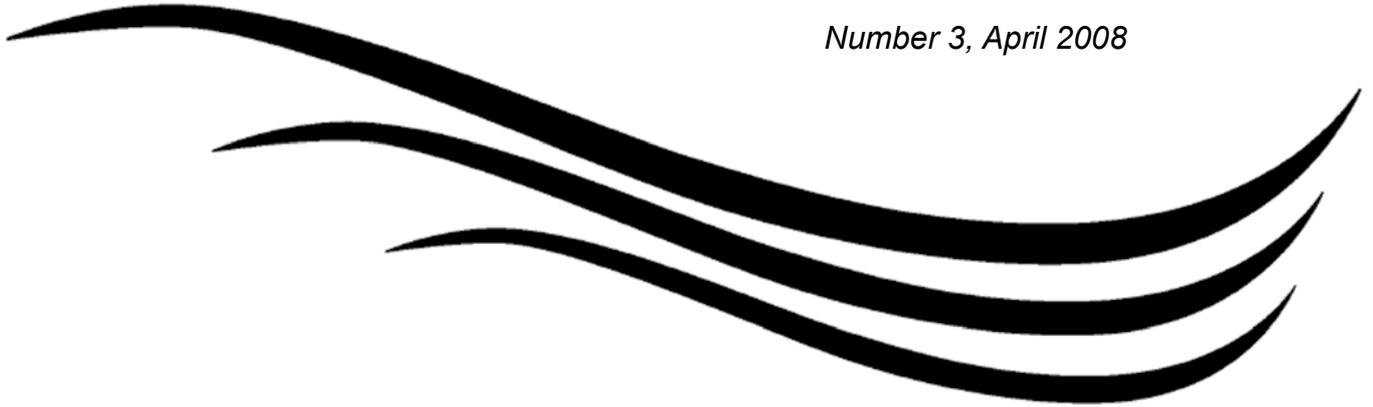


# CANDOUR

News and Views for Ministers

Number 3, April 2008



## Growing leaders

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Presbyterian Church  
of Aotearoa New Zealand

## Noticeboard

*Candour* is a monthly magazine about ministry and leadership. For more information, contact:

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The articles in *Candour* reflect the views of individual ministers or contributors writing in a personal capacity. They are not representative of the Church's official position. Please approach the author for permission if you wish to copy an article.

### Contributions

We welcome responses to published articles. If you would like to write a piece replying to any of this month's featured articles, please contact:

Amanda Wells (editor) on (04) 381-8285 or [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

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## Ministers' Information Forms

Ministers' Information Forms are an essential tool for ministry settlement boards looking to make a call. They are also an effective way for ministers to record their achievements throughout their career – including any additional training they undertake.

Ministers are strongly encouraged to update their Ministers' Information Form every three years so that the information remains current. If you would like to update your Form please email Juliette on [juliette@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:juliette@presbyterian.org.nz) for a template. Alternatively, you are welcome to send additional information to PO Box 9049, Wellington.

# Stepping up to lead

Amanda Wells

Churches like to talk about leadership. So much responsibility for the success or otherwise of our parishes is hung on ministers rather than on those they shepherd. I don't envy ministers in the expectations heaped on them and the typical human tendency to complain rather than compliment.

How do you grow leaders to bring the next generation into our churches? Many inside the church wrestle with this question, including the newly fledged Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership. Its internship model is about both practical and academic learning, with experience gained in the local church as well as in concentrated study. Given leadership opportunities, young people will seize them and blossom; something made apparent to me in the DVD produced for the Standing out project, which features inspirational young leaders from Knox Waitara, and just slightly older leaders from Studentsoul in Dunedin.

People only become leaders when their potential and talent is recognised by others. Part of becoming and remaining a leader is receiving feedback about your performance, so that you can strive for continual improvement. You could say that being accountable and being assessed are part of the implicit bargain between the leader and the lead. One of the key distinctives of the Presbyterian Church, particularly in the eyes of outsiders, is that leadership is not a top-down model. Instead of each rung appointing those below, ultimate decision-making rests on those in the congregation. In this issue of *Candour*, Susan Jones outlines the rationale behind the proposed system of ministry reviews, including some of the fears and concerns that ministers might have.

But leaders aren't just ministers; they're also elders, youth workers and those unnamed but influential people in your congregation. Everyone can benefit from thinking about the ways in which they practise leadership and how constructive this practice is. In the past, the distribution list of *Candour* was restricted rigidly to ministers, but recent years have seen a more relaxed attitude. Anyone who is in a leadership role in the Presbyterian Church can email me and ask to be added to the electronic subscriber list.

Leaders need stimulation, encouragement and support if they are to maintain their direction. John Turton writes in

this issue about the care of emotional and mental health as an essential component of this journey. He observes that our response as leaders to others is based more on our implicit beliefs and assumptions, rather than always being primarily about them. Overwhelmed leaders are particularly vulnerable to people who push their buttons, especially when they're unable to gain the perspective to think critically about their responses.

A lot of being a leader is about confidence. If you think you can do something, and you project this, people have a tendency to believe you. A couple of years ago I started leading tramping club trips. At first I was concerned about multitude of things that can go wrong with a group of people out in the bush. I felt a huge sense of achievement coming home on the ferry from that first trip I led, that we'd all made it back intact (if slightly traumatised by an unexpected snow encounter). Then I led lots of trips and it became more of an organisational challenge than a confidence issue; I learned that people would make the right decisions if you ran group decision-making well, and that a participatory approach meant much more committed followers.

Andrew Scott's essay in this issue talks about making connections as a leader; about a leader being a storyteller who weaves in the experience of others and stands alongside them rather than in front or behind them. It's been a really interesting experience presenting the Standing out workshops around the country; I'm not so keen on being up in front of people saying things, but I really enjoy the part where people from different groups in the audience feed back their thoughts. I appreciate the chance to weave their experiences and ideas into a wider dialogue about communicating better.

There are as many styles of leadership as there are individuals; yet we can all realise the potential and mana of a leader. Perhaps it's useful to reflect on the kind of people you've elected to follow, and the kind of leadership vision you strive towards.

