

# The Voice

of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College

VOL. XI

JANUARY - FEBRUARY

No. 1

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*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. — 2 Tim. 2:15.*

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THE VOICE is the publication of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, published bi-monthly in the interest of sound Christian teaching, and setting forth the doctrinal position of the institution. Printed by The Christian Press, Ltd., 159 Kelvin St., Winnipeg. Subscription price: \$1.00 per year. Send your subscription to:

THE VOICE, 77 Kelvin Street, Winnipeg 5, Man.

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## Stimmen aus der Bruderschaft

Mit dieser Nummer der „Stimme“ beginnen wir das elfte Jahr in der Herausgabe dieses Blattes. Auch solche bescheidene Schriftmission erfordert manche Opfer an Zeit und Kraft, besonders wenn sie „nebenbei“ verrichtet werden soll. Das umfangreiche Arbeitsprogramm hier im Bibelcollege nimmt uns als Lehrer so voll in Anspruch, daß man für schriftliche Arbeiten oft nicht die nötige Ruhe und innere Sammlung finden kann. Wie in aller Arbeit für den Herrn, gibt es auch in diesem Dienste manche Segnungen und Freuden. Zu den letzteren zählen auch die ermunternden Briefe mancher Leser, die das Blatt schätzen.

Wir sind dankbar für die Stimmen aus der Bruderschaft in bezug der Weiterführung dieser Publikation. Es scheint doch der allgemeine Wunsch unserer Leser zu sein (mit einigen Ausnahmen), daß das Blatt auch weiter als selbständiges Journal erscheinen möchte. Zu der Frage einer etwaigen Verschmelzung des „Voice“ mit einem Wochen- oder Gemeindeblatt, haben sich mehrere Brüder wie folgt geäußert.

Ein Leser aus *Ontario* nimmt Stellung zur Frage der Verschmelzung und gibt seine Begründung: „Ich sage bestimmt: Nein! und zwar aus mehreren Gründen. Damit würde das inhaltsreiche Material zu sehr verallgemeinert und käme, mit andern Blättern, die vielfach nicht aufbewahrt werden, in den Papierkorb, während wir doch jede Voice-Nummer sorgfältig aufbewahren und unter die theologischen Werke im Bücherschrank stellen.“

Ein jüngerer Bruder aus *British Columbia* bittet, daß das Blatt auch me' mit einem andern Blatte zu verschmelzen wäre ich persönlich nicht dafür, weil zur Aufbewahrung und weitem Verwertung ein Heft viel besser geeignet ist als eine Zeitschrift.“

Ein jüngere Bruder aus *British Columbia* bittet, daß das Blatt auch weiter erscheine wie bisher: „I, for one, would be very disappointed to see that happen (i.e. merger with another paper). For those of us who are just beginning in church work, this fundamental and inspiring reading material is much appreciated. Please continue it as in the past.“

(Fortsetzung auf Seite 24)

## PREACHING

### Pauli Evangelium nach 1. Korinther 2

Die Zeit des Apostels Paulus war in manchen Stücken sehr unserer heutigen Zeit ähnlich. Vor allem war damals, wie auch heute, ein Streben nach großem Wissen vorhanden. Von den Athenern wird uns in Apg. 17, 21 berichtet, daß sie auf nichts anderes bedacht waren, als etwas Neues zu hören. Dieser Geist hatte sich auch auf die anderen Länder ausgebreitet; denn es heißt in derselben Verbindung, daß die Ausländer und Fremdlinge desselben Bestrebens waren. Korinth bildete keine Ausnahme. Daher darf man die Schwierigkeiten, denen die Apostel bei der Verkündigung des Evangeliums begegneten, nicht unterschätzen. Paulus mag wohl gerade aus dem Grunde in Korinth besondere Bemühungen an den Tag gelegt haben, sich von den Weltweisen nicht in nutzlose Diskussionen verwickeln zu lassen, eine Taktik, die er auch in Athen schon befolgte. In unserem Kapitel erklärt Paulus, in Korinth dem Evangelium gegenüber treu geblieben zu sein. Diese Treue kam zum Ausdruck, indem er drei Tatsachen bezüglich des Evangeliums im Auge behielt:

1. Das Wesen des Evangeliums.
2. Die Botschaft des Evangeliums.
3. Die Verkündigung des Evangeliums.

In seiner Überprüfung der Arbeit in Korinth zeigt Paulus die Gründlichkeit, die ihm F. Godet zuschreibt: „In treating each particular matter submitted to his judgment, the apostle does not stop at the surface; he endeavours to penetrate to the very root of those various manifestations.“ (Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, p. 2f)

#### I

#### Das Wesen des Evangeliums

Wenn Paulus zu den Korinthern von seinem Evangelium spricht, denkt er bestimmt an seine Erfahrung in Athen, wo er vor der Versammlung der griechischen Gelehrten seiner Zeit versuchte, mit ihnen vom Wesen des Evange-

liums zu sprechen. Dort forderten sie große philosophische Lehrsysteme, die von den Weltweisen aufgestellt und vortragen wurden. Die Anwesenden machten es sich zur Aufgabe, das Gesagte auf seine Richtigkeit hin zu prüfen. Nun hatte Paulus jedoch kein religiöses System vorzulegen. Davon stand er auch ganz ab. Damit hatte er längst gebrochen. Das System der jüdischen Religion hatte ihn sehr enttäuscht. Auf der Reise nach Damaskus war er zur Einsicht gekommen, daß das Heil und die wahre Verbindung mit Gott auf dem Wege der jüdischen Religionsübung nicht zu erlangen sei. Dort erschien ihm der Mann, in dem er Heil und Vergebung und wahre Rechtfertigung fand. Von der Stunde an läßt sich Paulus nicht mehr auf Religionssysteme ein. Er kennt nur Jesus Christus, den Gekreuzigten. Anstatt sich ein System zu erarbeiten, das als Grundlage seines religiösen Lebens dienen sollte, sieht sich Paulus an einen Mann gebunden, dem er sich frei, freudig und völlig ergeben hat. Dieser Mann ist der ewige Sohn Gottes, der Gekreuzigte, der Auferstandene und der nun zur Rechten Gottes Sitzende. Diesem Mann zu gehorchen ist ihm Lebensaufgabe. Daher läßt sich für Paulus das Wesen des Evangeliums in einem Satz ausdrücken: „Ich hielt mich nicht dafür, daß ich etwas wüßte unter euch, als allein Jesum Christum, den Gekreuzigten“ (V. 2).

Darin besteht die Einfachheit des Evangeliums. Das einfache Evangelium wird mit Recht als das Gewünschte bezeichnet. So will es auch angesehen sein. Mit religiösen Systemen verglichen, ist es sehr einfach. „Gott hat den, der von keiner Sünde wußte, für uns zur Sünde gemacht, auf daß wir hätten in ihm die Gerechtigkeit, die vor Gott gilt . . . denn Gott war in Christo und versöhnte die Welt mit ihm selber“ (2. Kor. 5, 21). „Glaube an den Herrn Jesus Christus, so wirst du und dein Haus selig“ (Apg. 16, 30). „Wer den Namen

des Herrn anrufen wird, der soll selig werden" (Apg. 2, 21). Einfacher kann es kaum gestellt werden. Die Person Jesu Christi steht im Mittelpunkt des Evangeliums. Pauli Gesinnung, die in Gal. 6, 14 zum Ausdruck kommt, ist daher für die Christenheit maßgebend: „Es sei ferne von mir, mich zu rühmen, denn allein von dem Kreuz unseres Herrn Jesu Christi, durch welchen mir die Welt gekreuzigt ist und ich der Welt." Die Schrift fordert keine sonstige Kennzeichnung für das Wesen des Evangeliums als „Jesus Christus", denn „Einen anderen Grund kann niemand legen außer dem, der gelegt ist, welcher ist Jesus Christus" (1. Kor. 3, 11). In dieser Gebundenheit an den Mann Jesus Christus beteht die Einfachheit des Evangeliums.

Gerade weil das Evangelium das Einfache für sich als Wesensart beansprucht, wird es von vielen verworfen. Die Behauptung, daß sich alles um die Person Jesu Christi dreht, daß Er in allem den Vorrang hat, daß Er sich in kein religiöses System einordnen läßt, will manchem nicht recht einleuchten. Es läßt sich jedoch nicht leugnen, daß von der Schrift her die Bedeutung Jesu für alle Beziehungen zwischen Gott und Mensch hervorgehoben wird und somit das Wesen des Evangeliums ausmacht. Ohne Christus gäbe es eben kein Christentum, keine Gemeinde, gerade weil das Evangelium (der christliche Galube) in vollkommener Abhängigkeit von Ihm steht.

Diesen Christus kann man sich auch nur als denjenigen denken, der einmal das Werk der Erlösung vollbrachte und damit alles erledigt hätte. Er ist der Auferstandene, der Lebende, der beständig Wirkende. Er greift zu allen Zeiten in das Leben des Menschen ein und läßt sich keine Schranken setzen. Daher muß die Christenheit, wenn sie vom Wesen des Evangeliums zu zeugen hat, beim Wort Pauli stehen bleiben: „Ich hielt mich nicht dafür, daß ich etwas wüßte . . . ohne allein Jesum Christum den Gekreuzigten."

## II

### Die Botschaft des Evangeliums

Was hat Paulus über die Botschaft des Evangeliums zu sagen? Wenn Jesus Christus das Wesen des Evange-

liums ist, dann muß Er auch seine Botschaft sein. Und Jesus Christus steht auch im Mittelpunkt der Botschaft; denn Paulus weiß nichts anderes in seiner Verkündigung zu bieten, als Jesus Christus, wie er es schon im 2. Vers feststellt. In unserem Kapitel geht es dem Apostel darum, festzulegen, daß die Botschaft des Evangeliums — ebenso wie sein Wesen — nicht einem System menschlicher Gelehrsamkeit entspringt, sondern einer besonderen göttlichen Verordnung und Mitteilung. Er behauptet im Besitz der Botschaft zu sein, scheut sich auch nicht, der Gemeinde darüber die notwendige Auskunft zu erteilen, wie er in ihren Besitz gekommen ist, um sie in sein Denken einzuführen.

1. Paulus informiert die Gemeinde bezüglich der Befähigung, diese Botschaft zu empfangen. Er schreibt es dem Einwirken des Geistes zu (Verse 12 und 16). Der Geist aus Gott und — was wohl dasselbe sagt — der Sinn Christi, den er empfing, haben ihn befähigt, das wissen zu können, was Gott beschlossenen hatte, der Menschheit zu bezeugen. Dabei betont Paulus in Vers 11 die Art der Befähigung. Wie ausschließlich der menschliche Geist weiß, was im Menschen ist, so weiß nur der Geist Gottes, was „in" Gott ist, d.h. was Gottes Absichten sind. Durch die Begnadigung mit dem Geist aus Gott kommt ihm die Befähigung, Gott zu verstehen. Ein geheimnisvolles Sich-mitteilen von Seiten Gottes findet statt, um dem Menschen überhaupt zu befähigen, die Botschaft fassen zu können. „Erst durch die Geisteswirkung Gottes werden die göttlichen Geheimnisse . . . flüssig für das menschliche Herz", erklärt W. Meyer mit Recht („Prophezei", Der erste Korintherbrief, S. 97). Paulus schreibt es diesem Geiste aus Gott zu, daß er überhaupt wissen d.h. begreifen, fassen kann, was Gott zu sagen hat.

