



The Voice

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THE CHURCH SERVES ITS MEMBERS

THE VOICE
of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College

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EDITORIAL

WHY DO I NEED THE CHURCH

In chapter 1 of his *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer states that "it is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians." He points out, in terms of kingdom theology and Biblical perspective, that God's people are a scattered people. It is "only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians. It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly." And, he points out, anticipating what was for the confessing church in Germany to become a way of life, "not all Christians receive this blessing: the imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone." The remainder of the book stands as one of the most moving views of the *koinonia*, of the fellowshiping community, ever written.

But is the treatment idealized—do we, individually, really need the church? Do we recognize "the privilege of living among other Christians"?

Many of the functions once filled by the church have fallen by default or design to others. The urbanite no longer depends on Sunday morning visits or pot-luck suppers for his only social interaction; he can generally find more satisfying interpersonal relationships with members of his professional group. The urbanite's reaction to social problems may be more a reflection of the neighborhood he lives in (or the ones he avoids) than be moulded by a group (congregation) composed of people of non-homogenous backgrounds and social patterns. The urbanite can by utilizing his radio-TV listen to music and preaching of a range not to be duplicated in a single congregation. If, then, we can have social, inter-personal, didactic and aesthetic needs satisfied outside the structured congregational pattern, what needs remain to be satisfied that require of me a commitment to the visible members of God's family?

One of the problems lies in what we mean by "need" the church. Certainly psychodynamics and an understanding of personality may see many aspects of the "need" for the church satisfactorily resolved via social-science manipulation. But if by "need" we think of "fulfilment" and "completion" rather than "adjustment" and "compensation," the significance of being members of Christ's body is seen more clearly. Thus, the thinking of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14 stresses the interdependence of the individual

if each is to find completion in terms of his new calling. This interdependence is seen in the complementarity of the gifts of the Spirit, which are found in the congregation; the Spirit can work when all the gifts are employed, and the gifts can all be utilized only when the owner of each commits himself and his gifts to the community. I need the church, then, if I am to grow into the fullest expression of my new nature, if I am to realize to the fullest the gifts which the Spirit gives, since these must be exercised, according to Ephesians and Colossians, only in the context of the *koinonia*. Robert Friedmann, in commenting on this "brotherhood" concept among the Anabaptists summarizes forcefully when he writes, ". . . this interdependence of men gives life and salvation a new meaning. It is not faith alone which matters . . . but it is brotherhood . . . One cannot find salvation without caring for his brother . . ." I need the church to carry on and to complete the task begun in me by the Spirit.

But I need the church, too, because it is God's instrument for the continuing contact with wilful men. The church, as Christ's visible body, is the continuing incarnation, an ongoing theophany, the reflected epiphany finding its original in Philippians 2:5-13. The church, the visible congregation or people of God, remains the avenue through which God works. So J. B. Phillips writes in *God Our Contemporary*, that while ". . . there can be no doubt at all that the contemporary God is at work outside the limits of the Church's direct influence . . . I cannot see any prospect of any rebirth of religious faith without the Christian Church." It is this body of the committed to whom the awesome task of reflecting clearly God's will is given in Matthew 16:18, 19; 18:19, 20; it is this body to whom the epistles are addressed; it is this body that forms the triumphant chorus in the Apocalypse. I need the church because it is through the church that God effects his purposes.

I need the church as well because in it I find acceptance of myself, not for what I have been nor for what I am, but for what I will be. It is in the church that full acceptance of individuals as individuals is possible: acceptance based on full knowledge of what we are both in nature and in intent, acceptance that includes both forgiveness and discipline, as William Klassen's *The Forgiving Community* and Thurneysen's *A Theology of Pastoral Care* stress.

I need the church because the church is people: not an institution or a preserver of doctrine, but people. "The mystery of the church is simply that it is people," write Gibbs and Morton (*God's Frozen People*). "It is a divine society, not because of an infallible doctrine or an incorruptible organization, but because Jesus called men to follow him, and still does." And as he calls and I respond, I find myself in that *ecclesia*, that church. I need it; I can't avoid it.

V. Ratzlaff

ARTICLES

COMMUNICATING THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE IN OUR DAY

In his excellent book, *the Preacher's Portrait*, J. R. Stott urges upon all ministers the need to take repeated fresh looks at the New Testament ideal of the preacher. According to the New Testament he finds the following portraits of the preacher. He is to be a steward — carefully expounding the mysteries of God. He is to be a herald — proclaiming the mighty deeds of redemption and calling men to be reconciled to God. He is to be a witness — testifying of that which is personal knowledge and experience. He is to be a father — loving, understanding and gently caring for his flock. He is to be a servant — a bondsman of the Lord, faithful and obedient, willing to endure hardships.

At the heart of the New Testament portrait of the preacher is the call to communicate the Good News of God's act of love in Jesus Christ. For us today it means communicating the Biblical message to the contemporary man. This involves at least two problems: understanding the needs of the modern man and seeking to make relevant the biblical message which came to men in different cultures about 2000 and more years ago. How can the command to Abraham, for example, to get out of his father's house and country be God's word to man today? How can God's covenant with Israel at that momentous occasion at Mount Sinai speak meaningfully to this generation? How can Paul's sharp rebuke to the Galatian church and his exhortation to the Colossians, be a living message for men today?

