

12. Ibid., p. 3.
13. A.M. Climenhaga and John Hawbakar, "The Social Conscience of Evangelicals," *Evangelical Action*, Winter, 1970, p. 22.
14. *The Christian Leader*, April 20, 1971, p. 3.
15. Richard C. Halverson, "The Evangelism and Renewal of the Church," *Evangelism Now*, Ed. G.M. Wilson, World-wide Publications, p. 93.
16. Ibid., p. 203.
17. S.E. Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelicals*, p. 151-152.
18. Samuel Escobar, "The Social Responsibility of the Church," *Christian Living*, October 1970, pp. 23-27.

Church Membership: its Essence and Necessity

*"All of us are spiritually immature enough at times to need the con-
straining and encouraging consciousness that we have visibly associ-
ated ourselves with a covenanting body of believers," says Marvin Hein.
His statement will be a help to many churches.*

"If I were to be terribly honest with you, I'd say that for my part you could tear up that piece of paper that says I'm a member of the church. That piece of paper with a bunch of what I call 'do's and don'ts' at the end of it doesn't really mean very much."

Those were the parting words of a twenty-one year old young man as he concluded a very pleasant hour's conversation with his pastor. They were not words spoken in bitterness nor complaint. While they undoubtedly came out of some disillusionment with the established church, they came from a person who has discovered new life in his spiritual pilgrimage but showed little of the rebellion that so often is associated with the new spiritual discoveries of the young. While he spoke what seem to be disparaging words about church membership, he continues



Marvin Hein of Hillsboro, Kansas, presented *Church Membership: its Essence and Necessity* to the Denver Conference as part of the on-going discussion within the Mennonite Brethren Church, on meaningful church life. He pastors the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church (and has for the past 13 years) and is presently moderator of the MB General Conference. He is a former Oklahoma 'farmboy' who followed the church's call into the ministry, studied at Tabor College (B.A.) and at the Central Baptist

Theological Seminary (B.D. and Th.M.) and took up the challenge of pastoral work. Besides his local church responsibilities, he has taught at Tabor College and given active leadership to the Kansas Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and the National Association of Evangelicals (nationally).

an active relationship with an organized church essentially of the same kind in which he was reared.

A contrasting situation but nevertheless having to do with the same basic question of the essence of church membership is represented by the following example:

Susie Schmidt Swarhout is a middle-aged woman, born and reared in a Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, but after her marriage to a non-Mennonite moved to a small community where no evangelical congregation is available. Her family has worshipped in a United Church for fifteen years and she has been most active in the work of the church, but she continues to retain her membership in her childhood home church in Winnipeg. At several points in the past suggestion has been made that she should transfer her membership but she steadfastly proclaims a strong allegiance to the Mennonite Brethren Church and weeps at the thought of having her name removed from the church roll.

The latter illustration is one that has been prevalent for many years in many of our congregations. The former illustration, that of the young man actively involved but not looking upon membership as anything vital to his life, is a comparatively recent one. He is typical, however, of a growing segment of young people in our denomination, as well as in other fellowships, who believe that being listed on a membership roll simply is not essential.

The two problems are not similar: in one case the person is an inactive member and in the other he is an active-non-member. Both, however, pose problems for congregations that are membership-oriented, as we have been in the past, and have to do with the matter of the essence of church membership. The active non-member is present, working, contributing to the fellowship of which he is technically not a part. He is usually appreciated and often becomes one of the leaders in the church. This is

when the problem is created, however. Membership-oriented congregations begin to ask questions like these: Does an active but technically unattached person in the congregation have the privilege of voting when decisions are made? Should the new head of the Christian Education Committee, who is not a bona fide member because he has chosen not to transfer his membership from the church of his youth, be allowed to serve in the Church Council when the constitution requires all Council members to be listed on the membership roll? When a congregation sincerely wishes to meet its share of the financial program of the church, should it have to determine its portion by including the fifty members who are inactive, absent, and non-supporting?

The second problem also has its implications. Should a person who can find no like-minded group in which to fellowship be forced to terminate his relationship to a church that has nurtured him in the past? Or the question of dual membership may also be involved: someone may wish to join the church where he worships, but insists on remaining a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church as well.

