



Introduction

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At the heart of the mission of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary is the task of preparing faithful and effective leaders for the church. Beyond the practical, goal-oriented benefits of preparing for ministry, the opportunity simply to dedicate an extended period of time to study of Scriptures, the history and theology of the church, and the art and skills of ministry represents a precious gift for those who take it. The chance to sit with the gifted scholars and teachers of the church and to discuss the issues that matter most in life—such an opportunity is something sacred, exciting, and much to be desired.

It is with such a sense of awe and excitement that I sit with the gifted scholars and teachers of the church represented in this volume. In this book one finds some of the most important conversations and issues facing the church today. Here we find the story of debates and discussions among scholars and teachers over the last forty years or so regarding the nature and authority of pastoral ministry. They write of attempts to articulate and understand the respective traditions, values, and perspectives important to our sense of heritage and identity, whether in the Old Mennonite tradition, the General Conference Mennonite tradition, or more broadly, in conversation with other theological traditions.

Here we find insight into why we are the way we are. Here we find explanations for puzzling comments about pastoral ministry as we come to understand the historical and theological journeys behind them. Here we find constructive practical theology—attempts to articulate for this time and place what God calls us to as pastors. Here we find bold proposals for rethinking some of the church's answers in the past, even as we are encouraged to take that past seriously. Here we find critical reflection on how we participate in God's mission in the world—not only as disciples, but also as ministers, as

representatives of God to others. Here we come to the heart of the matter.

The Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is at its best when it understands its own history within its broader historical and theological context and when it values the contributions of that history without fossilizing it—perpetuating it for its own sake—or devaluing the history and contributions of the broader church of which it is a part. Tradition has value only insofar as it remains in a living, dynamic relationship with the changing realities of life. Perhaps the only thing worse than maintaining a tradition simply because it is there is abandoning a tradition because one never learned it or understood it or appreciated its dynamic tension with alternative traditions.

This book is a picture, expression, reappropriation, and extension of that tradition, both in its attempts to rethink and critically assess that theological heritage and in its articulation and reappropriation of that heritage for a new era. This book is an exercise in doing what Jesus said scribes trained for the reign of God do; we bring out of our treasure both what is new and what is old (Matt. 13:52).

Ross Bender, dean of AMBS from 1964 to 1979, introduces the subject matter with the story of the Dean's Seminar, an extended series of conversations among AMBS faculty about the New Testament theology of ministry and its implications for the church today. At the heart of these conversations were debates between "functionalism" and "office"; between the supposed early Paul and the late Paul; between ministry understood as the task of all God's people, who are individually gifted as equal members of Christ's one body, and ministry understood as vested in a special way in the office of the pastor as a seminary-trained professional. Were the advocates of the functional view really taking the "early Paul" more seriously, or were they unconsciously and illegitimately led to privilege functionalism under the influence of the egalitarian antiauthoritarianism of the 1960s? Is not the "late Paul" canonical too—and perhaps even more relevant and important for an age when ministry requires tending to the maintenance of institutions?

The conversations in the Dean's Seminar were passionate. In the end, the seminar concluded that "the Christian ministry is present in all its theological fullness wherever the people of God is gathered and

its members are obedient in the exercise of their gifts” (see pages 17-18 below). This essentially functionalist perspective did not enjoy universal support, however, and other voices in the church—including those of John Esau, Henry Poettcker, Rod Sawatsky, and Erick Sawatzky—continued to raise serious questions about the adequacy of this conclusion. They saw a disempowered pastorate, ineffective leadership, and the prospect of a church adrift without authority vested in designated leaders. How many times has the church, in the name of the priesthood of all believers or of the diverse giftedness of the Spirit, actually succeeded only in disempowering its leadership?

In his essay, Ross Bender explores the potential common ground between these seemingly opposed views of pastoral ministry. Bender suggests that one fruit of these continued conversations was the 1992 document written and adopted by the AMBS faculty, *Ministerial Formation and Theological Education in Mennonite Perspective*, which is reproduced as Appendix 1 in this volume. (For an articulation of how this understanding of ministerial formation and theological education has informed AMBS’s approach, see Appendix 2: “Theological Education and Curricular Design at AMBS.”)

