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A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

PAUL: A PATTERN FOR PASTORS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CORINTHIAN LETTERS.

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Abstract

In this essay we look at the Apostle Paul as pastor, with particular reference to the aims which directed him. We look first at objectives in regard to individual believers and then at his aim in the context of the community of the Church.

In considering the apostle Paul as Pastor, we have to face the problem that arises from the fact that Paul did not set out to give a systematic description of the pastor or his activities and responsibilities. Indeed, he never used the word "pastor" to describe himself. Any information about the topic is given incidentally as he dealt with matters that arose day by day and must be gathered from a variety of sources, collated and interpreted.

Our first task is to establish that Paul had what we may call "pastoral concern" and discharged the responsibilities that arose from that concern. It has been argued that he was at best a reluctant pastor, e.g.

> Paul saw pastoral theology as a regrettable necessity and an interruption to his primary task of preaching the gospel.[1]

However, this is disputed. D. Tidball argues:

> Paul saw both the original proclamation of the Gospel and its continuing proclamation in the Church, as one and the same process and both as manifestations of the activity of God.[2]

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1 G. Leonard, *God Alive - Priorities in Pastoral Theology.*, (London:Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981) p. 1.

2 D. Tidball, *Skilful Shepherds: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology.* (Leicester: IVP, 1986) p. 99.

citing in support I Cor. 3: 1-9.

Schultz takes the same line:
> Paul regards the Church, not only as a missionary enterprise to be called, but also as a pastoral enterprise, to be sustained and disciplined.[3]

We must then find an answer to the question whether when Paul had planted the seed of faith, he was concerned with its nourishment and development. If we look at the record in Acts (14:22ff) we find:

> They returned to Lystra, then to Iconium and the to `Antioch, heartening the converts and encouraging them to be true to their religion. They warned them that to enter the Kingdom of God, we must pass through many hardships. They also appointed elders for them in each congregation and with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their faith.

It is clear from this that Paul was not concerned only with the initial conversion to Christ, of those who heard his preaching of the Gospel, but also with their faithfulness, their growth in the faith and any difficulties they might have to face. We may also note from his action in ordaining elders, that he saw his responsibility extending beyond a concern for individuals. It was his ambition also to build them into a community of Christ.

> If Paul's mobility enabled him to found many churches, it also caused him great concern for the converts, he left behind. Relatively unorganised, fraught with distress, with only rudimentary instruction in the faith and in tension with the larger society; they were anything but stable when he

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3 H.J. Schutz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, (SNTS, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975) p. 182 c.f. p. 225.

left them . . . . . . Therefore, the possibility was good that the communities' conditions would change when Paul left them.[4]

This clearly caused him much thought and he set it out as one of the burdens he had to bear "the responsibility that weighs upon me every day, my anxious concern for all our congregations", (2 Cor.11: 28), a clear statement of his acceptance of pastoral care. His responsibilities in this matter, he discharged on occasions by a visit as recorded in Acts 14: 21ff, quoted above or to Corinth (2 Cor.13: 1ff). On other occasions, because of other pressures, he had to exercise his pastoral care at a distance, either through delegates, for example, Timothy (1 Cor.16: 5) and Titus (2 Cor. 8: 17) or by means of correspondence.

> All Paul's letters, including Romans, were written in response to pastoral needs, although not always in response to specific pastoral problems.[5]

His writings contain, admittedly not with any systematic arrangement, a pattern of pastoral care and directions for exercising that care. He nowhere set out to write a treatise on the pastoral office and function. Instead, he wrote out of a concern for the well being of the people of God. From the expression of his thoughts as he confronted various situations, we must draw out the substance of his thinking and establish the pattern that is there.

There is another matter which merits reference. As Ernest Best points out "It is not inappropriate to inquire what his converts thought of Paul, as he fulfilled his various roles among them." [6] We may state it as follows. It is one thing for a person to regard

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4 A.J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) p. 61.
5 Leonard op cit. p. 2.
6 E. Best *Paul and his Converts*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988) p23.

himself as a pastor and try to discharge the responsibilities that spring from it, but if no people look to him as pastor, his is deluded. When the members of the Church at Corinth sought guidance on matters that were causing debate among them, it was to Paul that they looked for that guidance. "And now concerning the matters you wrote about" (1 Cor. 7:1) and we have a series of items introduced with the words "peri de" περὶ δέ:marriage and the relationships within marriage, divorce and separation, virginity (1 Cor.7); eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor.8: 1-13); spiritual gifts (1 Cor.12: 1ff); the collection for the Church at Jerusalem (1 Cor.16: 1ff). He did not confine himself to the matters the Corinthian Christians had raised, but dealt with other matters reported to him by other sources e.g. by Chloe's people, the growth of factions in the Church or gross immorality. Taking Corinth as an example, not only did Paul look on himself as pastor to the Church there, its members regarded him as their pastor. This mutual regard is crucial to the effective functioning of the pastor and when a group at Corinth became disposed to question his authority and his right to discharge such a function, he was greatly disturbed and sought to remedy the situation.