A third problem cannot go unmentioned. More and more there are those people who confess Christ as Lord, are evangelical in their theology and outreach, but feel under no compunction to unite with any group. They want to "do their own thing" and prefer to fellowship anytime and anywhere with those in whom they find a kindred spirit. Such persons may not even wish to commit themselves to a "small group" kind of fellowship where the commitment is a real one but without formal membership. In other words, they are not willing to commit themselves to a fellowship where the membership is only orally preserved.

The problems posed in the above paragraphs are being increasingly discussed but comparatively little has been written about them. This is due in part to the fact that at least two of the situations mentioned above are relatively recent as far as any wide practice of them is concerned. Studies on the nature of the church have, of course, been made but the basic problem of the essence and necessity of church membership is more or less un-researched. What follows in this paper is a largely non-theological presentation of the problem with a number of suggestions for dealing with the issue. The writer makes no claims for having studied the question in depth and hopes only that his comments and observations will enable the readers to sense the problems under discussion and provide some bases for further discussion and study.

What does it mean to belong?

It should be clear at the outset that we are speaking about membership in a **local** congregation. This is not to say that the New Testament does not use the word translated "church" with other meanings as well. It is quite obvious that in the epistles and other New Testament passages the word "ekklesia" sometimes has a universal sense. In the universal sense the Church of Christ includes

all those who have been born of the Spirit of God and have become Christ's followers. There is repeated reference to this universal sense in passages like I Corinthians 3:9ff., I Peter 2:9, II Corinthians 11, Ephesians 5, and others. Moreover, the Bible is replete with examples where this universal Church is characterized as a building, a temple, the body and bride of Christ, etc.

More often, however, the word "ekklesia" refers to a group of professing believers meeting in one locality. The word itself, in the original Greek, actually has a political connotation more than anything else, but the New Testament adopts the word and fills it with spiritual content. The local "ekklesia," or "called out" group of believers, can mean either a small group meeting in a house or it can denote a larger assembly that convenes in a more formal setting. The New Testament speaks of such assemblies in Jerusalem, Antioch, Galatia and Ephesus (Acts 8:1, Acts 13, Gal. 1:2, and Acts 20).

The primary purpose of this local church can be described with one Greek word: **koinonia**. In the classical language from which it was taken, *koinonia* meant an association or partnership. In the New Testament sense it has to do with fellowship among Christ's followers. The word *koinonia* expresses the kind of close, intimate, meaningful association that resulted in some of the early disciples pooling their material resources, meeting together daily and weekly for prayer and food, and resulting in the conversion of many of their unbelieving neighbors. (Acts 2) It was *koinonia* that bound this group of Christ-followers into a cohesive whole that ultimately turned the world upside down.

The "ekklesia" or church was primarily people, not buildings. It is fundamentally **visible** and **local**, more than invisible and general. It was more **fellowship** than institution. It was **participation** in a common faith and life. It was God's community of grace and discipleship, the fellowship of believers, trusting in Jesus Christ and bound in that fellowship by a kind of **agape** love that caused them to bear each others' burdens and sometimes lay down their lives for one another.

Unfortunately, for purposes of this study at least, the New Testament does not speak of membership lists. The Bible does not instruct us explicitly regarding church membership rolls. Nowhere is there direct reference to a believer being received into the *koinonia* of the church by the warm handclasp of a pastor. Nor is there a great amount of evidence concerning the organizational pattern of the church.

Some simple organizational pattern is evident, however, even in the early Church. Apparently even the church in Jerusalem had some notion about who was a member of the church. The Pentecost account in Acts speaks of new Christians being "added to them daily," inferring at least that it was very obvious who was a Christ-follower and who was not. There is further evidence of the "set-apartness" of believers into some kind of organization when in Acts 5:13, after the sudden discipline of Ananias and Sapphira, it is said that "none of the others dared join them, but the people held them in high honor." It is only fair to admit, however, that as much or more emphasis seems to be placed in these

accounts on the fact that new believers were “added to the Lord,” as well as to a local community of faith.

The exercise of church discipline, as seen in I Corinthians 5, would seem to indicate that the church had specific ideas about who was a member. There were also stated times of meeting, officers appointed or elected by the congregations, and the solicitation of funds to carry on the work of the Lord. Letters of commendation in behalf of those who moved to other churches (Acts 18: 24-28) sound much like modern-day letters of transfer.