Despite the varying convictions and perspectives of twentieth-century Mennonite scholarship about the continued validity or helpfulness of the concept of the priesthood of all believers, there was a broad consensus that sixteenth-century Anabaptists were innovators in this area and broadly practiced the concept. In his essay on anticlericalism and pastoral identity among the Anabaptists of the Lower Rhine, Karl Koop questions the basis of this consensus. Citing the work of Marlin Miller, John D. Roth, and others, Koop notes that appeals to the priesthood of all believers were actually rare among sixteenth-century Anabaptists and that evidence exists of both anticlericalism and high esteem for the ordained ministry. Koop’s thesis is that although the laity played a heightened role in Anabaptist circles, most Anabaptists “affirmed the importance of genuine and qualified leadership.”

Koop traces the commonalities between the anticlerical spirit of the Middle Ages and the anticlericalism of the Anabaptists, suggesting that the latter was not a theological innovation of the Anabaptists, but rather was a theological expression of a broader phenomenon known already in the late Middle Ages. Furthermore, this impulse

was not fundamentally anticlericalism as such, but rather an impulse toward the reform of the clergy. The Kempen confession demonstrates that the language of anticlericalism actually exhibits a high view of congregational leadership. The theological burden of these Anabaptists was not some new proposal that congregations can or should operate without an ordained leadership; they desired that clergy be “true shepherds” rather than “worldly preachers.”

Walter Sawatsky argues that the issues of leadership and authority must be addressed with a broader geographical, historical, and ecumenical awareness. Questions about leadership and authority tend to be reductionistic in their focus on the individual. They deserve a broader perspective. Shifting patterns in the role and practice of the ministry in the Mennonite traditions owe as much to the influence of business and societal changes as they do to whatever theological innovations the sixteenth-century Anabaptists made. Sawatsky’s article is an argument for the value of sociology for understanding our theological debates. More specifically, he argues for appropriating Christian history in fullness—without the picking and choosing that sometimes characterize sectarian historiography—and for seeing our own history with its praxis and theology of ministry in interplay with other Christian traditions, Protestant and Catholic.

Mennonites have a congregationalist polity; but that says little. The quality of a congregationalist polity must be assessed in terms of how it maintains the links connecting leadership, a high view of church, and church as applied to all of life. Except for the Vietnam protest era in America, Mennonites have consistently held a high view of the charismata of ministry, and have observed rituals setting some apart for such ministry. However, Mennonites today need to grant more place to an apostolate or episcopate, practicing greater accountability to the whole church of Jesus Christ and its charismata by taking a long look at our history, especially in light of current episcopal and presbyterian church efforts to strengthen congregationalism in their churches.

Our theological discourse is poorer for the various ways in which it has been reductionistic. Many considerations have been ignored or largely unexplored, such as the ways in which migration—whether from the eastern United States to the Midwest, or from Russia to Canada—has influenced our patterns and structures of leadership. At

the heart of the matter, concludes Sawatsky, is the task of incarnating Christ in a sinful world—a task never forgotten, yet never fully realized by the church. The role of the minister in that task is to exercise “authority and power consciously with clear accountability.”

One would expect that a congregation would respect and take seriously the words of a pastor who speaks the Word of God to the congregation. But how does a congregation understand the authority of its pastor? What is—or should be—the role of “teaching authority” in the Mennonite church? Gayle Gerber Koontz picks up this question and addresses it in the context of the historical relationship between ecclesiology, authority, and ministry in the broader church since the Reformation.

Although the word of the prophet may be respected when it speaks to a community’s need to address a contingent situation in response to the Spirit, the authority of the other kind of spoken word—the authority of tradition, received wisdom, and fidelity to a community’s origins—has not fared as well in the Mennonite Church. This suspicion of tradition may stem from the fact that Anabaptism originated in protest against the Roman Catholic Church and against Luther’s consolidation of power and authority in response to the chaotic antiauthoritarian impulses of the Peasants’ War. Our particular story is precious both because it is *our* story and because it represents a gift to the broader church. But with the ecclesiological strengths of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition come some weaknesses. The Mennonite Church has been weakened by its lack of “appreciation and respect for the rightful authority of the spoken word that appeals to the memory and wisdom of the wider Christian church in interpreting the gospel.” It is time to recover that appreciation and respect.