Diesen Geist hat der Apostel als freie Gabe erhalten. Er hat ihn „empfangen." Gottes Wahl ist auf ihn gefallen, sowie auch auf die anderen Apostel. Der Herr wollte die Botschaft des Evangeliums unter die Menschen bringen. Daher verleiht Er den Aposteln den Geist als göttliche Ausrüstung, der sie allein befähigen kann.

2. Die außerordentliche Befähigung, derer es bedurfte, um Gott in Seinem Denken verstehen zu können, deutet schon an, daß die Botschaft selbst von besonderer Art ist. Paulus bezeichnet den Inhalt als „die heimliche, verborgene Weisheit Gottes, welche Gott verordnet hat vor der Welt zu unserer (der Gläubigen) Herrlichkeit" (V. 7). De Botschaft enthält, was der Mensch von sich aus weder erleben, noch ersinnen kann, an das sogar die kühnste menschliche Phantasie nicht hinanreicht. Denn sie handelt von dem, „das kein Auge gesehen hat, und kein Ohr gehört hat, und in keines Menschen Herz gekommen ist" (V. 9). In ihr ist enthalten, „das Gott bereitet hat denen, die Ihn lieben" (V. 9).

3. Die Befähigung durch den Geist aus Gott bereitet den Boden für die Übermittlung der Botschaft außergewöhnlichen Inhaltes vor. Paulus ist sich seiner Beschränktheit völlig bewußt. Daher schreibt er seine Kenntnis nicht dem eigenen Vermögen zu, sondern dem göttlichen Eingreifen, wenn er sagt: „Uns aber hat es Gott offenbart durch seinen Geist" (V. 10). Die Botschaft des Evangeliums ist also Offenbarungsgut. Der natürlichen menschlichen Vernunft war das Gut verborgen geblieben (V. 14). Die Apostel haben es durch die direkte göttliche Übermittlung der Kenntnisse, die auf keinem anderen Wege zu erwerben waren, bekommen. Ein geheimnisvolles Einwirken Gottes haben Paulus und die anderen Apostel erfahren, das den Weltweisen unerklärlich blieb. Sie hatten für solche Aufklärung kein Verständnis. Daher war ihnen auch die offenbarte Botschaft unglaubliche Torheit, da ihnen das Verständnis für das Geistgewirkte fehlte. Paulus war sich seiner Abhängigkeit von Gott völlig bewußt und stellt sich demütig in diese Abhängigkeit. Doch in dieser Stellung ist er sich seiner Berufung von Gott bewußt und behauptet frei und freudig, im Besitz der göttlichen Offenbarung zu sein.

Doch gleichzeitig bezeugt Paulus, daß Gott auch in der Offenbarung eine Einschränkung gemacht hat. Er bekennet: „Wir können wissen, was uns von Gott gegeben ist" (V. 12). Nicht alles Wissen ist Paulus oder sonst einem der

Apostel übermittelt worden, sondern, wie Petrus sagt: „was zum Leben und göttlichen Wandel dient" (2. Petri 1, 3) hat ihnen Gott kundgetan. Daher betont Paulus auch, daß er weiß, was ihm von Gott gegeben ist, nicht mehr. Was darüber hinaus geredet würde, wäre Schwärmerei. Dafür ist in der Botschaft des Evangeliums kein Platz. Sie ist eine göttliche Bekanntmachung, durch die Apostel übermittelt und im inspirierten Wort der Heiligen Schrift niedergelegt.

Die Botschaft des Evangeliums ist also kein Ausdruck des menschlichen Denkens. Sie kommt direkt von Gott her und ist durch die Schreiber des Neuen Testaments im inspirierten Wort niedergelegt worden. Das Offenbarungsgut bekam Paulus in der Zeit, als er allein mit dem Herrn in der Wüste war, wie er in Gal. 1, 17 berichtet. Johannes bekam es auf der Insel Patmos, Petrus in Joppe und bei sonstigen Gelegenheiten. Die Tatsache, daß Jesus in die Welt gekommen ist, bringt der Menschheit wunderbare Ausblicke in die Zukunft, in der wir zu erleben hoffen, was Gott für die Seinen bereitet hat, in die Vergangenheit, um die Seinen davon zu überzeugen, daß der Erlösungsplan nicht Zufall sondern Erwählung vor Grundlegung der Welt ist (V. 7). Die Botschaft des Evangeliums läßt uns auch etwas für das Heute zukommen. Jetzt schon soll der Mensch sich der Obhut des ewigen Sohnes Gottes freuen und in dem Bewußtsein durch das Leben gehen, daß diesem Christus alle Gewalt im Himmel und auf Erden gegeben ist.

## III

### Die Verkündigung des Evangeliums

Paulus hat aber auch noch etwas über die Verkündigung des Evangeliums zu sagen. Es gilt wohl, die frohe Botschaft des Evangeliums zu verkündigen, doch weiß er sich auch dabei an bestimmte Grundsätze gebunden.

1. Er kam bei der Verkündigung weder mit hohen Worten, noch mit hoher menschlicher Weisheit, die die menschliche Weisheit lehren kann (Verse 1 und 2). Paulus hat bei der Verkündigung ernstlich vermieden, das Evangelium von der Vernunft her zu erklären. Es besteht keine Möglichkeit, der

menschlichen Vernunft das Kommen Jesu und Sein Erlösungswerk faßbar darbieten zu können. Daher schlägt es auch immer fehl, wenn man Jesus als den idealen Menschen hinstellt und Ihn dem System der Moral zu unterordnen versucht. Es war nie die Absicht Pauli, das Evangelium von menschlicher Weisheit aus klarzulegen. Es paßt in kein System, es sprengt die Formen. Jesus und das Evangelium lassen sich nicht von Religionssystemen einfangen.

Auch sah Paulus es für nutzlos an, das Evangelium von der Logik her zu begründen. Er behauptet, nicht mit vernünftigen Reden menschlicher Weisheit umgegangen zu sein, wenn er das Wort verkündigte. Er wußte schon, daß die Vernunft letzten Endes doch versagt, weil die Erkenntnis dem Glauben entspringt, nicht der Glaube dem Zuspruch der Vernunft.

Wie kam der Apostel denn zu den Korinthern? Er kam um zu verkündigen, zu zeugen. Der Inhalt der Verkündigung war die „göttliche Predigt“, oder eigentlich „das Zeugnis Gottes“ (V. 4). Pauli Predigen war ein Ausrufen der göttlichen Tat in Christo Jesu. Dieser Verkündigung ist mit einer Beweisführung nicht gedient, vielmehr soll sie eine Übergabe an Gott bewirken, wodurch dann die Kraft Gottes am Menschen wirksam werden kann. So ruht der Glaube auf bestätigender Erfahrung des göttlichen Einwirkens und hat somit gesunden, befriedigenden Boden. Der Glaube, der nicht von Erfahrung gestützt wird, kann sich nicht halten. Ihm fehlt der Beweis, daß das Geglaupte einen Wirklichkeitswert besitzt. Wer die göttliche Kraft, von der das Evangelium zeugt, erfahren hat, der bedarf keiner Belege der Vernunft.

2. Paulus will jedoch bei den Lesern durchaus nicht den Eindruck hinterlassen, daß er Torheit gesprochen hätte. Es ist Weisheit verkündigt worden, aber Weisheit, die den Vollkommenen, d.h. den Gläubigen verständlich war, während sie den Ungläubigen verschlossen blieb (V. 6). Paulus erklärt hier, für seine Verkündigung die volle Zustimmung der Sachkundigen zu haben. Er weiß sich von den Gläubigen überprüft und zugestimmt. Darin liegt für ihn der weitere Beweis der Richtigkeit seiner

Verkündigung. Die Zustimmung der Gläubigen versichert ihn der Tatsache, daß er die Botschaft des Evangeliums richtig übertragen hat. Es ist bei jeder Verkündigung von Bedeutung, daß das Gesagte bei den „Vollkommenen“ als heimliche, verborgene Weisheit Gottes zu gelten vermag.

3. Paulus scheint sich auf zwei Arten der Verkündigung eingelassen zu haben. Er bezeichnet sie als „mein Wort“ und „meine Predigt.“ Man darf hier wohl den Auslegern zustimmen, die die erste Bezeichnung als privates Gespräch und die zweite als öffentliche Ansprache deuten. In beiden Fällen hat es Paulus gleich gehalten.

Was aber zu beachten wäre, ist die Tatsache, daß Paulus die Verkündigung in das Privatgespräch hineinzuflechten vermochte. Er hat sich in Privatgesprächen mit den Menschen über das Evangelium unterhalten. Daß das bei dem Predigen nicht zu kurz gekommen wäre, kann man sich schon denken. Doch daß bei dem Apostel auch noch Zeit geblieben ist, in Privatgesprächen daraufzukommen, ist das Bemerkenswerte.

Missionare berichten, daß die Neubekehrten auf den Missionsfeldern diese Art der Verkündigung durch private Unterhaltung üben. Sie macht sich da wieder bemerkbar und wird wieder ins Leben gerufen, wo der Geist des Herrn das Herz erfaßt und mit der Liebe zum Wort und zum Heiland, den man erlebt hat, erfüllt. In unserer Zeit ist schon mancher Segen der Predigt verlorengegangen, weil ihr inhaltsleeres Geschwätz und Gelächter auf den Fuß folgten.

4. Paulus hat es weislich vermieden, von einer „einfachen Verkündigung“ des Evangeliums zu sprechen; denn er sprach denkende Menschen an. Das Evangelium, das dem Wesen nach bestimmt einfach ist, wie wir es oben sahen, hat eine vielseitige Botschaft. Diese zu verkündigen und dabei den ganzen Umfang der „heimlichen, verborgenen Weisheit Gottes, welche Gott . . . verordnet hat zu unserer Herrlichkeit“ zu decken, ist eine sehr ernste Aufgabe. Sie besteht darin, daß der Verkündiger die mannigfaltigen Zweige der Botschaft in Worte kleidet, die den göttlichen Ansprüchen gerecht werden

u. dem Menschen genügend zugänglich. Die Verkündigung des Evangeliums darf sich nie das Ruhekippen unterlegen, sie habe ein „einfaches Evangelium“ zu verkündigen.

Wesen, Botschaft und Verkündigung des Evangeliums, die drei Gesichtspunkte gehören zusammen. Nachdem

## Involving the Mind in Preaching

All of us have expressed our disdain for intellectualism in the pulpit. It smacks of the ivory tower and comes to us full force in a myriad of quotations, logical propositions, and fine grammatical nuances. A few in the congregation may know where the preacher is going but the majority are not interested. Their only real point of contact during the hour is their imagination or the clock on the wall.

