



PRESTIGE LECTURE SERIES: Christian Leadership Revisited?

The role of the pastor in the future of South Africa: What difference can a good pastor make?

15 August 2012 Bloemfontein

Rev. Dr Jerry Pillay

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIBESITHI YA
FREISTATA



UFS·UV
THEOLOGY
TEOLOGIE



A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT ON THE **REV. DR JERRY PILLAY**

The Rev Dr Jerry Pillay was elected as the first President of the newly formed World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in 2010 and he is currently the General Secretary of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA). During 2004-2006 he held the office of Moderator of the UPCSA. Rev. Dr. Pillay has a wide knowledge of the Church having served, and continues to serve, as convener and member of numerous General Assembly Committees and ecumenical organisations.

Beginning from his days as a student he has had a very wide interest and involvement in ecumenical matters, church unity and Christian mission. As a pastor he formed and led ecumenical groups wherever he has served in congregations and has represented his denomination in ecumenical bodies both inside and outside of South Africa.

Currently he is UPCSA Trustee for the Council for World Mission (CWM) and serves on the Executive of the South African Council of Churches and the National Religious Leaders Forum in South Africa. In addition Dr. Pillay is leading unity talks within the Dutch Reformed family in South Africa.

Following secondary education he enrolled at the University of Durban- Westville completing his Bachelor of Theology (honours) and Master of Theology (M.Theol). By academic profession Dr. Pillay specializes in the area of missiology and New Testament Studies and he completed his PhD at the University of Cape Town.

Jerry is married to Sandra and they are blessed with three children.

<http://english.pct.org.tw/enNews56gam.aspx?strBlockID=B00292&strContentid=C201141500007&strCTID=&strDesc=Y&strPub=&strASP=enNews56gam>

THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR IN THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AFRICA:

What difference can a good pastor make?

In this lecture, I shall speak about the role of the Pastor in the future of South Africa and, in particular, what difference a good Pastor can make. In examining these questions, I shall attempt to establish the implications these will currently have for Christian leaders in South Africa.

From a historical perspective, the role of a Pastor tended to shift depending on varying circumstances and differing biblical emphases. As Christ, the Great Shepherd, is considered a Prophet, a Priest, and a King, the shepherds under Him similarly carry out those roles to varying degrees at different times in church history. At times the preaching role (prophet) became dominant; often the sacramental role (priest) became central, and, at other times, the governmental role (king) emerged as primary. Most theologians recognise that all of these roles are inherent in pastoral ministry, although many believe that the priesthood of all believers diminishes the priestly role of clergy.

In medieval times, the “government of souls” became the pre-eminent role of the pastor and, during the Reformation, ministers preached, taught, prayed, administered the sacraments, presided over the church, and cared for the needy. However, preaching the message of salvation by declaring God’s forgiveness of sin, grace and love for humankind remained the primary function of the pastor. During this period, a great interest was generated in public theology and life. Perhaps this can be observed in John Calvin’s intention to transform society, attempting to create a theocracy in Geneva.

Generally, it can be mentioned that Christian pastors have functioned in roles of believer-saint, biblical scholar, preacher-teacher, priest, liturgist, evangelist, father-shepherd, and disciple. They preached, taught, led worship, administered sacraments or ordinances, exercised oversight, cared for individuals, and served as custodians of community morals. Briefly, the pastor was regarded as God’s representative in the affairs of humankind.

The world has experienced significant changes. Social scientists tell us that a new culture emerges every three to five years and, no doubt, this has impacted on the definition of

role for pastors. Current changes exert pressure on the pastor's biblical teaching, ability to maintain integrity, and respond adequately to a radically different world which bears little resemblance to that of their Fathers. We stand at a crossroads. One path leads to effective ministry, revitalisation, and growth. The other road accommodates the value systems of a secularised culture and allows the church to slide further toward irrelevance and impotency that has reduced the impact of Christianity elsewhere. During the last half of the twentieth century, contemporary pastoral roles have emerged into a few broad categories with varying emphases: **The Fragmented Generalist** (expected to accomplish more tasks skilfully); **The Therapist** (deal with a range of personal and interpersonal difficulties that were not regarded as essentially spiritual problems); **the CEO** (expected to efficiently run the church as one would run a business), and **the Competitor** (in a desperate desire to compete successfully, pastors become media specialists, programming experts, stage directors and, even more sadly, performers). The idea is to mould the church according to the desires of the consumer: "Tailor the church service to whatever will draw a crowd. As a result pastors are more like politicians than shepherds, looking to appeal to the public rather than leading and building the flock God gave them."

