

Response by Rev. Dr. Charlemagne M. NDITEMEH  
to Dr. David BJORK's paper  
"Almost Reformed: The Role of the Pastor in Disciple-Making"

Bulletin de Recherche de la FACTEC  
2017, Vol. 3, 87-90  
@ Le(s) auteur(s) 2017  
Faculté de Théologie Évangélique du Cameroun

The main thrust of Dr. David BJORK's paper is that since 1517, the pastor has dominated the ecclesial space in almost everything and particularly in disciple-making. This year 2017 marks the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. In Cameroon, the Council of Protestant Churches in Cameroon is planning a huge ceremony to commemorate the gift of God to the ecclesial world in and through Martin Luther. There are two lines of the Protestant Reformation, namely, the Magisterial Reformation and the Radical Reformation. A third wing of the Reformation can be mentioned, i.e. the Counter Reformation of and from the Roman Catholic Church. The Magisterial Reformation was supported by and dependent for its success upon the good will of magistrates or secular rulers. The Magisterial Reformers, and those who followed in their tradition, adhered to the old Church-State arrangement that originated with the Roman Emperor Constantine in the fourth century.

But there is another wing to the Reformation known as the Radical Reformation, to which belonging were folks like Johann Arndt, Philipp Jakob Spencer, and Conrad Grebel, who trace some of their ideas back to Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland. The Radical Reformation was the beginning of the Anabaptist movement. Adherents of the Radical Reformation opposed all involvement by the church with the state.

Fresh from the backdrop of the Reformation, Dr. David BJORK assembles an armada of scholars who have argued against the unfortunate dichotomy of clergy/laity as a major obstacle to the activation of Jesus' people or as the main fillip for tuning down ministry to the professional role of the pastor. Standing with satisfaction by CRUMLEY, Dr. David BJORK affirms that different understandings of ministry in North America: "the functions pastors fulfill, and especially the way in which pastors belong within or over against the whole people of God, continue to stimulate lively debate," which unfortunately does not seem to be the case in Africa. The unfortunate paradox in this contention and comparison is that most of the African form and content of ministry in general is the very true clone of the package that the African Church learned and inherited *mutatis mutandis* from their respective pre-independence Western missionaries or "religious colonizers."

Dr. David BJORK's contention that the call to pursue the Reformation which began 500 years ago has not had much impact on Christ-followers on the African continent is nothing shy of full-blown hyperbolicism. In African ecclesiology, there has been a great evolution in the pastor's status and role since the late 1980s with the advent of modern Pentecostalism, which effects have not respected any mainline denominational boundary. Contrary to the idea that "many Africans appear to understand the pastor's status and role much as Martin Luther described it five centuries ago," many contemporary African Christians no more view the pastor as the *alpha* and *omega* or the sole depository of specialized spiritual authority, spiritual gifts, preaching, prophecy, discipleship, biblical hermeneutics, etc. The average African pastor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century no more speaks *ex cathedra*, as it were at the dawn of pastoral ministry in Africa. Countless African pastors across denominational divides have been challenged by the laity on spiritual and ministry matters. This explains the plethora of African laity nowadays in theological training institutions who do not intend to ever take on pastoral status and role in any local church. While it may be true that many in Africa reject the assistance of lay believers who have been specifically trained, saying that they only want the help of the 'man of God,' this reality is not an African monopoly. We find the same thing replicating itself in another form or face in the United States and Europe.

The "local pastor who builds up the saints, does the work of the ministry, and assures an organic connection with their divine Head," does not claim, has never claimed, and has no right to claim a monopoly over these Christian ministerial duties. With the exception of some ministry responsibilities (e.g. ministry of the Lord's Supper and solemnization of weddings), pastoral ministry is an inclusionary and not an exclusionary ministry. I have submitted elsewhere that "The Christian minister is and must always be a teacher of the truth concerning the Christian faith, a servant of God called from the people of God and sent among the people of God to bear witness and make disciples of all nations" (NDITEMEH, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Dr. David BJORK's contention "that the common or ordinary Christ-followers should function" in much the same way like the local pastor is properly in order.

