

Financial Crisis in Christian Ministries

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Financial crisis is a worldwide phenomenon. There's hardly any nation which has not faced this. We are taught in the Bible that God's children need not be unduly anxious about their material needs because God as their Father knows how to take care of them. This is the direct teaching of Jesus (Mt 6:25-34). Overanxiousness about material needs makes money our god (v24). That is paganism (v32a). We must never forget that God is our Jehovah-jireh! Without this faith we cannot please Him in life or ministry. But these days, at least in India, monetary need has become one of the chief concerns of Christian ministries. How do we address this issue?

Material prosperity does not necessarily mean God's favour, and the absence of it His disfavour. Mother Mary was too poor to bring a lamb for the offering, and so she brought a pair of turtle doves only (Lev 12:6-8; Lk 2:22-24). But the angel of the Lord called her "highly favoured and blessed" (Lk 1:28). Even in the Land of Milk and Honey, there were poor people (Dt 15:11-14). We insult the God of the poor when we call poverty a curse (Prov 17:5a). Though that widow was in poverty she was so rich in faith that she gave away even the only two coins she had (Lk 21:1-4)! God has chosen many poor people to be rich in faith (Js 2:5). So many "saints" in Jerusalem were poor (Rom 15:26). In the New Testament Church of the first century, there were not only people wearing gold rings but also those in rags (Js 2:2). Apostle Paul and his team experienced financial crunch in their missionary enterprise (Phil 4:15,16; 2 Cor 6:10; 11:27).

At the same time financial crisis in Christian ministries cannot be overlooked or brushed aside. God does allow the brook to dry at times (1 Ki 17:7). But because organized Christian ministries involve the livelihood of so many individuals and families, this must be taken up seriously. We must not throw the entire blame on price-rise and inflation.

I had the privilege and responsibility of being the CEO of a ministry called Blessing Youth Mission (BYM) in India for over 30 years from 1971. Though I had deeply dedicated and highly skilled associates and assistants in the administration, the ultimate moral responsibility of the management of finance was on me. By the grace of God we had reasonably a smooth sailing. I share here what I have learnt from the Bible, through experience and from other ministries over the years. The **avoidable causes** of financial crisis are highlighted in this article.

1. Deviation in Vision

There are "diversities of gifts, differences of ministries and diversities of activities" in the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:4-6). Each organ is assigned a specific job. The heart must not try to function as the kidneys. The hands must not try to function as the feet. Internal organs must be satisfied with their hidden function and not covet that of external organs. Christian ministers and ministries must remain in their calling according to the original vision God has given them. Revivalists must not turn Evangelists to become more popular. Revivalists primarily minister to believers, and Evangelists are to concentrate on unbelievers. These are two different ministries (e.g. 1 Cor 14:22).

God equips us with His power and provides for our needs only if we confine ourselves to His specific calling. Several ministers of God with pastoral calling sold their vision for American dollars and German deutchmarks and became orphanage managers. They got into trouble when orphaned by the overseas sponsors.

The deviation in vision in ministerial organisations is usually after the time of the founders. That's why it's important to frequently remind ourselves of our roots. Here's God's call: Isa 51:1,2, "Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the hole of the pit from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father, and Sarah who bore you; for I called him alone, and blessed him and increased him."

2. Overambitious Expansion

Even while functioning within the God-given vision, the ministries must be careful about their expansion. No doubt "abounding always in the work of the Lord" is God's will concerning each of us (1 Cor 15:58). Here's God's call: Isa 54:2, "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your habitations; do not spare; LENGTHEN your cords, **and** STRENGTHEN your stakes." In other words, we must lengthen only to the extent we are able to strengthen. This is where many Christian organisations fail.

God's work means "building" His Kingdom and "battling" against the kingdom of Satan. Counting the cost or estimating our strength is a must for both (Lk 14:28-32). Personally I would prefer four missionary agencies with 250 missionaries each to one agency with 1000 missionaries. Besides improving the staff-care and avoiding financial over-strain, this would also pave way for new leaders to emerge. Hardly the nextline leaders have the charisma of the founding leaders. They are not able to challenge Christians and mobilize funds like the forebears.

