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QUAKER PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND ITS EMBODIMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

OSCAR LUGUSA MALANDE

The reflection brought forth in this writing is part of the Quaker Theological Discussion Group in answering the question, *what is Quaker pastoral theology, and how is it embodied in the community?* It is majorly divided in two parts. There is exploration of the meaning of Quaker pastoral theology and embodiment of Quaker pastoral ministry.

MEANING OF QUAKER PASTORAL THEOLOGY

In thinking about Quaker pastoral theology especially in the contemporary world, it is vital to refer to the historical roots. R. John Elford in defining pastoral theology argues that,

An essential part of this study, as we shall see throughout, is the examination of ways in which contemporary [Quaker] pastoral attitudes and actions draw on older Christian [Quaker] thought and practice. This is now necessary because secular pastoral insight has become so generally advanced in the twentieth century that some think it supplants all that has gone before.¹

Pink Dandelion gives a general picture of pastoral Quakerism today by noting, “Pastoral Quakerism extended beyond holiness Quakerism and today covers a wide theological spectrum, including modernist, holiness, and fundamentalist perspectives.”² In this analysis, it means the Quaker luster is eroding or has eroded, which is a matter of concern.

It is in this connection that Lorton Heusel offers a wise counsel in suggesting that “Friends are torn between loyalty to historic Quakerism and recognition of contemporary needs. What we need to do is to examine the concept of the Quaker ministry, as conceived

by early Friends, to discover its weaknesses and strengths, and then to define unapologetically the function of the Quaker pastorate today.”³

Serving as a pastor and doing pastoral ministry should be vital in continuing the original call of Quakerism as noted in the introductory part of the Christian faith and practice of Quakers in East Africa that:

The Religious Society of Friends Church (Quakers) began out of a reform movement within the larger Christian Church and does not seek to depart from any of the valid principles and biblical foundation of the Christian Church. Early Friends wished to reject the formal church practices, which had grown up in the Church since New Testament times and sought to return to the power and simplicity of the New Testament church.⁴

Dandelion explains further by noting, “Thus, these Quakers critiqued the outward as it impacted on worldly speech but also on ‘empty’ theology which was not rooted in the experience of the direct encounter with God.”⁵ Understanding this call is inherent in the formation of Quaker theology, which is foundational in informing the meaning of Quaker pastoral theology, and how it should be embodied in community. Slipping into the trap of an *empty theology* can easily happen when there are squabbles here and there. Quaker pastoral theology rooted in experiential theology should help develop how a Quaker pastor and pastoral ministry should look like or is supposed to be.

In applying the *valid principles and biblical foundation of the Christian Church*, a pastor should be the conduit of revealing God’s revelation in Jesus Christ to humanity. It is elaborated in the image of the “Good Shepherd”⁶ encapsulated in what would be Jesus’ pastoral role. Harold Taylor notes, “this idea of the caring shepherd was so familiar and meaningful to the people of Israel that many preachers and writers used it, as we see in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament, as a picture language to describe not only human ‘shepherds’, but also the attitudes of God towards His people.”⁷ Some critical texts in the New Testament for reference are John 10: 1–16; Hebrews 13:20; Matthew 16:18, John 21:15,16; Acts 20: 28 and 1 Peter 5:2, 3.⁸

Embracing the image of shepherding fulfils the *experience of the direct encounter with God*, which should be profound in Quaker pastoral ministry, and it is foundational in the theology of ministry. Pete Ward is right in articulating, “God’s being is a dynamic or moved being that is revealed in ministry toward humanity. Theology comes from encountering the ministry of God.”⁹ Being careful in not becoming a hindrance to the mystery of God’s revelation to humanity and all creation is the most significant task of a Quaker pastor and pastoral ministry.

It is with no doubt that God is encountered in the great work that Quaker pastors do. What comes out of pastoral ministry is always for the good of humanity and all creation. Phil Campbell articulates, “The goal of helping persons become fully functioning individuals is an essential component of effective and compassionate pastoral care.”¹⁰ It is important to note that being careful in not becoming a hindrance in the transformational work pastoral ministry does is primary.

