

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 13 p. 1

Volume 13 • Number 1 • January 1989

Evangelical Review of Theology



WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP
Theological Commission p. 3

Editorial

The Church—Is It Relevant?

Time passes. As it does, in current secular history the time-bound ecological global crisis and consequent global depletion of resources have dwarfed all other world problems. To those who take the Christian faith seriously, a comparable crisis would be concerning the church. Never before in either sacred or secular history has the Christian Church been assessed to be so sick, so irrelevant universally, particularly in those regions and histories where christendom is a dead corpse (though every now and then heart-pacers have been vigorously attempted!). The world is perennially searching for a paradigm of human society, but for one reason or the other the Church has *not* been a candidate. Now the theological air is filled with dust: Should not the Church always remain militant or a 'little flock'? Is it not antiquated? How best and radically should the Church be restructured in order to be salvaged? After all, Jesus gave himself to us as the way of life, not the Church; and so the arguments go on. The causes for both are said to be the inevitable spread of secularization (a world-view necessarily without God) and the unparalleled abundance of material wealth. In any case, for Bible-believing Christians the nature and relevance of the Church in the contemporary world is the key issue, as myriads of publications and discussions on the subject in the last decade reveal. And one suspects that these inquiries will become more intensified, more numerous and more urgent everywhere in the coming decade.

All the articles and book reviews in this issue of *ERT*, published in original, speak to this problem of the relevance of the Church. Most of these are papers presented at the last meeting of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET), which took place in Woelmersen, West Germany in August, 1988. Evangelical ecclesiology was the theme of the conference. The understanding of the Church and her problems from other regions also are included to show the universal urgency of a relevant ecclesiology beyond the regions of Europe. It is hoped that these papers will evoke similar studies among evangelical [p. 4](#) thinkers in other parts of the world too. We earnestly hope that the readers of *ERT* will also be moved to respond. Any responses will be published for the benefit of our international readership.

The editor is grateful to all the paper writers and book reviewers for their contribution and permission to publish.

Editor [p. 5](#)

Essential Aspects of the Church in the Bible

R. A. Campbell

Printed with permission

It would be generally agreed that the NT writer who has most to say about the Church is Paul, and that his most developed thinking on the subject is to be found in Ephesians. Ephesians has been described by J. A. Robinson as ‘the crown of Paul’s writings’¹ and by John Stott as ‘the Gospel of the Church. It sets forth God’s eternal purpose to create through Jesus Christ a new society which stands out in bright relief against the sombre background of the old world’.² Many of today’s NT scholars, of course, would not start here. For them Ephesians is doubtfully Paul’s own handiwork, and even evangelical scholars seem to be in danger, if not of recognizing a ‘canon within a canon’, then of working with a hierarchy within the canon according to which the earlier letters of Paul carry more authority than the later and those they suppose may rather be products of a Pauline school. This is to treat the NT not as Scripture but as evidence in a detective inquiry. Our task is not to reconstruct something called ‘the historical Paul’ or ‘the primitive church’ but to come to Scripture as a whole and ask what it has to tell us through its different writers about the essential nature of the Church. For this purpose, to say that Ephesians is a later letter is to show its particular value to us. It is the maturest product of apostolic thought, written not in the heat of controversy or in response to a church crisis, but perhaps more than any of Paul’s letters except Romans, as a definitive statement of his faith and teaching concerning the Church of Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians the word ‘church’, *ekklesia*, occurs first in 1.2: ‘and he has put all things under his feet and made him head over all things for the church which is his body.’ Paul is praying that the readers will know the greatness of God’s power and love toward them, and he has been saying that the resurrection shows that Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth and has it *for the Church*. Christ is Lord and we who are so bound up with him are the beneficiaries of his Lordship. In [Eph. 3:10](#) the Church is central to God’s eternal plan, since it is through the Church that his wisdom is to be made known to the principalities and powers. In [Eph. 5:21–33](#) the relationship of husband [p. 6](#) and wife is briefly illuminated by reference to the love of Christ for his Church and the Church’s glad surrender to him. Although these are the principal occurrences of the word *ekklesia* in the letter, they do not go to the heart of the matter, for in them the Church is *assumed* rather than defined. In none of these passages is the Church as such the main topic of discussion. If we want to see what in essence the Church is, we need to turn instead to chapter [2](#) vv. [19–22](#):

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles, and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

A few verses earlier Paul has been addressing his Gentile readers and reminding them that before their conversion they were ‘separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise’. Now he says they have been brought near, they have access in one Spirit to the Father; in a word they have become part of the people of God. Another way of expressing this is that they have joined the household, the family of God, and this leads Paul to think of a building with foundations and cornerstone and finally of a temple where God dwells by his Spirit. As G. B. Caird says, ‘The change of metaphor from commonwealth and family to building and

¹ J. A. Robinson, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, 1903, p. vii.

