

POWER
FOR
GOD'S
SAKE

by Paul Beasley-Murray

THE 1999 ESSEX HALL LECTURE

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THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE 1999

POWER FOR GOD'S SAKE

by

REV DR PAUL BEASLEY-MURRAY

1. POWER ABUSE IN THE CHURCH - FACING UP TO THE DANGEROUS REALITY

Dishonesty in high places

Churches can be cockpits of conflict; deeply neurotic places where people play power games and deny the reality of their own circumstances. I have witnessed these things and been part of the strange collusion that allows churches to be extremely dishonest places.⁽¹⁾

The moment I read these words of Richard Holloway, Bishop of Edinburgh, bells began to ring. Yes, I said to myself, how right you are. Power is not only a reality in the world outside, it is also a reality within the church. Indeed, power may well be more of a dangerous reality within the church, precisely because it is for the most part unowned and unrecognised.

There is, it seems to me, a large degree of naivety, if not self-inflicted blindness, on the part of Christian people. We know that power games are a reality in the world of politics and in the world of business, but we do not want to accept that they are also a reality in the church. And yet why should the church in this respect be any different from the world? If all the other sins of the 'flesh' are to be found in the church, then why not this one? Any intelligent reading of the New Testament would reveal that there were power struggles right from the beginning of the life of the early church. Not only James and John come to mind, with their desire to sit on the right and left hand of Jesus in his glory, but the Judaizers who wanted to impose their way of doing church on the Gentile converts, the bickering factions at Corinth... It is almost no exaggeration to say that within every strand of the New Testament we can find evidence of power struggles affecting the life of God's people. Yet time and again we seem to close our eyes to this underlying reality, and many of us seem to prefer to live with an 'ideal' picture of the church.

I say 'us', because if I am honest there was a stage toward the beginning of my ministry when I too was blinkered and as a result operated with this romantic picture of a church where power struggles never took place. Strangely, even before my taking pastoral charge of a local church I had experienced power struggles,

both on a small scale within the life of a Christian student organisation of which I was a member and also on a larger scale within the life of the denomination to which I belonged. And yet somehow these experiences had failed to register as an ongoing fact of church life. I would maintain that the theological college at which I was trained was all part of that strange conspiracy of silence. At no stage do I remember anybody ever talking about power in the church as being an issue. Certainly no training was given to me and to my fellow students as to how we might handle power struggles of one kind or another. Instead we were taught how to preach! Although a revolution has taken place in theological education and ministerial formation since I first trained for Christian ministry, I am not convinced that ordinands, in this particular respect at least, are in most colleges trained any better. By and large ministers have to learn on the job, when it then becomes a matter of either sinking or swimming. Sadly for many it is the former.

Power in the raw

Of course there are overt and organised power struggles in churches, which hit the national headlines, and which are therefore recognised by all and sundry. In the North American scene one such public power struggle took place in the early 1990s at First Baptist Church Dallas, described by some as the most influential church in America. *Too Great A Temptation: The Seductive Power of America's Super Church* is the title of the book Joel Gregory wrote after his losing the battle with W.A. Criswell. It is a searingly honest and painful account, revealing the power, the politics and the hypocrisy which not only plagued that church, but which plague many others too. The book's concluding six pages should be compulsory reading for all church leaders, both ordained and unordained... From his own bitter experience Gregory came to see that

The church... is an institution divine in its original foundation but tethered to this celestial ball by every frailty to which humans are subject. Covetousness, littleness, jealousy, lust for power, ego, sacrilege, and a hundred other demons all lurk within the hallways...

The church on earth at its best is a crippled institution that God may elect to use for His purposes. The divinization of the church in an egotistic triumphalism denigrates the very purpose for which it is founded. After all, its founder died on the cross between two felons. Out of his weakness came strength and out of His death came life. Humanity does not consider Jesus Christ its centerpiece because he behaved like the CEO of a gigantic ecclesiastical corporation. He washed the feet of others; He did not trample them under His own in the name of God.⁽²⁾

In Britain probably the most well-known recent ecclesiastical power struggle was

the fight between the Dean, Brandon Jackson, and the Canons of Lincoln Cathedral. Time and again this battle hit the national headlines. The power struggle appeared to concern a loss-making exhibition of the cathedral's copy of the Magna Carta in Australia in 1988. However, what fascinated me was to discover that this long-running conflict, marked by "the presence of fear and rage within the group and of a sense of intolerable pain", actually had its roots in the distant past. The official report of Brian Thorne and Kathleen Baker, who were brought in by the Bishop of Lincoln to act as mediators between the protagonists, speaks of historic myths and "powerful unconscious forces at work". It goes on to say: "These basic assumptions have probably permeated the Lincoln environment for centuries and they operate in complete opposition to the spirit of the cathedral statutes, which require collegiality and co-operation based on an atmosphere of trust."⁽³⁾ Here we have a salutary reminder that unless major power struggles are properly dealt with, the seeds of their destructiveness may spill over from one generation to another. To put it in different terms, institutional 'viruses', as it were, can develop, with the result that although the players may change, the struggle does not. Hence the phenomenon, seen in certain local churches, whereby one minister after another leaves that church in unhappy circumstances. There is an abusive corporate mind-set (heart-set?) which desperately needs attention.

