants adopt triumphalistic patterns of service"<sup>108</sup>.

Needless to say, costly faithfulness does not necessitate apparent failure. The pursuit of church growth, for instance, which is motivated by a concern for the 'lost' as distinct from a desire for personal or institutional aggrandisement, is not wrong, but is commendable. Jesus too was concerned for the "harvest" (Matt 9.37,38; John 4.35). There is every reason to rejoice and to thank God when our churches grow as a result of men and women being won to Christ and his church. However, "success" from an eschatological perspective cannot be measured purely in terms of numbers. Indeed, success cannot be measured upon any external basis. Successful pastoral ministry also encompasses growth and development within the lives of individuals and congregations, as also within the life of the pastor him (her)self!

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<sup>108</sup> Deans Buchanan, "Ministry and Suffering in the Life of Paul", *Ministry Today* 8 (October 1996) 6.

Successful pastoral ministry involves costly faithfulness, which in turn involves modelling ourselves on Jesus.

Jesus is our model. As Jesus himself said, "A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher" (Lk 6.40). It is surely significant that the only occasion that Jesus explicitly told his disciples to follow his example was when he washed their feet (John 13.15). Yet to what extent is John 13 with its story of the foot washing lived out in Christian ministry? There is much to be said for the practise of one North American church, where the pastor at his induction was presented with a towel as a "sign" of his authority. By contrast in Britain ordinands at their ordination services are often presented with a Bible as a sign of their authority. In one sense that is absolutely right. The Bible is surely our ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice. And yet as the term "Bible-basher" reminds, the Bible can be used to bash others, whereas the towel is only of use for service. Maybe at the very least we need to present ordinands both with Bibles and with towels!

So it is to the model of Jesus that we now turn. In him we see power incarnate. In him we discover a new dimension to the handling of power.

## CHAPTER 6. POWER INCARNATE - LEARNING FROM THE LIFE OF JESUS

The biggest issue Jesus had to face in his life was the issue of power. For Jesus was by any reckoning a powerful man. Time and again we are told that he taught with an unparalleled sense of "authority" (e.g. Matt 7.29; Mark 1.22,27). The miracles he performed were in a very real sense acts of "power" (*dunamis*: see e.g. Matt 11.20-24; 13.58; Lk 19.37). Not surprisingly the crowds flocked to listen to him, to see him in action. Here was a leader to follow. In 20th century terms, Jesus would have had no difficulty in heading up some mega church, with a host of satellite churches to boot.

Yet power, even for God's sake, was not to be the dominating factor of his ministry. Love was to be his controlling passion, love which never forces itself on another, love which always respects the individual and which therefore allows freedom to the individual to choose which way one would wish to go. All this is seen so clearly in the wilderness temptations of Jesus. For the temptations were not just a time when Jesus' understanding of himself and of his ministry are being tested, they were also a time when Jesus was tempted to misuse his power.

### *1. Jesus - The Man For Others*

The temptations follow immediately after the baptism of Jesus. In his baptism Jesus had publicly identified himself with the people whom he had come to save. There in the waters of the Jordan Jesus had in the words of the prophet of old "been numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53.12) and in so doing he had taken the first step towards the Cross. The voice from heaven had confirmed the rightness of the step Jesus had taken. But what in practice did it mean? What shape was his ministry to take? How was he to use his God-given power? .

In this regard the words of Fred Craddock are instructive:

"It is important to keep in mind that a real temptation beckons us to do that about which much good can be said. Stones to bread - the hungry hope so. Take political control - the oppressed hope so. Leap from the temple - those who long for proof of God's power among us hope so. All this is to say that a real temptation is an offer not to fall but to rise. The tempter in Eden did not ask, 'Do you wish to be as the devil?' but 'Do you wish to be as God'?"<sup>109</sup>

#### *1.1 The first temptation to misuse power*

With regard to the first temptation to turn stones into bread, Luke tells us that Jesus had been fasting for 40 days in the wilderness. "He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished" (4.2) - he must have been ravenous! At this particular point the Devil implanted the thought into his mind: "*Why not turn stones into bread?*" (see Matt 4.3;

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<sup>109</sup> Fred Craddock, *Luke - Interpretation Bible Commentary* (John Knox Press, Louisville 1990) 56.

Lk 4.3) Such a temptation was all the more devilish, for the desert was covered with little pieces of limestone rock, which looked exactly like round loaves.

Here then Jesus was tempted to use his power for his personal use. But the temptation appears to have gone beyond that. For as Jesus contemplated his future ministry, it is not far-fetched to suggest that he was also being tempted to win others by social programmes of one kind or another. After all, Jesus was not the only hungry person in his day. There were plenty of others who barely had enough. Ought he not to see to their needs & thus gain a short-cut to their affections? Not only could he win them over to his side, he could sweep the whole lot into the kingdom! This would surely have been a good use of power for God's sake?

This was a devilish temptation indeed. For here he was being attacked along the line of his love for others: "*In the name of your compassion for the poor & the hungry, make the stones bread*". Possibly too he was being tempted to prove himself to be the Messiah: for a repetition of the miracle of the manna in the wilderness was expected to be one of the signs of the coming messianic age.

But Jesus resisted the temptation. He quoted Deut 8.3: "One shall not live by bread alone". He recognised that there is in people's hearts a deeper hunger than mere physical hunger; a hunger which is more insistent than hunger for bread; a hunger which cannot be satisfied either with bread, or riches, or material comforts. There is a hunger for God, a hunger which could only be satisfied as he offered up to God his broken body on the Cross.

Our situation today is very different. In Britain at least we are unlikely to sweep hordes of people into our churches through our social programmes or through our involvement in the community. Generally speaking, churches which are involved in social action or social service are involved because of the very real needs they see present in their communities. Such involvement is right and proper. It is rooted in Christian compassion, as also in the theological conviction that Kingdom preaching must be accompanied by Kingdom action if it is to be true to the pattern of Jesus (see Matt 11.2-6).

Yet leaders misuse their power if they allow most - if not all - the energies of the church to be channelled into social action as distinct from evangelism. Yes, of course there is a place for meeting people's physical needs. Jesus recognised that when he fed the 5000. Jesus exercised a holistic ministry. But this holistic ministry involved a recognition that people have spiritual as well as physical and emotional needs. However successful church programmes may be, if they are not meeting people's deepest needs, then they are not successful at all. One of the significant features of the time in which we are living is that, in the Western world at least, people's spiritual needs are coming to the fore. The post-modern age is not a secular age, but rather an age of new religiosity. Ministers and churches must resist the temptation to major on social needs alone - for this generation, as indeed the next, needs to also hear the story of God's love.

## *1.2 The second temptation to misuse power*

In the second temptation, if we follow Luke's order (Lk 4.5-7; see Matt 4.8-9) Jesus in his imagination stood upon a mountain from which the whole civilised world could be seen, and

as he stood there he found himself tempted to win the world for God by compromising his calling. The temptation here was not literally to bow down and worship Satan. Rather it would appear that Jesus was tempted to renounce the way of the Cross by going the easier way of being a political messiah.

Again there is a devilish aspect to this temptation, for Jesus' mission *was* to achieve world-wide dominion. But the end never justifies the means<sup>110</sup>. Although at this early stage Jesus may not have known exactly what the future held for him, already he knew that he was called to follow a path of suffering. Indeed, it is likely that in those forty days he was meditating on the so-called fourth Servant Song found in Isaiah 52.13-53.12 and seeing the implications of this prophecy for his own ministry. Later, of course, he came to see even more clearly that the way to glory was through being lifted up on a cross (John 12.31-32: see Isaiah 52.13). As the author of the great Philippian Christ-hymn came to write, the way to every knee bowing & every tongue confessing Jesus is Lord was through the cross & resurrection (Phil 2.6-11).

Jesus therefore refused to compromise. He refused to seek to win others by compromising with the standards of the world. Instead he quoted Deut 6.13: "Worship the Lord your God and serve only him". Jesus knew that only total obedience to God would do. And what was true of him, must be true of us too.

In days when church attendances are dwindling, we face the temptation to demand little of people if only they will come to church. In a consumer-oriented society preachers are tempted to pander to the wants of their listeners. So preachers have tended to major more on John 3.16 rather than on Mark 8.34. They have spoken of the need to believe, but not always of the call of Jesus to repent, to take up our cross and follow him. They have preached Jesus as Saviour - but not always as Lord. But Jesus demands total obedience: he offers not only a new life; he demands a new life-style.

This radical edge to Gospel preaching has been well described by Jim Wallis:

"The first evangelists did not simply ask people what they believed about Jesus; they called upon their listeners to forsake all and to follow him. To embrace his kingdom meant a radical change not only in outlook but in posture, not only in mind but in heart, not only in world view but in behaviour, not only in thoughts but in actions. Conversation for them was more than a changed intellectual position. It was a whole new beginning"<sup>111</sup>.

There is no room for compromise in the Christian life: radical discipleship is the demand. We cannot find God on our own terms - we must come to him on his terms. Church leaders and others misuse their position if they water down the nature of the demands of Christ.

But is there not another aspect to this temptation which also has particular relevance to church leaders? Jesus not only refused to seek to win others by compromising with the

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<sup>110</sup> Christians cannot be Marxist! The means as well as the end must glorify God. Some lines from TS Eliot, *Murder In The Cathedral*, are pertinent:

The last temptation is the greatest treason  
To do the right deed for the wrong reason

<sup>111</sup> Jim Wallis, *The Call To Conversion* (UK edition: Lion, Tring, Herts 1982) 6

standards of the world, he also refused to seek to win adulation from others by indulging in power games of one kind or another. Although Jesus called people to follow him, he was not solely concerned with a personal following. Jesus' primary concern was the kingdom of God. True, to receive the message of the Kingdom which he preached involved following in his company - but this following was God-centred and not self-centred.