² J. R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society*, 1979, p. 9.

temple is facilitated by the triple meaning of the word *oikos* (household, house, temple).³ Not all parts of the passage are equally metaphorical, however. To describe the Church as a temple is obviously a metaphor, and like all metaphors it has its limits—the Church is a temple in so far as God dwells in us by his Spirit; it is not the case that we are made of blocks of stones—but to describe the Church as fellow citizens and members of the household of God is much less metaphorical, for this is the language used in the OT to describe Israel. Paul is not saying that the Church is *like* a people of God or *like* Israel; he is saying that the Church is the people, it is Israel. All the privileges and responsibilities of the people of God belong to the Church. Jesus Christ has made Jew and Gentile one so that in and through this one reconciled people God's eternal purpose for the whole world can be fulfilled.

It is because the Church is thought of as the people of God that it can [p. 7](#) be referred to as the *oikos theou* ([1 Tim. 3:15](#)), with Christians as the *oikeioi theou* ([Gal. 6:10](#), [Eph. 2:19](#)). *Oikos* is secular Greek and meant not merely the building but the family/household who lived in it and formed a basic unit of society. It was regularly used metaphorically of a city, a state or the empire itself. The Roman emperors were accustomed to projecting themselves as 'fathers' of the nation, *patres patriae*. In the LXX *oikos* is similarly both a family, a clan, the royal family and Israel as a whole, 'the house of Israel'. So it was natural for Paul to use *oikos* language both of the local church which met in houses and functioned as a family/household, and of the universal Church of which God was the father and head ([Eph. 3:15](#)).⁴

The church as the people of God is not an isolated idea in Paul's letters. It lies behind the argument in [Romans 9–11](#), where Paul asks whether the rejection of the gospel by the Jews means that God's word has failed, whether God chose a people for his own and then was forced to reject them. As the people of God the Church must learn the lessons learnt by Israel in the wilderness ([1 Cor. 10:1–13](#)). Paul actually calls the church 'the Israel of God' ([Gal. 6:16](#)) and in [Titus 2:14](#) he says that Jesus Christ 'gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds'. 'A people of his own' is a clear echo of what was said to Israel at Sinai ([Ex. 19:5–6](#)).

OTHER NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

Paul is not the only NT writer to think in this way. Next to Ephesians the letter in the NT that says most about the church is 1 Peter. Here new believers are addressed as those who have become heirs to all God's promises. Language appropriated from the OT's description of the people of God runs through the letter. They have been born again to an 'inheritance' ([1:3](#)); they are to be 'holy, for I am holy' ([1:16](#)); they are to be built into a 'spiritual house to be a holy priesthood' ([2:5](#)); they are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood' ([2:5](#)); 'a household' ([4:17](#)). The whole letter is an extended call to the newly baptised to know who they are and be what they are, the people of God. We notice again how the idea of the church as the people of God readily expresses itself in terms of *oikos*. The thought is primarily of belonging, not of building (although in that direction, see [1 Peter 2:5](#), [Eph. 2:20](#)). In the world believers are strangers and exiles, *parokoi*, but members of God's [p. 8](#) *oikos*, with security, dignity and obligations to live by the code of the family and to be good stewards (*oikonomoi*) of God's grace ([1 Peter 4:10](#)). Another NT writer to work this idea

³ G. B. Caird, *Paul's Letters from Prison*, 1976, pp. 60–1.

⁴ See further J. H. Elliott, *Home for the Homeless*, 1981, pp. 170–200.

is the writer to the Hebrews. Christians are God's house (3:6), his people are moving through the desert towards the promised land in heaven. They are to be beware of missing God's rest by reason of unbelief, and to be encouraged by the vision of heaven that is deliberately contrasted with the assembly of Israel before Sinai: 'you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven ...' (Heb. 12:22-23). Finally the book of Revelation plunders the OT for images to describe the Church, culminating in the vision of the city coming down out of heaven from God dressed as a bride adorned for her husband.

