

# The Fraternal

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# Ministerial Well-Being

Carol McCarthy made an astute, yet acutely brief, contribution to the 1983 Assembly in which she claimed that Baptist churches and their ministers gave evidence of sometimes being “less than fully human”. She urged the denomination to give attention to “those whose job it is to help other people to grow — the ministers and leaders in our churches”. Pleading for ministerial training to be much more “people orientated” she concluded that “since Jesus took the trouble to become human you might think that we would have already a respect for the importance of being human; but we have developed in everyday values an extraordinary system of escape from humanity into other-worldliness. It leaves us not inhuman exactly but not fully compassionate either.”

Ministers believe that they should give evidence of spirituality: and that is a crucial factor in ministry in any age. But the fear of appearing all too human is undoubtedly at the root of much ministerial stress today. This is evidenced frequently in our churches where pastor and people seem light years apart in understanding the nature and life-style of the church. Such misunderstandings leave a considerable trail of human hurt which will take generations to heal.

In our churches the controlling factor, for better and for worse, is the relationship between minister and congregation. The minister's personal qualities, ways of leadership and skill in communication with other human beings who share the Christian faith, are decisive for the well-being of the congregation. Richard Baxter's maxim that “churches rise and fall as doth the ministry” is as true to-day as when he first expressed it. Faced with congregational tensions of many kinds, the minister must have the personal strength to tolerate the stress of disappointing “key” individuals within the congregation and sufficient diagnostic skill to read the congregational situation accurately. The minister needs to be able to interpret his actions without becoming defensive of himself. He must risk alienation by allowing — sometimes stimulating — the tension-producing process of self-examination which can lead a congregation to self-discovery. The minister who is alienated from a significant number of the congregation loses power to lead; and yet, the minister who is not able or willing to risk disappointment or anger deprives the congregation of the leadership it deserves.

The congregation also has its stresses, especially the older members who hunger for permanence in a world where just about everything seems to be in flux. When the church's image of itself is that of “sanctuary” then fear causes members to adopt a withdrawal pattern from the world and the rest of the church which must result in organisational collapse. Financial fears, the fear of losing a trusted church life-style, the fear of the encroachments of the young, and many other fears sap a congregation's vitality beyond recovery. Fear is a ‘death principle’ in a congregation, turning it into what D.H. Lawrence termed a “sunless” community; people have no sun in themselves and they put out the sun in others. Fear eliminates spontaneity, destroys community, turns people in on themselves and away from others.

Fearful ministers and congregations, for whatever reason they fear, need a spiritual re-birth. That re-birth is possible not by avoiding what is feared, but by

embracing it. Ministers and congregations must develop a life-style which allows faith to be rooted practically in today's world; where there is sufficient security to be able to talk about "difficult" matters openly; and where there is a willingness to learn how to handle emotional tensions evolving from life together in Christ.

Within the congregation the minister must be free from role ambiguity. He is to be seen clearly as one among many gifted people, and yet he must learn to develop a ministry of leadership to the whole congregation, and not just to a few individuals. His task is to help the whole congregation understand where it is and where it needs to be, to bring the members to a conscious theology of the Church which can be implemented locally. A considerable part of the minister's task will be to educate the congregation in an awareness that tension is the precondition of renewal in any organisation, and that includes the Church. Tensions will arise within the congregation's life and also from the pressures which the "outside world" will bring upon those who are distinctively Christian. Worship, a concern for evangelism and social justice, will all produce tensions: the minister's task is to enable them to be productive and creative of new life, not destructive of all life. The minister's role is to help the congregation live with tensions creatively, so that anxiety about spiritual growth or evangelism will energize rather than paralyze the congregation's life.

The minister will need to be aware that congregations have their own defence mechanisms. They will attempt to resist facing tension by making their minister a hero — "he's such a wonderful pastor" — and then make sure that by such adulation the minister fulfils the role they have created for him. There is a whole area of submission to the minister. This is often dressed up in a highly spiritual form, but in the end of the day it means letting the minister make the decisions so that the congregation can deny they have any accountability for the outcome. As one good lady put it to the late David Watson, when extolling the virtues of such a congregational life-style: "It is such a relief not to have the responsibility for making decisions yourself." Such submission to a shepherd sounds very scriptural until the decisions made come home to roost, and then it is recognised the decision-making shepherd has accepted responsibility for all the ills of the congregation.