The May issue of *Candour* will have the theme "Small churches", with a deadline of 28 April. If you'd like to make a contribution, please get in touch with me via [candour@presbyterian.org.nz](mailto:candour@presbyterian.org.nz)

# Emotional self-care as leadership growth

John Turton, Hutt City Uniting Congregations, Wellington

Years ago when I was in my last year at the Theological Hall, the person in charge of formation training requested that all ordinands keep a personal journal in which they would record their reflections on their training and development and hand in and discuss regularly. It caused a stir to say the least, and the noisiest were probably those who did not take time out to do emotional self-care work. At that time, keeping a journal had been no new task for me, as for the previous eight or more years it had been my practice and had helped me through some of the most difficult times in my life to that point. Seems it's easier for many to dig the garden, mow the lawn or do a round of golf for recreation than it is to do some emotional recreation such as an "inner workout".

In my first parish, I was 40km from the nearest church in any direction, was landed with two preaching places about 30 minutes' drive apart and an interim moderatorship that took a good 40 minutes as the Holden flies. Also waiting for me was an EAP task at the local dairy factory. Our children were all school age and we entered a new manse still being developed with a lawn, fences, a garage and storage space within. Shopping for groceries or any activity for the children usually involved an 80km-minimum round trip. You could say I hit the ground running. Within three years of that, and wearing the many hats a rural minister can be found wearing, I became aware that I was near burnout and puzzled about how it had crept up on me. My basic journaling practice had been outgrown by new circumstances that required me to seek new self-care skills if I were to remain a leader in church ministry. As I looked around me, I became aware that others within the same presbytery were also stretched.

That search connected me with something called Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT), which is a cognitive-behavioural approach to managing life's upsets. Without wasting any time, I invested some study leave in doing a basic course. The basic course involved an intense week in Parnell Auckland with New Zealand trainer Wayne Froggatt, author of *Choose to be Happy* and other books such as *Good Stress*. During that course and training, I became distinctly aware of certain kinds of beliefs I held about life, myself and others, particularly my colleagues at Presbytery, which were doing me in. My journal practice now involved me using these new found skills to spot irrational thinking. That week in Auckland turned my life around in terms of burnout.

But the memory that stays with me is the stunned mullet silence that my Presbytery gave when they heard my study leave report. Issues like studying, reproducing and emulating Willow Creek got more attention.

Within two years I elected to go do the Advanced Certificate level in REBT, which was much more intense. During that training, with some of the more common irrational beliefs in my thinking were disputed and altered, and I had a fresh faith experience of Jesus Christ as I realized the influence that distorted thinking could have in blocking our understanding of practical theology. I also arrived at a fresh understanding about the ministry of the Spirit of Truth as Comforter and Counsellor. The blocks that were removed had been inhibiting my effectiveness as a leader. My second study leave not only got the stunned mullet response again, but also a reprimand for some aspect of applying for my study leave I had omitted to make. My testimony of a fresh experience of faith was not received. I was speaking a different language now.

Two of the most common generic beliefs, irrational to the core, are about approval seeking and about wanting to do things "right". The third generic irrational belief centres on wanting life to be easy and comfortable. To explain those and the impact of their discovery and "repenting" of them will require some understanding of REBT.

REBT proposes that most human beings, if not all, innately tend to think irrationally. This shows itself in four key ways we distort reality in our perception"

**Exaggerating the badness of events:** You catch yourself rating outcomes, upsets, events, or failures as much worse than they truly are.

**Low discomfort or frustration tolerance:** We catch ourselves in our self-talk and ideas that for some reason we cannot stand or cope or handle something that we are quite capable of handling - but probably not without a degree of frustration or discomfort. We get hooked more and more on short-term pleasure (getting what we want rapidly at the cost of putting it off for later).

**Labelling:** Catching ourselves labelling our own self with inappropriate negative put-downs based on the merest of information, and also labelling situations, other people, life and sometimes even God in the same illogical way.

**Promoting mere wants to absolute needs:** Things we

normally desire taking on much more importance and urgency to where we rigidly demand satisfaction or success in terms of outcomes.

## Are your beliefs showing?

I discovered through my journaling and REBT training and supervision, that I was hooked on getting approval from those people I considered significant. Those who did not deliver would earn labels and I would use passive-anger to attack their reputation in various ways; I would indulge in anger, and like many I have heard of, head home to dump on the manse family, but keep an outward show to the parish so that their approval kept coming. The shock and horror of discovering this and realizing it was a fundamental flaw in my leadership cannot be measured. Truth becomes compromised then a person places greater importance on being approved of by peers, and significant others, and it cannot fail to show in one's lived spirituality.

My other discovery was discovering myself labelling others negatively in various ways for not doing things "right" as I personally understood "right". Becoming hooked on labelling means you as a pastor and leader centre on the person rather than the offending behaviour. You become hooked on the blame game instead of focusing on the behaviour, and working on change where things can truly be changed. Those two basic tendencies in my thinking were burning me out. These are just two of some chief self-discoveries that occurred early in my learnings.

The format of an REBT journal is not difficult to comprehend or to do. The real work begins when you start journaling and structuring how you view, perceive or interpret an event, whether it's something that happens to you as a person, or whether it's something that occurs within your thinking that troubles you in some way, evidenced in strong negative emotions and/or dysfunctional behaviour. The four main distortions are only one small portion of what REBT is about.

## How to begin keeping an REBT journal

In keeping your journal, you look for three basic aspects of the experience. First you endeavour to describe the activating or trigger event; in REBT this is normally referred to as the (A) or activating event. I use the term WHEN.

WHEN: This part describes when and where and what happened to activate your presenting issue

*When you walked past me in the street on Tuesday without saying, "Hi!" after I did.*

Then you write about the impact in terms of affect and effect upon you. In REBT this is referred to as the (C) or Consequences. I use the terms 'I FEEL' and 'I RESPOND' to capture it.

I FEEL: You talk about how your body feels and about the emotions that are present.

*I feel rejected and quite upset and angry about it.*

I RESPOND: You talk about your reactions in terms of behaviour or action.

*I respond by taking your name off my cellphone list, chucking your Christmas card in the bin, and withdrawing from others.*

At the completion of the journaling of your event or upset, you then journal what you are aware of in your thinking and perceiving. This can be in the form of images, ideas, thoughts, memories replayed. The A is the trigger and the C is the consequence however for this section in REBT we use the letter (B) for beliefs. I use the term BECAUSE.

BECAUSE: You talk about your thinking, self-talk, images and memories that were there, or are there, when you were triggered by the issue.

*Because if you're my friend you should acknowledge me when I acknowledge you.*

As an REBT counsellor I can assure you that the material you write in your B section, the BECAUSE, is sufficient for me to work with to discover the core irrational beliefs you hold and to show you how to defeat them in a whole new meaning of the word "repent".