It is obvious that the early Church was not highly organized. That membership in the local body of believers was an important concept, however, would seem to be indicated by the fact that excommunication from the believing community of unrepentant members was recommended both by Jesus and Peter (Mt. 18:17 and Acts 5). It would appear that, regardless of whether or not there was a formal membership list, these congregations knew very well who was a part of their community of faith.

No loners here

One thing can be said with a good measure of certainty: believers did not remain unattached. “Loners” find little place in the early Church. There is no record of Christians not associating themselves with a congregation. Interestingly enough, the word “saints” does not occur in the singular form in the New Testament. It is impossible to be a “man in Christ” in good and regular standing and be an absolute individualist. To be a Christian in the fullest sense means to be a member of the Christian community. There are cases, of course, where individual Christians have never found a spiritual home in any organized Christian community, but these are certainly exceptions to what the New Testament reveals and to the experiences of Christendom in general. Because *koinonia* is basic to being a Christian it is essential that the believer relate to other Christians. It is impossible to experience or practice *koinonia* apart from other people.

It becomes apparent, then, that at the heart of whatever it meant to be “joined” or “added” to the Church in the New Testament, was *koinonia* or fellowship. Central to whatever kind of association existed in those local communities of faith was a covenanting together for purposes of admonition and discipline, mutual sharing and witness, fellowship and burden-bearing. It becomes increasingly clear that for early Christians membership had to do primarily with the function of fellowship, rather than a relationship to the church because a name was found on the roll. *Koinonia* was at the heart of one’s relationship to the congregation. This is verified by the fact that when Paul suggested the exclusion of the immoral man in I Corinthians 5, the punishment imposed was a severing of fellowship more than anything else. The members of the church were “not to eat with him.” It was *koinonia* that was broken more than the removal of a name from the church roll.

Membership ought to be identification with a local congregation or group of fellow believers. In order for *koinonia* to take place, there will need to be a covenanting community, individuals bound into a corporateness, so that the ingredients of fellowship can be supplied and the

process of mutual sharing can take place in the believing community. This will demand more than an invisible, universal or spiritualized church. It will mean men and women bound closely together in a relationship that exists because they have covenanted to do God’s will. It would seem, therefore, that there is little biblical precedent for those who wish to commit themselves to no one but to the Lord. Whether or not membership should be a written one or orally preserved may be questioned, but a covenanting together among believers is essential.

The one question that needs to be answered is whether or not formal membership is required or is preferable in order that *koinonia* can take place. F.C. Peters has suggested that fellowship and membership may be considered as concentric circles.

Informal fellowship more often catches the real spirit of *koinonia* than does the formal. The close relationship that church members most often feel with a smaller group within the total congregation comes closer to the goal of *koinonia* than does the usual formal church membership. Or perhaps the kind of sharing experienced in many contemporary small groups inside or outside the formal church meets more precisely the spirit of what is contained in the meaning of fellowship or *koinonia*. The fact remains, however, that in the New Testament this kind of close fellowship seems to have existed in the larger church membership. We may well give attention in our time to providing the spiritual climate in which this warmer, more personalized kind of fellowship may occur within the larger congregation as well.

Why have formal church membership?

It is certainly possible for groups and even denominations to function without formal membership lists. The Plymouth Brethren, for instance, keep no records of membership. Other groups operate without formal memberships and apparently are happy with such arrangements. Still others place their church family into different categories, restricting voting rights to those who are active and present in the local congregation. A few communions also contend that faith in Christ makes you a member of the body of Christ and consequently a member of their denomination, although there is no official membership list.

One of the arguments sometimes given for having no formal memberships is that the New Testament does not give us such a precedent. Formal membership is looked upon by some as an accretion—something that has been added beyond what the New Testament church practiced and consequently not appropriate. It is to be admitted that no definite precedent for formal membership exists in the New Testament. However, if we are to exclude all activities and practices not found in the early Church, then such “accretions” as the Sunday school, organists, choir directors, Wednesday evening Bible classes and boards of trustees will also need to be eliminated. This is where pure exegesis is not always of the greatest help. The Bible contains the principles on which *koinonia* will

be established in the church, but we will need to make the applications of those principles in every age. The writer finds it difficult to conclude that formal membership is forbidden because the early Church had no written list of members.

