

Extract 57

[Eugene] Peterson challenges conventional wisdom regarding church marketing, mega pastors, and the church's too-cosy relationship to American glitz and consumerism.⁸⁵

Extract 58

Congregations insist that we [prospective pastors] must do and be... the experts to help them stay ahead of the competition. Congregations want pastors who will lead them in the world of religious competition... They want pastors the way the Israelites wanted a king – to make hash of the Philistines. Congregations get their ideas of what makes a pastor from the culture, not from the Scriptures: they want a winner; they want their needs met; they want to be part of something zesty and glamorous... The understanding and conviction that brings us [that is, the authors] together in this book are that pastoral work originates in and is shaped by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It takes place in the world's culture, but it is not caused by it. It is intimately involved in the world, but it is not defined by it. The gospel is free, not only in the sense that we don't have to pay for it, but also in the more fundamental sense that it is an expression of God's freedom – it is not caused by our needs, but by God's grace. The trinity – not the culture, not the congregation – is the primary context for acquiring training and understanding in the pastoral vocation... I have friends who think that it is virtually impossible to be an honest, God-honouring pastor in our present culture. They are convinced that the role itself, formed as it has been now in a century of buy-it consumerism and fix-it psychologism, has become so powerful that it defeats all individual efforts to work within it. The role of pastor is now so secularised and so politicised [and, I would add, so consumerised – DG] by the culture that, even with the best of intentions, it is no longer available as a venue for a genuinely Christian ministry... When I became a pastor, I found that most of

⁸⁵ Publishers' blurb for Eugene H. Peterson: *The Pastor: A Memoir*, HarperOne, New York, 2011.

the counsel and direction I was given came not from Scripture but from the culture... I didn't follow it; I wanted not only my life but my ministry to be shaped by the Christian gospel revealed in Jesus. None of my learned advisers ever suggested that I give up my Christian faith so that I could be successful at this pastor business; but what they did do by implication was suggest that I give up on Scripture as having anything definitive to do with the pastoral vocation in contemporary North America. Scripture was good for preaching, but when it came to running a church, organising a congregation, managing conflict, training church school teachers... [and so on].⁸⁶

Extract 59

The devil has seldom done a more clever thing than hinting to the church that part of [its] mission is to provide entertainment for the people, with a view to winning them. From speaking out the gospel, the church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she tolerated them in her borders. Now she has adopted them under the plea of reaching the masses!⁸⁷

Extract 60

Contemporary evangelism is a human system of methodology, and modern methodology will lead to the compromise of biblical doctrine. You cannot package the gospel as you do merchandise. We are not salesmen; we are ambassadors for the Lord Jesus through his word.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson (edited by Peter Santucci): *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2000, pp4-7.

⁸⁷ David Stone: 'Feeding Sheep or Amusing Goats'. Stone used this quote from Spurgeon: 'A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep, the church will have clowns entertaining the goats'. As will be apparent, there is some overlap with Spurgeon and Archibald Brown.

⁸⁸ O. Talmadge Spence in Keith Malcomson: 'Quotes on Ministry in the Church'.

Extract 61

It is a poor sermon that gives no offence; that neither makes the hearer displeased with himself nor with the preacher.⁸⁹

Extract 62

Luke tells us about another kind of weed; namely 'the pleasures of this life'. I am sure that these thorns [Luke 8:14] play a dreadful part nowadays. I have nothing to say against recreation in its proper place. Certain forms of recreation are needful and useful; but it is a wretched thing when amusement becomes a vocation. Amusement should be used to do us good 'like a medicine'; it must never be used as the food of the individual. From early morning until late at night some spend their time in a round of frivolities, or else their very work is simply carried on to furnish them funds for their pleasures. This is vicious. Many have had all holy thoughts and gracious resolutions stamped out by perpetual trifling. Pleasure, so called, is the murderer of thought. This is the age of excessive amusement. Everybody craves for it, like a babe for its rattle. In the more sober years of our fathers, men and women had something better to live for than silly sports. The thorns are choking the age...

When it comes to defending the gospel, where do you see it in this age? I hoped that many would be found among Baptists who would care for the truth; but now I come to the conclusion that it is with many, as with the showman when asked which was Wellington, and which was Bonaparte: 'Whichever you please, my little dears. Pay your money, and take your choice!'... I am weary of these drivellers! The thorns have choked the seed in the pulpits and in the churches as well as in private individuals. Oh, that God would return! Oh, that his Spirit would raise up among us people who believe indeed, and prove the power of their belief! The fruit of much modern piety is nil.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ George Whitefield in Keith Malcomson: 'Quotes on Ministry in the Church'.

⁹⁰ C.H.Spurgeon sermon 2040.