The fact that the Church is seen as the people of God throughout the NT and that this is the fundamental truth about the Church can be seen also from the way in which so many of the ways of describing the Church are dependent on it. Paul Minear, who has counted over eighty ways of describing the Church in the NT, says that these titles form 'not so much a technical doctrine as a gallery of pictures'.⁵ But they are not created out of nothing. When the Church is called the temple of God, or the flock of God, or the bride of Christ, this is possible because she is already known to the people of God and the OT images apply to her. The idea of the Church as the Bride, which Paul uses first in [1 Cor. 11:2](#) and in [Eph. 5:22-33](#), and which we have just been reminded appears at the end of Revelation also, has its roots in the OT prophets, especially Hosea and Jeremiah, who spoke of Israel's relation to Yahweh in terms of broken marriage promises. The image of the flock of God, which was used by Jesus ([Luke 12:32](#)) and appears also in Paul's address to the Ephesian elders ([Acts 20:28](#)), as well as [1 Peter 5:1ff](#) is found in both the Psalms ([95:6](#)) and the prophets ([Ezek. 34](#)). When the Church is compared to a temple it is the temple in Jerusalem that is in mind, and when the Church is compared to a city, it is not *any* city (the picture says nothing to our present concern with urban ministry) but to the city of God, Jerusalem. No one doubts that these are metaphorical descriptions of the Church; but the point is that they are OT metaphors arising from and pointing to the fact that the Church is the people of God. p. 9

THE MEANING OF *EKKLESIA*

In the light of this, much of the discussion about the word *ekklesia* seems to me to be beside the point. It has been disputed whether Paul's use of the phrase *ekklesia theou* derives from the OT description of Israel at Sinai as *gahal YHWH*.⁶ It is pointed out that the word 'ekklesia' in Greek had no religious significance as such and referred simply to a meeting or assembly, as it does for example in [Acts 19](#) to the silversmiths' meeting in the theatre at Ephesus. Paul, it is suggested, simply used the regular word for meeting to describe what was happening, with no special thought of the assembly of God's people in the OT. However, it is generally thought that Paul was not the first to use the term *ekklesia* of the Church. The earliest Christians had probably used the Aramaic word *knishta*, which was used to translate the Hebrew *gahal* or *edah* equally. The first Greek speaking Christians would have used the LXX where *gahal* is translated by *ekklesia* but also by *sunagoge*. But *sunagoge* was closed to them as a term for their own meetings because of its use for the weekly Jewish meeting. So even before Paul the term *ekklesia* entered the Church's vocabulary by way of the LXX. Now it is quite true that the link between *gahal YHWH* and *ekklesia theou* is never explicitly made by Paul or anyone else, but in view of the fact that

⁵ P. Minear, *IDB*, pp. 607-17.

⁶ For a summary of the debate see I. H. Marshall, *ExT.* 84, 1972/3, pp. 359-64.

the Church was understood as the people of God, this hardly seems to matter. All it shows is that Christian theology was not created by reflecting on the derivations and association of words alone, and that, as so often, linguistic studies alone will not settle for us what a word must have meant.

The same applies, I suggest, to the attempt by some scholars⁷ to show that Paul never used *ekklesia* to apply to the universal Church on earth, but only to local assemblies of Christians on the one hand and the Church, thought of as gathered in heaven, on the other. Their argument is that the word *ekklesia* always retains its sense of an actual meeting and is not used of the organization that holds the meetings or the people when they are not meeting. The Church Universal on earth never actually assembles, and so what looks like references to this are in fact descriptions of the heavenly reality of the Church gathered about Christ. Paul of course does use *ekklesia* in two ways. It does often indeed refer to a local church or meeting: we read of the 'church p. 10 in Corinth', or 'the church in your house', or to the 'churches in Judea' or 'the churches of Christ'. However, especially in the later letters to the Colossians and Ephesians, *ekklesia* is used in a more general sense: 'he is the head of the body of the church' ([Col. 1:18](#)), 'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' ([Eph. 5:25](#)). This later usage, it is suggested, refers to the Church in heaven, because the Church on earth is never in session, and because it is said that the believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. The first thing to say in reply is that the two usages overlap, in that the local sense is also found in [Col. 4:15](#) and the general sense is found in earlier letters in connection with Paul's having persecuted the church of God (not one congregation surely! [Gal. 1:13](#)). Second, the Church Paul suffers for ([Col. 1:24](#)) is the Church of which he became a servant ([Col. 1:25](#)), and this is surely on earth where the sufferings and the service are. But third, if we are right that Paul saw the Church as the people of God, as the remnant accomplishing God's mission in the world on behalf of all Israel, surely it is inconceivable that he thought of this as going on anywhere but on earth. To argue for this on the sole ground that *ekklesia* always means an actual gathering seems far-fetched. It is surely more likely that *ekklesia* experienced a natural development similar to that of *oikos*. J. H. Elliott writes: 'Both terms, *oikos* and *ekklesia*, originally were employed by Christian missionaries to depict local individual households or public assemblies of believers respectively. In the eventual expansion and consolidation of the Christian movement both terms were also subsequently used in a comprehensive manner to designate the sum total of Christian *oikoi* and *ekklesiai* as constituting the one universal household or assembly of God.'⁸ We should particularly note in this connection [Eph. 3:15](#) where God is spoken of as one from whom '*pasa patria*' in heaven and on earth is named. '*Pasa patria*' should be translated, as in NIV, 'the whole earth family', not 'every family', and it shows that Paul could indeed think of the universal Church on earth as well as in heaven.

