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The Voice

of the

*Mennonite Brethren
Bible College*

XIV: 2
MARCH - APRIL
1965

THE VOICE
of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College

Vol. XIV March - April, 1965 No. 2

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 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg. Subscription price: \$1.00 per year. Send your subscription to:

THE VOICE, 77 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg 5, Man.

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EDITORIAL

SACRED TIMES AND PLACES

Making All of Life Secular

One of the great tragedies of our age is the almost complete secularization of society. To be sure, there are still some so-called primitive cultures in which all of life from birth to death is sacred, because of the deep-seated conviction that the 'other' world constantly invades the present order. (Whether the 'other' world is thought of as the spirit world, or 'the gods', or demons, or the one God, is of no significance for our discussion.) But our own society has shut God out of the events of life and history; and the idea of demons and gods and spirits are for secular man merely vestiges of mythology and so are conveniently relegated to the category of 'old wives' fables'. Our universe is believed to be governed by fixed laws which do not allow for interventions either by the Deity or by demonic powers.

The sorry consequences of this complete secularization are only too apparent. One of the results is: moral chaos. If there is no God to whom one feels responsible, and who judges men according to eternal principles of righteousness, then it does not really matter how one lives. Man's only guide in the matter of morals then becomes society itself. If a sufficient number of people do something, it is right. Statisticians (if the name is not too honorable) pry into the private life of a few thousand individuals and tell us what the 'average' male or female or teen-ager does, and henceforth everyone may do it with a good conscience. "Man is the measure of things."

Another painful effect of the secularization of all areas of life is the complete illiteracy of the masses in things religious or spiritual. The language of the Bible — be the translation ever so colloquial — rings no bell in the mind of secular man. Everyone who has tried to witness to those who have no familiarity with religious vocabulary, know of this barrier in communication. We do not excuse our failure in winning others for the faith, but when there appears to be no point of contact at all, witnessing is not easy.

Another serious consequence of the secularization of society is: the meaninglessness of life. When all of life is profane, it becomes an endless treadmill, a vicious circle. To be sure, modern man has diversion. He must have it — and a good measure of it — if he is to keep up the spirit to live. But when both, his daily work and his recreation, are secular, then the daily or weekly routine of work and play and entertainment and diversions of all sorts becomes meaningless. Had man not been created in the image of God he could continue in such a routine, if otherwise his physical needs were met, with a measure of happiness. But he cannot live like the brute, though at times he may desire to do so (and some

succeed remarkably well at times). Unless there are sacred times and places and things which form centers of orientation, centers from which all of life can be interpreted — “all is vanity.”

Making All of Life Sacred

Such is the character of our society, generally speaking. By contrast, how different was Hebrew society in Old Testament days. There were sacred times — the weekly sabbath, the annual festivals; there were sacred places — the local shrine, the central sanctuary, the temple; there were sacred practices. With such sacred times and places at the center of life, all of the mundane things of life also became sacred. Plowing the field, preparing meals, bearing children, going to war, harvesting grain — everything was sacred and, consequently, meaningful.

But what does all this mean for us as Christians, today? First of all, it is a serious warning to us not to be swallowed up by the secularism of our culture. Secondly, it is a challenge to us to make all of our life sacred. And it is at this point that we face a serious problem. Some Christians have proceeded to make all of life sacred, as they presumed, by not recognizing any sacred places or times, in particular. Monday is to them like Sunday, and Sunday like Saturday. They argue that if it is right for the Christian to do it on Friday, it should not be wrong on Sunday. There is an element of truth in this, and by disregarding the context one could even find chapter and verse in the Bible to support such a view. But this is a somewhat dangerous approach, for instead of making all of life sacred, it usually ends up by making all of it secular. We need sacred times, such as a day of worship, a time for prayer, for these provide the interpretative centers from which all of life can be rightly viewed.

An illustration may help us to understand the problem better. A theology student engaged in house-visitation was asked by his dean whether he ever prayed with the people he visited. His answer was: “I believe all of life is a prayer, in keeping with the Pauline injunction, ‘Pray without ceasing’.” to which the dean wisely responded: “He who wants to be in prayer all the time must also pray *sometimes*.”

In my opinion the sacred festivals of the church year also have a place in hallowing the whole year. Just because society has secularized these times, such as Easter and Christmas, is not sufficient reason to abolish them from the life of the church — if only the church makes them ‘sacred’ seasons and not pagan holidays with a Christian veneer.

There are also other kinds of sacred times in the life of the believer which help him to keep his Christian life in orbit, as it were. He may remember some special orderings of divine providence in his life and permit these to become occasions to renew his love and loyalty to God. An outstanding deliverance, or a day of tragedy, may long remain memorable days which help him to

examine his life and re-dedicate himself to God — and so make all of life sacred.

Also, we need sacred places. One of the reasons the Waldenses incurred the wrath of Rome was their denial of the sanctity of places. They felt it was legitimate to pray in bed, in church, but, also, in the barn. And they were quite right. But we do not find ourselves in exactly the same circumstances. Their world was surfeited with religion; ours is irreligious. Therefore, we need a place — be it ever so humble — where we gather for fellowship and worship, where we listen to God, confess our sins, pledge Him our loyalty. It is interesting to observe that God’s people usually prefer to meet in a house of worship rather than in a community hall (although this may serve for a time). Of course, we may have sacred places other than the house of God, but we must have some sacred places — centers from which we can make all other places which we frequent sacred (or where we can learn that certain places are to be shunned, because they cannot be made sacred).

We are not making a plea for a return to legalism in which sacred times and places are observed in order to gain favor with God. We are pleading with God’s people to distinguish between the sacred and the profane; and we are insisting that if our daily work and our leisure time are to be sacred, we must have sacred times and sacred places.

D. Ewert

ARTICLES

MISSIONS BY PROXY

It is possible to make money by proxy. The structure of a modern corporation provides for such an opportunity. In this setting the individual invests a certain amount as he buys shares and then expects those in charge of the administration of the corporation to increase the value of his shares. In this way the administrators are charged with making money for the one who has made the initial investment. The investor goes his way, doing something else, but from time to time returns to ascertain what progress has been made. This can also become a method by which the individual church member involves himself in mission work. A periodic contribution, often even at a sacrifice, brings to many Christians a sense of inner release from the responsibility of actively involving themselves in the life and death struggle of winning the lost for Christ. Periodic investment in the missionary program may be followed by a careful scrutiny of reports from the mission fields, missionaries, or headquarters of the mission. When these reports are favorable one may be stimulated to make further

investments. Should the reports show aspects of the program which the investor does not understand or which strike him as imprudent, then verbal criticism is scattered quite freely and further contributions are either withheld or directed into other missions about which the respective investor knows less and whose failures have not yet come to his attention.

While the church member sits on the bleachers of the missionary arena to which he has paid his entrance fee, the responsibility for the progress of missions has been placed upon a special class of missionary personnel. These may be the specially designated and publically recognized missionaries and executives. These are the administrators of the missionary corporation. They are the called and the select. But as we set these apart to do the job; and as we watch their struggles and battles with interest, what happens to those who look on? They see themselves as those whose task it is to supply the few who run in the arena with the things they need; they themselves, however, never become actively involved in the work itself. They do missions by proxy.

