

# Some Observations on Pastoral Service

W. CURRY MAVIS

One of the encouraging aspects of contemporary American Christianity is found in the increased emphasis that is being placed upon pastoral service. This emphasis is evident in a growing body of literature in pastoral counseling, the ministry to the sick, and other forms of the person-to-person ministry. The pastoral emphasis is furthermore reflected in the curricula of many of the nation's leading seminaries where new courses in the field of pastorology are being added. The seminaries are becoming increasingly convinced that aptness and proficiency in certain classical fields as languages, philosophy and theology do not alone equip a young man for pastoral success. Finally a quickened interest in a ministry emphasizing person-to-person effort is seen in many of the churches of the nation. Ministers are increasingly setting up programs that are designed to give people personal guidance and assistance.

The Christian church has not always had its present vision of the importance of the person-to-person ministry. In long eras of its history, it relied largely upon certain aspects of public ministration in the carrying out of its task. At times its dominant emphasis has been upon public sacerdotal functions. At other times the center of attention has been on preaching. In its emphases upon these methods the church assumed that one or two services per week, though sometimes formal and stereotyped, should meet the varied and unique needs of the people. In some periods the church became so allured by the spectacular methods of mass evangelism that it felt its mission to the unconverted could be quite effectively carried out by that method. While the results of mass evangelism have been impressive, the fact remains that his-

tory has not validated this method as one that alone is capable of saving the world. Limitations of mass evangelism have been apparent in many periods of history, as at the present time, when the masses were not reached by this approach.

The object of this paper is to point out some facts that relate to the value and place of the person-to-person ministry in contemporary Christian service. It is not the design of this study to minimize the value of public worship and preaching. These Christian services have been vindicated long ago in Christian history. It is merely assumed here that the Christian task cannot be accomplished by public worship methods only.

The growing contemporary emphasis upon the pastoral ministry has solid foundations. First, the need for such a type of ministration is seen in the very nature of the Christian faith. The intrinsic impulses and fundamental purposes of the gospel of Christ cannot be accomplished apart from effective pastoral service. Secondly, the need for this type of religious service is indicated in the very nature of human experience. All other types of endeavor fail to meet some of man's basic needs.

## I

The need for effective pastoral service is inherent in the Christian faith. Christian idealism calls for a ministry devoted to the care of persons. The great Christian affirmations concerning the nature of religion assume the necessity of such a ministry. The Christian impulse finds its best expression in a ministry of helping persons.

A. One of the dominant impulses that gave rise to the creation of the pastoral ministry was the Christian concept of human worth. Jesus taught that human per-

sonality was invaluable. His teaching on this subject was basic, graphic and emphatic. He said that men were the children of God and were thus the object of Divine care (Matt. 10:29-31). He manifested his high regard for human personality by severely denouncing those who worked against the welfare of others (Matt. 18:7-10). He considered a man of greater worth than religious institutions (Mark 2:23-3:6). He taught that a person was of greater value than the whole universe (Mark 8:36, 37). He has been called "the champion of human personality".

Jesus Christ calls to every poor soul; he calls to every one who bears a human face; you are the children of the living God, and not only better than many sparrows but of more value than the whole world. . . . But Jesus Christ was the first to bring the value of the human soul to life, and what He did no one can undo. We may take whatever relation to him we will: in the history of the past no one can refuse to recognize that it was he who raised humanity to this level.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus' concept of the value of human personality was dynamic. It motivated him to minister personally to men. Herein he was different from the Roman and Greek philosophers. They too had a high concept of human worth. But they, even the Stoics, found it difficult to live up to their high idealism. Aristotle referred to the slave as a "living tool". The Stoic, Chrysippus, could conceive of happiness as only for the wise. He was pretty sure, however, that most men were fools. Even Seneca with all his pious idealism prayed, "Forgive the world, they are all fools". The Greek and Roman philosophers were generally "passively intellectual" about the worth of men. They lacked the *elan* to practice their own idealism by actually relieving the suffering of men.

Motivated by a profound appreciation of and love for men, the earthly ministry of Jesus was characterized by his personal attention in feeding the hungry, teaching the inquirers, forgiving the penitent, healing the sick and raising the dead. More

Synoptic attention is devoted to his personal contacts than to his public proclamations. Believing that man was of infinite worth, he spared no effort nor evaded any personal sacrifice in his attempt to redeem men. He died that man might be saved.

