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https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_canadian-journal.php

The Minister As Pastor¹

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THE pastoral ministry is an area in which there seems to be great confusion and uncertainty today. We are in need of clarification at two points: what we mean by the word "pastor" and in what way the pastoral office belongs to the essential nature of the ministry. In short, we must rethink and restate the theological basis of this aspect of the ministry.

I. WHAT IS A PASTOR?

Anyone who attempts to investigate this subject must feel a little like Christopher Columbus embarking on uncharted seas. There is a remarkable scarcity of literature on the theological basis and definition of the pastoral office. Like other areas of the practical ministry such as homiletics and Christian education this area has suffered from theological neglect. The idea has been abroad that these so-called practical areas require no such thorough theological investigation as we give to the areas of Biblical interpretation, systematic theology and church history. For Christian education it was long considered important to know educational theory and techniques but not too much theology; in fact until recently one could get by with very little theology. In homiletics the important thing was to be an expert in the preparation and delivery of sermons and it was expected that the theological content of the sermons would be taken care of in other departments of the seminary. So also for pastoral theology, the emphasis has not been upon theology but rather upon the learning of techniques in the work of a parish. The consequences have been that in all three divisions of practical theology the literature for a long time has tended to be functional rather than theological and that often there has been an embarrassing question mark hanging over the practical disciplines in our seminaries concerning their right to call themselves in the full sense *theological* disciplines. For instance, Paul Tillich in his *Systematic Theology* seems to locate the practical disciplines outside the structure of theology proper as constituting a kind of trade school in which techniques of the ministry are learned. We may object to that, but we must recognize that it merely codifies an order which we have permitted to exist very widely.

This order has had serious consequences in the life of the Church. The lack of thorough theological investigation in the practical fields has left them open to confusion. The Niebuhr-Williams report on the ministry and theo-

1. One of two lectures delivered as the Weber Memorial Lectures at the Moravian Theological Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

logical education, based on a careful assembling of data from most of the Protestant churches in America and from a very large number of seminaries, states unequivocally that American Protestantism has no clear conception what the ministry is and that in every denomination there are widely varying conceptions in competition with each other. But is that confusion surprising when one searches through the literature on the ministry and finds not one volume that deals thoroughly with the biblical and theological foundations of the ministry? Or consider the chaotic state of affairs in religious education only a few years ago. In Harrison Elliott's "Can Religious Education be Christian?" published as recently as 1940 he vehemently repudiated theological concern as an intruder in the area of religious education, and called for a radical break with the whole historic theological tradition of the Church. John Dewey was to be more significant for future developments than John the Apostle or John Calvin. For lack of seriously critical theological self-consideration religious education came very close to losing itself in a confusion of humanistic philosophy with Christianity.

But has there been any less confusion in our American preaching? The report comes in from every quarter that our Protestant preaching is in a very bad way, that large numbers of our ministers, in spite of three years in seminary and classes in homiletics, do not seem to know why they are in the pulpit, and that from those pulpits sounds a babel of gospels that is strangely and disturbingly like the confusion of tongues in the eleventh chapter of Genesis. Why should it be hard to find a pulpit in which a man Sunday by Sunday is opening the Scriptures intelligently and meaningfully and letting them speak their word from God into the problems and distresses of our twentieth century life? Why is there this chaos in our preaching? It is certainly not unrelated to it that there has been a neglect of critical theological investigation and definition in homiletics. We have stumbled into chaos in our engrossment in practical and technical concerns.