The minister who wishes to survive in the milieu of today's church needs to possess an inner ability to govern himself. He requires a personal autonomy which has the capacity not only to balance and resolve opposing demands within himself but also between himself and the congregation. To take risks, to sustain creative tensions, to challenge prevailing norms, demands an autonomy which all too few ministers have either sought or secured.

The minister who lacks such a personal autonomy is an inauthentic religious person. He is a minister enclosed upon himself, pre-occupied with a personal agenda to the extent of being paralyzed within the congregation. He is a minister who mouths orthodoxy, whatever that might be in his situation, and there is a hollow ring to it. The echoes of his preaching ring empty in the chapel where the people of God, looking up, are not fed: and they and he both know it. Lacking such autonomy the minister is exposed to the ultimate weapon of any voluntary society — the power of the members to neutralize a leader by thrusting personal criticism and the withdrawal of their support. Ministers, in our Baptist pattern of churches, are dependent upon members for financial

support, for their personal co-operation and presence, and if they choose to go "on the list" dependent upon the Superintendent encapsulating "a denominational view of the good minister" in his recommendation to another church.

The minister who is seeking personal autonomy will be wise to seek the gift of the Holy Spirit which is termed self-control. A gift not often mentioned among ministers, but one which is desperately important. Like most of the fruit which flows from the work of the Holy Spirit, self-control is gained at great personal expense: usually as the minister and congregation face tensions in each other's company. There are tensions which the minister's family have to face, as the church makes increasing demands upon the time of the minister. Members make demands on time and understanding, which all too often leaves the minister perilously short of time to be with his family. One way of resolving this is to provide a specific time when the minister can be consulted about pastoral matters. After ten years at Ealing, when this provision was made one evening a week without fail, I could count on one hand the number of evenings when nobody asked for an appointment. The study in the manse is something which most ministers still have to face: and it is all too easy to escape into it from the demands of the family, with a necessary hurt look if your spouse suggests that you are failing in your duty! Having had the opportunity to have a study at the church for some years now, and comparing the two experiences, I must admit that this situation should be more actively sought than it is. Not least for the freedom which it gives the minister when he is at home. We are not meant to work an 80-hour week!

There are other tensions which the minister faces in the congregation which call for self-control and a personal autonomy of the highest order. What should be the reaction of the minister, who is about to go on holiday for two weeks, when he discovers a senior deacon is passing a "round robin" at the AGM the night before he leaves, urging the members to terminate the five years old pastorate? How does the minister control himself when within eighteen months of beginning a pastorate he experiences the irretrievable breakdown of two marriages within his diaconate? What does a minister do when he finds repeatedly that the confidentiality of the deacons' court is breached, not openly in the church, but between deacons and wives, with the result that decisions agreed are overturned at a later stage?

There is a range of personal problems which probe the minister's confidence, especially when he himself faces the same problems. When a member of the manse family runs away from home, and is not seen again for four years, it produces a certain sympathy from the fellowship. But there are those who quote the pastoral epistles, suggesting that those ministers who cannot control their own family should perhaps leave the ministry. Such an experience brings you close to others with a similar problem, but it distances you from others who at some future time may have to turn to the minister for help.

To try and help someone face up to the death of a child is a very searching ordeal for a minister. It is made no easier when he himself has had to bury two of his grandchildren. The power of self-control is desperately needed as he helps others to face the ordeal. He has the strength of having been where they are now called to go: but his own heart and mind are a turmoil as he relives the experience again.

