

*"Proclamation cannot be divorced from social action; today we all stand on trial before Christ with respect to our faithfulness to both", says Victor Adrian, in this important statement on word and deed.*

# The Whole Gospel to the Whole Man

The believer in this world is always on trial (I Peter 1:7). He is tested and examined by the Incarnate One whose life and work sets the standard for all. What really counts in the Grand Examination will not be the extent of our understanding and knowledge (intellectual heresy) nor the number of our activities (the activist heresy), but the nature of our commitment to Jesus Christ, the nature of our faith (trust) in him, our love and our obedience to him.

## Tests of our commitment

(1) The willingness to proclaim Christ and his Gospel is the ground on which the believer's commitment to Christ is tested.

In the context of referring to the divine judgment our Lord says: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 10:32-33). Since faith comes by hearing

(Romans 10) and God has chosen to save men by preaching the Gospel (I Corinthians 1), followers of Christ need to confess him before men.

Peter failed his first test of faithful witness and confession when confronted with hostile public opinion. He passed the test after Pentecost, thrusting aside the Sanhedrin restrictions and saying: "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). The martyr (witness) is one who gives testimony concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (the Gospel), even unto death. The conflict in the believer's life begins when he is willing to go into all the world, to all situations, to all circumstances, to make the Gospel known. As Paul at Athens he witnesses to the God who "commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

To proclaim is not an option for believers; it is fundamental to Christian commitment: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved" (Romans 10:9-10).

The three great cluster words used in the New Testament to describe the evangelistic work of the early church are 'martureo' (to witness), 'euaggelizomai' (to tell the Gospel), and 'kerusso' (to proclaim). What the believers bore witness to is generally the same in content as the proclamation and the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> "To witness" means to attest to facts or assert truths with respect to Jesus Christ with the intent to lead others to faith. "To proclaim" means to herald, to preach, to announce the good news, the Gospel. In the Gospels of the New Testament it has particular reference to the announcement of the climax of history with the coming of Christ and his divine intervention in the affairs of men through his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and heavenly ascension. The faith which reflects a true commitment to Christ is, therefore, measured on the basis of the believer's involvement in proclamation, confession and witness.

Evangelicals have never had any serious dispute about



Mennonite Brethren Bible College president Victor Adrian has come back to the relationship of "proclamation to social action" frequently in his public statements in recent years. The Whole Gospel to the Whole Man is therefore a natural outgrowth of a longfelt concern. Adrian is a graduate of the University of Manitoba (B.A.) and Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia (B.D. and M.Th.) and is a candidate for his doctorate from Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis. During his years as a teacher, he has

served in elementary schools, high schools and was for three years principal of the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, Winnipeg. He has been at the MBBC since 1962.

the need to proclaim the Gospel. Their emphasis in evangelism has centered on proclamation, as illustrated at the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism:

Evangelism is the proclamation of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ, the only Redeemer of men, according to the Scriptures, with the purpose of persuading condemned and lost sinners to put their trust in God by receiving and accepting Christ as Saviour through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to serve Christ as Lord in every calling of life and in the fellowship of his church, looking toward the day of his coming in glory.<sup>2</sup>

(2) **The willingness to engage in social action is also ground on which the believer's commitment to Christ is tested.**

In his book, *Christ the Controversialist*, Stott is rather insistent on this responsibility when he writes:

The kind of evangelicalism which concentrates exclusively on saving individual souls is not true evangelicalism. It is not evangelical because it is not biblical. It forgets that God did not create souls but body-souls called human beings, who are also social beings, and that he cares about their bodies and their society as well as about their relationship with themselves and their eternal destiny. So true Christian love will care for people as people, and will seek to serve them, neglecting neither the soul for the body nor the body for the soul. As a matter of fact, it has not been characteristic of evangelicals in the past to be shy of social action, or even, when necessary, of political action.<sup>3</sup>

By social action we understand the biblical injunction of 'diakonia'—the Christian ministry of love and mercy to those in need. Christian social action can be understood both in terms of alleviating human suffering and misery in the world (helping victims) and in terms of attempting to change and reform the conditions in society which give rise to human suffering.