I. The Needs and Problems of Men in Biblical Days

The Bible addressed itself to original real life situations and needs; it was not written in a vacuum. God's progressive revelation of himself was not in book form, as Mohammed claims for the Koran, but in redemptive (sometimes judgemental) acts and words, in situations of human needs and predicaments. The call of Abraham was God's answer of grace to the problems created by the nation's grand rebellion against God at Babel. The Sinaitic covenant was in pursuance of God's promise to Abraham and in response to the critical suffering of abject slaves to Pharaoh. God heard their cries, saw their oppressions and came to visit them

redemptively. The prophets placed a right and necessary interpretation on God's acts of judgement on Israel as well as upon his acts of mercy and grace to those in captivity. The Gospel accounts of the New Testament expound with great clarity what God was doing in Jesus Christ. The various epistles expound on the significance of the Christ event as it related to the various practical needs of the Church. When the Galatians forgot they were sons of God and lived as though they were slaves under law Paul proclaimed the gospel of freedom of those who were sons in Christ through faith. When the Colossians were harassed by a complex philosophy according to human tradition which threatened their spiritual growth, Paul reveals Christ in unparalleled splendour and pre-eminence — in whom the fullness of God dwells, and in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. God's revelation came to men through letters addressed to the urgent and practical needs of men in that culture in those times.

II. Our Needs and Problems are Similar but Not Exactly the Same.

What about our needs in our culture in our day? On the one hand we are all sinners and need the grace of Jesus Christ. On the other hand we do not exactly have the problem of Israel, the Jewish community, which could not see their Messiah in Christ nor the reality of his kingdom, and which could not understand that Moses spoke of the fulfillment in Christ. We do not exactly have the problem of eating meats offered to the idols or of challenging the viewpoints of the Stoics and Epicureans at the Areopagus. Ours is not the problem of enduring the threat of martyrdom at Philippi or of seeking to instruct Philemon with regard to the problem of a run-away slave.

Not that we do not have similar problems or problems in similar realms: we have conflicts of tradition and gospel; of modern philosophy and the Word of God; of secularism, scientism and the Christian ethical way. However, a great deal of God's revelation came through letters which addressed themselves to the needs of the early church — many very particular needs! The question is how to preach from the Scriptures which came to a particular people in particular situations 2000 years ago so that our preaching might address itself to the needs of man in our generation and culture and still be the biblical message with its power and authority.

III. Bridging the Gap.

We can not evade the responsibility to speak to the particular needs of our society, of our churches and of the modern man. The prophets and apostles showed us the way; we can do no other. But how do we fit a biblical text into a modern situation?

Let us attempt to do this by a problem — solution approach to the Scriptures. Take Philippians 4: 1-7 for example.

Therefore, my brethren, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat you Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord and I ask also, true yoke-fellow, help these women, for they have laboured side by side with me in the Gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What were the particular needs or problems of the Philippians to which Paul preaches a biblical message? They suffered from anxiety, joylessness, restlessness and tense relationships with fellow believers. Their anxiety arose from the threat of persecution (1: 28-30), from conflicts with Judaizers (chapter 3), and from quarrels among members (chapter 4: 1-3). Paul suggests that they were frightened by the conflicts with their opponents which caused an anxiety which robbed them of joy and peace. They were not a rejoicing church. There were some who lacked forbearance which created tense relationships with fellow brethren. There was the breach between Euodia and Syntyche. These elements seemed to constitute the **original problem** of the Philippians to which Paul addressed his biblical message.

Biblical preaching requires a **careful study of the original problem** in the early churches to which the biblical message was applied by the apostles. The clearer we understand the original problem, the clearer we can understand the solution or the biblical message.

To the original problem came the message of God. Paul exhorts them to: rejoice in the Lord; be forbearing; remember that the Lord is at hand; and relieve anxiety by prayer, supplication and giving thanks. The promise attached to this message is that the peace of God will guard their hearts in Christ Jesus.

This biblical solution or message was directed to the original problem faced by the Philippian church. To preach the biblical message to man today requires of the preacher efforts to **locate parallel problems in today's world and society** to those of the problems to which the biblical text speaks. Having located and analysed them the preacher then speaks forth the biblical message of a text to the contemporary needs, problems or situations. We could conveniently summarize the problem-solution approach for the preacher in his attempt to make the gospel a message of today:

- 1) Seek a thorough acquaintance with the biblical message as it was spoken to men in biblical times: the better

acquainted with biblical message in the day of the prophets or of the day of our Lord or of Paul, the better prepared one is to speak to man today.

- 2) To close the gap between the Scripture and the situation today use the problem-solution approach as an aid. In seeking to crack a text ask the questions:
 - a) To what original problem or situation or need does this text speak?
 - b) What solution does the text suggest to the problem or situation or original need?
 - c) Is there a parallel problem in our age — in our society — in my congregation — in the believers' life, and analyse these problems!
 - d) Proclaim the biblical solution to the current problem.

This can be God's Word to man today.

Victor Adrian

THE WAY OF RECOVERY

(The following article is an excerpt from Focal Pamphlet, No. 6, "The Christian Calling", by Virgil Vogt, copyright 1961, by Herold Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, and used by permission.)

The church has always wrestled against the forces of indifference and disobedience to maintain a life which is worthy of her divine calling. But today this struggle is complicated and greatly magnified by a secular view of vocation which compounds truth with error. The result is attractive, but dangerously misleading.