So far we have confined ourselves to the Church in the thought of the apostles; but we must ask where Christians came by this conviction that they were the people of God. Surely the most likely answer is that it came from the teaching of Jesus. If we were to limit ourselves to the word *ekklesia* we would conclude that the church was peripheral to the teaching of Jesus, but that would be a mistake. It is true that the word only occurs in two places in the Gospels, both in the Gospel of p. 11 Matthew: once where Jesus says, 'You are Peter and on this rock will I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it' ([16:18](#)), and once when Jesus is teaching about dealing with sin within the fellowship of believers ([18:17](#)). The authenticity of these sayings has often been doubted both

⁷ R. J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, 1980, pp. 43–52; P. T. O'Brien, 'The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Reality' in D. A. Carson (ed.), *The Church in the Bible and the World*, 1987.

⁸ J. H. Elliot, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

because the language has seemed to reflect a later time and because the belief lingers on that Jesus expected the end of the world so soon that there was no room in his thinking for a continuing church. However there is a growing body of opinion willing to defend the sayings as genuine sayings of Jesus,⁹ and while here we cannot go into the whole question of Jesus' expectation, it will be sufficient to refer to Newton Flew's arguments showing that the Church is indisputably central in Jesus' thinking.¹⁰ Jesus after all called twelve disciples, and the number is more significant than the men. The Twelve as individuals were apparently quickly forgotten, but not the fact that there were twelve, or that Jesus had called them a 'little flock' ([Luke 12:32](#)). Jesus began his ministry by identifying with John the Baptist whose baptism called Israelites to begin all over again, and he concluded it by speaking a new covenant and giving his disciples a new passover rite. Moreover he spoke of himself as the Son of Man, a title best explained by reference to the figure who in Daniel represents the saints of the Most High, Israel in fact, vindicated by God after suffering. If Jesus saw his disciples as a new Israel, or as the faithful remnant who would live in the world, love their enemies and proclaim the kingdom in the interval before his return/vindication, then the question of the precise length of the interval is irrelevant. The evidence is that Jesus calls a community into being, and that we have here the source of the apostles' doctrine that the Church is the people of God and a vital part of the gospel message.

So far we have said nothing of Paul's description of the Church as the body of Christ, and yet for many people it has been this, rather than 'the people of God', that has been the essential definition of the Church. Against this I shall argue that it is only a metaphor, or rather two metaphors, that it is never used by Paul to *define* the Church, and that if we treat it as more than a metaphor, cutting it loose from the purposes for which Paul employed it and drawing conclusions he did not draw, then we get into trouble. But first we must see how Paul actually uses the phrase 'the body of Christ'. It occurs first in [Rom. 12:4-5](#): [p. 12](#)

As in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.

The idea occurs again in [1 Cor. 10:17](#) and receives extended treatment in [1 Cor. 12:12-27](#). In all three places the purpose of the comparison is to stress the interdependence of members and to promote the unity of the Church. Christians are one body, and a comparison with the human body is that each member has a service to perform that only he can do and all the others need. It is because we are in Christ and his Spirit is in us ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)) that we are so related to each other. Christ has created this situation and maintained it by his grace, but he is so to speak outside the metaphor at this stage. We are one body, his body, because we are in him, but it is not literally or ontologically his body, as if different members claim to be the eyes or ears of Christ. It is about what we are to each other, not what we are to Christ.