I. Missions by Proxy and the Scripture:

1. Mission by proxy cannot be found in scripture. The great commission does not place the responsibility of outreach on the shoulders of a few. Christ addresses himself to all his disciples (Matthew 28:19). The responsibility of witnessing rests upon the church as a whole (Acts 1:8). Paul writes to the Corinthians: "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18). All would accept the first part that "God hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ"; but the second part "and hath given us the ministry of reconciliation" is co-extensive with the first. In Scripture these two cannot be separated. All those who have been reconciled have also received the ministry of reconciliation. No one can claim the one and renounce the other. The nature of this ministry of reconciliation is further described: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, by ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). This is exactly the missionary program. From this none who have been reconciled can withdraw without violating the basic principle, "Saved to serve." The Bible knows of no spectators in the bleachers, watching the select few running the missionary race. Those who are not involved in soul-winning must face the question of the Saviour: "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" They must respond to the masters command: "Go ye also into the vineyard —" (Matthew 20:1-7).

2. Mission by proxy does not meet the need. The greatest bottle-neck in missions has never been a lack of open doors or want of souls who needed to be reached and could be reached. Neither has material support been the greatest limiting factor. Jesus identifies the greatest need in the missionary program with

the words, "The laborers are few." Therefore, in missions there is no **exemption from labor**, but only a **division of labor**. The Biblical program of missions has room for every believer, but the specific assignment for one may differ from the assignment of another. Too often we have a stereotyped image of a missionary. The image of a missionary is seen in the professional framework and anyone not qualified for such service feels himself exempt. With an emphasis on the professional, we create a distance between the clergy and the regular member of the church. With such distance comes a growing and rapidly spreading impression that only the professional must be active in the program of outreach. The other members are the recipients of the spiritual ministry by the professional, and the one responsibility of these members to mission is to give and pray. This is definitely included, but there is more than that. If we want to speak of the officers of the church as professionals then the responsibility of these professionals is to perfect "the saints for the work of the ministry" (Eph. 4:11-12). They are not to do all the work themselves while the membership becomes more and more passive. Officers of the church have the responsibility to activate the church members. There is a diversity of gifts and therefore a diversity of assignment, but in every case it is related to the missionary program of the church. If the work is left to a few the task will never be accomplished.

II. Mission by Proxy and Human Tendency.

Why is there such a general reluctance in our circles and in our day, to becoming personally involved in missions? Instead, some would rather do missions by proxy. They think within themselves: "I'd rather give and then forget about it. Let me make it possible for others to do it."

1. Such a reluctance may arise because of a lack in the teaching ministry of the church. The need for missionary giving and personnel in behalf of foreign missions has been so pressing that the church has emphasized this and neglected to teach and underscore the need for personal involvement in outreach. The call for funds and "full time missionary service" is well known to the church membership, but how every member can relate himself to the gospel outreach is not as clear. Some churches have made attempts to teach their members in this but have not been too successful. Thus the church may need to accept some responsibility for the prevailing concept of "missions by proxy". We must certainly continue to do the one but not leave the other undone. The need for funds and missionaries is still great and should constantly be held before the people. At the same time there must be a corresponding emphasis on "every member participation." The church must build the bridge that will permit the member to span and enter the area of missionary activity.

2. The reluctance to becoming personally involved has also been strengthened by the stereotyped image of the missionary as de-

scribed above. If I cannot do mission work of a certain type or at a certain place I cannot do any at all. Then I better just give and be done. While a church member supports missions abroad he **still must be** a missionary at home. Seldom do you find church members evaluating their profession, and daily task, as humble as it may be, in relationship to the outreach of the gospel. By saying this I do not advocate complacency based on the supposition that you can be a missionary anywhere. But I see a crying need for each church member to examine the question, not only whether he can be, but whether he is, a missionary where he is. The missionary responsibility of the individual Christian is definitely related to the offering plate on Sunday morning, and the missionary program abroad carried on by a small group of specifically delegated people. But participation abroad does not absolve the Christian from an active witness and a conscious effort to bring those, who are near home in his everyday associations, to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. While emphasizing this personal involvement in witnessing, I would still like to plead that foreign mission never become foreign to the responsibility of the individual church member. Even though the Christian carries on a personal witness, there is also a corporate witness of the church in which he is just as involved as in the other. The individual member cannot separate himself from the total church, nor its program. The two are inseparable. If a church involves itself in the missionary program with other churches, then its members are involved corporately and also individually. It is never a foreign or distant responsibility. Usually you find that those who are most actively involved in soul-winning on the individual level will also be very active in church outreach and most heartily support a conference outreach.

3. Reluctance to becoming actively engaged in Mission work has been strengthened by our ability to rationalize. Not having done our part, a certain restlessness comes upon us. Such a guilt feeling may seek a way of escape and we begin to rationalize. We say: Others can do it better than we can, and thus we cease to be alert to the opportunities that come our way. Pre-occupation in other pursuits hinder us from personal involvement as well. We rush around and major in minors, and find no time to do that which is best. We complain of weariness, as the result of much labor and forget that the Lord invites such to come unto Him and He will give them rest, and such rest is followed by the words "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). In fellowship with Him the weariness from daily toil is changed to a readiness to take His yoke and His burden. The ability to rationalize need not be pursued any further. All practice it and "with one consent began to make excuse." (Luke 14:18.) We conclude by saying that our sluggishness in personal involvement in the gospel outreach can never be justified by any rationalization. The question we need to answer honestly is: Are we devoted to Christ and to the task He has committed to us?

III. Mission by proxy and an Alternative.

1. Everyone needs to recognize that missions must be done at least on four different levels.

i) The personal level. Here we refer to that person to person interaction of the individual Christian with anyone whom the Lord may lay upon his heart. No group dynamic can absolve the individual from this responsibility. From the standpoint of the individual Christian, the neighbour next door is not first of all the responsibility of the church. The person working next to a Christian must not be delegated to the outreach of the church, without such a Christian first involving himself. In the early history of the Mennonite Brethren church it was on this level where the greatest victories were won. Recognition and accepting of personal responsibility is foundational to all other levels of outreach. Church and conference outreach breaks down if it isn't undergirded by the every-member involvement.

ii) The local church level. Having accepted the responsibility of reaching someone for Christ on the individual level, the Christian needs the benefits of cooperative effort. Working together with others to win the lost gives the individual added incentive and enrichment. Team work in any field brings experiences which one cannot afford to miss. This is particularly true in soul winning. In this work one can claim the promise of the Savior: "If two or three shall agree on earth, touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:19). Thus group dynamics begins to operate in outreach. The local church becomes a centre where individual members unite and work together for winning those who need to be won in the local community. Such group involvement will bring life to the church services and particularly to the prayer meetings. But church outreach is no substitute for personal soul-winning; it is only a supplement.

iii) Several churches uniting for the purpose of beginning a new church in a needy area. To start a new church in a new location may be beyond the potential of the individual local church. Such assignments constitute the main purpose and task of the home missions programs of the various district and provincial conferences. Their concern is not to replace the effort of the individual church in its own locality, but to move out into localities where a need exists and where there is no local church to do the job. But the participation of the local church in a district or provincial conference outreach in no way absolves it from the responsibility of reaching its own community. No home mission program can take the place of the soul-winning effort in the local congregation. It is again, only a supplement; it seeks to do what the local church, by itself, cannot do.

iv) The uniting of several district and provincial conferences to do a mission work abroad in a foreign country. This part of

the outreach has often been designated as foreign missions. It is obvious that individual churches could hardly carry on a successful program abroad. In most instances it would be difficult for even a district or provincial conference to do this. Here we all need to unite to lengthen the cords and strengthen the stakes to overcome cultural and language barriers, and to provide a home base in terms of prayer support and financial undergirding for the outreach abroad. It is here that a church, through the Conference, may select specially qualified people to go forward in its behalf to establish a witness in a foreign land. But again, a General Conference outreach is not a substitute for a district or provincial conference effort, nor for local church or personal outreach. It only supplements the others.

