

THE PASTOR AND HIS RESOURCES

Gaius Helix

Introduction

There is, today, in the churches around the world, a renewed vision of their responsibility to bring to people everywhere the Good News of salvation, and to minister to their needs. There is also tremendous growth among churches in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and in Papua New Guinea.

In 1992, I spent three weeks in Seoul Korea, and saw for myself what God is doing in the churches there. For example, one of the congregations, the Yoido Full Gospel church, founded and pastored by Dr Yonggi Cho, has a membership of about 800,000. According to verbal reports that I got from them, every month they have 10,000 new members. What is their secret? Well, there are many important features that mark their church, concerning which I was very much impressed. They are:

1. Prayer life;
2. Ministry of all believers;
3. Dependence on the Holy Spirit;
4. Discipleship training;
5. The Bible;
6. Personal life and commitment of the pastor and the leaders.

In this paper, I will develop these characteristics, in addressing the topic I wish to discuss. We will start by looking at the meaning, and the ministry of the church, as a basis for why the pastor should tap into these resources. Then I will discuss the role of the pastor, which will lead onto his resources.

What is a Church?

“But you are the chosen race, the King’s priests, the holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:9 GNB).

Many people are not clear about what the church is. That is why we are also unsure about what the church should do in our world. Christians are God’s special people in the world. He has chosen us to be His very own people. This is a very great honour. Let me explain what the Bible means by the word “church”.

a. The Meaning of the Word “Church”

Our people today use the word “church” in many ways.

- We call the building, in which Christians meet, a “church”. We say, “We are going to church”, when we mean we are going to a building. The Bible never uses the word “church” to mean a building. In the New Testament, the word “church” always means a group of people, never a building.
- We talk about the “Baptist church” or “Roman Catholic church” to mean a denomination, or groups of Christians in different places, who all hold the same teachings. This idea of different denominations, or different kinds of churches, is not found in the New Testament. The Bible does not use the word “church” in this way.

What then is the meaning of the word “church” in the Bible? The Greek word translated “church” is ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*). It means “a group of people gathered together”. So the basic meaning of the word “church” in the New Testament is “the gathering of God’s people”. It is used in the New Testament in two different ways: a general way, and in a particular way:

- In a general way, when it means all those who believe in Christ, all true disciples, who belong to Christ, are part of the church (e.g., Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22-23).

- Sometimes, in the New Testament, the word “church” is used to mean a particular group of Christians meeting in one place (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2; Acts 14:23).

The pastor of a local church, especially in our Melanesian churches, needs to understand this meaning, as this will change his philosophy of ministry, and his attitude to the resources that God has given to the church. For too long, in many of the churches in Melanesia, the church has been crawling, because of a variety of reasons:

- The pastor and the leaders have not fully understood the biblical meaning and concept of the church.
- They are insecure in their positions, and any involvement by congregation members, who may be more talented than they, is seen as a threat to their position. Therefore, to safeguard their position, they water down any teaching of “the ministry of all believers”.
- I see, also, another area, in which both the pastor and the congregation fail to understand. And that is for the pastor, who sees himself as the only qualified person trained to do everything in the life of the local church. He answers all correspondence, he answers all telephone calls, drives the church bus, dropping off people after night fellowships, he does pastoral visits, he does the preaching, and so the list goes on. From my observation, the pastor, especially in urban churches, spends most of his time on administrative work, and neglects his primary calling (that’s if he understands his calling). I will discuss the pastor’s role later. For the congregation, their view is the pastor is paid to do the church work, whatever it may be; and, in many ways, this traditional church culture enforces this rule.
- Then, maybe, because of how traditional pastors have been trained, the pastor and the congregation see church work as belonging to the professional clergy, and not for the laity. I

believe this, in many ways, also reflects our traditional Melanesian religion, where the work of communicating with the spirits is restricted only to priests. I believe this cripples the biblical teaching on the ministry of all believers, and brings a false fear among the people, which comes from Satan, and is deeply rooted in the traditional religion of our animistic society.

b. The Body of Christ

One of the best-known New Testament descriptions of the church is “the body of Christ”. This is an important picture that Paul uses to describe the church, and can help the pastor in understanding his place and role in the church. Christians, including the pastor, are joined to Christ in such a living way that they become His hands and feet, to show His life, and do His work in the world (see Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-27; Eph 1:22-23).

Christ is the only head of the church, not the pastor. Every local church, and every Christian, are under His direct rule and control. He is the source of their spiritual life. But, just as in the body, every part has a special work to do, so every Christian has a gift or work to do for Christ. No one Christian, including the pastor, can do all the church’s work, and no one person is more important than any other person in the church. Every Christian is needed, and we depend on each other for our life together. When we all work and function together, we will see growth in individual lives, and the church will grow, both in quantity and quality. The Korean church is an example of this. The result of the pastor having to run everything by himself is that often little work is done, and the pastor runs the risk of a nervous breakdown or burnout. I know what it means to spread oneself so thinly, and achieve so little, because I have been through it.

However, having said all that, one of the gifts that God has given to the church is the gift of a “pastor” (Eph 4:11). Let me discuss this in the next section.