In pastoral theology we find the same confusion and the same theological neglect. What does it mean to be a pastor? There is an evangelistic conception which says that the minister must preach the gospel from house to house and attempt the conversion of people as individuals and not just in the mass. There is a less evangelistic but religiously formal conception which merely insists that a minister read and pray, that is, conduct worship in the homes of his people once each year. I imagine that these two conceptions belong largely to the past. Then there is the friendly church-visitor conception based on the principle that a home-going minister makes a church-going people. There are men in large congregations who make ten-minute calls in every home every six months and thereby keep their people under a sense of obligation to go to church. The content of the call is quite secondary; in ten minutes no serious conversation on any subject can be expected. More recently there has been the counsellor conception in which general visitation of a congregation is abandoned and people with problems are encouraged to visit the minister in his study. This focusses the attention on problem cases

and it is only natural that psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis have been drawn into consideration to contribute what help they can in the treatment of such cases. But the tendency has been for this counselling task to be regarded as the whole pastoral task and for the term counsellor to replace that of pastor. Taking the picture as a whole, is it any wonder that the young graduate is not too clear in his mind about his pastoral office? The picture is confused, and again, in this confusion there has been a lack of critical theological thinking and writing which would clarify the situation. There has recently been one courageous attempt to provide a theological preface to pastoral theology—by Seward Hiltner. He acknowledges the pioneer character of his work. He could find little or nothing in our theological literature to provide guidance in his venture. Most American works published on the subject, Hiltner asserts, have been mere "hints and helps for ministers." Unfortunately Hiltner himself does not set his subject in its full theological context but proceeds from a viewpoint limited severely by his own concentration upon the development of the counselling aspect. For instance, he never once attempts to make clear what the total ministry is of which the pastoral office is one part or to show what relation a pastoral ministry of the present day has to the pastoral ministry of the prophets or of Jesus or of Paul. The result is that he leaves us still in our confusion concerning our responsibility and opportunity as pastors, and concerning the relation of the pastoral function to that of preaching and that of teaching.

It is surely clear that one of the drastic needs of the present is the recovery by the practical disciplines of their thoroughgoing theological character. The task of theology is the investigation of the question of truth and error in every aspect of the Church's life. It is possible for the Church so to preach, so to teach, so to act, so to deal with individuals that it is no longer the Church of Jesus Christ but something else, some other kind of institution. The Church is in constant danger of unconsciously becoming something other than that which it was founded to be, the body of Jesus Christ, in which He continues to live and speak and act among men. To be a theologian in education is therefore to ask whether what we are doing educationally is in its central features and in all its details what we are compelled to do in faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be a theologian in homiletics is to ask what we must preach and how, if in our preaching Jesus Christ is himself to be present, proclaiming the nearness of his kingdom and offering himself to men as their only rightful king and lord. And to be a theologian in pastoral theology is to ask what we must do and what we must not do in our dealing with individuals if our ministry to them is to be in the truest sense a continuation of the pastoral ministry of Jesus Christ himself. That question forces us back into the Scriptures to ask about the origins of a pastoral ministry. It makes us trace its varied formulations through the centuries in the Church, trying always to see which developments were valid and which invalid. It makes us reconsider our doctrinal formulations of the Christian faith to find what it is in our understanding or misunderstanding

of the gospel that incapacitates us for the pastoral office. Thus pastoral theology should be simply the bringing of the whole of theology to a focus upon this one point in the Church's life where it attempts to deal with human beings not in the mass but as individuals or in intimate groups, family or otherwise.

There are several other factors in the situation that should be mentioned at this point. In contrast to the counselling programs which require large amounts of time to be spent with people who have acute problems, is a tendency, encouraged by our American accent on bigness, to be impatient with spending time on individuals or small groups. It seems to be more efficient to use the available time to reach people on a broader scale. It is very easy for us in a day when numbers are counted important to become blind to the opportunity which we have only when we are confronted with one person and to forget that the Church is built not by sweeping masses of people into it but by the awakening of faith in single persons, one by one. The mood of our day is against the expenditure of time on careful, painstaking pastoral work. But it is equally true that humanity in our day is acutely in need of pastoral care for this very reason, that individuals feel themselves lost in the impersonal mass of modern society. They are conscious of being manipulated in the mass by the clever advertisers of cigarettes, deodorants and all the rest, and they are caught up into a mechanical round of activities both inside and outside the home in which there is little that is distinctively their own. They are in danger of becoming units in a mass society rather than persons. And even in the Church there is danger that they may be nameless units in a mass rather than persons in a community. This is one reason why it is important today for a minister to know his people's names, and not just those of the adults but also those of the children. It is well for him to know much more than the name but certainly it is true that to be called by name brings always a sense of being recognized as a person. To be nameless in a community is to be a unit and not a person. One of the important functions of pastoral work is to contribute to the transformation of an aggregation of units into a community of persons.

