

Editorial – Money in the church

Paul Beasley-Murray

I never enjoy those occasions when a presentation is made either of a church budget or of the accounts for the past year. In spite of all the best efforts of my church treasurer, the presentation always goes on too long and seems to give unnecessary opportunity for the ‘awkward squad’ to ask their questions. I would prefer the presentation to be limited to a few figures (along the lines of the accounts of a major company in the financial columns of a newspaper). Indeed, at the last church meeting we began with just a summary sheet:

Spiritual leadership	£x
Administration	£x
Support for teams (as distinct from committees)	£x
Care and outreach	£x
Fabric	£x
Reaching the world (outside giving)	£x

Unfortunately, there then followed several pages of further information!

Money beyond the church!

One of the contentious issues we face as a church is the amount of money we give away. In theory we operate an ‘all-in budget’, which includes not just the money we plan to spend on our own mission and ministry, but also the money we plan to give away. The fact is that there are a host of other occasions when money is raised for outside projects. For example, we have ‘love’ offerings at Christmas (last year for an Aids project in Uganda), Harvest (last year for a health project in Nepal), and Church Anniversary (this year for a Christian satellite broadcasting project in the Middle East) as well as throughout the year raising money for a good number of other causes too (including a Bible-a-month scheme, a missionary birthday scheme, personalised missionary support etc.). In addition to the ‘specials’ we also give away significant sums of money through the budget.

The present contention arises as to the proportion of money we should give away. In previous years we gave away 20% of our income. This year, due to the impact of major fund-raising for redeveloping our church premises, we are having to draw in our belt, and so agreed to give away a minimum of 10% of our income, and, if funds permitted, to increase at the end of the year the giving to our usual 20%. There were howls of protest from certain quarters. "God will not bless us if we only give away 10%!", said one middle-aged lady. "On what basis do you make that judgement?", I wondered to myself. I fell to speculating as to whether that particular lady was actually tithing her own personal income, let alone double-tithing.

Money and secrecy in the church

But there was a further and more contentious matter. Like most churches we encourage our members to give by covenant or through the use of Gift Aid, and as a result gain many thousands of pounds from the Inland Revenue. Although a good number take their stewardship responsibilities seriously, there are other taxpayers in our church who for one reason or another have never signed a covenant or Gift Aid form. My gut feeling is that the chief reason for the latter group's failure to sign is that they do not want the church treasurer and covenant secretary to know how little they give.

But to return to the issue of contention. At our last church meeting it was proposed that the leader of the finance team be allowed to know the names of those who give through covenant or Gift Aid (but not the amounts they actually give!) so that he together with the church treasurer and covenant secretary might be able to challenge - in a sensitive manner, of course - those taxpayers who had yet to give tax efficiently. At this stage some members began to be apoplectic - "Confidentiality is of the essence!". As one older man told me in no uncertain terms, "Our Lord had instructed that our left hand should not know what our right hand is doing - giving should be secret!"

But why should our giving be secret? A careful reading of Matt 6.3-4 reveals that Jesus was concerned above all with 'hypocrisy' rather than with secrecy. Although I am not privy to the details of anybody's giving, I sometimes wonder whether much of the stress on secrecy today is related to the 'hypocrisy' of some who claim to give generously, but in reality may well not actually do so.

Furthermore, the account of the way in which Jesus intentionally sat in front of the treasury and watched people putting in their offerings (Mark 12.41) suggests that for Jesus giving was not a private matter. Nor does the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5.1-11) appear to encourage secrecy in giving. The more I think about it, the secrecy that surrounds money in church is not innocent at all, but rather a smoke-screen for short-comings in personal discipleship.

Money and Ministry Today

At first sight the above may seem a strange 'editorial' to this issue of *Ministry Today*, in which money has no role to play in any of the articles. Yet, there is a relevance. All the articles have the practice of ministry in mind. Unfortunately, most of our contributors are no longer practising ministers in the sense of being ministers in pastoral charge. Much as I appreciate the contributions of men and women engaged in wider ministries, I long for more ordinary pastors to engage on reflecting on life in the local church. Yes, reflections even on the presentation of the church budget at a church meeting could be of interest. So please, feel free to send in your own reflections.

Paul Beasley-Murray

MAKING CULTURAL CONNECTIONS - RESHAPING WORSHIP FOR EVANGELISM IN A MISSIONARY CHURCH

Simon Reynolds

The need to respect the background and experience of those who come to explore the Christian faith has become established as a primary foundation of evangelism. The work of the Catechumenate Network, for example, as well as the spin-offs from John Finney's research, have provided local churches in the UK with appropriate