2. The individual must see himself involved in every level of outreach. The responsibility of the individual begins at Jerusalem and then goes through Samaria to the uttermost parts of the earth. Church outreach is not only responsibility of the pastor or other leading personalities in the church. Every member must make this his concern. In the home missions program it is not the responsibility of a few conference officials or of small designated group, but of every church with every individual in it participating. On the general conference level we cannot leave foreign missions as a foreign aspect of outreach. The individual must consciously relate himself to the outreach through the church and district conference and then through the general conference into the far-flung mission field. The general conference mission program abroad is bound to collapse unless it rests on a solid structure of outreach in the homeland and in the local community and neighbourhood.

Therefore we conclude that missions by proxy is not a Biblical concept. Missions by proxy will never get the job done. Missions by proxy may last for a season, but will fail at the end. All those who have been reconciled to God have also received "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18). May each one be faithful to his charge.

J. J. Toews

HOBBYHORSE — A Christian pastor is said to have visited an assylum where he saw an insane man galloping down the hall astride a broom. Upon asking the poor fellow why he was riding a horse he received this answer: "This is not a horse, it is a hobbyhorse."

Soon the man returned still riding the broom, and again the pastor inquired, "Don't you ever get off that horse?"

To this the man replied, "This is not a horse; it is a hobbyhorse. Don't you know the difference between a horse and a hobbyhorse?"

"No, what is it?" asked the pastor.

The inmate replied, "You can get off a horse, but you can't get off a hobbyhorse."

There are religious controversialists who ride some hobbyhorses to death. They can't get off the subject. It is their obsession. When that subject comes up, the conversation picks up and usually "heats" up. Paul accuses such persons of "doting (Gr. sick) about questions and strifes of words" (I Tim. 6:4). Just as the mentally sick man in the assylum could not get off the hobbyhorse, so are some religious disputants gripped with a doctrinal seizure, a mental obsession, a soulish sickness, that keeps them forever riding their hobbyhorse. They can't get off the subject.

WORTVERKUENDIGUNG ERFORDERT WORTERKLAERUNG!

Der Dienst des Predigers ist ein "Dienst am Worte" (vgl. Apg. 6, 4). Dem jungen Prediger Timotheus ruft Paulus als Abschiedsmahnung die Worte zu: "Predige das Wort" (2. Tim. 4, 2). Die evangelische Predigt ist nicht zu trennen vom Worte Gottes, deshalb sollte man auch keine Predigt halten ohne Text. Der Gebrauch eines Textes gewährt jedoch noch keine Garantie für eine biblische Botschaft. Bei der Versuchung des Herrn Jesu brauchte Satan auch einen Text aus der Heiligen Schrift. Irrlehrer zitieren viele Worte der Schrift in ihrer Beweisführung. Eine biblische Botschaft erfordert rechte Schrifterklärung und rechte Schriftenanwendung. Gottes Wort fordert wiederholt auf zur rechten Schrifterklärung. An den Propheten Jeremia richtet der Herr diese Worte: "Ein Prophet der Träume hat, der erzähle Träume; wer aber mein Wort hat, der predige mein Wort **recht**..." (Jer. 23, 28). In ähnlicher Weise haben wir die Aufforderung in 2. Tim. 2, 15: "Befleißige dich, Gott dich zu erzeigen als einen rechtschaffenen und unsträflichen Arbeiter, der da **recht** teile das Wort der Wahrheit." Es geht also in der Predigt um ein rechtes Schriftverständnis. Es ist die Aufgabe des Predigers, die wirkliche Botschaft des Textes zu finden und dann weiterzugeben. Es ist hier zu beachten, daß jedes einzelne Bibelwort seine wahre Bedeutung erst im Geist und Sinn der ganzen Offenbarung empfängt. Schrift muß durch Schrift erklärt werden. Die folgenden Warnungen und Winke dürften dem einen und andern eine Hilfe sein in seinem Bemühen, das Wort **recht** zu verkündigen.

I. Ursachen einer falschen Texterklärung.

1. Mangelhaftes Sprachverständnis.

Ein Verständnis für Sprache ist unerlässlich für ein rechtes Verständnis des Textes — ob es sich um die deutsche oder englische Sprache handelt. Der teure verstorbene Prediger und Lehrer, A. H. Unruh, pflegte zu sagen, daß der Teufel ein Feind der Grammatik sei, denn ein besseres Verständnis der Sprache gebe dem Menschen auch ein besseres Verständnis des Willens Gottes. Ein Studium der Philologie (Sprachwissenschaft) kann hier wertvolle Dienste leisten indem man die Sprachwurzeln einzelner Wörter und Begriffe besser kennen lernt. Ein Studium der Semantik (Wortbedeutungslehre ist auch bedeutungsvoll, weil man dadurch ein Verständnis gewinnt für den Gebrauch eines Wortes. Manche Worte haben im Laufe der Zeit eine ganz andere Bedeutung erhalten und theologische Streitfragen sind oft zurückzuführen auf diesen Umstand — man braucht wohl dasselbe Wort, aber nicht in demselben Sinn.

Rechte Texterklärung wird oft erschwert durch mangelhafte oder veraltete Übersetzungen. Dieses gilt von der geliebten

Lutherbibel sowohl als von der geschätzten "King James Version." Wir dürfen nicht übersehen, das erstere in der Sprache des 16. Jahrhunderts, und letztere in der Sprache des 17. Jahrhunderts, geschrieben wurden. Inspiration bezieht sich auf die Originalschriften, nicht auf die Übersetzungen. Gewisse Abweichungen in der Lehre sind zuweilen zurückzuführen auf Abweichungen in den Übersetzungen.

Eine andere Ursache der falschen Texterklärung ist das mangelhafte Verständnis für die Eigenart der Bibelsprache. Die Bibel, in besonderer Weise das Alte Testament, ist durchzogen von einem hebräischen Geiste. Die Denkweise des Morgenlandes ist im Allgemeinen viel bilderreicher und anschaulicher als die des Abendlandes. Das abstrakte, analytische Denken, daß sich in strengen Gesetzen der Logik bewegt, findet man wohl kaum in der hebräischen Gedankenwelt. Ein hervorragender chinesischer Theologe erinnerte uns an diese Verschiedenheit in der Denkweise in einem Vortrag vor Universitätsstudenten wie folgt: "Ihr Leute des Westens seht die Wahrheit in Punkten; wir sehen sie in Bildern." Wir müssen uns bemühen, die biblische Denkweise zu erfassen! Eine weitere Ursache der falschen Texterklärung ist die

2. Ignorierung des Zusammenhanges.

Jeder Text steht in einem Kontext. Der Zusammenhang gibt dem Texte seine tiefere Bedeutung. Weshalb wird der Zusammenhang von manchem Prediger ignoriert?

Einmal fehlt es am Blick für die organische Einheit der Schrift. Diese einheitliche Offenbarung hat Jesum Christum als Ausgangspunkt, Mittelpunkt und Höhepunkt. Die Bibel ist nicht eine Sammlung von Fragmenten der Wahrheit, sondern eine progressive Heilsoffenbarung und Heilsgeschichte. Diese Tatsache erfordert Beachtung des Zusammenhanges.

Weiter ist zu beachten, das Gottes Wort durch heilige Menschen geredet worden ist. Jedes Wort ist daher auch zum Teil zeitgebunden — es wurde unter besondern Verhältnissen zu einer bestimmten Zeit, an einem bestimmten Ort, und zu bestimmten Personen oder Gruppen geredet.

Oft wird ein kurzer Text auch aus dem Zusammenhang gerissen, weil der Redner andernfalls nicht seine Anwendung machen kann. Man zitiert gerne Joh. 10, 28 als Beweis der bedingungslosen Sicherheit der Gläubigen, und vergißt, daß die Verheißungen sich auf die Nachfolger beziehen, die in Vers 27 beschrieben werden.