Part of this same problem is the fact that many people have no one either in the home or among their friends with whom they can discuss freely doubts or difficulties that they have in relation to the Christian faith or questions that trouble them at the very centre of their existence. The more important their problems the less is the likelihood that they will have anyone with whom to talk. The Christian Church should be a fellowship in which they would find the opportunity they need and in which they would be able to bring such questions into the open, but only too often the fellowship in a church remains on too superficial a level. It is imperative, therefore, that the minister make himself available to his people at this point of need, establishing in their minds the confidence that they can open up to him freely any question that may be of concern to them. That confidence is not built in a moment, and it is never built unless the minister struggles against the current ten-

dency to spend his time with his people in friendly, superficial and purposeless conversation.

For some ministers the development of a counselling program has meant the abandonment of all attempts to visit in the homes of their people. The minister is available in his study at certain hours for persons who need his help. Beyond this he visits the sick and the dying and persons in special need. In this way his time seems to be used to best advantage. A program of home to home visitation, he says, is too wasteful of time and can easily be merely a succession of social calls, expected by the people, but not intended by them to have any spiritual significance. Moreover, if the calls are made in the afternoon he sees only the woman of the house and it is a bit unmanly for a minister to spend his afternoons visiting with the women of the congregation. In defending a measure of home to home visitation, it is necessary first of all to make clear that it is an insufferable bondage when a minister feels compelled to call on each home once in every so many months. That may be a major impediment in an effective pastoral ministry. No call should ever be made without a purpose. But when the minister ceases to go into the homes, and meets his people as individuals only when their problems become sufficiently acute to make them seek him out in his study, there are serious losses involved. First, there is a narrowing of his pastoral ministry to the acute problem cases so that he ceases to get near the host of others with less acute but no less real or important problems. Second, there is a misunderstanding of the pastoral office as though its one concern were with people's spiritual problems. The pastoral office should have in it as many concerns as there are in the total ministry of Jesus Christ. There are times when in pastoral conversation the need is to tell the person plainly and convincingly what the gospel has to say to him, in short to preach the gospel—but woe betide the pastor who preaches to an individual as though he were speaking from a pulpit to a congregation. More often there are opportunities for teaching, though again it should be in such a form that the person is unaware that he is being taught. To him it will be merely an interesting and profitable conversation, but to the minister it will be a part of his teaching ministry. Both the preaching and the teaching ministries need to be brought to bear upon the pastoral ministry in order to give it content and purpose. It is not sufficient to do our preaching in the pulpit and our teaching in classes in the church. We need to go to people where they are living and in conversation with them take up our ministry to them so that we speak in direct relation to where they are in their growth in the Christian faith. It is in such conversations that they will uncover their problems and difficulties to us before they become acute. This broader type of pastoral care we might liken to preventive medicine, by which the spiritual health of a people is maintained and guarded, and, if there were more of it being practised, there would be fewer acute problem cases demanding special attention.

II. THE THEOLOGY OF THE PASTORAL OFFICE

Enough has been said to indicate the complexity of the problem that confronts us and the need for a rethinking of the nature of the pastoral office. The starting-point for any such rethinking should be an examination of the nature of the ministry in the Scriptures and particularly as it finds its definitive expression in Jesus Christ.