Consideration of space in this essay prevent a full consideration of Paul's work as pastor, I intend then to concentrate on his pastoral aims as these are factors determining many other matters.

When we think of Paul's aims in his pastoral work, it is convenient to divide our consideration into two sections, which are by no means mutually exclusive. We shall look first at his objectives in regard to individual church members and then draw at his aims in the context of the community life of the church.

There is no better statement of Paul's ambition for the individual church member than " to present each one of you as a mature member of Christ's body." (Col.1: 28). The clauses either side of this

> We admonish everyone without distinction, we instruct everyone in the ways of wisdom . . . . . . To this end I am

toiling strenuously with all the energy and power of Christ at work in me.

set out his determination to work for its fulfillment and his willingness to adopt any means possible for its achievement.

He sets out elsewhere a similar hope:
> So shall we all at last attain to the unity inherent in our faith and out knowledge of the Son of God - to mature manhood measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

Here he made clear what he thought of as the measure of maturity, Christ himself.

It is clear then that Paul was not content for this converts to remain as spiritual infants. He wanted to produce Christians who were able to stand on their feet, progressing to become mature spiritual adults, who were no longer unhealthily dependent on him or other Christian workers and no longer, for whatever reason, unstable in their discipleship. There is here an implicit parallel drawn between the processes of physical and spiritual growth and maturity, recent converts were like infants in their bewilderment, lack of knowledge and lack of strength. "tossed about by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching, dupes of crafty rogues and their deceitful schemes," (Eph. 4:14). If the infant child is to reach mental as well as physical maturity, he is not left just to grow, he must be nurtured. This attainment to adulthood is not necessarily tied to any particular span of years, it is a matter of being mature in the sense that,

> (a person) knows his rights and responsibilities and can assume the burdens and joys of being man or woman" [7]

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7 Jacob Firet *Dynamics in Pastoring.* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1986) p. 180.

Reid, **Paul**, *IBS* 19, April 1997

Nurture or care directed to this and may be described as:

> the help given by persons responsible for the development
> of a child which leads the child to the ability, as an adult to
> fulfill the life mandate of an adult. [8]

Translating this into more concrete terms in the setting of Paul's activities as recorded in the N.T., it meant that he set out to teach truth, to encourage faithfulness, promote right living and develop unity in the churches. Full life in Christ was threatened in various ways, by those things which added to the gospel, such as legalism, asceticism, or gnosticism, or by libertinism which subtracted from it. These had to be combatted and much space was taken up in Paul's letters as he dealt with these matters, so that much of his time and energy was taken up with pastoral concerns as he countered error with the aim of producing mature loyalty to Christ in every disciple.

We must take note that it was not Paul's aim to produce a mindless, unthinking obedience and compliance with his own ideas, rather, consistent with his aim of producing maturity, he set out to enable believers to work things through for themselves. On the occasions when he appeared to be imposing his ideas on the church, it was because he was concerned that the central truths of the gospel were at stake [9] His approach more often was to invite assent to the truth of what he said, based on what they already knew e.g.

> And now, my brothers, I must remind you . . . (1 Cor.15:1,
> c.f. Rom.15: 15; Phil 3: 15).

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8 ibid p. 181.

9 H. Von Camperhausen, *Ecclesiastical Authority and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries* (London: A & C Black, 1969) p. 51.

Only in this way would they be able to become responsible for their own spiritual condition. As J.Firet puts it in a discussion of what he call the "agogic factor" in the pastoral relationship.

> the pastor many not make choices for the other in the relationship, 'but', must bring within reach of the other's experience what true discernment is [10]

Pastoral care or nurture in the faith, must then be distinguished from indoctrination or conditioning which would take away a person's right to self determination.

