



FRESNO PACIFIC  
UNIVERSITY

# FPUScholarWorks

---

**The pastor as teacher.**

Author(s): Hiebert, Waldo.

Source: *Called to Teach: A Symposium by the Faculty of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary*, edited by David Ewert (1980), pp. 87-96.

Published by: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies.

Stable URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/11418/707>

---

FPUScholarWorks is an online repository for creative and scholarly works and other resources created by members of the [Fresno Pacific University](#) community. FPUScholarWorks makes these resources freely available on the web and assures their preservation for the future.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PASTOR AS TEACHER

Waldo Hiebert

This subject raises one of the most critical questions in the church today: What is the role of the pastor? This question puzzles not only the pastor, but it is also a question which puzzles the congregation. What is the major work that a pastor is to do? The pastor is caught in a maze of expectations from which he can hardly escape. He is verily in a cross-fire. "From the moment a young pastor steps into the pulpit or presides at a board meeting he is caught in the cross-fire of conflicting expectations for the ministry."<sup>1</sup>

The pastor is expected to be a good preacher, an effective counselor, an efficient administrator, a dynamic teacher, and a bold leader. Besides, he is to "be good with young people," relate well to the elderly, be an advisor, ex officio member of all committees, and coordinate all activities of the church. Some church constitutions describe the pastor's role in these ways! This job description is not only impossible for a human being to fulfill; it is confusing, frustrating, and unbiblical.

Among these many expectations there must come a prioritizing of duties. On the basis of biblical and theological understandings it must be determined what the pastor's first duties are. The Scriptures have not left us in the dark about this. Let us turn to the Bible and allow it to teach us. We shall examine four strategic Scriptures which deal with this subject.

#### I. THE BIBLICAL BASE

A. *Ephesians 4:11-12*. Two major contentions are to be noted in these verses: First, special and supporting and

equipping gifts are to be given to the church. They are: apostles (missionaries or church planters in today's language), prophets (we might say preachers), evangelists, pastors and teachers. It should be noted that in some translations there is a hyphen between pastor and teacher (pastor-teacher), indicating that this is one basic function, or one office. Many scholars consider pastor-teacher as being one basic spiritual gift. The pastor is thus described as a shepherding-teacher. So much for the designation of gifts.

The second contention is that these gifts are for the equipping of the saints and for the upbuilding of the body of Christ. It can be said, then, that the pastor is a pastor-teacher, preparing believers for their work of ministry, and working to build up the body of Christ.

This is really a graphic description of the minister's task: Equipping the saints! "Equipping," literally means "to make fit" or "to mend." It is the same word as used for mending nets. To equip means to men, to heal, to put back together what has been torn apart. In a sense the pastor is thus a healer, a restorer, a fixer, "putting people together," so that they can again do their ministry.

Here we should also take a closer look at the word "pastor." What does it really mean? The word "pastor" is a translation of the Greek word *poimen*. The Greek term literally means one whose chief function it is to feed the flock.<sup>2</sup> The English word "pastor" comes from the Latin *pascere* which means to feed.

The Bible freely uses the word shepherd for the church's teachers and leaders, thereby signifying that the chief task of the shepherd is to provide grass or nourishment for the flock. This is stated in many places, especially in Ezekiel 34, Psalm 23, and in John 10. The pastor then has a clearly defined priority. His first duty is to feed the flock, and he does this by teaching and preaching the Word. This, then, leads us to the next basic text regarding the chief task of the pastor.

B. *I Peter 5:1-5*. This is a basic summary statement of the task of the pastor. There is but one imperative duty listed here and that is: "Feed (or shepherd) the flock of God that is among you (vs. 2)." And this task is to be done voluntarily, not by constraint, nor for money, but eagerly, and not

by lording it over the people he serves. Again the main duty of the pastor is to feed the people of God, which consists primarily of teaching and preaching the Word.

C. *Acts 5:42*. "And daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." This describes the activity of the apostles in the early church. Without fear they persisted in this dual ministry of teaching and preaching.

It has long been a debate among Christian educators as to the relationship between teaching (*didache*) and preaching (*kerygma*). C.H. Dodd, in his classic book, *Apostolic Preaching and Its Development*, makes a sharp distinction between preaching and teaching. Other writers, like James D. Smart, in *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*, contends that such a sharp distinction should not be made. These functions, teaching and preaching, are like two rails on a railroad track, both are needed for proper function. "They are together in being both the service of the Word of God. . .the content of preaching and teaching is the same."<sup>3</sup>

There are these two ways of presenting the Word of God. Some scholars indicate that preaching is essentially the proclamation of the Word of God to the unbelievers, while teaching is primarily the indoctrination of the believers in the Word of God, but that distinction is overly precise. Both teaching and preaching must be done in the congregation as well. "The minister who refuses to come down from the pulpit and participate in the work of teaching is like a farmer who scatters seed on the land and refuses to do anything more until the harvest. . .preaching and teaching are both essential to a full ministry, and the lack of either one renders it defective."<sup>4</sup> A pastor who does not preach and teach is unfaithful to God and his calling.