God does not expect any single missionary organisation to evangelize each of the 212 tribes of India or reach out to each of the 29 States of this country. Instead of all the Indian Missions attempting to establish mission stations in all the States of India, each agency can choose one or two States and bless the population with saturation evangelism. For this we need the largeheartedness and the faith of our father Abraham who told Lot, "We are brothers ... If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left" (Gen 13:8,9). In order to avoid the speculation of competition between Jesus and John over the number of baptisms, Jesus left Judea and moved to Galilee (Jn 3:26; 4:1-3).

3. Milking without Feeding

The financial needs of the apostles for their ministries were as much as ours. They of course had learnt "both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil 4:12). It's referring to this experience Paul confessed, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (v13). (I wonder who quotes this text in this context!)

The ministry of the apostles was not in anyway affected due to fluctuations in financial inflow. This is obvious from what we read in Acts and the Epistles. The secret was a sacred principle on which they operated. It is this: They sowed spiritual seed among the people of God and in turn reaped a material harvest from them (1 Cor 9:11). They called this a "rightful claim" (v12). Whichever congregation the apostles visited, they concentrated on "giving" some blessing to the members rather than "getting" something from them. Here are some sample texts which endorse this point —

To the Church in Rome: "I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established" (Rom 1:11).

Again to the Church in Rome: "I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ" (Rom 15:29).

To the Corinthian Church: "I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2 Cor 12:14,15).

How many mission leaders and speakers can say that they visit existing Churches to bless the members spiritually? Is not promotion of their own organisations top on their agenda? Why then should not the Pastors of these Churches view these visiting preachers suspiciously?

In the annual camps of the Blessing Youth Mission from 1971, when I was the main speaker, maximum time was allotted to the preaching of the Word of God to edify and equip the delegates. There were instances when we even forgot to take the offering in the 3-day programmes! The appeal for funds was minimum in the Mission's magazine also. God honoured this approach. We never lacked anything. Each Mission has "promotional" workers. Let them be primarily interested in promoting the health of the existing Churches which they visit. Go to feed the sheep rather than to milk the cows! Bless people, not bleed them! Through pulpit talks and printed or recorded materials, bless the people abundantly. "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6).

4. Duplication of Ministries

Everyone trying to do everything is not God's will. Whether it is the people group or the place for outreach, the guidance of the Lord must be sought. The Holy Spirit is the Chief Executive of missionary work (Acts 13:2-4). As such His guidance must be sought at every step. Mere discussion in committee meetings is not enough. There must be direction from Above for every major decision. The Holy Spirit directed Peter to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:19,20). The Holy Spirit stopped Paul and Silas from entering Asia or Bithynia (16:6,7). God provides for our needs only when we go where He sends us. When Jesus sent forth His twelve disciples, He instructed them where to go and where not to go (Mt 10:5,6). And He followed His instructions with a promise of provision of their material needs (vv9-11). God's men doing God's work in God's time in God's way will not lack God's support.

To go into "all the world" is a "general" command to the Church. Regarding the target group and place of operation, there must be "specific" guidance. Peter was called to be an apostle to the Jews, and Paul to the non-Jews (Gal 2:7). Only if they play God-ordained roles for them, their ministry would be "effective" (v8). Apostle Paul and his associates were careful not to go "beyond the measure" and "beyond the sphere" God had appointed for them (2 Cor 10:13,14). This they did lest they took credit for "other men's labours" (v15). Paul maintained his vision for pioneer fields (Rom 15:20,21). How do we expect God to take care of us when we flee to Tarshish disobeying His call to us to go to Nineveh (Jonah 1:1-3)? Instead of feeding us with fish He would feed the fish with us! ... 4

5. Adulteration of the Message

When the ministry grows and its material needs multiply, there are two options: either to turn to God the Source or to people the channel. The tendency that's presently observed in many Missions is to choose the second option. We forget how much God is concerned about our physical needs. Look at the Lord's Prayer. He defines missionary work in the first three requests: God's Name, God's Kingdom, God's Will (Lk 11:2). The remaining four requests are for our needs. The first of these four is "Our daily bread" (v3). See how Jesus illustrates the fatherly concern of God through the examples of "bread, fish and egg" (vv11-13)!

