

## Editorial – What Is Competency?

### Paul Beasley-Murray

A minister-friend went through a sticky patch. Some church members accused him of being ‘incompetent’. The matter was referred to denominational ‘powers that be’, and ultimately they found in his favour. So he continues in ministry.

I do not know the details of the case. Apparently some felt that he was not a sufficiently strong leader, and that this was the root cause of why the church was in decline. Part of his defence was Acts 2.47, where Luke wrote of the early church that “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved”. Had I been my friend, I might have questioned whether my accusers had been playing their part – or whether one reason for the church’s decline was their resistance to change.

However, what interests me in this case was the word ‘competency’. This is one of the latest ‘in’-words. Now that churches cannot force their ministers to retire at the age of 65, I am told that the way to get rid of them is to accuse them of ‘incompetency’. The Ministry Department of the Baptist Union in collaboration with Principals of Baptist Colleges has produced a list of ‘core ministerial competencies’ they wish to see developed in ministerial candidates. They include the abilities to:

- study, understand, and communicate the beliefs, practices, story and Scriptures of the Christian faith, within and beyond the congregation, and to live a life of Christian discipleship and witness consistent with that understanding;
- understand Baptist history, principles and practices;
- offer servant leadership;
- offer high levels of informed and compassionate pastoral care and support;
- lead a church in its mission;
- develop and maintain a spirituality that will sustain a life-long ministry;
- manage one’s self;
- lead others.

The list goes on, but as it does, it becomes in my opinion banal. For instance, it requires the abilities to effectively use basic IT resources and media; and to manage child-protection and

vulnerable-adult policies. I fail to understand why others cannot share such responsibilities. Certainly in my own church these abilities are delegated to others.

I much prefer the list of 'benchmarks for ministry' drawn up by the United Reformed Church. They define 'a minister of Word and Sacraments' in the URC as a person who is:

- A faithful disciple...
- A theologian...
- A worshipper and worship leader...
- A pastor...
- An educator...
- A missionary and evangelist...
- A collaborator and community builder...
- A public figure...
- A communicator...

However, important as it is to define 'competencies' or 'benchmarks' of ministry, my friend was surely right in arguing that ultimately our 'competency' comes not from our abilities, but from God himself. In this respect, some words of Paul in 2 Corinthians are apposite. At the end of 2.16 he asked: "Who is sufficient for these things?" – literally, "who is 'competent' for these things?". In his defence he essentially replies "I am". He argues that people only have to look at the church in Corinth to see how the Spirit has been at work in their hearts (3.1-2). And yet Paul is aware of his own weakness. His confidence in ministry is not in his own ability, but rather "our competence is from God" (3.5). Perhaps my minister-friend was right after all in putting the 'blame' for the lack of his growth on the Lord! What do you think?

## The Death of Christendom – Then What?

### Alun Brookfield

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If we define Christendom (as the Collins English Dictionary does) as "the collective body of Christians throughout the world or throughout history", then clearly, as long as there are Christians in the world, Christendom will survive.