## Emotional Responsibility

With REBT the issue is not about where these beliefs came from in terms of socialisation, family of nurture, or traumatic experiences. REBT works with you in terms of where you are now. Why? Because the beliefs are present with you now and only you can effect change in them. Knowing who is responsible in history is about assigning blame, but knowing who is responsible for you being upset begins by looking in the mirror. How you view these things, how you evaluate them, and hold them in your thinking will contribute considerably to how upset you are able to make yourself. It's called emotional responsibility. If no other skill is encouraged through this article, I would pray that you learn about emotional responsibility because at that point your journey into new dimensions of emotional self-care may begin. If you'd like support in this area of growing as a leader through emotional self-care skills, then I invite you to visit my website: [www.onlinecounsellor.co.nz](http://www.onlinecounsellor.co.nz)

# Making sense of ministry reviews

Susan Jones\*

Ministry is a very public kind of vocation. Each Sunday most ministers face dozens of eyes, ears and hearts, as we pray and preach to and with our assembled congregation(s). Our work patterns and goals are reported to our parish councils or sessions and sometimes closely watched. When we visit, we find that our words and actions have been noted and discussed. Everyone knows how much we are paid. Less frequently now, sometimes the parishioners know our homes, the manse, better than we do. God knows what is in our hearts. It can sometimes feel there is no privacy anywhere!

And yet, ministry is at the same time a very, very private vocation. We hear tragic and heart-wrenching stories in confidence. We know more about our parishioners than they know about each other. Knowing we cannot divulge the relevant information, we must watch when some members ignore others whom we know need more attention and welcome than they are getting. We see people at their very best and their very worst and we cannot tell anyone else about it. We hear two people disagreeing at a meeting and know intimately where both are coming from and why these two people will always “talk past each other”. We know when we face the public space of worship that the emergency we were involved in the night before cannot be offered as an excuse for sloppy presentation or preparation because what we did last night, while it was part of the mission of the congregation, it is not the congregation’s business.

Some of us came to ministry from professions where appraisals and reviews were regular and continual. I well remember the tensions in a school, for example, when Her Majesty’s Inspectorate invaded our space and teachers stiffened up while (if you were lucky) students became unnaturally polite and compliant. In other professions, reviews affected salary levels and bonus payments and so carried other fears.

We bring then to the innocent words “appraisal” or “review” a baggage of fears and uneven past experiences. There will be those amongst the ministry of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand who know and welcome the review process, because their experience of it in the past has been good. There are others who regard it as yet another sign that the church is sliding downhill into business mode and neglecting the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## The beginnings of ministry reviews

In fact, when, some years ago, the Equipping the Leadership Policy Group began looking at aspects of ministry to see what was important and what was less important, we found ourselves using some words which were quite different from those in the business scene – like faith and spiritual growth and theological and worship and formation. We also found, however, that as in any other profession, it was important that ministers had interpersonal skills as well as good written and oral communication skills; skills found in any business-style review process. We realised that ministers, like any CEO or business manager, needed to develop and keep on developing their communication skills so they could more effectively write the editorial for the church newsletter, write that occasional column in the local newspaper, deliver that weekly sermon, speak at the local Anzac service, or take that tragic funeral for a non-church family. The varied situations in which ministers need to communicate require extremely complex and highly developed skills in communication, as well as deep faith, Biblical knowledge and theological insight.

We realised too, in a Church as broad as ours, that the aspects being reviewed to see whether a minister was continuing to develop needed to be widely generic to ministry. We needed to see whether a minister could help another’s faith grow, without specifying whether that faith was extremely liberal or extremely conservative or in-between. The full range of ministers in the Church needed to be able to help others grow their faith in Christ whatever end of the theological spectrum they might come from themselves. The instruments used for the review process needed then to reflect that wide focus, and especially so ministers would not feel their whole work was being judged only by their theological stance.

The Church had already previously identified its mission: “to make Jesus Christ known”. It had also previously identified eight signs of a healthy congregation that might therefore be effective in making Jesus Christ known.<sup>1</sup> The aim of ministry reviews was to help further develop a ministry that would help the Church to work towards

1 The eight signs are: Outward focus, healthy relationships with the wider church, a sense of direction, Worship which is enhancing of life, relevant and inviting, a lively faith, a strong sense of community, an involving leadership and experiencing newcomers and numerical growth.

both of those aspirations. Carefully selected, therefore, were nine aspects of ministry development that would help ministers to lead their congregations to health and effectiveness in making Christ known.<sup>2</sup> Five of the aspects are about development of mission vision in the minister: vision, implementation, change, faith and awareness of context. The remaining four aspects develop mission capacity in the minister: written communication skills, oral communication skills, interpersonal skills and character.

### Is this Biblical and theological?

Those working to bring the ministry and parish review processes to Assembly have developed a Biblical theology of reviews. Keep watching the website as it develops and send in your comments. Throughout Scripture, we found, God evaluates the leaders and the people. The old priest Eli coaches the young Samuel in hearing and responding to the voice of the Lord and then in his prophetic role. Like Nathan approaching David, the prophets carried God's evaluation to leaders. God speaks to Elijah cowering in his cave after threats from Jezebel and coaches him back into service. God affirms Jesus at his baptism... Paul both evaluates the churches he planted and visited positively in some places and coaches them to do better in others.

### How does it work?

The plan is to train reviewers, so that there is an evenness in quality of ministry reviews throughout the country. This plan will be detailed in the forthcoming Assembly papers. Your elders will be involved, as well as your supervisor, as well as the reviewer working through the development aspects with you also. Final recommendations for further coaching/education will be made known to your supervisor, but ministry review reports will be kept confidential in the national office in your ministry file.

### How scary is it?

I probably have as high a performance anxiety as any ministry in the Church, so I approached this idea with some personal trepidation. It needs to be acknowledged that for existing ministers, some anxiety is understandable since we were not initially trained specifically with the nine aspects of ministry in mind. Certainly some of our training covered things like communication skills (the famous elocution lessons and many, many essays and sermons!). Other aspects, however, are now relevant in the present ministry situation. You will have noticed this in your own ministry work. It is hoped this disconnect will change as our ministry formation systems pick up the nine development aspects in ministry training.

<sup>2</sup> These aspects of development were at first called competencies and the development framework was initially called a competency framework.