The moment we depend on people the channel rather than God the Source, we tend to do all that's possible to please and entice the supporters. The first thing we do is adulterating the message or diluting the doctrine. We are afraid of preaching the truth lest we offend our supporters. Jesus and the apostles did not compromise on this. Once the disciples of Jesus following His teaching asked Him, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?" (Mt 15:12). He coolly answered, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted" (v13). In the same way, mission leaders should be able to say, "Every supporter whom our heavenly Father has not joined with us will be set aside!" Some of the believers who once loved Apostle Paul with perfect love hated him with perfect hatred because he preached the truth (Gal 4:13-16). But he kept speaking the truth. As in his times, there are many preachers today who adulterate the Word of God for material gain (2 Cor 2:17). This temptation is strongest for fund-mobilizers for Christian ministries.

The Blessing Youth Mission was founded for "prophetic teaching" and "apostolic evangelism." As the main pulpiter of the Mission, and with the basic calling of a Bible Teacher, I had a difficult choice to make. I was the chief fundraiser too! Teaching of sound doctrine is one of my main burdens. If I point out the unscripturalness of infant baptism, several supporters from Anglican Churches would be offended. If I emphasize the priesthood of all believers, traditional Churches with a strong clergy-laity divide would be shocked. If I stress the need to be filled with the Holy Spirit and operate His gifts, many evangelicals may not find it tasty. If I say that there is no law of tithing in the New Testament, and believers are free to distribute the Lord's money to trustworthy para-church organisations besides supporting their local Church, Pentecostals would become furious. And so on. The BYM is interdenominational and it has supporters from all denominations. We decided once and for all that whether we gain supporters or lose them, we would stay faithful to the Word of God on the pulpit and in print. We would preach what people "need" rather than what they "want" (2 Tim 4:3,4). God honoured this stand by supplying all our needs. There was always a balance of twelve or seven baskets full! Beloved, make sure that none of your supporters wake up on the resurrection morn to an unpleasant surprise.

6. Carnal Fundraising Methods

Commercialisation of religion was common even in the days of Jesus. He rebuked the Pharisees who made "long prayers" to empty the purses of widows (Mt 23:14). This is comparable to the promises of star evangelists to offer "special prayers" for special offerings. Foreseeing this, our Lord pointedly told His disciples, while sending them forth on the

Gospel mission, “Freely you have received, freely give!” Those with the gift of healing must be extra-careful (10:8). The apostles took this forthright instruction of their Master seriously. When Simon the sorcerer offered them money, saying, “Give me this power that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit,” Peter rebuked him saying, “Your money perish with you!” (Acts 8:18-20). Peter chided him saying his heart was filled with “wickedness, poison, bitterness and iniquity” (vv21-23).

Para-church organisations must be careful about their reports in their magazines, periodicals and circulars. What “impression” we leave in the hearts of the readers is more important than what “information” we serve. God knows our intentions. This is the knowledge David wanted his son Solomon to have (1 Chr 28:9). Exaggeration does not glorify God. It’s a lie that pleases Satan the father of lies. See how accurate the Biblical authors were in their writing. Matthew, writing about the ministry of Jesus in Nazareth, reported, “He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Mt 13:58). Mark did not hesitate to report that the first touch of Jesus on the blind man restored to him only a partial vision (Mk 8:22-25). Read the opening lines in the Gospel of Luke to see how diligent he was in writing his narrative (Lk 1:1-4). John did not round off the count of fish in the miracle catch from 153 to 160 (Jn 21:11). Referring to his persecution, Paul wrote, “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one” (2 Cor 11:24). Who would find fault with him if he had left out the words, “minus one?” This is honesty in reporting. Exaggerated reports may bring in more contributions from a few. But God who is displeased with exaggeration may somehow stop some regular contributors from sending their offerings. Beware!