The Role of the Pastor

The experience I had in Korea helped me to see how important is the role of the pastor. While the pastor, as a person, is a member of the body of

Christ, the gift of pastor is given to the church to “prepare God’s people for works of service” (Eph 4:11, 12). Peter Wagner writes: “strong pastoral leadership is indeed a vital sign of a healthy church”.¹ The pastor’s role in a local church is an important one. What then is the pastor’s role? Wagner offers this commentary:

“The pastor of a group of Christians is the person responsible, under Jesus, who is the Master Shepherd, for teaching, feeding, healing the wounds, developing unity, helping people find their gifts, doing whatever else is necessary to see that they continue in the faith, and grow in their spiritual lives.”²

From this definition we can draw these duties:

1. **A Pastor is under Jesus, the Chief Shepherd.** This is important in helping the pastor to see that, while he is pastoring, those under his care belong to the Chief Shepherd, and the pastor is accountable to Him for how he manages the sheep. This is a big responsibility, and calls for a growing close relationship with the “Big Boss”. This next lot of duties highlights the scope of the pastor’s responsibility.

2. **Equipper.** The primary responsibility of the pastor, I believe, is to “prepare God’s people for words of service” (Eph 4:12). This can be done through:

- a. Systematic teaching and preaching, through church-organised programmes. For example, through Sunday services, adult Sunday School, Men’s and Women’s Fellowship, etc. In this way, the church is fed and built up in the faith.

[N.B.: The footnote numbers in the original printed edition were incorrectly numbered. They have now been numbered correctly. –Revising ed.]

¹ Peter C. Wagner, *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986, p. 78.

² *Ibid*, p. 143.

- b. Training, using training institutions and para-church groups involved in training in various fields of church work.
- c. Healing the wounded is done through counselling and praying for the bruised in the church. I believe this healing should take place in emotional, spiritual, and physical areas, with healing in social, family, and church relationships.
- d. Unity that is founded on love. The pastor must work hard, together with everyone, to maintain this unity. Not that everyone will be just the same, but, as the saying goes, “unity in diversity”. This unity, with all our differences, can be worked, through proper coaching and biblical teaching from the pastor. Love and unity are pillars of the church in its witness to a divided world (John 13:34-35).

From the above list, the pastor’s role in the church is not easy. It is a big and awesome responsibility. We are dealing with people’s lives, and their eternal destinies. But it is a rewarding one, if we know that we are doing it for the Lord, and He has promised to be with us always (Matt 28:20). It is also worth noting that the Lord has given resources to help the pastor in his ministry.

The Pastor and His Resources

From all that I have said above, the following resources can be drawn upon by the pastor.

a. His Personal Life and Commitment

“Keep watch over yourself” (Acts 20:28a). This, to me, is fundamental, and a resource the pastor can draw upon. This speaks of all areas of the pastor’s life: with God, with his family, the word, prayer, etc. The secret of his ministry hinges on this inner life. As Robert Murray McCheyne said, “According to your holiness, so shall be your success”.³

³ This quote is from a cassette “The Evangelist and His personal life”, by Luis Palau.

b. Ministry of all Believers

As I have discussed in this paper, this is the greatest human resource that the pastor has at his disposal that he can tap into. They just need training, and good coaching, from the pastor.

c. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Jesus promised to send a Helper, the Spirit of Truth, to help us in our lives and ministry. He will give us power for witness (John 14:15-17; Acts 1:8). The pastor should depend on Him, since he is involved in spiritual warfare.

d. Training Available

As discussed already, para-church groups are there to assist the pastor train his members. But, as a pastor, he needs continuous training, too. Maybe I should also add the availability of good commentaries, and other study helps today.

e. The Bible

The Bible is there to give the pastor help in his ministry. It is God's manual for his work, which the pastor should understand and use. Equipped with the right exegetical tools, the Bible must lead and guide the pastor in his work.

f. Prayer Life

One of the characteristics that was true of the lives of Jesus and the early church was their prayer lives, both individually and corporately. This is true among the churches in Korea, and around the world. Churches in the Pacific are discovering this. It is a resource available to the church that needs no further proof, but practice.

Conclusion

My simple conclusion would be: the pastor is a gift that God has given to His church, like many other gifts, and the person with the gift must see that the role of the pastor is not to do everything, but to enable others to find their place in the life and ministry of the church to the world. God has also

given and equipped His church with resources that the pastor can tap into, to enable him and the church to grow, and become the church that she ought to be, in a world that does not know God.

Bibliography

- Balchin, John F., *I Want to Know What the Bible Says About the Church*, Eastbourne UK: Kingsway Publications, 1979.
- Gibbs, Eddie, *I Believe in Church Growth*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981.
- Green, Michael, *Evangelism Through the Local Church*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993.
- Hitchen, John M., *The Church and its Work*, Wewak PNG: Christian Books Melanesia, 1976.
- McGavran, Donald, *Understanding Church Growth*, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1970.
- Stedman, Ray D., *Body Life*, Glendale CA: Regal Books, 1974.
- Wagner, Peter C., *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986.
- , *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, Glendale CA: Regal Books, 1979.
- Watson, David, *I Believe in the Church*, London UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982.