What is needed is not blind trust in the “right” people, but rather renewed appreciation for the gifts of knowledge and expertise in the Christian tradition. In particular, “congregations have special responsibility to call pastors with competence in two specific areas—ability to respectfully interpret the wisdom of the historical church in the process of looking toward the future, and commitment to and ability in relating to Christians of other denominations.” In short, the Mennonite Church needs pastors who are knowledgeable about and open to the Spirit of God moving in the people and the theological

heritage of other traditions, who are able to see ways in which the history of theological discourse (whether that of Augustine or Menno Simons) may elicit wisdom for today's church.

In his essay, Perry Yoder argues that "that the church's failure to understand the pastoral role as a teaching role is a serious conceptual flaw, with deleterious consequences for congregations and for the larger church." The teaching ministry of the church is usually associated with "Christian education," which in turn is usually associated with Sunday school, and Sunday school with children and youth. In most of our congregations, Christian education (to say nothing about the children and youth themselves!) has a lower status than do pastoral care or ministerial leadership. Combine this perception with demands that compete for the pastor's time, especially on a Sunday morning, and it is easy to see why many pastors fail to take seriously their role as teachers.

Yoder traces the role of teaching in the Old Testament and in the ministry of Jesus. He concludes that leading the people of God requires connecting canon, community, and commentary—a three-cornered dialectic that can be maintained only when ministers take seriously their teaching role. Yoder does not argue that *only* an ordained pastor can fulfill the role of teacher and interpreter, but he does argue that the pastor has a special calling and responsibility to take that role seriously. Today's church will be both healthier and more faithful as pastors take up the challenge to provide pastoral care in the form of teaching. Yoder calls us to recover, embrace, honor, and exercise the ministry of teaching.

Jacob Elias reflects on his own call to the ministry—and how the debates of the 1960s and 1970s in the Dean's Seminar did and did not affect his understanding of the ministry and of his role as minister. He says, the "functional or charismatic understanding of ministry never seemed to sidetrack me from my sense of calling to the pastorate or undermine my authority to fulfill my pastoral responsibilities." Elias's experience would seem to confirm the potential for developing an understanding of ministry that holds the positive features of both functionalism and office without dichotomizing them or resorting to reductionism.

An area of broad consensus among German Protestant biblical scholars of the twentieth century was that one could trace a linear

development in the early church from a charismatic, functionalist understanding of ministry and giftedness, seen in the life and teachings of Jesus and more clearly in the writings of Paul (the “early Paul”), to the structured institutionalism and legalism of the post-Pauline writings (the “late Paul”). This development within the first century C.E. was usually seen as a “fall” from the openness of grace and charisma to the dull legalism of institution and hierarchy. The phrase “early Catholicism” served as a shorthand expression for this way of describing these changes in the early church.

Elias describes the historical development of this understanding in the twentieth century, along with more recent critical assessments of it. Today’s scholars are more likely to recognize that the first-century story was more complex—that signs of office and institutionalism existed in the earliest periods (cf. Phil. 1:1) *and* that egalitarian expressions of the giftedness of all are found in the supposedly post-Pauline writings (cf. Eph. 4). If a new consensus is emerging, it is that “official and charismatic understandings of ministry coexisted from the beginning.” This emerging consensus has potential for informing the functionalism vs. office debate.

If one moves beyond the usual practice of focusing on the “titles” Paul used of leaders in the church to asking what metaphors or similes he employed in describing himself or others as ministers, one finds a remarkable variety of images, many of which reflect “tender family themes of vulnerability, nurture, and encouragement,” including much maternal imagery. Elias concludes that whatever the forms of ministry or church structure, faithful ministers serve the gospel of Jesus Christ by being “servant-leaders affirmed and set apart by the community of faith for a ministry of proclamation and nurture and care.” No debate about offices or structures need detract from such a ministry.