Just as the proclamation of the Gospel is not an option for the believer so social action is not an option. In our Lord's eschatological discourse he ends with a sobering parable which indicates very clearly that the genuineness of faith shall be tested on the basis of our good deeds of love to men:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was **hungry** and you gave me food, I was **thirsty** and you gave me drink, I was a **stranger** and you welcomed me, I was **naked** and you clothed me, I was **sick** and you visited me, I was in **prison** and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, **as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me**" (Matt. 25:31-40).

Our Lord indicates that what we do with our lives **now** determines our eternal destiny. When the Alpha and Omega winds up history and the ultimate issues are before

us our lives related to the concerns for the needs of men will determine our destiny. Our faith will be tested by our works, for faith without works is dead. While the call of the Gospel is a call to personal redemption through Jesus Christ it is also a call to social responsibility in the world. At the heart of the Gospel is the service motif: "I have come not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give my life a ransom for many." At the heart of the Gospel is self-giving love. The response to the Gospel is loving our neighbor as ourselves as well as loving God with our heart, soul and mind. The Sermon on the Mount ends with the eschatological reference: "Not every one who says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father which is in heaven." The genuineness of our love to God finds expression in our love to man according to John. Proclamation cannot be divorced from social action; today we all stand on trial before Christ with respect to our faithfulness to both. This is what living "in the world" is all about. But the trial of faith is not without hope and joy, the joy of sharing in the victory of Christ and the hope of a new heaven and earth where righteousness dwells.

## Debate among evangelicals

There is a general recognition that the Gospel proclamation needs constantly to be scrutinized with respect to its biblical integrity. No part of the Gospel should be obscured; it should be wholly and exclusively rooted in the apostolic kerygma. Three particular questions are frequently raised among evangelicals.

### (1) Is ours the full-orbed Gospel?

Over 20 years ago Carl F.H. Henry dropped a bomb into the evangelical community with his *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. His charge was that for the first time in history evangelicals stood divorced from the great social reform movements (p. 36). He contrasts this stance with the Old and New Testament traditions where the believing community challenged the culture of its day, condemning with redemptive power social evils and bringing a message of light and salt to the earth. Henry goes on to state that the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot be indifferent to the need of the total man (p. 42).

Kenneth Strachan, a missionary statesman, in his *The Inescapable Calling* regards as valid some of the criticisms leveled at the evangelicals with respect to their understanding of the Christian mission in the world. Some of the criticisms he mentions are:

(1) A stress on individual piety that emphasizes the conventional standards of the group and neglects to grapple in practical ways with the ethical implications of the Gospel as they bear upon the complexities of modern society.

(2) A superficiality in the presentation of the Gospel that contributes largely to the apparent irrelevance of the church in the world today (p. 30).

Being mindful that many representatives of the mainstream of Protestantism tone down individual salvation as well as the conflict between the church and the world (D.T. Niles, *Upon the Earth*; Johannes Plauw, *The Missionary*

**Nature of the Church**), Strachan is courageous enough to make the following statement:

They rightly call the churches to come out of their pharisaical isolationism and pseudopietism and become—as Christ meant them to be—true salt and light in the world. They correctly demand that our eyes be opened to the universal horizons of God's redemptive purposes and that **we focus upon portions of his revealed Word that, in our particularist bias, we have tended to ignore.** In the midst of an anguished humanity in desperate straits, they rightly echo the Lord's cry for attending to justice and mercy—those weightier demands of the law to feed the poor and heal the sick—which a proselytistic zeal is ever prone to evade (p. 34, italics mine).