But to return to First Baptist, Dallas, and Lincoln Cathedral. Although these churches may be exceptional in the way in which the clerical wrangling has been made so damagingly public, the infighting itself is not so exceptional. Struggles for power and influence are the bread-and-butter diet of many a church, even though such struggles carry pious labels.

Not all power games, of course, involve power struggles between ordained ministers. Power struggles take place at various levels. For instance, in some churches ministers are pawns in the hands of their church boards. Gerald Coates, the leader of the 'Pioneer' group of 'New' churches, once caricatured the life of many a Baptist church when he wrote: "Resist the devil and he will flee from you — resist the deacons and they will fly at you."⁽⁴⁾ My own experience of deacons is very different. The deacons I have had the privilege of working with have been incredibly supportive of my leadership. And yet the experience of others is that this has not always been the case. As one wit put it, "Deacons can make even Herod look compassionate!"

Sometimes ministers become the victims of a small but powerful faction within the church. One example of Anglican in-fighting which hit the national press was the power struggle between clergy and laity at Selby Abbey, which brought about the resignation of three vicars within six years. One former vicar, Rev Peter Dodd, said: "At Selby Abbey there is a tiny minority who would appear to be twisting how they would define the will of God to achieve their own personal ends

and desire for status. There is a vociferous, small group within the Abbey who are determined to have their own way at whatever personal cost to the vicar." (5) This Anglican example of clergy victimisation can be paralleled many times over in any and every denomination. The only difference between Selby Abbey and other churches is the high profile it has received.

On other occasions it is not the ministers who are abused, but the members of the church who are abused. They are abused in the sense that power is perverted, people are manipulated, families are divided, and casualties abound. An unhealthy dependence of members on the leadership develops and ultimately creates total spiritual confusion in their lives. The leaders of such churches so mesmerise their followers that, for a while at least, their leadership is accepted without question. One thinks for instance of the People's Temple led by Jim Jones, who was responsible for the suicide and murder of some 900 of his members in Jonestown, Guyana; or of the Branch Davidians led by David Koresh, many of whose adherents died in the siege of Waco in 1993. However, such abuses of power are also to be found in more orthodox churches.

Some of the more charismatic community churches have been particularly prone to authoritarian leadership, manipulation, excessive discipline and spiritual intimidation.⁽⁶⁾ An early membership handbook emanating from the 'Harvestime' Restoration group of churches based in Bradford, put submission to the leaders of the church on the same level as submission to God. In this handbook Hebrews 13.17 with its injunction to "obey your leaders and submit to them" was paralleled with James 4.7 with its call to Christians to "submit" themselves "to God", with the impression being even that there is little difference between "submission" to the elders and "submission" to God.⁽⁷⁾ But there is a difference, of course. Human leaders are fallible, but God is infallible.

As far as more mainline churches are concerned, one can point to the spell-binding power exercised by the Rev Chris Brain, the Sheffield vicar who in 1986 set up the rave-style 'Nine O'Clock Service' until, after revelations of wide-ranging abuse, he was removed from his post in 1995. According to Roland Howard, "Brain's manipulative techniques with those he was close to were astounding. He had the ability to create slavish dependence even with the strongest, best-balanced and most intelligent people. He oozed charisma, and his jaw-dropping service conferred an aura of mystery and power."⁽⁸⁾

From my own experience, and the observation of the experience of a number of my friends, I have seen the way in which power has been mis-used and people have been abused in Christian churches and institutions. The travesty is that power has been exercised as though it were for God's sake, even though the real underlying issues may have had nothing to do with God himself. (To be fair, it is not only Christians who have been guilty of acting out of false motives. Members

of the helping professions in general can likewise be unconsciously motivated by a lust for power, while appearing to operate under a cloak of objective and moral rectitude.⁽⁹⁾) To make matters worse, because Christian faith is a matter of life and death, there is often a peculiar intensity surrounding power and power struggles in the church. The bitterness of Christian in-fighting is to be experienced to be believed. Would that God could at times be left outside the situation!

Many have been deeply wounded. The wounds have been so deep and the pain so intense that large numbers have left the church altogether. Indeed, it is not simply those who have been abused who have left, but also those who have seen friends and loved ones abused. This experience of the abuse of power in the church has been so devastating that many have given up on God altogether. Others may still retain their faith in God, but although they may not have given up on God, they most certainly have given up on his people. And who would blame them? In the words of one placard: "Those who make it hardest to be a Christian in this world are often the other Christians."

Furthermore, such power games within the church have all too often seriously hindered the church in its mission and growth. According to Lyle Schaller, a distinguished American church growth consultant, in the USA

On any given day in perhaps three-quarters of all churches the ministry of that congregation is reduced significantly as a result of non-productive conflict. In perhaps one fourth of all churches that internal conflict is so sufficiently severe that it must be reduced before the parish can redirect its energies and resources towards formulating new goals and expanding its ministry.⁽¹⁰⁾

Indeed, the mission of the church is not just affected by mis-directed and mis-spent energy. The very fact that power games are being played is a negative witness in itself to those outside the church. Warring and abusive factions in the church undermine the credibility of the Christian faith.