In his book, *Churches That Abuse*, perhaps better entitled *Leaders That Abuse*, Ronald M. Enroth exposes some of the extraordinarily crass shepherding practices to be found in certain American churches. But these practices are to be found not just in the USA. They are to be found wherever a church becomes cult-like. In this respect the checklist drawn up by the Christian based Spiritual Counterfeits Project in Berkeley, California is helpful. For their *Twelve Characteristics Of A Counterfeit Church/Cult* are typical of situations where leaders set themselves above others:

1. Authoritarian, oppressive leadership; no room for other ideas and independent action
2. Lack of accountability at the top; leaders don't need or want to answer for their actions.
3. Pyramid of power; the further from the top, the less power and influence members have.
4. Belief that members and their families are inferior to the leader and his circle.
5. Belief that the leader is closer to God and can hear Him better than the lay people.
6. Strong pressure to conform to the manner, dress, speech etc of those in power.
7. Financial needs of the group (or its leaders) placed above those of members' families.
8. Pressure to give undue amounts of time to the group, to neglect other responsibilities.
9. An 'us-versus-them' mentality; distrust of all other churches/groups/persuasions.
10. Narrow doctrines and teachings so unique that only this group has the 'right path'.
11. Discouragement of frank and open discussion about the group, its doctrine, or its leaders.
12. Ostracism of former members; prejudice against those no longer 'choosing to belong'.<sup>112</sup>

But power games are played in all sorts of guises - and are not just to be found in some of the more way-out Christian groups. Even within orthodox mainstream Christian churches ministers, for instance, can often be prone to playing similar power games.

Paul Tournier, for instance, has written:

"There is in us, especially in those whose intentions are of the purist, an excessive and destructive will to power which eludes even the most sincere and honest self-

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<sup>112</sup> Cited by Roland Howard, *The Rise & Fall Of The Nine O'Clock Service* 153

examination". Tournier goes on to say that part of the difficulty is that some of our members collude in encouraging us to seek power: "They look upon us as experts, God's mouthpieces, the interpreters of his will.... Very soon... we find ourselves thinking that when they follow our advice they are obeying God, and that when they resist us they are really resisting God"<sup>113</sup>.

But to go the way of Jesus is to turn one's back on power and on success. For the seeking after power and success is a seeking after self. We, like Jesus, are called to deny self and seek first God's kingdom. Church leaders abuse their power if, for instance, they set themselves up on some kind of pedestal with a view to gaining some kind of following. The spirit of the Apostle Paul should rather be theirs: "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4.5). Sadly, as experience all too often shows, power can blind those who misuse it.

### *1.3 The third temptation to misuse power*

In the third temptation Jesus in his imagination was taken to "a pinnacle of the temple" (Lk 4.9; Matt 4.5). This "pinnacle" may well have been the tall tower in the temple on top of which a priest used to be stationed with a silver trumpet to sound a blast when the first streaks of dawn came across hill, and so announce that the time of morning sacrifice had come. At such a time the temple court would have been crowded with expectant worshippers, all looking to the tower to see the priest who would give the signal. If Jesus had chosen to leap at that moment, he would have had a large audience for a quite sensational miracle.

Jesus, as he contemplated the future pattern of his ministry, was once again tempted to avoid the way of suffering and instead to seek to win his contemporaries by some display of supernatural power. Yet again this was a devilish temptation, for at least some of the Jews expected the coming Messiah to give "signs". Indeed, at that time there were all kinds of false messiahs around making all sorts of claims: e.g. Luke tells of a certain Theudas (Acts 5.36) who persuaded people to follow him out to Jordan with the claim that by a word he would divide the waters in two and that they would pass over dry-shod. True, in the first place the Jews were looking for a Messiah who would repeat the miracles of Moses, but there was no reason in principle why Jesus should not have given some other "proof" of his messiahship.

What sign would Jesus give? There in the wilderness Jesus was perhaps tempted to do something startling, something dramatic, something spectacular, to bring the world to his feet. But Jesus resisted temptation, and instead quoted Deut 6.16: "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'". In such a context to have leapt would have been not to exhibit trust in God, but would rather have been to seek to force God's hand by flinging a challenge in his face. Had Jesus leapt he would no doubt have gained immediate applause, but he would have scarcely saved a soul. For people may acclaim something that stirs their imagination, but they are only saved by something that touches their heart.

A parallel may perhaps be discerned in the so-called "power evangelism" popularised by

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<sup>113</sup> Paul Tournier, *The Violence Inside* (English Translation: SCM, London 1978) 137.

John Wimber and practised by many a Pentecostal evangelist. Does not that form of evangelism amount to dragooning people into the Kingdom through spectacular means? And where, if anywhere, does the Toronto blessing and some of the wilder excesses of 'charismania' fit in? Is not much of the falling on the carpet - so-called being "*slain in the Spirit*" - more a form of manipulation than of anything else<sup>114</sup>

The lesson of this third temptation is surely that mind-boggling techniques are not to be part of our armoury. It may well happen from time to time that we wish our churches could be engaged in more spectacular ministry. And yet the spectacular does not sit comfortably with the way of the Cross. At the end of the day we are calling people to respond to the love of God - and not just to the power of God. We are in the business of evoking responses in the hearts of men and women. This in turn requires a different approach to evangelism - it requires a different approach to ministry. In the final analysis we are calling people to respond to the *love* of God – and not just to supernatural power.

Luke ends his account of the temptation of Jesus with the words: "When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Lk 4.13). When that opportune time came, we are not told. It may well be that life for Jesus was a constant struggle to go God's way - that life for him consisted, as it were, of a series of wilderness-type confrontations, culminating in the testing of Gethsemane. But one thing for certain: temptation for Jesus was not just a passing phase, to be likened to some kind of spiritual adolescence, out of which he eventually grew. Temptation was part of an ongoing spiritual battle, which could only intensify<sup>115</sup>. If that was true for Jesus, then how much more so is it true for us - not least in this area of the use and abuse of power?

Undoubtedly Jesus was tempted to abuse his power - and what's more to abuse it for God's sake. But as the Temptation story makes so clear, he resisted the temptation. For him the end never justified the means. The models he developed for ministry were quite other; and although they are rooted in ancient society, they are still in principle relevant for ministry today.

## 2. *Jesus - The Servant*

It seems likely that for Jesus the key model to his ministry was that of the Servant. When his disciples argued about power and position, he told them: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10.45). It is undoubtedly such thinking which lies behind the incident in the Upper room when Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Jesus here foreshadowed his death and in so doing showed himself to be the Servant par excellence

The menial nature of the foot-washing cannot be overemphasised. For the rabbis, it was a

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<sup>114</sup> See Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders And Power*.

<sup>115</sup> In the light of Lk 22.28, where Jesus said to his disciples, "You are those who have stood by me in my trials", Hans Conzelmann was wrong to deduce that the ministry of Jesus was a time "free from Satan" (see Hans Conzelmann, *Theology of St Luke*, Faber & Faber, London, London 1961, 28-29, 80-81). The natural interpretation of Lk 4.13 is that Satan only left Jesus for a while - and not for the whole of his ministry.



task which could not be required of a Jewish male slave (Mekh Exod 21.2.82a, based on Leviticus 25.39). Washing the feet of another person was seen as a very undignified action, a job reserved for Gentile slaves, as also for wives and children.

Two Jewish stories illustrate this story. The mother of Rabbi Ishmael wished to wash his feet on his return from the synagogue, but he refused to allow her to perform so demeaning a work; she on her part requested the court of rabbis to rebuke him for not allowing her the honour. Significant also is a Jewish commentary on Genesis 21.14 which states that when Abraham sent Hagar away he gave her a bill of divorce, and took her shawl and wrapped it around her waist "that people should know that she was a slave"

This is the background to John's description of how Jesus "got up from table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him" (John 13.4-5). The disciples must have been bowled over. Indeed, the original Greek of John 13 gives the impression of Peter spluttering in astonishment and incomprehension: literally, "Lord, *you* - *my* feet..."! Peter was shocked. Jesus was just going too far.

We don't know the circumstances which occasioned Jesus to wash the disciples' feet. However, it is possible that Jesus was alone with his disciples in the Upper Room, and that there was therefore nobody else present who might be expected to perform such a menial, albeit necessary, task. As far as the disciples were concerned, such a task was certainly beneath them. But not beneath Jesus! What's more Jesus didn't simply wash Peter's feet. He washed the feet of all the disciples. He washed the feet even of Judas Iscariot.

The way John introduces the story is incredibly moving. He begins with the statement concerning Jesus: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13.1). This theme of love is picked up later on, when Jesus gives his disciples "a new commandment" to love one another, as he has loved them (John 13.34,35). Love is clearly the very basis of Jesus' ministry. What was true of him should be true of us too.

John then immediately precedes the foot-washing by describing Jesus as "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God" (John 13.3). Jesus is depicted as being supremely self-conscious of who he was, and yet in spite of that he washed his disciples' feet. Or maybe, precisely because he knew who he was and what God wanted of him, he was able to do the unthinkable. Precisely because he was secure in himself and in his God, he did not have to stand on his dignity.