Strachan also focuses our attention on the total world situation today as a challenge to the Christian to be faithful to the whole Gospel:

One has only to look upon the tide of human misery and be a spectator to the unrest and unhappiness of the masses to recognize that Christianity is not merely facing a problem of communication—that is, a problem of gaining a hearing for the Gospel. It faces also the problem of meeting immediate urgent need, of **giving true expression to the Gospel it preaches;** and its survival depends upon this.

Communism, therefore, not only challenges the theological presuppositions of Christianity as does Western secularism, but in a world of population explosion, of social misery, political strife, and sheer hunger, it challenges the Christian church to be Christian indeed, to express the compassion of Christ in concrete and comprehensible reality. So communism drives us toward a **fresh biblical understanding of the Christian mission and function in the world,** of social and political responsibility in a day of collectivism, and of **the demands and obligations of Christian love toward those who in one sense are enemies and who are nevertheless beloved of God** (p. 25, boldface mine).

In his *Evangelicalism and Social Responsibility*, Vernon Grounds, president of the Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, from the vantage point of seeking to be a relevant Christian in a revolutionary era, suggests faithfulness to the whole Gospel:

It is imperative, then, that as evangelicals we engage in some hard thinking about our social responsibility. Are we faithfully obeying God's will as it has been disclosed in God's Word? **Are we communicating and implementing a full-orbed Gospel?** Is our version of Christianity truncated, perhaps emasculated, and therefore something far less than the dynamic it ought to be? Are we reading the Bible through the dark glasses of tradition, failing to see what it actually teaches and how it actually bears upon every dimension of life? Granted that Scripture is no more a compendium of sociology than it is of science. **As evangelicals we affirm that it is, nevertheless, our infallible rule of faith and practice; and practice certainly includes all of our relationships, internationally no less than personally** (p. 3, boldface mine).

This concern for a full-orbed Gospel is also reflected in David O. Moberg's book, *Inasmuch* (Christian Social Responsibilities in the Twentieth Century). This book consists of one of the finest treatments of the social responsibility of the Christian on the basis of reference to the teaching of Scriptures. Responding to the second part of our Lord's summary of the command of God to love one's neighbor as oneself, he writes,

**The Gospel is eminently personal,** for each man has his own encounter with God and chooses to accept or reject him. **But the Gospel also is social,** for every person is deeply immeshed in a social situation, and it is impossible to love God while hating one's neighbor (1 John 4:20-21). Neighborly love is always social; as soon as two persons are related in any way to each other, they are in a social relationship. **There is therefore no such thing as a "personal gospel" apart from a "social gospel";** God's saving grace is expended to man in a social situation, not apart from it. Recognizing this is not the same as being caught up in the theologically liberal "social gospel" (p. 31, boldface mine).

James DeForest Murch, long-time editor of *United Evangelical Action* and managing editor of *Christianity Today*, acknowledges that the evangelical action has had a certain incompleteness about it:

It is possible that evangelicals have in some respects had too weak a social concern. **There is a great need just now for the formulation of a biblical philosophy of social action if the church in the modern world is to become a mighty force for righteousness and a mighty testimony to the full-orbed Gospel of Jesus Christ.** Nothing less than such an evangelical testimony can be adequate for the cultural crisis which has overtaken the western world. Evangelicals have it within their power to speak with authority in matters of social justice in a way that liberals cannot speak because their concepts are based upon the revealed righteousness of a sovereign God<sup>4</sup> (emphasis mine).

Horace L. Fenton Jr., general director of the Latin American Mission, at the Wheaton "Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission" in 1966 stated the following:

Many evangelicals seem to have concluded that while compassion and charity are certainly an important part of our message, this does not imply a deep sense of social responsibility on the part of the church. Fortunately, they do not tell the whole story. Other evangelicals show a changed attitude toward these matters and recognize the importance of social concern as a manifestation of their obedience to Christ.

What accounts for this change? **For one thing, a careful re-examination of the scriptural teaching on the subject has led many evangelicals to feel that they have unconsciously been overlooking certain biblical emphases.** There seem to be whole areas not only in the Old Testament prophets, with their demands for social justice, but also in the teachings of Christ and the apostles, to which we have given too little heed<sup>5</sup> (boldface mine).