Already in the Old Testament the lines of a pastoral ministry begin to appear. The earliest function of the priest was not the offering of sacrifice but the giving of Torah, which is not just law but also direction and instruction. The priest was the custodian of the nation's religious tradition; to him the people were supposed to be able to turn for understanding and guidance in all problems that involved their relationship with God. To Hosea the irresponsibility of the priests was that they themselves no longer had any true knowledge of the God in whose name they ministered. We usually think of the prophet as thundering his messages of doom at the nation as a whole rather than dealing with individuals, a preacher rather than a pastor. But if we look more closely we find that, even though the public oracles are invariably directed to the nation, there are clear indications of the prophet's concern with individuals. Isaiah had a group of disciples with whom he was intimately concerned. Jeremiah thinks of prophets and priests as physicians whose task is to deal with the wound in the nation's life (6:13, 14). Ezekiel describes the prophet as a shepherd and watchman over the community who is responsible to God for the life of each member of the community (3:16ff.). If they die in their sin without having received his warning, their blood is upon his head. This awesome conception of the prophet's responsibility for his people was to be taken up by Paul into his understanding of the Christian ministry (Acts 20:26, 27). It is in Second Isaiah, however, that the pastoral concern of the prophet comes to clearest expression. He describes himself as listening each morning for a word from God with which to strengthen the fainting courage of his people (50:4ff.). There is evidence at various points in his book of a group of believers clustered about him and looking to him for guidance and help. There is evidence also that, where he found his people unfaithful to God, he had no hesitation in pointing out to them where they were going astray, even though he earned the enmity of some of them in return for his care.

In the ministry of Jesus this focus upon individuals comes into much greater prominence, so much so that for some people his prophetic mission to the nation as a whole is lost from sight. If we examine the material in the gospels which formed the substance of Jesus' preaching and teaching, we shall find a large part of it with the stamp upon it not of addresses to large audiences but rather of conversations with individuals and small groups. The Sermon on the Mount, for instance, is best understood as having been addressed to a group of committed disciples rather than to a mixed multi-

tude. The gospels are full of incidents where Jesus is represented as speaking to one or two people, so that much of his most familiar teachings were given in a pastoral situation. If we were to take out of the gospels all the passages in which Jesus is acting as pastor, there would be a great void.

It is also plain that Jesus thought of himself as pastor. In one familiar passage he describes himself at a physician, sent not to all men indiscriminately but to the sick, and therefore justified in going only to those who need him most. John's gospel represents him as calling himself "the good shepherd" and as not only knowing each of his sheep by name but as being known by each of them. It is one thing for the pastor to know his people; it is something different, something much more important and much more costly to him, to let himself be known to them. Jesus' pastoral relationship with his disciples and with others was one in which he laid himself open to them in an unconditional way, interpenetrated their situation with his love and understanding and took upon himself the burden of their sins, distresses and anxieties. He gave himself to them, not in any sentimental way but in the profoundest identification of himself with them. He made himself one with them so that they were conscious of him not judging them from without but understanding them from within.

The striking feature, however, in almost all accounts of Jesus' pastoral dealings with individuals is that the profundity of his understanding is accompanied by what can only be called a drastic surgical approach to the person's problem. The rich young ruler approached Jesus with great respect and with a frank admission that his highly moral and religious achievement was insufficient, but Jesus, probing to the root of his problem, the ultimate mastery of his soul by his possessions, confronted him with a choice between God and possessions. Nicodemus, a learned man, when he engaged Jesus in conversation, was abruptly confronted with the ultimatum that no man could know anything of God's kingdom unless he was born of the Spirit. With Zacchaeus a transformation was effected simply by Jesus' acceptance of him in a situation where he was experiencing rejection from all his fellow townsmen. Simon the Pharisee heard from Jesus a parable which told him that he was nothing more than a bankrupt with God and that his failure to recognize his dependence upon God's mercy made him a merciless and loveless man (Luke 7:35ff.). The lawyer who asked Jesus to define a neighbor received an answer in the parable of the good Samaritan that must have left him gasping and angry. The general impression is that Jesus' methods in his public relations were not in the best modern tradition. He was not concerned primarily with keeping people friendly and loyal to him or to his movement. By his abruptness and even offensiveness he must have lost many people like the rich young ruler who could have been won over and incorporated into the Church by any modern pastor. The difference arises from the fact that so often today the aim of pastoral work is primarily to keep people friendly and loyal toward the church. Jesus' primary aim had to do with the relation of the person to God, the laying bare of the

hidden obstacles to his true life in God and the conquest of those obstacles. He preferred to lose the man for the time being rather than for the sake of a superficial friendliness and a deceptive intimacy to leave the man in the dark about himself. His first responsibility was to speak the truth to each man in love. In short, as a pastor he was discharging his full ministry in immediate confrontation with individuals, speaking to them in the most informal conversational way the word which had in it for them both God's judgment upon them and the power of God to redeem them.