D. *I Timothy 3:1-7*. In this passage the qualifications of a bishop, overseer, elder, or pastor are listed. The qualifications all have to do with moral character, with the exception of one characteristic which is a function: "apt to teach" (able to teach). Of all the qualities the minister is to have there is apparently but one skill required in this passage, and that is that he should be able to teach. This points out

(1) the significance of character (or modeling) and (2) the significance of the skill of teaching. This should make it clear for the pastor that in his preparation for the ministry he learn more than only to preach; he should also prepare himself *as a teacher* of the congregation. Teacher education is of high priority in his preparation.

Before leaving this brief biblical survey, we must offer a summary theological statement, which forms a base upon which our contention lies, namely that the pastor is also to be a teacher.

We see the local church as a body of gifted ministering believers. In their midst are the supporting gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. It becomes their responsibility to nurture, encourage and prepare (equip) these ministers (members) for their work of ministry. In the midst of this "school" (church) or in this miniature theological seminary, (as Findley Edge, calls it)<sup>5</sup> the pastor-teacher becomes a teacher, an educational director. Larry Richards put it this way: "When we grasp the purpose and servant character of leadership, we can clearly see the pastor as an 'educator.' In fact, we see him as the primary Christian educator in the contemporary local church."<sup>6</sup>

## II. THE PASTOR'S ROLE AS TEACHER

A. The pastor is often, at least in function, the education director for the local church. Let's face it, most of our Mennonite Brethren churches are small, 100 members or less. There is only a handful of larger congregations in our brotherhood which may be able to afford a second staff member to guide the Christian education program. Most churches will depend upon the pastor to guide their educational endeavors, in most churches, the pastor is his own educational director.<sup>7</sup>

In larger congregations where an education director is employed, the pastor may not be directly involved with the administration of the educational and training program, but he will most surely be considered as advisor or consultant to the educational staff. There is probably no one else in the congregation who can offer better counsel to the total nurture program than can a pastor.

If I were a pastor again, I would want to have some hand in guiding the education of the congregation. How else can a pastor fulfill his task as an "equipper," if he is not interested in the training of the believers? It seems to me that the pastor's interest and participation in the training program is not only theologically sound, but also educationally consistent with his calling.

Dr. A.H. Unruh, former President of the Winnipeg Mennonite Brethren Bible College and conference leader, used to stress the involvement of the pastor in local church education to the extent that he advised against the existence of a Christian educational committee. He felt that the educational program should come under the guidance of the pastor and the church council.

Never should the pastor look upon the Sunday School, or any part of the educational program as a matter of secondary concern to him, and leave it to another group to control it. Naturally, the pastor cannot and should not get involved with all the aspects and programs of the church. But from Christian education he cannot extricate himself and fulfill his calling.

B. The pastor is further involved in the educational process of the local church as one who definitely participates in the enlistment and training of leadership. Finding and training leaders for the local church program, and for mission activities beyond the local church, is always a crucial task. Jesus, when looking upon a needy multitude said, "pray the Lord of the harvest that he send forth workers into his harvest (Matthew 9:38)." This task may be visualized in two aspects or two parts.

The first task is to discern the gifts of lay-leadership in the church. Certainly the pastor's wisdom and sensitivity is most crucial for the selection of local church leadership. Such potential leaders must be found, tried, encouraged, advised, and trained, and for this significant ministry the pastor's help is needed. His knowledge of the people is helpful in discerning the gifts of the church and their potential.

Secondly, leaders must be trained, oriented and prepared for their task and assignment. We often make the serious error in this process by not offering training for the task. We elect or appoint leaders, send them out to do their

work, but often do not offer them any training at all for their jobs. This is a very common practice, and it is sad! This brings about a lot of frustration and discouragement among the lay leadership of the church. We just must not simply elect them and then put them to work without at least some orientation. The newly selected leaders and teachers need training, at least some kind of orientation or in-service training.

Take, for example, the deacons. They are usually elected by the church, and immediately put to work. Some of these new deacons haven't the slightest idea what they are really supposed to do. They are supposed to visit, but have never been taught how. It is imperative that the pastor (and a senior deacon) provide at least some basic orientation and in-service training to such an important function. Thus the pastor finds himself again in a teaching role. In fact, he thus carries out the directive of Paul to Timothy: "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2).

C. Furthermore, the pastor is a teacher of the entire congregation as such. While there is in most churches a staff of teachers (Sunday school, mid-week Bible teachers, VBS, etc.) no one carries a greater responsibility than the person called to minister the Word on Sundays, and on many other occasions in the church.

There is no other person in the church who better feels the pulsebeat of the congregation, can better ascertain its needs, and is in a better position to give Scriptural guidance to the congregation than can a pastor. It is his responsibility to educate the church concerning its God-given task, and to guide the church into a living knowledge of the Word of God. It is the pastor's task to "feed the flock of God." Nothing can substitute for the systematic teaching of Scripture in the congregation. An ancient proverb says, "When there is hay in the manger, the horses will not bite each other."