An evangelism which ignores social concern is by its nature an incomplete and unscriptural evangelism, and it will likely be unheeded evangelism.<sup>6</sup>

The genuine concern of evangelicals for a full-orbed Gospel-mission in the world, which takes into account God's interest in the total man, is most commendable. Our proclamation in a revolutionary world must be totally rooted in the New Testament Gospel and must be constantly tested by it. If this means bringing social action and concern into a redemptive context, as a number of evangelical leaders suggest, such corrective measures should be undertaken. The whole council of God must be our guide. We are held responsible for the total ministry entrusted to us.

In clarifying the missionary task of the church, evangelicals spend considerable energy contrasting it with the formulations which have gained favor with the World

Council of Churches. The following criticisms are expressed:

(a) The Gospel is reduced largely to social idealism; the quest for better social structures replaces individual conversion.<sup>7</sup> Referring to Dr. D. Edmund Perry's statements, "I abhor the notion of individual salvation," and "Christian is a societary term," Henry comments:

It is clear that the concept of community or social action is here proposed as a preferable alternative to individual or personal experience of Jesus Christ as Saviour from sin. The authentic mission of the church is thus certain to be that of changing the structure of society and not that of winning individual converts to Christ as the means of renewing society. The 'gospel' is said to be addressed not to individuals but to the community.<sup>8</sup>

(b) The church relies too much on legislative compulsion, or the government, to usher in the *shalom* society, rather than on personal reconciliation to Jesus Christ by receiving the Gospel.<sup>9</sup>

While we rightly deplore a substitution of sociological concerns for spiritual concerns, it does not follow that sociological concerns must be neglected. Henry makes the observation that evangelicals came to stress evangelism (proclamation) above social concern because of the liberal lack of emphasis on personal regeneration.<sup>10</sup> If modern ecumenism concentrates largely on the question of social justice, racial discrimination, hunger, poverty, and war, at the expense of preaching the Gospel that saves individual men, evangelicals should not polarize by concentrating almost exclusively on saving individual souls. The New Testament concept of mission should be our guide.

The Gospel is not preached in a vacuum. The dilemma confronting us is well posed by one of our own missionaries to Latin America:

How does one act redemptively in a society seething with tensions? Where does the church begin to bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim liberty to captives? Should we be so numbed by shocking inequalities, overwhelmed by poverty, intimidated by violence that we withdraw to a safe, sheltered haven to proclaim the Gospel? That is a temptation. Certainly it would be easier than grappling with the difficult problems that plague Latin America.<sup>11</sup>

The writer goes on to suggest part of the biblical data which needs to be taken into account to find a solution to the dilemma:

Jesus himself seems to have helped some needy people without first seeking to evangelize them, and evidently the Good Samaritan did not try to proselytize the wounded man before he offered him help. Certainly if the church serves the community without the narrow aim of getting members, she can witness to the fact that God is interested in the whole man, not only in his soul.<sup>12</sup>

Paul Tournier, a prolific writer and sensitive Christian psychiatrist, in *The Whole Person in a Broken World*, sees the dichotomy of the spiritual and the material in the modern man. His great need is to understand how to relate to his world, to know in particular what light the Gospel throws on the complexities of his relationships, not only in the world to come but also in this world. Somewhat

critical of the church as he has observed it, Tournier writes:

It has fled into piety, into merely preaching salvation. Far be it from me to suggest that this is not its essential mission. But God also created the material world, not only the spiritual world. And the salvation he brings to us in Jesus Christ is not only the answer to the religious struggle of our souls, but also to the physical suffering of the world . . . . Magnificent sermons are preached in the church but the mass of men no longer come to hear them. They think the sermons are intended for the specialists who are pre-occupied with theology. They do not expect from them anything that will contribute to the solution of the real problems of social, economic, and cultural life with which they have to grapple (p. 78).