It is worth noting that Paul did not use the very strong words of command ἐπιτάγη & ἐπιτάσσειν when referring to his own instructions, expressly repudiating any idea of compulsion, instead offering guidance and issuing appeals. The words διατάσσειν & παραγγέλλειν are to be found, but with one exception (Co. 4: 10), always in Corinthians and the two Thessalonian letters. It was in these letters that Paul adopted an authoritative tone because of the seriousness with which he viewed the situation there. Elsewhere, he preferred not to speak in such terms, choosing to express himself more gently, e.g.

> "If then our common life in Christ yields anything to stir the heart, any loving consolation, any sharing of the Spirit, any warmth of affection or compassion, fill up my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike." (Phil. 3:1).

And

> Accordingly, although in Christ, I might make bold to point out your duty, yet because of that same love, I would rather appeal to you (Philemon 8,9, c.f. Gal.3:17).

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10 Firet op cit p. 222 of *The Child in the Church* (British Council of Churches, 1976) p. 21.

This strategy was no mere technique on Paul's part, adopted with the hope of ensuring their more willing compliance. It was the only strategy consistent with his view of the gospel.

> Christ set us free, to be free men. Stand firm then and refuse to be tied to the yoke of slavery again. (Gal.5:1).

To substitute one set of chains for another, even if manufactured by Paul, in what he saw as the best interests of the Church, would be to deny that freedom which he saw as being of the essence of the gospel.

> Recognition of the one being nurtured as equihuman by the one nurturing, is basic to the whole process if unhealthy domination and dependence are to be avoided[11]

For all his apostolic status and authority and his part in founding a church, he did wish to set himself above it and its members or behave in an authoritarian way towards them. To do so would be to render him guilty of not giving them the respect that was their due and would also tend to prevent them from achieving that freedom and maturity in Christ that was his objective. He could not gain maturity on their behalf, nor endow them with it, but he could encourage and try to help them towards it, for always.

> Personhood (or maturity) is an achievement in so far as a person is created by his own free decisions and won against sufferings and disadvantages.[12]

We note then in Paul's concern for the development of the Christian, his stress on the co-operation or participation by the Christian in his own development and his responsibility for it: "You must work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil.2:12). The pastor must not seek to accept a responsibility

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11 ibid p. 220
12 B.C.C. *Child in the Church*   p. 22.

which ultimately is not his, nor ever can be, but must aim for the situation to develop, so that he can step out of the picture and leave the person who is the object of his concern standing on his own feet, mature and free [13]

It must be stressed that this freedom is not absolute; independence may mean independence from the pastor, but never independence from Christ or freedom from Christian obligations:

> You, my friends, were called to be free men, only do not turn your freedom into license for your lower nature, but be servants to one another in love. (Gal. 5:13).

From a compulsory service to sin, Paul saw Christians as called to a voluntary service of Christ and others. Freedom for him was not merely an independence from certain things, but also an independence for others [14] and dependence on Christ [15]

The realisation that independence for the Christian means interdependence leads to an appreciation that no-one exists in isolation, but in a network of relationships, that is, in some form of community, whether it be good or bad, effective or ineffective. Being in a community does not obliterate the individual. On the contrary it provides the context for the individual life, personal growth and development takes place within community [16] This figured largely in Paul's thinking. He made it clear that progress towards maturity is not an individual matter, but takes place within the fellowship of the Church, for example, in Ephesians 4: 1-16. But there is more than this. He was concerned also for the progress of the Church towards maturity, as a body it had to make progress.

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13 Firet op cit p. 220.
14 R. Banks *Paul's Idea of Community*. (Paternoster. Exeter 1980 p. 175.
15 H. Taylor *Tend my Sheep.* (T.E.F. Study Guide 19. London: S.P.C.K., 1983) p. 125.
16 B.C.C. *Child* p. 33.

His objective certainly was the building up of each believer into the life of Christ, but this involves:

> an integration of the individual into the life of a Christian community and a building up of the whole church into the fullness of Christ.[17]

> so shall we all at last attain the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ (Eph.4:13).

In his evangelistic activity, Paul did not simply issue an individualistic challenge to give up vice, but aimed at forging a community of those who responded to the proclamation.[18]

There are two aspects to be considered in this. There is first, the mutual support which members owed to each other and secondly, the nature of the community which was in Paul's mind. It must not be overlooked that these two aspects are closely related. The depth of the members commitment to each other will influence the nature of their fellowship and the depth of fellowship will influence how and to what extent they care for each other.