Granted that we are not for intellectualism, are we ready to espouse emotionalism? My wife and I attended a Negro church service in Elkhart, Ind. For approximately ninety minutes the congregation was under the almost hypnotic influence of the pianist and organist who kept up a strange rhythmic "beat." The congregation entered fully into the spirit of the rhythm. Soon two "sisters" reacted bodily by a series of convulsive "jerks." But the music never ceased. For approximately two hours the intellectual was held in abeyance and a "fellowship of the nerve endings" was indulged in.

Preaching is communication and therefore involves the mind. If the work of Jesus had been exclusively emotional, we would have no New Testament today. You cannot put emotions on paper. They are the child of the moment, the pleasant or unpleasant accompaniments of experience. Emotions cannot be preserved for posterity. If preaching is to serve more than the mere moment, act as more than a stimulus for feeling, it must carry an intellectual content capable of storing the memory of man with materials for later thought.

We must preach for intellectual involvement. By using the word "involvement," I have steered away from mere intellectualism. Whenever a person becomes deeply involved with a truth, he

die Gemeinde von heute durch die Apostel über das Wesen informiert worden ist, und die Botschaft in der heiligen Schrift niedergelegt erhielt, haben wir über die Verkündigung zu wachen, daß sie im Sinne der Schrift und nach der Art des Apostels Paulus geschehe.

C. Wall

begins to feel, to emote. However, his feelings now follow in the wake of a truth; his feelings are anchored to something which has an abiding quality. The feeling will subside but the truth remains. To be involved is to invest the entire person in the process and in this way the feelings are also activated.

Fiery sermons without intellectual content are actually dangerous. They arouse without giving direction. An aroused person must act and since no direct line of action is suggested, he follows his own inclination. Things are done on the spur of the moment. Snap decisions are brought about only to be regretted in a few days. On the other hand, a suggestion may be given in the sermon, but since the supporting biblical evidence is lacking the individual must respond on the basis of the preacher's conviction. The truth was not "internalized." It did not become the hearer's conviction since conviction grows on the soil of thought and meditation.

It is no small matter for a preacher to induce the congregation to leave the bleachers and to come into the arena to participate with him. To leave them on the bleachers is to leave them uninvolved and to remain uninvolved is not to learn. How will he do this? The preacher has inherited one of the most difficult vehicles for affecting human experience. He must involve people by words. Edgar Dale, in **Audio-Visual Methods of Teaching**, claims that the medium of verbal symbols is the least effective among several media of instruction. He suggests a cone of experience to indicate the relative effectiveness of instruction. Direct, purposeful experience is most effective for it involves the entire person. Man remem-

bers most clearly that which he has deeply experienced through involvement. Ask a person to relate the experience of losing a wife or a husband. He doesn't say: "Now, how was that again?" He knows because it deeply involved him. Contrived experience comes next, according to Dale, and then follow dramatic participation, demonstrations, field trips, motion pictures, visual symbols and last of all, verbal symbols. This brings to my mind the statement of a friend of mine, a successful high school teacher, who said, "The minute I start lecturing, my pupils stop learning."

What does this mean for preaching? Has God chosen the most inferior means of communication? Is this what Paul meant by the "foolishness of preaching"?

Let us not forget that Dale speaks of **secular** communication. Preaching is not secular communication but divine truth through human media. The work of the Spirit of God is ever present when the Word is proclaimed. With Luther, we say that the Spirit of God works in and through the Word of God. Preaching God's Word is not an exercise; it is an event. God and man meet when the Word is proclaimed and such a meeting becomes an experience. We are not merely dealing with verbal communications; we are dealing with a divine visitation, as Peter calls it. Therefore, what Dale says about verbal symbolism does not altogether apply to preaching. Actually, proper preaching and prayerful listening will constitute a purposeful experience which, according to Dale, involves the entire person and makes for the highest level of learning. But in order to have this purposeful experience there must be intellectual involvement. The listener must think and the preacher must offer something to think about.

In order to preach for involvement the preacher must understand his audience. When Francis Asbury, the Methodist circuit preacher came to America, he found that his message was not welcomed at first. In his diary he records that in a certain place "the people were insensible to my preaching." It was not until he had become acclimated to the

frontier of America that he was able to communicate effectively to the people. He now knew their needs and their interests and was able to bring the Word of God to them so that it bore down upon their lives. Many a missionary has almost despaired in his attempt "to find his audience." He did after he had found himself in the new land.

Preachers are often trained for an encounter with ideas. They make good philosophers but are unable to lead men and women to a real involvement with the Christ in the Scriptures. A recent report on theological studies records the lament of hundreds of seminary trained men who had received the best theological education available; but it was a training for theological study and teaching and not training for the work of the ministry. These men readily confessed that the training for the work they had to do was received on the job, and by trial and error. Repeatedly they referred to themselves as the blind leading the blind.

What we are talking about is an over-emphasis on subject matter and an under-emphasis on people.

Ministers, says Edgar N. Jackson, in **A Psychology for Preaching**, generally fall into three groups. Some have a natural warmth and feeling for people and that quality dominates their ministry whether they are trained or not. Others have personality defects that make it easier for them to reject people than to accept them. Finally, the great majority are normal, healthy individuals who are anxious to improve their techniques for relating themselves and their message to their people. They are the ones who gladly accept the insights from the social sciences. They are not interested so much in criticizing the schools they have attended nor excusing their shortcomings as they are in sharpening their practical and intellectual tools so that they can work more effectively in the future.

I have found it extremely helpful to concentrate on individuals in my sermon preparation. I cannot understand the needs of one thousand people at one time, but I can try to acquaint myself with twenty-five or fifty individuals. A surgeon operates on individuals, on one

person at a time. The psychiatrist talks to one person. The preacher must refrain from dealing with a "Massen-mensch." Such a person is always fictitious, only individual people are really alive. If the preacher has no individuals in mind when he stands before God or when he preaches, his sermons will come to people like a custard pie. The pie splatters over everything but hits nothing very hard.

One woman with a sense of humor was heard to describe her pastor's sermons as "scratching where we don't itch." She and her friends had deep needs but somehow the sermons were not directed to these problem areas.

To preach for involvement also demands a certain amount of intellectual daring on the part of the preacher. If preaching is an event, then it remains to be said that some events can backfire. Preachers in search for safety seldom find themselves involved with people in search for truth. They take recourse to trite cliches and pious platitudes. They will side with issues which others have already fought out and settled. When the smoke of battle clears away they are found raising ancient battle cries and fighting strawmen. And yet consider their greater danger of creating a lop-sided faith in people which emphasizes only certain aspects and never faces the current issues of the day. Such people are ill-equipped to face the battle of the hour. They have been denied the experience of honest intellectual combat and growth. This does not call for a contemporaneity which jumps on every passing bandwagon or joins in with every passing fanfare. However, preachers must think through basic issues facing their congregations and do this honestly and boldly. To fail in this is to fail as a leader. A leader cannot rely on quotations; he must quote himself and take the consequences. This is preaching from conviction.

A question might justifiably be raised at this stage: How does one practically involve the hearer intellectually? What are the homiletical techniques which enable one to enlist the mind for action?

The opening sentences of a sermon can best serve their purpose if the

preacher deliberately and skillfully makes the hearer feel that he is involved. The opening sentences should not be commonplace and imply that the hearer already knows the answer. They should be inviting and challenging. Imagine such an approach leading into a discussion of home missions: "Our latest Canadian Conference Yearbook tells us that over 14,000 Mennonite Brethren have added 187 new members to the church roll in the last twelve months. Are you really satisfied with this?" Most speakers convince their audience to follow them in the first few minutes or convince them in the same time to shut off their thinking mechanisms for the next hour.

Involvement seems to be the method which Jesus used. We have only fragments of His sermons but it is obvious that He called out an immediate response. His listeners were involved. When He was through the audience was ready to act: sometimes to thrust Him out of the city, at other times to make Him King. Jacgson says: "We may be sure Jesus spent little time sawing sawdust. He ripped into the real problems of people and his age. He generated real participation and response."

To gain attention is a great feat but to sustain it is a greater accomplishment. Long distance cable communication is made possible by boosters every few miles to increase the signal. Electrical impulses once strong must be kept vital. Even so communication must be continually renewed and revitalized. It has been estimated that an average class listening to a teacher has serious lapses of attention every seven minutes.

Humour is useful in sustaining attention provided, of course, it is two-edged humour. It must also teach, not only activate attention. A story that is inserted merely to make people laugh cheapens the sermon. I think those who knew the veteran Mennonite Brethren pulpiteer, A. H. Unruh, will agree that his humour was two-edged humour. It was a vehicle which carried a lesson.

Dean Charles R. Brown of Yale had some homespun advice for preachers. "It is not well for a minister to go out of his way six inches to make a joke.

But when some unexpected turn comes to him naturally in the treatment of a great truth, he is unwise to turn aside in order to avoid it. Let him study the great masters of delicate humour in the literature of the race. Let him use, if he will, those lighter statements which bring a sense of surprise."

Contrary to most books on homiletics, it might be well to begin with the strongest point in the sermon. Most books suggest working up to a climax by beginning with the weak and moving into the strong. Experiments have shown that students remember better when the strong points come first. The logic seems rather simple. We tend to lose our hearers at the beginning so that when the strong points come the hearers are not with us any more.

All of this spells preparation. In a sense the whole life of the preacher is his preparation. All he sees, all he hears, all he does—everything which makes

him who he is—this is his preparation for the great task of involving listeners.

Sermons do not just happen, they grow in the soil of human experience. Creative thinking leads to stimulating preaching.

I have often quoted Robert Burns in his less known poem **To a Mouse**. Permit me to change it slightly. Ae, would some power the giftie gie us, To hear ourselves as ithers hear us.

Preaching is a great responsibility. To stand before an audience and ask for their attention for forty-five minutes is to commit oneself to having something to say. Anything less is misleading the people. God forgive us if we have made preaching a trifling matter. We are not called by God to entertain and amuse; we are called to involve men and women in life's most serious business—following Jesus.

F. C. Peters

## PRACTICAL

The growth of a church in numbers—there are other ways of growth—raises the question of whether it were not the part of wisdom that a limit be placed on the size of a church. This question is all the more a serious one in the light of the fact that 'growth' in some local churches represents merely a 'reshuffling' of membership—one church 'growing' at the expense of others. A very saddening dimension is added to

the situation when the sinful motives of prestige and competition enter into the desire for growth. The question of the size of the local church has serious implications for its outreach into the community. The brethren H. Baerg and J. J. Toews have agreed between themselves to discuss two aspects of the problem of church size. These brethren wish it to be made clear that the following discussions are to be understood as a brotherly dialogue. Ed.

### The Preferable Size of a Church

The question of the ideal size of a church has often been discussed. It is not difficult to find advocates for both sides of the question. Some will argue feverishly for the large, and others will contend for the smaller church. In discussing this question in an article, we

do not expect to settle the issue to the satisfaction of all concerned, nor to achieve any degree of finality, but we trust, with the help of God, to throw some light on the issues involved. Generally, the larger the church, the greater the prestige it enjoys and the admir-

ation it receives. It is also evident that the larger church may have a greater influence in the community and will sooner be noticed by various agencies of the political and economic world. Yet, are these the criteria by which to find the answer to our question? Should this be a matter of mere personal likes or dislikes? Should we not much rather concern ourselves with scriptural implications and questions of efficiency in the various functions assigned to the church?