Findley Edge suggests that the educational aspect of the church is that of a miniature theological seminary of which the pastor is the teacher-president. The church is a

school of Christian discipleship where all are learners growing and maturing in the Christian life.<sup>8</sup>

Of special concern for the pastor should be the membership class, where candidates for baptism and membership receive education and orientation into the fellowship. Some ministers feel that it is not important to have special classes. If there are training sessions, they delegate their task to a deacon, or an associate pastor. This is forfeiting too much. I have seldom found people more open to learn, and with greater desire to grow, than a membership class. Besides offering an opportunity to the pastor to teach a significant group, it also gives him the opportunity to learn to know those people more intimately who come into the fellowship.

### III. CAUTIONS FOR THE PASTOR-TEACHER

The pastor who would be a teacher has certain cautions to observe.

A. First is the inevitable pressure of administrative duties, which tends to rob him of his study and teaching time. It is estimated that the average pastor now spends 40-50% of his time in administration.<sup>9</sup> Then there are multitudes of other duties, visitation, counseling, conference work, etc. which demand time. I once asked a pastor of a large church how he found time for study and the preparation of sermons. He said, "You have to fight for time to study!" If a pastor is not very conscientious and tenacious about his study time, it will be taken away from him by other pressing calls. Yet, the teaching and preaching of the Word is after all his foremost task. He must protect his study time, and request the congregation to help him protect that time also.

B. Another caution that needs to be mentioned is the tendency on the part of pastors to hold on to too many leadership responsibilities and their failure to share responsibilities with other leaders and lay-leaders in the congregation. Pastors find it hard to let go. As a result they run to all committee meetings and group meetings in the church. They even feel that they have to make all the calls upon the sick and shut-ins. Worthy as all these ministries are, they

must be shared, and the pastor-teacher must hold firmly to priorities. He can never afford to sacrifice time for study of the Word in preparation for teaching and preaching. There is constant need for the pastor to review and to hold on to priorities, of which study and teaching is an important one. There are many tasks and duties which a pastor could allow others to do and thus free extra time for himself for study and teaching of the Word. A good biblical model is found in Acts 6:1-7 where the apostles "gave themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word," and chose deacons to care for the widows.

C. Some pastors are not conscientious teachers because they lack the vision for it. "The Christian church is commissioned to teach, but its pastors are not always committed to the teaching ministry."<sup>10</sup> And when this vision and joy in teaching the Word is not there, it is easy to allow pressing duties to absorb all the time.

The minister today is in a real cross-fire of demands. The demands upon the pastor are almost unreal. He is to preach, teach, counsel, visit, administer and coordinate. Today's pastor has only one choice—to draw up priorities for himself. And if he does not have a vision and deep-seated satisfaction in teaching-preaching it will be easy for him to let it drift to 3rd and 4th place on his agenda.

D. Another caution that needs to be given is that a pastor will need refreshing and "re-tooling" from time to time. It is not possible to give out constantly and never to take in. Eventually the well wants to run dry. It is taxing, demanding and emotionally draining to be constantly preaching and teaching. Therefore, it is wise if a pastor takes seriously the idea of continuing education. He may consider requesting the church to allow him a month, or three month "study leave" occasionally. Many seminaries provide this kind of continuing theological education for pastors. Our seminary has had a number of pastors on campus who have come for a quarter, or even a year for study. One pastor inserted a three month study period between two pastorates—a noble projection! As times and circumstances become more demanding, the pastor-teacher will need a periodic break for reflection, for sharpening his tools of communication and for deepening his understanding of the Word.

## CONCLUSION

The pastor is a teacher. This is so by design. This is the mandate of the Scriptures. This is the very nature of his work. This is sound theological and educational doctrine. While the pastor has many duties, teaching is a primary one. This priority he must always protect, and guard against the many pressures of the ministry. Teaching is his "blessed burden," his first and blessed task.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Donald Smith, *Clergy in the Cross-Fire*. (Westminster, 1973), p. 13.
- 2 J. Lyn Elder, *Pastoral Care*. (1968) Golden Gate Semanary, p. 11-15.
- 3 James Smart, *The Teaching Ministry of the Church*. (Westminster, 1954), p. 19.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
- 5 Findlay Edge, *The Greening of the Church*. (Word, 1971), p. 177.
- 6 Larry Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*. (Zondervan, 1975), p. 138.
- 7 J. Clark Hensley, *The Pastor or Educational Director*. (Central Baptist Seminary Press, 1950).
- 8 Findley Edge, *The Greening of the Church*. Chapter 8.
- 9 Alvin Lindgren, *Foundation for Purposeful Church Administration*. (Abingdon, 1965), p. 15.
- 10 Peter Person, *The Minister in Christian Education*. (Baker, 1960), p. 15.