Power for God's sake is a serious problem. It is a serious problem not just in a few isolated spots, but in the church as a whole. What's more, it is a dangerous issue in the church, precisely because it is all too often unrecognised. It was this conviction which led me in 1996 to engage in a questionnaire-based survey of some 141 ministers and 112 of their church officials — i.e. 253 leaders in total. The results confirmed that power is indeed a problem in the church.⁽¹¹⁾

To summarise some of the findings in headline fashion:

"Churches treat us badly" say nine out of ten ministers
Most ministers under 45 have considered giving up their calling
One in six ministers leave their churches in "unhappy circumstances"

One in seven ministers confess to sexual misbehaviour
One in five churches racked by power politics
Accountability is a myth in the church

Headlines can of course be misleading. Inevitably they simplify reality. And yet the pressures of ministry appear to be increasing, with the result that an unacceptable proportion of ministers are considering leaving the ministry. Although there is a good deal of satisfaction in ministry, nonetheless there is a good deal of unhappiness too.

But there is not just unhappiness among ministers. There must be unhappiness also among many members. For ministers are not simply victims of abuse, at times they themselves can be the abusers. Many ministers can and do abuse their position, and in so doing abuse others.

Where does the root of the problem lie? Why is it that in communities dedicated to the service of the Servant King power games of one kind or another are such an issue? No doubt the ultimate root is to be found in the sinfulness of the human heart. Egocentricity is alive and well in the church almost as much as in the world. However, a contributing factor to the problem is that many—if not most—people have not thought through the issue of how power is handled in the church. The survey showed that there is a good deal of uncertainty in the attitudes of both ministers and their church officials toward power. Most ministers, for instance, believe that they have a God-given authority to lead, and yet they are unsure as to the nature of that authority. Most ministers appear to feel happiest when their use of power is linked to the empowerment of others, but in reality the survey revealed that most ministers have a tendency to hold on to power.

At this point therefore, having exposed some of the ways in which power is abused in the church, it seems it would be good to look at a positive approach to the use of power in the church.

2. POWER FOR THE PEOPLE HANDLING POWER WITH CARE

Power can be good

In the first place, we need to recognise that power of itself is not necessarily something that is evil. Power can be good. It all depends on how it is handled. When properly handled, for instance, nuclear power provides light and energy; but when mishandled it destroys life and spreads devastation over vast areas.

The Scottish theologian James Mackey in his monumental treatise helpfully compares power with light:

Just as the refraction of light reveals the colours in the rainbow, the analysis of power proves it to be deployed along a range of appearances of which raw force is one extreme and pure authority another, and shades composed of mixtures of these in various proportions take up the middle space.⁽¹²⁾

In other words, we cannot compare and contrast power with authority as if the two were antithetical. Authority is but one aspect of power.

Unfortunately many Christians regard power as something which is intrinsically evil. They say that it is a force which is beyond redemption, and which certainly has no business in the church. Martin Hengel, the German New Testament scholar, begins his authoritative work on *Christ and Power* with a quotation from Jacob Burkhardt:

Now power is of its nature evil, whoever wields it. It is not stability but lust, and 'ipso facto' insatiable, therefore unhappy in itself and doomed to make others unhappy.⁽¹³⁾

Similarly Leith Anderson, the senior pastor of Woodhead Community Church, an American 'mega-church', has likened power to holding a gun to a person's head or withholding a paycheque from an employee. "Power forces others to obey, even against their wills." Along with others he contrasts coercive power with legitimate authority:

Authority is earned. Authority is freely given. Authority is people listening to and acting on the words of a leader because they choose to and want to. Authority is trust and confidence. Not understanding the difference and assuming authority that has not been given is a certain route to disaster in a church or an organization.⁽¹⁴⁾

Certainly our survey has revealed a good deal of ambivalence among church leaders towards power. It was, for instance, only a bare majority of ministers and church officials who thought that "power is not a dirty word".

But such a negative valuation of power is not helpful. We get nowhere in denying the validity of the term 'power', as if power is always a force for evil. The fact is that power of and in itself is morally neutral. Power can be extraordinarily destructive, but it can also be extraordinarily creative. Power can destroy relationships, but it also can restore relationships. Power can oppress, but can also liberate. Power can exploit, but power can also enable. It all depends on how it is used.

In Genesis 1.26, for instance, humankind was given power ("dominion") over all the creatures God had made. Clearly God did not intend power to be used for evil, but rather for good. Although in fact we humans have tended to use our power to

the detriment of the creation, the hope is nonetheless expressed in Genesis 1 that power will be used positively.

We cannot say often enough: power in itself is not intrinsically evil. God through his creative power brought order out of chaos. God through his redemptive power brought life out of death. God through his Spirit offers this same power to his people. In the words of the Apostle Paul, God "by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine." (Ephesians 3.20) There is no reason why, in principle, this power should not be available within the church today.

Power to exercise

In the second place, we need to recognise that ministers are called upon to exercise the power that is theirs. Power is given to them for a purpose.

Traditionally ordination has been understood as the church conferring on its ministers the authority to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments. The authority of the minister is not, however, to be limited to the Word and the Sacraments. Indeed, from a New Testament perspective this priestly emphasis on the role of the minister is misplaced. The New Testament emphasis is upon leadership. Paul, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 as also in Ephesians 4, describes how all God's people are called to serve, but some are called to lead (see Rom 12.8; 1 Cor 12.8; Eph 4.7). It may well be argued that ordination in the New Testament entails the church above all recognising the authority of its ministers to lead.

Whatever the niceties of theological interpretation as far as ordination is concerned, one thing is certain: if today's churches are to face up to the challenges offered by contemporary culture, then they desperately need leaders who will think through those challenges and who will offer strategies for enabling their churches to fulfill Christ's mission today. If such strategies are to be effective, then churches will need leaders who will help enable them to make the necessary changes to their life in order to adopt the necessary strategies.