And yet, the incident of the foot-washing illustrates more than simply the willingness of Jesus to put status to one side. For Jesus the foot-washing is an anticipation of the Cross. In the Synoptic Gospels the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine symbolise the divine self-giving; in John's Gospel the washing of the disciples feet symbolises the divine self-giving too. Jesus is therefore not just the Servant, he is also the Suffering Servant. The washing of the feet represents costly service.

We must keep all of this in mind as we hear Jesus saying to his disciples: "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13.14-15). Here is a word addressed to all disciples of Jesus - all of us, without exception, are called to serve one

another. Yet maybe in the first instance there is a particular word to those who are called to positions of leadership and teaching in the church. Precisely those who have positions of honour *in* the church of God are called to be servants *of* the church of God.

Certainly this is what Jesus said to his disciples on other occasions: "Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10.43-44). What does this mean in practical terms? It surely means at the very least that there is no place for status or position within the church of God. To speak of a hierarchy within the church is to go against the spirit of Jesus' teaching. There are no VIPs in the church - or if there are, then all may enter the VIP lounge, for every member is "very important" in the sight of God.

This does not mean that there are not differences in function. Jesus himself recognised that some are called to lead. Jesus, however, insisted that leaders are servants. It is true that leaders serve the church of God best when they exercise their God-given gifts of leadership. But in doing so they are serving others, and not themselves. In doing so they are not putting themselves above others, but rather under others. In the light of the foot-washing serving others far from promoting the interests of self involves promoting the interests of others. Indeed, as with all true discipleship, serving others involves denying self. In leadership terms such self-denial may involve delegation. For in delegating tasks to others we are empowering others to exercise the gifts God has given them. Such delegating may not always be easy, especially where it involves tasks we enjoy, tasks which we feel good in doing. Yet for the sake of the other, as indeed for the sake of the Kingdom, delegation is right and proper. On the other hand, not all delegation is right and proper. For there are some tasks which cannot and should not be delegated. In particular, the task of leadership cannot be delegated to others. The formulating of the vision and the maintaining of the vision are tasks which belong to leadership. Sometimes it is tempting to avoid the responsibilities of leadership, for such responsibilities can be heavy and costly. Leaders are less likely to suffer brick-bats if they hide behind others. But leadership patterned on the Servant-King inevitably runs the risk of being unpopular and misunderstood from time to time - just as Jesus was.

Leadership, however, patterned on the ministry of Jesus as exemplified in the foot-washing, can never be about consolidating personal power. As love for others was the basis for the ministry of Jesus, so love must be the basis of servant-leadership too. The well-being of others always has precedent.

### *3. Jesus the Shepherd*

Another model for ministry adopted by Jesus is that of the shepherd, and in so doing Jesus took up familiar imagery used in the Old Testament of God's love and concern for his people (see, for example, Ezek 34). In the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matt 18.12-13; Luke 15.4-7) Jesus by implication likened himself to the shepherd who goes in search of the sheep who had strayed from the fold. Indeed, Jesus defended his concern for the Canaanite woman with the statement: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15.24: see also Matt 10.6) On another occasion Jesus referred to his disciples as "little flock" (Luke 12.32). He picked up this imagery at the Last Supper when he quoted Zech 13.7 ("I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered") to foretell his abandonment by his disciples (Mark

14.27). Mark tells us that on the occasion of the feeding of the 5000 Jesus saw a great crowd "he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6.34). Matthew uses similar language of Jesus in a more general context: "When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9.36).

It is in John's Gospel above all where the metaphor is fully developed. Two passages come to mind in particular. In the first passage, John 10.1-18, Jesus declared; "I am the good shepherd" (John 10.11). In the second passage the Risen Jesus commissioned Peter to feed his sheep (John 21.15-19). It is precisely because of John 21 that we are able to use John 10 as a pattern for later Christian ministry. For although in John 10 Jesus does not refer to future leaders acting as shepherds of the sheep, John 21 provides us with that justification. The Anglican Ordination Service rightly has John 10 as its Gospel reading. So with John 10 in mind we should ask ourselves: What does the metaphor of the shepherd have to say about the use of power in the church today? What does this metaphor have to say about how Christian leadership is to be exercised?.

### 3.1 *Relationships are key*

In the first place the metaphor suggests that Christian leadership is to be exercised within the context of meaningful relationships. Leadership, based on the pattern of Jesus, does not operate on some kind of impersonal basis from afar. Leadership involves relationships, in which leaders relate with people, and people with leaders.

All this is suggested in the emphasis Jesus puts on the fact that the Good Shepherd knows his sheep: "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out...and the sheep follow because they know his voice" (John 10.3-4). A little later Jesus repeats the same thought again: "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father" (John 10.14,15).

The knowledge here to which Jesus refers is experiential and involves an intimate relationship. For whereas "in the Greek tradition knowledge is thought of as analogous to *seeing*, with a view to grasping the nature of an object; for the Hebrew, knowledge means *experiencing* something. In the area of religion, therefore, knowledge of God for the Greek is primarily contemplation of the divine reality; for the Hebrew it means entering into a relationship with God"<sup>116</sup>. This emphasis on relationship is made all the clearer by the imagery of the shepherd and the sheep.

To fully appreciate the imagery here, we have to remember that in the time of Jesus sheep were kept not for their mutton but for their wool. Whereas today most sheep live only a brief life before they are slaughtered for their meat, in Palestine sheep used to be looked after by a shepherd for many years. Shepherds could therefore meaningfully get to know their sheep, and vice versa. Over a period of time a relationship of trust could develop. It was only on the basis of this relationship that the shepherd could meaningfully lead his flock.

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<sup>116</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary: John* (Word, Waco, Texas 1987) 170

A fascinating insight into the relationship between the Eastern shepherd and his sheep was offered by G.A. Smith:

"On the boundless Eastern pasture, so different from the narrow meadows and dyked hillsides with which we are familiar, the shepherd is indispensable. With us sheep are often left to themselves; I do not remember to have seen in the East a flock without a shepherd. In such a landscape as Judea, where a day's pasture is thinly scattered over an unfenced tract, covered with delusive paths, still frequented by wild beasts, and rolling into the desert, the man and his character are indispensable....

Sometimes we enjoyed our noonday rest beside one of those Judean wells, to which three or four shepherds come down with their flocks. The flocks mixed with each other, and we wondered how each shepherd would get his own again. But after the watering and the playing were over, the shepherds one by one went up different sides of the valley, and each called out his peculiar call; and the sheep drew out of the crowd to their own shepherd, and the flocks passed as orderly as they came"<sup>117</sup>.

Here there are clear lessons for Christian leadership. Christian leadership is always concerned for individuals, and not just for the church at large. Effective Christian leadership can never just be task-orientated, it must also be people-orientated too. Indeed, within a voluntary organisation such as a church the task or mission of the church can only be achieved as the members of the church come together as a team to fulfil the agreed goals of the church. But for this working together to happen members must feel valued for themselves, and not just for the work they may achieve. Indeed, it is only as people sense that they are loved and cared for that they will at all cooperate in seeking to fulfil whatever the task might be.

One sign that leaders care for people is that they know their people. They know them by name. They know their individual circumstances. To know people's names is to show that they count. Not to know a person's name is a sign that we do not really care - that they do not really have value. In smaller churches this may be no problem. In larger churches, where visitors may often be present, this may pose a challenge. But how would we feel if God did not know us by name? Those who play power games end up treating people as pawns who can be moved around the board at will; but Jesus - and those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus - treated people as people, whose concerns are more important than any church programme. One sign that people count is the fact that they are known.

Is it significant that not only does the shepherd know the sheep, but also that the sheep know the shepherd? A meaningful relationship has to be mutual. Leaders do not have to be perfect, but they do have to be seen to be trustworthy. Furthermore, the fact that leaders may be perceived as vulnerable and as frail as others does not necessarily make them less trustworthy. What counts is that God is seen to be at work in their lives. There is no place for pretence in Christian leadership, as indeed in the Christian life in general. It is precisely when leaders are real with their people and when God is seen to be real in leaders' lives, that leadership can be effective. Christian leaders who are truly concerned for the welfare of those in their charge have nothing to hide. It is leaders whose motives are questionable and

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<sup>117</sup> G.A.Smith, *The Historical Geography Of The Holy Land* (Collins, London 1966 = 25th edition, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1931) 210-211.6

whose eye is on power, who have far more to lose.

### 3.2 *Leading not driving*

In the second place, the metaphor reminds us that true pastoral leadership leads but never drives. It may inspire, but never force. Jesus said: the good shepherd "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them and the sheep follow him because they know his voice" (John 10.3-4). As is well known, in the Middle East the shepherd goes ahead of the sheep, and the sheep follow. It is only the butcher who drives the sheep! The very metaphor of leadership used here implies no coercion. When Jesus calls, the sheep respond of their own free will. Precisely because they know him, they follow willingly.

There are dangers in drawing too close a parallel between Jesus and ourselves. For Jesus is the "great shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13.20); he is "the chief shepherd" (1 Peter 5.4: see 2.25). Today's Christian leaders are at best under-shepherds. We can therefore only give a lead in so far as we in turn are following the leader. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin said once to a group of Indian clergy,

"A true Christian pastor will be one who can dare to say to his people: 'Follow me as I am following Jesus'. That is a terrible test for any pastor. A true pastor must have such a relation with Jesus and with his people, that he follows Jesus and they follow him"<sup>118</sup>.

