

**The Pastor as Public Witness**  
Elim Theology Conference  
4<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

This paper is offered to cover, in a little more depth, some of the points I want to make in my presentation. Given that we only have a day together, and our time is therefore limited, it is my hope that my reflections here will help you to continue your exploration of this important question. This paper itself will be followed by an academic paper, which I will make available to you when complete and I hope to present later in the year, exploring the role of the pastor as a public witness, and the particular challenges and possibilities of a Pentecostal perspective on this issue.

## Introduction

Not long after I became a Christian, I remember someone saying to me that I was now a witness to Christ and a theologian whether I liked it or not. They reminded me that the only choice I had was between whether I was going to seek to be a ‘good and faithful’ witness and theologian or bad ones. Those words have lived with me throughout my ministry. All who follow Christ are *always* a witness and all who follow Christ are *always* theologians as. We cannot avoid it. Perhaps that is why the Scriptures remind us

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

**Colossians 3:17<sup>1</sup>**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

**Romans 12:1-2**

The Lord Jesus reminds His disciples that they are to be ‘salt’ and ‘light’ in their families, their communities and their world, and He challenges them to see their whole lives as entrusted to His purposes.<sup>2</sup> Our faith may be a personal choice, but it is not simply a private affair.

*God is personal, but never private. And the Bible reveals a very public God. But in an age of private spiritualities, the voice of a public God can scarcely be heard. Private religion avoids the public consequences of faith. In particular, affluent countries and churches breed private disciples, perhaps because the applications of faith to public life could become quickly challenging and troubling. Can the devotees of private religion every understand the politics of God?<sup>3</sup>*

If we reject a dichotomised worldview that separates our personal faith from our public life, then it seems clear to me that this *not only* has an impact on those whom we pastor, but also on *who we are* and *what we do* as pastors. The calling of the pastor herself becomes one that must be considered by asking whether she is seeking to be a *good and faithful* witness in the

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptures, unless otherwise stated, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission.

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew 5:13-16, for example.

<sup>3</sup> Wallis, J., 2006. *God's politics*. Oxford: Lion, p.31.

world and a *good and faithful* theologian. Not only are we to understand our roles as pastors in the light of Paul's explanation to the Ephesians that

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

**Ephesians 4:11-13**

We are also to understand that our own lives are a witness *and* a theological statement. As Paul says to the believers in Corinth, about the fruit of his own ministry, he reminds them

*You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

**2 Corinthians 3:2-3**

When Paul encourages Timothy in Timothy's pastoral ministry, he reminds him of the need to be alert to what he describes as 'deceitful spirits and teachings of demons'<sup>4</sup> and he urges Timothy to '[h]ave nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness<sup>5</sup> but instead to

*set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*

**1 Timothy 4:12**

Our lives and our ministries, as pastors, are irrevocably linked. Just like all other believers, we are to give attention to our witness and our theological convictions. Just consider the following examples with me for a moment and their impact on the public witness of the Church:

- (1) How you responded to the recent images of the storming of the Capitol in Washington D.C., particularly the images of banners with 'Jesus' written across them, or the video footage of the conduct of those within the chambers, as they used the Lord's Prayer and laid claim to the name of Christ in their actions. Consider particularly the ways in which some parts of the Christian witness in the U.S. and beyond have been held in subservience to particular constructs of nationalism, eschatology (I know this will be picked up later) and the relationship between the Church and the State and think of the impact of both those pastors who have admitted this and apologised for it, and those who have dismissed it, or re-narrated their own involvement with it.
- (2) The impact on the public witness of the Gospel of the prolonged silence from pastors and church leaders in recent child-abuse controversies in the Church.
- (3) How leaders have responded to issues of race in recent years and the potential negative impact it has on a community's trust of the Church's mission and message.
- (4) The remarkable impact of the eulogy that was delivered in April 2019 at the funeral of the young journalist Lyra McKee. The officiant, a personal friend of mine, was Father

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1

<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 4:7

Martin Magill. When he asked the collected dignitaries, friends and family who were attending Lyra's funeral why it took the death of a 29-year-old woman to get them to talk to one another, his remarks received a standing ovation that rippled from the back of the cathedral to the front, confronting the politicians with their own failures (who were the last to stand, and did so very sheepishly) and then rippled on out into the world. It could be argued that what he said was the last part of the catalyst that brought those same politicians around a table and saw the Assembly at Stormont recommenced.