Tournier is mindful that the world has to face a tremendous task. The results of the industrial revolution, the era of science, progress in technology, and the enormous development of economic needs have overwhelmed the modern man. The light of the Gospel must come into the world which the modern man faces. Tournier's concern is that the church must formulate what the Gospel means for economic, political, and intellectual life. It must formulate an evangelical professional and social ethics to help the believer be a Christian in this world (p. 160).

The task of being faithful to the full counsel of God for men in this world faces us squarely. Men with evangelical vision and commitment involved in frontiers of church growth and expansion abroad and at home call us to faithfulness in proclamation and faithfulness in working out the implications of the Gospel for man and his total need.

#### (2) Is it a question of priorities or of inseparability?

A great deal of effort has been spent in pitting proclamation against social action or vice versa. While evangelicals generally admit to the biblical emphasis on both, they frequently attempt to relate them in terms of priorities. Recognizing on the one hand, that the motivations for such structuring are sincere attempts to be true to the task of proclamation (men are saved only by hearing), one is also aware that such structuring tends to tone down the need for *diakonia*. Formulations based on the priority approach in relationship read as follows:

Therefore, the church's **first business** is to confront every man with his need to be born again in Christ. But the Christian is **also called** to show God's love in concrete ways.<sup>13</sup>

Here proclamation is stated to be the "first business" and the ministry of love as "also" our calling. Other formulations are set up in terms of "first and second place."<sup>14</sup>

The question is whether the New Testament poses the relationships that way. It would seem to me that the emphasis is on the **inseparability of proclamation and social action** (100% for proclamation; 100% for social action). Billy Graham on one occasion remarked that we must approach man with the Gospel in one hand and a glass of cold water in the other. With Richard C. Halverson we ask: "Why, for example, do we isolate and emphasize evangelism as being more important than the two great commandments which comprehend all the law and the prophets, to love God and neighbor?"<sup>15</sup> Myron

S. Augsburg insists that "our mission calls for a deep awareness of the unity of Christ's mission, a rejection of the polarization of evangelism and social action, engaging us in a service which brings the whole man to Christ."<sup>16</sup> Elton Trueblood in *The New Man For Our Time* calls for wholeness in man and "double priority" with reference to "pietism" and "activism." With respect to "the total Gospel" he writes:

We need to give careful attention today to the relationship between social service and evangelism. The danger is that service may take the place of evangelism or that evangelism may be re-defined so that it is social service and nothing more . . . . The early injunction of Christ was to become "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17), and this is quite as significant as the injunction to feed the hungry. To feed a man is important; but man does not live by bread alone, so it is equally important to sense the love of Christ. If we do only the one and not the other we may in the end undermine the motivation even for feeding itself" (p. 102).

I would like to make reference to two men who made the same point and who speak out of considerable involvement in the Latin American Mission. Horace Fenton, director of Latin American Mission, states the following:

There is an increasing awareness on the part of evangelicals that the relationship of mission and social concern is made doubly important by the revolutionary nature of the times in which we live. If, by our lack of social concern, we bring approbrium upon the evangelical message, we shall have only ourselves to blame for the fact that we cannot get an audience and we shall answer to God for the inadequate and inaccurate way in which we have represented him. In our own day, we know better than ever that a man's social context has a bearing on his receptivity to the Gospel, and that, consequently, social concern is and must be an integral part of all true evangelism.<sup>17</sup>

The second statement comes from Samuel Escobar, a Latin American convert who has become very active in the Christian ministry and whose astute observations with respect to proclamation and social responsibility deserve quoting at some length:

Up to now in Latin America there has been a tendency to identify concern for social problems with theological liberalism, or with coldness toward the evangelistic task. We must end once for all this lamentable confusion. There is a sufficient basis in church history and in the Word of God to affirm strongly that a concern for the social dimension of evangelical testimony in the world isn't an abandonment of the fundamental truths of the Gospel, but is rather to carry to their final consequence the teachings about God, Jesus Christ, man and the world, which are the bases of the Gospel.