Such a warning should give cause for reflection to some of today's ecclesiastical power-merchants.

That warning apart, we learn here that true Christian leadership can never force others to follow. Leadership is not a form of dictatorship. Leadership may be authoritative, but it is never authoritarian. Leadership is not lordship. In the words of the Apostle Peter, leaders are not to lord it over those in their charge (1 Peter 5.3). True, Christians are called to respect those who "have charge of you in the Lord" (1 Thess 5.12). They are even called to "obey" their leaders (Heb 13.17). But at the end of the day they have to be given the freedom to choose whether or not they will follow the lead that is being given to them. Power may manipulate, but love always gives choice.

### 3.3 *The welfare of others uppermost*

In John 10 the Good Shepherd serves the sheep in his charge. It is their good and not his good that he seeks. Unlike the "thief" who "comes only to steal and kill and destroy", the good shepherd comes not to deprive people of life, but rather to give people life. "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10.10). The ultimate sign of service is to be found in the fact that "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10.11). Whereas the "hired hand" is only in the shepherding business for what he can get out of it and does not truly care for the sheep (John 10.13), Jesus, the good shepherd, is

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<sup>118</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Good Shepherd* (Mowbray, Oxford 1977) 14.

prepared to give his all for the sheep.

The remarkable nature of this service emerges, once we begin to rid ourselves of some of the more romantic and sentimental notions concerning sheep. Sheep are not particularly loveable creatures. They can be dirty and pest-ridden. They can be silly and stupid. And yet, in spite of all this, the Good Shepherd cares for them unreservedly - even if it is to his own detriment.

Again, the lessons are clear. True Christian leadership always enhances the life of others, whereas the abuse of power always leads to the destruction of others. True Christian leadership refuses to use others - whether they be individuals or churches - as stepping stones in their career. Far from living off others parasitically, it gives sacrificially to others. Furthermore, it is this willingness to lay down one's life for others which ultimately distinguishes a good shepherd from a bad or faithless one. Important as are such things as competence and ability, even more important is love and sacrifice.

### *3.4 Growth-promoting*

Shepherding involves ensuring the sheep are fed. Jesus, as the good shepherd, declared: "Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (John 10.9). Admittedly, this aspect of the metaphor was not developed by Jesus here in John 10. On the other hand, it formed a major thrust of his lakeside conversation with Peter, where Jesus commissioned him to "feed" both his lambs and his sheep (John 21.15,17). The Good Shepherd is presumably concerned not just for the survival of his sheep, but also for the growth of his sheep.

In the light of the metaphor we are reminded, therefore, that pastoral leadership is about promoting the growth of those in one's care. In the words of the Apostle Paul it is about "warning and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col 1.28). Pastoral care is not just about seeing to the casualties of life, it is about encouraging personal change and growth of all (Eph 4.11-16).

But how does a shepherd feed his sheep? Unless the sheep in question is newborn or sickly, the shepherd does not normally bottle-feed the sheep. Rather good shepherding is all about leading the sheep into good grazing ground. In the words of the Shepherd Psalm: "He makes me lie down in green pastures; and he leads me beside still waters" (Ps 23.2). Are we reading too much into the metaphor if we say that in today's terms feeding sheep is not about spoon-feeding, but about helping God's people feed themselves? Christian nurture is not about giving detailed instruction to people on what to believe or how to live their lives, but rather about opening up God's Word in such a way that people can discover God's truth for themselves and through appropriate reflection find ways in which to apply God's Word to their own lives. Good shepherding enables God's people to become mature in their thinking (1 Cor 14.20). True Christian leadership is not about mind or thought control, but rather about opening up people's minds to God's Word.

In turn this means that good shepherding encourages diversity rather than uniformity. In the words of Frank Wright, "that means that we are... to coax different seeds of growth in the people we care for, until they reach a maturity, that richness of character, their own particular

character and no one else's"<sup>119</sup>. Where power is exercised aright in the church, there are no clones. People are empowered to become themselves.

### 3.5 *A costly calling*

Pastoral leadership can be costly. Unlike the hired hand, who, when he sees the wolf coming, "leaves the sheep and runs away - and the wolf snatches them and scatters them" (John 10.12), the good shepherd, says Jesus, stays by his post, even if it involves the cost of his own life. The good shepherd is not motivated by self-interest, whether it be a wage-packet or self-preservation, but rather by concern for the sheep. As we have already seen, in true pastoral care the welfare of those in one's charge comes first. However, here the emphasis seems to be on the cost of that caring.

Although the setting is very different, pastoral leadership today can be costly. Here we have in mind not the relatively low salary levels which are the lot of many ministers, but rather the sacrifices of time and energy which are expended in pastoral care. Furthermore, there is sometimes the cost of 'stickability' - of remaining at one's post in spite of calls to go elsewhere. The invitation to accept a 'call' to a bigger and larger church - or indeed, just to another church - when things are tough can be remarkably tempting. But if a church is to grow and to develop, then pastoral longevity is often called for. Short-term pastorates may help ministerial career development, but they may not necessarily help the church. As a rule of thumb truly productive ministry tends to develop only after a minister has stayed in post for five years or more. In this respect some observations of George Barna can be quite salutary:

"The smaller the church body the more likely the pastor is to spend a few years in that pulpit. Perhaps this is one of the ramifications of the numbers-crazed, upwardly mobile mentality that plagues the pastorate. Failing to accomplish the numerical growth with which the profession is enamoured, pastors move to other congregations in hopes of finding a setting more responsive to their efforts... The revolving door syndrome begs the question of whether God really calls most pastors to spend only a few years in each church before moving to new (and presumably greener) pastures"

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### 3.6 *A broader horizon*

Pastoral leadership, which is true to the heart of Jesus, will never allow itself to be bound by the church and its needs. For the Good Shepherd is concerned for the sheep which are lost. "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice" (John 10.16). Indeed, if the parable of the Shepherd and the Lost Sheep (Matt 18.12-13) is anything to go by, then the lost always have priority over the others. As Jesus said to his critics "I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2.17: see also Lk 19.10). The love of Jesus was never exclusive, it was always all-inclusive.

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<sup>119</sup> Frank Wright, *Pastoral Care Revisited* (SCM, London 1996) 26.

<sup>120</sup> Barna, *Today's Pastors* 37

What does this mean in terms of the Christian church today? It means in the first place that no leader with a shepherd's heart can ever be 'owned' by a church. No pastors worth their salt can ever be chaplain figures, simply there to see to the pastoral needs of the church and its members. Rather the concern for the lost and the strayed must always dominate. Mission must always come first on the church's agenda. A church which ceases to live for others ceases to live for Jesus.

Secondly, this particular application of the metaphor reinforces the seriousness of the effect of many a power game. For where churches are involved in power games, time and again the mission of the church is downgraded and obstructed. In such a situation it is all too easy for the energies of the church to revolve entirely around internal concerns. Maintenance rather than mission heads the church agenda.

Even more seriously, where power games are played, there are always casualties. The casualties I have in mind here are not those who simply transfer from one church to another - although their hurt should not be underestimated - but rather those who give up on the institutional church altogether. They may not give up on God, but they certainly can and do give up on the people of God. The quality of the church's life, far from attracting people to the Christian faith and then confirming them in their faith, has proved sadly destructive.

#### **4.     *Learning from Jesus***

In recent years there have been all kinds of major changes taking place in Britain's theological colleges, not least with regard to the area of practical theology. Thirty years ago, for instance, 'pastoralia' often consisted of the college principal simply giving 'tips' from his own somewhat dated experience of church life. Today theological colleges employ a wide range of specialists to teach their students the practical skills of ministry. Along with the specialist teachers are the specialist books. "How to be an effective minister" books abound. And to be fair there is much to be learnt from these books and from their authors. However, at the end of the day the essential model for ministry has not changed. Jesus remains the one to whom we should look (Hebs 12.2). He remains the pattern for ministry - even in this admittedly complicated area of power in the church.



## CHAPTER 7. POWER FOR THE PEOPLE - HANDLING POWER WITH CARE

### 1. *Power can be good*

Many Christians regard power as something which is intrinsically evil. They say that it is a force which is beyond redemption, and which certainly has no business in the church. Martin Hengel, the German New Testament scholar, begins his authoritative work on Christ and Power with a quotation from Jacob Burckhardt: "Now power is of its nature evil, whoever wields it. It is not stability but lust, and 'ipso facto' insatiable, therefore unhappy in itself and doomed to make others unhappy"<sup>121</sup>

Similarly Leith Anderson, the senior pastor of Woodhead Community Church, an American 'mega-church', has likened power to holding a gun to a person's head or withholding a pay check from an employee. "Power forces others to obey, even against their wills". Along with others he contrasts co-ercive power with legitimate authority:

"Authority is earned. Authority is freely given. Authority is people listening to and acting on the words of a leader because they choose to and want to. Authority is trust and confidence. Not understanding the difference and assuming authority that has not been given is a certain route to disaster in a church or an organization"<sup>122</sup>.

Certainly our survey has revealed a good deal of ambivalence of church leaders towards power. It was, for instance, only a bare majority of ministers and church officials who thought that "power is not a dirty word".

But such a negative valuation of power is not helpful. We get nowhere in denying the validity of the term "power", as if power is always a force for evil. The fact is that power of and in itself is morally neutral. Power can be extraordinarily destructive, but it can also be extraordinarily creative. Power can destroy relationships, but it also can restore relationships. Power can oppress, but can also liberate. Power can exploit, but power can also enable. It all depends on how it is used.