Another feature of Jesus' pastoral ministry was his increasing focus on people who for some reason or other felt themselves excluded from the religious community. At the beginning of his ministry he is frequently reported present in the synagogue, but, as the resistance of the religious community to his gospel grew, he turned more and more to the outsiders. The parable of the lost sheep, which was spoken in defence of that policy, reveals the direction of Jesus' concern. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." His pastoral ministry was an active search for those who needed him most and who, by the absence of religious and moral defences against his claims upon them, were most likely to respond to his approach. The ninety-nine sheep safely in the fold are plainly the good, loyal, respectable members of the synagogue. That Jesus considered them safe in God's fold can no more be deduced from the parable than that Jesus considered the Pharisees genuinely righteous and healthy can be deduced from Mark 2:17. The exact opposite is evident in the parable told by Jesus to Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7:41. To Jesus all men were sick and sinful and therefore in need of pardon and healing from God. But until men knew they were sick and sinful he could do little for them. He found the outsiders much more ready to acknowledge their need. It is important also to note that Jesus went in search of those who needed him and did not wait for them to come to him. One of the differences between Jesus and John the Baptist was that where John proclaimed his message in the barren Jordan region and waited for men to come to him, Jesus travelled from place to place in search of men. This characteristic of his mission which is of such significance for the entire outlook of the church was rooted in the nature of the love of God which must invade the world in search of the objects of its care. Jesus was a pastor not just because he was interested in people or for the sake of attaching people to his movement, but because he could not be the One in whom God's saving love dwelt in all its fullness without being a shepherd hunting through the highways and byways of Palestine for his lost sheep.

It would carry us too far afield to consider passages bearing on the pastoral office in the remainder of the New Testament. As it is, we have made only a sampling of evidence from the gospels. But the sampling is sufficient to suggest to us that our current conceptions of a pastor are not very closely in line with what we see in the gospels and that our rethinking can profitably find its starting-point in the Scriptures. A few specific points stand out most prominently.

First, the word pastor has behind it both for Jesus and for the prophets the concept of shepherd and in Old and New Testament alike the shepherd's responsibility is not limited in any narrow sense. Ezekiel and Second Isaiah as prophet-shepherds in Israel regarded the whole nation as being under their care. Both undoubtedly had groups of believing disciples who clustered about them and profited most from their ministries, but they felt themselves responsible to God even for those who were hostile to them. Jesus, as we have seen, took as his special task of shepherding the reaching of those within the nation who had placed themselves beyond the pale of religion. In contrast, the work of a pastor is today conceived as the exercising of a personal care over the members of a Christian congregation, the visiting of the sick, the aged, the bereaved or those in any special trouble. If the congregation has a large membership, these duties engross a large part of the minister's time, and, if he attempts a yearly house to house visitation, it absorbs all his available time for pastoral work. Thus he finds himself in the disturbing situation of being a shepherd, who, in contradiction to Jesus' parable of the lost sheep, spends all his time, and is expected to spend all his time, in the care of the ninety and nine who are safely in the fold (or at least so consider themselves) and has no time whatsoever to follow Jesus in his pastoral search for lost sheep. Being a good pastor only too easily comes to mean taking such good care of the members of one's congregation that they remain loyal and are not inclined to stray away into other folds where the pastor might be more attentive. At that point there is need for revolution today in the name of Jesus Christ. Congregations need to be told how Jesus defined a pastor and that their congregational life should be so organized and the attitude of the people such that the minister would be liberated to lead the way for others in search of lost sheep in the world outside the church.