EMBODIMENT OF QUAKER PASTORAL MINISTRY

The role of the pastor and pastoral ministry has elicited different views among Quakers. Existence of lingering questions continues up to date. The meanings of “Quaker pastor” and “pastoral ministry” has evolved over time. Derek Brown articulates,

For there are some Quakers who believe that the pastoral role is anathema to the very heart of Quakerism, while others believe that the Quaker distinctives in faith and practice should be of secondary, if not marginal, concern to a Friends pastor. Even within programmed, pastoral Quakerism, there is a lack of unified understanding of the pastoral role: specifically, an explicit expectation and understanding of the boundaries of leadership and authority.¹¹

The historical background of the Quaker church leadership provided in a chapter I wrote on “The Concept of Hierarchy and Doing Ministry: Evaluating the Roles of Leaders and the Use of Authority in Quakerism,”¹² offers an overview of how pastoral ministry came to

be and how it has impacted the formation of Quakerism. There was a shift from participatory to a hierarchical nature of ministry, which remains a matter of concern among Quakers.

The understanding of Quaker pastoral ministry draws from the work a pastor does that is enlisted as,

- i) planning, leading, and coordinating the public worship of the Church,
- ii) involving other members as participants in worship leadership,
- iii) providing pastoral care and counselling,
- iv) conducting marriages and funerals,
- v) visiting those who are sick, and [home visitation],
- vi) providing instruction in Christian faith and discipleship,
- vii) general pastoral administration,
- viii) reaching out to those who are outside the meeting, and involving other members in outreach,
- ix) provide care of widows and orphans.¹³

It is guided by the Quaker way of doing ministry, which is participatory as described in the understanding of *Ministers and Pastors*. It is noted: “All disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ are to be ministers and should use their spiritual gifts in service to each other; to proclaim the Gospel faithfully in daily life.”¹⁴

The bone of contention lies in deviating from the Quaker way of ministry. Robert Barclay provided the insightful meaning of ministry by stating that,

every true minister of the Gospel is ordained, prepared and equipped for work of the ministry. Every evangelist and every Christian pastor ought to be led and directed in his labor and work of the gospel by the leadings, motions, and drawings of God's light...Those who have received this holy and

unspotted gift have received it without cost, and should give it without charge (Mat 10:8). They should certainly not use it as a trade to earn money.¹⁵

In discussions I have had with most pastors and having served as a pastor, the historical background of Quaker ministry in worship influences the Quaker view of pastoral ministry. There is need to analyze and evaluate how the church embraces and views pastors. It is for certain that caution must be taken, as pastoral ministry seems to be a burden to the church.

A case study in this part of the world (East Africa) can be seen in the support available for training pastors and sustaining pastoral ministry. I remember going to a church that I was serving as a pastor and overheard some members saying they were wondering why pastors should train and even be paid and yet the gospel was freely given. In my early years in serving in ministry I would go without being given any pay even for three months. And even what would be given would be so minimal. It continues to be an experience for many pastors even up to date.

Serving as a pastor can be fulfilling and can be the best decision that one can make in life. At times it is easy to decide wrongly by not being so clear whether one is being called to serve in pastoral ministry. Having a call from God to serve as a pastor is vital. It hinges on the divine agency that is foundational in pastoral ministry. With me I was assured of the calling to serve through God's still small voice.

Human agency is vital, too. In some other parts of the world, the clearness committee serves this purpose. It is very critical and can be problematic when there is no clear calling to serve as a pastor and still go-ahead with becoming a pastor anyway. One does not just wake up one morning and say "I want to become a pastor." To serve as a pastor needs preparation and it takes God's grace to serve in ministry.

Care must be taken in being aware of those who are ministered to in understanding how they conceptualize pastoral ministry. At times there can be tendencies of the pastor being questionable on account of being contrary to the *shepherding* role. Different contexts inform how pastoral ministry happens. In the case of the African context, a critical area of examining is the interaction of culture and faith,

and how it impacts the embodiment of pastoral ministry. The practice of Christian faith is a continuity of both African and Christian religions.¹⁶ Cultural practices affirmed by both the African and biblical cultures and the influence of technology could be either constructive or destructive if care is not taken.¹⁷

General guidance for Quaker pastors lies in the words of George Fox in being patterns and examples in the world¹⁸ in reaching out not only to those within the precincts of the church but even those beyond the walls of the church in making true Christianity realized to the whole world as is the original intent of Quakerism.

ENDNOTES

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- 3 Lorton Heusel, “The Quaker Pastorate” *Historical Quaker Books* (1956), 71. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/quakerbooks/71>
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- 6 Harold Taylor, *Tend My Sheep* (London: Study for Promoting Christian Knowledge), 7–9.
- 7 Ibid, 7.
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- 15 Robert Barclay, *Barclay’s Apology in Modern English*, ed. Dean Freiday (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 1991), 171.
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- 17 Ibid, 210–211.
- 18 George Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, John L. Nickalls, ed. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 263.