Today's ministers need to be leaders. In a very real sense the church today needs not more members, but more leaders.⁽¹⁵⁾ For where the right leaders are not only present, but also exercising their power to lead, there the church will grow and new members will be found. What is more, these new members will not just be Christians 'recycled' as it were from other churches, but converts whose lives have truly been turned around by the Gospel of Christ. But this will only happen as leaders exercise their 'powers' of leadership. Chaplains may have a role to play in hospitals and in prisons — they have, however, no role to play in the church. One reason why many churches are making little impact on their communities is that

time and again their ministers have felt trapped by the personal needs and expectations of their members. They have assumed the role of their church's personal chaplain. But there is more to ministry in the local church than caring for the pastoral needs of church people — ministry also involves caring for those without. Ordination to the Christian ministry places a call on ministers to mobilise their people for ministry and mission not only in the church, but also beyond the confines of the church.

Power in trust

Thirdly, Christian leadership, rightly understood, is not just about the exercise of power, it is about power exercised in trust. The church through the act of ordination gives its ministers responsibility to lead the people of God forward in its worship, fellowship and mission to the world. Such a responsibility inevitably brings with it power. It also brings with it accountability.

It is significant that when the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy of his ordination, he reminded him of the power that God had given him:

Rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1.6-7).

However, this power was qualified. For along with power Paul mentioned love and self-discipline. The three gifts of power, love, and self-discipline go together. Power, if it is to be used responsibly in the church, must always be complemented by love and self-discipline. As Thomas Oden puts it:

Power needs to be directed, guided, shaped by love and good sense. Lacking love, power is dangerous. Lacking power, love is ineffective. A love that is empowered but lacking a sound mind is apt to be wild and fruitless.⁽¹⁶⁾

It would appear from the passage in 2 Timothy that he was tempted not to use the power with which he had been entrusted. There was, perhaps, within him a natural reticence which caused him to be tempted to withdraw from his leadership responsibilities within the church. To quote Oden again: "The spirit of timidity is typified by the unprofitable servant who would not take responsibility for having buried his one talent — he buried it out of anxiety that it might be misused (Matt 25.25)."⁽¹⁷⁾ Are we reading too much into Scripture if we say that there are plenty of Timothys around in church leadership today? There are plenty of leaders who are afraid to lead.

One of the reasons why some may be afraid to exercise leadership today is that they may not be prepared to pay the cost. Leadership is not easy, for instance,

when it involves standing up to 'power-brokers' in the church who resist any change because it threatens their comfort or their security. Nor is leadership easy when it involves confronting wayward, albeit powerful, members of the church, whose lifestyle runs contrary to the way of Christ. Sadly, as Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, point out:

What we call church is often a conspiracy of cordiality. Pastors learn to pacify rather than preach to their Ananias's and Sapphiras... Many 'successful' pastors are happy only because they surrendered so early. They let the congregation know that they judged the success of their ministry purely on the basis of how they were liked in the congregation.⁽¹⁸⁾

It can need courage not to be afraid of one's congregation; it can be tough being a leader. But not to exercise one's God-given leadership responsibilities is in fact a misuse of one's calling. Leaders are called to lead. In such a context not to lead is actually an abuse of power.

Needless to say, limitations are imposed on the power of leaders in the church. For, as the respondents in the survey rightly answered, "pastoral leadership is non-coercive." Leadership, if it is truly pastoral, can never 'lord it' over others (1 Peter 5.3). People must always be free to accept or not to accept the direction offered by their leaders. But this does not mean to say that direction is not to be offered. And in the offer of that direction power is inevitably exercised. In this respect Walter Wink is quite perceptive when commenting on the words of Jesus, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all" (see Luke 22.24-27). He adds, Jesus "does not reject power, but only its use to dominate others."⁽¹⁹⁾

Such leadership is always held in trust. It is held in trust, in the sense that leaders are accountable to others. In the first instance, leaders are accountable to God: the day will come when they will have to give an account of their stewardship of 'power' (Hebrews 13.17). Yes, not only bishops (Titus 1.7) but leaders in general are 'stewards of God's mysteries' (1 Cor 4.1), and in that role they are 'managing' the household of God for their heavenly Master (see Luke 12.42).

But leaders are also accountable to the church. Just as Paul and Barnabas gave an account of their missionary activities to the church at Antioch which had set them apart for this particular work (Acts 13.1-3; 14.27), so today's Christian leaders should be prepared to give an account of their ministry to the people of God. Leaders are not to be a law to themselves. Christ alone is the head of the Body. Rightly understood, the church, in appointing its leaders, has delegated to them authority, authority which the leaders are free to exercise until the church withdraws its recognition of them.

Checks on power

This accountability of leaders to the church is an important check on their power. It is when there are no checks that things can go wrong, that power can be misused and in turn people abused. The fact is that leaders are not infallible. Their judgement, like the judgement of any other group of people, can become clouded. Wrong decisions can be made and wrong behaviour ensue. The Apostle Peter, for instance, got it wrong when he visited the church in Antioch (Galatians 2.11-14). The instructions that Paul gave for handling accusations against elders (1 Timothy 5.19-20) indicate that local church leaders can get it wrong too.