My essay examines the use of the word *ordain* in the King James Version to translate a wide variety of Hebrew and Greek verbs. I consider whether the political and theological context in the Church of England in the seventeenth century may have influenced the translators’ use of the word *ordain*. I conclude that the sheer variety of Hebrew and Greek words behind the word *ordain* in the King James Version demonstrates the fluidity of what we call ordination. In fact, there was no concept of ordination in the New Testament—at least in the way that Catholic and Protestant churches use the word today.

Appeals to “office” in the free church tradition may depend unwittingly on the theological and political interests of King James I in his seventeenth-century English context. Finally, caution is warranted when one attempts to articulate a biblical theology of ordination based on any English version of the Bible without reference to the original languages.

In his essay, Ben Ollenburger explores the ways in which the offices and/or functions of pastor and prophet might be coterminous, overlapping, or opposing. He begins by contrasting the pastoral and prophetic offices as broadly understood in the church. For instance, pastors speak primarily to an *internal* audience; prophets speak primarily to an *external* audience. However, a closer look at the biblical record shows that prophets too spoke primarily to an internal audience—even when delivering oracles against the nations. Prophets were essentially poets, interpreters, and theologians who proclaimed and taught the Word of God to God’s people. That is not so different from what pastors are called to do.

Some caveats remain, of course. The pastoral office is an office. Many prophets had no office, but spoke as God directed, through their own artistry and intellect. The congregation has a responsibility to do theology by testing and weighing the words of prophets—indeed, the people are to weigh any proclamation. Just as the prophets of both testaments did, pastors today address the community of faith on God’s behalf as ambassadors of God’s contested sovereignty. Our understanding of the ministry of the pastor will be greatly enriched if the biblical role and function of the prophet are sought and embraced.

Like Ollenburger, Ted Koontz sees this prophetic role as directed first of all internally. Much serious moral reflection needs to be done by the church on such issues as access to health care. The pastor has a vital role as preacher, teacher, and prophet in the congregation’s discernment, proclamation, and embodiment of the implications of the gospel for key issues facing people in today’s world. Neither discernment nor proclamation nor embodiment will suffice by itself; the clarity and strength of the church’s witness depend on the integration of the three.

Mennonites have historically been viewed as prototypical of the “Christ against culture” type of H. Richard Niebuhr’s famous typology—and not without reason. Mennonites have generally seen

themselves as a separate people—a people defined by voluntary discipleship called to embody a different model, a different way of being from that of the world. Nonconformity was once seen as an essential expression of faithfulness among some Mennonites.

Two observations call into question the continued usefulness or adequacy of separation or nonconformity as the primary stance of the church in relation to society. First, times have changed. Mennonites have to a large degree made themselves at home in North American culture. Second, neither complete separation from nor identification with culture is really an option for any body of believers that claims the name of Christ. We all accept certain characteristics of modern culture, reject others, and debate yet others. Mennonites do not object on moral or ecclesiological grounds to driving on the right side of the road or attending an orchestra concert. Because of its inevitably ambiguous relationship with society and culture, the church must take up the challenge of ongoing moral discernment: it must sort out values, messages, technologies, and practices in order to “determine which are in harmony with God’s reign and which oppose it.” Here the prophetic role of the pastor becomes central. “Prophetic leadership is crucial if the church is to engage its surrounding culture critically (analytically, carefully, and thoughtfully, rather than reflexively).”

Picking up on Koontz’s point that the church is inevitably implicated in the life of the world and never really separated from it, Mary Schertz proposes that the Mennonite Church embrace more fully and intentionally the call to public leadership as an expression of Christian ministry. Whether as a result of our history of persecution, our fascination with our superior humility, or our insecurities, we have failed to make ourselves available to the world through public ministry. Schertz suggests that this failure is nothing less than a failure to love the world as God has loved it. She calls the church to embrace this more public role in our communities—not because we despair of or shrink from the task of signifying God’s reign as the people of God, but precisely *as* signifying the reign of God in the world—and because God so loved the world. Ironically, perhaps the truest nonconformity to the world lies in loving it as God loves it.