> The Christian fellowship is a caring community; the obligation to build one another up in the faith is laid on all Christians. [19]

Writing in 1982, Frank Wright applauds what he sees as the move away from the idea that pastoring was the preserve of the clergyman, priest or minister, whose task it was to:

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17 ibid p. 34.

18 Malherbe op cit p.11.

19 Malherbe op cit p.11.

shepherd people through the chances and changes of this mortal life, and the laity as the objects of this pastoral care 20

The examples he gives show that the greater part of pastoral care and support has been given by unordained church members throughout the years. This is in keeping with the mind of Paul. Writing to the church at Thessalonica, he commanded:

> Admonish the careless, encourage the faint-hearted, support the weak and be very patient with them all. (I Thess.5:14).

This directive was addressed to all the church members and so makes clear that pastoral concern was to be expressed in the mutual caring of the members for each other and had not yet been delegated to a "Pastor". By the time Ephesians was written, it was recognised that

> while all must care for one another, some, whose Christian experience, spiritual gifts and position in the Christian community so qualify them, are especially charged with Christian oversight and pastoral care [21]

But Paul nowhere exempts any members of the church from the obligation to love one another and to express that love in caring.

In the Church at Jerusalem, careful attention was given to "the fellowship" (τῇ κοινωνία) (Acts 2: 42). This word and its associates include the idea of mutual care and of that care expressed in a practical way. The root idea of κοινωνία is "taking part with someone in something" [22] In this there are two possible

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20 F. Wright *Pastoral Care for Lay People.* (London: S.C.M.. 1982) p. 8.

21 R.E.O. White op cit. c.f. Eph.4: 11f.

22 Ralph P.Martin *The Family and the Fellowship* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1979) p. 36. c.f. Hauch *TDNT* Vol.3 p. 805.

stresses, either on the "with someone" or on the "in something". We may lay emphasis on the unity of the participants in the activity, but for our immediate interest, the stress falls on the "sharing with". For example, Paul praised the κοινωνία of the Macedonian Christians (2 Cor.8: 4) and urged the Corinthians to follow their example and to "give a literal contribution to their need to the general good" (2 Cor.9: 13). C.K. Barrett offers two possible explanations of ἁπλότητι τῆς κοινωνίας, "the integrity of your fellowship" or "your participation in the collection" [23] The context makes it clear that God will be glorified, not simply because the Corinthians were prepared to share their possessions, but because of the quality of Christian living they demonstrated by doing so. It does not refer to charity which extended beyond the Christian society, but to the mutuality of love, which is part of the Christian κοινωνία and which may be demonstrated in other ways than by sharing money [24] Mutual care, accepting responsibility for each other was for Paul an essential quality of Christian society and his vision was of pastoral care exercised in the activities of all members, whether in support, encouragement or even discipline.

There was, and is, an element of risk involved in such procedures, but it was a risk that Paul was prepared to take, even with the troublesome Corinthians. In the important matter of exercising discipline on one who had caused pain and trouble to Paul and the Church, Paul was content to have the reproof or punishment delivered by the Church (2 Cor. 2: 5-11). The decision about the form of action was taken ὑπὸ τῶν πλειόνων meaning either "the main body", "the majority", or even" a considerable number"[25] Their action displayed the mature wisdom which it was Paul's object to have developed in believers individually and as a body.

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23 C.K. Barrett *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians. A Commentary*, (London: A & C. Black, 1973) p. 241.
24 ibid.
25 C.K. Barrett, Comm. Op. Cit. p 91.

The failure to maintain even the appearance of unity, mutual respect and care, scandalised Paul when he heard that one member of the Church at Corinth was suing another in the civil court of a pagan city (1 Cor. 6:1-11). There were several aspects which caused him concern, not least the lack of faith, in each other's integrity, which led them to take the dispute outside the fellowship and entrust it to "pagan law courts". These members at least did not share his exalted view of the church and its members, who were to judge the world, but where deemed incompetent to settle trivial issues. Each Jewish community had its own machinery to settle civil disputes within its membership; "the least that could be expected of a Christian church was that it shared similar arrangements if necessary"[26]. If the situation had become so serious that recourse to any form of legal procedure was necessary, this represented a failure in Christian living, which had allowed malicious attitudes to develop. He reminded them that "the unjust" would not come into possession and of some of the possessions they had given up, but they had not given up wrangling. Instead of being so involved, they should have been prepared to suffer wrong than to cheat or persecute other Christians. To sum up in two points, Christians should not be involved in law suits with other Christians, but if this standard proved impossible to reach, cases between Christians should be tried by Christians.