There are admittedly some poor reasons for insisting on a formal membership. Our concept and practice of levying dues and establishing norms for financial purposes has caused us often to act unwisely and unbiblically. Since many of our responsibilities are measured in terms of how many members appear on the church roll, we have become so member-conscious that all kinds of unbrotherly actions have followed. Congregations with large numbers of absentees look for ways to eliminate that portion of their membership so that the financial requirements will not be so great. Members may even be received at a point in the official church year when they will not be included in the number of members listed in the annual yearbook—the number on which norms and levies are based for individual congregations.

Finances before people

Besides shifting our giving to a non-biblical context (parity rather than ability), an emphasis on the number of members has caused untold harm to the spirit of brotherhood. It can be quite safely said that if we did not have to be concerned about financial problems in the church, we would likely be less concerned with numbers or actual membership rolls.

Equally distressing is the simple but intense concern we have for numbers. There is enough humanity in most of us to be obsessed with ideas of largeness. Pastors are known by the size of the church they pastor. Pastors take into account very quickly, when considering a call to a church, the size of that congregation. Smaller churches keep a close eye on the membership roll in hopes that they can rank as high as other churches. Our culture has repeatedly indoctrinated us with the importance of numbers and size. For that reason, along with others, having people listed on a membership list has become important.

There are legitimate reasons, however, for a formal membership. The informal relationship, although sometimes very effective, is often weak. If we treasure a believer's church, it is clear that members of the community of faith will need to be related in some tangible, recognizable way for practical purposes. It is not enough to say that a church should have a membership list because the local Kiwanis Club operates with a membership roll, but there is a covenant-establishing process involved in the believer's church idea that virtually demands an identifiable way of showing who belongs to the group. It is not the contention of the writer that this cannot happen without a formal membership, but it is quite apparent that such a formal membership can assist in carrying out the implications of what *koinonia* ought to mean among people.

Fellowship is commitment to one another

Our culture is already so individualistic and mainstream evangelicalism is often so shallow in its concept of the covenant-relationship in the brotherhood that we need some tangible way of identifying ourselves as mem-

bers of the group. It is not membership that is wrong; it is the absence of *koinonia* within the membership that is at fault. Fellowship implies a real commitment to others because of our common loyalty to Jesus Christ and to each other and a formal membership ought to enhance the possibilities for discovering and working out such a commitment or covenant.

A formal membership provides a pragmatic way of defining spiritual responsibilities. While there are misuses of membership lists, the fact remains that the list is still a good way to help define what needs to be done. In this day of larger and larger formal bodies, a list could well serve a good purpose in assisting the congregation to analyze its problems and responsibilities and then to implement the work that needs to be done. To allow each to make his covenant with the group on a very informal basis may be desirable in some groups and may be quite effective at times, but ultimately such action leads to irresponsibility and an attitude of independence that cannot be reconciled with the principle of the covenant relationship and mutual sharing.

Formal church membership should and often does extract a public commitment from those who seek it. This is perfectly proper when it is seen as being more than getting on the roll. If all believers were spiritually mature and capable of making correct decisions individually, perhaps a formal church membership would be superfluous. All of us, however, are spiritually immature enough at times to need the constraining and encouraging consciousness that we have openly and visibly associated ourselves with a covenanting body of believers.

That there is a need among us for this kind of corporate covenanting is shown by the many communal groups forming among young people in our time. We need to learn about our own inconsistencies and inadequacies relative to covenant-making from such groups, but we need also remember that the idealistic but loose formal relationship often leads to separateness whenever there is disagreement or dissension.

The writer is persuaded that often when a person insists that membership is not essential to his spiritual life, he is simply not willing to enter into the work and program of the church wholeheartedly. While there are undoubtedly exceptions and although such non-members likely will deny this fact, experience tends to show that non-members really have points at which they do not wish to identify completely in a covenant-making relationship with the congregation. If and when becoming a part of a formal membership has any meaning at all, there are certain responsibilities that seem to be taken more seriously by the new member. All of us are immature enough at times to need the constraint of knowing we are visibly and tangibly connected with a group of people with whom we have covenanted to live the life in Christ. If this is to be interpreted as living by law rather than by grace, then we simply respond that all of us need that kind of "law" from time to time to bring us to do what we know is right and good.

There is something binding about expressing loyalty to a congregation in a visible form. That same pledge to mutual love can indeed be in the heart of a person who

makes such a commitment without benefit of being listed on a membership roll. It is also possible to "join" the church without making the commitment in heart. As a general rule, however, a tangible and formal act of associating with fellow believers has some binding qualities, both to the "joiner" and those with whom he affiliates.