The secular view of Vocation

According to this widespread secular view, "vocation" is associated with some ordinary employment in this world. Instead of a calling which grows out of one's relationship to Jesus Christ and which has a direct relevance to the common life of God's people, many today think they are called by God to business administration, nuclear physics, or driving a taxi. The apostle

Paul, as we have already seen, continually made his decisions in the light of a calling to serve Christ and spread His Gospel. Tentmaking was not his major concern.

Today, however, one hears of people who think they are called to be tentmakers and storekeepers, watchmakers and bookkeepers—as if God's call is really necessary for the fulfillment of such tasks. Obviously it is not, for many are tentmakers and storekeepers without ever having heard or answered God's call. God calls us to a lifework which is known and possible only for those who have been called.

This confusion goes back to the reformers, especially to Luther and Calvin, who first applied the concept of vocation to the ordinary jobs and employments of life. They took the Biblical concept of a calling and cut it loose from direct connection to Christ and His work in and through the church. They took his Biblical idea of a calling out of its context in salvation history and turned it loose in the world at large.

Now it turns out that there are a thousand and one different callings, many of them having little or no relationship to the church. Men, nevertheless, are taking up these so-called vocations with the seriousness and sacrifice which only the Christian calling has a right to demand. Various aspects of worldly employment have thus been given a religious meaning, and men undertake these careers as though in doing so they are thereby fulfilling some spiritual mission.

Opposing secular view

We cannot take a neutral attitude towards this secular view. We must oppose it in God's name. It is an enemy of the church. There is no profession or career in this world which is worthy of the dignity and transcendent importance attached to the holy calling which God has given to His people. There is no job which ought to govern and give shape to our life except the Christian calling. There is no career which is able to guide us rightly in choosing the alternatives of life except that one all-encompassing and completely demanding career—to be saints together with all those who call upon the name of our Lord and Saviour.

It has already been pointed out that this does not mean a rejection of all interest and participation in the workaday jobs of this world. But it definitely puts them in second place. It robs them of any metaphysical significance which they wrongly claim for themselves. It shows us that such things are significant only as a part of our total calling and in themselves they are no calling. In themselves, such jobs are not adequate to give purpose and direction to life.

Interestingly enough, Luther and Calvin advanced their concept of vocation as a protest against the double-standard morality of the medieval Catholic Church. Catholicism used the concept of vocation or calling only in connection with the monastic life. Instead of the Roman view that only a few Christians live a holy Christian life, the Reformers now said that a holy Christian life is that which everyone lives.

This, however, is no solution to the problem. It only moves the double standard to a different place. Or worse yet, in actual practice it often removes all Christian standards entirely, taking the everyday world out from under the claims of Christ. It gives divine sanction to careers and practices which originate, not in the mind of God, but in the corrupt hearts of men.

The Reformers failed to do away with a double standard because they did not attack the root of the problem. They, like the Catholicism which they opposed, did not see that the Christian calling is a unique task of Christian people. The relationship of the church to the world was just as wrong in their thinking as in that of the Roman Catholic Church. In both cases church and society were merged into one confused and confusing reality. As long as our view of the Christian calling must fit a situation like that, applying to believer and unbeliever alike, we shall never deal satisfactorily with the double standard.

It is as if a college dean would try to outline graduation requirements to fit, not only those who had completed a four-year course, but also those who had never darkened the doors of the college. In formulating these graduation requirements, suitable now for the whole college town instead of the student body alone, the dean would surely go amiss. He might set up rigorous tests which only a few outstanding scholars could pass. This in effect is what Catholic monasticism did. The Reformers came along and noticed that this did not challenge most of the students to their fullest. So they set up requirements possible for everyone. But still the real students are not adequately challenged.

A suggested solution

The solution to this dilemma is simply to recognize that students are different from the general population, and that goals and requirements appropriate to them are also unique to them. So also in the church we need to recognize quite simply that believers and unbelievers are different. We need a concept of the Christian calling which is challenging to Christians, but which will obviously be rather irrelevant for non-Christians.

First, every such Christian ought to raise the basic question—Should I be here? Since for most of us baptism did not have

its proper vocational significance, we cannot simply be sure that the path of progress is to go on from where we are. We cannot simply take for granted that God wants us to be at the place and in the work in which we now find ourselves. Rather, our first response should be to question this and to ascertain God's will in the matter.

Christ wants you to stay where you are and to keep on doing what you are doing only if you can do as much for the kingdom right in this place and in this work as you could anywhere else in the world. Could you serve Christ more effectively in Voluntary Service, or in some foreign land as a Christian worker, or in some kind of church-supported work? If the answer is yes, and if you are qualified and acceptable for such assignments, you ought to make the change. You don't need to sit around waiting for a call! If you are a Christian, God has already called you for this. It is simply a matter of confirming and accepting His call.

This question—Could I be doing more for Christ somewhere else?—is a serious one for people, like ourselves, living in an economy of abundance—in material, cultural, and intellectual wealth. It is in contrast to the poverty of many others in the world where there are acute shortages of physical and cultural resources. Our staying here amidst this abundance is justified only if we are clearly contributing as much or more by being here than we could be going somewhere else.

Again, this question—Could I be doing more for Christ in some other work?—is a serious one in the face of a shortage of workers in all types of Christian service. To give Christ and the church their rightful claim in our vocational decisions means putting the ministries of the church ahead of everything else.