#### 1. Scriptural Allusions

Nowhere does the Bible give us a specific statement regarding the ideal size of a church. However, we are not left without scriptural indications relative to this matter. Numbering of church members had its beginning with Pentecost, the day the church was born. Before the Spirit came upon the believers, there were 120 (Acts 1:15), and on Pentecost there were "added to them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). Later, we read of five thousand (Acts 4:4). Thereafter, however, no specific numbers of church members seem to be given. Neither can we be sure that these numbers of the believers in Jerusalem indicate a functional unit. We read, "All that believed were together and had all things common . . . and they were continuing daily with one accord in the temple . . ." (Acts 2:44-46). This may indicate daily meetings of large crowds over a given period of time, but in the same context we read, "And breaking bread from house to house." Other versions say, "breaking bread in their homes" (RSV). The word "homes," the Pulpit Commentary explains, "represents the private Christian place of meeting as contrasted with the temple. The meaning is not that every disciple broke bread in his own house, but that they broke bread at the house where the Christians' assemblies were held . . ." The upper room of Acts 1, where one hundred and twenty were gathered, may serve as an example. Such smaller units are indicated in other scriptures too. Acquilla and Priscilla had a church in their house at Ephesus (I Cor. 16:19), and

again later, when the same couple lived in Rome (Romans 16:5). There is reason to believe that there were more Christians in the city of Ephesus than just the small group that gathered in a house (see Acts 20), but could it be that for functional reasons the saints in Ephesus had smaller units which gathered in smaller houses? When Paul wrote "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse" (Col. 1:2) he likely addressed more than "Nymphas, and the church which is in his house" (Col. 4:15). In his more personal letter to Philemon Paul also addresses himself "to the church in thy house" (Philemon 2). In all of the above instances the emphasis is on smaller units, not on cathedrals and large crowds. Could it be that as a rule, for functional reasons, they gathered in smaller groups and that only for special occasions all the thousands in Jerusalem came together? It could have been an arrangement as we have it today, where the smaller local church functions as a unit, but for certain occasions we gather as a conference of churches.

It may be argued that in the early days when the church was persecuted the meeting in inconspicuous places was a matter of necessity and not of choice. Man's choice may have favored large Christian centres, but God, who controlled the persecution, scattered the thousands who were in Jerusalem and only after he had so done, do we read that they "went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). In church history, imposing architecture and large memberships in local congregations appear to be associated with formalism and lack of missionary zeal. Large cathedrals of past centuries are the remains of the Dark Ages and today are the specialty of liturgical denominations. Times of expansion by the living church seem to be characterized by smaller, functional units and simplicity of architecture with a strong emphasis on the message and on functional efficiency. It is difficult, therefore, to avoid the impression that scriptural suggestions favor the smaller unit as a strong working force for God.

## 2. Functional efficiency of the church as a fellowship.

Sociology has two key concepts which are related to our problem: "Gemeinschaft" and "Gesellschaft." Some others may refer to the same human relations by speaking of primary group and secondary group. "Gemeinschaft" conveys the idea of informal and intimate relationship. It is a face to face relationship that is not necessarily planned nor has it necessarily any other purpose but that people want to enjoy each other. The sentimental element, though unconscious, is strong, and members of such a group are very responsive to the attitudes and sentiments of other group members. Group members are evaluated intrinsically, that is, not for anything that they can do or contribute, but for who they are. Here social distance is at a minimum and common interests, though not always defined, are many.

By "Gesellschaft" or secondary group, we refer to a more formal relationship where organization becomes important. The office one holds within the group is significant and one evaluates members more extrinsically or in terms of what they can do, or what benefits the other group members can derive from them. Here sentiment is less important and interest is a more significant factor. Membership in a "Gesellschaft" refers to a more complex society of larger proportions. A "Gemeinschaft," however, meets more the basic human needs than "Gesellschaft." The human individual can sooner do without "Gesellschaft" than without "Gemeinschaft." One can be in a "Gesellschaft" and still be very lonely. While in a "Gemeinschaft" one always feels surrounded by friends who understand.

A local church will need both aspects of human relations. The Bible speaks in principle of an organizational pattern and names such offices as prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, deacons, etc. Such organization is necessary for the orderly execution of the Christ-given responsibility to the church, i.e., to make disciples and teach them to observe what Christ has com-

manded. But the church must mean more to the individual member than just an organization where we work for Christ. The church must offer to the individual member a fellowship which satisfies—a "Gemeinschaft" which meets his inner needs. It must be a relationship for the individual member where he is not only appreciated for the talent he brings to the church, but where he is cherished for what he is—a redeemed child of God. For him church must become an experience where status relation is definitely secondary. It is a brotherhood! It is a fellowship where all are on one level and where bonds of love bind the individual to the group more so than organizational requirements. Here we have to reckon with one basic premise! As the size of the group increases, the relationship of members within that group to each other, shifts from the "Gemeinschaft" level to the "Gesellschaft" level. Once the "Gemeinschaft" experience is no longer a significant aspect of church life, the church can no longer be to its members, what in the biblical frame of reference it is to be—a fellowship of brethren. When the emphasis shifts from "Gemeinschaft" to "Gesellschaft," it will very often happen that certain "Gemeinschaft groups" will form within a church and the church becomes cliquish, and this weakens the unity of the church and makes it very difficult for an outsider to find his way into the church and feel at home. This is the difficulty that many outsiders encounter when they become members of Menonite Brethren churches. We are willing to include them in our organizational pattern, but not in the more intimate "Gemeinschaft" relationship.

The preferable size of the church then should be such that the membership does not only recognize itself as a unit organizationally but that they also sense the "Gemeinschaft" aspect, which gives them that strong sense of belonging, of being wanted, of being one, in love and understanding.

## 3. Functional efficiency of the church in evangelism.

Here we ask: "What church would be more effective in its outreach to the

lost?" We are not dealing here with the matter of church growth by membership transfer, but more with the actual bringing in of non-Christians. There may be those non-Christians who would prefer to come to a larger church where their appearance may be less conspicuous. If the church is too small, the stranger may be too self-conscious, being noticed by everyone. However, if the newcomer can slip in and out without the church noticing a seeking soul, the opportunity of supplementing the influence of the message by a personal touch for God, will be lost. This is a problem the larger churches have sought to resolve, yet to my knowledge no large church has been satisfied with the results achieved. A middle-sized church where the stranger is noticed and receives a personal greeting, sensing the warmth of some of the church people, is more likely to succeed. The stranger will also find it easier to become integrated into the totality of the church when the primary relationship includes the total membership instead of having a large organization within which there is a multiplicity of "Gemeinschaft" groups who can so easily develop into closed cliques.

Furthermore, evangelism in a church should involve the total membership, yet the percentage of passive and inactive members is usually greater in a larger church than in the smaller church. This might be for two reasons. First, the larger church has difficulty in setting up a working program which will involve its total membership. Secondly, in a large church the individual member always feels there are so many others that can do it and are better qualified to do it. Therefore, he prefers not to project himself. In a smaller church each member recognizes that his help is needed and this generates a willingness to participate. All this seems to substantiate the premise that after the church has reached a certain maximum the rate of growth declines in direct proportion to the size of the church. This is a basic law of Sunday school and church growth. Here we can learn from nature where we so often find multiplication by cell division. The cell grows to a certain size, and

then divides into two. They grow again up to a certain point and both divide, and thus they expand. This could work equally well in the church situation.

## 4. Functional efficiency of the church in administration.

Here we cannot overlook the fact that the larger church will have the potential to accomplish tasks which may appear more difficult for the smaller. A larger church can also be more selective in its appointment of officers to certain tasks and, therefore, their program may run more efficiently and expertly. However, the larger church will forfeit a considerable amount of energy for overhead organization. It can reach the point where a number of the departmental officers are so pre-occupied with organizational responsibility, to keep the machinery going, that they never get to do any work on the ground floor where work toward the growth of the church really counts. There is also a hidden danger that a larger church can afford to overlook the less gifted people. Here the people with one talent may not have the opportunity to develop and employ their talent for the Lord's cause. The people with five talents will do the work with professional proficiency and thus actually introduce professionalism into the church structure. Expert proficiency is indeed desirable but when it creates a distance between the officers and the general membership of the church (where individual members feel that what they would like to do, and would be able to do, is not good enough), it may be a liability rather than an asset.

## 5. Functional efficiency of the church in pastoral responsibility.

The pastor of a church owes to each member of his flock personal attention. It is not sufficient to become a pastor of a flock. A good shepherd "calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out" (John 10:3). A pastor cannot be satisfied when administrative responsibilities pre-occupy him to the extent where he can deal with his people in groups only. For, how shall he "watch for your souls, as they that must give account" (Heb. 13:17), when individual

contact must be neglected in favor of other pressing duties, or because of too great a number of people? The pastor's ministry is not only that of public teaching but also of teaching from "house to house" (Acts 20:20).

The individual member longs for a personal touch from the shepherd who is to watch over his soul. This becomes increasingly difficult when the church becomes too large. In my pastoral experience in four of the larger churches of our conference this has been a constant burden and created a great guilt complex: my relationship to the individual member was often limited to administrative interaction and secondary contacts through reports from deacons and Sunday school workers. This did not lend itself to a ministry where the individual could be sheltered from the wolves of doubt and worldliness. There was no time for the preventative ministry which was so needful. Often when the damage was done, one had to go for a ministry of cure, where earlier

attention could have kept a soul from a disease.

In conclusion, we must, however, point out that a church can be too small, and organizational efficiency will then suffer to an undesirable degree. There should be enough people so that not too many offices need to be held by any one person. There should be enough for a good choir, young people's group and the other phases of the church program. It may be that the preferable size of a church would be around the three hundred mark and when the membership stands at three hundred and fifty, one could actually think in terms of releasing a hundred members to start a new church. Both of these churches could then grow again until they have reached the three hundred and fifty maximum and then divide once more, and thus build beautiful, yet modest structures in more places, so that more of the non-church going people will be within easier geographic reach of an active church body.

J. J. Toews

## Are Our Churches Getting Too Large?

Through the church the Gospel is offered to the world and God accomplishes His saving work in the lives of individuals. Within the church the new life of the regenerated individuals is fostered and nurtured. It offers the means for building each one in Christ until all grow up into Christ to the "measure of fullness of His stature." The constant influx of new members, babes in Christ, and the emergent disobedience or defeat of older members by the enemy of our souls makes this task of growing up into Christ a never-ceasing charge upon the church until the last enemy is defeated and the entire church is triumphant and glorious. If these goals of the church are accomplished, it matters not if the membership numbers 75 or 750, if the congregation meets in the house of one of the believers, or if it meets in a cathedral.