- (5) The impact of the speech that Rev Martin Luther King delivered on the steps of the Capitol on the 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963.

The election of Rev Raphael Warnock to the US Senate to represent Georgia as its first black senator. Interestingly, his twitter feed describes him as *@ReverendWarnock* and his description is *Pastor. Advocate. Savannah born & raised...Senator for Georgia*<sup>6</sup> in that order.

The public witness of pastors can be good or bad, but it cannot be ignored. Our communities of faith look to us for guidance, for instruction, for example and for assurance. They need us to help them think through what it means to live an authentic and a faithful life in a rapidly changing world. At this moment in our world, with so many figures of stability and trust shaken, and so much uncertainty swirling around us, *who we are* and *what we do* is of the utmost importance. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson,

*What you are stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary.*<sup>7</sup>

### **Public Spires in the Public Square**

I do not have the time today to unpack fully the challenges and opportunities that a re-imagined understanding of the role of the pastor as a public witness might present to us. I am currently two years into some academic research in this area with the University of Chester and I have been fascinated, challenged and somewhat dismayed, by the ways in which the public roles of pastors have been understood.

There is much to read and explore about our roles as social activists, as political lobbyists, as community champions and as those who seek to 'speak truth to power'<sup>8</sup> and I will return to those in a moment, but there is much less to explore around the significance of *pastoring itself* as a public witness. Indeed, it is hard to even find a commonly held view of what the outcomes and outputs of effective and faithful pastoring might look like in public life. Whilst we have such criterion for most areas of public life, they do not seem to exist in abundance for the role of a pastor.

I am currently focussed on an extensive literature review of this issue and would be grateful for any help you might be able to offer me in identifying common definitions of the public

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<sup>6</sup> See

[https://twitter.com/ReverendWarnock?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/ReverendWarnock?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor). Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Emerson, R. W., 1875, *Letters and Social Aims*. Boston, Massachusetts: James R. Osgood and Company, p.80.

<sup>8</sup> I am happy to provide some guidance in reading materials for this for those who might be interested, but a good starting point for those who would like to read further is <http://bruceashford.net/2019/12-sets-of-resources-for-aspiring-public-theologians/> (last accessed on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021). It should be noted, however, that the list speaks from a North American perspective. Further recommendation from a British and European perspective can be made available for those who would like it by contacting me directly – [malcolm@dundonaldelim.church](mailto:malcolm@dundonaldelim.church).

good that is brought about by effective pastoring and how one might measure it. It strikes me that the absence of such rationale and thinking is at least one of the causes for the demotion of the role of the pastor behind that of other functions such as change-bringer, chief executive, manager, counsellor, therapist, activist, project-developer, personnel consultant and so many others.

We have lost the importance and the contribution of the pastor to the public square at our peril. If we are not careful, we will become complicit in re-imagining pastoral ministry so much that we remove from it the fundamental call to serve Christ and His Church through helping people respond to His grace and live in faithful and joyful obedience to His purposes for the world in accordance with the teaching of Scripture and in the strength and Presence of the Holy Spirit. My baseline definition of the pastoral task is to see Christ formed faithfully in those whom we lead and to help them to live in the purposes of God for their lives.