As a mid-career parish minister, for example, I have found that, though it has never been written in specifically in black and white, being a change agent is now increasingly part of my job description. No one ever taught me how to do this. I did attend a small one-day seminar provided by an Anglican ministry educator on change once, at my own initiative. Mostly I have learned on the hoof, initially blithely making changes and wondering why people got upset, then latterly preparing the way more carefully in order to reduce the disruptive effects of change on the congregation. I have learned through supervision and my own observation to separate my own worth from comments made to me because people are upset about change with which I am associated.

Before you feel as panicky as I did about that, consider how "change" might be part of a review. The most helpful thing I have found about the review framework is that each aspect is broken down into manageable, bite-sized concepts. (We are working on getting the language equally manageable!) I was afraid I would get a "bad mark" (notice that fear from the past?) in change, having never thought I was skilled as a change agent. On reading through the breakdown of what is meant by change, I found, however, that I was already skilled at some aspects of good change behaviour.

I found, for example, that I already did "apply general change principles to specific contexts" and that "recognises and rewards achievement and those who try to effect change" was sometimes true of me. I wasn't that great at "strategises for change at the different levels of the organisation" and I assumed I needed some coaching in that area to get that developing better in my ministry. But the most blinding epiphany came when I read "models the changes s/he seeks in the world." I suddenly realised I could learn about helping others to change by making changes in myself and self-consciously role modelling how I coped with change to my congregation, which could help them in their making of changes too.

Another epiphany came when I read "can deal with negative emotional reactions to change directed at themselves as leader" and realised that some of the personal hurt I had felt in times of change had been because I took personally the emotional reactions people had to change, but that I was improving in that area because of the professional help I had received at those times. Overall, there were areas of change management in which I could see I was developing in, while others needed more work. What's more, in participating in the ministry review, I was learning about what change involved and what coaching/education/mentoring I needed to become more skilled in this area.

## Essays

It was the same with the aspect of Implementation. Here I learned that while I could put things into practice quite well, that I involved people and was not afraid to delegate (though that got compromised when I was particularly busy), I was making the mistake of not describing the big picture to those to whom I delegated a small part of the big picture. Someone doing one part of the job did not know what others were doing or why. So, when people showed initiative there was sometimes doubling up of effort. Also, sometimes, initiative was stifled because people did not know whether or not they could expand on the tasks they had been delegated.

The breakdown of the aspects offers detail that sometimes can seem too much. It shows ministers, however, what they are doing well, while at the same time, shows them those parts of a process where more work or help or education are required.

The whole idea of ministry reviews is a change for those of us who are ministers in the Presbyterian Church. We may find, however, that many of our parishioners are being reviewed frequently in their workplace and appreciate that we might be prepared also to be reviewed in our work for them and for God.

I hope I have been able, in this article, to convey some of the big picture behind this change to ministry reviews, so you know better where you fit. If you have any questions or comments that we can incorporate into the processes being developed (almost as we speak) please get in touch with me via [jones.rs@xtra.co.nz](mailto:jones.rs@xtra.co.nz)

*\*Convenor, National Ministry Review Workgroup*



**KNOX CENTRE  
FOR MINISTRY  
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Job Descriptions, including a list of the seven key subject areas for the Lecturer's position, may be obtained from the Registrar by emailing [registrar@knoxcentre.ac.nz](mailto:registrar@knoxcentre.ac.nz)

Applications should be sent to the Director at Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, Knox College, Arden St., Dunedin, or [principal@knoxcentre.ac.nz](mailto:principal@knoxcentre.ac.nz)

**Applications close on the 20th of April 2008**

# Tell me a story...

Andrew Scott,

I've been learning the art of story-telling. As far as talent is concerned, I suspect I am a journeyman at best, but the joy of seeing the light in people's eyes as they become the story for themselves makes it all the more important for me to hone the little talent I do possess. You see, I have come to believe that one possible form of leadership is that which identifies the story and then weaves a foundation on which others both become the story and weave their own patterns to form the rich tapestry that is our life together.

And from that idea there arise a multiplicity of questions that challenge, explore, and develop the possibility of leadership as story. I say leadership as story because it is more than simply telling a story, or even acting the story. It goes beyond standing as a dispassionate or even passionate observer of the nature of the story, or as a researcher of the story.

It even goes beyond the simple living of the story. At its best, I think it means becoming the story in such a way that those who listen want to become the story, not as adjuncts or associates, but as an integral part of the flow of the story, at once retelling the past, becoming the present and imagining the future.

As a story-teller, it will never be enough to tell someone else's story. The story must become my own if I am to become the story. For those around me, who listen, participate and perhaps, if my telling is sufficient, become the story themselves, it cannot ever simply be someone else's story. And so I need to learn the story of the people I live among. I need to learn how they have placed their boundary stones, where they have set their monuments. I need to listen to how they tell of their past and how they dream of their future. I need to share in their sorrow and in their joy. Then their story becomes my story and the weaving goes on.

For those who are listening carefully, there is an unspoken thread without which little sense would come. It is that story assumes community, fellowship, togetherness. For what is a story-teller without an audience? And what audience gathers without some kind of common story?

So for those who have managed to stay with me this far, here are some thoughts about leadership as story. We are, at our roots, story driven. It is how we manage to keep our lives in some form of order. In this context a leader must do several things well.

First, they must know their own story; the feelings as well as the facts. The feelings are perhaps the most important part here, because our feelings take two-dimensional facts and give them depth and colour and taste and smell. Facts have their place, but feelings make them mine. How do I feel when everything is so busy I'm not sure which way is up? How did I feel when I realised that Jesus Christ was more important than anyone or anything else in my life? How do I feel when I dream about the future? How well we feel our stories will have a lot to do with how well we tell them.

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## As a story-teller, it will never be enough to tell someone else's story

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Second, we need to know the story of the people we live amongst. I am consistently amazed at how little leaders know about the lives of their audience;

not the facts, they're easy. But how do people feel about the gang of young people wandering the streets? How do they feel about the new playground across the road, or the death of their neighbour, or the loss of their cat? How do they feel about their children's school results and their parents living too far away to visit? How do they feel about not being able to cook nice meals or afford a nice outfit to wear out? And how do they feel about how they have arrived at this time and place, about their hopes and dreams for the future?

The third task is to work out how to draw these facts and feelings into a coherent whole, so that people can both identify their story and yours, and begin to see how there are threads of their own they can weave into the whole. It requires the lightest touch that draws together and in the same movement sets free. As a listener, I realise that this is my story and our story, it contains me and bounds me and also give me permission to shape and reshape the telling of what has been and what is to come. Some will tell with grace and fluency while others will stumble and stutter, and all will provide depth and colour to the story

to which one story-teller can never attain.