The accountability of leaders to the church need not be regarded as a restriction, but as a safeguard. At the Council of Jerusalem, it is clear that James, together with the apostles and the elders, took the lead, but the decision reached was very much the church's decision (Acts 15.22,28).

In this respect it is significant that, both for Jesus and for Paul, if discipline has to be exercised then it is exercised not through a single church leader but through the local church collectively (Matthew 18.15-20; 1 Corinthians 5.4-5,13). The ultimate authority is to be found as the church comes together to seek to discern the mind of Christ.

But how does this accountability work out in practice? This is an area to which a good deal more attention needs to be given in the average church. As we have seen, in most churches accountability is a myth. In many a church ministers have no job specification and no form of annual review and appraisal. Many church officials, as indeed many churches generally, have little idea — let alone control — of how their ministers operate. The situation is ripe for exploitation. Precisely because of the fallenness of humanity, it is essential that structural checks are built into the ministry of the church.

This will involve the drawing up of a job specification, agreed between the minister and the church, and subject to occasional review. Both the minister and the church will benefit from a clear understanding of the minister's role.

It should also involve an annual appraisal, in which the past twelve months are reviewed and then clear goals set for the future twelve months. The precise mechanics of the annual appraisal will vary from church to church, and from denomination to denomination. However, it is vital that the appraisal takes place at least annually — indeed, there is much to be said for there to be an interim meeting (say after six months) to check on progress. Ministers must be prepared to give up some of their traditional independence and submit themselves to such procedures; without them they are in danger of allowing their freedom to turn into license, which in turn can encourage power abuse in one form or another.

The power of love

A more subjective check with regard to the misuse of power is to be found when leaders reflect on what motivates them to seek and to exercise power in the church.

Power for power's sake is wrong. But power for love's sake may be another matter. The use, or misuse, of power has its roots in the motives which underlie the actions. Power combined with self-interest inevitably results in abuse. But in 2 Timothy 1.7, the gift of power is combined with the gift of *agape*, love, which by definition is self-sacrificing, seeking only the good of the other.

Sadly the power of love is sometimes confused with the love of power. In this respect some observations by Tom Smail, at one stage a leading figure in charismatic renewal, are pertinent:

My own experience of charismatic renewal strongly suggests that if some of its leaders were as concerned with being men of love as they are with being men of power, because they saw that the only power the Spirit has is the power of love, it would be a more wholesome thing than it has sometimes been.⁽²⁰⁾

Martyn Percy similarly contrasts the pursuit for power on the part of John Wimber and other charismatic Christians with the Biblical affirmation that God is love: "Wimber puts God's love in the service of his power. Orthodoxy would insist that they should be reversed." He goes on to point out that the miracles of Jesus are not primarily acts of power, but acts of love:

The healing miracles of Christ were often his particular response of love to needy individuals... Where physical healing does take place, it is often for individuals who are shunned by the prevailing religious institutions, or on the fringes of society... Jesus seldom healed friends.⁽²¹⁾

The miracles of Jesus are clearly more than acts of power, they are acts of powerful love. The underlying motivation must therefore always be one of the key factors in our evaluation of the use of power.

Would, however, that ministers were always clear about their motivation! Unfortunately ministers can be very un-self aware. Most, if not all, ministers would say that they act out of love — but this does not mean that they necessarily do. We can so easily deceive ourselves. We can deceive ourselves even in those times of quiet when, with the best of intentions, we may seek to scrutinise our motives before the Lord. We need help from outside to see ourselves as we really are.

It is precisely because motives can all too easily be hidden and unknown that ministers would do well to add the more objective check of spiritual direction.

Spiritual direction, rightly exercised, brings to the surface one's own feelings and thoughts and in the process can mercilessly expose false motives. There are times when such direction can be exceedingly painful — precisely because the real 'person' emerges. However, it is only as the inner self is exposed to God's light and love that there is any hope for growth and development in the Christian life.

It is important to stress that spiritual direction should not be an optional extra for those ministers who are interested in 'that kind of thing'. It is rather a *sine qua non* for all engaged in ministry. Spiritual direction is essential for pastoral integrity. It is also essential if ministers are not to abuse their power.

The power of self-control

Paul in his injunction to Timothy to "rekindle the gift of God that is within you" appears to link the exercise of power with 'love' and with 'self-control' or 'self-discipline' (2 Timothy 1.6). In this respect the third beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount comes to mind. Jesus said: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5.5) In common Greek usage the 'meek' were not weaklings, but rather the strong whose power was under control.

Aristotle, for instance, defined the meek person as one who is "neither too hasty nor too slow-tempered. He does not become angry with those he ought not to, nor fail to become angry with whom he ought." Meekness on Aristotle's definition is gentleness combined with strength.

Jesus in the so-called 'Great Invitation' invited would-be disciples to take on his yoke and learn from him "for I am meek and humble in heart" (Matt. 11.29) and in so doing combined the idea of gentleness with strength. For Jesus is here inviting others to experience God's love and power as they live their life in fellowship with himself. It was by this 'meekness' and 'gentleness' of Christ that Paul later appealed to the unruly Corinthians for sympathy and obedience (2 Cor. 10.1).

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey he deliberately pointed to an Old Testament prophecy in which the expected Messiah was described in terms of 'meekness' (Zechariah 9.9). As the time when he cleansed the temple indicated, Jesus was no weakling; and yet as his encounter with the woman caught in adultery showed, he could be gentle. His passions were under control.

