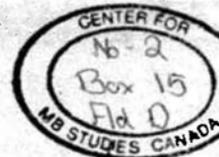


RESPONSE TO: "A CONVERTED AND BAPTIZED PEOPLE"

By Ed Boschman



The paper is well researched, commendably organized and readable, and decently comprehensive. The two writing styles within the paper, first formal, then personal, are well suited for the two sections presented (research and interpretation). Both an early paragraph outlining the plan for the paper and numbered pages would have been helpful.

I. Membership: Its Meaning

The closest the author comes to a working definition of church membership is that borrowed from Hein: "Living within a network of inter-personal relationships that both lay their claims on us and invite us to contribute our best." That may well be more than adequate.

II. Membership: Its Importance

A. "Need for special people"

The writer suggests that "God needs a special people," therefore membership is desirable. Opponents of formal local church membership would say that entrance into the universal church answers the need for the special people group. This reader was somewhat confused by the discussion which first defined covenant as mutual and then unilateral. If it was meant that God unilaterally offered the opportunity for covenant, fine. (Further, the same God who calls the Hebrews "my people" also at times says they are "not my people.")

B. "Need for family"

The second reason cited for membership is the "need for a family in which to grow". This section is excellent. The mutuality of growth and ministry are well documented and fleshed out.

III. Church Membership: Its Prerequisites

A. "Conversion"

The writer's paragraphs regarding conversion are satisfying. Conversion is defined as "a commitment to God" born of faith and repentance. The use of Paul as an example is very helpful.

B. "Baptism"

A credible case is made for the fact that baptism is the outward sign of the inward grace, and that the Bible teaches it as the expected and normative practice of the converted. The Great Commission itself makes that unmistakably clear. The point made regarding preparation/teaching prior to baptism is well put.

Though the paper works well until the end of footnote #15, the subsequent paragraph creates difficulty. This reader wonders whether Blamires' quote is appropriate following the writer's assertion. Does the writer in his statement rule out any differentiation between initiation into God's kingdom by conversion and entrance into the local community of believers?

IV. Church Membership: Its Celebration

A. The Lord's Supper

The writer concludes that the New Testament does not preclude unbaptized believers' participation at the Lord's table. Agreed. The process by which the conclusion is reached, however, needs examination. It seems to this reader that the issue in question is establishing a principle regarding basic Scriptural Christian practice. The rhetorical question posed as an answer to the dilemma, however, deals with fluctuation in the form of a basic Scriptural Christian practice.

Additional paragraphs regarding openness of the Lord's table to "other" Christians are convincing. Equally clear is the admonition to be Scripturally prepared.

Additional Notes:

1. I assume the references to Australian scholars lend foundational stability.
2. The issue of readiness for baptism when it is inextricably linked to membership is not addressed. Are there good criteria for this matter when adolescents and pre-adolescents request baptism?
3. Our history pushes us toward aggregate membership (norms), causes problems with true statistics, local budgets, conference finances.
4. (Nb: Not within parameters of C of F.)