In Gen 1.26, for instance, humankind was given power ("dominion") over all the creatures God had made. Clearly God did not intend power to be used for evil, but rather for good. Although in fact we humans have tended to use our power to the detriment of the creation, the hope is nonetheless expressed in Genesis 1 that power will be used positively.

Power of itself is not evil. Power can be good. It all depends on how it is handled. When properly handled, for instance, nuclear power provides light and energy; but when mishandled it destroys life and spreads devastation over vast areas.

The Scottish theologian James Mackey in his monumental treatise helpfully compares power with light:

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<sup>121</sup> Cited by Martin Hengel, *Christ And Power* (Christian Journals, Belfast & Dublin 1977)

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<sup>122</sup> Leith Anderson, *Dying For Change* (Bethany House, Minneapolis 1990) 191

"Just as the refraction of light reveals the colours in the rainbow, the analysis of power proves it to be deployed along a range of appearances of which raw force is one extreme and pure authority another, and shades composed of mixtures of these in various proportions take up the middle space<sup>123</sup>".

In other words we cannot compare and contrast power with authority, as if the two were antithetical. Authority is but one aspect of power.

We cannot say often enough: power in itself is not intrinsically evil. God through his creative power brought order out of chaos. God through his redemptive power brought life out of death. God through his Spirit offers this same power to his people. In the words of the Apostle Paul, God "by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3.20). There is no reason why, in principle, this power should not be available within the church today.

## 2. *Power to exercise*

In the second place we need to recognize that ministers are called upon to exercise the power that is theirs. Power is given to them for a purpose.

Traditionally ordination has been understood as the church conferring on its ministers the authority to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments. In the Anglican ordination service, the bishop gives a copy of the Bible to each one of the newly ordained priests and declares:

"Receive this Book as a sign of the authority which God has given you this day to preach the gospel of Christ and to minister his Holy Sacraments" (ASB).

Such authority is a form of power. It is the prayer of the church that this power will be used aright. In the words of one of the Anglican ordination collects, the church prays that the newly ordained "may be found faithful in the ministry they have received". Faithfulness is present where the preaching of the Word and the presiding at the Table both point to the Christ who is present in Word and Sacrament.

Faithfulness in ministry, however, is not to be equated with allowing forms of preaching and worship to become fossilised. In today's post-Christian society there is an urgent need for ministers of the Gospel to use their power more creatively. To preach the Gospel of Christ today may involve traditional expository preaching - but it may also involve presenting Christ through the medium of "Seeker Services" and the like. To lead the people of God in worship may involve traditional hymns, but it may also involve celebrating the faith through electronic images and synthesised sounds. If today's church leaders are to speak with authority, then they must not only be heard, but also understood. Moth-balled authority has no power as far as the world is concerned.

The authority of the minister is not, however, to be limited to the Word and the Sacraments.

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<sup>123</sup> James P. Mackey, *Power and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994) 13

Indeed, from a New Testament perspective this priestly emphasis on the role of the minister is misplaced. The New Testament emphasis is upon leadership. Paul, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, as also in Ephesians 4, describes how all God's people are called to serve, but some are called to lead (see Rom 12.8; 1 Cor 12.8; Eph 4.7). It may well be argued that ordination in the New Testament entails the church above all recognising the authority of its ministers to lead.

Whatever the niceties of theological interpretation as far as ordination is concerned, one thing is certain: if today's churches are to face up today to the challenges offered by contemporary culture, then it desperately needs leaders who will think through those challenges and who will offer strategies for enabling their churches to fulfil Christ's mission today. If such strategies are to be effective, then churches will need leaders who will help enable them to make the necessary changes to their life in order to adopt the necessary strategies.

Today's ministers need to be leaders. Indeed, according to John Finney, a personal description for members of the clergy - as also for all in any leadership position within a church should look like this:

"Analytical and strategic thinker who can convey vision  
Administrator  
Team builder who gets the best out of others  
Deep personal spirituality  
Able to face conflict and enable change  
Warm personality with a heart for mission".<sup>124</sup>

In one sense the church today needs not more members, but more leaders<sup>125</sup>. For where the right leaders are not only present, but also exercising their power to lead, there the church will grow and new members will be found. What is more, these new members will not just be Christians "recycled" as it were from other churches, but converts whose lives have truly been turned around by the Gospel of Christ. But this will only happen as leaders exercise their "powers" of leadership. Chaplains may have a role to play in hospitals and in prisons - they have, however, no role to play in the church. One reason why many churches are making little impact on their communities is that time and again their ministers have felt trapped by the personal needs and expectations of their members. They have assumed the role of their church's personal chaplain. But the fact is that there is more to ministry in the local church than caring for the pastoral needs of church people - ministry also involves caring for those without. Ordination to the Christian ministry places a call on ministers to mobilise their people for ministry and mission not only in the church, but also beyond the confines of the church.

### 3. *Power in trust*

Thirdly, Christian leadership, rightly understood, is not just about power, it is about power exercised in trust. The church through the act of ordination gives its ministers responsibility

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<sup>124</sup>John Finney, "Patterns of Ministry" 90 in *Treasure In The Field* (Fount/HarperCollins, London 1993) edited by David Gillett & Michael Scott-Joynt.

<sup>125</sup> *Dynamic Leadership* 9

to lead the people of God forward in its worship, fellowship and mission to the world. Such a responsibility inevitably brings with it power. It also brings with it accountability.

I find it significant that when the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy of his ordination, he reminded him of the power that God had given him: "Rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim 1.6-7). However, this power was qualified. For along with power Paul mentioned love and self-discipline.

The three gifts of power, love, and self-discipline go together. Power, if it is to be used responsibly in the church, must always be complemented by love and self-discipline. As Thomas Oden puts it: "Power needs to be directed, guided, shaped by love and good sense. Lacking love, power is dangerous. Lacking power, love is ineffective. A love that is empowered but lacking a sound mind is apt to be wild and fruitless"<sup>126</sup>.

It would appear from this passage that Timothy was tempted not to use the power with which he had been entrusted. There was, perhaps, within him a natural reticence which caused him to be tempted to withdraw from his leadership responsibilities within the church. To quote Oden again: "The spirit of timidity is typified by the unprofitable servant who would not take responsibility for having buried his one talent - he buried it out of anxiety that it might be misused (Matt 25.25)"<sup>127</sup>. Are we reading too much into Scripture if we say that there are plenty of Timothys around in church leadership today? There are plenty of leaders who are afraid to lead.

One of the reasons why some may be afraid to exercise leadership today is that they may not be prepared to pay the cost. Leadership, for instance, is not easy, when it involves standing up to "power-brokers" in the church who resist any change because it threatens their comfort or their security. Nor is leadership easy, when it involves confronting wayward albeit powerful members of the church, whose lifestyle runs contrary to the way of Christ. Sadly, as Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, point out: "What we call church is often a conspiracy of cordiality. Pastors learn to pacify rather than preach to their Ananias's and Sapphiras... Many 'successful' pastors are happy only because they surrendered so early. They let the congregation know that they judged the success of their ministry purely on the basis of how they were liked in the congregation"<sup>128</sup>. It can need courage not to be afraid of one's congregation'. It can be tough being a leader. But not to exercise one's God-given leadership responsibilities is in fact a misuse of one's calling. Leaders are called to lead. In such a context not to lead is actually an abuse of power.

Needless to say, limitations are imposed on the power of leaders in the church. For, as the respondents in the survey rightly answered, "pastoral leadership is non-coercive". It can never "lord it" over others (1 Peter 5.3). People must always be free to accept or not to accept the direction offered by their leaders. But this does not mean to say that direction is not to be offered. And in the offer of that direction power is inevitably exercised. In this

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<sup>126</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *First And Second Timothy And Titus: Interpretation Commentary* (John Knox Press, Louisville 1989) 32-33.

<sup>127</sup> Oden 33

<sup>128</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Abingdon, Nashville, 1989) 138,141

respect Walter Wink is quite perceptive when commenting on the words of Jesus, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (see Luke 22.24-27), he adds: Jesus "does not reject power, but only its use to dominate others"<sup>129</sup>.

Such leadership is always held in trust. It is held in trust, in the sense that leaders are accountable to others. In the first instance, leaders are accountable to God: the day will come when they will have to give an account of their stewardship of "power" (Hebrews 13.17). Yes, not only bishops (Titus 1.7) but leaders in general are "stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Cor 4.1), and in that role they are "managing" the household of God for their heavenly Master (see Luke 12.42).

But leaders are also accountable to the church. Just as Paul and Barnabas gave an account of their missionary activities to the church at Antioch which had set them apart for this particular work (Acts 13.1-3; 14.27), so in turn today's Christian leaders should be prepared to give an account of their ministry to the people of God. Leaders are not to be a law to themselves. Christ alone is the head of the Body. Rightly understood, the church in appointing its leaders has delegated to them authority, authority which the leaders are free to exercise until the church withdraws its recognition of them.

#### 4. *Checks on power*

This accountability of leaders to the church is an important check on their power. It is when there are no checks that things can go wrong, that power can be misused and in turn people abused.

The fact is that leaders are not infallible. Their judgments, like the judgments of any other group of people, can become clouded. Wrong decisions can be made, and wrong behaviour ensues. The Apostle Peter, for instance, got it wrong when he visited the church in Antioch (Gal 2.11-14). The instructions that Paul gave for handling accusations against elders (1 Tim 5.19-20) indicate that local church leaders can get it wrong too.

