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## Editor's Notes

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Of the making of many books on pastoral ministry there is no end. Christian publishers' catalogues and bookshops are full of books aimed at helping pastors become better pastors. The problem is that most of them seem to want to make pastors become something other than what they are called to, namely who for love of Christ aim to seek, feed, heal, guide and protect the sheep for whom Christ laid down his life. Whatever the virtues of current secular models of leadership – the manager, therapist, social worker or even professor – they are not what the Bible says the pastoral leadership of God's people is fundamentally about. Leadership of God's people is fundamentally about being Christ-centred shepherds.

One of the classic works on this subject is **Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor***, which the Banner of Truth keeps in print. No pastor can read this work without being deeply challenged. Baxter's vision, zeal and compassion are compelling. Of course Baxter has to be read in context. The world of 21st century Britain is very different than that of 17th century Britain. It would be impossible today to visit and catechise in the way Baxter did. Nevertheless we must not lose Baxter's vision for evangelising in depth albeit with different methods. Another more recent classic is **William Still's *The Work of the Pastor*** (Rutherford House/Paternoster 1996). Many of us owe William Still an incalculable debt for the model of his faithfulness and godliness during his long and fruitful ministry in Aberdeen. This short book is his distilled understanding of the pastor's work. Basically a pastor is a man of prayer who unleashes the word of God onto a congregation, both publicly and privately and through it onto the world. Through the expository preaching of the word unbelievers are converted and believers built up and equipped for ministry. Key to the pastor's effectiveness is his death to self, his confidence in his call to a particular congregation, his walk with Christ, being himself in Christ, his determination to prepare sheep for sacrifice on God's altar and his conviction that the word of God has power to change lives and churches. As with Baxter, much in Still's own context must be taken into account and his principles adapted accordingly to our own circumstances. But that said, this is the one book I would give a young pastor with the admonition to read it at regular intervals during his ministry. It is full of seeds that by God's grace will bear fruit in God-honouring ministries.

But there are other excellent books on pastoral ministry. One of the best is **Derek Tidball's *Skilful Shepherds: explorations in pastoral theology*** (IVP 1986/1997) Having discussed different approaches, Tidball defines pastoral theology as 'the interface between theology and Christian doctrine on the one hand, and pastoral experience and care on the other' (p. 24). What is refreshing about this book is how Tidball gives the former priority over the latter, unlike so many books on the market. He eschews a 'how to' approach to pastoral theology for a more biblical approach. The first section of the book seeks to establish biblical foundations and merits careful reflection by pastors especially the chapter on Paul. The second section is an historical survey of pastoral ministry which, while necessarily cursory, offers many insights into fruitful ministries from the past. The chapter on the 20th century highlights some of the challenges to pastoral ministry with which most of us are familiar. The final section looks at the themes of belief, forgiveness, suffering, unity and ministry from a pastoral perspective.

Occasionally Tidball straddles the fence on some issues, but all in all this is a wise guide through some of the difficult areas of ministry. A more recent book by Tidball is his *Builders and Fools* (IVP 1999) in which he looks at ministry in terms of the biblical metaphors of ambassador, athlete, builder, fool, parent, pilot, scum and shepherd. The chapter on the leader as a fool is particularly insightful about ministry in a culture in which pastors don't make sense and must point people away from the wisdom of man to the wisdom of God. Every chapter is very challenging and thought-provoking. I would especially recommend it as the basis for a discussion in a leadership team or fraternal as well as for personal reflection.

**Peter White's** *The Effective Pastor* (Mentor 1998) contains a lot more of the 'how to' than the two Tidball books but without losing its theological focus. The book covers most aspects of pastoral ministry and has many helpful things to say about the pastor as a man of God, preaching, public worship, discipling younger and older believers, developing a congregational strategy, evangelism, stress, administration, etc. As such this is a very good book on ministry. I think that White is a little too ready to draw upon secular management theories and the behavioural sciences for support, but that said he has distilled a lot of sanctified common sense and has reflected biblically on ministry. There are a number of echoes of William Still's concerns in the book, which should help us apply some of his principles in our contexts today.

One of the most significant writers today on pastoral ministry is **Eugene Peterson**, an American Presbyterian minister who has recently retired from teaching at **Regent College** in Vancouver. His trilogy on pastoral ministry beginning with *Five Smooth Stones* contains much excellent material, especially in the introductory essays. You won't agree with everything he says, but you will find him stimulating and helpful. From the vantage point of a man with long pastoral experience in a normal church (Peterson is by no means a mega-church superstar), he writes with humane wisdom concerning the very ordinary work of the pastorate. What I like about Peterson is the way he invests the stuff of pastoral ministry, such as visiting an older Christian, with the glory of **Jesus Christ**. In some measure this comes out in a book he has written with **Marva Dawn** entitled *The Unnecessary Pastor* (Eerdmans 2000). The title expresses the conviction that true pastoral ministry is unnecessary to what our culture thinks is necessary (being paragons of goodness and niceness, custodians of moral order, chaplains of culture), what we think is necessary (holding the church together, keeping the show on the road), and what our congregations think is necessary (being the experts, leading in a worldly fashion, being a success). Instead Peterson and Dawn call for ministers who as humble servants of Jesus will teach and preach the word, pray, lead and simply be the shepherds people really need. To this end Dawn reflects on pastoral ministry from Ephesians. While she has much good to say (her comments on the church as a missionary congregation of disciples is very insightful) I found her chapters somewhat contrived and discursive. Peterson is much better in his reflections from the Pastoral Epistles, particularly in his thoughts on how Paul lived the Scriptures.

Of a similar nature to Peterson (it is commended by him) is one of the best books I have read recently on pastoral ministry. In *The Art of Pastoring: ministry without the answers* (IVP-USA 1994) **David Hansen** adopts an autobiographical approach to the subject. With humour and insight he takes us through his experience as the pastor in a

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