Anne Lindbergh wrote in the *New York Times* a few years ago about how such self-control is to be found, so that people can have power to lead in the various communities they serve. "Courage is the first step, but simply to bear the blows is not enough. Stoicism is courageous, but it is only a half way house on a long road. It is a shield permissible for a short time only. In the end one has to discard shields and remain open and vulnerable. Otherwise, the scar tissue will seal off the wound and no growth will follow. To grow, to be re-born, one must remain vulnerable — open to love, but also hideously open to the possibility of more suffering." The conflicts which such anxieties produce in ministers are recognised in theory, but in practice they are traumatic. Ministers know that conflict is a predictable part of leadership, but to experience its anguish and suffering at first hand, produces in most ministers a high level of emotional conflict, which reaches out into their family and the congregation: An American pastor has written of this :

"To be a pastor today ... is to experience anxiety. Health does not lie in the direction of ridding oneself of anxiety. Instead, anxiety is to be recognised, acknowledged, interpreted, brought into the light, befriended, accepted and used. When unrecognized and uninterpreted, anxiety will undermine the pastor's capacity to lead, and by a kind of domino effect weaken the congregation's ability to respond to the changing world within and around."

Each of the words in that second sentence needs to be pondered carefully. Here is a very clear description of all the stages necessary in developing the spiritual quality of self-control. A quality which provides the personal autonomy which makes ministry not only possible, but a blessing, as it honestly faces the pressures. Failure to look honestly at our anxieties will rob our ministry of its effectiveness, make us over-dependent upon the church, and will slowly but surely destroy our belief in ourselves.

The minister must "come to himself" as did the young man in the parable of Jesus. This is the start of discovering a necessary personal autonomy. Unless the minister begins to understand the consequences of living with his head in the sand there is little hope for him. There are no short cuts to secure this experience: it demands personal courage. In the minister's personal life and in his role within the congregation it is vital that he moves into, not away from, his anxiety. Responding to a series of articles in the *Baptist Times* in 1980 on stress in the ministry, Keith Roberts had the courage honestly to face and to discuss the marital problems faced by some ministerial families. "Speaking as a pastor" he wrote "I am well aware that there are 'things wrong' with me, with my wife, and with each one of my members. (Although they clearly love the Lord and one another)! The fact is that surely every marriage experiences tension from time to time, and often pastors, and other active members of churches are so busy with 'church work' that they do not have time to sort out the tensions. The problems grow, and sometimes seem too big to sort out. The way in which some cope with it is by breaking the marriage; the way in which others cope with it is by carrying on living as a married couple but not experiencing the total partnership that marriage is meant to be." That which commends itself in these paragraphs is its sheer honesty. Such recognition and interpretation of difficult areas will enhance the power of all of us to lead.

Another factor in securing the personal autonomy which is essential for facing stress is the ability to arrive at the conviction that the "church makes a

lousy mother". Go to any ministers' fraternal gathering and it will soon be evident that few of those present would wish to admit that there are not some very good and positive things happening in their congregation. The one swallow who makes a summer has absolutely nothing on Baptist ministers if they feel under threat for their church! But as the meeting progresses and personal conversation takes over, any fly on the wall would note the difference. Now there is a steadily increasing note of complaint at what the congregation will or will not allow. Certain congregation members come in for a considerable private attack. It is necessary for ministers to realise that the Church cannot be counted upon to be a sensitive and wise employer. Because the congregation members are not ministers they find it difficult to understand the minister's problems. In any case, they will almost certainly devolve that responsibility upon the diaconate. This does not mean the congregation should not make the effort to understand; but it does mean that the minister must honestly take account of this. He needs to distance himself from the congregation. This is the role of the Fraternal, though few are structured to meet it. The ministers should be objectifying their experience of the Church through an honest sharing together. They should be helping each other to spot the problems to go after, the abuses which should be corrected, discovering how to negotiate with the key people — even how to deal with a Superintendent and the forms which he provides when a minister thinks of going "on the list". There is a danger of a trades-union type of agenda dealing with pay and working conditions; but this should not deter the Fraternal from fulfilling its real, rather than its imagined, role. It will help the minister to take responsibility for himself, so that he does not expect the congregation to assume responsibility for his life and well-being.

Perhaps the greatest test of the minister in respect of his personal autonomy is whether he could face the prospect of life "without these people". An idea which many ministers find impossible to contemplate, not least because of the vocational sifting which has been part of their selection and training. Would it be possible to walk away from this work and do something else? Is the posing of such a question terrifying in itself? In a strange way, the posing of such an idea brings its own strength for the task. For the minister to realise he could be free from the congregation gives him the power to trust and understand; knowing he could leave them, makes his decision to stay become less a matter of external necessity, more an inner choice, willingly made.