These world challenges on the role of a Christian pastor have also found their way into South Africa and they have had a further impact generated from the social, political and economic challenges and changes we have encountered. South Africa is essentially a politically inclined society and for many Pastors the "activist" mentality seems to be an ingrained aspect of ministry. In the midst of our current challenges we ask, "*So, what kind of people are we going to be?*" "*What kind of Pastors is needed to address our current context in South Africa?*"

The modern day gurus on leadership tell us that what we need today is transformational leadership. Transformational leaders enhance the motivation, morale and performance of followers through a variety of mechanisms. They have a significant influence on their followers who are willing to work harder than expected because they feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect for the leader. Transformational leaders offer followers something more than just working for self-gain; they provide followers with an inspiring mission and vision and give them an identity. The leader transforms and motivates followers through her or his *idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, individual consideration and inspirational motivation*.

However, in attempting to answer the questions posed earlier, I shall focus on two significant aspects which I believe pastors need in order to engage effective ministries following the example of our Lord, Jesus Christ. They are: (1) character and (2) skills.

1. CHARACTER

Four character attributes are currently non-negotiable for Pastors: **personal integrity, spiritual vitality, common sense, and a passion for ministry that arises out of love for people.**

Personal integrity

At present, our Political leaders seem to be lacking in personal integrity and moral values. We do not have good role models that our children and youth can look up to in South Africa and we wonder why there is so much crime and violence in our country. And sadly current church problems often stem from a lack of the same. We live in a society in which we ask: "Whatever happened to Ethics and Morality?" Clergy's status and esteem have steadily eroded over the centuries and the downward spiral accelerates. Warren Wiersbe (1998: 17-18) observes our integrity crisis:

For nineteen centuries, the church has been telling the world to admit its sins, repent, and believe the gospel. Today, in the twilight of the twentieth century, the world is telling the church to face up to her sins, repent, and start being the true church of that gospel.

For some reason, our ministry does not match our message. Something is wrong with the church's integrity. Our current quest is to be relevant. We assume that relevance means preaching a watered down gospel, doing what the people do, identifying with others in their sins rather than confessing and repenting. We looked up to pastors. What seems to be the catch phrase is "we want a Pastor who is just like us" Why? Because it suits us! Since biblical times, people have been trying to cut a god according to their design (golden calf) and we have not stopped. In our quest to be relevant and to meet people where they are, Pastors need to be guarded lest they throw away the signs, symbols and significance of their role and function. Our task is to bring people onto God's agenda rather than create a God according to peoples' desire and want.

We need Pastors who can provide Spiritual Leadership. A spiritual leadership which is conditioned by the "fear of God" as described in 2 Cor. 5. The most compelling requisite in pastoral ministry is not new programs, bigger budgets, superior technology, state-of-the-art buildings, more talent, or better marketing, but authentic leadership and competence. Churches often throw money at problems, add bureaucracy, utilise technology, manoeuvre politically, and employ an array of techniques. However, our great need is for leaders, particularly clergy, anointed with the Spirit of God, equipped for every good work, consumed with holy vision and passion, and who say with integrity: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1)

John Harris (1998: 3) declares: "The lack of authentic examples by the clergy is the greatest weakness of organized religion." Jesus reserved his most severe rebuke for the Pharisees, who were plainly incompetent: "blind guides" who shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces" (Matt. 23:13). Few things hurt the church more than leaders who are learned but lifeless, politically powerful but spiritually impotent, fanatical about law but ignorant about grace.