What this might involve is well illustrated by the way one man recently made his decisions. He resigned an important position as Cost Reduction Administrator in a large manufacturing plant in order to accept the leadership of a small church. He had been employed in this electronics factory for fourteen years and had worked up to a promising position on the top management staff. He had an attractive salary of around \$10,000 per year plus many fringe benefits. He was personally responsible for organizing and administering an extensive cost-reduction and profit-improvement program, and the profits at stake ran into millions of dollars.

Now he is pastor of this small church. He says, "I find the challenge of the pastorate greater than the challenge of my other job!" Furthermore, even though his \$10,000 a year dropped to about \$1,300, he says, "The financial sacrifice in this change seems of little significance."

This is an illustration of what it may mean for the individual to give the ministries of the church first place as he makes his vocational choices. We do this, not as a bitter sacrifice, but rather as a joyful privilege, knowing that in doing so we are involved in the greatest venture of all history. We are faced with challenges more demanding, with a future more promising, with a task more rewarding and an organization more important than are found anywhere else on the face of this globe.

While we must give the ministries of the church first priority, this does not mean we should automatically rush in to fill every "full-time" position which is now vacant. Some of these positions are as much a part of our downfall as is the lack of people to fill them. For example, church institutions have a way of multiplying positions way out of proportion to their usefulness in the total life and mission of the church. Often it has falsely appeared as though the specialized institutions are more important to the church's life than is the work of local congregations. Nothing could be further from the truth. We must therefore affirm a priority of the local and inclusive church ministries as over against the specialized and highly institutional ones.

Full-time professional pastors

Furthermore, in the congregations themselves the growing demand for full-time professional pastors is not altogether wholesome. Instead of a one-man ministry which this often brings, the New Testament teaches us to think of a plural and varied ministry in the congregation.

And as to the support of ministers, the New Testament picture is not quite as simple as is often assumed. It is significant that the most thorough argument for ministerial support in the new Testament (I Corinthians 9) is brought forward only to be set aside by Paul's own rejection of such support. Unfortunately, the first part of the argument is often quoted without its proper conclusion. Paul chose to support himself, at least in part, as a better way of fulfilling his apostleship. That this is no quirk of circumstances is confirmed by his specific reference to this matter in relationships with the churches at Corinth, Ephesus, and Thessalonica. Considerations such as these raise questions about the wisdom of a trend to a single, fully-supported ministry.

Thus, as the serious Christian gives the ministries of the church priority, he must practice a good deal of discernment, remembering that his task in this world is not to keep certain offices filled, but to get a job done.

At the beginning of this paper I suggested that our present concept of being called into "the ministry" is, in fact, one of the

better prevailing definitions of what our Lord expects of every believer. Let us now look at this more carefully to see just how the individual who has been called to "the ministry" responds to his calling.

The "ministry" defined

Being called to "the ministry" may involve giving up one's old way of making a living. However, it does not necessarily mean this, and there are many "ministers" who continue in their old employment and yet at the same time faithfully and effectively fulfill the Christian work to which they have been summoned.

Being called to "the ministry" may mean moving away from your home community with its family and friends. But it doesn't necessarily involve this, because many "ministers" stay among their own people and do a commendable job of fulfilling their Christian responsibilities.

Being called to "the ministry" may mean going away for special training in Bible and theology. However, it does not necessarily involve this, because many "ministers" have been effective in their work without special training.

Being called to "the ministry" may mean preaching every Sunday, doing pastoral visitation, exercising congregational leadership. But it does not necessarily mean this, because many "ministers" are engaged in various other tasks and feel this in no way violates or decreases their faithfulness to the Lord.

What, then, does it mean to be called into "the ministry"? The evidence seems contradictory. For some it means one thing, for some another. This is exactly as it should be. It reveals that the crucial factor in being faithful to the call of God is that one should devote his whole life to the service of Christ and the church.

What this means specifically will vary, depending on one's circumstances and the needs of the church. Every man lives within certain concrete alternatives. The difference between one who is called and one who isn't is that the called-one judges these alternatives in the light of his Christian calling. And because of this calling he also considers a few alternatives in life which the other man doesn't even bring to mind.

The appropriate response of the individual, then, is to decide everything in the light of his calling, giving an open and willing ear to the counsel afforded him by brethren in the church. Whether to give up the old job or not, whether to get school training or not, whether to preach or to serve in other ways—all these things are determined in the light of God's call as it judges and illuminates the specific needs, opportunities and

abilities of the individual and the church involved. Being faithful to the call of God means rendering maximum service within the limits of one's abilities and circumstances. That is why some go to school and others do not. That is why some stay where they are and others travel half way around the world.

The position being suggested here is that every Christian ought to weigh his alternatives in just the same way as does the one called to be a "minister" or a "missionary" at the present time.

The church involved in decision

In saying this, another point becomes obvious, namely, that whenever Christians start to make their decisions in this way the whole body of the church will necessarily get involved in these basic decisions. This is true at the present time for "ministers" and "missionaries." Since their work is so closely related to the welfare of the church, they do not simply go here and there on their own and do what they see to do. Their own sense of leading must be confirmed, in most cases, by the church. They need to be sent and appointed to their various tasks because the welfare of the church is at stake.

In contrast to this, many other Christians today go here and there in different kinds of work without ever considering the possibility of consulting the church about it. Nor does it occur to the rest of the church that they should be interested in such things and have a word to say about it. Such consultation is quite irrelevant at present, because what these people are doing has so little real bearing on the life of the church. Whenever Christians start to give the ministries of the church their rightful priority in vocational decisions, then brotherly consultation will emerge as something relevant.