A few suggestions

It is the writer's opinion that the answer to the problem under discussion is not a scuttling of the membership roll. There are changes, however, in the polity of the church that might well overcome some of the objections to a formal membership and would add meaningfulness to the act of becoming a member in the congregation. Following are some suggestions:

(1) The ritual of acceptance should be made more meaningful. Too often in our churches the process of becoming a member on the roll is carried on in the same manner that was practiced fifty years ago. While there has been more preparation for baptism than in former years, there is still a practice in many congregations where the candidate for membership answers a simple "I do" and feels relatively unrelated to the congregation in the process. The ritual of acceptance should become more than ritual.

More meaningful entry

Baptismal services should probably occur more frequently than has been the case in the past so that a congregation does not come to expect that new members will join only once or twice a year. Moreover, everything possible should be done so that it does not become an automatic thing to join the church at a particular age. Pastoral classes (in preparation for church membership) might well be inter-generational if possible so that young people understand that their step of obedience is not just something that happens when they are eighth graders and that they are indeed becoming related to people of other ages in the body of Christ.

In the actual process of acceptance into the local church attention should be given to the role played by the congregation. Church covenants need to be more than committing oneself to a set of rules and regulations. Such covenants also need to be more than giving assent to a set of church principles. The ritual of acceptance should include the means whereby the candidate for membership and the congregation know very well what kind of relationship it is into which they come. The emphasis on *koinonia* and mutual sharing should be made very plain both in the preparation for membership and in the actual ritual. Both the congregation and the "joiner" should respond, committing themselves to this covenant-relationship, whenever new members are received.

Even in the transfer of members from other congregations more care should be taken in making the transferee and the congregation aware of their mutual obligations and privileges. It is altogether possible that most of our transfers are made too casually and without real heart involvement, especially by the receiving congregation.

Fewer absentee members

(2) Inactive and absentee memberships should be clarified. If *koinonia* is at the heart of church membership, then the basic purpose of membership is largely lost if and when the member is away from the congregation or is inactive in attendance and work. Absentee membership should be discouraged. In a real sense it negates the *koinonia* understanding of membership. There will be cases in which such absentee membership may be necessary or even preferable, but in principle believers ought to be strongly urged to join people of like faith wherever they reside. The home church should not be hesitant in making such suggestions to its members who are absentees.

In the case of members who remain in the community but are inactive in the church's fellowship, strong consideration should be given to clarifying such a person's relationship to the church. If *koinonia* is central to church membership, the inactive member has for all practical purposes excommunicated himself. Perhaps such a non-active member should be asked to choose whether or not he wishes to remain on the membership roll. If he persists in remaining but gives no evidence through attendance, service, support or some other form of visible and acknowledgeable contact, he should be taken from the roll. In a spiritual sense it is not the church who has severed the relationship of *koinonia*. The onus is on the inactive member to prove why his name should remain on the list. Too often the congregation has felt compelled to find reasons why the inactive member ought to be removed. When the function of membership (fellowship) ceases, membership in essence has already ceased.

Transfers of membership from one congregation to another ought to occur sooner than is often the case. Churches from which members come should urge the departing member to associate quickly with a sister congregation. Sometimes a person who moves into a new community and fellowships with a congregation hesitates to join, does nothing to unite visibly with the congregation, and then feels awkward in taking such a step after worshipping and working with this congregation for two or three or more years. Everything possible should be done to encourage a quick transfer, once the decision has been made where the fellowship shall take place.

(Note: The writer is aware that the issues discussed in the preceding three paragraphs have also been researched and presented to the recent Canadian Conference in St. Catharines by the Canadian Board of Spiritual and Social Concerns. A recommendation dealing with certificates of transfer, letters of transfer, releases by letter, and non-disciplinary removal was accepted by the conference. Since this recommendation was reported after this paper was written, it is hoped that the accepted recommendation can be made available to the delegates of this Study Conference.)

Periodic review

(3) Church members should occasionally be required to review their covenant with the local congregation. It is part of our tradition that a person voluntarily comes into the church fellowship. It is not a tradition among us that members should voluntarily leave the membership when the function (*koinonia*) has already ceased. If and when a member honestly feels he cannot live in agreement with

the principles of the church, and when his fellowship is no longer meaningful, it may be best for him to be released from membership.