The best leaders are nevertheless flawed. Sinful omissions and commissions corrupt every area of every life. God entrusts his treasure to "jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). Yet people inevitably evaluate the local church chiefly by the quality of its leaders. Spiritual leaders cannot be perfect, but they

must be authentic, ingenious, and able representatives of and role models for the church. Authentic leadership requires credibility, monogamy, temperance, self-control, hospitality, skill in teaching, maturity, judicious family management, and freedom from drunkenness, violence, quarrelling, and greediness (1 Tm. 3:2-7). Scripture forbids autocratic styles of leadership: 1 Peter 5:3 calls leaders to “not lord it over those entrusted to you but to serve God’s people.” Christian leaders are called to have servant hearts: “(Instead) whoever wants to become great among you must be your servants, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matt. 20:26-27). Of course, the greatest example of this is Jesus himself as expressed in Philippians 2: 1-11 where we are told “your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus Who, being in every nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.” Leaders must be examples “in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Pastors need to perceive themselves as mere servants of Christ as we lead God’s people.

Integrity embraces uncommon devotion to truth, unyielding opposition to falseness, and unvarying commitment to ethics, morality, and virtue. Integrity concerns itself with truth, not popularity. Our society idolises happiness and materialistic success, and in playing to such natural desires, some preachers major in “prosperity theology” of the so-called success gospel. They pander to fleshly appetites and gain the praise of people, but in doing so they ignore the basic principles of hermeneutics and gut the gospel of its demands. The God of the “success” preachers is not the God of the Bible or the historic church. He is a manufactured god, an idol. Lack of integrity disqualifies the most gifted individual. Without a basic congruence between the message and the messenger, the candidate for ministry cannot meet the church’s needs. *A good pastor would be a model disciple and a guardian and communicator of Truth.*

Spiritual vitality

Robert Murray McChesney (1966:282) said, “*It is not great talents that God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus.*” Spiritual vitality is knowing God and living under the authority of Scripture. Spiritually, vital leaders show a passion for ministry, contagious enthusiasm for Christ, and faithfulness in the spiritual disciplines. There is a daily practice of the presence of God – including personal worship, confession of sin, and intercessory prayer. A meaningful prayer life is essential to spiritual genuineness and effective ministry. Without the marks of deep spirituality – “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (1 Tim 6:11) – no one should seek or retain church leadership. A pastor who maintains a vital and living relationship with our Triune God will/should have a greater positive impact on our society for s/he is attempting to seek to please God rather than the self.

Common sense

Perhaps some of you might dispute my statement that you are aware of some people who tend to have spiritual vitality but do not seem to just get their ministry right. They are always upsetting members by what they say and do. That could be correct, spiritual vitality must

also be coupled with common sense: the ability to have insight, discernment, wisdom, and judgement. Common sense enables a leader to set proper priorities, order schedules wisely, choose better rather than worse alternatives, and recognise the relative value of differing matters. Clergy who lack common sense rarely succeed at anything worthwhile. Thus common sense should be considered as something as part of one's character. In this we see the need for pastors to abound in *relational aptitudes*.

Passion for ministry

At present, to many pastors, the sense of “calling” into ministry is lost; it has become a mere job. We need to look afresh at our understanding of ordination and what it means in relation to covenanting with God. The demands that are placed on congregations for material compensation by ministers speak for themselves. This, too, is the mentality of our young people who generally associate work with wealth rather than helping to build a better world. The starting point for many in ministry today is not what God is calling me to do but “how much are you offering me?” This is not to say that the latter is not important, but it certainly should not be the starting point for ministry. Our current mentality and literature emphasise managerial exploits, pragmatic strategies, technological expertise, and an incredible array of pragmatic methodologies for building churches, but rarely refer to the necessity of loving people deeply and passionately. As a result, many contemporary church members feel used rather than cared for. We should heed the call of Spurgeon (1972: 514) to preachers: *“Love your fellowmen, and cry about them if you cannot bring them to Christ. If you cannot save them, you can weep over them. If you cannot give them a drop of cold water in hell, you can give them your heart’s tears while they are still in this body.”* Ministerial departure from such a mindset hurts the church and is to our shame.