Die Ignorierung des Zusammenhanges wird oft bestärkt durch die moderne Kapitel- und Verseinteilung. Es ist zuweilen besser die Einteilung zu ignorieren als den Zusammenhang (vgl. Matth. 16, 28 und 17, 1; 2. Kor. 6, 14-17 und 7, 1).

3. Unbiblische Vergeistlichung.

Die Botschaft soll aus dem klaren Sinn des Textes hervorgehen, und nicht aus einem "tieferen," beigelegten Sinn. Die Vergeistlichung historischer Personen, Ereignisse, und Begriffe mag den

Zuhörer ins Staunen versetzen und ihm auch einige wertvolle Lehren geben — jedoch die Frage bleibt: Ist dies die Botschaft des Textes?

Sicherlich enthält die Geschichte Isaaks manche wertvollen Lehren für den Gläubigen von heute. Es ist jedoch eine unnatürliche Vergeistlichung, wenn man in Isaaks Heirat vornehmlich eine Darstellung der Werbung der Brautgemeinde findet, und zwar wie folgt: Isaak (Christus), Rebekka (Gemeinde), und Elieser (Heiliger Geist). Die Gleichnisse des Neuen Testaments sind besonders dieser Gefahr ausgesetzt. Anstatt daß man aus dem Gleichnis vom Barmherzigen Samariter die offensichtliche Lehre der praktischen Nächstenliebe zieht, versucht man einen "tieferen" Sinn zu finden — nämlich, den ganzen Ratschluß Gottes in der Erlösung der Menschheit!

Obiges sind einige Ursachen der falschen Texterklärung. Solche "Schrifteinlegung" verletzt nicht nur das homiletische, sondern auch das ethische Gewissen des Predigers. Auf jeden Fall ist große Vorsicht am Platze!

II. Winke für eine rechte Texterklärung.

Für eine rechte Texterklärung ist allgemeine Schriftekennntnis eine selbstverständliche Voraussetzung. Im Lichte der ganzen Offenbarung erhellen auch die sogenannten "dunkeln" Stellen. Zur besonderen Beachtung empfehlen wir folgende Regeln:

1. Der Wortsinn des Textes ist festzustellen.

Whately empfiehlt den Text durch ein Mikroskop zu beschauen. Das bedeutet sorgfältiges, aufmerksames, wiederholtes Lesen des Textes. Biblische Wörterbücher, Konkordanzen, und auch Kommentare können dabei behilflich sein. Man beachte hier jedoch die Eigenart der Bibelsprache. Solche Begriffe wie **Geist**, **Seele**, **Herz**, **Leben** u.a. muß man verstehen und definieren im Lichte des biblischen Sprachgebrauchs, und nicht im Lichte der modernen Psychologie. Dasselbe gilt von solchen Begriffen wie **Licht** und **Finsternis**, die man ethisch, und nicht physikalisch erklären muß. Grundlegend für alle rechte Schrifterklärung ist eine Erfassung des grammatischen Wortsinnes.

2. Die historische Situation des Textes ist festzustellen.

Der geschichtliche Rahmen eines Textes ist von größter Bedeutung. Die Beschreibung des geschichtlichen Zusammenhanges und der sozialen und politischen Verhältnisse der Zeitperiode in welcher der Text entstanden, geben der geistlichen Wahrheit "Fleisch und Blut" und eine größere Realität. Der Prediger stelle sich bei der Vorbereitung folgende Fragen: **Wann** wurde das Wort gesprochen. **Wo** wurde das Wort gesprochen? **Von wem** wurde das Wort gesprochen? Bei **welcher Gelegenheit** wurde das Wort gesprochen? Die rechte Antwort auf diese Fragen wird zur Bereicherung der Botschaft beitragen.

3. Der Lehrgehalt des Textes ist festzustellen.

Die Feststellung des Wortsinnes und der historischen Situation ermöglichen eine Feststellung des Lehrgehaltes. Zum Beispiel finden wir, daß das ernste Wort in Gal. 6, 7: "Irret euch nicht, Gott läßt sich nicht spotten..." in Verbindung mit der Unterstützung der Diener am Wort gesprochen wurde. Also ist es in erster Linie ein Lehrtext für die Gemeinde, und nicht ein Evangelisationstext für die Ungeretteten. Die Stelle in Phil 2, 5-11 wird gewöhnlich als klassischer Text gebraucht für die Erniedrigung (Kenosis) Jesu Christi. Der Zusammenhang zeigt jedoch, daß es bei Paulus darum ging, die Gläubigen anzuspornen so gesinnt zu sein "wie Jesus Christus auch war." Also gibt uns der Text nicht nur eine wunderbare Christologie, sondern auch ein praktisches Beispiel der Jüngerschaft.

Abschließend wäre noch darauf hinzuweisen, daß jeder Text im Lichte einer progressiven Offenbarung und Heilsgeschichte erklärt werden muß. Das schließt in sich, daß man alt-testamentliche Texte im Lichte des Neuen Testaments erklärt. Das letzte Wort hat Gott nicht am Sinai gesprochen, sondern durch Seinen Sohn Jesus Christus. — Erklärung ist jedoch nicht Endziel der Predigt. Rechte Erklärung ist die Grundlage für rechte Anwendung. Je schriftgemäßer die Erklärung, desto wirkungsvoller wird die Anwendung sein. Möchten wir als Prediger stets mit Paul Gerhardt beten:

"Hilf daß ich rede stets,
Womit ich kann bestehen!
Laß kein unnützes Wort
Aus meinem Munde gehen.
Hilf daß ich rede wohl.
Und wenn ich reden muß,
So gib den Worten Kraft
Und Nachdruck ohn' Verdruß."

J. A. Toews.

A VICTORIOUS FAITH FOR A CHALLENGING FUTURE

In writing to the Philippian Church, Paul says: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ..., that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Even though the Philippians were to face many adversaries, their future was bright. They were on the winning side; they were "more than conquerors" through faith in Jesus Christ.

There is a strange note of pessimism in the air today. They tell us that things are not what they used to be and that the Church is becoming progressively more ineffective. I suppose it depends

very much on where we look and what our frame of reference is. The paradox of faith is that in spite of obvious weakness and abundance of conflict, the believer sees ultimate triumph where the unbeliever senses only defeat.

Such triumph, however, is in Christ. Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" so often that it must spell something extremely vital to the life of the Church. Victory is in Christ. Only as the Church appropriates the life in Christ will it experience the victory which Christ has truly wrought on Calvary.

As I look to our Mennonite Brethren Conference, several encouraging aspects of our fellowship emerge. We are a brotherhood which is not torn apart by strife and doctrinal difference. For this we need to thank God. We have a message which we can articulate and support by our own experience. We have many open doors by which we may enter to proclaim this message to a needy world. To this we must add the work of the Spirit of God who empowers us for our task.

There are two aspects of faith which together make it a victorious faith. Our faith has **content** in that it is anchored in the redemptive acts of God in history. These acts of God lie outside of our experience and prevent our faith from becoming mere subjectivism. "Faith is the evidence of things not seen." The proclamation of the believer is not only what he has experienced but **what God has done**. Faith is also an attitude in that it represents my personal trust in, my personal appropriation of, my personal commitment to what God has done. Paul writes to the Thessalonians that the word of faith came to them" in much assurance." In the punctuation of faith we are done with question marks; we use the exclamation mark.