Sympathy appeals must be avoided at all costs. It puts God to open shame. It denies the fact that the earth with all its fullness, silver and gold, and the cattle on a thousand hills are His (Psa 50:10-12; Hagg 2:8). We come across so many beggars in streets with pictures of gods and goddesses hanging around their necks. Do not bring down the Living God to that level. Preachers must not beg people for money; on the other hand people must beseech the preachers to receive their offerings (2 Cor 8:4). Do not present missionaries and fruits from their labour as mere promotional material. It’s cheap. Pagan converts may be brought to our gatherings to present them as an “offering” to God to “glorify Him” (Rom 15:9,16).

Financial reports must not be cooked up. Whether you have an excess or a deficit, be honest and frank before people. I have hardly come across ministry periodicals where, like Moses, the leaders asked people to stop sending any more offering! (Ex 36:6,7). The need of the day is not more money but a revival of giving among God’s people. Such a revival will come when the principles of giving are taught forthrightly from the Bible, and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit is prayed for. Following Pentecost, the believers even sold their properties voluntarily and laid the money at the apostles’ feet (Acts 2:44,45; 4:34-37). People lost their grip on earthly gold when they got a glimpse of eternal glory through the Holy Spirit. “Will You not revive us again, O Lord?” (Psa 85:6). What if the Government of India bans the operation of *Compassion International* in India? Don’t say that the BJP’s hand is behind it. I would say that God’s hand has done it (Job 12:9). We have enough and more of Christian families in India which can adopt or sponsor one child each!

7. Diversion of Funds

When an appeal is made by a Christian organisation in its periodical or in a meeting, the readers or the audience pray over it and possibly discuss the matter with their family members. God burdens them about this need and they decide to send an amount. The organisation has a moral obligation both before God and the donors to spend that amount exclusively for the stated purpose. The money cannot be diverted to other causes. If we divert the funds, how do we revere God who specifically guided the donor? Diversion of funds has become too common in missionary organisations and evangelistic ministries. This displeases God and grieves the Holy Spirit who inspires His people and directs their giving. This is lack of integrity and faithfulness in stewardship. God would stop honouring our further appeals to people.

God's people give generously towards charity projects because He as the God of the poor inspires and leads them so. Using the charity funds for other projects, however legitimate, is an insult to the Father of Mercies. You may take money from general funds for charity purposes, but never vice versa. The apostles handled this matter with great sensitivity. They received a "lavish amount" as contributions from believers for the poor saints in famine (2 Cor 8:20). Look at the apostles' testimony in this context: "We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men" (vv20,21). I would urge organisations to return the diverted charity funds to the designated purpose, with interest. Let's bring back the smile on the face of the God of the poor!

If a charity project for which funds were solicited is oversubscribed, give that excess amount to a needy fellow-organisation to spend for its ministry among the poor. Why not? This is a Biblical principle. For example, look at what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians: "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard-pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality" (2 Cor 8:13,14). To support this view, he quotes the example of gathering of manna in the Old Testament (v15; Ex 16:18). I would call this the "networking" of missions. Otherwise it's empty talk in Conferences.

Wherever and in whatever way possible, Christian ministries must share their material blessings with each other. During my leadership in the Blessing Youth Mission I initiated a scheme by which the staff would pool a portion of what they would set aside as the Lord's money from their salaries and send it to other organisations to bless their staff. The covering letter would have this line: "This is just to say that we are serving the same Lord as one Body!" Following my Talk on *Missionary Giving* in any Missionary Convention, I would present a few Missions worthy of support. First I would mention FMPB, then IEM, and so on. Only after that I would mention BYM, the Mission I was leading!