The fourth task of the story-teller leader is to let go of the story and trust the new story-tellers to keep the story going. It will never be the same and there are times when it will seem to get bogged down or side-tracked, and that's good because it gifts shape and depth to the story. It is this task that is probably the most difficult because every

story-teller knows how the story should be told. We know best where to drop our voice, when to leave out details to surprise later, how to draw people into the story and make it theirs.

And we should also know when we have finished with our telling and it is time for someone else to take up the story. I think that's my cue...

# Ministry roles in the Pastoral Epistles

Gene Lawrence,

Surveying the Pastorals for terms or nuances of ministry roles reveals good insights as shown in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1**

Ministry Role	1 Timothy	2 Timothy	Titus
Apostle	1:1, 2:7	1:1, 1:11	1:1
Servant			1:1
Teacher, Instructor	1:3, 1:7, 4:6, 4:11, 6:2	1:11	2:1
Bishop	3:1		1:7
Deacon	3:8		
Elder	5:17		1:5
Herald, Proclaimer, Evangelist		1:11, 4:2, 4:5	

Whilst there appear to a number of roles, only four stand out as “offices” or “roles” as opposed to “duties”: apostle, elder, bishop, and deacon. I say that these four are offices or roles because these titles could be applied to people who serve, teach, instruct, herald, proclaim, and evangelise. It is, therefore, these four ministry roles that will be clarified in this writing.

## Apostle

An apostle, in common terms of the day, was a person or people representing another, somewhat like an ambassador. This person had the express authority and full powers of the one sending them.<sup>1</sup> It is commonly agreed that the Gnostics gave the word *apostolos* “the oriental concept of emissaries as mediators of divine revelation.”<sup>2</sup> In the Old

1 Colin Brown, Ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Zondervan Reference Software Version 2.8 (Grand Rapids; The Zondervan Corporation, 1989-2001)

2 Ibid.

Testament the Aramaic equivalent denotes the commissioning and empowering of a person for a specific purpose.<sup>3</sup> In the New Testament it is argued that “apostle” is used in two ways: solemn and nontechnical.<sup>4</sup> The solemn apostles were “of Christ”<sup>5</sup> in so far that they had seen Christ and were commissioned to spread the Gospel message.<sup>6</sup> Non-technical apostles were those who had been sent as messengers from churches or other people.<sup>7</sup>

It is evident that an apostle in the New Testament context is not bound to one church community but to communities of churches. Apostles played the role of guardian of the church and promulgators (proclaimers and heralds) of the gospel.<sup>8</sup> James Dunn makes us aware that Paul saw the apostolic ministry including the planting or founding of churches.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in the context of the Pastorals, Paul’s authority as an apostle was exercised over the church through his emissaries Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete.

## Elder (Presbyteros)

3 Ibid.

4 Hawthorne, Gerald F.; Martin, Ralph P.; and Reid, Daniel G.; eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press) 1998, c1993. Electronic Media

5 Ibid.

6 See 1 Corinthians 15:1-9 where Paul lists people, or groups of people, to whom the risen Christ appeared. One of these groups contained over five hundred people.

7 Hawthorne, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* Electronic Media

8 Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1994.) p. 562

9 James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998) pp 540-541

There appears to be an absence of any reference to elders in the Pauline writings outside of the Pastorals.<sup>10</sup> However it is important to gain some understanding as to who elders were and what their role was in society.<sup>11</sup> The formation of the nation of Israel can be explained as extended families forming clans, clans forming tribes, and tribes forming the nation.<sup>12</sup> In this system each family possibly had a spokesperson who spoke on their behalf in the clan. The clan probably had people to represent them at tribal level, and the tribe would have had members to represent them at national level. These representatives were usually the elders, and were men, as the Israelite society was patriarchal.<sup>13</sup> Elders were usually the older men of a community, advancing in years, with a seniority that entitled them to respect and dignity.<sup>14</sup> Elders didn't need to be old men though, even if the Mishnah says that "at 60 years one is fit to be an elder."<sup>15</sup>

Ecclesiastes 4:13 tells us "better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning." Wisdom is a key ingredient in the choosing of an elder. Beckwith describes elders as i) older men, ii) a man selected from amongst other elders to rule or judge because of his character and abilities, and iii) a man specially qualified to be a judge or teacher because of his special study of the Mosaic Law.<sup>16</sup> Elders, therefore, were men held in high regard amongst their peers and looked to for wisdom when making decisions within the larger community. This being the case, it is not out of the ordinary to find that community or tribal elders also held positions of influence such as judges and teachers. The significance of this in the Pastoral Epistles is that when a group of believers would meet in a house it was important to have an elder (or elders) who were able to speak wisdom and truth into the teaching, especially if the house belonged to a younger believer. Also, having

elders within the Christian community would give credence to the movement, especially in the sight of Jewish authorities.

### Bishop (Episkopos)

Episkopos is more accurately translated as "overseer". Episkopos is derived from two words – epi, meaning over, and skopeo, meaning to look or watch.<sup>17</sup> A question that requires a response is, "is the role of episkopos one of official status requiring special ordination and separation?" Professor John MacQuarrie would say that it is, "[i]f ministry were merely a role or a function or a collection of functions, then there might seem to be no need for a distinctive ordained ministry in the Church."<sup>18</sup> I agree with Jeffrey Sobosan that reading Episkopos as "bishop", in the sense that we know today,<sup>19</sup> is not correct. The terms Episkopos and Presbyteros appear to be used interchangeably throughout the New Testament<sup>20</sup>, leaving many to think that they are one and the same thing.

However, taking the example of how a Jewish elder (Presbyteros) could be a judge and/or a teacher, it is not inconceivable that an elder of the Christian church could also be the overseer, adding function to the status of elder. Sobosan agrees with this allowing the two titles to explain "two distinct attributes of the same person."<sup>21</sup> The role of overseer in the Pastorals is not a readily defined function although 1 Timothy 3:2 refers to the overseer as an "apt teacher". The qualifications for an overseer are to be found in their character – they are to practice what they preach, so to speak. Some translations use the word "office" or "leadership" as if it is a position to be desired.<sup>22</sup> I am not convinced that this. I agree with Gillespie that when laity release themselves from God's mission, they

10 Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, p. 584 This then becomes an argument for post-Pauline authorship.