The Apostolic church, imbued with the spirit of its Lord and following his example, created the pastoral ministry as a new type of religious ministrations. The early Christians could do nothing other than that. They had caught Jesus' ideal of the high worth of man. They were possessed with a dynamic love that sought to express itself in helpfulness and service to all men. As an instance of this, consider the situation in the early days of the Jerusalem church. The apostles, acting as pastors, sought to meet both the physical and spiritual needs of the Christian group that was assembled there. Because of the multiplicity of their tasks proper provision was not given some of the Hellenist widows. The apostles appointed seven men to give particular attention to this problem. This was doubtless the beginning of the Christian diaconate. The pastoral ministry arose as a natural expression of the early Christian leaders in their attempts to implement their ideals of human worth.

In the later apostolic and post apostolic church the deacon's office was further developed because of the genuine Christian concern that existed for the welfare of believers. The early Christian communities experienced such rapid numerical growth that the pastor, bishop or presbyter could not personally care for the people. Deacons were appointed so that they might directly contact needy Christians. The early deacons were not primarily concerned with public worship, preaching or church administration. They were well characterized in a later day by *The Apostolic Constitutions* which called them "the ears and eyes and mouth and heart of the bishop." They were the church's agents in contacting the people. They were full-time field workers moving about in the early Christian communities taking physical and spiritual assistance to the believers.

<sup>1</sup> Harnack, Adolf, *What Is Christianity?*, pp. 72, 73.

B. The need for a person-to-person ministry is further indicated in the Christian concept of the inwardness of religion. This concept tends to indicate the nature of the Christian task. The faith that undertakes to continuously foster interior growth within its adherents has a much greater task than the religion that primarily emphasized the external aspects of life. Every educator knows that it is easier to pass on a body of data to students than to develop basic personal attitudes. It is easier to teach the hands to perform a skill than to inspire the heart with a great ideal. The development of attitudes represents a fundamental achievement. It requires the response of the whole man as a rational-emotional-spiritual being. The teacher recognizes that the matter of developing right attitudes is usually slow. Often he is required to lead patiently the students by the use of factual material, guided experiences, and example into a more mature mental and spiritual disposition.

The matter of fostering continual development of the interior life is such a great task that it cannot be done in group meetings alone. The approaches of the priest, the prophet and the teacher need to be supplemented by the distinctly pastoral approach. The specialized services of the minister as prophet, priest or teacher are too narrow and limited to develop the interior life effectively. After the minister has given the people an inspirational challenge through his message as a prophet of God, has fervently prayed for them as a priest and has faithfully taught them as a teacher, there will still be a great need for the personal care, instruction and guidance of a shepherd-hearted man so that the worshippers may effectively develop internal spiritual insight and strength.

C. The need for pastoral service is further seen in the Christian idea that religion is co-extensive with life. Jesus taught that God is concerned with every act of man. All human behavior has religious significance. Paul expressed this concept when he said, "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:13).

This concept has implications that concern religious ministrations. If every human act has religious significance then much instruction and interpretation will be needed in order to indicate to perplexed persons what God's will is in complex and confused social situations. Guidance will be needed to assist people to make moral choices in accordance with the divine plan. In this area also the Christian task is not as simple as is the task of the ministrants of a faith where men believe that one may become religious once and for all time, by the acceptance of a creed or the formation of a few religious habits. Much nurture and guidance is needed in the task of helping the contemporary Christian meet the varying unique problems and situations of life intelligently and creatively. He must do this to live effectively for Christ in every area of his life. Such guidance assumes pastoral service.

## II

The person-to-person ministry is needed to supplement public worship for the latter can meet only a part of the needs of a part of the people. Many of the unique needs of worshippers remain unfulfilled after the benediction has been pronounced. On the other hand, vast groups of people seldom enter the house of God to appropriate to themselves the values of group worship. Both of these classes need the services of an effective person-to-person ministry in assisting them to solve basic and vexing problems of life.

A. Men need the counseling services of their pastor in solving their spiritual problems. The pastor as a specialist in spiritual life must personally help people with their individual religious needs as a lawyer gives personal guidance in legal problems and as a doctor ministers in the area of health. The legal and health problems of the people are so unique that neither the lawyer nor doctor has been able to substitute legal and medical lectures for personal attention. While the common elements in people's religious needs may be greater than in some other areas, the fact remains that people

have unique spiritual problems. This is true for a number of reasons. Every person, excepting an identical twin, has a unique biological inheritance. All people, even brothers and sisters, have an environment that is different from that of every other person. The choices of people as well as the accidents of life put every man in a unique situation.

Furthermore, every man is an amateur in the matter of living. Needs and problems change with increasing age. Human situations are affected by the flux and change in the material and social environment. People will always find themselves in unique and novel situations. At such times they need the guidance of one who is acquainted with basic spiritual and life problems.