8. Investment in Mega-structures

The craze in Christendom for mega-structures is saddening. I wonder whether the Babel spirit is returning. Down through history God's view on huge buildings has not been favourable. It was not God's perfect will to have a Temple built for Him (Acts 7:46-50). Jesus was not terribly impressed with the huge buildings the disciples showed Him (Mk 13:1,2). We have no Biblical record of the early Church, with its swelling membership

and money, erecting huge structures to gather for worship or fellowship. Of course this does not mean we must not have Church buildings. But overinvestment in huge structures has landed many evangelistic agencies and missionary organisations in trouble. Building projects by popular evangelists have syphoned the money that should go to reach the unreached and church the unchurched. Christians are enticed to lavishly donate to preachers who “promise prayers” for them rather than contributing sacrificially to missions which “request prayers” for the lost and the least. This is unethical in the sight of the Good Shepherd who is more concerned about the one lost sheep than the nintynine safe inside the fold (Lk 15:4-7). Many Christians, though sincere, have been duped by the *God-told-me* heresy of some preachers.

In times like these, and in a country like India, it’s advisable to have five halls which can accomodate 1000 persons each rather than to build a single one to seat 5000. Anti-Christian elements will find it more difficult to demolish five buildings than one. Secondly, four new localities can be covered to exert Gospel influence (Acts 2:46,47). The third advantage is even greater: Four new leaders would emerge! The shepherding care also will be better (Jn 10:14; Prov 27:23). Loss of one sheep from a fold of one hundred can be more easily identified than from a fold of thousands (Lk 15:4). When there are worship sheds in pioneer mission fields without a proper roof, it’s unforgivable to invest crores of rupees for building bell-towers for Church buildings. How did we become so insane? Our only prestige symbol should be the “cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to us, and we to the world” (Gal 6:14). A Church historian writes that it’s bricks that killed us!

When preachers are not able to pay back the huge loans received from banks, they invariably resort to begging in their TV programmes. What a pathetic show before the non-Christian viewers! It is obnoxious to watch Christian TV programmes in which the bank details are flashed even before one Bible reference is indicated. Is it ministry or business?

9. Cheating the Government

In our Churches there’s so much of teaching on “tithes.” It’s good, but how about payment of “taxes” which is in no way less important? Some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, that is, religious zealots and political spokespersons, tried to corner Jesus with the tricky question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Mk 12:13,14). Jesus immediately asked for a denarius which was the common Roman coin normally paid as wages for one day’s work. If Jesus had replied “no,” the political Herodians would charge it as treason. If He had answered “yes,” the religious Pharisees would call it disloyalty to the Jewish nation. The answer of Jesus was neither political nor religious but spiritual: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (v17). In all the three Gospels, the introductory words before questioning Jesus was, “*Teacher*, You are true and You *teach* the way of God in truth” (Mt 22:16; Mk 12:14; Lk 20:21).

Yes, this is the right *teaching* to all of us: “There is no authority except from God ... Tax officials are God’s ministers” (Rom 13:1-7). In Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees and Herodians, Caesar comes first! Which means, God is not pleased with any tithe-payer who is a tax-evader. Jesus was an honest tax-payer (Mt 17:24-27). Christian ministries must be truthful while submitting accounts to the Income Tax Department, and they should regularly teach this truth to their supporters. Bringing black money as offering

must be discouraged, because black money is cursed. Only then can we expect God's blessing on our funds. Preachers and ministries which target the business community for collecting huge contributions must not hide the Biblical truth. A little with His blessing is better than a lot without it. Auditors can cook up, tax officials can be bribed, but everything is naked before God's eyes. Most of our tax and customs officials are upper-caste Hindus. They know the hollowness in many a Christian organisation. Is this why our converts are mostly from backward tribal background? But the early Church, besides moving commoners, impacted also the creamy layer of the society: "Cultured and learned Greeks, leading women, prominent women and men ... NOT A FEW" (Acts 17:4,12). Jesus was friendly with tax officials in order to lead them to salvation (Lk 5:27; Mk 2:15-17; Lk 7:34; Mt 21:31; Lk 15:1; 18:13,14; 19:2,9).