The accountability of leaders to the church need not be regarded as a restriction, but as a safeguard. At the Council of Jerusalem, it is clear that James together with the apostles and the elders took the lead, but the decision which was reached was very much the church's decision (Acts 15.22,28).

In this respect it is significant that both for Jesus and for Paul, if discipline has to be exercised, then it is exercised not through a single church leader, but through the local church collectively (Matt 18.15-20; 1 Cor 5.4-5,13). The ultimate authority is to be found as the church comes together to seek to discern the mind of Christ.

But how does this accountability work out in practice? In the average church this is an area requiring a good deal more attention than it usually gets. As we have seen, in most churches accountability is a myth. Frequently ministers have no job specification and no form of annual review and appraisal. Many church officials, as indeed many churches generally, have little idea

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<sup>129</sup> Walter Wink, *Engaging The Powers* 111

## 5. *The power of love*

A more subjective check with regard to the misuse of power is to be found when leaders reflect on what motivates them to seek and to exercise power in the church.

Power for power's sake is wrong. But power for love's sake may be another matter. The use or misuse of power has its roots in the motives which underlie the actions. Power combined with self-interest inevitably results in abuse. But in 2 Tim 1.7 the gift of power is combined with the gift of *agape*-love, which by definition is self-sacrificing, seeking only the good of the other.

Sadly the power of love is sometimes confused with the love of power. In this respect some observations by Tom Smail, at one stage a leading figure in charismatic renewal, are pertinent:

"My own experience of charismatic renewal strongly suggests that if some of its leaders were as concerned with being men of love as they are with being men of power, because they saw that the only power the Spirit has is the power of love, it would be a more wholesome thing than it has sometimes been"<sup>130</sup>

Martyn Percy similarly contrasts the pursuit for power on the part of John Wimber and other charismatic Christians with the Biblical affirmation that God is love: "Wimber puts God's love in the service of his power. Orthodoxy would insist that they should be reversed". He goes on to point out that the miracles of Jesus are not primarily acts of power, but acts of love: "The healing miracles of Christ were often his particular response of love to needy individuals... Where physical healing does take place, it is often for individuals who are shunned by the prevailing religious institutions, or on the fringes of society... Jesus seldom healed friends<sup>131</sup>". The miracles of Jesus are clearly more than acts of power, they are acts of powerful love. Spiritual direction does not guarantee perfection; it does, however, provide a more objective check upon the inner self.

## 6. *The power of self-control*

Paul in his injunction to Timothy to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you" appears to link the exercise of power with "love" and with "self-control" or "self-discipline" (2 Tim 1.6). In this respect I am reminded of the third beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matt 5.5). It is possible that the original words of Jesus in Aramaic referred back to the Hebrew text of Psalm 37.11, where the reference is to the '*anawim*', the ordinary term for the "poor" and the "afflicted". On the other hand the beatitude as we now have it in Matthew's Gospel reflects of the LXX version of Psalm 37.11, where the Psalmist speaks of the "meek" (*praeis*). In common Greek usage the "meek" were not weaklings, but rather the strong whose power was under control.

Aristotle, for instance, defined the meek person as one who is "neither too hasty nor too slow-tempered. He does not become angry with those he ought not to, nor fail to become angry with whom he ought". Meekness on Aristotle's definition is gentleness combined with

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<sup>130</sup> Tom Smail, "The Love of Power and the Power of Love" *Anvil* 6 (1989) 229

<sup>131</sup> Martyn Percy, *Words, Wonders And Power* 144

strength.

In the so-called 'Great Invitation' of Matthew 11.29, Jesus invited would-be disciples to take on his yoke and learn from him "for I am meek and humble in heart" (Matt 11.29). The call combines the idea of gentleness with strength. Jesus is inviting others to experience God's love and power as they live their life in fellowship with himself. It was by this "meekness" and "gentleness" of Christ that Paul later appealed to the unruly Corinthians for sympathy and obedience (2 Cor 10.1).

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey he deliberately pointed to an Old Testament prophecy in which the expected Messiah was described in terms of "meekness" (Zech 9.9). The way in which he cleansed the temple showed that Jesus was no weakling; and yet as his encounter with the woman caught in adultery showed, he could be gentle. His passions were under control.

In Jesus we see, to use words made popular by Graham Kendrick, both "meekness and majesty":

"Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity  
in perfect harmony - the man who is God:  
Lord of eternity dwells in humanity,  
kneels in humility and washes our feet".

All this is of relevance to Christian leaders. Where power and love and self-control are combined, there "meekness/gentleness" is found. Such a spirit is to characterise the way in which discipline is exercised (Gal 6.1) as also the way in which opposition is met (2 Tim 2.25). God does not want spineless leaders: he wants leaders who are able to speak the truth in love, leaders whose lives exhibit the power of self-control.

In this regard some words of Harold Bussell are apposite:

"The antithesis of the misuse of power is gentleness, which is best seen and understood within the framework of strength. Gentle leaders, pastors, or teachers, do not force their insights and wisdom on the unlearned, nor flaunt their gifts before those in need. They are patient. They take time for those who are slow to understand. They are compassionate with the weak, and share with those in need. Being a gentle pastor, shepherd, leader, or teacher, is never a sign of being weak, but of possessing power clothed in compassion"<sup>132</sup>.

## 7. *Power for the people*

The New Testament understanding of the church emphasises not simply the role of leaders, but also the role that individual members have to play. We see this very clearly in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul develops the picture of the church as a body. God, says Paul, has so designed the body that the involvement of every person with his or her special gift is necessary for the proper functioning of the community. Every member has a unique role to

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<sup>132</sup> Harold Bussell, *Unholy Devotion* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan 1983) 70.

play. Yes, there are particular leadership roles given by God to certain individuals, but these individuals do not have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of "wisdom" and of "knowledge", of "faith" and of "prophecy" are not the exclusive preserve of leaders.

This theological insight needs to be combined with an understanding of modern organizational systems. The fact is that a sense of powerlessness is often a potent breeding ground for subsequent power struggles. By contrast, where people feel empowered to take a meaningful part in the decision-making processes of their church, the possibilities of destructive conflict are reduced.

The American Mennonite Ron Kraybill emphasises that "where there is dirty fighting, someone is feeling powerless. This is hard to remember. Cornered people are often intimidating and can inflict serious injury. Worse, they mask their powerlessness - from themselves as well as others. Nothing suppresses a whimper better than a snarl! As a consequence, the root of the problem often lies hidden. Anyone close enough to hear the whimper is likely to get snarled at. Or bitten".

Kraybill goes on to helpfully distinguish between "outcome" powerlessness and "process" powerlessness. Outcome powerlessness is found when one's preference is overruled or someone else prevails against one's wishes: "This form of powerlessness disappoints, but doesn't embitter. People healthily empowered in other ways know that no one wins all the time and tolerate such disappointments".

Process powerlessness, however, is much more serious. For process powerlessness is not just about not winning, but rather about not being "seriously consulted. Or when the process of arriving at a decision is too hasty, exclusive or unclear for one to feel a part of things... When people complain about outcomes, they almost always do so because they believe the process was unfair"<sup>133</sup>. The result is often antagonism and lack of trust. People need to feel valued. They don't need to know that their opinions have been heard. This does not mean to say that they therefore expect that they get their own way all the time; it does mean that they do feel they count. Empowering the people of God is not just a New Testament principle of leadership, it is also just common sense!

In practical terms this means that there have to be structures within the church which give people an opportunity to express their views and to know that their views have been heard and taken seriously. Precisely how this is done will vary from church to church. For churches differ greatly in their power structures. In some churches ultimate power resides in the hands of the leaders – whether they be called ministers, bishops or elders. In other churches it rests with 'translocal' councils – whether they be called synods or conferences. In churches with a tradition of congregational government ultimate power lies in the 'church meeting'. Whatever the power structure, it is vital that people have a regular opportunity not only to receive information about the church, but also to make their own comments and suggestions. There is no place for benevolent paternalism – let alone dictatorship – in the church today!

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<sup>133</sup> Ron Kraybill, "Powerlessness" 96 in *Mediation and Facilitation Training Manual: Foundations and Skills For Constructive Conflict Transformation* (3rd edition, Mennonite Conciliation Service, Akron, Pennsylvania, 1995) edited by J. Stuzman & C. Schrock-Shenk..



Not only is it an abuse of personhood – it can also be deemed to be an abuse of the Spirit and his gifts!

### *Power for 'people- building'*

For Paul the acid test for the use of spiritual gifts, discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14, is whether or not the exercise of that gift is for the benefit of others. "Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor 14.26) declares Paul. The same maxim can be applied to the exercise of leadership, which is also a gift of the Spirit. Power rightly exercised will result in "people-building" rather than "people-using".

To put it another way, leaders exercise their power most effectively in empowering people in turn to exercise their gifts and fulfil the ministry to which God has called them. In the words of the Apostle Paul, God gave gifts of leadership in order to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph 4.11-12). Hence, deduces John Mallison, "leaders stand accountable not for programmes implemented as much as for gifts released into the community of faith and beyond"<sup>134</sup>. Christian leadership is not about keeping power to oneself, but giving power to others. In the words of Jackson Carroll, "The secret of exercising power is not to hoard one's power or to use it paternalistically, but to learn together to honour each other's gifts and use one's own gift to strengthen and support the other"<sup>135</sup>. In a very real sense the church is called to be "a community of empowerment".