Pastoral ministry, in its fullest and most creative forms, has been pushed right back to the top of the agenda for us. In years to come, those we seek to lead will not remember how many sermons we posted online, how many times our technology didn't work, or how many great videos we found for our gatherings. They will, however, remember whether or not we loved them, spoke to them, prayed with them or simply allowed ourselves to be present to them as physical reminders of the ongoing promises and Presence of Christ. Tim Keller has suggested that in a smaller church your pastoring sets up your preaching but in a larger church your preaching sets up your pastoring.<sup>9</sup>

We are called, as pastors, who are part of the community of faith, and this part of 'public spires in the public square' – a phrase borrowed by Kevin Vanhoozer<sup>10</sup> from Leslie Newbiggin.<sup>11</sup>

### **What does it mean to a public witness as a pastor?**

It would be impossible for me to do anything other than dip my toe in the water of this vast subject now, so let me simply set out five key areas for you to consider as you think about your ministry as a pastor and the attendant call to public witness that it carries before reflecting on some of the distinctive *Pentecostal* aspects of this vocation. Those five key areas are:

- (1) Our public witness as a prophetic voice
- (2) Our public witness in prayer
- (3) Our public witness in preaching
- (4) Our public witness in presence
- (5) Our public witness in pastoring

I am delighted that we are now moving ahead with the Pastoral and Public Theology Task Force in Elim. This working group, which is accountable to the National Leadership Team, will hold together the call to be a public witness and to be theologically and pastorally faithful. The current working group members are Simo Frestadius, Dominic de Souza, Dave

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<sup>9</sup> To explore this further, see Keller, T., 2012. *Center Church: Doing balanced, gospel-centered ministry in your city*. Zondervan. Also Wright, C.J., 2010. *The mission of God's people: A biblical theology of the church's mission*. Zondervan. Also Goheen, M.W., 2011. *A light to the nations: The missional church and the biblical story*. Baker Academic. Also Marshall, C. and Payne, T., 2009. *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything*. Sydney: Matthias Media. Also DeYoung, K. and Gilbert, G., 2011. *What is the mission of the church: Making sense of social justice, shalom, and the great commission*. Crossway.

<sup>10</sup> See Vanhoozer, K. and Strachan, O., 2015. *The pastor as public theologian*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, p21

<sup>11</sup> Newbiggin, L., 1989. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, pp.222-233.

Newton and I have the privilege of chairing the group. As we develop our aims and objectives and identify the core issues we need to address in our cultures and societies, I am very aware of the huge task involved.

The pressing issues in Northern Ireland will not always be the same as those in Scotland, England or Wales. The issues faced in a Global movement like Elim are diverse and complex. It is obvious, therefore, that the Pastoral and Public Theology Task Force needs to work with regions and nations to identify the key challenges they are facing and find ways to support pastors in addressing them. From vaccines to climate change, from issues of race to issues of gender discrimination, from issues of identity to issues of sexuality, from finance to housing, from education to taxation, there are a plethora of issues that we are confronted with. As we begin to set priorities for how we support pastors in engaging with these, and many other, challenges, we want to be pragmatic, but also pro-active, intentional and faithful.

It strikes me, though, that the five key areas I am outlining here, together with my concluding reflections, will help us begin the work.

### **(1) Our public witness as a prophetic voice**

Notwithstanding the aspects of our eschatological ministry that both Simo and Martin will highlight for us later, we are called to ‘speak truth to power’. To put it colloquially, we are called to be in the presence of power as ambassadors for Christ,<sup>12</sup> as women and men who are ‘citizens’ of Heaven<sup>13</sup> and understand our ministries in the light of Eternity and filtered through the call to be faithful to Christ above all else<sup>14</sup> but never to be in pockets of power. When we become intoxicated by power, or pawns in the hands of political parties, we not only dull our witness, but we also become a bad witness. One need only think of the impact of the church’s subservience to their political masters during the Nazi dictatorship in Germany to be reminded of the devastating impact of allowing ourselves to become bit part players in the politics of nationalism. The Barmen Declaration’s six-point opposition to such capitulation still stands as a powerful example of what it means to be prophetic<sup>15</sup> and perhaps helps us to identify key components of what a prophetic stance in our own day might look like namely, my rough starting point would be:

- i. Christ, as revealed to us through the Word of God, is the Supreme Revelation of God to us. Any contemporary power or political posturing that claims to be Christian but contradicts Him will be refuted.
- ii. Christ’s authority and example for our moral and ethical life holds central place in the Church as the People of God. Any moral expectation placed upon us that contradicts His example is to be honoured only in so far as it does not place our allegiance to Him in jeopardy.
- iii. Politics and political expectations and statements will not be given priority over Christ’s view of the world or of human beings.
- iv. No political leader can demand the obedience of the Church, Christ alone is Lord of His Church and, ultimately, the Lord of the whole earth.

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<sup>12</sup> See 2 Corinthians 3-5 particularly.

<sup>13</sup> See Philippians 3:12-4:1, NB v20.

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 11:13

<sup>15</sup> See Hendel, K.K., 2009. The historical context of the Barmen declaration. *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 36(2), p.133. Also Busch, E., Krötke, W., Huber, W., Woodard-Lehman, D. and Bonhoeffer, D., 2019. *The Legacy of the Barmen Declaration: Politics and the Kingdom*. Rowman & Littlefield.

- v. There should be a separation of powers and responsibilities between the state and the Church which does not impinge upon the dignity and calling of the Church or the 'state' (although the idea of the nation state is not, per se, a Biblical one).
- vi. We will not subordinate the Church to the State or the Word of God or the power of God's Spirit, to the Church.

Such a position, though not perfect, offers a space for discussion for us as pastors around issues of nationalism, the dignity of people, and creates a space where we can speak truth to power without being held ransom by power. It depends, however, upon a pastorate that is already committed to Christ. After all, we cannot be held ransom by anything else if we are already captivated by Him.

Such a position frees us to be Christ's first. In the words of Thomas Merton,

*when speech is in danger of perishing or being perverted in the amplified noise of beasts, perhaps it becomes obligatory for a monk to try to speak*<sup>16</sup>

### **(2) Our public witness in prayer**

In his 55 thesis at the end of 'The Pastor as Public Theologian'<sup>17</sup>, Vanhoozer reminds us that the public witness of the pastor is of vital significance. In thesis 21 he states,

*Jonathan Edwards saw the pastorate as a 'divine business', a participation in Christ's work of representing God to human beings (especially in preaching) and human beings to God (Especially in prayer).*

The responsibility of the pastor to *both* be a person of prayer themselves *and* to lead the Community of God as a *praying community* is vital for our public witness. To root ourselves and our communities in prayer is a public declaration that our strength lies in God and not in ourselves. It is a reminder, written into our liturgy and common life, that the answers to our problems lie *beyond* us and *in Christ*. It is a profoundly counter-cultural declaration of dependency and humility. It is an act of confrontation on the popular modern notion that we do not need God.

I wonder if we have lost this vital aspect of pastoring – the call to be a praying person and to lead a praying community, and understanding this *in and of itself* as a witness? I know that in my own preparation for preaching and teaching, I can often spend as much time crafting my prayers during and at the end of a service or a message, as I can the message itself. It is the space where our 'confession' that God is the One Whom we need becomes 'enfleshed' in our own ministries. Have we allowed ourselves to forget that without him, we can do nothing?

### **(3) Our public witness in preaching**

Edward's view applies equally to preaching as part of the pastoral task as it does to praying. Our public witness in preaching is not only about the preaching of what we often call a 'Gospel' message, but also in preaching the Whole Counsel of God. To do so carries with it an inherent acknowledgement that the Truth of God's Word defines our understanding of the world, and our place in it. It is to accept and recognise that the pastors are theologians whose calling is to use words, rooted in Holy Writ, to help those we lead, and to challenge the societies of which we are part, remember that what God has done, is doing and will do through Christ is the axis of the world.