In this matter of helping people spiritually, the pastor needs to assist them personally to relate spiritual principles to their own life problems. Basic Christian principles are not always understood. At such a time the parishioner needs instruction. At other times, people are aware of basic Christian truths but are unable to apply the known principles to their own problems. A similar fact is found in many areas of life. Men and women often have knowledge of basic data and theories without making that knowledge functional. But the differential between knowledge and practice is probably greatest in the area of personal religious living. This is largely due to the fact that there is a carnal drag in the human spirit. In Romans Paul graphically portrays how inward sin struggles against the application of great spiritual truth to personal life. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:22, 23). Paul taught that natural man would resist the application of spiritual truth to life.

There remains a spiritual lag of a different character in those who have obtained a state of heart purity through the cleansing power of the Holy Spirit. In their

hearts the "law of sin and death" has been annulled. But often there is a hesitancy to apply spiritual principles to actual life situations. This hesitancy arises from the urgency of "things present" and the seeming unreality of "things not seen".

People tend to evade reality in religious matters. In Western culture persons begin early to develop ego-protective mechanisms. By youth many have a rather full complement of these mechanisms including rationalization and over-compensation. While these mechanisms operate in life generally, they especially become a great hindrance when spiritual problems arise. When faced with the need of making necessary confession or restitution, the person is most likely to seek to protect his ego or status by evading the demand. At times when self-denial is needed for effective Christian service people quite naturally experience an impulse to sidestep the issue. Jesus' word to the disciples is always contemporary. "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Tempted to follow a course leading to ego-status and self interest, people have the impulse to exempt themselves from rigorous spiritual tasks and sacrifices. When these impulses are followed, people usually seek to justify their evasive action.

Through personal counseling the pastor has his best opportunity to help men and women face spiritual reality. At one time this was Nathan's mission to David. After David's two-fold sin of adultery and murder he had apparently rationalized his action. He had made Bathsheba his wife. It was by an ingenious parable that Nathan forced the king to realistically face himself and his sin. Without the personal prophetic rebuke and "counsel" David would likely have maintained a self-deceived attitude toward his sin.

A superb example of how a person may be led to face spiritual reality is seen in Jesus' consultation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Jesus wanted to assist the woman spiritually. However, she had been made ego-sensitive and shy by the rejection of her neighbors. She

was highly self-defensive. When Jesus directed the conversation to her own life she evaded the embarrassing references by raising impersonal theological questions concerning the advent of the promised Messiah and the nature of divine worship. Jesus finally shocked the woman by frankly raising the question of her sin. His statement, "Thou hast had five husbands already", cleared away the hypocritical mist that had hindered him in helping her. Rapport was established, for no moral hedging was then necessary. The woman became a believer.

Jesus brought the woman to face spiritual reality by the moral shock method. Here is one place where pastoral counseling differs from other types of consultation. The psychiatrist and other professional counselors seldom use this technique. In fact, many counselors consider it to be bad. The pastor will have need of it. However, this technique must be used carefully. In any specific case it will be impossible to accurately predict beforehand what the result of the contemplated moral shock treatment will be. As in the case of Jesus, it may be happy. It may lead the counselee to realistically face his problem. On the other hand, it may so destroy the rapport between the pastor and the parishioner that further counseling is impossible. The moral shock treatment should be used only when the counseling situation appears favorable and after other methods have failed.

B. The person-to-person ministry constitutes an effective supplement to corporate worship in the matter of assisting worshippers to solve their more difficult personal problems. The contribution that corporate worship makes in this area should not be overlooked. By the reading of the Word and by preaching, worshippers receive courage to face life with its difficulties. Divine strength is given to the frustrated and confused through the ministry of prayer. Insight may come to perplexed people at any moment in the service. However, after any single worship service has made its maximum contribution many worshippers need the personal attention of a wise counselor.

The person-to-person ministry makes a direct approach to people's unique personal problems. Necessarily corporate worship tends to make an indirect approach. The latter deals with general principles and with characteristic life situations. In the very nature of the case no one man's need can be dealt with specifically.

A few years ago Dean Inge succinctly pointed out the limitation of this method of approach. The dean suggested that if a person had a large number of narrow-necked bottles which he desired to fill with water, he would not set them in a group on the floor and spray water over them hoping to get each filled. He would rather take each bottle in his hand and place it under a faucet.