When a minister faces up to the anxiety and personal stress of his work, cuts the cords of total dependency upon the congregation, and faces fellow ministers and congregation honestly, he is on the way to becoming fully human and is better equipped to help others to that full humanity which Christ desires for all his disciples. It is no easy road to follow, and courage is the first requirement. It requires openness and vulnerability if true autonomy is to be found. It is no other than the narrow way of Christ, who was vulnerable to the powers of sin and death, vulnerable to the point of death by crucifixion. A vulnerability which was possible because of his authentic autonomy, and from which flowed the triumph of Easter Day and gift to all of the Holy Spirit's power. To know Christ is to share his sufferings, in growing conformity with his death, that we may experience the power of his resurrection.

**Roger Hayden**

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# The Call to the Ministry — Some Mid-Point Reflections

To be convinced that one has been called of God is an assurance that has saved many a minister from giving up in despair when he has had to face almost insuperable difficulties in the course of his vocation. Despair, both at his own miserable efforts, his failings of pride, of selfishness and insensitivity and lack of real love; and the failures of his people: their lack of Christian grace and charity, their failure to take discipleship seriously or to grow up in Christ, and especially, for some, the bitter experience of a difficult diaconate or an insensitive congregation. To know that, despite all, God at one particular moment laid his hand upon you and set you apart for this special task is to be held fast by an inner conviction that has eternal anchorage.

However, at the present time, despite this inner assurance which many have, the whole significance and experience of being called is undergoing changes and challenges that require someone to make an effort to look at the situation afresh, ask a few questions and hope that there might be a few answers. Many changes have taken place within society, the church and the ministry that make the understanding and interpretation of the concept of **Call** less simple than it was when I began twenty eight years ago.

Please note that I intend to speak of the **Call** in a very circumscribed way. I wish to discuss mainly the events and attitudes that relate to the actual experience of receiving an invitation from a church or some ecclesiastical institution when one is either at college or in a pastorate; I am not discussing the whole significance of a minister's calling, this is not an essay in pastoralia, it is primarily interested in that event when a minister is asked to change situations.

I am stimulated to do this for a number of reasons. I am now fifty five and I have been twelve years in my present church and I am faced with a number of choices. Should I quickly seek a move before I am "past it", or at least before most congregations will think so, including the church I now serve? Incidentally, I feel that in many ways I have more to offer now than ever before. I am still fit, still very active, keener than ever and *more experienced* than I have ever been (at least, in some areas of the ministry) and although I have only ten years to go before retirement, I do not see that these years need to be anything other than ten years of rich service to the church. Or, should I stay? I have no evidence that the people wish me to move, indeed, much evidence to the contrary, but am I in a rut? Am I too comfortable? Have the people become so used to me and my approach that it makes them feel cosy? In other words, do I still feel a strong **Call** to this present church?

Again, recently, the Secretary of the B.M.F. sent out a questionnaire on the matter of ministers owning houses and the difficulties they felt relating to this fact. Some of the replies were interesting and thought provoking.

Also, not so long ago, one church in the West Midlands had the bitter experience of calling two ministers over a period of three years and having them both move on again within less than a year and yet both the church and ministers had believed that they were convinced of the **Call** of God to be pastor and people! What happened to those convictions and assured leading of the



Holy Spirit? Prior to these events the church had had a very good ministry with another young man who had stayed for seven happy and successful years. It can be appreciated that the church is somewhat perplexed and a little disillusioned about the concept of **Call**. Are the ministers?

Finally, I have been a Moderator for two pastorless churches and found the various comments made by some deacons most illuminating — especially if a man was over forty five! If he was over fifty — well! Their understanding of what a **Call** meant was unclear!

When I heard the **Call** thirty eight years ago as a young man of eighteen I remember the tremendous thrill of that dawning conviction and how the excitement increased as various groups vindicated my own sense of call and I was finally accepted for training. In all honesty the reasons for the elation were not all spiritual, other factors came into it — the admiration of other church members, the satisfaction of the fellowship that they were sending yet another man into the ministry, the prestige (then, if not now) of being a minister. Being human, such unworthy sentiments were present, but mainly it was the thrill of a high calling and the surprise that God should single me out for this task.