Too many printers, broadcasters, telecasters and builders complain about the unpaid bills by Christian ministries. After performing a multiplication miracle for the widow of a prophet, Elisha instructed her to *first* clear her debts, and then live on the rest (2 Ki 4:7). Once the Director of Far East Broadcasting Association (FEBA) requested me to speak to a Tamil preacher who had many pending bills for the airtime he used. Whenever FEBA reminded him, he started writing in his magazine that FEBA was pressurising him! What else would FEBA do?

10. Defects in Leadership

God sends His blessings, spiritual or material, to a local Church or a ministerial organisation, primarily through the leadership. This truth is pictorially illustrated in Psalm 133. The flow of blessing starts with the "head" of Aaron and runs down to his "garments" (v2). Human leadership is never perfect but it must work towards perfection. It was after Peter went through the refining process he could minister to his brothers (Lk 22:31,32). I briefly explain here six common defects which must be rectified in the matter of leadership —

a) Politics

There's dirty politics in many a Christian organisation in the choice of leaders. A desire to serve people is desirable, but lust for leadership is detestable. Lust for leadership is the first disqualification for leadership. Even when God called them to leadership, Moses and Jeremiah hesitated. Moses was the meekest man on earth, and Jeremiah was a man of brokenness. By playing manipulative politics we can bring someone to leadership, but see what God says about it: "They set up kings, but not by Me; they made princes, and I did not acknowledge them" (Hos 8:4). Those days it was Church politics; now it's Mission politics. Sad!

b) Character Flaw

Character is primary, and charisma is secondary, for spiritual leadership. In 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-11, Apostle Paul lists out the qualifications for leadership. Both these lists start with "blamelessness." He then stresses two things: "marital fidelity" and freedom from "covetousness." One of the divine requirements in the Law for kings was also that they must not multiply "wives" and "wealth" (Dt 17:17). Leaders with moral failures and corrupt hands will lack fair judgment and lose spiritual discernment. God's blessing in their ministries will be blocked, and supporters will lose confidence. Such leaders must repent or else be removed. "One sinner destroys much good" (Eccl 9:18b; Jer 5:25). When sin is tolerated in Christian ministries, God will "cut off the supply of bread," even if godly men like "Noah, Daniel and Job" are among their staff and supporters (Ezek 14:12-14).

c) Partiality

The Book of Deuteronomy is the explanation of the Law (Dt 1:5). The very first thing Moses spoke against was partiality of leaders (vv15-17). Prophet Samuel's final testimony was that he was impartial throughout his career (1 Sam 12:3). The kingship of David was characterised by impartiality (2 Sam 8:15). Our God as the Leader of leaders has no partiality (Eph 6:9). Partiality is a serious "sin" in the sight of God like adultery or murder (Js 2:1,2-4,9-11). Paul the senior apostle admonished Timothy the young leader not to do anything with partiality (1 Tim 5:21,22). Too many of our leaders are guilty of favouritism, regionalism, casteism and nepotism. God will not endorse such leadership with His blessings.

It has become common for the leaders to give special attention to those who contribute in lakhs, and take for granted those who contribute just hundreds and thousands. Such partiality was there even in the early Church (Js 2:1-4). God looks at the proportion of our giving and how much we keep back. This is what Jesus pointed out comparing the offering of the rich and that of the poor widow (Mk 12:41-44). If Mission leaders go after the affluent and big donors, they are displeasing the God of the poor. In my 48 years of public ministry I have found that the poor are more reliable than the rich. No wonder Jesus by and large was hard on the rich. I have always told my associates that receiving Rs. 1000/- from each of one hundred donors is to be preferred to receiving Rs. 1,00,000/- from a single donor. Is it not better to have one hundred persons involved with their prayer in the work than a single person? Leaders must beware of the manipulative tendencies of big donors. Don't earn God's displeasure.