But, since the church is a human institution as well as a divine organism, is there not a minimum and a maximum membership at which level the church

is most effective? Major attention is given in this paper to the matter of the size of the church which will enable the members to operate an effective program. Obviously, size is not the only determining factor of effectiveness. Size does not assure efficiency; it can only make it possible. However, when a church is too small in terms of membership, it becomes very difficult to provide an adequate program—such a church will be able to provide only limited opportunities. When a church is too large, there are difficulties of establishing communications, coordinating the various agencies, and agreeing on objectives. The possibility for people to cooperate effectively is to be the important consideration in determining the size of the church. We have no accurate guide to determine what the actual membership size of the New Testament churches was, but we do know that spirituality and unity was the essence of the New Testament concept of the church. Self-exalting divi-

sions receive the pronouncement of the curse of God.

### The Problem

"Are not our churches getting too large?" is a question which has been asked many times by members of our churches as well as of other churches. An appropriate answer to the question is not as simple as it appears on the surface. Obviously, an intelligent answer must take a number of factors into consideration. Some individuals have come up with a quick and pat answer to the question: "I don't know all the members of the congregation because the church is too big." Put it has happened in a church of less than 100 members where many members did not know the whole congregation. Furthermore, there are school situations where teachers do not know the names of the 100 (plus) students after many months of daily contact. Is this a valid criterion by which to conclude that a church of 100 members, or a school of 125 students is too large?

In seminary courses on Church Administration, it has been stated again and again, by authorities who have done considerable research, and who weigh the matter on the basis of principle rather than from a few subjective points of view, that the ideal church, numerically speaking, is one of a membership of between 350 and 650 members. If the figure falls below or rises above the stated figure, efficiency is lost, relatively speaking, of course, and depending on the local situation. Having pastored two smaller churches, one of 125 members and the other of 265 members, I would endorse the assertion made above.

But by whom is the charge made that our churches are getting too big? Not by the member, or the pastor, who has vision, enterprise, and a spirit of adventure. Almost invariably the accusation is made by two groups of people: by members of the larger churches who make no effort, or at least very little effort, to get acquainted with the growing congregation. These people are not willing to pay the price of adjustment to a complex situation and seek excuses for their lack of an outgoing attitude

and spirit. The second group of people are those who are in the smaller churches, but who are aspiring to "bigness." These people sometimes justify their "sheep-stealing" tactics by the attitude "well, they have too many members anyway"—like the thief who says the rich man has more money than is good for him anyway. No doubt, this is not always the case, for it has happened frequently that a person moving from a larger church to a smaller church has found new opportunities of service. However, it has probably happened just as often that a member has moved from a small church, where he as an individual was of no account, to a larger church where doors of service were opened to him.

Our churches are facing problems other than size, which probably lie at the base of the agitation. We are fast changing from a rural life and culture to an urban situation. There are basic changes in concepts and views. There is the language problem. There is a certain lag noticeable as the result of increasing formalism. There are many who feel that our provincialism and isolation must go; since the big church will always move slower, the answer seems to be in the smaller units. It appears that the transitional situation in our churches has to be faced in a more mature manner. We do need to establish new units, which invariably will be smaller than the mother church; however, we must not undermine and smite the parent church with a crippling blow.

### Ineffective Membership Size

A church can be too small for effective witness and training. Our people are rapidly moving to the larger cities, urban life thinks in terms of multitudes. We are living in a day of super-markets, mass production, assembly lines, world government, etc. In the city smallness of membership in a church constitutes weakness. Gauged by the quite generally accepted urban standard or ideal (500 active members), many of our churches are so diminutive that they are actually weak units who have many years of hard struggle before them. Thoughtful and experienced leaders



find this condition a depressing handicap which will stifle effectiveness for many years—unless there are wide opportunities of soliciting members from other churches. The magnetism of the larger church is beyond question greater than that of the smaller church because, as a rule, people prefer to be somewhat inconspicuous and to maintain anonymity to some degree.

Consideration must also be given to the matter of staffing the various essential agencies and ministries of the church. The small church will always be confronted with the problem of securing enough leadership for the various church groups and organizations. Identical persons are listed for committee after committee, provoking a breakdown due to participation duplication or leadership weariness. There is an excessive accumulation of offices in a few individuals. In a small church it was discovered that seven persons were holding forty-two major leadership positions. Such conditions are more common than is generally acknowledged. Neither is this practice totally excluded from the church with a large membership. In either case, redistribution of offices is looked upon with suspicion and often regarded as a personal affront.

Furthermore, some children and youth organizations may not even exist on account of the scarcity of individuals of the necessary age. Or, still worse, children of all ages are thrust together into a "catch-all" association with the vain hope that somehow the spiritual objective will still be reached. The 're-districting' of our school districts into larger units is a case in point. Administration authorities have set the minimum goal of a teacher for each grade, in order to do a good job at teaching. Under sub-ideal conditions it is most difficult to have a properly graded and departmentalized Sunday school. Similarly, it is difficult to interest people in a diminutive Young Peoples, choir, or mid-week class.

When smallness combines with other factors such as disproportionate dominance of females and aged, few fully employed members, meager budget, and inadequate worship facilities, one can surmise the tragic outcome. It is diffi-

cult for a small church to make much of an impact upon its community. Its puny efforts are hardly noticeable. People will live in the proximity of the church totally unaware of its presence.

#### Effective Membership Size

A certain robustness of size, balance of sex groups, and representation of age levels are necessary for urban church success. This is so particularly because in the city smallness itself constitutes weakness. Not that we cannot worship and pray unless there are 300 people, or have a teaching situation with less than several hundred. Where two or three are gathered together there can be an effective prayer meeting and grandmother Lois and Timothy can be in an effective Christian education situation. However, we can say that already in Biblical times there were congregations of over 3,000 and assemblies which met in believers' houses. If there were weaknesses and neglects in the large congregation, the answer was to have better administration, not to divide into smaller units. (Although we cannot equate the Jerusalem situation with any given local church situation in our day.) Our problem in the larger churches is that we try to operate them with the same administrative staff as we do the small churches. If a church of 100 members can afford to have a full-time pastor, why could not the 500 or 600 member church have at least two full-time workers so that visitation and the educational administration would not be overlooked? The overhead would still be much less in the large church than it is in the small church.

When we think on the expanding educational program in our churches, we must agree that the graded system and the multiple agencies require a sufficient number of people in order to be of practical and maximum value. The whole set-up is designed for the greatest amount of participation and maximum involvement of the members. This is particularly true if there is not too much pluralism in the matter of holding offices and filling service opportunities.

Furthermore, the contact opportunities are so much wider in the larger church than in the small church. If

people rise up to the challenge, there is always opportunity to get to know new people. There is probably not as great danger of provincialism, isolation and cliquishness as in the small situation. No doubt, we all have anti-social tendencies, but if it takes hold of a small group, there is no chance for the stranger; he "stands out like a sore thumb." If the people are unfriendly in a large church, at least no one pays any attention to him and he remains anonymous. In a small church, frequently, the cliques will stand in their corners and whisper to each other, "War-kent-ihn?" (Incidentally, they say that is where one of our Mennonite names had its origin.) If the reader is skeptical about the validity of the point made, it might be well to put this to a test by going, as a total stranger, to a church with membership of 100 to 200 and then to one with membership of 400 to 600. You will discover where you felt more comfortable and at ease—there is a certain safety in numbers.

We are all impressed with the modernity of our society; everything must be up-to-date and all want to have the latest gadgets. But in the church there is a curious reversal of this policy. Here we seem to have a strange regard for antiquity. When the congregation grows to include members whom we do not know and when the organization is more complex than it was in the smaller churches, instead of meeting the challenge and coping with the situation, the answer is sought in a simplification of the situation by reverting back to the small church. Strange as it may seem, some of the critics of complexity in the church teach in a large school unit with several thousand children, or they work in a business which has tremendous administrative machinery and employs several hundred staff members. These people would never concede that we should revert back to the one-room school or to the small corner grocery store.

All of us have experienced warmth and rich fellowship in the small church as well as in the large church; however, I believe that most of us would feel there is less risk of this type of atmosphere in a larger church. If we

happen to be in a large city over Sunday and we choose a totally strange church to go to, which do we choose, the small church of 100 to 200 members or a medium church of 400 to 600 members? As a rule, the stranger in our community feels the same way.

Let's face it, the little church wants to be bigger and eventually "big." That is not wrong. Woe to the church if it does not want to grow. Shall we then set a ceiling and say that a church cannot become larger than 300 members? That would stifle growth. We would no more think of doing that than we would say that no one can earn more than \$250 per month. It would be arbitrary and unjust to the future membership and leadership of the church. By this we do not mean to say that a church must never think of dividing its membership in order to start a new church. We must start new churches, and these will be small. But we must not say that all 600-member churches should split into two or three smaller units and that the ills of those churches will be healed and that this is the method of church growth.

#### Conclusion

The basic ingredient and strength of the local church are the people. To have more members means a stronger church, to a point. In each conference, M. B., Baptist, United, or Methodist, the smaller churches look to the larger churches for help. We just could not visualize a conference with no church larger than 250 or 300 members. It is true that growth takes place in the cells or smaller units, but not in the units as they stand alone, the units must fit into a larger body. The large church as well as the small church must be divided into small growing cells or units. No one fellowships with all the members in the church whether there are 100 or 600. The answer is: better fellowship units where there is warmth and friendliness. The Sunday school class, the club, the prayer band, etc. must become the units that are alive and reach out to include our friends and neighbors.

The struggling amoeba and the sleeping giant face essentially the same

problem. Let us avoid either extreme and be a people of vision and warmth with an outgoing spirit. Basically the question is not large versus small, essentially it is a matter of our witness to our communities. No one would want to discourage the small church by saying, your situation is hopeless; neither

would anyone want to justify lethargy and complacency of the large church that "has everything." We do not want to remain midgets but we want to grow to a size that measures up to the colossal gigantic task of the city charge today.

H. R. Baerg

## THEOLOGICAL

### Jeremias Sündenbegriff

(Fortsetzung)

In der vorigen Nummer des **The Voice** sagten wir etwas über den Wortschatz, die Verbreitung, und die Ursache der Sünde, nach den Aussagen Jeremias. Jeremia war ein Bahnbrecher in mancher Hinsicht. Er ist der Prophet des „Herzens“ und strebt die Verinnerlichung des Glaubens an. Er ist der Prophet des „neuen Bundes“ (Jer. 31). Diese Verheißung des neuen Gnadenbundes wuchs, geschichtlich gesehen, aus dem Zusammenbruch aller Hoffnungen für eine Herzenerneuerung in Israel. Nach Jeremias Ansicht hatte die Sünde das Herz so stark vergiftet, daß die einzige Hoffnung für Israel darin lag, daß Gott das Herz reinige und sein Gesetz ins Herz schreibe. So wuchs sein Heilsbegriff aus seinem Sündenbegriff. Beachten wir nun, was er noch weiter über die Sünde zu sagen hat.