That conclusion suggests a second step. The pastoral task both inside and outside the church (for we dare not overlook either area) is so vast that in no community can the work be overtaken by one man. It has been proved in the past that every congregation has in it men and women who, with training, can do very effective pastoral work. It is absolute folly for all the shepherding to be left to one man. We should follow Jesus' example in training the twelve and then the seventy to share the work, building up in each congregation a body of men and women who will be willing to take careful training and to spend themselves in this essential ministry. Only when that happens are minister and people likely to find their way over the wall of the religious community into the world outside where their greatest opportunity lies.

Another point at which Jesus' example sets our practices in question is in the way in which he discharges his full ministry in the pastoral situation. In his dealings with individuals he is both preacher and teacher. He preaches and teaches in a conversational manner which in a measure conceals what he is doing, but nevertheless it is singularly effective preaching and teaching. He does not as pastor do something quite different from what he is doing

in his public ministry. It is here that often today there is a radical discontinuity in our ministries. The preacher and the pastor can be two quite different people. At a ministers' conference some years ago one man spoke for many when he confessed he could preach the gospel fluently as long as he had a pulpit between himself and his people, but, when that formal situation was no longer there and he found himself informally confronted with one of his people, he was tongue-tied and helpless, without a word to say.

There is no severer test in the ministry than that which meets us in the pastoral situation. It tests the integrity of our knowledge, for, while second-hand knowledge, and even second-hand sermons, can sometimes be passed off for the real thing in the pulpit, in personal conversation, eye to eye, we can speak only that which we know for ourselves. It also tests the strength of our understanding and concern in relation to our people when we have to deal not with human problems in general but with the specific problem of one person. So severe and shattering is this test when we first meet it that it is only human that we should try to run away from it. There are various forms of evasion. One is the finding of good reasons for abandoning all visitation in homes. Another is the shortening of the visit to a period so brief that no significant conversation is possible. Another is the resolute maintenance of a chatty superficial level in the interview that effectively discourages serious questions. Yet another is the formal religious visit which gives the minister a good conscience that he has done something to make the call religious when in actuality he has gone into hiding behind his Bible reading and prayer. There are innumerable ways of guarding ourselves against the costly exposure to the rude realities of our people's lives. But when we refuse all such protection and accept this exposed position as the necessary permanent condition of our ministry, profound consequences follow not only for our pastoral work but also for our preaching and teaching. The pastoral situation becomes for us the place where we learn who the people are to whom we preach on Sunday and whom we teach on Thursday. In fact, our preaching becomes a continuation in public of the conversations we have been having in private and retains the quality of personal address in which we seek to speak the word which we have heard in the Scriptures in which God himself deals in judgment and in mercy with our broken, confused, sinful lives.

This continuity of the preaching and pastoral ministries is extremely important in dealing with people who have special problems. Quite often the problem has its origin in an arrested spiritual development. The person is failing in the relationships of life because he has no more than a nine year old's understanding of the Christian faith and has no knowledge of the resources of prayer. What he needs is help in discovering the realities of his situation and in taking the first steps in an independent development in faith and prayer. What must not happen is that he should develop a relation of dependence upon the minister rather than upon God. He should therefore

at the earliest possible moment find in the worship and sermons of the sanctuary the continuation of what began for him in the private conversation. This point is significant in the light of the tendency in some forms of counselling to attach the person to the minister as counsellor and to prolong private interviews over a wide expanse of time.

