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The ADC Disciple

Anabaptist Disciples of Christ is an affiliation of Conservative Anabaptist churches seeking likeminded fellowship, instruction, and accountability in church administration and congregational life in the Biblical pattern of the Apostolic church.

Pride Disqualifies a Pastor

WHY HUMILITY IS VITAL FOR MINISTRY

by David Mathis

Few things poison the church, and sully her reputation in the world, like arrogant pastors. Manifest arrogance in politicians, lamentable as it is, we might expect. But arrogance in the pulpit — this is a great blight on the church and in the community where she is to shine her light.

It's not as though the New Testament didn't foresee the danger, or that somehow this is a recent development for the church. Christians have always known to keep conceited men from church office. If the Scriptures' pervasive condemnations of pride and arrogance weren't enough, then the express qualifications for pastor-elder make it all the clearer:

He must not be arrogant. (Titus 1:7)

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:6)

"Recent convert" (Greek *neophytos*) means, literally, "newly planted." It's a fitting image for a new convert to Christianity. New plants haven't yet had time to grow their roots deep and wide. New plants — whether transplanted or from the seed — are much easier to uproot than trees that have grown deep into the soil over a matter of month and years, rather than days and weeks.

Elsewhere, when Paul addresses the formal appointing of pastors and elders, he charges Timothy, and the churches, "Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands" (1 Timothy 5:22). This principle of patience in appointment to office applies not only to pastors, but to deacons as well: "Let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless" (1 Timothy 3:10).

A thread holds these warnings together: Swelling pride in a leader endangers the whole church, and the longer a man has faithfully walked with God, the less likely the remaining pride in him is growing rather than shrinking.

Why No New Plants

Pastoral ministry can be very trying emotionally — not typically at every step, but acutely so in crisis moments. It's only a matter of time until pastoral ministry proves more emotionally challenging than anticipated. Certain kinds of spiritual trauma are inevitable because pastors are more regularly exposed to the depths of human depravity.

The surprising depths of indwelling sin in professing Christians, multiplied across a congregation, can be enough to damage, if not uproot, young plants. New plants aren't yet ready to endure every kind of storm. They need to send roots down and out and strengthen stalks and sprout leaves and bear some initial fruit. Soon enough they will be ready for the hard winds and driving rains of pastoral ministry, but not right away.

Added to that, Satan loves to target the opposing lieutenants, and all the more when one is manifestly young and weak. A new convert among the pastors can be an easy target, a convenient foothold for the devil's efforts (Ephesians 4:27). Wise churches arm themselves against such schemes (Ephesians 6:11).

These are real dangers with putting new plants in leadership, but the specific danger Paul mentions — and so deserves the most attention — is that the new plant might be "puffed up with conceit" (1 Timothy 3:6). Such *conceit* apparently had become a problem in the Ephesian church (1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 3:4). The false teachers there may have arisen in precisely this way. Newly converted, and manifestly gifted in teaching and looked to as natural leaders, perhaps they were hastily ordained to the pastoral office, which may have produced two effects at once: (1) they were not given sufficient testing to see what these men were really made of spiritually and (2) the appointment itself, and serving in office, may have altered the trajectory of what otherwise could have been healthy growth and development.

1. How Has Old Pride Persisted?

In the first case, the new convert's arrogance may simply remain from his former life of unbelief. Paul lists "swollen with conceit" as characteristic of those outside the church (2 Timothy 3:4). Accordingly, new converts need some time in the faith to let the swelling go down. The caution may be more than simply the concern that being put in leadership may make an immature man arrogant, but that being a new convert, he hasn't yet had as much conceit pounded out of him yet. His mind is still being brought under the authority of God in fundamental ways. Not only does the dust need to settle; the roots need to go down deep.

Pastors must not be arrogant (Titus 1:7), among other reasons, because they are to be men under authority, stewards of, and under, the words of Christ and his apostles. Paul identifies one who is "puffed up with conceit" with one who "teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness" (1 Timothy 6:3–4). The very heart of the pastoral task is teaching — and not teaching

self or preference but teaching "the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul mentions "the condemnation of the devil," who in his pride and swollen conceit was unwilling to bow to God's authority.