Power is never to be exercised with a view to enhancing the standing of the leader. When it is rightly exercised, it always enhances the standing of the other. Jesus denounced the religious leaders of his day, not least because of their concern for status. He urged his disciples not to be like the scribes and Pharisees who "love to have the places of honour... and to be greeted with respect... and to be called rabbi" (Matt 23.6-7). Instead they were to avoid being called "Rabbi (Teacher)", "Father" or "Master" (Matt 23.8-10). John Stott paraphrases this: "We are not to adopt towards any human being in the church, or to allow anybody to adopt towards us, an attitude of helpless dependence, as of a child on his or her father, or of slavish obedience, as of a servant to his or her master, or of critical acquiescence, as a pupil to his or her teacher"<sup>136</sup>. Christian leaders are rather to be servants (Matt 23.11) who serve their people best by enabling them to fulfil their God-given potential.

In other words, Christian leadership gives power to the people. The respondents to the survey were right in endorsing the exercise of power in the interests of empowering others.

### 9. *Power in weakness*

At one stage in our analysis of the survey we identified three different ways in which leaders exercise: power from "above", power from "within" and power "with". Sometimes, however, Christian leaders discover that none of these ways of operating are available to

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<sup>134</sup> John Mallison, *Grid* (Summer 1987)

<sup>135</sup> Jackson W. Carroll, *As One With Authority* (Westminster/John Knox press, Louisville 1991) 95

<sup>136</sup> John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (IVP, Leicester 1992) 291.

them. Perhaps as a result of some power struggle in the church, all of a sudden they find themselves robbed of their power. They no longer have any influence in the church. Indeed, they may have been summarily expelled from the church. At times like these there is another form of power available - but this time in the first instance not power to exercise, but rather power to receive - power "from below".

If there is one passage of Scripture which should be written on the heart of every Christian leader it is 2 Cor 4.7-12. Paul begins: "But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us" (2 Cor 4.7). There are times in ministry when we become acutely aware of our fragility and frailty, when perhaps it feels as if the "clay jar" has not just been badly cracked, but irredeemably broken. Yet all is not lost. For human weakness is always an opportunity for God's power to be at work. To borrow from JB Phillips' translation, we may be "knocked down", but we are not necessarily "knocked out". "Death" need not have the last word; "resurrection" may be around the corner - not just in the next life, but in this life too. For while we may be weak, God's power is "extraordinary".

The theme of power in weakness is picked up a little later in 2 Cor 12. At a time of unanswered prayer God "breaks through", as it were, Paul's "break-down". "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12.9). When Paul came to the end of his own resources, he discovered far greater resources in Christ. In God's topsy-turvy world weakness is a pre-condition for power. Oswald Chambers comments: "God can achieve his purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance upon them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because the unusual dependence upon him made possible the unique display of power and grace. He chose and used somebody only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources".<sup>137</sup>

We see weakness and power come together supremely in the Cross of Christ. From one point of view, the Crucified Christ is a picture of disaster and defeat. "He saved others; he cannot save himself", said the mockers. Ironically, there was more truth in their statement than they realised. Precisely because he did not save himself he could save others. Christ's apparent weakness in fact became a catalyst for saving power. Paradoxically, Christ's very non-resistance became the means of his over-powering the Evil One. It was as Jesus divested himself of his power that he in fact disarmed the "principalities and powers": the Cross became not the scene of defeat, but of triumph (Col 2.15). "Jesus", wrote Tom Smail, "did not attack evil by standing outside it in divine immunity and smashing it with the laser beams of supernatural force; he did not defeat it by violent and overwhelming assault upon it, but rather by taking it on himself and letting it do its worst to him"<sup>138</sup>.

In this respect the Cross of Christ is not just a one-off. It is also a paradigm for all Christian people. "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps... When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly" (1 Peter 2.21,23). In the first place these words are applicable to all Christians and refer to suffering caused by unbelievers.

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<sup>137</sup> Oswald Chambers, *Leadership* (Summer 1993) 111

<sup>138</sup> Tom Smail in *Charismatic Renewal: The Search for A Theology* by T.Smail, A.Walker & N.Wright (SPCK, London 1993) 62.

But I believe we may also apply them to Christians suffering as a result of other Christians - even perhaps of Christian leaders abused by other leaders. And although Peter no doubt had vindication beyond the grave in mind, the experience of many is that God uses those moments of suffering and of weakness to become gateways to victory and to power.

#### 10. *Power for 'pastor building'*

So far the thrust of this chapter has been on the power of ministers to affect the life of the church. However, as we have seen in the survey, power is not simply in the hands of ministers. Power can be exercised by others in the church over against its ministers. What's more, such power can be abusive power, which can entail suffering not only for the ministers themselves, but also for their families. In the words of Patricia Fouque,

"Abuse within the church is two-way. Very real abuses are experienced by ministers and leaders, as also by their families. Children of the Manse or Vicarage carry heavy burdens, and when there is conflict in the church or their father is dismissed from post, they have to face not only a change of school, friends, church, but also their parents' pain. Many are left with a deep sense of betrayal and struggle well into adult years, with feelings of bitterness, resentment and anger"<sup>139</sup>.

It is therefore not just churches which need to be handled with care, but also pastors and their families also need to be handled with care. Pastors - and their families - are human. They bleed. They are fallible. And they are Christ's gift to the church (Eph 4.7). As such they need to be handled not only with care, but also with respect too.

In practical terms what does this mean? In the first place, the church needs to accept their pastoral responsibility for their ministers and their families. The pastoral care of ministers and their families is not just the responsibility of outside figures such as bishops and superintendents, but first and foremost the responsibility of those whom they seek to serve. One way of giving expression to that responsibility is for leaders once a year to review the general well-being of their pastor - and family where appropriate; it should be as much an agenda item as, for instance, in certain churches the annual review of the pastor's salary is an agenda item. In such a forum one might well give thought to issues of work-overload etc.

Secondly, leaders need to ensure that the financial arrangements for their ministers are fair and God-honouring. Such financial arrangements include not only salary and housing (or housing allowance), but also expenses incurred as a result of administration, travel, study, hospitality etc. Penny-pinching can well be tantamount to abuse.

Thirdly, leaders need to encourage their minister to use the services of a spiritual director. As has been shown, spiritual direction is not a luxury, but a necessity. Similarly ministers need to be encouraged to explore forms of supervision. "Who is to guard the guards themselves? Who is to watch over those who are doing the watching?" These words of Juvenal originally related to the enticement of guards by a woman, but they are capable of more general application. Ministers are vulnerable people, and all the more so because of their calling.

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<sup>139</sup> Patricia Fouque, "Abuse In Ministry", *Ministry Today* 10 (June 1997) 10.

They need to be "guarded" and not just helped.

Fourthly, leaders need to ensure that there is a system for annual appraisal and review. If not, then they should take steps to set up such a system. As we have already seen, appraisals give an opportunity for leaders to affirm their pastor and to say 'well done', to review previously set objectives and set future goals, to provide a safe environment for discussing problems and, where necessary, to express dissatisfaction, and to identify needs for further training and development.

Fifthly, when difficulties arise, as inevitably they do, leaders should always be ready to defend their pastor against unfair criticism. Time and again the minister is made the 'scapegoat' when things seem to be going wrong in the church. The 'buck' stops at the minister's office. Not surprisingly the majority of ministers believe that at times they have been unjustly treated by the church, and not least in the area of unfair criticism. Yet even where the criticism is fair, in the first place leaders should speak privately to the pastor, face to face, rather than join in the public criticism. Anything else is abuse.

Sixthly, churches should consider appointing a minister's advocate, who can represent the minister's interests. Such an 'advocate' cannot normally be a church official, since by definition church officials represent the interests of the church. Instead, an independent person of standing needs to be found. Such an appointment is helpful at any time. It can be of particular help when difficulties arise, whether of the pastor's own making or not. In such a situation it can be helpful for the leaders to ensure that somebody is able to speak on the pastor's behalf and represent the concerns of the pastor. Sadly experience shows that, when things go wrong, churches are not always fair in their treatment of their minister. Nor for that matter are bishops and superintendents of help - for when the chips are down, the interests of the institution rather than of the individual all too often take precedence (see John 11.50!)<sup>140</sup>.

## *11. Power abused*

What happens when, in spite of best intentions, everything goes wrong and power is grossly abused? When, for reasons good or bad, the minister is forced to leave the church, and pain abounds? As we have already seen, ministerial terminations are not uncommon. At some stage or another most ministers leave a church in an unhappy circumstance.

The temptation churches face is to try and to forget the whole unseemly incident. To push everything under the carpet and pretend it never happened. To appoint another minister and simply begin another chapter. Life, however, isn't that simple. Just as a hasty re-marriage after a painful divorce would be unwise, so too a hasty engagement of another pastor would be an act of folly. There are in the first place lessons to be learned. But more than that, there is also sin to be dealt with.

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<sup>140</sup> In this regard some words of Morris West are apposite: "Institutional power distances men and women from their own humanity. They forget that men and women, not institutions, are the subjects and objects of salvation. The institutions may survive; people have only their precarious now" (*A View From The Ridge* 111).