In this business of the sharing ministry of discipleship, the local pastor is not a monopolist. The contextual role of a pastor among Christ-followers is comparable to that of a soccer coach who prepares and instructs the team to victory. Praise God that Dr. BJORK agrees somewhat with this in his submission that "He [the pastor] will coach them [Christ-followers] in the art of asking pertinent questions, and of holding each other accountable for

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<sup>1</sup> Charlemagne M. NDITEMEH, *Towards an African Christian Premarital Counselling*, Bamenda: Full Gospel Press, 2011.

choices that are made” (BJORK, 2015, pp. 145-146). In order to have the clergy and the laity at the same level of service and functioning, they must all come on board at the same level of spirituality and spiritual giftedness. Of course, this is practically impossible. Hence the hierarchical understanding and structuring of the Church. Drawing inspiration from Larry OSBORNE, the “idea that pastors and clergy somehow have a more direct line to God than do ordinary believers,” has long been buried within Protestantism since the days of the Reformation.

Dr. BJORK’s hermeneutical (re)constructions of New Testament ecclesiology in the book of Ephesians leaves nothing to be desired. The problem remains the problem, namely, that Dr. David BJORK appears to be adamantly insisting on a problem that does not and should not exist: the clergy and laity dichotomy wherein the former dominates the latter to the advantage of the former. The pastoral office is divinely instituted. Without the laity, no pastor can succeed in ministry; without the pastor, the laity knows so well that their ministry, let alone disciple-making, would suffer many flaws.

It is very comforting to note that Dr. David BJORK sees and validates the complimentary roles of believers. Pastors are first of all believers, before being pastors. And as pastors, they have been equipped such that what they bring on board Christian ministry may be bigger than those of the laity. And to whom much is given, much is expected (Luke 12:48).

Dr. David BJORK’s vision of a completely more Reformed pastor to redefine his role as “fostering an environment wherein the Christ-followers mutually correct and edify one another,” appears to be excellently plausible. The problem is that his case for contemporary small-clusters of Christ-followers as it were in Ephesus and elsewhere during the formative period of the New Testament (which was marked and marred by persecution), seems to be out of touch with today’s realities and especially the freedom of worship.

In conclusion, whatever might have been the shortcomings of the Reformation according to its critics, the Reformation ushered in some sense and degree of spiritual liberation. The Magisterial Reformation preceded the Radical Reformation. Honesty would admit that but for the Magisterial Reformation, the Radical Reformation might never have found a space for expression. And because the Magisterial Reformers depended on the civil magistrates for its success, the Reformation could not move speedily. The continuous criticism that the Reformation didn’t go far enough appears to be a mark of extreme radicalism. If the Church lived and worshipped under a spiritually and administratively porous system for over 1500 years after the death of Christ and before the advent of the Protestant Reformation with all its variegated gains, then 500 years of pastoral leadership preponderance in

ministry is nothing to justify an overwhelming alarm over the ministry of the Christ-followers in disciples-making.

The collaboration and relationship between the clergy and laity in Africa has so far been harmonious and healthy. To provoke unnecessary flames between the brethren on account of a pastoral professional pseudo-monopoly of ministry would be altogether unfortunate. Nowadays, there is an undeniable and functional division of ministry labor between the clergy and the laity on the one hand and between the laity *inter se* on the other hand. For a truth, it is in evidence as Dr. David BJORK submits in his conclusion “that the continued reformation of the pastorate will not happen without tension.” The good news is that if there is fire in the Church or in Christian ministry, it will not burn the Church and/or her ministry because Jesus Christ is in it and is leading his people. It would be comely to lay this matter to rest by humbly learning at the blessed feet of our own memorable African Augustine of Hippo: In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, love. African Christians and ecclesiology have many essential issues that should unite us more than any quarrel over a non-essential matter like the clergy and laity dichotomy in ministry in general and disciple-making in particular.