At that time, too, I recall how the excitement was enhanced by reading those classics of the pastoral ministry: James Black, *The Mystery of Preaching*; P.T. Forsyth's *Preaching and the Modern Mind*; James Stewart, *Heralds of God* and all those works published by W. Sangster on preaching and the role of the Minister. All of it thrilling stuff, which made the **Call** so full of excitement and challenge. I still remember those words of Stewart: "For you the issue (of your vocation) has been settled. To bring men face to face with Christ has seemed to you a matter of such immense or overwhelming urgency that you propose to devote your whole life to doing nothing else and ... it is a thrilling noble enterprise. It demands and deserves every atom of a man's being in uttermost self-commitment". Again, "To spend your days ...actually offering and giving men Christ — Could any life-work be more thrilling or momentous?" and, finally, "Yours is the greatest of all vocations". I recall too, P.T. Forsyth's reference to preaching as that with which "Christianity stands or falls", and "The great, the fundamental sacrament is the sacrament of the Word". Who is it that handles this Word as a full-time vocation? — we ministers who are called to that high office! This office Forsyth also calls "A prophetic and sacramental office".

All this is thrilling! For the young minister it is the sort of sentiment that should send him forth into the ministry with his heart thumping and with high hopes and great enthusiasm to subdue the world for Christ; and, to recall such early hopes and choice zeal, is, for the veteran pastor, to reanoint the bruised and jaded spirit that may have been battered by the experience of life in the ministry; an experience that has known just a little too much of insensitive deacons or unthinking congregations who are not only hesitant to praise but are slow to respond to the demanding challenges of the Gospel in the modern world. I sometimes think it is easy for great and famous men to write exciting books about preaching and pastoral work because they have mainly had the satisfaction of preaching to large congregations or have ministered in big churches. Would they have been so enamoured with the role if less gifted and with small congregations? How many *ordinary* ministers feel quite so exalted at the thought of preaching to the same fifty people (or less) week by week?



# WEST HAM CENTRAL MISSION

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Dear Fellow Ministers

I am not given to a preoccupation with my own guilt. Perhaps there is too much of it to cope with! There is one person, however, who unwittingly causes me to feel guilty approximately four times a year. I refer, of course, to our beloved brother in the Gospel, Jim Clarke! In the course of his duties connected with the production and distribution of this journal, he contacts me on or about the 7th of the month to remind me, oh so lovingly, that I should have submitted my article by the 1st.

I suppose it is all a matter of priorities. My desk, like yours, sometimes all but disappears under the sheer mass of paperwork that has to be done. Conflicting demands, requests, concerns press in on every side, and inevitably some things seem to be forgotten or neglected. Throughout my ministry, I have tried a number of ways to establish proper priorities and efficient, fool-proof methods of dealing with my responsibilities. Sometimes I have been within sight of success. Often I have hopelessly failed.

There is a sense in which the whole of life, and certainly the life of West Ham Central Mission, is a matter of establishing and maintaining the right priorities. Administration has its place. Publicity is of tremendous importance in encouraging prayerful support. The necessity for fund-raising is ever present. In the end, though, the one thing that matters more than any other is that in our ministry, whether in pastoral charge or in such work as ours at West Ham, we seek the glory of God in enabling others to recognise and achieve their full potential as human beings and His sons and daughters by grace. Our Saviour said "I have come that they might have life, and have it in all its fullness". You and I, in our different ways, are committed to the same goal.

When you think of the Mission, then, and when you pray for us, don't think of "an organisation" or "a social work agency". Think, rather, of a company of fellow Christians exercising a multiplicity of skills, but all with the same thing in view, namely; that men and women and young people with all kinds of needs, physical, mental, spiritual and social may discover through our work that they are accepted and loved and valued by God and by us. Only thus will they know their true worth and discover the richness and fullness of life that is God's gracious intention for all His children.

I cannot guarantee that I shall be absolutely on time with my next contribution to the "Fraternal" (sorry Jim!). What I do pray, for you and for me, is that at least in the things that are most important we shall be given the discernment to get our priorities right in the sight of God.

Yours in His Service,

**Trevor W. Davis,**  
Superintendent Minister

How many who have ministered mainly in the back-waters, and will only be remembered by the local few, still thrill at the magnificence of their **Call**? Do they still believe there is no greater calling?