**An evangelism that does not take note of social problems and which does not announce the salvation and lordship of Christ within the context in which the hearers live is a deficient evangelism. It is a traitor to biblical teaching.**

Although it may be a caricature, I believe the synthesis made by one evangelical youth is very eloquent: "In the past they told us not to worry about changing society because the important thing was to change man; new men will change society. But when the new men actually begin to be concerned about changing society, they are told not to worry, that the world has always been evil, that we are waiting for a new heaven and a new earth, that this earth is condemned to destruction, so why try to change it? The worst part is that those who teach this are peacefully enjoying all the advan-

tages that this passing world offers them, and they defend them passionately when they seem to be in danger . . . .

Service is not evangelism. Men, whatever their social class, economic conditions or political position, need to know that God loves them and that Christ offers them the way to return to God. Rich and poor, capitalist and workers, military and politicians, all need to hear the call to repentance and faith. To proclaim the good news by preaching, personal testimony, literature, and biblical distribution is always necessary, here and now, by every believer. **But he who evangelizes has a different life. He is someone who has learned to serve.** He is a living letter who shows forth the truth and applicability of the message he proclaims. **We can never separate the proclamation of the Gospel from the demonstration of that Gospel.** They are different, but both are indispensable. That is, Christian service isn't optional. It is the mark of a new life. "By their fruits ye shall know them"<sup>18</sup> (boldface mine).

A well-balanced summary of this question has been given by John R.W. Stott in *Our Guilty Silence*:

Social action is not to be equated with evangelism, nor is it a constituent part of evangelism, nor is it primarily a means to evangelism (hospital patients and school pupils being a conveniently captive audience for the Gospel). Like evangelism, social action must stand on its own feet and in its own right: both are the services of love, a part of the *diakonia* of Christ and of Christians, as he calls them to follow in his footsteps. Nevertheless, although they must not be identified with one another, they should not be isolated from one another either. The two walk together hand in hand, neither pretending to be the other, nor using the other as its cloak or prop (p. 30).

## Wholeness of Christ's mission

### (1) A Man for Others

A catch phrase which apparently originated with Dietrich Bonhoeffer speaks of Jesus Christ as "a man for others." The phrase conveys the truth that Jesus was passionately concerned for people. Peter speaks of this concern when he says: "He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). Our Lord summed up his ministry when he quoted Isaiah 61: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18).

We can hardly spiritualize all these terms which apply to human needs and conditions. At a later occasion when John doubts while in prison similar terms are clothed with great concreteness. In answer to the question: "Are you he who is to come?", Jesus points to his credentials: "Go tell John what you hear and see, the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt. 11:3-5).

It was this concern for people which had made Jesus a controversial figure in his day. The Pharisees, who with their perverted doctrine of separation had little pity for people in ignorance, sin or need, were scandalized by our

Lord's freedom of movement among the despised and rejected in their society.

He had time to listen to the cry of the blind beggar Bartimaeus; he ignored the regulations about lepers, stretching out his hand to touch and heal them; he ignored restricting conventions and spoke freely to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's Well and showed forgiving love to a prostitute who bathed his feet and kissed and anointed them with oil; he did not fail to heal the sick on the Sabbath; he ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, seeking to bring healing into their lives; this interest in and association with outcastes, untouchables, and the despised was an expression of divine compassion for those in need and not as interpreted by the Pharisees, a compromise with sin. Jesus was indeed a man for others. He had taken the form of a servant in order to lay down his life for others. "For our sake he made him to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Our Lord's life is a model for us. "As the Father has sent me, so send I you" into the world. Our Lord was not just "a man for others" in a purely humanitarian sense. His mission among men was prompted by the highest motives of love for God the Father. He had come to do the Father's will. It is this love which distinguishes authentic Christian concern for men from noble humanitarianism. The forgiving of sin and healing of bodies were both expressions of the loving mission of our Lord. The concern for the total welfare of man has an excellent base of support in our Lord's ministry.