11 This writing does not allow an in-depth study of *Eldership*, therefore some assertions have been made according to the small amount of reading undertaken on this topic.

12 R. Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority Within Earliest Christianity* (Studies of the New Testament and its World: Edinburgh; T&T Clark Ltd, 1994) p. 21

13 Ibid.

14 Roger Beckwith, *Elders in Every City: The Origin and Role of the Ordained Ministry* (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 2003) p. 28

15 Beckwith, *Elders in Every City*, p. 28

16 Ibid. p.33

17 Brian Winslade, *Elders and their place in the Church*, 1994

18 Professor John MacQuarrie, 'The Church and the Ministry: II Ministerial Character' *The Expository Times* Vol. Vol.87/5 (1976) p. 147

19 Jeffrey G. Sobosan, 'The Role of the Presbyter: An Investigation into the *Adversus Haereses* of Saint Irenaeus' *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 27/2 (1974) p. 131

20 William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Word Biblical Commentary 46. Dallas: Word, 2000) p. 161 See also Sobosan, p. 132

21 Sobosan, *The Role of Presbyter*, p.134

22 NRSV and New American Bible use 'office'; Revised English Version uses 'Leadership'; New Jerusalem Bible uses 'presiding Elder'

delegate the mission to the clergy.<sup>23</sup> This elevating puts clergy into a position they are not supposed to fulfil. The overseer is one ministry within the whole priesthood of believers and it is quite possible that a person's desire for this ministry is given by God but it is not above anyone in status; they walk along beside.<sup>24</sup>

### Deacon (Diakonos)

Diakonos is not a technical term used only in the church. It is used to describe anyone who serves.<sup>25</sup> "Basic [meanings] in secular [Greek] are: (a) to wait at table; this is expanded to (b) care for household needs, and from this to the general meaning (c) to serve generally."<sup>26</sup> In Judaism, as opposed to Greco-Roman, service, especially for God, was seen as good.<sup>27</sup> However, the New Testament is silent about how deacons became a recognized group within the church.<sup>28</sup> In 1 Timothy 3 Paul writes about deacons as if they were already in existence, almost as if deacons arose naturally within the church, not like overseers who desired the role. Again, it is not the function of the deacon that is highlighted but rather the character qualities required for a deacon.<sup>29</sup> I do not agree with Dunn that the Pastorals show deacon as being an office. A deacon would be recognised by what they did and how they went about doing it. In this context it was important for deacons to live and serve in such a manner that brought glory to God, not shame or disrespect.

I agree with Sobosan when he describes Presbyteros as a state and Episkopos as a function.<sup>30</sup> This makes sense when Paul talks about double honour in 1 Timothy 5. If an elder is also serving in a teaching capacity as overseer, then he is doing twice the work. It could also be a logical conclusion that deacons are elders in training. I do not see that the overseer is a law unto himself but rather the overseer serves the church in judging and teaching capacity and is accountable to the elders as such. Whilst the Pastorals appear to favour men in any of these min-

istry roles, this is only due to the patriarchal society of the times. Women who are of the character required to be elder, overseer, or deacon should be encouraged into the roles. The role of the Apostle was invaluable at the birth of the Christian church to ensure that the truth remained intact, which is what Paul was doing by sending Timothy and Titus as emissaries to Ephesus and Crete.

In 2008 we see major differences between denominations and their interpretations of the Pastorals. Some churches have ordination into the offices of bishop, elder, or deacon whilst others still select men and women according to the character traits as set out in the Pastorals. Perhaps today the role of overseer could equate to that of the minister within the Presbyterian Church, and the elders are those gathered chosen by the congregation to give wisdom, insight, and leadership where required. The role of deacon within the Church is perhaps over officiated. Any one who serves in the life of the church would technically be a deacon/ness. In the new terminology of "ministry-leader" any person who has responsibility for teaching, or making decisions with authority and responsibility could also be classed as an overseer. Seen in this light, the question needs to be asked, "is there any need for a senior minister?" Is one overseer more senior than another? It could be the case, however, that the judging is in watching the character of a person at work.

One scripture in the Pastorals, 1 Timothy 4:14, alludes to a council of elders. Whether this Council is of one congregation or of the geographic church is not made clear, although given the nature of the early church, the latter is most probable.

Whilst there is no strong leaning toward the Presbyterian form of church governance within the Pastoral Epistles, elsewhere in Scripture there is, along with the evidence outside of Scripture. However, as the church moves into the future, the role of ordaining people into the ministry may need to be broadened to include such roles as children's workers, youth workers, seniors workers, and so on. There is no evidence within the Pastoral Epistles that ordained ministry is only for sole or senior minister roles.

*If you would like the bibliography for this article, please email: [gene@stjohnshastings.org.nz](mailto:gene@stjohnshastings.org.nz)*

23 Thomas W. Gillespie, 'The Laity in Perspective' *Theology Today* Vol. 36/3 (1979) pp 317-318

24 Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p 187

25 Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p 161

26 Colin Brown, Ed. *NIDNTT*, Zondervan Reference Software Version 2.8 (Word search for 'Deacon')

27 Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p 197

28 Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy/Titus*, (New International Version Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999) p 132

29 James D. G. Dunn, 'The First and Second Letters to Timothy and the Letter to Titus' *New Interpreters Bible* Vol. XI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) p 806

30 Sobosan, *The Role of the Presbyter*, p 133

# Atheist priests and other performative oxmorons

Bruce Hamill

Why would anyone create a sign like this? The answer, of course, is that it is a joke. Exactly why it is amusing takes a further moment's reflection. The first thing I notice on reading the sign is that it highlights what is banal and ignores what is significant. This is perverse enough, but it does so in a grandiose and bold manner, as if performing a public service. More interesting still, and giving depth to the humour, is the way it plays on the very concept of a sign. The being of a sign lies in its signifying something other than itself. A (narcissistic) sign that adverts to itself rather than something else is not really a sign. It purports to be a sign by taking the culturally expected form of a sign, however in adverting to itself, proves itself to be a non-sign. This non-sense is not the logical incoherence of an oxymoron. There is no contradiction in the language of the sign. However, the contradiction lies in the performance embodied in the sign and therefore I call it a performative oxymoron.

Just as the role (and being) of a sign lies in its referentiality, so the role (and being) of a minister of the Gospel, lies in their service of and witness to the gospel of God's action towards us in Jesus Christ. Inasmuch as any of us fulfil this role, it is surely a miracle of divine grace. To some extent we are all of us performative oxymorons, inasmuch as our lives distract from the Gospel rather than point others towards it.