#### IV. Das Wesen der Sünde

**A. Die Sünde ist Narrheit.** Dem Alten Testament sind vier Worte für Narrheit geläufig: **kesil**, **'ewil**, **nabal**, **sakal**. Wir gewinnen wenig, wenn wir einen Versuch machen, zwischen diesen Worten zu unterscheiden, denn die Unterschiede liegen mehr in den Wurzeln der Wörter als im Gebrauch derselben. Nach dem Urteil des Propheten war Israel „dumm und töricht“ (10, 8), das heißt aber „gottlos.“ „Törichte Kinder sind sie und ohne Einsicht: klug sind sie zum Bösestun, aber auf das Tun des Guten

verstehen sie sich nicht“ (4, 22). So kann man „Dummheit“ mit „Gottlosigkeit“ übersetzen. Menge übersetzt in 29, 23: „daß sie Gottlosigkeit (nabal—Torheit) in Israel verübt.“ Die Torheit, in diesem Fall, war Ehebruch. Noch viel stärker wird der geistliche Stumpfsinn durch das Wort **ba'ar** ausgedrückt (tierisch, stumpf, starr). „Starr (**ba'ar**) steht alsdann jeder Mensch da“ (10, 14). „Meine Hirten sind verdummt (**ba'ar**) gewesen und haben nicht nach dem Herrn gefragt“ (10, 21). Also geht es bei der Dummheit nicht um unschuldige Stumpfheit, sondern um die innere Verhärtung, die es dem Menschen schwer macht, auf Gottes Ansprüche zu reagieren. Dummheit ist selbstverschuldete Gottlosigkeit.

**B. Die Sünde ist Krankheit.** „Arglistig ist das Herz, mehr als alles andere, und verschlagen (**'anush**—krank) ist es“ (17, 9). Die Sünde ist wie ein unheilbarer Krebs. Wir haben es bei der Sünde nicht mit Kindereien zu tun, aus denen der Mensch mit der Zeit herauswächst, sondern mit einer tödlichen Krankheit. Wiederholt spricht der Prophet in medizinischen Bildern von der Krankheit und den Wunden des Herzens. Mitunter ist die Wunde auch die Strafe oder das Unglück, welches als Folge der Sünde kommt; oft aber wird die Sünde selbst als Wunde, als Krankheit, bezeichnet. Die geistlichen Führer versuchten, den moralischen Schaden Israels „leichtfertig obenhin“ zu heilen, aber „die schwere Wunde“ läßt sich

nicht durch schöne Worte heilen (6, 14). Wegen der Wunde Israels ist Gottes Herz verwundet. „Gibt es denn keinen Balsam mehr in Gilead (dorther kam das heilkräftige Harz des Mastixbaumes), und ist kein Arzt mehr dort? Ach, warum ist der Tochter meines Volkes noch keine Heilung zuteil geworden!“ (8, 22). Anfänglich, so scheint es uns, hat Jeremia noch gehofft, daß die Krankheit (Sünde) Israels geheilt werden könnte, aber später wird er sehr pessimistisch. „Tödlich ist deine Wunde, unheilbar der Schlag“ (30, 12). Nur Gott kann die Sündenkrankheit kurieren.

**C. Die Sünde ist Abirring.** Wiederholt kommt in Jeremia das Wort ‚Weg‘ (**derek**) vor. Der ‚Weg‘ ist Gottes Gesetz (5, 45). Es ist dieses „der Pfad der Vorzeit“, der auch der „Weg des Heils“ ist (6, 16). Diesen Weg hat Israel verlassen und ist „den Weg“ der Völker (10, 2) gegangen. Das ist aber ein „verkehrter Weg“ (3, 21), und in diesem Wege fallen sie (18, 15). Die Sünde ist ein Verlassen des Weges, ein Abirren. „Mich . . . haben sie verlassen“ (2, 13), und das ist „schlimm und unheilvoll“ (2, 19), denn „alle die dich verlassen, werden zu schanden“ (17, 13). Neunmal braucht Jeremia das Wort **meshubah** (abwenden, abkehren, abirren). „Warum hat sich denn dieses Volk . . . abgewandt in immerwährender Abkehr?“ (8, 5). Oft wird das Wort als Eigenschaftswort gebraucht, um Israel zu beschreiben — „abtrünniges Weib“ (3, 6). „Kehre um, Israel, du Abkehrende“ (3, 12). „Sie sind abgefallen (**sur**) und davongegangen“ (5, 23). Die Sünde ist aber nicht ein Abirren, das man entschuldigen und übersehen kann, sondern sie ist ein mutwilliges Abkehren vom rechten Wege. Sie ist das Einschlagen einer falschen Richtung.

**D. Die Sünde ist Treubruch.** Vom Standpunkt des Bundes, den Gott mit Israel gemacht hatte, spricht Jeremia mit Vorliebe von der Sünde Israels als von einem Treubruch. Die Bundessprache ist ihm geläufig. Israel ist Yahwehs Braut, seine Geliebte, seine Edelrebe, seine Herde. Yahweh ist ihr Baal, ihr Ehemann. Der Abfall Israels wird in der Sprache, die aus dem Ehever-

hältnis kommt, beschrieben. Der Grund liegt nicht nur darin, daß der Bund zwischen Yahweh und Israel als Eheverhältnis verstanden wurde, sondern auch in dem Umstand, daß der kanaanitische Kultus, dem Israel anheimfiel, enge mit dem geschlechtlichen Leben verknüpft war. So wird Israels Sünde als Ehescheidung beschrieben (3, 1-5). Israel hat ihren ersten Mann—Yahweh — verlassen, und ist die Frau eines andern geworden. Sie hat Gott die Treue gebrochen. Sie lebt nun im Ehebruch, „mit jedem Stein und Baum“ (Kultsymbole für männliches und weibliches Geschlecht). Neunmal braucht Jeremia das Wort Ehebruch (**na'aph**). Dazu kommt noch das krass ausgebaute Bild der Hurerei (**zanah**). Die Sünde ist Treubruch. Und was sind die Folgen?

#### V. Die Folgen der Sünde

**A. Die Sünde wird zur Gewohnheit.** Die Strafe der Sünde ist zum Teil schon darin zu sehen, daß die Sünde den Menschen bindet; sie wird leicht zur Gewohnheit. Nirgends wird dieses so klar dargestellt als in Jer. 13, 23: „Kann wohl ein Mohr seine Haut verwandeln und ein Parder sein buntes Fell? Dann würdet auch ihr imstande sein, gut zu handeln, die ihr an Bösestun gewöhnt seid.“ Durch wiederholtes Sündigen legt die Sünde dem Sünder Ketten an, die er schwer zerreißen kann. Man wird schließlich „geschickt“, Böses zu tun (4, 22); aber Gutes zu tun wird schwer. „Sie haben ihre Zunge an Lügenreden gewöhnt . . . und können nicht anders“ (9, 5). So werden die geistigen Fähigkeiten getötet.

**B. Die Sünde stumpft das moralische Gefühl ab.** Es ist sehr tragisch, wenn ein Mensch dahin kommt, daß er sündigen kann, ohne darüber Gewissensbisse zu haben. Angesichts des moralischen Tiefstandes in Israel urteilt Jeremia, „mein Volk hat es gern so“ (5, 31). Solange der Mensch sich schämen kann, wenn er gesündigt hat, ist für ihn Hoffnung. „Die Schamröte ist die Abendröte der untergegangenen Sonne der Gerechtigkeit“ (Fr. Delitsch). „Doch schämen sie sich keineswegs, und Erröten kennen sie nicht“ (6, 15). Es kommt eine Stunde im Leben des Sün-

ders, wo ihm durch lange Gewohnheit an die Sünde, die Fähigkeit verloren geht, sich seiner Sünde zu schämen. Dann reagiert der Sünder nicht, einerlei ob Gott freundlich oder ernst mit ihm redet. „Vergebens habe ich eure Kinder geschlagen; sie haben sich keine Lehre daraus gezogen“ (2, 30). „Du hast sie zwar zerschlagen, aber es hat ihnen nicht wehe getan“ (5, 3). „Alles zerbricht nur nicht das Menschenherz“ (Bengel).

**C. Die Sünde betrügt den Menschen.** Der Baalsdienst ist an sich schon Betrug, weil es außer Gott keine Götter gibt. Baalsdienst ist ein löcheriger Brunnen, der die Wasser nicht hält (2, 13); er ist also trügerisch. Wiederholt braucht Jeremia das Wort „**hebel**“ (Atem, Dampf, Nichts), um das ziellose Bemühen Israels zu beschreiben. Die Götzen selbst sind nur „**hebel**“ (8, 19). Einen sehr bedeutenden Grundsatz hebt Jeremia hervor, indem er sagt, daß wer nach dem Nichtigen (**hebel**) läuft, wird selber ‚nichts‘ (**hebel**) (2, 5). Die ganze Leere des Lebens, die Inhaltslosigkeit des Geistes, wird daran gesehen, wem man im Leben nacheifert. Es sollte hier bemerkt werden, daß im hebräischen Denken das „Wertlose“ das „Gottlose“ ist. Söhne Belials sind „wertlose Söhne“. Die Sünde betrügt gerade in dem Sinn, daß sie dem Sünder ein falsches Gefühl bei der Abschätzung von Lebenswerten gibt. „Ihr verlaßt euch auf Trugworte,“ sagt Jeremia (7, 8), „die keinen Wert haben.“ Trugworte sind die Versicherungen der falschen Propheten, daß Israel, abgesehen von ihrem Wandel, immer Gottes Bundes-treue erfahren wird. Israel mußte den bitteren Betrug der Sünde kosten, als Jerusalem, mit Tempel zusammen, zum Schutthaufen wurde.

**D. Die Sünde bringt göttliche Wiedervergeltung.** Wenn Jeremia auch immer wieder die Gnadentür durch seine Einladung zur Rückkehr öffnet, so sind seine Gerichtsdrohungen doch sehr klar und schwer. Wie sein Vorläufer Hosea, der im Nordreich arbeitete, so mußte Jeremia sich dahin durchringen, daß der Bund Gottes mit Israel nicht auf ewig, in automatischer und mechanischer Weise bestehen könnte, wenn Israel

so weiterlebte. Das war für die Propheten nicht leicht. Gott hatte seinem Volk seine ewige Treue (**chesed**) versprochen. Müßte der Zusammenbruch der israelitischen Nation nicht ein Treubruch vonseiten Gottes bedeuten? Solchen Gedanken durften sie nicht hegen. Sie mußten sehen, daß Gott nicht verpflichtet war, eine sündige Nation zu verteidigen und zu erhalten. So wird Gottes Strafe auch ein Stück seiner Treue und Gnade; denn nach der Strafe verspricht er den neuen Gnadenbund zu stiften. Die Botschaft Jeremias lautet also: „Jetzt will ich Unheil über dies Volk bringen, den Lohn ihrer Anschläge“ (9, 19). Wer aber auf den Ruf zur Buße achtet, erfährt Heilung für seine Sünde.