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<sup>16</sup> See Baker, J.T., *Thomas Merton Social Critic*. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232566703.pdf> accessed on 19th January 2021

<sup>17</sup> Vanhoozer, pp.183-188

I do not mean, by this, that we become spiritual extensions of one political party – such is the danger of some aspects of North American Evangelicalism.<sup>18</sup> Nor do I mean that we become a community of leaders on the edge of culture, with no place in the public life of the nation, such as is often seen in Continental Europe. The point I am trying to make is that we see preaching and proclamation as a core way of explaining what it means to be human, what it means to be part of a community and what our ultimate purpose is.

Our public witness in preaching means, therefore, that the messages we preach, and the curricula that we develop seek to speak into the culture that we find ourselves in whilst remaining firmly rooted in the soil of God's Word. We are, in the words of Christ, in this system of things, but not of it.<sup>19</sup>

We are called to communicate Christ to everyone, everywhere, always.

A particular challenge for us to navigate is how to preach *faithfully* in a *pluralistic* context with displaying arrogance about our own position. I would suggest we have something to learn here for Frances Schaeffer's models of co-belligerence<sup>20</sup> and from exploring theological methods of co-relationality<sup>21</sup>

#### **(4) Our public witness in presence<sup>22</sup>**

By this, I mean that we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ through engagement with the communities, the societies and the world where God has placed us. We do not run away from the world or lock out the challenges of our day. Instead, we *embrace* the call to be the hands and feet of Jesus in our world, meeting people where they are, serving them where we find them, and 'doing good to all, especially to those who of the household of faith.'<sup>23</sup>

How do we, for example, engage with the issues of poverty in our communities?<sup>24</sup> Are we serving holistically and without a hidden agenda? Have we understood the difference between *mission* and *Gospel*? If we have not grappled with why we serve, we will not be able to have a singularity of purpose in our serving. To quote Alan Roxborough and Fred Romanuk,

*Mission is not about a project or a budget, or a one-off event somewhere; it's not even about sending missionaries. A missional church is a community of God's people who live into the imagination that they are, by their very virtue, God's missionary people living as a demonstration of what God plans to do in and for all of creation in Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup>*

It goes without saying that if we hope to lead a church into presence ministry consistently, then we must grapple with questions of mission, Gospel and presence in our own theology.

<sup>18</sup> See McDaniel, E.L. and Ellison, C.G., 2008. God's party? Race, religion, and partisanship over time. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2), pp.180-191.

<sup>19</sup> See John 15:19 and 17:14-16

<sup>20</sup> See Wilson, A.R., 2014. Southern Strategies: Preaching, Prejudice, and Power. *American Review of Politics*, 34, pp.299-316.

<sup>21</sup> For an outline of this theological method see Graham, E. and Walton, H., 2019. *Theological reflection methods*. London: SCM, pp.151-184.

<sup>22</sup> For a fuller unpacking of this theme, see Duncan, M., 2007. *Kingdom come: The local church as a catalyst for social change*. Oxford: Lion.

<sup>23</sup> See Galatians 6:10

<sup>24</sup> See my chapter 'Poverty: What does it look like and can we rise to the challenge' in Duncan, M., 2007. *Kingdom come: The local church as a catalyst for social change*. Oxford: Lion., pp.151-163

<sup>25</sup> Roxburgh, A. and Romanuk, F., 2006. *The missional leader: equipping your church to reach a changing world*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. xv.

To be engaged in our culture carries with it a need to seek to understand our culture. That is a challenging under-taking that will never be complete and a moving feast that we will never be able to fully keep up with. H. Richard Niebuhr's classic text, *Christ and Culture*, for example, outlines five Christian stances towards culture:<sup>26</sup>

- (1) Christ against culture.
- (2) The Christ of culture.
- (3) Christ above culture.
- (4) Christ and culture in paradox.
- (5) Christ transforming culture.