How far has the emphasis in certain circles on the equal place of the laity, or even whether or not the distinction between clergy and laity is Christian and valid, affected the minister's sense of vocation? Does he still, in Forsyth's words, see his ministry as sacramental and, therefore, unique? One can only hope and pray most do. This can be done I am sure provided that, wherever we minister we remember that we are above all servants first of Christ, then of His people. To be able to accept this as fact is to find the answer to most of the frustrations that arise in the ministry that in the end can be traced back to a false pride or an over-estimated evaluation of our virtue and gifts! In the end the acids of disillusionment and frustration will only be neutralized when, because of continuous relationship with Christ, what we preach we really believe, and the principles we teach are actually those we follow and have found work in even the most adverse circumstances. The **Call** you and I received may not have quite as indelible a mark upon it as it has for the Catholic priest, but in another more existential sense it can be as real, if that Call is renewed daily and fed by prayer, a constant and intense study of Word and Theology and related disciplines (Philosophy, Science and Sociology etc.), and a constant involvement with our people in pastoral work, and a sharing of the life of the wider society.

However, the concept of **Call** in this era has not only to face the pressures and challenges of the traditional demands of the ministry but there are other distractions that were absent when I began in the 1950's. These new factors *do influence the Call* and they come both to older and the younger men: the older men if their wives have independent professional skills or the minister himself has additional sources of income that rightly or wrongly (especially if, with this extra money, heavy financial commitments have been accepted) have become "essential". The younger men are affected because, perhaps more than the senior minister they are much more part of the aftermath of the affluent society that inculcates certain basic ideas of what constitutes a normal satisfactory way of living with modern homes and all the *ultra modern cons!*

As I look back to 1956 when I accepted my first **Call** I had only one desire —to be where God wanted me to be. Little else came into it. This is not said in any sense of pride, it was just how it was. For my second and third church it was basically the same. Indeed, in two churches I had certain *personal* hesitations, but God's **Call** dominated! Today, I question whether or not such a desire is always manifest among some ministers. For example there seems to be an air of professionalism among some of the younger men that minimises the theological significance of the **Call**. By all this, I am not implying, I hope, that I am a better person or minister than men more involved than I in worldly responsibilities. Some men see it as according to God's will to take other considerations into account, and such considerations for them form just as much part of a **Call**.

But, what are these "other considerations"? They vary and rarely do they all exist in the same manse. Again, I am not here including the unworthy factors such as wanting to move to a church that will give to the minister an aura of fame or glamour, nor am I thinking of the men who might feel that Superintendent's office is the apex of achievement because it brings some

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Yours sincerely,

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General Manager

*authority* (?) with it or elevate the man in a wrong way; nor again the man who chooses a part of the country because its rural or beautiful environment suits him better. Such motives, always unacknowledged by us all, unfortunately exist. Perhaps I am unconsciously guilty of such human frailties; but the factors I am mainly concerned with are ostensibly morally neutral and yet they do intrude on a simple response to a **Call** to change situations. They are such matters as the following: A man has decided that there is value in possessing one's own house and, finding it possible to take out a mortgage, he commits himself to being a house owner. In most instances this is made possible because he has a wife who is a professional in her own right and has maintained that calling or has taken it up again as the family has grown up and so brings in a salary that is often not only twice as much as what her ministerial partner earns, but is the source of the funding for the mortgage. It is clear here that difficulties arise immediately one considers a move in response to a **Call**. There is the matter of selling one's house and finding another one in the area of call. Can one sell the house quick enough? Will one be able to purchase another in the area where the church is? Can the wife obtain a post in or near that area so that the income to pay for the mortgage will continue to flow? Has the church a manse which must now be sold?