The limitation of corporate worship in meeting unique personal needs is obvious. In every congregation there is a wide variety of individual problems. One man may be anxious about the loss of his job. Another may be concerned about the illness of a child. Another person may be saddened because of the death of a member of his family. A youth may be trying to decide about attending college. Another young person may be considering marriage. Besides such common personal problems, there may be peculiar one represented in the congregation. Human need is broad. In no service could a pastor make specific suggestion that would help all those who were perplexed. Many of the confused people would find it difficult to apply great life principles to their own situations. In times of personal perplexity the parishioner needs his pastor to assist him in analyzing his difficulty and outlining a method of solving it. The pastor can do a number of helpful things in this area.

First, the pastor can assist the counselee in gaining insight into his problem by encouraging a free expression of all the significant elements in the situation. This is especially necessary where the emotional factors are large. Unexpressed emotional attitudes become barriers to objective thinking. The pastor will need to assist the parishioner to reach a place of emotional objectivity so that he can think rationally.

The expression of ideas usually helps in the thinking process. Most people can more readily gain insight by active interaction with another than by brooding over a problem alone.

Every parishioner needs to find a wise and considerate person in his pastor so that he may talk over important personal problems. Often the mere process of outlining the problem will bring insight. A contemporary college teacher and counselor recently gave a vivid example of this phenomenon. A college boy had come to her for counsel. The student started to relate his difficulty but after saying a few words he became emotionally disturbed and began to speak in a low and inarticulate voice. The counselor asked the young man to repeat what he had said. He started again but after a few sentences again spoke so inarticulately that he could not be understood. The counselor then explained that her hearing was not good and she asked that the lad repeat his story more loudly and clearly. The young man started again only to repeat the procedure of the other two times. The counselor did not ask the young man to go over the account again but sat attentively feigning comprehension of his story. Upon finishing his account, the young man became emotionally composed, arose and thanked the counselor for solving his problem for him. On referring to this incident several months later the counselor remarked that she had not learned at the time, nor later, what the lad's actual problem was. Her helpfulness was in providing the student a favorable opportunity to outline his problem. Personal insight came with analysis of the situation.

Second, the pastor can assist the parishioner to relate his present enigma to the whole of his life. Perplexed persons often over-emphasize their problems because of their mistaken ideas. At such times the pastor needs to clarify the confused viewpoints. At other times people lose a proper perspective because they get too "near" to their problems. Their present situation appears so large that it obscures other important considerations. This often causes the perplexed to act impulsively and ir-

rationally in trying situations. The pastor-counselor can greatly assist the counselee by helping him to relate his present difficulty to the whole of life.

Third, the pastor can help the counselee outline a plan of solution for his difficulty. Sometimes the mere insight into the perplexing situation will suggest the logical plan of procedure. At other times this is not true. Then the pastor-counselor will need to assist in evaluating the counselee's suggestion for solution of the problem. Furthermore, he can suggest various positive steps that the counselee should take. In doing this the pastor-counselor will always remember that he is first of all a Christian and he will draw upon the great Christian therapeutic resources, such as prayer, faith, worship, and the reading of the Word.

### III

In the light of historic precedent and present need contemporary churchmen should provide for an effective person-to-person ministry.

First, this implies that ministers shall be carefully trained for personal service. Perhaps our seminaries have been weaker in this area than in any other. As medical colleges train prospective doctors in the techniques and skills of diagnosis and therapy so the ministerial training centers should train ministerial candidates to diagnose and assist in curing personal and spiritual ills. Ministers who have missed this training during their seminary days can greatly strengthen their effectiveness in personal service by private reading.

Second, the provision for an effective person-to-person ministry will mean that many larger churches would need to increase the size of their ministerial staff. Perhaps there should be a full time minister for every five or six hundred members. Parishioners will welcome adequate provision for personal counseling and other forms of pastoral service. More than ever before people are going to professional counselors for personal assistance. Young people consult with educational, recreation-

al and community leaders. Adults consult psychiatrists, practising psychologists, industrial counselors, social workers, lawyers and doctors about personal problems. The desire for personal guidance is probably greater than heretofore. There are two reasons for this. There is greater actual need for consultation and guidance because of the complexity of contemporary life. Because of our complex social situation personal problems have become more intricate, involved and difficult. Furthermore, with the developing art of counseling, people have come to realize the value that inheres in personal guidance. Christians

prefer a counselor with a Christian perspective of life. Herein is a great opportunity for the Christian minister.

Third, all of the person-to-person service should not be performed by salaried staff members. Laymen should share in this task. Unless adequately trained, they will not undertake to do specialized counseling. They can, however, be greatly useful in personal evangelistic efforts and kindred activities. They too will need training for this work. The pastor has few tasks that are more important than that of inspiring, training and guiding his laymen in personal evangelistic efforts.