His work has been critiqued many, re-interpreted, defended and opposed<sup>27</sup>, each one seeking to answer the important question of how we live as Christ's people in the world around us. There may not be a single way of doing this, though. As Miroslav Volf argues,

*Faith stands in opposition to some elements of culture and is detached from others. In some aspects faith is identical with elements of culture, and it seeks to transform in diverse ways yet many more. Moreover, faith's stance toward culture changes over time as culture changes. How then, is the stance of faith toward culture defined? It is – or it ought to be – defined by the center of the faith itself, by its relation to Christ as the divine Word incarnate and the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*<sup>28</sup>

If culture is constantly changing, and how we engage with it must change, then what it looks like for you and me to enable faithful presence today, and indeed to live our own lives as a faithful presence, will not only change over time, but it will also change depending on our own contexts. Just as each Gospel writer shares the same Gospel through their own lens, and for their own audience, so we must discover how we live Gospel in our own lives and before our own communities. This does not require compromise and giving up our convictions, but it does demand that we know what is primary and what is secondary, and it requires us to see the needs and challenges of our communities, our society and our world today, rather than trying to address the needs of a bygone era.

## **(5) Our public witness in pastoring**

Here, then is my last point. How do we *actually pastor* in a way that is a missional purpose? The way in which we walk with women and men, instruct the faithful, reach out to the world, care for the sick, visit those in prison, encourage the faint-hearted and shepherd the flock of God becomes *in and of itself* a witness to the world. I have a hunch that this is an area of ministry that has been pushed right back to the top of our agendas again by current circumstances and that it will remain at the top of the agenda.

My own research shows that a gap seems to exist here. In our rush to embrace leadership styles and techniques from businesses, we have lost something of the importance of Biblical shepherding. Leading as a shepherd, preaching as a shepherd, listening as a shepherd. Walking through the rites of passage that humans face, weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who rejoice – these are aspects of pastoring that we must discover again, and celebrate as incarnated statements of mission to a broken and lonely world. Whether it be helping people think about vaccines, helping them deal with issues of sexuality or identity,

<sup>26</sup> Niebuhr, H., 1956. *Christ & Culture*. New York: HarperCollins World.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see Carson, D., 2012. *Christ and culture revisited*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. Also, Carter, C., 2007. *Rethinking Christ and Culture*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press. Also, Naugle, D.K. 2009, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, Oxford University Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK.

<sup>28</sup> Volf, M., 2011. *A public faith*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Brazos Press, p. xv.



or walking with them through the heartbreak of loss, the role of the pastor *in and of itself* has never been more important.

Our communities watch how we treat people. They notice when we do not notice them. Stories of care, or lack of it, spread quickly across a church and a community. If we neglect the flock, then the message to others is that we do not actually live out our convictions. If we are hard-hearted in one situation, then others who may be facing the same situation get the message that this is how we will treat them. If we put projects and prestige about people and their lives, then the community can see that we lack compassion. Perhaps that is why we are reminded by Jesus that people will know how much we love Him by how much we love one another?<sup>29</sup>

It might also be worth considering the challenges of our behaviour and demeanour as women and men who hold positions of public leadership as pastors. There is much we could say here, but Nolan's seven principles of public life would be a good place to start<sup>30</sup>. They are:

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership

### **Conclusion – Our distinctive Pentecostal witness in the public square as pastors.**

So, we come to my closing observation. If the five areas I have outlined are somewhere near the truth, namely that as pastors in the public square we must think about

- (1) Our public witness as a prophetic voice
- (2) Our public witness in prayer
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and that clearly this calls for a deeper and more consistent approach to connecting our praxis with our theory, our *orthodoxy* with our *orthopraxy*, then it also demands that we re-imagine the locus and the method of theological formation for pastors. Vanhoozer and Strachan's work, previously cited, is a clarion call for us to take seriously the task to be pastor-theologians and it begs us to remember that the Academy serves the Church in the community of faith, not the other way round. There is much to do here – but with grace, commitment and time, it can be done.