2. Will Leadership Provoke New Pride?

But not only does a new convert need time for the swelling of his old pride to go down, but also we should consider how the appointment to leadership might affect a man. Will being put forward as a church officer be the occasion of a new kind of puffing up? This seems to be the main concern Paul has in mind in 1 Timothy 3:6: not just getting over former conceit, but will he be puffed up by the leadership role itself and thus fall into the same (prideful) condemnation as Satan?

In seeking to fill positions and opportunities for leadership, we often take one of two approaches: "man for the job" or "job for the man." "Man for the job" means the need is such that the candidate should fill the role and its expectations from day one. "Job for the man" means the role is an opportunity for a developing leader to grow into the role and expectations as he serves. While the pastorate is never fully a man-for-the-job scenario (who is sufficient for these things?), we should not approach our search with a job-for-the-man mentality when it comes to pride and arrogance.

A man may be able to grow into teaching, and aspects of pastoral manner, and a host of other things while serving, but not so with humility. We are not to think of the pastorate as a helpful crucible that might make an arrogant man humble. The pastorate is indeed a crucible. It will make a humble man all the more humble (2 Corinthians 12:7), but it is not a lab for arrogant men.

Keeping new converts from the council serves not only the church but also the new convert. It is healthy to be established for a season as a Christian, to first soak in one's identity being in Christ, not his office. Before attempting, in ministry, to have the spirits subject to us, we first need a good, solid season of rejoicing that our "names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

How Recent?

But how recent a convert? How new a plant? Here the wisdom of plurality in local-church leadership is on display. The New Testament doesn't give us a particular timeframe, whether a year or five. As with the other elder qualifications, "not a new convert" is analog, not digital. It's not that a man goes to sleep one night a "new plant" and wakes up the next day ready to weather the storms. Rather, such maturity — and in particular, humility — is incremental and on a spectrum. And Paul leaves such to be determined collectively by the plurality of elders, confirmed by the church, given the age and maturity of both the candidate and the church and other relevant circumstances, not least of which is the present needs of the church.

Observe the differences between the well-established Ephesian church (1 Timothy) and the fledgling Cretan church (Titus). When writing to Ephesus, Paul specifies "not a new convert." The Ephesian church was old enough, likely a decade old or more, that relatively new converts would not be needed in leadership. Crete didn't have the same luxury. The whole church was newly planted, and as Titus went to appoint elders, it was inevitable that they all would be, in some sense, new plants. However, the underlying concern remained: conceit. And so Paul specifies for the Cretans, "he must not be arrogant" (Titus 1:7).

An important qualification is that "not a new convert" does not necessarily mean "not young." We know that Timothy himself was relatively young, likely in his upper twenties or early thirties. Yet Paul writes to him not to let the church look down on him for his youth, but to set an example (1 Timothy 4:12), including fleeing youthful passions (2 Timothy 2:22). As Elihu spoke truthfully to Job, it is not age that makes a man wise but the Spirit of God (Job 32:8–9). Pray that the passage of time increases the Spirit's work of wisdom in a man, but don't assume such merely by the passing of years.

Two Key Questions

To make the pursuit of pastoral humility tangible — for churches and councils searching for a pastor and for men aspiring to ministry — consider two particular manifestations of humility essential in pastors and elders:

1. Does he think with sober judgment?

Here the question is not only about sober judgment in general (which is vital, called sober-mindedness, 1 Timothy 3:2), but in particular related to self-assessment. Romans 12:3 says, "By the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned." Is he self-deprecating? Is he willing to admit faults? Is he regularly angling to build himself up in others' minds with his own words? Does he give evidence of thinking of himself more highly than he ought to think?

2. Does he count others more significant than himself?

Paul writes to all Christians in Philippians 2:3–4 a word that is especially pressing for church leaders: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." Counting others more significant than self cuts to the very heart of the pastoral calling, and to the heart of the faith. Jesus himself, the great Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25), is the paradigmatic humble leader who took note of, looked to, and gave himself for the ultimate interests of others (Philippians 2:5–8). Pastoral labor never eclipses or replaces the perfect humility of Christ, who "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8), but it does seek to echo his humility, and so point to it, in our daily efforts.

Give Us Humble Pastors

When God does the double miracle of producing humble men and giving them as pastor-teachers to local churches, what kind of men might we expect to find teaching and leading our churches? Humble pastors love the Scriptures and "the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 6:3). They receive their calling as undershepherds, gladly embracing their role under the authority of their Chief. Humble pastors love preaching not themselves but Christ Jesus as Lord (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Humble pastors give benefit of the doubt and expect the best (not assume the worst) from each other and from the flock. They don't let cynicism about their people develop and fester in their hearts. They have a kind of gentleness of spirit, and no less zeal for God's honor, that keeps them from being afraid of being wrong and, therefore, feeling a constant need to self-protect.