In South Africa at present numerous people are living with brokenness and pain as a result of life's experiences such as the trauma of death, divorce, relationships, sicknesses and diseases. They need prayer and the personal touch. As they shepherd and care for God's people, pastors have a great role to play in these areas. Pastors ought to have both passion and compassion in ministry. Many people leave the church when they sense a scarcity of these qualities. Of course, pastors find it increasingly difficult to care for the whole flock, but their task is to “oversee” this ministry responsibility. Pastors need to engage in *teamwork and team building*.

2. SKILLS

While good character and a Christ-like lifestyle will do much to enable pastors to make a significant difference in the shaping of South Africa, I believe that pastors need certain skills in order to make a more fruitful impact. Some of these skills include:

Scriptural expertise (theological soundness)

The Apostle Paul counsels in 2 Tim. 4:2: “Preach the Word”. It is the pastor's responsibility to acquire a “love affair” with Scripture, a passion to know God's truth and thereby to know

God. Without a sound theology, we have nothing to offer broken people except secularism and humanist advice. There are many false doctrines that are emerging in South Africa. The focus on the cross and the Resurrection is lost; churches tend to offer motivational speeches rather than preach the message of the gospel.

We need to return to the basics of simply reading the Bible and studying the Word. There are too many pastors who only read their Bibles because they are forced to prepare a sermon for Sunday. Some of my colleagues who teach theology at universities tell me that many of their students for the ministry do not know the Bible, because they are not reading. The fact is that many people in the pews are asking many challenging questions. Therefore, we better know our Bibles, lest we think that what is being quoted comes from Shakespeare.

The way we currently read our Bibles is also an important issue. Gone are the days when the preacher said it and the people simply believed it. The intellectual revolution, modern technology, social media and access to information have led to more critical thinking and engagement. Young people are generally not so interested in faith-tradition in as much as they are in faith-encounter. They want to know who this Jesus is here and now. What is he saying about evil and suffering in the world. Why do injustice, oppression and suffering persist? It is not surprising then that atheism is becoming a growing religion in the world.

All of these experiences pose a challenge to the reading of Scripture. As we try to make sense of the experiences in life and the occurrences in history, we are even called to re-read Scripture in the light of those experiences. At present, there is an endeavour to re-read Scripture from the perspective of the poor and the oppressed. This is described as one of the theological miracles of the 21st century – the resurgence of the preferential option of the poor.

One of the things we are doing in the UPCSA is to stress the participation of the poor in the decision-making processes of the Church. We have implemented the consensus model of decision-making. We are attempting to free the silent voice to speak and participate in God's movement. Scripture, too, must be interpreted in the community as the people reflect on their own experience in the light of God's Word. The text must speak to the context and the context must interpret and understand the Word. Pastors need to learn the skills of facilitating the study and engagement of the Scriptures. I am aware that in America many pastors conduct a lectionary discussion group to prepare for next Sunday's sermon. They want to know what others are thinking and experiencing and how the Scripture can be opened and revealed to them. Pastors need to know the Scriptures in order to help others to interpret and understand.

Cultural sensitivity

South African communities are constantly changing. Most churches currently have a mixture of cultural groupings. Unfortunately, not many Pastors are sufficiently skilled to deal with these new growing church communities. They continue with church as usual, often not accommodating the diversity of cultural expressions and celebrations. For example, in congregations that are culturally diverse, I have observed little or no attempt

to sing or pray in African languages or integrate a different style of worship. Pastors need training in African languages; in fact, this should be a prerequisite in theological training in South Africa. Students need to be equipped with tools for the study of any culture. Pastors in South Africa can play a vital role in bringing people of different cultural experiences together, helping them to understand and learn from each other, and even assist people to transcend cultural boundaries. Is this not what we observe in the ministry of Jesus? The church is in a unique position to encourage cultural tolerance, education and acceptance, because millions of people in South Africa from different tribes and cultural backgrounds belong to it. However, the question is: “Are we exploiting this opportunity?”