In this address to my brethren I want to share with you several aspects of the expression of our common faith which awaken in me hope and confidence. I shall not make reference to various aspects of the **content** of our faith. This we have done at the three study conferences which were held during the last six years. I trust you will also sense my desire to express myself positively, that is, to point out what we, by the grace of God, have and need to intensify.

I. There is in our ranks **an unsophisticated Biblicism**.

This, I believe, is evidenced in our preaching in churches today. Generally the Mennonite Brethren have not produced great scholars nor have they many great writers among them. One reason might be that the Church has had serious difficulty persuading some of its leaders to forsake the pulpit so that they might give themselves to writing. Our missionary and evangelistic efforts testify to our conviction of the primacy of biblical preaching.

Our people still love Bible conferences. Special conferences on

race relations, industrial relations and the like have not really taken root.

The nature of much of our preaching has been of an expository character. We come together to study books of the Bible. Some of our great men of the pulpit such as H. W. Lohrenz, A. H. Unruh, Jacob Reimer were men who loved the text of the Bible. I believe this is still true of some of our contemporary preaching in the Mennonite Brethren Church.

This unsophisticated biblicism is also seen in our attitude toward the message of the Bible. We feel that we cannot very well publish a document unless it is well supported by biblical references. I am not saying that we have always quoted Scripture correctly, but I admire the spirit which gives such priority to the Word.

An unsophisticated biblicism must obey the Word once light has come from the Word. Our brethren frequently asked: "Was sagt das Wort?" Once the message of the Word was established, obedience followed. To such an attitude of obedience we must again dedicate ourselves. There is a danger that we discuss without commitment. Such discussions are cheap, they contain no challenge for the participants. They never become life and death matters.

Recently I heard of a number of theologians who came together once a month to discuss the message of the Bible. Among them were two Mennonite theologians. After several contacts one of the men looked at the Mennonite and said: "You know, I have the feeling you really expect us to do these things." This seemed to be a new experience for him. He had never witnessed discussion which leads to commitment.

It is also remarkable to me that we have not defined our view of Scripture. I take this to mean that we seem to understand each other in this matter. We begin to define when we sense that we no longer clearly understand each other. What is clearly understood is taken for granted. I do not define my relationship to my wife because I feel it isn't necessary, both of us seem to sense how we relate to each other. That the Mennonite Brethren Conference has never formally defined its relationship to the Bible need not be construed as weakness. However, as soon as we become suspicious of each other, whether such suspicion is legitimate or not, we will have to declare our stand to Scripture in definition. I trust when we do this we will always remember that the thing defined is always greater than its definition.

My brethren, our personal attitude toward scripture expressed through obedience, and our reverent use of scripture in worship and preaching will better convince our children of our unsophisticated biblicism than a very learned definition which is not really meaningful in our lives.

II. In our church and conference relations we have had a **functional polity.**

We share with others an Anabaptist view of the church. The term "brotherhood" is often used in our circles and I trust it is more than a pious cliché. The term expresses our relationship to others but it also seeks to set forth an approach in church polity. As a term of relationship it seeks to describe our attitude toward those who are "in Christ." It judges all attempts to define our relationship to our fellow believer in non-spiritual terms. As an expression of polity brotherhood points to a way of solving a problem common to all believers in fellowship, a way of seeking to know God's will in our day.

Here again we stand in danger of making brotherhood a definition rather than a working principle in our inter-personal relationships in the church.

Functional polity would suggest that methods must change, they must be tested in the crucible of experience and judged by the results they produce. It is to be understood that such methods will always operate in the framework of our New Testament charter. But are there not several ways of implementing new Testament truths? Is the New Testament message bound by time or by culture?

Tennyson in "The Passing of Arthur" says: "The old order changeth, yielding place to new; and God fulfills himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

We must from time to time review our organization to see if it actually helps us to do our work or whether we are in a bind due to obsolete organization. Note with me that there are more Mennonite Brethren outside of Canada and the United States than are presently living in North America. Our figures show that some 34,000 members live in other lands and 25,000 fellowship in Canada and the United States. However, our General Conference is definitely geared to the work of these two countries. Is it not time that we rethink our polity in the light of these statistics? Perhaps our working as Area Conferences is the better approach to our present day needs. What we would then need is a World Conference of Mennonite Brethren which would be a faith conference and which would provide opportunity for fellowship and teaching.

Brotherhood polity would also suggest that **all** brethren become involved. They must leave the bleachers and come into the arena to involve themselves. There are no spectators in the kingdom of God. All are important and all are needed.

III. In the work of the Kingdom we seek a **relevant ministry.**

It must be a ministry which embraces all. We stand in danger of defining ministry in such a way that only a few are meant.

Our statistics tell us that our "ministers" are becoming fewer with each triennium. Does this then mean that our "ministry" is also decreasing?

Again, I feel that we have a problem in definition. We have defined "ministry" in terms of church polity and it has become synonymous with "leader."

Each member has received a ministry from his master and he should be encouraged to exercise it. The professional people have an excellent opportunity to minister to the spiritual needs to those who come to them. Often they enjoy the respect of their patients, clients, or customers and could use this prestige factor toward spiritual ends.

The church should capitalize on this professional potential for special ministries. Recently I heard of three young Mennonite doctors who have formed a partnership. Two practice and the third doctor goes to the mission field supported by the two at home. As they rotate this ministry they experience great joy in ministry.

One of the problems with which we must cope as our generation seeks to recapture the concept of ministry is that of immobility. We become fixed, fixed in our locality, in our property, in our vocation or in our social life. The church may want to use us but we cannot respond because we have "taken a house." We forget our pledge to God that we would "use" our profession to His honor, and it is using us.

A relevant ministry also ministers to all. Too often we have adjusted to a certain group and would prefer to minister to that group. The challenge is to "lengthen the cords" and thus to embrace more people by the ministry of the church. Middle class people, professional people, university people — all must come into the circumference of our concern. I firmly believe that this is already happening in our brotherhood but we need more direction and more courage to increase the effectiveness of an all-embracing ministry.

Can people with differing backgrounds, and from different socio-economic levels, really worship together? Must we by sheer necessity permit, if not foster, groups with common backgrounds and interest in the church? It is my firm belief that "in Christ" we have a common center and if Christ is our all-sufficiency we will worship together "without respect of persons."

Our ministry must also recapture the concept of fellowship. Ministry is not only preaching at people. There is a ministry of sharing in the New Testament which included goods, property, feelings, strength and intercession. This is a needed ministry for a lonely generation. To enter into a brother's life and to help bear his burdens, to allow another to enter into the holy precincts of my personal life and trust him that he will not misuse it, this is the ministry of fellowship. It is exactly here where we have experienced our greatest defeat. Distrust, suspicion, bitterness and pride have closed the door to a vital ministry.

The channels of communication must again be opened by the work of the Spirit of God. Let us not resist the Spirit as he convicts us of our backbiting and slander, of our exclusiveness and prejudice. Let us become open with each other once more.

The larger our churches become the more difficult it seems to be to fellowship effectively. Recently one church has sought to restore the spirit of fellowship by dividing the entire congregation into "cells" or fellowship groups. Instead of meeting as usual for Wednesday night prayer meetings, the congregation meets in homes along the lines of these fellowship units. For once old and young have opportunity to communicate. This happens several times a year and the groups are reshuffled annually.

IV. In our group witness we seek a significant ethic.

It is difficult for us to accept change as a necessary aspect of our Christian life. Often Christians look upon change as sin. The illustrations are numerous which point to things which were once considered to be out of bounds for the members but are fully accepted today.

We need a philosophy of change. What are the essential principles which guide us in our change. Must we always wait until enough dissenters have broken rank until we ourselves finally acquiesce and change? Are these dissenters then our spiritual leaders? Or does the church always change by pressure from its unspiritual members?