## VI. Die Heilung der Sünde

**A. Durch aufrichtige Buße.** Durch all den Gerichtsdonner hören wir immer wieder Gottes Ruf zum Heil: „Kehrt um, ihr abtrünnigen Kinder“ (3, 14). „Kehrt doch um, ein jeder von seinem bösen Wege“ (18, 11). Etwa siebzigmal finden wir in Jeremia das Wort **shub** (wenden, drehen, umkehren, abkehren), oft mit den Vorwörtern **min** (von) und **le** oder **'el** (zu). Auch **nacham** (leidtragen, leidtun) gehört zum Wortschatz für die Buße (8, 6; 31, 19). Nebst diesen Hauptwörtern für Buße werden noch manche Bilder herangezogen, um die Buße zu schildern. Die Beschneidung des Herzens (4, 4); das Aufbrechen des Brachlands des Herzens (4, 3), und andere Bilder fordern zur Buße auf. Zur Buße gehört das Bekenntnis der Schuld. Jeremia legt seinen Hörern wiederholt Bekenntnisse in den Mund. „Wir haben gegen den Herrn, unseren Gott, gesündigt, wir selbst und unsere Väter, von unserer Jugend an bis auf diesen Tag und haben auf die Stimme des Herrn, unseres Gottes, nicht gehört“ (3, 25). Aber zu dem Bekenntnis muß auch noch die Änderung des Lebens kommen. Jeremia hat dafür ein Wort, das immer wieder vorkommt, nämlich „gutmachen“ (**heytib** — von **tob**). „Bessert euren Wandel und euer ganzes Tun, so will ich euch an diesem Ort wohnen lassen“ (7, 3). Und wieder, „Denn nur, wenn ihr ernstlich euren Wandel und euer ganzes Tun bessert . . .“ (7, 5).

Er spricht auch von dem Reinigen des Herzens; aber weil die Sünde nicht nur eine ‚Hautkrankheit‘ ist, soll Israel wissen: „wenn du dich auch mit Laugensalz wüschest und noch so viel Seife an dich wendest, deine Schuld würde doch als Schmutzleck vor mir bleiben“ (2, 22).

„Wasche dein Herz vom Bösen rein, Jerusalem, auf daß du Rettung erlangst!“ (4, 4). Damit wird nun die Verantwortung für die Heilung der tödlichen Krankheit, der Sünde, ganz auf den Menschen gelegt. Der Prophet hat darüber nicht spekuliert, ob der Wille des Menschen frei ist, oder nicht; Gottes Botschaft fordert den Hörer zur Annahme oder zur Absage auf.

**B. Durch die göttliche Gnadengabe.** Da wo der Mensch sich reuig zu Gott wendet, tut Gott Buße (**nacham** — dasselbe Wort als für die menschliche Buße), und schenkt anstatt Strafe Vergebung. In 5, 1 werden wir stark an Abrahams Fürbitte für Sodom und Gomorrah erinnert. Dem Propheten wird gesagt, daß wenn er in Jerusalem einen Gerechten findet, „dann will ich ihr vergeben.“ Aber, Israels Abfall ist so komplett, daß Gott fragen muß: „Weshalb sollte ich dir verzeihen?“ (5, 7). Doch bleibt die Gnadentür offen. „Kehrt um . . . ich will euren Abfall wieder heilen“ (3, 22) — ‚heilen‘ gehört zum Wortschatz für die Vergebung. Diese Heilung wird aber zuletzt auf die Zeit nach dem Gericht verlagert, denn Israel tut nicht Buße. Nur dann erst wird Gott „vergessen“ (3-, 34). „reinen“, „vergeben“ (33, 8). Wenn Gott den neuen Gnadenbund aufrichten wird, gibt er seinem Volk ein anderes Herz — er schreibt sein Gesetz ins Herz (31, 33). Mit der unerbittlichen Diagnose der sündigen Verfaßung des Menschen „blieb nur der Ausblick auf die eschatologische Neuschaffung des Gottesvolkes, die den unheilbaren Riß zwischen Gott und Menschen heilen konnte“ (Eichardt, III, S. 87).

**Schluss.** Das Buch Jeremia ist keine systematische Theologie. Es ist der Ausdruck des Ringens eines Propheten, der Gottes Ruf zum Dienst an einem sündigen Volk gehört hatte. Dieser Dienst wurde ihm oft schwer, und er

klagte, beschuldigte, weinte, that Buße, und fing vom neuen an. Wer sich die Mühe macht, sich in die Botschaft Jeremias hineinzulesen, wird anderen einen reichen Tisch decken können, und wird selber in seinem Glaubensstand als Diener Gottes gestärkt werden. Die Absicht dieser zwei Artikel über Jeremias Sündenbegriff war: Anregung zu geben, den Gedankengängen der biblischen Schreiber nachzugehen. Was fehlt uns mehr als ein biblisches Denken!

David Ewert

## Dilemma

An amusing story tells of a group of theologians who were discussing predestination and free will. The argument grew so heated that sides were drawn and the group broke up into two fiercely prejudiced factions.

But one theologian, not knowing to which camp he belonged, stood for a moment trying to decide. At last he made up his mind to join in with the predestination crowd.

When he tried to push his way in, they asked, "Who sent you here?"

"Nobody sent me," he replied, "I came of my own free will."

"Free will!" they fairly shouted at him. "You can't come in here of your own free will. You belong with the other group."

So he turned and went toward the free will group.

When he tried to join them, someone asked, "When did you decide to join us?"

"I didn't decide. I was sent here," he answered.

"Sent here!" they were horrified. "You can't join us unless you choose to by your own free will." And so he was excluded from both companies.

Unhappy divisions! It is possible to hold both biblical points of view in balance without sacrificing the meaning of either one.

(Prairie Overcomer)

## CHRISTIAN WORKER'S LIBRARY

### Illustrating the Sermon (VI)

(Continued from last issue)

#### D. Selected Sources of Illustrations for the Sermon:

We maintained, just before concluding the previous section, that the preacher who would preach effectually must, for one thing, search out and gather illustrations that "can help his sermons to get down to practical ways and means . . ." An inevitable and entirely warranted question at this point is: just **where** does one **find** such illustrations? And so we must needs address ourselves to the subject, next, of the likely **sources of worthwhile illustrations**. This matter of sources is one that could take us very far afield indeed, if it were pursued with anything like the proverbial scholar's diligence and doggedness. We propose here, however, only to delimit some of the **broad areas of literature and life**, wherein such illustrations are to be found and to suggest one or two particular items, or instances, that serve to exemplify more concretely each of these areas.

**1. The Holy Scriptures.** Here, again, it is well for us to begin with the Bible itself. Much can be, and indeed has been said about the Bible as the unique source of divine wisdom, about human life and destiny, as the world's "greatest gold mine of redemptive truth." Because of this plain but supremely significant fact, preachers greatly used of God have always called, and recalled, our attention to the imperative need, especially for those who would preach and proclaim the Gospel of God, of acquiring a full acquaintance with, and more comprehensive grasp of the contents of the Scriptures, and of their redemptive significance. P. T. Forsyth, to cite one preacher of the nineteenth century whose influence upon preach-

ers, in British circles at any rate, has been very great and is so even yet, has put the matter very plainly and pointedly: "It is the chief business of the preacher to know the Bible better than any other book;" he ought, moreover, so to "live in the Bible that he wears it easily."

Simon Blocker, in his very suggestive work, **The Secret of Preaching Power**, to give another instance, urges throughout the very real importance and benefits of thematic Christian preaching that is based upon an alert and unremitting study of the books of the Bible in their **total** theological and redemptive significance. He argues, rather convincingly, that when a preacher digs—and digs hard and faithfully—in the "spacious mines of God's self-revelation" with an eye for its great and integral themes, he will never preach himself 'out,' but will experience, instead, an 'embarrassment of riches,' time and time again. Such a preacher, he adds, develops "an eye for themes as well as an ability to construct them himself," and experiences, moreover, "much excitement as he searches for treasure in the wonderland of Christian truth."

But what Blocker has here said about the use of the Scriptures for the purpose of getting from them substantial **sermon subjects** can, and must also be said about the use of them for the purpose of discovering worthwhile **sermon illustrations**. The Scriptures are indeed a rich repository of theological and redemptive truth—and this is primary—but they are also a storehouse of concrete, even dramatic episodes that portray and illustrate such truth 'in action.' The stories of the Bible may be old, as some are quick to remind us, but the fact remains that they are still able to stir the imagination, awaken

the conscience, and inspire to nobler living. And, after all, "no story," as Sidney Howard (himself a dramatist) has so rightly said, "is older than its applicability to life."

Halford Luccock reminds us (in **In the Minister's Workshop**) that the use of the Bible in preaching, from the days of Chrysostom until now, "is full of scores of examples of stories shinningly new in their application to new life. The characters of the Old Testament and the New walk our streets; their temperaments and problems are ours, and the way they met them, for good or evil, comes close to us **when brought close by the preacher.**"

In other words, it is undeniable that there is a certain fundamental simplicity and universality about the stories of the Bible that renders them amazingly relevant to contemporary life and need. "[They are] so simple," Anne Lindbergh has fittingly said, "that they are like empty cups for people to fill with their own experience and drink for their own need over and over again through the years."

And just so we have found it in our own experience, too, limited though it be. If we may be allowed a personal reference at this point, we would merely suggest here, by citing only the main character involved and the central truth(s) illustrated, how we have sought to use familiar Old Testament narratives and episodes both to exemplify and confirm certain moral and spiritual truths that remain eternally relevant for us: (a) Jacob (Gen. 32:22-31)—release from habitual scheming and inveterate self-sufficiency in the Christian life; (b) Joseph (Gen. 39-41)—the slow but thorough preparation needed for fruitful service in the Christian life; (c) Moses (Ex. 2:11-3:1)—reasons and cure for impatience and rashness in the Christian life; (d) Gideon (Judges 6-7)—the deliberate routing of timidity and fear in the Christian life; (e) Abimilech (Judges 9)—sources, manifestation and consequences of selfish and unholy ambition; (f) Ruth (Ruth 1-4)—nature and benedictory love for mother, man (husband-to-be) and God; (g) Esther (Esther 1-4)—the remarkable charac-

ter and workings of divine providence; (h) Hannah (I Sam. 1-2)—difficulties, conditions, and blessings connected with a fruitful prayer life; (i) David (I Samuel)—the need for and blessed manifestations of genuine humility in the Christian life; (j) Elijah (I Kings 18-19)—the crippling effects of, and divine cure for discouragement in the Christian life.

But the Scriptures supply not only stories and narrative episodes but almost every conceivable type of illustration which the preacher may need for any given occasion or purpose. Something—but only **something**—of the profuse and amazing richness of this one great source is suggested by the words of Dawson Bryan (in chapter 4 of **The Art of Illustrating Sermons**): "There are events [in the Bible] of gripping intensity, pastoral scenes of surpassing beauty, ancient customs with modern counterparts and contrasts, institutions which reflect age-old but eternally new virtues and vices, stark Nature, red in tooth and claw but still with the dream shining through, and portraits of people with their motives and thoughts laid bare such as no book ever before or since has revealed them."