Consider the further problem of the children's education. A **Call** does not always fit into convenient periods such as when the children are ready to move into a different school or have now finished "A" levels or beginning at University or just finishing a job (if they are fortunate enough to have one). Must we as parents give this fact prime consideration, so, whether the other church needs us or not, or God intends us to go there we may have to say, No! Perhaps the church where we are has had enough of us anyway and wants a change. So, do we stay in order to help our children and distress the church or do we move believing that their education etc. will not be affected in the end? Or, again, because of the financial commitments we have accepted or the higher standard of living we now enjoy, (either because the church pays so well (!) or we have a chaplaincy or a teaching job on the side) a response to call might complicate our financial position. Add to these the fact that some men are in big churches and have felt that there is now nowhere else to go that is better or more challenging. Some I believe may have even left the ministry because they feel that there is now no position in the church that can stretch their talents. To state it like this is, of course, to judge such an attitude as wrong, but it has existed; it still may exist, and many of us may feel that our next move must be a *step-up* or else we will have failed. Sometimes it is concern for elderly parents who need our constant care and a **Call** away from a particular area will mean it is much more difficult to help them as they need. So it goes on; the possibility of a response to a **Call**, of Yes or No, based simply on whether or not we feel it is God's will, is impossible.

Although on occasions it may appear that there is a note of cynicism and condemnation in my tone I do not mean to imply that all the reasons for hesitancy about a swift acceptance of a **Call** are all suspect. My purpose is to encourage serious reflection on what are now, and will become even more so in the future, added complications that make the Christian understanding of a **Call** less clear than it used to be. There are practical, theological, and spiritual issues here that need deep thought and prayer.

The fact that most of these matters complicate the issue of the minister's **Call** does not mean necessarily that the changes that have taken place in some minister's situation are wrong. On the contrary, some people think that such matters are right and proper for the minister to be involved in. After all there are many aspects of the minister's life that already set him apart from his fellow Christians, put him in a different category, and some people believe that this in itself is wrong. If, therefore a minister has to sell a house and buy another one before he can move, so what, every lay Christian if he is a house owner has to do this. Again, if his wife works or is a trained professional in some useful social skill, who says that the minister's role is superior? Can she not be "called" to teach in a certain school or work in a hospital or engage in social work as much as her husband? Has the wife no rights as an individual who may feel that her calling is as important as the work of the pastor? Has she no claim to be considered if they move? What if the **Call** is to an area where she cannot fulfil her professional role? What if she knows that without a lot more Christian grace and virtue she will find it terribly frustrating to return to church work and housework alone, not having any opportunity of using fully the skills for which she spent many years of training? Is it right? Is it even true to say that because the husband happens to be a parson his calling is more spiritual and therefore more important than any other calling? Where the interests of the wife or the children are concerned, could it not be seen as sheer selfish arrogance on the minister's part to imagine only his **Call** matters — have his dependants no say in such matters? Have they no interests that need furthering? Or is it still acceptable to believe that the **Call** to the ministry overrules every other consideration? In other words it is not so easy a problem as some simplistic answers would suggest! It also raises afresh the real nature and significance of the **Call** to the ministry and the relationship of that call to other Christian activity in the world.

So, after all this, where are we? What solution to this problem can I offer? Quite frankly I do not know. I no longer see things in such black and white colours as I used to do. Most areas where major fundamental questions are involved end frequently in ragged edges and there is no divine word, nor any clear irresistible fiat to be obeyed. Every individual has to sit down and pray and think (not always in that order either) and weigh the pros and cons of each situation; and discuss them with one's family and friends. Above all, one has to be sure as one can be that self interest alone is not dominating the reflections and decisions — if this happens the **Call** will be a failure from the word go. Some of us are fortunate, we do not have wives who are professionals, and do not pay mortgages; our children are grown up and we have always somehow moved at just the right time; our parents are still very well or have passed into glory. For us it is so wonderfully simple — we have a **Call** and apart from small selfish reasons there are virtually no complications to prevent us just saying, Yes! However, for many this is not so, and what is needed I believe is for a group to sit down and think, pray, read, and investigate this very pressing issue. Much is at stake. Deep theological issues are involved and it is time we stopped just drifting and began systematically working through the whole complex issue.

To be **Called of God** to serve Him in the ministry is still a glorious experience; but because times change, social structures and mores vary; because no

Christian lives in a vacuum, and because above all the Faith must be thought out afresh in each decade, so that its eternal truths may be applied adequately to the age in which one lives; then, surely, those who have a special **Call** to proclaim and live out that faith in full-time service should be as clear as possible as to what truly is their place and significance in the age in which they live. Happy is the man who is reasonably clear; irresolute and unfulfilled is the man who is not!