Humble pastors are transparent rather than evasive; authentic (in the best of senses) rather than superficial. Not defensive but eager to learn and grow and improve. Humble pastors listen. They are the kind of men not inclined to absorb others' attention, more interested in hearing from others than telling others about themselves. If we could sum up, in one word, what one attribute we need most in the pastorate today, as in every generation, few would come close to humility.

God, give us humble pastors.

Used with permission. David Mathis (@davidcmathis) is executive editor for desiringGod.org and pastor at Cities Church in Minneapolis/St. Paul. He is a husband and father of four.

PASTOR SPOTLIGHT

Tim R. Miller serves as an Associate Pastor at Crosspointe Mennonite Church in Baltic, Ohio. He and his wife Leann have five children – Brevon (21); Sabrina (18); Taylor (16); Tiffani (16); and Chloe (14). He was ordained on March 9th, 2014.

Tim works as a Sales Manager at Walnut Creek Planing.

Tim recommends the book T*he Kingdom That Turned the World Upside Down* by David Bercot. He also enjoys the podcast "Anabaptist Perspectives."

Tim offers some reflections on his pastoral journey -

"I never want to forget the marvelous grace of our almighty God, whose kindness, mercy and unending love are reflected in His patience toward fallible, recalcitrant mankind. That He would then permit such imperfect messengers to be the hands and feet of His gospel, first stretches the mind, then humbles the heart. Salvation and a relationship with the Creator are gifts that should never be kept to ourselves. They must be continually shared with all those around us, free and applicable to any culture or context.

Reflecting on the past number of years, it is quite interesting and comforting to see the finger of God on our experiences, both pleasant and painful. To know that He is directing the events and situations of life, doing 'far more abundantly than all that we ask or think' (Ephesians 3:20), gives a peace and assurance that nothing else will. Being involved in the mission of this special group of people, the Church, is amazing and fulfilling, notwithstanding it does involve a bit of time and hard work.

May we all be encouraged to unwaveringly give our best for Christ, laboring diligently in the thickest of the fight, regardless what opposition may come. What a blessing to serve in some small way, but then to stand back and simply observe the Lord's glory 'in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen' (Ephesians 3:21)."

Thank you Tim and Leann for your faithful service to the Church of Christ!

Editor's note: Brother Tim is leading an effort to plant a church in the Canton, Ohio area and so I have asked him to write the missions article as well.

Book Review

Recently during sharing time in a Sunday morning service, the question was raised, "Why do we look for righteousness in a fallen world?" This is an intriguing and profound question. If 2020 has taught us anything, it is that the kingdom of heaven is distinct from all earthly kingdoms. Furthermore, that kingdom is characterized by the righteousness and perpetuity of the One who is at its head – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In his book *In God We Don't Trust*, David Bercot further underlines this two-kingdom principle in a compelling narrative of the founding of America and told from a perspective that few people have ever heard. That perspective is the kingdom of God. It looks at the founding of America in the light of Jesus' teachings.

Our currency declares, "In God We Trust." But did the American colonists truly trust in God in the founding of America?

For example, the Scriptures tell us, "The authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God…Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due" (Romans 13). Yet, the American colonists refused to pay their taxes, and they rebelled against their government. Was that right?

The American colonists had many admirable traits, and they established a wonderful country. This is not an anti-American book. Rather, it is a pro-Kingdom book. Bercot firmly believes that Jesus and His Kingdom must have our ultimate allegiance. And in the pages of this book, Bercot shows how the colonists repeatedly failed to do things God's way. This was true in their treatment of the Indians, in trafficking slaves, in building economies on rum and tobacco, in smuggling, and in refusing to pay their taxes. In short, the colonists lacked the faith to believe that if they did things God's way, everything would work out for the best.

One could argue that our civil governments were never meant to completely display and do things from God's perspective and values. And it seems to me that that is exactly Bercot's point. Jesus made it very clear that "His kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). And as subjects of that kingdom, we would do well to align ourselves with the patriarchs and other heroes of faith mentioned by the Hebrew writer in chapter 11:13-16 – "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

The product of nine years of research, *In God We Don't Trust* challenges much of most of us learned in school about the founding of America and the American Revolution. Bercot's well-documented findings will surprise many people. At the same time, this timely work will strengthen the convictions of Christians who take seriously the teachings of Jesus.