Paul had yet another concern for the church. It was his desire to develop and maintain purity in it. There was an element of this in 1 Cor.6: 1-11, examined above, but he gave it an added intensity in 2 Cor.11 1-3 where again the corporate life is a factor also. Here he adopted the figure used in the O.T., of Israel (Isaiah 54: 5; 62:5 etc), as the Bride of God and sets himself as the one who had betrothed her in Christ. C.K. Barrett [27] followed by M.J. Harris [28]

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26 (26)F.F. Bruce. *First and Second Corinthians*. (The New Century Bible Commentary. London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1971 p. 59.

27 C.K. Barrett, Comm. Op. Cit. p. 272.

suggests that because of his part in "begetting the Corinthian Christians", Paul pictured himself as the father of the bride, but surely F.F. Bruce [29] is closer to the thought when he draws the comparison between Paul and the παρανύμφιος , "the bridegroom's friend" who among other duties was responsible for guaranteeing the chastity of the bride. He finds a parallel in John the Baptist's depiction of his role "the bridegroom's friend who stands by" (John 3: 29) "I am afraid (v.3) this is part of the pastoral burden he bears (2 Cor.11: 28) and part of his motive in writing was to do all he could to keep the church pure and chaste, a fit bride for Jesus Christ.[30]

The issues of fidelity and infidelity to Christ as they will appear at the time of presentation, the parousia were mainsprings of Paul's thought and activity. In this as in so many matters the eschatological element added a new dimension to the intensity of his feelings, so that he could refer to it as θεοῦ ζήλῳ. It was not jealousy about his own status that moved him, but concern that the purposes of God were being frustrated. This jealousy focused on the whole church at Corinth as the Bride.

We may summarise Paul's pastoral aims then. For the individual believer his hope was that each would attain to maturity in Christ, able to take his place in the church, the Body of Christ, and contribute to its life and functioning by sharing in that life and sharing his own life and love with the other members. For the church, he hoped that as a body it might develop in unity and mutual love and care.

Let us set this alongside modern pastoral thinking. For example, a modern definition of pastoral care many be offered:-

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28 M. J. Harris. *Expositors' Bible Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976. Vol. 10 p. 385.
29 F.F. Bruce Comm p. 234.
30 C.K. Barrett Comm Op. Cit., p. 273.

> Helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed towards the healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling of troubled persons, whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns [31]

This has received support and acceptance from other writers [32], and may be taken as representative of much modern thought. The object of pastoral care would appear to fall within the sweep of Paul's purpose and may be assumed to represent aspects of the outworkings of his concern, but two thoughts appear to diverge from his pattern. Their concern is restricted to "troubled persons", and in their discussion of the definition they offer, they go on to say "soul care always deals with troubled persons" [33]. Paul would surely have differed. From his point of view, as long as people are on the Christian pilgrimage, they need a pastor, even if their lives are apparently trouble free. His view of pastoral care always includes the idea of nurture. Even a healthy child needs nurture.

Another difficulty may arise from the phrase "representative Christian persons." In their discussion Clebsch and Jackle incline to a preference for "authorised pastors" [34], but concede that:-

> unordained and officially uncommissioned persons can also bear the authority of the Christian faith to troubled persons.[35].

This is a concession, but for Paul, pastoral care was the expression by members towards each other of the love they have found in Christ.

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31 W.A. Clebsch and C.R. Jackle *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*. (New York: Harper, 1967) p. 4.
32 e.g. F. Wright op cit p. 23 c.f. Seward Hilmer *Preface to Pastoral Theology*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958) pp. 89ff.
33 op. cit p. 5.
34 op. cit p. 4.
35 ibid.

Reid, **Paul**, *IBS* 19, April 1997

The focusing on "troubled persons" i.e. individuals, blots out of their view any consideration of the church as a body. The two aspects, individual care and the nurture of the body, must be held in balance and this would lead to an improved understanding of the work of pastoring today.

Let the last word be from Ernest Best [36]:

> We often thank God for Paul the theologian and Paul the missionary pioneer. I believe we can also thank God for Paul the pastor, who so demonstrated his care that his churches grew, and left an example so that the church continues to mature."

T. S. Reid.

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[36] op. cit. p. 161.