Since at the present time many members in our churches are not putting the ministries of the church first in their vocational thinking, what will it mean for the ones who do? Whether life's decisions are faced in this way by the whole membership or just by a small minority makes a lot of difference.

When there are fewer people putting Christ and the church first, it will necessarily mean that the ministry of the church is limited. This means that where such serious Christians are in a minority, they will be forced back, more and more, to the most elementary kinds of Christian work, whereas in a church full of such dedicated Christians, the ministries of the church can blossom forth in a varied expression of Christian love and service.

Where serious Christians are in a minority, they will there-

fore find themselves in positions of congregational leadership which they might not be filling if they were a part of a more faithful church. The essential leadership of the congregation concerns such things as its witness, its love, and its discipline. Those who make their decisions with Christ first ought to see that such things are being taken care of before they choose some other related though less strategic assignment.

This then is the response of the individual. He should not just assume that we go on from where we are, but ought to inquire whether God really wants him to continue as he is. Each individual must ask whether there is any other way in which he might serve the kingdom more effectively. And then, as he makes future decisions, he ought to weigh every alternative with Christ and the church in first place, both in his scale of values and in his counseling procedure.

The response of the congregation

The challenge to lead a life worthy of our calling can never be given its authentic, Biblical character, nor will individuals respond to it unless there is a revitalization of our congregational life.

At the present time the structure and life of most congregations implicitly recognizes that only a handful of people are letting this be their real calling in life. The rest give it marginal attention.

Once in a while people come to us these days who really want to let the service of Christ and the church be their whole calling in life. They want to give all that they have and are into His service. And frankly, many times we are embarrassed to know what to do with such people. They just do not fit into the present pattern of congregational life. If they happen to have special abilities and leadership potential, we can often answer their need by assigning them to some local pastorate or some institutional job. If they happen to be young people or old people (in any case without many children) we can sometimes use them, at least temporarily, in a Voluntary Service assignment.

But what can you do if this person is just an ordinary Christian, with no special abilities, only a high-school education, and let's say, about six children! How can a man like this give his whole life to Christ and the church and do this in a meaningful way?

This only shows us how inadequate our present pattern of church life is for people who want to walk worthy of the Christian calling in all its implications. Should our situation undergo a basic change, a tremendous surge of interest and action would result, making our present congregational structures

quite outdated. For example, I recall hearing of one unmarried schoolteacher, fully dedicated to God's calling, whose financial contribution to the church was as much per week as that of 100 members in some other churches where members give this calling only lip service. Besides giving as much as a hundred others, this person was also contributing much by way of personal service in evangelistic visitation, and Sunday-school teaching. Now what if there were a hundred people like that in your congregation? Things might be a little different.

Did you realize that a good number of our larger congregations in America have more members than the whole denomination has missionaries in all countries of the world combined? This means that in some cases it takes more people to run one local congregation in comfortable America than it takes to staff our entire foreign mission outreach. This contrast is offset somewhat by the fact that missionaries are often working in co-operation with sizable groups of native Christians. Nevertheless the contrast is appalling. A mere handful are doing more than great numbers. Why?

Missionary force vs. Home churches: a comparison

The difference between these groups does not consist primarily in the fact that overseas missionaries are supported full time for church work. Any one of these larger home congregations could themselves support a dozen or two full-time workers, if they would live the way the missionaries do. And besides, we have already seen that in many cases one can be just as effective, if not more so, while supporting himself.

Furthermore, the difference is not explained by the greater abilities and training of the foreign missions staff. Many who are sent out are not of unusual ability, nor do they, in many cases, have extensive training. The churches in America have many people whose ability and training are equal to if not greater than that of the foreign missions staff.

The difference does not consist either in the opportunities for evangelism. No longer can we say that we are living in a Christian nation, while the missionaries labor among heathen people, ready and open for the Gospel. In many parts of the world today the population makes a false claim to religion in just the same way as American people do.

What then explains the difference between the achievements of these two groups of people? The difference is in the quality of their Christian life, in their sense of calling, and in their realization that they are sent by God and the church to do a job. In a word, for the missionaries, evangelism is a calling. For

many Christians in America such a thing is so foreign that they hardly know what you are talking about.

If and when the American churches recover the same sense of calling which guides the missionaries, the whole pattern of church life will be drastically altered. I agree fully with J. Lawrence Burkholder, when he says, "If we were to rediscover the New Testament doctrine of work in relation to the Great Commission, it would revolutionize the church in a single generation. It would mean that Christians would consider mission work and Christian social service as a natural calling rather than a special calling. It would mean that every Christian young person would prepare for the future in the light of the call of the church" (Church and Community, p.9).

This revolution must take place in the local congregations. Unless it takes place there, it will be no revolution at all. It is the task of congregations in our present setting to summon people to this kind of vocational commitment. It is also its task to pioneer in new forms of congregational life that will be adequate for handling an influx of new life and vitality.

Brotherly discipline

The revitalization of congregational life will involve a recovery of brotherly discipline, where members speak to one another about their deepest concerns, and where the body of the church becomes an agent for ethical discernment and binding decision, as reflected for example in Matt. 18. The revitalization of congregational life will manifest a new quality of brotherly sharing.

The spiritual burden bearing of church discipline will be matched in other forms of mutual helpfulness. In the material realm, no one will say that the things he possesses are his own, but will freely make available both his current and capital resources for the work of the church and to minister to the needs of the saints. The revitalized congregational life will also bring with it a recovery of mission as the basic reason for existence. Such congregations will be the light to the world around.