d) Authoritarianism

Leaders in Missions and other ministerial organisations should not boss over the workers. The employer-employee concept is not valid in Christian ministries. God is the Employer and we are all coworkers with Him (1 Cor 3:9). The disciples of Jesus had numerous defects and in no way were they comparable to Him. Yet He called them His "friends" (Jn 15:15). He said that He would NOT call them servants! Apostle Paul the leader of his missionary and ministerial team gave fatherly care to his associates. In turn they respected him as their father (Phil 2:22; 1 Thess 2:11). While giving Timothy serious instructions about appointing leaders, Paul suddenly prescribes a native medicine for his stomach ailment (1 Tim 5:23)! The leader is to be a "servant" to the workers under his care. That's the example set by Jesus (Jn 13:13-15). Wherever there's servant-leadership, God abundantly blesses those ministries. Once the leaders turn authoritative, they not only lose spiritual authority but also God's favour.

e) Lack of sacrifice

The heartcry of fulltime workers of certain Missions is, "Fat-salaried non-fulltimers rule over us. How can they empathize with our problems and pain?" What they say is legitimate because incarnational identification is indispensable here (Heb 2:17). C.T. Studd threw away his fortune and cricket bat to found World Evangelisation Crusade (WEC) and give leadership to the workers. Dr. Billy Graham identified with his associate Evangelists by drawing only a salary from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). Dr. Bill Bright the Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) raised his own monthly support from individual donors just like any other CCC staff worker. Being inspired and challenged by these noble examples, though postgraduated from a prestigious

technological Institution (IIT), I resigned my job in 1975 to lead the fulltimers and volunteers of the Blessing Youth Mission (BYM), and lived on a meagre missionary salary till my retirement in 2003. My wife, a Paediatrician, similarly resigned her Government job in 1975 to work fulltime in BYM without any salary. Several others followed resigning their lucrative jobs, assumed a simple lifestyle and shared the leadership responsibilities in the Mission. It is not enough that the top leaders “spare” money and time for the activities; they must “invest” their life in the ministry. This is how God met all the needs of Paul and his fellow missionaries. Paul writes that even an ordinary soldier in the Army cannot be a non-fulltimer (2 Tim 2:4). How can the Army Chief be a part-timer or a spare-timer? Experienced and mature elders can be advisors, but not authorities over fulltimers.

f) Neglect of the Church

I often remind myself of what the senior-most missionary statesman in India, Dr. Sam Kamalesan, told me years ago: “Stanley, all our endeavours must be ultimately tied to the Church for abiding fruitfulness.” Para-church organisations are only a supplement and not a substitute to the local Churches. The Church is the building; the para-church organisations are just scaffolding. In all our planning sessions we must ask how our decisions would benefit the Church rather than profit our organisation. Otherwise we would be building our own empires instead of the Kingdom of God. Paramedical staff don’t operate on the patient; they just assist the doctors for surgery. The missionary labours of Paul and his team were linked to Churches like those in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi and Galatia. Christ’s last letters were also addressed to the Churches, whether they were alive, lukewarm, dying or dead. It’s the responsibility of the leadership to maintain the understanding in the organisation that Churches don’t exist for Missions, but Missions exist for Churches. Christ loves the Church and returns to marry her. God is not obliged to meet our needs if we don’t align ourselves with His eternal purpose. There are also organisations which outlive the purpose for which they were founded. They must be pulled down as we do with scaffolding once the building is complete.

Conclusion

When there arises a financial crisis in a Christian ministry, it’s natural that the leaders and keypersons plan to intensify their fund-mobilisation efforts. But I would not recommend this as the first remedial measure. This might give some temporary relief. But it will only be like “watering a vegetable garden by foot,” and not experiencing “rain from heaven” (Dt 11:10,11). On the other hand, if the leaders would collectively resort to a season of prayer to self-examine before God to find out the reasons for blockage, they would come out hearing again “the sound of abundance of rain” (v13-15). This article may be helpful for this exercise.

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