The pressing question, or perhaps longing, that I want to leave with you is to ask you to take seriously what *Pentecostal* distinctives of pastors as public witnesses might be. I am thrilled that the issues of public theology are moving up the agenda in Pentecostal seminaries and denominations around the world. It fills me with hope that we are 'coming of age' and exploring what the power of the Spirit might mean for those of us who have a distinctive call to the Academy and to weld together the praxis of the Church and the learning of the Academy. This is, in my view, the rising age of Practical Theology – a sub-discipline of the

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<sup>29</sup> John 13:35.

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life> accessed on 18th January 2021

Church that is coming of age. Yet within that discipline there are still only a few Pentecostal voices. I welcome them and thank God for them, but we need more.

The fathers of Pentecostalism, and particularly those of the *Foursquare* paradigm, gave us the language of Jesus as Healer, Saviour, Baptiser and Coming King. There is rich soil to plant in here. The power of these four aspects of Jesus's Ministry continue to inspire me – and in many ways trouble me. Yet I have a deeply held hunch that God has been calling us to re-imagine Pentecostalism itself. I do not mean, by that, abandon the raw, primitive passion of our forebearers. Quite the opposite. Their passion and focus saw the Pentecostal Movement flourish through some of the hardest years of modern history. Pentecostalism flourished through World Wars, Pandemics, the Great Depression, the Cold War and much, much more. It thrived because those who went before us had deep experiences of the Spirit and sought to proclaim hope to individuals in the Name of Christ. It also thrived, however, because those upon whose shoulders we stand loved people. They wept with them, walked with them. They never lost their connection to the communities they served. Their fellowships were not machines, they were families. Their strategies never simply focussed on numbers or results – they saw the people before them and sought to love them, know them, lead them and release them into what God had for them.

What if God wants the pietism of our Movement to be celebrated whilst at the same time calling us, as Pentecostals into a new move of His Spirit – one where we believe that Christ is the Healer of broken communities, not just broken people? What if the Spirit is drawing us into a deeper expression of mission – that believes that the power of the Gospel is evidenced in a community healed, a public discourse that is imbued with hope, a whole generation that can be saved from the perils of hedonism, liberalism and capitalism? What if the Spirit wants us to proclaim that He empowers whole communities for mission, not just one or two, and that our task as pastors is to capture a new and enlarged imagination of what a transformed community, a transformed justice system, a transformed economy, a transformed world can look like?

What if the Spirit is whispering to us that the best days lie ahead, and for us to step into them we must enlarge our vision of what the Spirit is doing in our world and wants to do in us and through us? What if, as well as this, the Spirit is asking us to consider the challenges of over-realised eschatology too? What if we are being empowered to find a new vocabulary for empowerment by the Spirit that offers hope to the excluded and offers a hand of welcome to those who do not know that God offers them a place in the Family of the Church? What if, the new tongues that we must receive, are new words and ways of engaging with a world that does not know what we mean when we use our language, but still longs for the Song of Hope that resonates in our hearts?

What if the world is waiting for a Pentecostalism that connects the pulpit to the pavement, the congregation to the community, our churches with the challenges of our society, our prayers with the pain of the world, our hope with the hurting, our comfort with the grieving, our theology with our practice, and our pastors with the public square again? What if 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pentecostalism is the vehicle God wants to use to re-discover the holiness of all vocations, the possibilities of all human life and the power of Hope?

What if we give ourselves to this noble task once again, in such a way that we proclaim the Gospel, serve the poor, engage with our communities and lead our churches into a mission that touches every part of our societies, speaks into every strata of our communities and reaches every corner of the earth? What if this is the age of a Pentecostalism that spends itself on behalf of the poor and the hungry, challenges systemic injustice and offers the excluded and the forgotten a vision of the world and themselves where God can use them, wherever they are, to further His Kingdom?

Perhaps we have come to the Kingdom, sisters and brothers, for such a time as this.

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