- Nate Yoder, Editor. Portions used with permission.

An Urban Church Plant – Establishing a Vision

Canton, Ohio

Most of us grew up reciting John 3:16, arguably the most familiar verse in Scripture. The focal point of this verse is often our own eternal life, and rightfully so. But is there more we should learn from this passage?

Notice words such as "world," "whoever," and "perish." In the following verse, "world" is again used three times. It is not God's will that the "world" be condemned, but that they be saved! If "world" connotes all who ever lived, then isn't it staggering to think that God wanted every soul to be reconciled to Himself? Each person ever born was to enjoy a restored relationship and intimate fellowship with Him, just as it was in the Beginning.

Jesus called His first disciples to be "fishers of men", regardless their original vocation. His final words at His ascension again emphasized this all-encompassing mission: go into all the "world" and make more disciples. Many Anabaptists consider this par for the course, to varying degrees. It definitely includes quiet, Godly lives that display the love of Christ to our communities. And it also involves telling others about Jesus when the opportunity presents itself.

But shouldn't His disciples be urgently seeking opportunities, rather than waiting for them? Has today's mission changed from that of the original twelve? Is not every follower of Christ still called to be a fisherman, leaving a life of selfishness for one of serving? A satirical article by Mennonite pastor and author John Drescher begins with these words, "Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen." He ends by saying, "Is a person a fisherman if year after year he never catches a fish? Is one following if he isn't fishing?"[1] To be sure, mission programs have been well supported by Anabaptist churches. However, what about the "fishing" efforts of the local church, right where we live?

The goal of an urban church plant, where there is a culturally diverse population, is to bring seekers into the church, regardless of background or ethnicity. Following are four thoughts to consider when living in such a setting, where "fishing" is the primary mission.

The relevance of the gospel

The good news of the kingdom of heaven is not meant for only one people group. God told Israel that it wasn't because they were more righteous that He separated them to Himself (Deuteronomy 7:7, 9:4-5). Paul continued this theme when he told the Romans that "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek" (Romans 10:12). Finally, John wrote about an "eternal gospel" that was to be proclaimed to "every nation and tribe and language and people" (Revelation 14:6). The gospel of Jesus Christ is for everyone! It is relevant to every situation, every problem, every race, nation, society, ethnicity and culture!

More specifically, do we truly believe that our Anabaptist faith is just as relevant to others as it is to cultural Anabaptists? Or are those few doctrinal issues that separate us from most of western Christianity only for those who grew up with them? I would propose that conservative Anabaptism has much to offer a broken, chaotic world. What we believe is relevant in far more ways than just as a quiet, quaint lifestyle. But those beliefs, firmly rooted in Scripture, should be demonstrated outside our own communities, to be effective and show relevance.

Counting the cost

Luke 14:25-33 is a most thought provoking passage about the cost of discipleship. Never have I seen Jesus' words so clearly demonstrated as through the lives of our Yemeni translators in Greece. An imam father tells his oldest son that unless he recants and returns home a Muslim, he is no longer his son, and dead to their family. Another Yemeni grandfather refuses to allow a wife and two young daughters to be with his son, their husband and father. Both men will not give up their Christian faith, but instead actively evangelize other Muslims. Their primary objective in life is to share the joy of being released from the bondage of Islam.

The privilege of being a child of the King can be taken for granted. It's the accepted way because being a Christian is what we've always done. Yes, praise the Lord for multiple generations who believe! But is belief enough? Considering our lives (families, friends, homes, possessions, communities, work, etc.) as compared to what much of the world must pay to follow Christ, is our cost really that significant?

Some of Jesus' disciples turned away when His words were hard to accept (John 6:66). Jesus also said that the gate to the Way is narrow, the Way itself is hard, and few will find it (Matthew 7:14). Can I really say that I count all things as rubbish (Philippians 3:8)? Am I really committed to following King Jesus wherever He may lead, through any adversity? The test of sincerity comes only when under fire; when I am out of my comfort zone, not firmly ensconced in it.

Considering outreach, does my life demonstrate to a lost and dying world any of the above? If those I'm trying to reach must forsake all, shouldn't I need to sacrifice as well?