I sense that one of the greatest emerging conflicts in churches in contemporary South Africa is related to faith and culture. I have already observed in my own church how this is affecting relationships between Black and White folk and different ethnic groups. We are heading for a potential explosion and the sad thing is that we are not willing to address these issues in the church. Pastors need to rise to the challenge and create space for people from different cultural backgrounds to connect, communicate and understand their faith in Jesus Christ together. We cannot simply write off practices and beliefs as syncretistic, because the early missionaries told us so. Instead, we need to interact, dialogue and understand together as we search the Scriptures and define our realities in our varied experiences of God. Christian leaders cannot say “I don’t want to go there or do this or that”. The fact is the people we pastor are struggling with these issues as they try to make sense of their realities and life encounters. How do we enable and empower them to emerge in a new developing South Africa? We can take the “protectionist” approach and rebuke everything which we believe contradicts God’s word, or we can take the ‘dialogical approach’ and test the signs of our times to perceive and understand the new things that God may be doing among us. It is imperative for pastors to embrace this emerging role if they want to make a difference in this land and world.

Racial transcendence

The situation in South Africa is very volatile, with racial divides becoming increasingly entrenched. Pastors need to ask, “What can we do to build relationships across racial barriers?” We need to become agents of reconciliation, healing, transformation and peace. We have a very significant role to play in preaching racial tolerance, and in asserting human value and dignity. We need to use the opportunities we have within our church communities to bring people together, and to create opportunities for people to learn from each other and about each other. We need to employ biblical teaching in this area and embody what we teach as we follow the example of Jesus who transcended not only cultural but also racial barriers. It is often amazing that many pastors do not teach about these issues and, if they do talk about them, their thoughts are often negative. It seems that the irony of a new South Africa is that we are moving into deeper entrenched racial divides. I find it quite alarming that people I know who once fought for justice and the demise of apartheid in South Africa now use words and language which say otherwise. If we as pastors are doing this, then what message are we sending to the people we pastor? We need to preach a

positive message to help build this democratic South Africa. Pastors need to be *agents of hope* in South Africa.

Community engagement and development

There are many pastors and churches that are very church-centred rather than kingdom-focused. In South Africa, we need to have a broader vision of the church and its engagement with the world. In building the new South Africa, pastors need to be trained to address the needs within communities. How do we address issues of crime, violence, immorality, HIV and AIDS, unemployment, etc.? We cannot remain detached from these. We need to consider issues of poverty and address them in the light of the gospel. In this we have to recognise and assume our *prophetic* role as pastors. We need to speak out against injustice, greed, nepotism and all the evils that perpetuate themselves in our society. It is a fact in South Africa that, in spite of our new democracy, the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer. We cannot turn a blind eye to these truths. We also need to realise the need to work with other ecumenical organisations in addressing these realities. Pastors need to think of their parishes as the entire community and not create little kingdoms and empires in congregations which have little or no contact with the external environment.

In addition, we need to look into the structures and resources of the church to ask, “Are we perpetuating the evils in our society and practices that prevent ‘the fullness of life’ for others? How do we first transform the structures of the church as we seek to transform the country?”

One of the serious problems we face in South Africa is the disintegration of family life. There are many dysfunctional families as a result of divorce, death, and extended families. Pastors need skills to deal with these issues, but their starting point must be based on teaching family values, instructing and counselling *biblically* on this subject. *Pastors need to be agents of transformation – creating an “alternate society/life-style” to what we have.*

Conclusion

Pastors often underestimate the role they can play in the development of a better South Africa. We need to take pride in our “calling”, follow the example of Jesus, exercise ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, and not take our lead from secular models lest we go astray. In order to be effective pastors in South Africa, or anywhere in the world for that matter, we are going to need both character and the requisite skills to make a difference. I offer you these as some of the thoughts to ponder upon as we revisit Christian leadership and the role of pastors in the future of South Africa. I thank you!

Bibliography

- Harris, J. 1979. *Stress, Power and Ministry*, Washington, D.C.: Alban Institute
- Bonar, A.A. 1966. *Robert Murray McCheyne, Memoir and Remains*. London: Banner of Truth
- Spurgeon, C. 1972. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 59. Pasadena, Tex.: Pilgrim Publications
- Wiebbe, W.W 1988. *The integrity crises*. Nashville TN: Oliver Nelson Books



UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



UFS·UV
THEOLOGY
TEOLOGIE

www.ufs.ac.za/theology