We can talk of such far-reaching changes in our local congregations only because we know that it is Christ Himself who walks amidst the churches, who cares for their welfare. We can speak of such things because we know that in His right hand Jesus holds the authority over these churches. These things are not idle speculations. They are realistic possibilities for every congregation which will remember from what it has fallen, repent, and do the works which it did at first.

Virgil Vogt

SERMONS

A SURPRISE PACKAGE

"They spent their time in learning from the apostles, taking part in the fellowship, and sharing in the fellowship meals and the prayers."
Acts 2:42

There is a story from the land of India which tells how a certain group of men attempted to describe an elephant. Each in turn was led to a different part and asked to describe what he felt. One grasped the tail and said the elephant is like a rope; one hugged a leg and said the elephant is like a tree; another felt his side and said the elephant is like a wall; and the last one stroked the trunk and said the elephant is like a snake. The fact that all of these men were blind hindered them from determining the true meaning of the whole.

There are those in our day who attempt to describe the church. Each in turn analyzes, from a given perspective, what he sees and feels. One took his place among the listeners and now tells us about "The Empty Pulpit"; one looked in from the outside, and then pictured for us "The Comfortable Pew"; and another dared to speak from the midst of the congregation to proclaim "The Incendiary Fellowship." For us to declare that they are blind, or false prophets, may be more revealing of our own situation, rather than analytical of theirs.

Two terms have been coined in recent years to describe the combined form and function of today's church. We speak of the gathered church, and we speak of the scattered church. While the Scriptures do not use these descriptive adjectives, they do detail what happened when the church was gathered, and describe dramatically the results of a scattered church. Our concentration here upon the former is based on the understanding that the latter is the subject of the next issue of the "Voice."

1. Does the Size Matter?

Even a casual reading of the Sunday church bulletin reminds those who attend that the Church is busy. And as much as we might want to make others responsible, we must finally admit, because we are the Church, that we want it so. The Christian education of the young is important. Who can deny

the need of the ladies to be together? Should the church stop gathering for Bible Study and prayer! Surely it is good to meet one's fellow members casually over coffee. How else can a corporate group function unless it convenes for business from time to time? And since we demand variety there will be specials in the church calendar.

However, as convincing as this analysis might be, we do want to reserve the right to attend and participate according to our personal preferences. After all, it is modern to fight the establishment. Some might even hint that the hired pastor is only doing what he gets paid for.

While the developing patterns of the early church are hardly binding upon the disciples of today, they can be considered as instructive. The language of Acts 2:42 is arresting. Moses' admonition to the spies who were about to enter Canaan included the encouragement, "Be of good courage." (Nu. 13:20). The root idea of "proskartereo" includes the understanding of strength and perseverance. In the New Testament, the same term is used for devotion to and constancy in prayer (Acts 1:14, 6:4; Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2). The descriptive suggestion of Acts 2:42 then is that the early church gathered, within the limits of the situation, constantly, devotedly, and with perseverance. A group that acknowledges its pilgrim character within a hostile land will always find it meaningful to come together.

The size of the package matters only in so far as it is a true indication of the contents.

2. What Does the Wrapping Say?

A tour of any urban center reveals a wide variety in church structures. Most are conveniently labelled for identification. However, now and then, on entering foreign territory, we look at and see their shapes. Some can best be described as boxes; other resemble the castles and fortresses of medieval times; and others sprawl, in varied shapes and sizes, over the green carpets of suburbia. Any attempt at determining the meaning of the church from these forms would at best be doomed to failure.

As content is usually considered more normative for gaining an understanding of meaning, let us examine the early church in this regard. They are described as being involved with the teaching of the apostles (didache) and fellowship (koinonia), and with sharing meals and prayers. Again the terms are weighted.

What scholar has not longed to find a writing which would unlock the secrets of life itself. The apostles as scribes to the Kingdom brought out of their treasures things new and old.

The facts and meaning of the life of Jesus, and the glory which followed by the illumination of the Spirit of God, make of the written word the living Word. The early church would know who and what they believed. So the Church today comes together to be taught the Scriptures so that they might know the Christ they believe, and how to live in obedience to Him.

In the coming together of the group there is to be an interaction characterized by a spirit of generous sharing. A selfish getting is to be unknown. Jesus' words can become true—"it is more blessed to give than to receive." The church gathered shares one Lord and expresses one Love.

The record of what followed in the early church is for our understanding. There is an operation of the grace of God in the lives of His children which brings them together in ideas, practises, religious habits, and even economic rights and responsibilities; but to deny the working of God's Spirit is to risk the judgment of God. At times this wrath is evident in sickness and death. At other times He leaves. But where His Spirit is heeded there is true togetherness with much joy.

The wrapping says only, consider carefully who the package is from.

3. Will the Contents Be Useful?

There are two occasions when most worshippers will be quiet in a service of worship. The first is during the Lord's Supper, and the second is during times of prayer. In both, the central figure is the resurrected and ascended Christ.

While the breaking of the bread is done "in remembrance of me" the assumption of the resurrection is apparent. One would hardly partake of the broken body of the dead man. But the identification with the living Christ has serious implications. The fact of forgiveness involves my willingness to forgive; the assurance of love leaves me free to love; and the state of peace impels me to be a peacemaker. Of this the gathered church reminds itself as did the early church in the sharing of the breaking of the bread.