Too often we have emphasized non-conformity without evangelism. Evangelism without non-conformity becomes hypocrisy; non-conformity with evangelism becomes legalism. We must have both. Evangelism necessitates nearness to the world to which we would witness. It keeps us constantly near the people to whom we speak. Non-conformity keeps us from losing our identity as citizens of the Kingdom of God. It reminds us that we are pilgrims and strangers in enemy territory. We seek not to hide our otherness.

We must also develop a Christian system of values. The Pharisees of Jesus' day exalted the insignificant and neglected the essentials. We too can err in similar fashion.

Is it possible for members of a group to change together? Can we together wait before God in matters of ethic until we have the consensus of the brotherhood under the leading of the Spirit? It was done in Acts 15 in the question concerning the Gentiles and it can be done in 1965 in questions relating to our witness.

Let me close by pleading for a witness for social righteousness. We as a Mennonite Brethren church must also be heard in matters of social righteousness. God would warn the world of sin through His chosen instruments, His people.

"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ... that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." Let us unitedly move forward in victorious faith into a challenging future. F. C. Peters

A SERMON

DER PHARISAEER UND DER ZOELLNER

Text: Lukas 18, 9-14

Das Gleichnis welches heute vor uns liegt, ist ein wohlbekanntes; uns stehen die Einzelheiten, die Männer von denen es spricht, klar in Erinnerung. Von Jugend auf haben wir von dem stolzen Pharisäer gehört, selbstgerecht bis auf den höchsten Grad, hart in seinen Anforderungen andern gegenüber, aber immer bereit sich selbst zu schonen. Wir kennen ja diese Pharisäer schon wie sie so bitter gegen die Person, die Lehre und das Wirken unseres Heilandes waren. Wir wissen, daß zum großen Teil, es gerade diese Pharisäer waren, die dazu beitrugen, daß der Herr Jesus ans Kreuz geschlagen wurde. Kein Wunder, daß Gott das Gebet so eines Menschen nicht annahm; mit solchen Menschen möchten wir auch nichts zu tun haben. Gott sei Dank, wir sind nicht Pharisäer!

Andererseits ist uns das Bild des Zöllners auch sehr klar. Wir haben ja niemals seinen Landesverrat noch sein ungerechtes wüstes Leben, gesehen. Vielmehr haben wir oft gehört, wie die Zöllner bereit waren den Herrn Jesus zu hören und aufzunehmen. Wir haben gehört, wie sie allgemein verachtet wurden und unser Mitleidsgefühl ist erweckt. In diesem Gleichnis ist der Zöllner so bescheiden (er steht vor ferne) so demütig. Er läßt sich nicht durch Haß oder Verknennung abhalten. Wer würde sich nicht viel lieber mit dem Zöllner als mit dem Pharisäer identifizieren.

Aber wenn wir so denken, ist das in sich nicht schon ein Beweis, daß in uns ein gut Teil des Pharisäers Geist steckt? Können wir überhaupt mit so einer Auffassung, wie wir sie geschildert haben, die Hauptbetonung dieses Gleichnisses ergreifen? Müssen wir nicht erst diese Männer im selben Licht sehen wie jene Zuhörer des Herrn Jesus sie sahen? Wollte der Herr Jesus nicht gerade durch diese zwei Männer (es mußten eben zwei sein; durch einen hätte er es nicht tun können) vervollständigen und klarstellen?

Wir wollen uns deshalb etwas mit diesen Männern beschäftigen, um daß wir doch nicht das wesentliche in diesem Gleichnis übersehen würden.

Das Bild des Pharisäers

Wie sahen denn Jesu Zuhörer diese Männer? Einmal den Pharisäer! Zum großen Teil waren die Pharisäer in Ehren gehalten bei den Leuten. Sie waren Menschen mit einem starken Gerechtigkeitsgefühl, strebsam und ehrlich, wenigstens nach äußerlichem Verhalten. So weit der Mensch urteilen konnte, lebten sie

keusch und moralisch. So auch der Pharisäer im Gleichnis. Er war ein religiöser Mann; er beachtete die Anforderung des Gesetzes bis ins Kleinste. Er war bereit den Zehnten "von allem" zu geben. Er ließ es sich auch etwas kosten an seinem Leibe Gott zu dienen, indem er zwei mal in der Woche fastete. Wir müssen daran denken, daß Jesus dieses Gleichnis zu Menschen sprach bei denen dieses der rechte Ausdruck eines frommen Lebens war. In unserer Zeit würden wir ihn vielleicht so beschreiben: Er ist ein ernstes, aufrichtiges Gemeindeglied. Er besucht alle Gottesdienste, ist tätig in der Sonntagsschule, in der Bibelstunde, auf der Gemeindeberatung. Er zahlt gewissenhaft alle Gemeindesteuern und trägt zu den freiwilligen Sammlungen reichlich bei. Von Zeit zu Zeit merkt man ja eine gewisse Selbstzufriedenheit und hier und da spricht er hart und richterisch über solche, die es nicht so machen wie er, aber im großen und ganzen ist er doch ein geschätzter Mensch, eine starke Stütze in der Gemeinde.

Der Zöllner.

Nicht so der Zöllner. Dieser Mensch ist ein offener Sünder. Er hat sich am Eigentum anderer vergriffen; das hat mancher selber erfahren, vielleicht sogar der Pharisäer, der im selben Raum mit ihm ist. Er hält es mit solchen, die dem Streben der geistlichen Leitung entweder feindlich, oder im besten Falle, gleichgültig gegenüber stehen. Vielleicht sah man ihn auch im trunkenen Zustand auf der Straße hintaumeln — ein richtig unmoralischer Mensch. Wir würden doch wollen vorsichtig sein, welche Beziehungen wir mit solchem Menschen anknüpfen würden!

Ich glaube, daß wir nur dann, wenn wir diese Männer etwas in diesem Lichte sehen, bereit sind die Wahrheit aufzunehmen, die der Herr Jesus unterstreichen wollte.

Er wollte uns sagen, daß die Annahme der Gebete der Menschen weder vom Wesen der Menschen noch von ihrer Lebensart abhängig ist. Der Mensch soll nicht glauben, daß weil er allerlei "gutes" aufhäufen kann, er daher angenehm ist, noch soll er durch seine offenbare Sünde sich abschrecken lassen. Soweit es ihn betrifft, schaut Gott auf die innere Einstellung mit der er vor ihm kommt.

Der gefährliche Blick.

Diese Einstellung wird stark beeinflußt durch den Maßstab, den Standard den wir bei uns anwenden. Der Pharisäer sagt hier gar nicht, daß er keine Sünde hat. Vielleicht, wenn man ihn hätte zur Rede gestellt, hätte er zugestanden, daß er es wisse, das er noch nicht vollkommen sei. Vielleicht kannte er zu wohl "die Wölfe, die in seinem Inneren heulten." Aber er wird von so einer Selbsterkenntnis abgelenkt durch den Blick den er tut. Er schaut weder in sich, noch aufwärts zu Gott. Er schaut bei sich auf das Äußerliche und dann schaut er seitwärts, oder sogar (wenigstens von seinem Standpunkt) hinunter auf das Äußere des andern. Er

sieht in seinem Blick die Räuber, die Ungerechten, den Zöllner, alles offensichtliche Schänder des heiligen Gesetzes. Bei so einem Vergleich, glänzte er; er hat Gefallen an dem was er sieht.