### (2) A Man with God's Word for Others

But our Lord was more than "a man for others"; he was also "the man with God's Word for others," as Bishop Coggan has put it.<sup>19</sup> Our Lord was quite specific that "man cannot live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Our Lord had come to announce good tidings; he had come to preach; he had come as the guardian of certain truths from the Father. The Gospels put a great deal of stress on the teaching and preaching ministry of our Lord. No subject was more frequently on his lips than the preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43; Mark 1:14).

This good news about the kingdom of God was preached by Philip (Acts 8:12), was preached by Paul (Acts 20:25) and is to be preached to the ends of the earth by us before Christ comes (Matt. 24:14). Authentic Christian mission is a combination of an urgency to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God and exercise of compassion for those who are deprived of justice and equality.

### (3) His Kingdom

It is in his Gospel of the kingdom that we have a "wholeness" of Christ's concern for man in this world and in the world to come. The kingdom concept comprehends both the believer's Godward relationship and his manward relationship, his temporal and his eternal destiny. According to our Lord the kingdom came into this life with his earthly presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. Although not yet in its full splendor and perfection God's rule or kingdom created new people of God. Through the

Holy Spirit men were born into the kingdom (John 3)—the Gospel is personal. Where men, however, received the Lordship of Christ they became a new people of God; they became the ecclesia, the church, the ones called into the presence of God. Preaching from a mount (Matt. 5-7), our Lord spoke of his followers as a city set on a hill and as the light of the world. Here we have the formation of a society based upon personal commitment to Jesus Christ. It is a society which has some continuity with the hopes of the Old Testament and its declaration of a kingdom of peace. Under Christ's Lordship his followers were to be men poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers. They were to become a city of love and brotherhood—the Gospel is also social. The Gospel consists of the good news that in the midst of this world there can be a fellowship of people, a true brotherhood, in whose midst is the living Christ.

However, the good news of the kingdom has a future reference. Christ will come again in visible form. His final victory over death and sin will usher in a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. This good news speaks powerfully of our blessed hope, the eschatological kingdom.

Our twentieth century which knows so much of loneliness, disrupted relationships, violence, injustice and war, needs to hear the full-orbed Gospel of Jesus Christ. It needs to experience the kingdom of God now. It needs to witness the people of God demonstrating love and peace. It needs to see the light of the Gospel as it reflects not only upon their personal needs but as it shines into man's relationships in his social, economic and political life.

Great changes do not begin on the surface of society, but in prepared hearts: in men who by communion with God rise above the apathy of the age, and speak with living, vital energy, and give life to the community, and tone to the public mind (Edward Beecher).

### FOOTNOTES

1. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., p. 71.
2. Quoted by C.F.H. Henry in *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*. Waco: Word Books, p. 39.
3. John R.W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (A Study in Some Essentials of Evangelical Religion). London: Tyndale Press, p. 188.
4. R.E.C. Warner, Editor, *Why In the Word?* Waco: Word Books, p. 85-86.
5. Quoted in Sherwood Elliot Wirt, *The Social Conscience of Evangelicals*. New York: Harper and Row, p. 150 and 151.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
7. Carl F.H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*, p. 39.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 39; cf. John Stott, *Christ the Controversialist*, pp. 185-187; cf. Ronald K. Orchard, Editor, *Witness in Six Continents* (Records of the meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches held in Mexico City, December 8-19, 1963), Edinburgh: Edinburgh House Press, pp. 75-87.
10. Carl F.H. Henry, *The God Who Shows Himself*. Waco: Word Books, p. 59.
11. John Klassen, "Stones or Bread for Latin America," *The Christian Leader*, April 20, 1971, p. 2.

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-

- vide 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

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



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).