It is probable that many preachers have only **begun** to taste and appreciate this richness of Scriptural material, and that they would see fit to use much more of it, perhaps even in new and different ways, if they studied the Bible assiduously with this fact ever in mind. Still, one wonders seriously whether the counsel which one expository preacher of great power used to offer, in this connection, isn't, after all, the wisest counsel of all: "read the Bible through often with considerable rapidity in order to keep the settings freshly in mind, not with the idea of finding an illustration for the sermon of the present week, but **that out of the overflow of the mind well filled the Scriptural illustrations will come unsought at the needed moment.**"

**2. General literature.** Here the field is, obviously enough, very broad indeed, and lest our readers take this to be a "catch-all" for all literature that lies outside the Bible or for all liter-

ature that is not definitely religious, in tone or theme, we stop briefly in order to divide and delimit, albeit somewhat arbitrarily. We include here, first of all, the works of writers, in any language and treating of one or other of a great number of subjects, which have stood the test of time and become, by common critical consent, **great, or classic**, to use a more distinctly literary term. We include, secondly, the worthwhile **biographies and diaries** of men and women who have contributed, in one way or another, to the wisdom and/or welfare of mankind. And we include, finally, the enormous field of **history, general as well as religious**, the latter division of which comprises, in turn, church and missionary history.

a) **The classics.** It were presumptuous, and indeed even foolish to designate a fixed and final number of works of literature as "great" or "classic," and so to imply that all others are "second-rate," or worse. Still, it has been possible for reading and thinking folk (not only literary critics or teachers!) to agree, to a surprisingly great extent, about the superior worth and value of **certain** books in the broad field of general literature. And the existence of such a consensus of critical opinion and judgment has rendered both possible and meaningful the publishing and widespread use (in schools as well as in family and community discussion groups), of such sets of books as, for example, **The Great Books of the Western World** (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 1952).

What it is that grants a work of literature the right (or probable right) to a place in this roster of "classics" cannot be easily or adequately explained in a few words, for there are **several** significant attributes that are common to them and that set them apart from others. What we can affirm here, however, without simplifying the matter unduly, I think, is that such "great" or "classic" works are capable of saying much that is either vitally true or fundamentally significant about man and his lot, on **one** level of experience at least, to readers of diverse cultures and different generations. John Erskine has

expressed this affirmation very succinctly: "The great books are those which are capable of reinterpretations which surprise us by remaining **true** even when our point of view changes. This is why we rank Homer and Virgil and Dante, Shakespeare, Chaucer, Cervantes and Moliere so high—because they still say so much, even to peoples of an altogether foreign culture, a different past, an opposed philosophy." And Ralph P. Boas (in his **Enjoyment of Literature**) says much the same thing when he declares that "in great books you can get your **truest** glimpse of the spectacle of life itself." They are works, therefore, which, whether they be novels, dramas, poems, letters or even philosophical essays, and whether they be ostensibly religious or purely secular in tone and treatment, are all authentic and rich inexhaustible sources (within certain limits, of course) of insight into human character and, also, as Halford Luscock has said, "of knowledge of the **tempers and distempers of that time, in which religion must live and move and do whatever work of redemption it is to achieve.**" And it is from this point of view only, we suggest, that advice such as James Beebe (and others) offers to preachers, "do not buy a book that may be **exhausted** at a single reading," becomes particularly meaningful for them.

Of course, this is not to suggest that to wander through the classics is to make one—almost inevitably—a "storehouse of illustrative and illuminating material." Nor is it to suggest that every preacher can and must trace a path through these rich tracts of literature in order to find illustrations that will most effectively serve his purposes. What a preacher can and may appropriate here will depend, to some extent, upon his own peculiar literary inclinations and taste and upon what he feels he ought to know of the best literature. **Moreover, how** one reads is just as important, especially here, as **what** one reads. The great books, oftentimes, do not yield up their imperishable treasures to any but the **sensitive and sympathetic** reader who has trained himself to catch reflections, whether blurred or

bright, of what is basic human character, and to perceive parables and symbols, whether subtle or simple, of moral and spiritual meaning, **wherever he can.** It is only with such an attitude

and approach that, in many instances, the preacher can truly benefit from his reading of the classics, be genuinely open to the possibility of illustration, and so find ready grist for his mill.

## YOUR QUESTION

**Warum vermeiden Prediger in unsern Kreisen die Lehre von der Wehrlosigkeit?**

Daß diese Lehre in unsern Gemeinden vielfach vernachlässigt und unter Umständen ganz vermieden wird, könnte man wohl als erwiesene Tatsache feststellen. Wo liegen die Ursachen?

In einigen Fällen ist es ein Mangel an biblischer Erkenntnis in bezug dieser Lehre; in andern Fällen ist es ein Mangel an moralischem Mut eine unpopuläre Wahrheit zu verkündigen. Es gibt jedoch auch manche Prediger des Evangeliums, denen man die obigen Schwächen nicht zur Last legen kann, die aber trotzdem zurückhaltend sind, wenn es gilt diese Wahrheit zu betonen. Das Problem dieser Brüder liegt oft auf einem Gebiete, auf das ich heute etwas näher eingehen möchte. Eine Klärung der Begriffe könnte hier vielleicht eine Hilfe sein.

Es kommt immer wieder vor, daß man die Lehre von der Wehrlosigkeit mit einer **liberalen Theologie** identifiziert. Der sogenannte Pazifismus hat seine Anhänger und Vertreter vielfach in liberalen Kreisen gefunden. Die Geschichte des religiösen Pazifismus in den Vereinigten Staaten während der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre ist ein klassisches Beispiel für obige Feststellung. Solche führenden Männer wie Kirby Page, John Haynes Holmes, Harry F. Ward, Sherwood Eddy, u.a. versuchten die öffentliche Meinung zu beeinflussen für eine vollständige Entwaffnungspolitik und eine entschiedene Ablehnung des Krieges zur Lösung internationaler Probleme. Wir möchten darauf hinweisen, daß sich dieser Pazifismus in seiner Motivierung wie auch

in seinem Ziel scharf von der biblischen Wehrlosigkeit unterscheidet. Der Pazifismus verurteilt den Krieg aus politischen und ökonomischen Gründen. Er wurzelt weder in der Erlösung Christi noch in der Heilserfahrung des Menschen. Man geht nicht vom Boden der göttlichen Offenbarung aus, sondern vom Boden der Vernunft und der Humanität. Christus wird als Träger der Friedensidee hochgehalten und nicht als Erlöser, der durch sein Kreuz den Frieden gestiftet hat.

Der Umstand, daß es eine falsche Friedenslehre gibt, die in der Vergangenheit oft mit einer liberalen Theologie verbunden war, darf uns jedoch nicht im Betonen einer biblischen Wahrheit bestimmen. Es ist immer ein Zeichen der geistlichen Unreife, wenn man das Kind mit dem Bade ausschüttet. Wir verwerfen die Untertauchungstaufer nicht, weil die „Mormonen“ und die „Zeugen Jehovas“ dieselbe auch üben. Es ist einfach tragisch, daß in Nordamerika gerade die evangelischen Kirchen, zum Beispiel auch die Denominationen, die zur „National Association of Evangelicals“ gehören, oft eine patriotische und militärische Staatspolitik am stärksten unterstützen und sogar befürworten. Manche Prediger in unsern Kreisen werden von diesem Geiste mitgerissen und glauben, daß man nur recht evangelisch sein kann, wenn man dieselbe Posaune bläst.

Zur Verkündigung eines ganzen Evangeliums gehört auch die **Lehre von der Wehrlosigkeit** — die Lehre, daß der wahre Jünger Jesu sich in allen Lebensverhältnissen vom Prinzip der Liebe und des Friedens bestimmen läßt. Der Weg des Kreuzes ist unzertrennlich

mit dem Werk des Kreuzes verbunden. Die Geschichte der christlichen Kirche in den ersten Jahrhunderten, sowie auch die Geschichte der Anabaptisten des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts, zeigt sehr klar, daß die Betonung der biblischen Wehrlosigkeit in der Weltevangalisation kein Hindernis ist. Im Gegenteil: gerade auf dieser Linie finden wir oft

das Geheimnis des Sieges in der Ausbreitung des Glaubens. Nur die Verkündigung eines ganzen Evangeliums, nur die Offenbarung des ganzen Ratschlusses Gottes, wird die Gemeinde richtig bauen und eine verlorene Welt wirklich retten. Gott helfe uns, **alles** zu lehren, was der Herr uns befohlen hat! (Matt. 28, 20) J. A. Toews

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(Fortsetzung von Umschlagseite 2)

Ein Leser aus *Manitoba* schreibt: „Teure Brüder, eure Arbeit ist es wert, daß sie in Form dieses Heftes auch weiter erscheint. Das . . . Gemeindeblatt würde in dem Falle (einer Verschmelzung) sicherlich profitieren, aber die Geschwister, welche jetzt starken Gebrauch von *The Voice* machen, wohl kaum.“

Ein Leser aus *Ontario*, der alle 60 Ausgaben des Blattes besitzt, reagiert wie folgt: „My first reactions to the above proposal is to recommend that *The Voice* be kept as it is for the reasons you have adhered to over the past decade, and for the additional reason that the present format is of a handy book size making it convenient for stacking on library shelves . . .“

Ein Leser aus *Alberta* sieht einen Vorteil in einer etwaigen Verschmelzung: „Es dürfte durchaus wünschenswert sein, wenn diese Artikel von den vielen Lesern eines Wochen- oder Gemeindeblattes gelesen würden.“

Noch ein Wort von einem Leser in *Ontario*, der früher auch die Ansicht des Bruders aus Alberta teilte: „Heute denke ich etwas anders. Es werden in dem Blatt so viele Gedanken und Hinweise gebracht, die der Arbeiter auch später brauchen kann . . . In der Form dieses Büchleins . . . sind sie wie ein Nachschlagewerk.“

Wir sind den lieben Brüdern von Herzen dankbar für diese Winke. Es ist immer unser besonderes Anliegen gewesen, unsern lieben Mitarbeitern am Wort mit diesem Blatte eine „Handreichung“ auf den Tische zu legen, die für ihren Dienst bedeutungsvoll wäre.

Eine beständige Orientierung an der heiligen Schrift auf allen Gebieten der christlichen Lehre und des christlichen Lebens ist für eine fruchtbare Wortverkündigung von der größten Bedeutung. Durch die verschiedenen Abhandlungen möchten wir anregen zu so einer biblischen Orientierung. Wir schätzen es auch, wenn Brüder Fragen einsenden, deren Beleuchtung und Erörterung von allgemeinem Interesse sein könnte. Möchte diese Gemeinschaft am Wort dazu beitragen, die „Einigkeit im Geist“ zu stärken!

J. A. Toews

## PER PACEM AD LUCEM

I do not ask, O Lord, that life may be  
A pleasant road;  
I do not ask that Thou wouldst take from me  
Aught of its load;

I do not ask that flowers should always spring  
Beneath my feet;  
I know too well the poison and the sting  
Of things too sweet.

For one thing only, Lord, dear Lord, I plead,  
Lead me aright— [should bleed—  
Though strength should falter, and though heart  
Through Peace to Light.

I do not ask, O Lord, that Thou shouldst shed  
Full radiance here;  
Give but a ray of peace, that I may tread  
Without a fear.

I do not ask my cross to understand,  
My way to see;  
Better in darkness just to feel Thy Hand  
And follow Thee.

Joy is like restless day; but peace divine  
Like quiet night:  
Lead me, O Lord, till perfect Day shall shine,  
Through Peace to Light.

Adelaide A. Procter, 1824-1864