Willard Swartley addresses another neglected aspect of pastoral ministry, that of healing. Despite the centrality of healing in the Gospels and the near equation of healing with salvation in the

teachings and ministry of Jesus, neither today's church nor most ministerial candidates expect the gift or ministry of healing to be high on the list of qualifications for pastoral ministry. It is strange that the question "Are you a healer?" is seldom if ever asked in interviews with pastoral candidates. Swartley encourages pastors to take up this ministry and to embrace "healer" as an important part of their self-identity. He further calls on seminaries to include—if not organize their curriculum around—healing, in our preparation of people for congregational ministry.

In his essay, Arthur Paul Boers addresses both the identity and the task of the modern pastor. The task of thinking critically about God's action in and love for the world is best understood as the task of "spiritual theology." Spiritual theology is theoretical, personal, *and* formational. It is not just an intellectual discipline; it emphasizes pilgrimage, relationship with God, spiritual discipline, community, practical discipleship, justice, humility, and repentance. Many metaphors have been offered as the primary metaphor for understanding the role of the pastor. Some of these metaphors derive from the Bible and some have been identified as particularly important for our time in the essays of this book. Boers considers the adequacy of several of these metaphors to encompass the task of the pastor. Each is found wanting in some way. The alternative proposed by Boers is that we see pastoring as "spiritual orienting or orientation," with the pastor adopting the identity of a "spiritual orienteer." The pastor is one who, in all of the tasks of ministry, whether in preaching, in administration, or in crisis counseling, seeks always to orient the congregation—including himself or herself—to God.

June Alliman Yoder explores one of the often ignored tasks of the Christian minister: that of listening. Drawing on the insights of communication theory, Yoder maintains that communication is a complex task and that careful, thoughtful, intentional, attentive listening lies at the heart of it. Even when it comes to preaching—that stereotypical activity of the pastor—Yoder maintains that the only effective preacher is the good listener. For the pastor, "listening, or paying attention, is the single most important form of ministry and the activity that most defines the pastoral role."

The role of the pastor in ministry requires listening for God's call and listening for God's word. When it comes to preaching well,

one must listen to the biblical text, to the congregation, to scholars who have studied the text, and to the broader historical and social context in which a congregation finds itself. Even during the delivery of the sermon, the preacher must attend to the Spirit of God, listen to his or her own sermon, and watch for the communication of the congregation. Finally, the pastor must listen to his or her own self, cultivating the self-awareness necessary for self-care. Few ministry tasks do not call for significant quantities of listening and sharp listening skills.

In her essay, Rebecca Slough explores pastoral ministry as an improvisational art. Anyone with experience in pastoral ministry knows that no manual exists that can say, "In such a situation, a pastor should always do this or say that." Effective ministry depends on one's knowledge and on one's abilities to read ministry situations and listen to the improvisational leading of the Spirit. Circumstances, situations, and people themselves are too complex for a formulaic approach to ministry. Thus, some improvisation is necessary in any effective pastoral interventions.

In true improvisation one does not begin with a blank slate. Improvisation requires, in fact, both knowledge and a number of advanced interrelated skills. Like good jazz musicians, pastoral ministers improvise on the basis of knowledge of their art. Pastors' improvisation rests on knowledge of the Bible and the story of our faith, as well as on the skill of thinking critically about theology and ethics. They need to have a whole range of ministry art skills from which to draw. They need to know their people, their community of faith. And like good jazz musicians, they need self-knowledge and self-awareness.

The development of pastoral counseling as a specialized activity and even separate profession has been a mixed blessing to the church, writes Daniel Schipani. On the positive side, pastoral counseling has empowered pastors to tend carefully to their skills of listening helpfully and constructively and to embrace this function as an important part of pastoral ministry. On the negative side, pastoral counseling has often been seen as an illegitimate stepchild of psychotherapy in which pastors pretend to act like "the professionals" but know that they are not. It has often measured itself against the standards of professional psychotherapy rather than by the measures of effective ministry.