God used a Presbyterian brother in Christ to show me the meaning of public prayer as worship. How easily we discourse with the Almighty, for the hearing of others. We do well to call Him Father, as we are sons. But do we remember He is our Heavenly Father, who knows us, as He knows all things? To approach the throne of God with boldness never means to carry on a casual conversation with a contemporary. He is Creator and we are creatures. This conviction alone, with the understanding of His care, can give true boldness.

The early church carried on the practises of the synagogue

and temple in their observance of appointed times for united prayer. Evidently the practice continued to be relevant. The church today gathers to learn from the living Word in the written word, to be identified with the ministry of the resurrected Christ, and to share with the King of Kings, the concerns of the Kingdom.

The contents of the package will be useful for those who already know how they are to be used.

To describe the Church today one must exercise care lest size, wrapper, and supposed use hide the fact that she is the body of Christ ministering in the world.

"We worship Thee, Father Everlasting, whose years shall have no end; and Thee, love-begotten Son, whose goings forth have been ever of old; and Thee, Eternal Spirit, whose movings in our midst are ever seen.

Enlarge and purify the mansions of our souls that they may be fit habitations for Thy Spirit, who dost prefer before all temples the upright heart and pure."

Amen

Herbert Swartz

WE ARE THE CHURCH: A WEDDING SERMON

I will not presume now to present words of solemn warning, warm encouragement and homely maxims. If you have not already sought counsel, and if your parents and friends have not already freely said all they know (and more), it would be too late to begin now in a crash program of marital counselling.

But I would like to think of the deeper implications of the marriage relationship as Paul draws it to our attention in Ephesians 5:23-32. Now, this passage is often inverted. Usually we think of the union of Jesus and the Church as being like that of husband and wife, but Paul is saying just the converse: that marriage is like the union of Jesus and His Bride, the Church; that before the foundations of the earth, God had already planned this union of Christ and Church.

Tonight I will concentrate on the relationship between Jesus and His Bride, and what we, as constituents of that Bride, must constantly remain aware of. For many here, the church (the Bride of Christ) has come to have a new significance as its true dimensions of *koinonia* and concern have been approximated. Further, since you are concerned about making the church (the Bride of Christ) of paramount importance in the fixing of your goals, we might consider, together with you, what all of us as

members of the Bride of Christ must keep in mind about our identity. Also, when I mention "the church," I am referring to it as the New Testament writers did: as an organism, a visible and identifiable group of believers, a communion, community of called-out ones, Trueblood's "Company of the Committed." When we talk about the Bride of Christ, we are not concerned about a building, a denominational pattern, about an ecclesiastical structure: we are talking about men and women who have felt God calling them, and who have responded to the call to "come, take up the cross, and follow."

When I read the passages where Paul talks about Jesus as the Head (Ephesians 5; Colossians 1:17-21, 2:19-3:1), a 'prepositional relationship' comes into focus: "in him," "in them," "baptized into them," etc. As members of the Bride of Christ, we are to be one with Christ: like desires and shared interests. Further, all believers are members. There is no longer the individual standing out in self-assertion, but the realization that we are equals in the calling that has been extended to each one of us. Edward Taylor, in *Fall of the Dynasties*, records the funeral procession of Frances Joseph of Austria.

"As the procession approached, a knight in armour stepped up and knocked on the closed gate. A monk in a cowl queried, 'Who knocks?' 'The body of his August Majesty, the Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary demands to be admitted. . . .' came the answer. 'We know of no such person here,' the monk replied. 'Again I say, who knocks?' Now the knight, bowing humbly, murmured, 'A poor brother, a fellow being, seeks entrance. . . .'"

As members of the body, we allow no racial barriers, no creedal-distinctions in peripherals, to separate us from communion. We must keep firmly in mind the "priesthood of the believer," avoiding Niebuhr's charge that "witness and evangelization are left to the itinerant and annual revivalist or evangelist."

Becoming more specific for us, what does Christ intend doing for the church, His Bride? What are we, as members of His Body, His Bride, to do or to have done?

Paul, in v. 26, states that the process will begin through the "washing by the Word." To state that we are largely Biblically illiterate is to state a truism. I had one budding theological scholar who confided to me in an examination that an "epistle is an apostle's wife." The freedom which Luther and Tyndale demanded, the right for all to read the Bible for themselves, has in our time been translated to read, "the right not to read." We can thwart Jesus' wish for the cleansing of the church by not permitting the Word to work, falling at the first level simply by not knowing the objective material. But there are more

dangerous levels at which we can also prevent cleansing by the Word. We can use theological blinkers, reading with preconceived notions. One group says, "Read the Bible literally;" another says, "Read the Bible figuratively." Then the two come to books like *Hosea* and *Songs of Solomon*, and their positions are suddenly reversed. If we wish the washing by the Word to be thorough, we will be willing to gain new insights: language study, culture analysis, historical perspectives, hermeneutical concepts. Keck, in *Taking the Bible Seriously*, points out that the Reformation removed the Bible from the hands of the priest and gave it to the scholar: that in order to interpret it correctly, one must first know what is in fact there. If we are a people of the Book, then, we must not only know it but about it. If we are concerned about the washing by the Word, and that the Word is the instrument of salvation, perhaps there will be some here who will commit themselves to this task. I see many university students here, people who are training themselves to communicate better in their own language, in their own field—are you willing to use your training in the actual Word-proclamation of the organized denominational program—pastor, linguist, teacher, technician, communicator.