All this is of relevance to Christian leaders. Where power and love and self-control are combined, there 'meekness/gentleness' is found. Such a spirit is to characterise the way in which discipline is exercised (Galatians 6.1) as also the way in which opposition is met (2 Timothy 2.25). God does not want spineless leaders: he wants leaders who are able to speak the truth in love, leaders whose lives exhibit the power of self-control.

The question, however, arises as to how such self-control can be practically achieved. No minister would disagree with the need to exercise self-control. The challenge is to translate the ideal into reality. This involves more than merely defining the concept, but rather going a stage further and working out its practical implications for ministry. What does it mean, for instance, to exercise self-control when counselling a person of the opposite sex? What does it mean to exercise self-control in the handling of confidences? The difficulty most ministers face is that — in Britain at least — there is no code of conduct for ministry. Unlike any other profession, ministers in most denominations have no code of ethics to which they should adhere. Yet there are all kinds of ethical implications for the way in which ministers should relate to individuals in the church. Likewise there are ethical implications for leadership styles ministers may adopt. 'Conduct unbecoming' of a minister needs to be spelt out. With a view to promoting self-control there is much to be said for ministers adopting (or if necessary drawing up) a code of ethics — a 'rule' of ministry — which in turn may provide a degree of help and objectivity to promoting self-control within their lives.⁽²²⁾

Another objective aid to developing self-control in ministry is working under 'supervision'. True, the aim of professional 'supervision' is far wider than that of encouraging self-control. However, it does enable people to stand back and examine how they have treated their 'clients', and thereby encourages better pastoral care. Supervision involves the setting of proper boundaries. Supervision involves accounting for one's dealings with people. Supervision would certainly weed out any form of abusive relationship!

Power for the people

The New Testament understanding of the church emphasises not simply the role of leaders, but also the role that individual members have to play. We see this very clearly in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul develops the picture of the church as a body. God, says Paul, has so designed the body that the involvement of every person with his or her special gift is necessary for the proper functioning of the community. Every member has a unique role to play. Yes, there are particular leadership roles given by God to certain individuals, but these individuals do not have a monopoly of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of 'wisdom' and of 'knowledge', of 'faith' and of 'prophecy' are not the exclusive preserve of leaders.

This theological insight needs to be combined with an understanding of modern organisational systems. The fact is that a sense of powerlessness is often a potent breeding ground for subsequent power struggles. By contrast, where people feel empowered to take a meaningful part in the decision-making processes of their church, the possibilities of destructive conflict are reduced.

The American Mennonite Ron Kraybill emphasises that

where there is dirty fighting, someone is feeling powerless. This is hard to remember. Cornered people are often intimidating and can inflict serious injury. Worse, they mask their powerlessness — from themselves as well as others. Nothing suppresses a whimper better than a snarl! As a consequence, the root of the problem often lies hidden. Anyone close enough to hear the whimper is likely to get snarled at. Or bitten.⁽²³⁾

Kraybill goes on to helpfully distinguish between 'outcome' powerlessness and 'process' powerlessness. Outcome powerlessness is found when one's preference is overruled or someone else prevails against one's wishes:

This form of powerlessness disappoints, but doesn't embitter. People healthily empowered in other ways know that no one wins all the time and tolerate such disappointments.

Process powerlessness, however, is much more serious. For process powerlessness is not just about not winning, but rather about not being

seriously consulted. Or when the process of arriving at a decision is too hasty, exclusive or unclear for one to feel a part of things... When people complain about outcomes, they almost always do so because they believe the process was unfair.

The result is often antagonism and lack of trust. People need to feel valued. They need to know that their opinions have been heard. This does not mean to say that they therefore expect that they get their own way all the time; it does mean that they do feel they count. Empowering the people of God is not just a New Testament principle of leadership, it is also just common sense!

In practical terms this means that there have to be structures within the church where people may have an opportunity to express their views and to know that their views have been heard and taken seriously. Precisely how this is done will vary from church to church, for churches differ greatly in their power structures. In some churches ultimate power resides in the hands of the leaders — whether they be called ministers, bishops, or elders. In other churches ultimate power lies in the hands of 'translocal' councils — whether they be called synods or conferences. In churches with a tradition of congregational government ultimate power lies in the 'church meeting', where members come together to discern the mind of Christ. Whatever the power structure, it is vital that people have a regular opportunity not only to receive information about the church, but also to make their own comments and suggestions. There is no place for benevolent paternalism — let alone dictatorship — in the church today! Not only is it an abuse of personhood — it can also be deemed to be an abuse of the Spirit and his gifts!

Power for 'people-building'

In 1 Corinthians 12-14 the acid test for the use of spiritual gifts is whether or not the exercise of that gift is for the benefit of others. "Let all things be done for building up" (1 Corinthians 14.26) declares Paul. The same maxim can be applied to the exercise of leadership, which is also a gift of the Spirit. Power rightly exercised will result in 'people-building' rather than 'people-using'.

Or to put it another way, leaders exercise their power most effectively in empowering people to exercise their gifts and fulfill the ministry to which God has called them. In the words of the Apostle Paul, God gave gifts of leadership in order to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4.11-12). Hence, deduces John Mallison, "leaders stand accountable not for programmes implemented as much as for gifts released into the community of faith and beyond".⁽²⁴⁾ Christian leadership is not about keeping power to oneself, but giving power to others. In the words of Jackson Carroll, "The secret of exercising power is not to hoard one's power or to use it paternalistically, but to learn together to honour each other's gifts and use one's own gift to strengthen and support the other."⁽²⁵⁾ In a very real sense the church is called to be 'a community of empowerment'.