Close community

No man is an island. God created us for interaction with other humans. In Acts, when a Jew or a Roman became a Christian, they were ostracized. Where could both turn for relationships and fellowship? Enter the local church, the body of Christ, called to demonstrate "what the whole world would look like if everyone followed King Jesus."[2]

How well does a typical Anabaptist church model welcome "outsiders?" When someone from a different background counts the cost and leaves their sinful past for a life with Christ, do they find meaningful cross-cultural fellowship that guides them until they too begin "fishing for men?" When someone hears "brother" and "sister," it should mean the same as if used for biological siblings. Acceptance is not optional when a part of the family, regardless how different a person may be.

A local church should be "a family of families living like family."[3] The rampant individualism in today's Christianity is never seen in Scripture. Only as a body, complete with diverse parts harmoniously exercising different gifts, can the church fulfill its commission to evangelize the world. Such love and acceptance, reflective of the Lord of the church Himself, has drawing power (John 13:35)!

Relationship evangelism

A close community cannot flourish without close individual relationships, built through spending significant time together. Was Jesus' method of discipleship for the original twelve specific to that time, or is it really the model for discipleship today? If converts are satisfactory enough, then perhaps not. But if disciples who multiply is the goal, then there is no other way.

What would happen if spending quality time with non-believers (making them our friends, having them in our homes, meeting them for coffee, learning about their culture and family) was simply a way of life? The overarching reason would be discipleship, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all of Jesus' commands. If even 10% of the Anabaptist community (not just preachers or missionaries) would take on this mission right where they live, as part of the fabric of everyday life, what impact would this have for the kingdom of heaven?

In closing

"What if Jesus actually meant every word He said?"[4] The many aspects of this question have been at the forefront of considering a church plant in Canton, Ohio. The "fishing ponds," particularly in urban settings where the language and culture aren't always so different from our own, are teeming with hungry "fish." Are obedient lives in loving relationship with King Jesus still as attractive to a lost and dying world as they were in Acts? I would contend that they are. But it is only as those lives point to the Messiah, rather than a culture or way of life, that any church plant will be successful.

What is the measure of success? Is it not in fulfilling the same Great Commission that Jesus gave to His first disciples? Are "fishers of men" actually catching "fish?" Since the story and mission of the entire Bible is the salvation of mankind[5], then the lives of all disciples of Christ should be centered around the same.

- Tim Miller
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Editor's note: Thank you Brother Tim for sharing this vision with ADC. Crosspointe would appreciate our prayer support as the vision for this church plant becomes reality, Lord willing.

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[1] John M. Drescher, "Parable of the Fishless Fishermen", Church Growth: America Magazine. Sept.- Oct., 1978.
[2] Adaptation of a quote by John D. Martin, Shippensburg Christian Fellowship, Shippensburg, PA.
[3] Quote by Matthew Milioni, Followers of the Way, Boston, MA
[4] Quote by Dean Taylor, Followers of the Way, President of Sattler College, Boston, MA.
[5] For more on this, see Christopher J.H. Wright, The Mission of God (Downer's Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2006)

ADC Church Profile —

Abundant Life Christian Fellowship near Lancaster, Pennsylvania was founded in March 2016. The current leadership team is Merv King, Pastor; Justin Smoker, Deacon; and Dwane Weaver and Michael Smucker, Elders.

Since its founding, the congregation has met in the basement of a local Mennonite school but has just purchased its own church building December 11, 2020.

ALCF is a young congregation with approximately 36 families and 130 children and with a membership of about 65.

From the outset ALCF has felt the need for biblical plural leadership and is still currently in the process of putting that leadership in place. ALCF also has a desire to see biblical discipleship taught and modeled in a way that enables and encourages men to lead their homes and families.

ALCF is located in southeastern Pennsylvania about forty minutes southeast of Harrisburg and on the outskirts of the city of Lancaster on Route 23 (New Holland Pike).

ALCF has members serving with All-Nations Bible Translation in Niger, Africa; New Horizons in Colorado; Allegheny Boys Camp in Maryland; and Plain Compassion Crisis Response.

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How convinced are you that God is who He says He is?

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Do you depend on God, or do you do life on your own?

SESSION 3: NO BRAGGING HERE
Why doesn't everyone receive God's grace?

SESSION 4: A STANDING INVITATION
When you need grace, what do you have to do to get it?

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