Second, Paul says that Jesus wishes to present "himself a glorious church." The Latin "gloria" used here is functionally similar to the Hebrew "Shekinah" which referred to God's presence with the Jews in their flight from Egypt, when the Shekinah led them by day and hovered over them at night, according to the story in Exodus. Do you feel part of a God-lived-in group? The Bride of Christ should feel that God is leading and guiding her. All too often we, as members of this Bride, are willing to sit down and wait till problems disappear from "natural causes," wait till some people leave or die, wait until circumstances change through sheer pressure of impersonal historical process; we do this instead of being intensely aware that God is with us **now and wants action now**. There is a word which conveys this excited feeling: it is the Greek "entheos"—literally, "filled with God"—which we know as "enthusiastic." The church DARES to think that God can lead and guide and give progress: in cultural-transition problems, in changing ethical concerns, in confrontation by a "Zeitgeist" at variance with the Spirit of Love and "ultimate concern." There is no need to wait for the next generation, for the next decade—if we are a glorious church, Shekinah-having group.

Further, Jesus wishes to claim His Bride without any spot on the garments. Now, I don't want to become too allegorical—or more allegorical than I already have been—but there are some spots which the church in our own experiences has evidenced.

What is the function of the church? The church is the body of Jesus on earth—the continuing Incarnation—the visible expression of the Godhead. If Jesus' primary function was to ensure his self-preservation, then it is ours too. If Jesus' primary function was to institute a culture, a way of life, then it is ours too. If Jesus' primary function was to create an economic or political system, then it is ours too. If Jesus' primary function was to show God's love to humanity and expend himself so that all might see God's love, then it is ours too. If anything detracts from this primary function, then the church is spotted. That we are not entirely without dissimulation in this regard can be seen from the attitudes of members to the following: our church membership increase is less than half that of the Canadian population increase; there is no realistic attempt being made to meet the needs of the inner city; in our own province where their needs have been so much focused, the Indians and Metis are simply ignored and in fact, by some Mennonite employers, discriminated against.

There is another spot on the Bride of Christ today, one that we s professionals in our affluent middle-class must consider personally. We see this spot in Conference reports, in treasury statements, in Board reports—and in our own income tax compilations. The last year the Canadian gross national product increased by 11%, and it is a safe estimate that our church members shared equally in this increase. Yet our giving to treasuries at the denominational level has risen only a little more than 2%. At all other points we appear to be holding our own—in the purchase of pastel-coloured bathtubs, transistorized carving-knives, electric toothbrushes and cordless distortion-free multiplex wide-image TV consoles. And of course we have the scores of steepled, carpeted architectural wonders, within which we sit on Sundays and feel humble and insignificant. We smile at the folly of the Pharaohs, never realizing that the ornate structures we build—used generally on Sundays and one evening a week—are nearly as dysfunctional. Our mission program is curtailed, our educational institutions tend to have continuing deficits, we have problems recruiting personnel for denominational work; yet the businesses also dependent on our investment and patronage seem to be able to expand and keep the "Business as Usual" signs up. Although enrolment in our professional schools and colleges continues to rise, and we have more graduates in the professions and trades within our churches than ever before, the call of Christ to fill the gaps in our denomination's spiritual and educational program appears to be, if not unheard, at least unanswered. Preoccupation with the temporal, and a casual disregard for the body of Christ, places a terrible blot on the church.

We have met to worship with you in the celebration of your vows to each other, to the church of Christ and to God. May we remember that we all are members of the Bride of Christ, knit with Him in union; may we be presented to God a glory-filled church, cleansed by the Word, without spot.

V. Ratzlaff

BOOK REVIEW

The Church Creative: A Reader on the Renewal of the Church

M. Edward Clark, William L. Malcomson, Warren Lane Molton (Editors), Abingdon Press, 1967, 208 pp., \$4.20.

One does not have to carry out any extensive opinion poll to realize that the general attitude toward the institutional church is one of indifference or even disgust. The church may react to this by insisting that this attitude only reflects the increasing paganization of our society. Or it may take the charges against it seriously, try to determine what is wrong and try to change its image in the community. The "how" then becomes the major problem.

The editors of *The Church Creative* invited eighteen authors to describe examples of new forms of ministry in which groups and churches are engaged. The examples selected are quite diverse, ranging from attempts to solve labor-management problems to the night ministry in our growing urban areas. Several are more specifically concerned with a more meaningful group life within the church itself. The editors state clearly that these are not intended as examples of "how to do it," but rather they are presented "in the hope that they may encourage others, both laity and clergy, to seek

to minister creatively, experimentally, even daringly in the particular and peculiar situation in which they are located" (p. 9).

Some of the new forms of ministry described would, without a doubt, evoke a rather strong negative reaction from us. The question that is most likely to arise in the reader's mind again and again is: What is the real essence of the Church? Is the Church's primary task preaching, the cultivation of fellowship between members, or service to those outside? We tend to accept the pattern of the local church which we now have as the normative one, and yet it may be quite different from the New Testament pattern. Should we attempt to recreate the New Testament pattern in all its details or do changing times require changing forms?

Though not all the essays in *The Church Creative* can be described as stimulating, many of them are. They may help us to rethink our concept of the Church's ministry, and they may help us to do some creative thinking as to new methods which might be employed. It is my own conviction that some new forms are badly needed if we are to win this generation, but we will have to be careful that we do not "sell out" the gospel in our attempts to be relevant.

Abe Dueck