Dies ist ein gefährlicher Blick, dieser Blick zur Seite. Sobald wir diesen tun, stehen wir in Gefahr zu vergessen, daß wir auch Sünder sind. Wir können ja die Fehler und Sünden der andern so scharf und genau sehen; bei uns sind wir oft so geübt die rechte "Erklärung" zu finden für Wort und Handlungen, die anderen nicht gefallen, oder über die wir vielleicht etwas unruhig fühlen. Der Herr Jesus verurteilt solchen Blick zur Seite, wenn er auch eine gewisse "Dankbarkeit" gegen Gott erweckt.

Diese Dankbarkeit — Ich danke dir Gott — is eigentlich nur ein Gewohnheitsausdruck oder eine Anstandsform. Da ist nichts Echtes dabei, nur Heuchelei. Und weil die Dankbarkeit nicht echt ist, schadet ihm so ein Gebet nur. Einmal weil alles Unechte vor Gott ein Greuel ist, und zweitens, weil er durch so eine vermeintliche demütige Äußerung, verhindert wird sich selbst zu sehen. Und weil er sich selber nicht sieht so wie er ist, findet er sich nicht gedungen um die Gnade Gottes zu flehen, und wer nicht um sie bittet, eben weil er keine Notwendigkeit für sie sieht, wird sie kaum erhalten.

Der Pharisäergeist im Zöllner.

Aber dieser selbe Geist der Selbsterhebung kann auch Raum finden im Herzen eines Menschen, dessen äußerliches Leben mehr Ähnlichkeit hat mit dem Leben des Zöllners als mit dem des Pharisäers. Der Zöllner kann auch seitwärts schauen. Der Zöllner hätte so beten können: Ich danke dir Gott, daß ich nicht bin wie dieser Pharisäer. Ich gehe nicht so stolz umher; ich suche nicht Ehre bei Menschen. Ich habe betrogen, ich habe gelogen, aber schließlich bin ich offen damit. Ich komme vor dich und bekenne, daß ich ein Sünder bin, usw. Die Worte sind in diesem Gebet anders; der Geist ist derselbe. Wir können auch mit unserer Bußfertigkeit, mit unserer Demut, stolz werden.

Wenn der Mensch vor Gott kommt, dann soll er sich mit sich selbst beschäftigen; und nicht mit den Sünden anderer. Er schaut nicht seitwärts, er schaut aufwärts. Zwei Tatsachen stehen unmittelbar vor ihm: die Heiligkeit Gottes und seine eigene Sündhaftigkeit. Alles andere ist jetzt Nebensache. Er muß vergehen, es sei denn die Gnade Gottes wird ihm zuteil. Im festen Glauben an diese Gnade ruft er, und Gott is gnädig. Er empfindet daß Gott ihn erhört hat auf Grund von Gottes Wort. Er geht davon, gerechtfertigt — als ob er nie gesündigt hätte. Aber diese Rechtfertigung ist nur von Gott. Wie oft ist es, daß ein begnadigter Sünder handelt und spricht als ob er in sich selbst gerecht ist. Wie schnell vergessen wir, wie nahe wir dem Vergeben waren.

Die Vergebung unserer Sünden, die Gaben des Geistes, unsere Dienste und Leistungen im Reiche Gottes, sind und bleiben immer nur Gaben der Liebe und Gnade Gottes. Satan ist bereit uns die

äußere Form dieser Dinge zu lassen, so lange er uns innerlich vom Bewußtsein unserer Abhängigkeit von Gott lösen kann. Wenn er dieses zustande bringt; dann werden selbst die Gnadengaben uns zum Verhängnis. Der Herr Jesus schließt das Gleichnis mit diesen Worten: Denn wer sich selbst erhöht, der wird erniedrigt werden; und wer sich selbst erniedrigt, der wird erhöht werden. Das ist auch eine Botschaft für uns.

H. Voth.

BOOK REVIEW

THE SUBURBAN CHURCH

Protestantism in Suburban Life by F. A. Shippey: Abingdon Press (1964)

During the last two decades, critical discussion of an unprecedented kind has been devoted to the church's role in, and obligation to the urban community. Indeed, several larger and also smaller Protestant denominations (Methodist, Lutheran, Evangelical United Brethren, (Old) Mennonite, etc.) have sponsored rather careful studies (sociological, as well as religious) of the church in urban movement of the church into urban, America. These surveys, and numerous independent studies, have documented the remarkable sociological changes of our time and the rapid movement of the church into urban and more recently, suburban society. But these studies — many of them — have also ventured a solemn judgment: all is not well with the urban and suburban church of our day. The essence of their critical evaluation is simply that the Christian church is encumbered with serious problems in its new geographical and cultural setting and is becoming less capable of reaching out to its new community and serving it effectively in the best sense of this word. Such a critical conclusion, increasingly reiterated by contemporary writers, has prompted anxious concern a-

mongst leaders of the church.

A very recent study of the suburban church in particular that, as it seems to us, is more illuminating and more optimistic than most studies of the subject which have appeared to date is F. A. Shippey's *Protestantism in Suburban Life* (Abingdon Press, 1964).

Protestantism in Suburban Life is, first of all, a well-informed and amply-documented discussion of the suburban church in contemporary America. The sociological and religious facts, insofar as these can be ascertained through responsible investigation, which Shippey has brought together in this study, are many.

He established the fact that rapid suburban development is presently to be found in nearly every part of the United States, that the highest percentage increase in such development is occurring in the North East, the far West, and around the Great Lake, that one person out of four is now a suburbanite and that by 1975 this proportion will, in all probability, rise to one out of three. He reveals, also, that there are changes occurring within the social composition of these suburban communities: single-

faith communities (consisting originally of more elite Protestant groups) are actually on the way out and new-comer groups, formerly excluded, are now entering them — groups such as Jews, Negroes, Roman Catholics, fringe sects, and “blue-collar workers.” And Shippey discloses, in further discussion of these changes, how incomplete and inaccurate the “organization man” stereotype (still found in some sociological and fictional works) is as a description of present-day suburban life.

The author’s comprehensive coverage of the facts is further manifested in his references to sociological studies (by S. F. Faav and W. M. Dobriner, for instance) of actual “neighbouring” between city and suburban residents, to studies (of Duncan and Reiss, R. Dewey, W. T. Martin, etc.) on family mobility and population in urban and suburban areas, to case studies (as those of R. Gordon’s *The Split-Level Trap*, H. E. Salisbury’s *The Shook-Up Generation*, or G. L. Robert’s *How the Church Can Help Where Delinquency Begins*) and novel literature (by writers like J. P. Marquand, S. Wilson, P. De Vries, E. Schiddel, S. Treadwell, F. Birren or M. Huston) about suburban morality, to recent research on family patterns and family problems in suburbia, or to data about the actual processes involved in the establishment of new suburban congregations.

Protestantism in Suburban Life is, moreover, a rather discerning and revealing study that does more than merely supply an array of interesting facts; it interprets the data gathered in such a way as to provide genuine insights for alert and concerned readers. These insights, it is true, are sometimes purely so-

ciological in nature. More often, however, they are distinctly religious in intent and suggest how the Christian church may, in actual fact, see and accept a particular responsibility towards its immediate community.

Shippey, for one thing, takes writers who have distorted the actual situation — moral and religious — in suburbia to task, and defines clearly the nature of their distortions. He explains in a discerning section entitled “the cult of suburban criticism,” how such writers have fallen short in their analyses of suburban life, both sociologically and religiously. He indicates how their literature often contains a “strange mixture of sociological and soap opera,” or else involves a serious misunderstanding of the fundamental nature and structure of the Christian church.

Again, Shippey analyzes and describes contemporary suburban life in most suggestive terms. He singles out significant facets, and indicates how suburbia may be viewed as: (1) an escape from industrialism, (2) a refuge from minority groups, (3) a guarantor of economic and social homogeneity, (4) the “abode of modern man,” the mecca of modern comforts and conveniences, or (5) an area of cultural tensions.