Power, rightly exercised, always enhances the standing of the other. Power is never to be exercised with a view to enhancing the standing of the leader. Jesus denounced the religious leaders of his day, not least because of their concern for status. He urged his disciples not to be like the scribes and Pharisees who "love to have the places of honour... and to be greeted with respect... and to be called rabbi". (Matthew 23.6-7) Instead they were to avoid being called 'Rabbi' (Teacher), 'Father' or 'Master' (Matthew 23.8-10). In John Stott's paraphrase: "We are not to adopt towards any human being in the church, or to allow anybody to adopt towards us, an attitude of helpless dependence, as of a child on his or her father, or of slavish obedience, as of a servant to his or her master, or of critical acquiescence, as a pupil to his or her teacher."⁽²⁶⁾ Christian leaders are rather to be servants (Matthew 23.11) who serve their people best by enabling them to fulfill their God-given potential.

In other words, Christian leadership gives power to the people. For many ministers it would be a salutary exercise to reflect on the extent to which they had been successful in empowering others over the past twelve months! Indeed, one practical check might be to ensure that this aspect of ministry is discussed at every appraisal.

Power for 'pastor building'

From 'people building', let me turn for a moment to 'pastor building'. For power is not simply in the hands of ministers. Power can be exercised by others in the

church over against its ministers. What is more, such power can be abusive power, which can entail suffering not only for the ministers themselves, but also for their families. In the words of Patricia Fouque:

Abuse within the church is two-way. Very real abuses are experienced by ministers and leaders, as also by their families. Children of the Manse or Vicarage carry heavy burdens, and when there is conflict in the church or their father is dismissed from post, they have to face not only a change of school, friends, church, but also their parents' pain. Many are left with a deep sense of betrayal and struggle well into adult years, with feelings of bitterness, resentment and anger.⁽²⁷⁾

It is therefore not just churches which need to be handled with care, but pastors and their families also need to be handled with care. Pastors — and their families — are human. They bleed. They are fallible. And they are Christ's gift to the church. (Ephesians 4.7) As such they need to be handled not only with care, but also with respect, too.

In practical terms what does this mean? In the first place, the church needs to accept its pastoral responsibility towards ministers and their families. The pastoral care of ministers and their families is not just the responsibility of outside figures such as bishops and superintendents, but first and foremost the responsibility of those whom they seek to serve. One way of giving expression to that responsibility is for leaders once a year to review the general well-being of their pastor — and family where appropriate; it should be as much an agenda item as, for instance, in certain churches the annual review of the pastor's salary is an agenda item. In such a forum one might well give thought to issues of work-overload etc.

Secondly, leaders need to ensure that the financial arrangements for their ministers are fair and God-honouring. Such financial arrangements include not only salary and housing (or housing allowance), but also expenses incurred as a result of administration, travel, study, hospitality etc. Penny-pinching can well be tantamount to abuse.

Thirdly, leaders need to encourage their minister to use the services of a spiritual director. Spiritual direction is not a luxury, but a necessity. Similarly ministers need to be encouraged to explore forms of supervision. "Who is to guard the guards themselves? Who is to watch over those who are doing the watching?" These words of Juvenal originally related to the enticement of guards by a woman, but they are capable of more general application. Ministers are vulnerable people, and all the more so because of their calling. They need to be 'guarded' and not just helped.

Fourthly, leaders need to ensure that there is a system for annual appraisal and review. If not, then they should take steps to set up such a system. Appraisals

give an opportunity for leaders to affirm their pastor and to say 'well done', to review previously set objectives and set future goals, to provide a safe environment for discussing problems and, where necessary, to express dissatisfaction, and to identify needs for further training and development.

Fifthly, when difficulties arise, as inevitably they do, leaders should always be ready to defend their pastor against unfair criticism. Time and again the minister is made the 'scapegoat' when things seem to be going wrong in the church. The 'buck' stops at the minister's office. Not surprisingly the majority of ministers believe that at times they have been unjustly treated by the church, and not least in the area of unfair criticism. Yet even where the criticism is fair, in the first place leaders should speak privately to the pastor, face to face, rather than join in the public criticism. Anything else is abuse.

Sixthly, churches should consider appointing a minister's advocate, who can represent the minister's interests. Such an 'advocate' cannot normally be a church official, since by definition church officials represent the interests of the church. Instead, an independent person of standing needs to be found. Such an appointment is helpful at any time. It can be of particular help when difficulties arise, whether of the pastor's own making or not. In such a situation it can be helpful for the leaders to ensure that somebody is able to speak on the pastor's behalf and represent the concerns of the pastor. Sadly experience shows that, when things go wrong, churches are not always fair in their treatment of their minister. Nor for that matter are bishops and superintendents of help — for, when the chips are down, the interests of the institution rather than of the individual all too often take precedence (see John 11.50)

Power abused

What happens when, in spite of best intentions, everything goes wrong and power is grossly abused? When, for good reasons or for bad reasons, the minister is forced to leave the church, and pain abounds? The fact is that, at some stage or another, most ministers leave a church in an unhappy circumstance.

