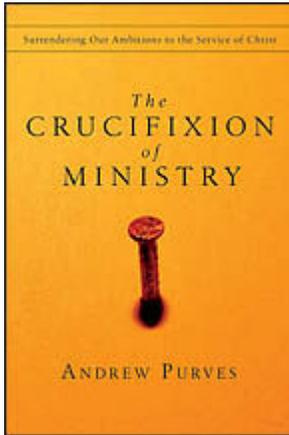


Q&A

AUTHOR INTERVIEW



An interview with
Andrew Purves
about *The
Crucifixion of
Ministry*

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Q: In what ways do you think ministry is lacking today?

Andrew Purves: Far too many ministers cast their ministry back upon themselves. The danger is ministerial messianism. The fact is, we can't raise the dead, heal the sick, forgive the sinner, comfort the afflicted and so on. It comes as a shock, I think, when we finally discover we are not the Messiah. When we think it is all up to us, our ministries have become a hindrance to the work of Christ because we have put ourselves into the place where only he should stand. When we do that, God kills our ministries—the crucifixion of ministry. But that's good news, for us and for our parishioners. Ultimately, they need a savior more than a minister. Jesus Christ is Lord, and as such he is the true and only minister. The real failure in practical theology is timid and limited Christology. Our perception of a living, acting, reigning Lord is just not vigorous enough. Generally, we have turned Jesus into a long-gone moral influence whom we have to imitate, rather than a living Lord who is at work in every aspect of the world's life.

Q: What are the effects of this lack in Christian ministry?

Andrew: Burnout, depression, exhaustion, loneliness, etc. By mid-career it can become a major crisis—the burden is too heavy to carry. We come to the ministerial Jordan, so to speak. The Lord, in effect, says to us, “Let me carry you across and henceforth let me do the ministry, while you bear witness to what I am up to; or stay here, keep trying to do it by yourself, and you'll work your way to retirement embittered and weary.” Thus I have developed the classical doctrine of our union with Christ: he joins us to himself so that we share in what he is up to.

Q: What made you decide to write a book on the crucifixion of ministry?

Andrew: Frankly, in part my own sense of inadequacy—I can't pray like Peter or preach like Paul. I am weary of people attempting to guilt me into ministry. I have also watched my wife, a Presbyterian pastor, struggle with big questions: How can I preach hard and true year after year and nothing seems to change? Why do the sore heads remain sore-headed? Why is ministry so terribly draining and as such becomes joyless? It is only when one is long in the tooth in ministry that one comes to see, to know in a deep way, that Jesus—in the freedom of his love and in the power of the Spirit—has to show up. So this has become the principal hermeneutical question for ministry: What is Jesus up to, here in this hospital room, with this congregation this Sunday morning, with this couple whose marriage is struggling? What does it mean to reframe ministry as bearing witness to a living, reigning and acting Lord at work among us? This means, of course, that at its core ministry is therefore a theological act.