But even the active member should probably be asked from time to time whether or not he wishes to remain a part of the fellowship. This would provide an occasion for him to renew his dedication to Christ and the people with whom he has covenanted to live. Some churches are beginning to practice a renewal of vows that asks members periodically (every two years, five years, etc.) whether or not they want to continue to live in the covenant relationship in the church. It is unfortunate when only new members are asked whether or not they are willing to live in this kind of continuing relationship.

(4) Church discipline should be exercised as a withdrawal of fellowship. We have passed from one extreme to another in the matter of church discipline. There was a time when excommunication meant being ostracized from the believing community. Today, in our intense desire to be redemptive, we hesitate carrying out any discipline, lest we alienate the person and leave him without spiritual care. Neither system, in the mind of the writer, is satisfactory. We must find some biblical method whereby discipline is both effective and redemptive.

It is obvious that excommunication today does not have the same effect upon a person that the expulsion of the immoral man in Corinth had upon the man who was "delivered over to Satan." For good reasons or bad, the distinction between the church and the world is not as sharp as it was in Corinth when Christians came out of a rank paganism and no one had to guess whether or not a person was in the world or in the church. The excommunicated person today can find another church where he is welcomed with open arms or he can even live without church attachment in a "Christianized" society without feeling the same kind of pressure that must have been felt by the fornicator in I Corinthians 5. The writer is quick to confess that he has no ready solution to the matter of discovering a discipline that is both effective and redemptive.

(5) The Church structure should allow for smaller, more informal group meetings where **koinonia** may be more possible. The established churches are sometimes too suspicious of smaller fellowship groups and thus create the impression that such groups must necessarily operate outside and without the blessing of the church. Especially in larger churches, smaller fellowship groups are almost imperative if **koinonia** is really to take place. While there are always the dangers of cliquishness and schism, the benefits of the smaller group to the entire congregation would seem to outweigh what dangers there might be. Moreover, if the small group can feel that the congregation is not looking upon it with constant suspicion, there will be less tendency to disassociate itself from the remainder of the congregation.

It is also to be hoped that a true **koinonia** group will discover that it needs the larger body of Christ's followers. The sympathetic attitude of the larger congregation may well encourage the small group to seek the counsel of

others as it wrestles with the issues of the spiritual life in Christ.

(6) The elements of the informal fellowship should be brought into the formal worship experience of the congregation. There are undoubtedly purposes in the formal worship services that are not the same as those purposes in the small group and vice versa. But since the informal fellowship usually catches the spirit of **koinonia** more readily than the larger group meeting, that which enhances fellowship should be brought into the formal meeting as much as possible. This is already being practiced in some of our congregations where more opportunities for sharing are being given.

It needs to be recognized that certain ends can be accomplished best in different settings. The worship service with a thousand people in attendance can do certain things not possible in the small group. By the same token the small group can accomplish desirable goals not attainable ordinarily in the larger group meeting. We need to recognize the place of both and learn from one another as a part of our mutual sharing in the life of the church.

(7) Christian love demands that anyone not feeling free to become a formal member be allowed that freedom without severing fellowship. The person who is a committed Christian, is active in the fellowship and work of the church, but thinks formal membership is not essential, should be accepted as a part of the church family in spite of his objections to actual church membership. Individual congregations will need to determine whether or not such people have voting rights and other privileges, but there should be an acceptance of such persons in the spirit of fellowship.

Open to God's new thing

Neither the implications of the problem discussed nor the suggestions made in the preceding pages are adequate and sufficient. There are many other questions that could well be raised. One of the most critical questions, in the writer's mind, is the eventual consequences that will come to a conference of churches in the event the church becomes largely a group of smaller, non-member fellowships where each group determines how it shall carry on a mission of outreach and evangelism. It is in keeping with the spirit of the times for everyone to "do his own thing" and the small group movement encourages that spirit.

There may be a day coming when large scale denominational enterprises will simply not be able to function because people will not be willing to covenant with such larger fellowships to do a work. We may come to enjoy the **koinonia** of small groups so much that allegiance to larger groups will wane sufficiently so as to make cooperative mission endeavors precarious business. While this threatens the establishment, God in His own way may be preparing us for some changes we would be very unwilling to make otherwise. We need certainly to be open to His leading as He builds the Church of which He is Lord.