The temptation churches face is to try and forget the whole unseemly incident. To push everything under the carpet and pretend it never happened. To appoint another minister and simply begin another chapter. Life, however, isn't that simple. Just as a hasty re-marriage after a painful divorce would be unwise, so too a hasty engagement of another pastor would be an act of folly. There are, in the first place, lessons to be learned. But more than that, there is also sin to be dealt with.

In the introduction reference was made to the troubles at Lincoln Cathedral, troubles which in one guise or another have apparently bedevilled the place for centuries. The troubles at Lincoln can be paralleled many times over — there are

churches, for instance, where down through the years almost every minister has left under a cloud. There are Christian institutions where the leadership has almost perpetually been dogged by unhappiness and, at times, by outright conflict. In such it would appear that there has been some kind of institutional 'virus', evil in nature, which has never been dealt with properly. The cast has changed, but not the plot. In a study of involuntary terminations of ministers within three American denominations, it was discovered that "40% of the Episcopal churches, 34% of the United Churches of Christ, and 45% of the Presbyterian churches had existing conflict or problems in the congregation before the terminated pastor started his or her job".(28) In other words, in such situations the ministers concerned were the innocent 'lightening rods' who, quite unjustly, bore the brunt of their church's long-standing factionalism. Or, to use the theological framework developed by Walter Wink, the fallen principalities and powers are having a field day. The weapons that have been used have not been of Christ, and so the demonic within the structures has never had its come-uppance.

The first step in dealing with a situation of power abuse, whatever the form, is for the church to acknowledge its share in the sinfulness of the situation. Just as in the breakdown of relationships within a marriage there is rarely an innocent party, so too in the breakdown of relationships within a church. True, one party may be more guilty than another. True, one party may be the 'injured' or 'wronged' party. But sin rarely confines itself to one group within a church. If an abuse of power is not to be repeated again, the church needs to face up to its culpability and confess its share of guilt. Such a confession of shared culpability is difficult enough within a secular organisation, but within a church it is doubly difficult. For, as we have seen, God is brought into the situation. Where God is on 'our side', we feel doubly righteous. It takes a good deal of insight and humility for people involved in church fights to acknowledge that they too were in the wrong.

But confession is not enough. Repentance too is necessary. Repentance, in Biblical terms, is more than being sorry about the mess. Repentance involves a 'turning around'. Lessons need to be learned, new attitudes need to be adopted, new structures need to be put in place to ensure that whatever happened never happens again. To ensure that such repentance is genuine, the repentance — as also the confession — needs to be made public. Changes are not to be brought in by sleight of hand, but with the knowledge of the whole church.

Thirdly, forgiveness needs to be exercised — to be sought as well as to be received. Forgiveness, where major hurt has been caused and great wrong has been done, is never easy. Where lives have been ravaged, where careers have been halted, when faith has been destroyed, where children have been damaged... in all such situations (and many more) forgiveness is never easy. Indeed, it can be a battle. Pride, anger, bitterness, resentment — all these emotions come to the

surface. Yet forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian faith. "If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6.15) As Jesus showed so clearly on the Cross, there is no sin that is not forgivable, impossible though forgiveness at times may seem. What is more, just as the Cross was God's way in Christ of triumphing over the principalities and powers, so too the Cross and all that it stands for needs to have the last word in power struggles today — without the forgiving power of the Cross the world and the church remain in the grip of those principalities and powers. Power struggles will continue to dog the church's life. And the world will be given no reason to believe.

Fourthly, where possible, some kind of public expression of reconciliation needs to be made. The fact is that power struggles in the church are never private. The shock waves go through the local community and often further afield too. The shock waves also spread down through the years of the church's future. The Cross needs to be seen to have triumphed — both for the sake of the community as also for the sake of the future of the church.

Needless to say, this is a complex process. Almost certainly some kind of outside church 'consultant' is necessary to help forward the process. Indeed, perhaps the first step in the process is the appointment of such a consultant. Would that in Britain we had the American system of 'interim ministers'. As the name suggests, 'interim ministers' serve a church for a limited period — normally no longer than 12 months — and act as a buffer between the ending of one ministry and the beginning of another. Where there has been a church fight, such interim ministers can help a church to deal with its past. It is not fair nor right for a new minister to sort out the problems of the past. Nor for that matter should a church consider appointing a new minister until it has truly been able to put the past to rest.

People power

Power for God's sake always has the welfare of people at heart. "We do not proclaim ourselves", wrote Paul; "we proclaim Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake". (2 Corinthians 4.5) People — every time — take precedence over personal and institutional well-being. Management and efficiency can so easily become false gods serving the interests of the institution. But power is for people.

NOTES

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- 7 *Belonging To An Anointed Body* (privately printed, no date) 20.
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- 9 See Adolf Guggenbuehl-Craig, *Power In The Helping Professions* (Spring Publications, Dallas, Texas 1971).
- 10 Lyle E. Schaller in the Foreword to *Leadership And Conflict* (Abingdon Press, Nashville 1982) by Speed Leas.
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- 12 James P. Mackey, *Power and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994) 13.
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- 14 Leith Anderson, *Dying For Change* (Bethany House, Minneapolis 1990) 191.
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- 26 John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (IVP, Leicester 1992) 291.
- 27 Patricia Fouque, "Abuse In Ministry", *Ministry Today* 10 (June 1997) 10.
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