The case of the atheist priest, however provides a particularly challenging form of the performative oxymoron. Rather than seeking to bear witness to God's action in Jesus Christ, this minister redefines "God" as a symbol of a cultural process and of cultural values. It is important to understand that this is not the modification of a concept over time, as Dominion Post columnist Ian Harris often suggests, based on a better understanding of something (namely God). It is a matter of changing the subject. Traditionally, the basis for the minister's role is that God acts towards us.

It is to this action that the minister bears witness, or tries to. If the minister points us, instead, to human cultural activity and processes this is not a matter of refining his or her ancient role but inaugurating a new role. Ministers who change the subject are in fact changing their own identity. Those who continue to bear all the cultural forms of a minister of the Gospel, just as the sign in our picture bears the form of a sign, are trading on the forms and expectations of their congregations while at the same time playing a completely different role. Unlike the sign in our picture they have no sense of irony. They see no bridge out ahead. For them it is no joke.

However, for those of us who still take seriously the traditional role of a minister, this performative oxymoron begins to look decidedly ironic. Something like the sign that grandiosely performs a public service to cultural values while ignoring the fact that the bridge is indeed out.

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## A theological fragment

Maurice Andrew

Some say that panic about global warming is a threat to economic growth. Others concede we should note the dangers of global warming but still continue economic growth. Many say that they should not have to pay for combating global warming. We are suffering from economic gluttony.

The first priority has become economic, but we all depend on creation and the first priority should be to let creation grow. This will cost money but the only way to achieve equity in paying will be to get our priorities right: first to be convinced that the growth of creation comprehensively takes precedence over human, isolated growth.

In putting this conviction first, we participate in creation, knowing that we are not doing everything. Creation also *is* and *acts* apart from us.

When we acknowledge that there is being and activity different from us, we may be opened out to recognise Being and Activity that, through us all, transcends us. We know God as creator. Exposed to ourselves as pursuing our own interests over those of other parts of creation, we are confronted by the creator creating the energy to integrate our interests. God the creator transforms our interests from isolation to comprehensiveness: "Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise the Lord from the earth!"

John Dominic Crossan, *God and Empire*. (Harper Collins: 2007)

Reviewed by Donald Feist

In previous books, Crossan has written about Jesus and Paul in the context of both Judaism, and the Roman Empire, earthing his subjects even more thoroughly with references to archaeology. In this book, he continues this approach, addressing primarily Christian Americans on the subject of how one can be a faithful follower of Jesus in an empire with much the same ambitions, and which uses essentially the same methods, as the Roman Empire.

In the first of five sections, Crossan speaks of civilization as “a cage” and “a trap”. He argues that all civilizations have been

hierarchical, unequal, imperialist and violent. This condition has long ago become normal - but is it inevitable? Are humans capable of something better? Monastic life, he claims - speaking from long reflection and personal experience in his early years - demonstrates that humans can both imagine and strive for a life where justice-inequality is the norm, rather than the injustice-as-inequality that is normative in any given civilization as a whole.

The second section, “God and the Ambiguity of Power”, ranges from Genesis 1-4, through Torah and the prophets to Revelation in support of his thesis “the Christian Bible presents the radicality of a just and non-violent God repeatedly and relentlessly confronting the normalcy of an unjust and violent civilization” (p94). The Bible “records the ongoing struggle between the normalcy of civilisation’s programme of religion, war, victory peace (or ...peace through victory) and the radicality of God’s alternative programme of religion, nonviolence, justice, peace (or ...peace through justice)” (p94).

Crossan next turns to “Jesus and the Kingdom of God”. Through a careful study of Biblical texts, Josephus and archaeological material, he demonstrates that Jesus rejected John the Baptist’s message of the imminent arrival of an avenging God. Jesus announced that the Kingdom of God was not imminent, but already present; a Kingdom not of the retributive justice of a violent God, but of the equal, inclusive justice of a radically non-violent God.

Section 4 is devoted to Paul - who “accurately and effectively rephrased Jesus’ message of the already-present

Kingdom of God in his own language for a wider world”. Appreciating how thoroughly Paul was true to Jesus’ picture of a God of radical non-violence, equality and justice is complicated for us, first by the way in which Luke modifies the facts about Paul, and secondly by the way in which the pseudo-Pauline writers (especially in Timothy and Titus) at times contradict what Paul himself says, in order to accommodate the Christian message a little more to the norms of civilization.

Crossan’s final section is “Apocalypse and the Pornography of Violence”. He begins by tracing the development of faith-based violence from the assassination of Ghandi in 1948 to the Twin Towers in 2001. Then he moves to explain why he believes the writings of Hal Lindsey on the Rapture and Armageddon must not be

lightly dismissed as religious escapism, but vigorously met with “faith-based, Bible-based and Christianity-based rejection”. (Crossan is writing for Christian Americans, but perhaps in this matter too, when the US sneezes, we are liable to catch worse than a cold). There follows a careful study of the Little Apocalypse in Mark and the Great Apocalypse of John. He writes: “It is one thing to announce, as in Mark’s Little Apocalypse, that there will be a spasmodic paroxysm of human violence before the returning Christ. It is another thing to announce, as in John’s Great Apocalypse, that there will be a spasmodic paroxysm of divine violence by the returning Christ. The First Coming has Jesus on a donkey making a nonviolent demonstration. The Second Coming has Jesus on a war horse leading a violent attack. We Christians still have to choose.”

In the Epilogue Crossan asks: “How is it possible to be a non-violent Christian within a violent Christianity based on a violent Christian Bible?” He offers no detailed answer to the “How?” But he does say: “Since we invented civilization some 6000 years ago ... we can also un-invent it. In the challenge of Christian faith, we are called to cooperate in establishing the Kingdom of God in a transformed earth. In the challenge of human evolution, we are called to Post-Civilization, to imagine it, to create it, and to enjoy it on a transfigured earth.”

There are more riches in this book than I have mentioned here. I warmly recommend it.

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### He argues that all civilizations have been hierarchical, unequal, imperialist and violent

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Karen Armstrong, *On The Bible*. (Allen and Unwin)

Reviewed by Alan Goss

In her epilogue to this book, Karen Armstrong puts her stamp on the Bible in clear and forthright terms. She is concerned that in an age when people want certainty “at the click of a mouse”, the Bible is in danger of becoming dead or completely irrelevant. It also provokes fierce argument, even hatred, and is used as a sword rather than a ploughshare.