When pastoral counseling is removed from the congregational context, pastors feel disempowered as counselors and neglect the rich resources of wisdom available in the Bible, the Christian tradition, and the community of faith. Pastoral counseling works best when it is understood and practiced as an expression of pastoral ministry, not when it is understood and practiced as a form of psychotherapy that can afford to ignore the wisdom traditions of the community of faith. Schipani seeks to reenvision pastoral counseling. It should be viewed, practiced, and taught pastorally; contextualized ecclesialogically; centered on Jesus Christ as the Wisdom of God; grounded in Scripture; viewed, practiced and taught as a unique form of the (re)creative process guided by the Spirit; and oriented toward the reign of God.

Much is at stake. Pastors who embrace the call to counsel are agents of change and growth toward the realization of the reign of God in their communities. But do pastors generally embrace the task of being change agents? Is being a “servant leader” compatible with being a change agent? By what authority can a pastor embrace such a role?

Nelson Kraybill explores issues of power and authority in his essay. Though some Christian leaders have tried to pretend that power and authority do not—or should not—exist in the church, these dynamics are a normal and necessary part of church life. Nevertheless, the New Testament church conceived of power and exercised authority in ways that departed from patterns of the surrounding Roman imperial culture. Systems theory has taught us that the effective leader is one who can effectively self-differentiate while maintaining relationships. Examination of the New Testament shows that it is full of leaders who did just that. The call to leadership in the New Testament is a call to a noncoercive change agency. Thus, both conflict management and vision setting are at the heart of empowering leadership.

In the final essay, Erick Sawatzky reflects on the changing patterns and conceptions of pastoral ministry in the last half of the twentieth century. He suggests that the rapid changes toward egalitarianism that characterized the third quarter of the century owed more to changes in the larger society than to more accurate readings of the New Testament. Many churches and pastors at the end of the twentieth century found themselves confused about and ambivalent toward

leadership in general and toward the office of pastoral minister in particular. What is needed is a renewed authority in the office, an authority borne both by competence and by effective and empowering relationships.

Effective pastoral leadership is more than simply a matter of *doing*; it is also a matter of *being*. Competence in performing tasks is important, but so is the integrity of the person in the office. More than simply *doing* a prescribed set of tasks, *being* a pastor also entails filling a role that is larger than the sum of its parts: location, leadership, authority, and professionalism. It is not as though there is any one thing that only the pastor can do; rather, the uniqueness of pastoral ministry lies in the particular confluence of God's call, personal integrity, the position itself, and competence to do the work. Such a calling is one to be embraced by those called and honored by congregational members.

Is it possible to reform our understanding of ministry in a way that recognizes the particular calling and giftedness of pastors while empowering the laity to exercise their own gifts as well? Can the church believe in and practice the priesthood of all believers without the anticlericalism and disregard of the gifts of leadership and its authority that has often accompanied it? Is it possible to affirm and esteem the particular gifts and calling of the pastor in a way that honors both the individual and the office without dishonoring or disempowering the members of the body?

The debates between those who emphasize the priesthood of all believers and those who maintain the value of a trained, professional pastorate have been energized in part by fears about what might happen to the church if their side was neglected. The functionalists fear that the validity and value of the spiritual gifts of all God's people will be denied or ignored, while those who emphasize the "office" fear that "priesthood of all believers" language will disempower the pastor. History suggests that both fears have some basis in fact. History also shows that the most effective congregations have not been those that have sought a "balance" on this matter, but rather those that have honored and respected all of the gifts of the Spirit, including the gift or office of pastoral minister. May God grant us that grace!

This book is dedicated to the reappropriation and honoring of pastoral ministry, with all of the gifts and expressions of ministry that

it entails—not because it is the one ministry that matters, but certainly because it is *a* ministry that matters. And while preaching, teaching, prophesying, healing, performing, listening, nurturing, discerning, embodying, improvising, interpreting, orienting, and counseling may all be part of that calling, it is ultimately God who gives the gifts and who will build God’s church; we are but workers in God’s vineyard.