**G.R. Neal**

## **Of Interest to You**

That is what this column has been called in the past and hopefully, will be called in the future. However this month, I must apologise that this will be a misnomer for this contribution. I have found it extremely difficult to put on the mantle which the Fellowship passed on to me from Arthur Coffey whose sudden homecall came as a shock to so many of us. I have also found it difficult deciding precisely where to start in recording moves and events of interest to you. In short I have had trouble getting my act together during these summer months to produce a column that would be of interest to you, and free of any sins of omission. I have decided to make my starting point, therefore, for recording names and moves, etc., 1st September 1984, and information which comes to me after that date will appear in this column in the next issue. References this time will be of a general nature, and I would be grateful to have any news that members think would be of interest to their fellow workers in the ministry.

During our Sunday morning Prayer Tryst over the coming months we would remember especially those students who have recently left college and begun their ministries, that they might know God's richest power resting upon them in these early days. We would remember those who have recently changed pastorates both at home and abroad, and have moved to new spheres of ministry, that their assurance of the Lord's calling may stay with them. We would pray the Lord's blessing upon those who have retired from full time ministry and pray that they may still find fulfilment in their reduced commitments. We would remember with sympathy those who have recently been parted from their life's partners, and pray that they might know the fullness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit the Comforter at work in their lives. Finally we would remember one another across the five continents of the world, and especially we would remember those who do not have the freedom of worship so dear to us.

**Raymond Burnish**

# Truth Scientific and Religious

On holiday this summer, I saw again the famous mediaeval map of the world which hangs in Hereford Cathedral. It bears little resemblance to the maps with which we are familiar, whether two-dimensional projections on paper, such as "Mercator's" or three-dimensional globes. Our world-view has changed beyond all recognition since this map was drawn, both geographically and in many other ways. Richard of Haldingham and Lafford, in about 1300 knew nothing of the existence of Australia or the Americas. Without the benefit of accurate surveying techniques, or satellite photography, he located the city of Jerusalem at the very centre of the world, itself depicted as a flat disc. Few if any of his contemporaries would have quarrelled with his judgment. Divine revelation, through Holy Scripture and the teaching of the Church, gave Jerusalem a central theological and spiritual significance, from which its central physical location could be assumed or deduced.

The primary difference in outlook between contemporary man and mediaeval man, is not that we hold different views about the location of Jerusalem, nor that we would today believe the idea of physical "centrality" as meaningless, because no point on the surface of a sphere is any more central than any other. Rather, we hold very different views about the appropriate method by which the location of Jerusalem may be determined and agreed. Not even the most fervent Christian believers would want to use atlases drawn on the basis of deductions from Holy Scripture according to some system of interpretation. We would all choose atlases based on scientific geography.

Now it may seem that what I have written so far is making very heavy weather of an obvious point. There is today no confusion or controversy among Christians about the true way to reach an understanding of the physical geography of the world. However, it is worth pointing out that there were Christians who held a literalist view of the Bible and its authority who did disagree with scientific geography, certainly until late into the last century. When Joshua Slocome, the American who was the first man to sail single-handed round the world, paid a courtesy visit during his journey to President Kruger of South Africa, the President asked him what he was doing. When he replied that he was circumnavigating the globe, he was sternly rebuked for making so erroneous and blasphemous a claim! Even if this particular issue is now a dead one, there are still many Christians who do not seem to have grasped the point that the fundamental change brought about by the growth and success of science is not that we now believe a different set of "facts", but that we believe in a scientific method for discovering facts.

In the first, and better-known, great conflict between modern science and religion, Galileo looked through his telescope and observed the mountains of the moon, the phases of Venus and the moons of Jupiter, providing hard evidence that the moon is not a "perfect" spherical body, that Venus' changes are compatible with rotation around the sun, and that not every heavenly body has the earth at the centre of its motion, all conflicting with the Church's teaching on astronomy and a literalistic interpretation of many Bible passages, for which Luther also denounced Galileo. The Cardinal who refused to look through a telescope because he preferred what he regarded as Divine revelation to humanly discovered fact was only the first of many obscurantists.