When we study the Bible, says Armstrong, we need to bring to it a spirit of charity and compassion, for it means different things to different people and is coloured by their particular circumstances at the time. The Bible has never encouraged its readers to follow a strict party line. The modern practice of quoting proof texts to give divine authority to this or that ruling or belief is out of step with the way the Bible has been interpreted over the years.

From the very beginning, says Armstrong, the Biblical authors contradicted each other but their conflicting insights were included in the final text. Indeed the Bible’s inconsistency is a virtue rather than a vice, a point well made by the New Zealand author Kate Camp in a recent book. In discussing the Old Testament, Camp writes, “it is this very inconsistency that gives the Old Testament its strength and durability ... Instead of finding strength in its unmovable, monumental certainty, it finds it in its fluidity and flexibility. It can absorb any shock, any change, any challenge: the text is earthquake-proofed by its own elasticity.”<sup>1</sup>

In technical terms the Bible has built into it a kind of self-correcting mechanism that helps us to avoid going down any one route (belief, doctrine, orthodoxy, etc) that its adherents claim is the “only way”. Throughout her book, Armstrong takes pains to show how down through the ages Jews and Christians “have tried to cultivate an intuitive approach to scripture”. Today, she says, we are much more strident, talkative and opinionated, and need to heed Augustine’s call for charity when studying the scriptures.

Armstrong freely acknowledges that there are good things and bad things in the Bible. She deals with the topic of violence in the scriptures, which raises problems for many people. Armstrong suggests that the time is ripe for Jews,

1 *Kate’s Klassics*, by Kate Camp (Penguin Books)

Christians and Muslims to establish a counter-narrative, or “canon within a canon”<sup>2</sup>, that will stress the more peaceful and benign aspects of their respective traditions. Those texts that are violent and problematic and which have been exploited by some of their followers would be clearly identified and the reasons for their inclusion in scripture explained.

In this book, the Bible is presented as a rich and varied tapestry of colour and design with no one single message. The Jewish authors of the Bible revised the texts they had inherited and interpreted them freely to fit the circumstances of their times. It is crucial to note, says Armstrong, that reading the Bible literally is a modern development.

Karen Armstrong has written a scholarly but very readable book that is timely, balanced and wise. As she says, today the Bible and other scriptures have a bad name. They are charged with breeding violence, superstition and fanaticism and prevent people from thinking for themselves. Perhaps, like the original authors of the Bible, we need to be more free and playful in our approach to scripture, openly identifying what are the “good and bad things” within its pages, as the idea of “a canon within a canon” suggests. This would involve co-operation and understanding with the other monotheistic faiths to work out a common way of interpreting scripture and call for the exercise of tolerance, openness and charity in the process. It is worth a try.

Armstrong maintains that when people read the Bible with an open, receptive ear, they found it led them to an experience of transcendence. For Jews and Christians, it is the Word of God. However, over the past 150 years or so there has been a Biblical revolution that has greatly affected the mainline churches. It is freely acknowledged that they are under pressure, if not in a state of crisis. It is therefore vital that people be exposed to new thinking about the Bible as well as old, that they be helped to become Biblically and theologically literate. This book would be a big step along the way.

2 A term suggested by Michael Fishbane, Professor of Jewish Studies Chicago.

## Causing Trouble

In March, United States newspaper Wall Street Journal ran an article titled “Obama pastor’s sermons may violate tax laws”. If you have been following the Democratic Party’s presidential candidate nomination process, you will have heard about the influence that Barack Obama’s minister, the Rev Jeremiah Wright Jnr has had in his life. You may have also have read the extraordinary speech Obama gave in relation to this influence.

The Journal article discussed whether the church had violated federal law restricting a church’s political activity.

Those of us privileged to have visited the US and had some involvement in its faith communities will know of the heightened complexities surrounding church-state separation. I’ve often puzzled over this difference in New Zealand. We live in a far more secular country in terms of church membership and participation but debates about, for example, the public celebration of Christmas and the somewhat arbitrary nature of hymns and prayers being used in schools and at public events like Anzac services seem almost absent.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a Washington, DC, based organisation, says that it has filed 13 complaints with the IRS in the past year over alleged church politicking.

What kind of sermons would you and you and I have to preach in order to get the attention of the Inland Revenue Department? Or, perhaps now, the Charities Commission?

In a speech to the NZ Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations, Judith Tizard said that “the single biggest issue with respect to the charitable purpose test seems to be the position of advocacy. It goes without saying that charities must not be political organisations.” Tizard reminded her audience that the most enduring development in the legal understanding of charity occurred in 1891 when Lord McNaughton paraphrased a summary of charitable purposes that divided the notion of charity into four “heads”: gifts for the relief of poverty, gifts for the advancement of religion, gifts for the advancement of education and gifts for other purposes beneficial to the public, not falling under any of the preceding three heads. McNaughton’s simple summary has since become a generally accepted interpretation of charity and these long established heads provide the definition of charitable purpose used in the Charities Bill.

Just a few years ago I was involved in a rather unpleasant dispute with the local Council who had deemed some of our church activity (running a computer workshop for children from homes without computers, and supporting a small gallery aimed at exploring the relationship between faith and art) as being outside the activities of a church – and hence the buildings in which they occurred were rateable. It was a protracted and somewhat acrimonious debate that ended in a negotiated settlement.

It seems to me that we are going to need to sort out our ecclesiology. In an age hardly imagined by Lord McNaughton, the burgeoning group who identify as “no religion” on the census may well ask why there should be a tax benefit for those who support proselytising for a faith that they do not share. The Charities Commission may well be asking churches to substantiate their claims that they contribute to a general social good, and local body councils, hungry to increase their rates income, may take a much keener interest in churches engaged in activities that appear outside their view of what constitutes legitimate church activity. These issues will be further accentuated by those churches or religious organisations identified most strongly with the formation or support of political parties or engaged in strong advocacy roles (not to mention those running businesses).

On the other hand, maybe this is the future for us. Can we imagine a church being true to the Gospel and not incurring at least the attention, if not the anger, of the “authorities” or the powers and principalities. Isn’t their discomfort a sign that we are doing something right? I am troubled by what the angel says to the church in Laodecia “...because you are lukewarm –neither hot or cold - I am about to spit you out of my mouth...”

In terms of what we are about as a church, our reference point is not the local council or the government, but our faithfulness to the Gospel. There is a place of ambiguity and doubt and testing, but there is also the central challenge of being the confessing church for our times.