Finally, the entire pastoral ministry is to be undertaken in full awareness that no person receives a Christian ministry in the midst of his problems and distresses unless somehow his life is brought under the light of God's own presence. We are ministers of God before we are ministers to human need, and our one hope that something effective may be accomplished concerning the person's problem is that through our ministry they may become aware of God's dealings with them; that is, aware that at the root of their problem is something wrong in their relationship with God and that the beginning of healing in their practical problems is the healing and restoration of this inner relationship. We dare not lead them to think that there is something we can do, some word we can speak as ministers, some discipline we can lay upon them, some process of counselling to which we can submit them, which of itself is able to accomplish the desired healing. There are things that men can do to help people in their troubles; that has been proved by the psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts; but the help given from these quarters does not claim to be and cannot be the kind of help that comes only from reconciliation with God. It will be a tragic thing if Christian ministers begin to forget that they are ministers of reconciliation in this radical sense that we see exemplified in Jesus' own ministry and exchange this ministry for one which, by copying some of the techniques of the psychiatrists, seems to offer people more direct and immediate help. We need to learn all that we can from psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis to deepen our understanding of the people with whom we deal and to guard ourselves against approaches to them which are likely only to complicate their problems. A minister who refuses to learn from these sciences is as irresponsible in his work as pastor as he would be as preacher and teacher if he refused to make use of the biblical researches of the past hundred years in his interpretations of the Bible. We need every help we can find in lifting the edge of darkness that always hides the other person from us. But what must not happen is that the Christian minister should exchange the role of minister of reconciliation with God for the role of a species of amateur psychiatrist. The two are not just the ancient and the modern forms of the same thing.

The pastor, however much he may be helped from many modern sources in his understanding of his people, is not likely to be a minister of reconciliation to them unless he learns to read his own and their inner situation out of the Scriptures. The word of God in Scripture is not just a revelation of God; it is also a revelation of man, and these are not two separate revelations but one. Wherever God reveals himself, man sees himself and his whole life in a new light. The point at which God reveals himself fully in Jesus Christ is the point at which the heights and depths of our humanity are laid bare. Not only the mystery of God but also the mystery of man is pierced by the

word of God. The Bible is therefore the primary textbook of the pastor out of which he reads his people, their problems and the way of their healing. By it he will be kept from all superficial diagnoses of even the least of their problems, for he will learn that what shows as only a tiny problem on the surface may be the only visible evidence of a much larger and deeper problem in the person's life with God. The rich young ruler thought he lacked only some one small thing in his spiritual life when in actuality he had not yet faced the magnitude of the No that he was saying to God. But, above all, the Scriptures keep us aware that the problems of any one man are not in himself alone or merely in his relations with one or two people, so that if he is twisted in himself or tangled in his relation with others we can get him straightened out. The deepest reality of his life is his relation with God and this is the substructure of his relation with himself and with those about him. Therefore all our straightening out of his relations with himself and others leaves the main problem untouched so that at the centre, in his relation with God, a conflict remains out of which at any moment may emerge disruptive forces. He is not really helped until at the centre he is reconciled with God. But this is not something which we or anyone else can accomplish with human techniques. The ultimately decisive help is not ours but God's. The word and spirit of God are his only hope. This is what makes the ministry of the Word and Spirit of such paramount importance. God uses a human ministry that men in the midst of their present problems may hear God himself speaking to them in his word and may know themselves confronted with God himself in his Spirit. Through the ministry of Jesus Christ embodied in us God himself must come to them and reconcile them to himself. *Through* us God must do what neither we nor anyone else can do.

Some years ago Eduard Thurneysen, until lately minister of the cathedral and professor of homiletics in Basel, published an article on "Justification by Faith and the Pastor's Task" in which he warned the ministry against raising false expectations in people's minds. Only too easily do people begin to think that we as pastors can solve their problems for them and this impression is reinforced when they hear from a number of people that a certain minister has been most successful in solving people's problems. Some ministers begin even to be advertised as experts in this respect. Thurneysen pointed out that, if justification by faith is the ultimate need of each of these people, we dare not do anything that will lead them to trust in solutions of their problems on a more superficial level. Our task before all else is to expose the real problem of their existence which is hidden behind the complex of difficulties visible to them. This is another way of saying that we must be ministers of God to them, bringing to them the good news that God has acted decisively to meet the real problem of their life so that they must give up all attempts to find some form of justification for themselves and receive as a gift from God his justification of them in Jesus Christ. A pastoral ministry of this kind is much more exacting and dangerous than any other kind, but it can be undertaken with a confidence that in it we are beginning to share in the pastoral ministry of our Lord himself.