In the introduction reference was made to the troubles at Lincoln Cathedral, troubles which in one guise or another have apparently bedeviled the place for centuries. The troubles at Lincoln can be paralleled many times over - there are churches, for instance, where down through the years almost every minister has left under a cloud. There are Christian institutions, where the leadership has almost perpetually been dogged by unhappiness, and at times by outright conflict. In such it would appear that there has been some kind of institutional "virus", evil in nature, which has never been dealt with properly. The cast has changed, but not the plot. In a study of involuntary terminations of ministers within three American denominations, it was discovered that "40% of the Episcopal churches, 34% of the United Churches of Christ, and 45% of the Presbyterian churches had existing conflict or problems in the congregation before the terminated pastor started his or her job"<sup>141</sup>. In other words, in such situations the ministers concerned were the innocent 'lightning rods' who quite unjustly bore the brunt of their church's long-standing factionalism. Or, to use the theological framework developed by Walter Wink, the fallen principalities and powers are having a field day. The weapons that have been used have not been of Christ, and so the demonic within the structures has never had its come-uppance.

The first step in dealing with a situation of power abuse, whatever the form, is for the church to acknowledge its share in the sinfulness of the situation. Just as in the breakdown of relationships within a marriage, there is rarely an innocent party, so too in the breakdown of relationships within a church. True, one party may be more guilty than another. True, one party may be the "injured" or "wronged" party. But sin rarely confines itself to one group within a church. If an abuse of power is not to be repeated again, the church needs to face up to its culpability and confess its share of guilt. Such a confession of shared culpability is difficult enough within a secular organization, but within a church it is doubly difficult. For, as we have seen, God is brought into the situation. Where God is on 'our side', we feel doubly righteous. It takes a good deal of insight and humility for people involved in church fights to acknowledge that they too were in the wrong.

But confession is not enough. Repentance too is necessary. Repentance, in Biblical terms, is more than being sorry about the mess. Repentance involves a 'turning around'. Lessons need to be learned, new attitudes need to be adopted, new structures need to be put in place, to ensure that whatever happened never happens again. To ensure that such repentance is genuine, the repentance - as also the confession - needs to be made public. Changes are not to be brought in by sleight of hand, but with the knowledge of the whole church.

Thirdly, forgiveness needs to be exercised - to be sought as well as to be received.. Forgiveness, where major hurt has been caused and great wrong has been done, is never easy. Where lives have been ravaged, where careers have been halted, when faith has been destroyed, where children have been damaged... in all such situations (and many more) forgiveness is never easy. Indeed, it can be a battle. Pride, anger, bitterness, resentment - all these emotions come to the surface. Yet forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian faith. "If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6,15). As Jesus showed so clearly on the Cross, there is no sin that not forgivable, impossible though forgiveness at times may seem. What's more, just as the Cross was God's way in Christ of triumphing over the principalities and powers, so too the Cross and all that it stands for needs

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<sup>141</sup> Speed Leas, *A Study of Involuntary Terminations In Some Presbyterian, Episcopal, and United Church Of Christ Congregations* (Alban Institute, Bethesda 1980) 11.

to have the last word in power struggles today - without the forgiving power of the Cross the world and the church remain in the grip of those principalities and powers. Power struggles will continue to dog the church's life. And the world will be given no reason to believe.

Fourthly, where possible, some kind of public expression of reconciliation needs to be made. The fact is that power struggles in the church are never private. The shock waves go through the local community and often further afield too. The shock waves also spread down through the years of the church's future. The Cross needs to be seen to have triumphed - both for the sake of the community as also for the sake of the future of the church.

Needless to say, this is a complex process. Almost certainly some kind of outside church "consultant" is necessary to help forward the process. Indeed, perhaps the first step in the process is the appointment of such a consultant. Would that in Britain we had the American system of "interim ministers". As the name suggests, "interim ministers" serve a church for a limited period - normally no longer than 12 months - and act as a buffer between the ending of one ministry and the beginning of another. Where there has been a church fight, such interim ministers can help a church to deal with its past. It is not fair nor right for a new minister to sort out the problems of the past. Nor for that matter should a church consider appointing a new minister until it has truly been able to put the past to rest.

## 12. *People power*

Power for God's sake always has the welfare of people at heart. "We do not proclaim ourselves", wrote Paul; "we proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor 4.5). People - every time - take precedence over personal and institutional well-being. As Martyn Percy so rightly says in his critique of the Anglican Turnbull report, "management and efficiency are not at the 'heart' of leadership as portrayed in the New Testament. Instead service and sacrifice are presented as 'models', mirroring the *kenosis* of Christ"<sup>142</sup>. Management and efficiency can so easily become false gods serving the interests of the institution. But power is for people.

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<sup>142</sup> Martyn Percy, *Power And The Church*

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Abuse for God's sake? No, no, no! The title for this book was chosen not so much to pose a question, but rather to underline the irony of the situation. Where power is misused, God and his Kingdom suffer. People are hurt, faith is undermined, and the Gospel is called into question. Power wrongly used always adversely affects the mission of the church. Where power games are being played, so much energy is misdirected. Individuals and groups in the church become inward-looking rather than outward-looking. The church, and the struggles within the church, become the focus of their attention, rather than the world for whom Christ died. From a human perspective at least, in such a situation God, the church, and the world, are all losers.

One of my aims in writing this book has been to expose the dangerous reality of power in the church. True, at first sight there appears, for the most part, to be nothing sensational about the abuse of power among God's people. But herein is to be found the danger. If the abuse of power were rampant in every church, then it would be obvious to most, if not to all. However, it is precisely because the abuse of power is less melodramatic and more subtle that many fail to see the problem. Hopefully the problem has now been exposed.

The problem of abuse of power in the church, however, is compounded by the fact that God is often brought into the issue. This may seem a strange comment, because one might well assume that if God were brought into a problem, then the problem might be solved. And that is true. Where God is brought into a problem and allowed to have his say, as it were, problems do begin to be solved. Sadly in the church God is often brought in to bolster up "our" side. Like the German army, whose soldiers once wore belts with the words "Gott mit uns" (God with us) we tend to want to use God for our own ends, rather than submit to his purposes. The reality is that when we seek to use God for our own ends, not only do we become blinded to the blasphemy of seeking to use God for our own ends, we also become blind to the weaknesses of our own position. Indeed, not only do we become blind, we become even more arrogant and even more resistant to other ways of looking at things, with the result that there is greater intensity to the power-struggle. With God on our side, the inevitable conclusion is that the other side is doing the Devil's work. As history proves, religious conflicts are the worst.

How can this problem of power in the church be effectively addressed? In this book we have sought to explore a variety of avenues.

In the first place we have sought to expose the problem of power in the church. As we have argued, it is the very hiddenness of the abuse of power which makes it all the more dangerous. Once we become aware of the issues surrounding the abuse of power, that moment we become the better able to deal with abusive power when it raises its ugly head. But it is not only awareness that needs to be promoted: self-awareness is also crucial. For the problem does not always lie with others - it sometimes lies with ourselves. As we have seen from the survey, few, if any leaders, can truthfully put their hand on their heart and say they have never abused their position. Abuse is deceptive - not least to the abuser. The fact is that our motives and our actions are not always as pure as they might be - indeed, are they ever? Half the battle against the abuse of power in the church may actually lie in self-awareness.

In the second place, we have sought to make clear that the exercise of power *per se* is not wrong. Powerful people are not by definition mini-Hitlers! Everything depends on the way power is exercised - and not least, on the way in which the exercise of power is motivated. For instance, Brice Avery, writing as a psychiatrist, describes "healthy power" as

"the kind that people have proportionate to their own inner security and sensitivity to themselves and to others.... Someone who is reasonably integrated and at home with their own inner spontaneity is naturally powerful"<sup>143</sup>.

Jesus was such a naturally powerful person. "He didn't need or search for power, he was fully integrated, he had it because he didn't need it"<sup>144</sup>. Difficulties, however, arise where power is sought for selfish ends; where power is sought to compensate some inner sense of inadequacy. There power becomes toxic<sup>145</sup>. There power threatens to damage, if not destroy, life within the organism we call the Body of Christ.

Therefore, in the third place we have sought to encourage the right use of power. In this respect we have looked at various models developed by others, both theoretical and personal. We have seen that power can be used aright where it is complemented by love and self-discipline; where the needs of others, rather than of self, are uppermost. However, precisely because we can so easily deceive ourselves, we have gone on to suggest a number of practical steps ministers and churches might consider taking with a view to safeguarding the exercise of power in the church.

Finally, time and again we have referred to Jesus. For Jesus is the pattern for our living, and for our leading. As Leighton Ford wrote in his preface to *Jesus: The Transforming Leader*:

"The understanding of Jesus' leadership is not only important, but essential to our time. He was able to create, articulate and communicate a compelling vision; to change what people talk about and dream of; to make his followers transcend self-interest; to enable us to see ourselves and our world in a new way; to provide prophetic insight into the very heart of things, and to bring about the highest order of change"<sup>146</sup>

Jesus too is the pattern for our serving. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus", wrote Paul to the Philippians, and thereupon cited that great Christ-hymn, which tells of how the Lord Jesus emptied himself of all his rights and privileges in order to serve the purposes of God (Phil 2.5-11). Jesus reversed all human ideas of greatness and rank, and in so doing unleashed in an unparalleled way the power of God into our world. Power for God's sake is power surrendered in the service of others.

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<sup>143</sup> *Churches And How To Survive Them* 75

<sup>144</sup> *Churches And How To Survive Them* 75

<sup>145</sup> See Brice Avery, *Churches And How To Survive Them* 78-92

<sup>146</sup> Leighton Ford, *Jesus: The Transforming Leader* (Hodder & Stoughton, London 1991) xv.



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