

Jason Roach asks if ordained ministry is the only career path for those wanting to see a world won for Christ

# Making Christ known

A medical student thinking through his career options told me recently, 'The overriding need in this world is for people to hear the gospel; therefore the only thing worth doing with my life, if I am able, is to become an ordained minister.'

For me this begs important questions, for example, what proportion of the time of an ordained minister actually involves evangelism, direct or indirect. But the issues go deeper than that. Many will intuitively sense that something is awry with my friend's statement. How does one respond theologically to what can seem for many a powerful argument?

Evangelism is undoubtedly the *logical priority of Christianity*.<sup>1</sup> A question for me is this: does this make it *our only responsibility*? It is our Saviour's intention that our whole lives, our worship, might reflect God's sovereign rule over every area of life - as salt sustaining, light shining<sup>2</sup> agents of his common grace in the world.<sup>3</sup> We are created 'to do good works'<sup>4</sup> as well as to be agents of his saving grace through Christ. As John Stott has suggested, 'We have all been prodigals; God wants us all to be Samaritans too.'<sup>5</sup>

## Loving our neighbours

Jesus tells us that the law can be summarised in the two commands to love God and to love our neighbour.<sup>6</sup> And as the parable of the Good Samaritan shows, our neighbour is simply anyone in need, made in the image of God.<sup>7</sup> Practically, Jesus demonstrated this in his actions as he 'went round teaching'<sup>8</sup> and 'went around doing good and healing'.<sup>9</sup>

As with Jesus' ministry, the expression of this love over a period of time, should rarely be less than evangelism, but will undoubtedly involve other areas of service as our individual gifts and opportunities are carefully weighed and reweighed throughout our lives. They are partners not enemies. For example, social responsibility is a biblical requirement, but can also be a bridge to evangelism, by removing prejudices, and opening doors that were previously closed. There are also diverse specialised ministries for which wise and spirit-filled Christians, like the seven in Acts 6, are required.

## Proclaiming Christ

I believe that we demonstrate love supremely by proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> But the

proclamation is not just that 'Jesus saves', but that 'Jesus Christ is Lord'. This implies three things:

1. Demonstrating his rule in our own lives - by obeying his will irrespective of what the world around us does.
2. Knowing what God's will is - by actively seeking the 'renewing of our minds'.<sup>11</sup>
3. Evangelising - because God's will and rule in the world will only be demonstrated by a people equipped with the Holy Spirit.

We can strive for these ends in many contexts, from campaigning and curing to oratory or operating. Where we have gifts and influence and opportunity to make the fruit of the renewal of our minds a reality in the world as well, we should seek to do so. As Martin Luther King said: 'Morality cannot be legislated, but behaviour can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change hearts, but they can restrict the heartless.'<sup>12</sup>

## Making choices

As doctors, we will want to see God's will done in many different spheres: bioethics, health care rationing, global health or faithful preaching. All these need people uniquely gifted to serve in their particular fields.

We do need to make life choices carefully in full submission,<sup>13</sup> prayerfully,<sup>14</sup> with wise counsel<sup>15</sup> and with our minds.<sup>16</sup> However, we need to remember that nothing we can do can *affect* the plan of he who 'works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will'.<sup>17</sup>

Even if we make what we think is the 'wrong' choice, God will use us to *effect* his plans if we submit ourselves to his will. This means that it is unhelpful to think of the offices of teacher or preacher or missionary or doctor or nurse as 'rankable' in terms of import in the eyes of the Lord. Our task is in whatever we do, wherever we are, to 'work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men... It is the Lord Christ you are serving.'<sup>18</sup> Our service should be joyful, not reluctantly calculated, as this will not be worship. The Lord cares less where we serve him, but *that we serve him*, with everything, and in everything, for he is everything.<sup>19</sup>

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