Also, the author identifies specific suburban “groups” or “types” of people and suggests how an awareness of their existence may constitute a distinct challenge to the Christian church that is concerned about its witness to the community. Some of the “groups” identified by Shippey are: (1) **the marginal Protestant**, who tends to be overtly critical of the church and fails to see any vital connection between the faith and practice of Christians, (2) **the “pioneer”**, who may not be a believing Christian but who is willing

to accept responsibility for himself, willing to accept heavy vocational assignments, and willing to take risks in order to advance himself and his family, (3) **the stranger**, who may be a member of a minority group but who, in any case, never stays long enough to become accepted by the community, (4) **the “organization man”**, often found among young executive and other high-level white-collar personnel, whose characteristic traits are such things as “high educational achievement, upgrading of self, mastery of personality skills, loyalty to the corporation, the apotheosis of the organization ethic, . . . conformity, and budgetism,” (5) **the “wistful pagan”**, who fears to take genuine religion seriously and frequently ends up in humanism, and (6) **the regular church-goer**, who may or may not be a committed Christian in fact. What is especially illuminating about Shippey’s discussion of these “groups” is his raising of pertinent questions about them: what particular problems does their situation present that the Christian church must first face and answer before it can effectively reach and minister to these groups?

Shippey’s discussion of the question “who is my neighbour?” is also a very stimulating one that seeks to apply the Biblical conception of neighbour concretely to the suburban situation. He remarks, at one point, that “for the suburban congregation the specific meaning needs to be delineated. To what extent does being a brother’s keeper demand a sharing of time, talent, and material resources? What are the terms or conditions of this sharing? To what extent does it mean a sharing of faith itself?” (p. 89).

And we may refer to Shippey’s

analysis of shifting family patterns in suburbia as another instance of sound Christian discernment on the author’s part. He reveals, among other facts, how in certain suburban communities the mother has been compelled to assume a strongly dominant role in the family, and asserts that this development has, in some ways, upset the potential balance of family life and served to emphasize again, the need for a new ministry to families on the part of the Christian church.

But **Protestantism in Suburban Life** is, finally, a **positively-oriented and forward-looking study**. There is much sober analysis of problems in this book, but there is also a frequent recurrence to the challenges and hopeful prospects that confront the church in suburbia today. In this respect, the merits of Shippey’s study — quite frankly — far transcend such more caustic discussions of the contemporary Christian church as Pierre Berton’s *The Comfortable Pew* (McLelland and Stewart, 1965) or Bishop Robinson’s *Honest to God* (S.C.M. Press, 1963).

A few illustrations of such essentially valid optimism may be given here. In his treatment of “suburbia as a Christian symbol” (chapter 1), Shippey urges that suburbia be viewed as a place where, above all, **the relevance of the Christian faith in the modern world may be crucially tested**. “Does Christian commitment,” the author asks, “genuinely suffice for the intellectual and emotional testings of our day? Suburbia furnishes the possibility of an answer. It is a proper place to test the relevance of the faith. Beneath the public show of materialism and space-age science, there does exist an underdeveloped interest in what Protestantism really has to offer.” Again

Shippey urges that suburbia be viewed as a place where **the Christian stewardship of material blessings may be decisively tested.**

The author is also more optimistic about the potentialities and prospects of the Christian clergy in suburbia today than are such contemporary writers as Peter De Vries (*The Mackerel Plaza*), Sinclair Lewis (*Elmer Gantry*), W. H. Whyte (*The Organization Man*), Peter Berger (*The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*), or G. Winter (*The Suburban Captivity of the Churches*), for example. In the clergyman's own life, Shippey contends, "is embedded the tension between gospel and world, but personal commitment yields the gospel the dominating place. As a prophet and reformer the pastor remains sensitive to man's needs and problems. Here is the Protestant ministry." (p.187)

And Shippey is, to supply one other illustration of his sane optimism, not overly disturbed by current criticism of the growing "institutionalism of the church." He reminds us that the Christian church is, after all, **both a**

fellowship and an institution, and while an exclusive or excessive emphasis upon the institutional aspect of the church may, of course, hamper its best development, "some ongoing structure is necessary and desirable in the proper function of significant church work. Without some adequate social structure such accomplishments as visibleness, continuity, nurture, and the transmission of the gospel would be impossible in the suburban church, or elsewhere." (p. 199)

At several points, we must add, the author's theological position seems to fall short of evangelical orthodoxy. Shippey does not deem conversion the utterly essential experience which evangelicals do; nor does he always distinguish clearly between the church of "converted believers" and the church of communicants who may or may not be committed believers. But this matter aside, the author does speak in terms that committed and courageous Christians everywhere can understand and truly appreciate, and for this we may be genuinely grateful.

Herbert Giesbrecht.

LIFE BY THE SPIRIT

By A. Skevington Wood. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co.

1963, pp. 144. — \$2.50.

In this book the author makes an intensive examination of Romans chapter eight, in order to describe the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Romans chapter eight is regarded as the climactic chapter of the book as well as the culmination of Paul's teaching on the doctrine of holiness or sanctification begun in chapter six. What Paul emphasizes in the chapter as

distinctively central in the life of holiness, is the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit.

The book is well organized treating such subjects as: the law of the Spirit, the mind of the Spirit, the power of the Spirit, the guidance of the Spirit, the witness of the Spirit, the intercession of the Spirit, and the sustenance of the Spirit. The author proceeds in a semi-popular

manner managing very well to weave into his expositions a wealth of excellent information based upon careful word studies, as well as key interpretations of Bible expositors ranging from the Reformers to the present day. And all this without cluttering up the direction of his thought.

The thoroughness of Wood's exegesis may be illustrated by one of his word studies in his attempt to get at the meaning of being guided by the Holy Spirit. The particular passage is "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." To determine the manner or method adopted by the Spirit to guide his children, a careful study is made of the word "led" (*ago*). After a three page examination of the usage of the term in Scripture, it is concluded that it signifies to guide, to show the way, to bring on the way and sometimes to impel. Summing up, Wood writes: "His manner is not only by suggestion but even more by compulsion. He does more than draw from without: He drives from within. That is the glad testimony of those who have received the fulness of the Spirit. They are conscious of being projected on their course by the impetus of the Spirit . . . The indwelling Spirit urges him on his God-appointed way." Related to this aspect of the Spirit directing the life of the believer, are such questions as, who is led, and where does the Spirit lead — what is the direction?

While the exposition of chapter eight is thorough-going and inspira-

tional, this reviewer has some difficulty with the author's reflections on chapter seven, as an attempt is made to relate the latter part of that chapter to chapter eight. Woods falls in line with a number of commentaries which consider the conflict Paul describes in chapter seven as one the believer experiences before he has entered into the full life of the Spirit. The appropriation of the powers of the Spirit is to resolve such a conflict (p.22). The Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided life results in the settling of the combat of flesh and Spirit. This is to say that chapter eight describes a higher way of life than chapter seven, and that the believer ought to live in chapter eight (p.33). This reviewer believes it is more correct to understand the conflict of Paul, described so vividly in chapter seven, as a conflict remaining in the believer even in the highest reaches of Christian experience. As long as sin remains and indwells the believer, as it will until the resurrection day, the bitter conflict remains. This is one aspect of the Christian experience. Another aspect is to know and experience the power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To know the joy and peace of such guidance does not remove the conflict of the believer in this life.

Studying Romans eight with the help of **Life By the Spirit** is to be highly recommended. One cannot help but be gripped anew by the exceeding greatness of the believer's privilege to be in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Victor Adrian