In Colossians the metaphor is developed and used differently. Christ is the head of the Church, his body ([Col. 1:18, 24](#)), and Christian growth depends on holding fast to him as head ([Col. 2:19](#)). The thought here is that Christ is supreme over all and is the source of all life. The metaphor is developed in the service of showing that Christians do not need

⁹ By G. Maier, 'The Church in the Gospel of Matthew' in D. A. Carson (ed.), *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, 1984.

¹⁰ R. Newton Flew, *Jesus and His Church*, 1938.

any other mediator, any other wisdom, in order to experience fullness of life. They have Christ in them, and that is enough. In Ephesians both the earlier and later use of the metaphor come together. The supremacy of Christ and the Church's security in him are the climax of the opening chapter ([Eph. 1:22-3](#)), and it is further said in the marriage passage that Christ nourishes and cherishes the church as a man his own body ([Eph. 5:29-30](#)). In both passages Paul appears to be referring in familiar terms to the church, not stating a new doctrine, and in both places the main point is how the Church benefits from Christ. Then in [Eph. 4:1-16](#) the idea of unity in diversity appears; since Christ is now the head, believers are no longer said to be parts of the body but only to be gifts whereby the whole Church can grow up to maturity in Christ.

TWO METAPHORS

From this brief survey we can see that in fact we have two distinct metaphors: the body and its members (Romans and Corinthians), and the head and its body (Colossians and Ephesians). The first teaches the unity of believers, and the second the sufficiency and love of Christ. **p. 13** This cannot easily be combined into one picture or doctrine of the Church. In particular we should notice what Paul does not say. He does not say that we are Christ's body in the sense that it is through us he does his work in the world,¹¹ although it seems to us a natural extension of the metaphor: he dwells in us by his Spirit, we do his work in the world. But Paul never uses 'body language' to relate Christ to the world, only to relate believers to one another or believers to Christ.

To take this further step is to open the door to all sorts of false ideas, such as that Christ is limited by his Church (whereas Paul is actually teaching the unlimited power of Christ in [Eph. 1](#)). To say, for example, that the Church is the 'extension of the incarnation' is to dissolve the essential difference between Christ and the Church by virtue of which he can be our Saviour ([Eph. 5:23](#)). If we say that 'his body' is more than a metaphor, that the Church really is the Body of Christ, then since the man's body is himself, and where it goes he goes, we end up with the absurdity that Christ saved himself. Paul can avoid this only because he never thinks of it as anything but a metaphor of strictly limited application. Similarly he can raise the appalling thought that a Christian can take the members of Christ and join them to a prostitute ([1 Cor. 6:15](#)), but as a *reductio ad absurdum*, not as a literal possibility. The problem, by contrast, with the 'extension of incarnation' approach is that it becomes impossible for us to take seriously the possibility that the Church should ever sin, for example by unbelief. The church loses the precious ability to be self-critical. An example where this kind of thinking can take us occurred only recently. The Archbishop of Canterbury was attending the national assembly of evangelicals in the Church of England. He congratulated them on their growth and the contribution they had made to the life of the church over the last generation, but appealed to them to give more explicit attention to ecclesiology. 'The church', he said, 'is not just a useful shorthand term for the community of the faithful. If it truly is the Body of Christ, the Church too demands our belief, trust and faith.'¹² We are left wondering in what sense are we to trust the Church too. If all he meant was that we should show more regard for one another, not only in the local congregation but in the wider councils of the Church, not only to those of our own tradition but to those of other traditions, there are surely less dangerous ways of saying it. **p. 14**

¹¹ P. T. O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 111-113.

¹² *Church Times*, London, May 6th, 1988.

There are good grounds, then, to see ‘the people of God’ rather than ‘the body of Christ’ as the basic definition of the Church in Scripture, while rejoicing in all that the body idea so finely expresses. ‘The people of God’ is far more widespread in the NT. Unlike other ways of speaking of the Church, which each make their point and no more, this is the truth on which the various metaphors build. It is fully personal and readily comprehensible. It defines us in terms of our salvation, since we are those who have entered into a covenant with God through Christ, and in terms of our purpose, since God chooses to use his people to bring the whole world back to himself. It makes plain that to be a Christian is not to be saved in isolation. It is a term that can express both the Church in its local manifestation, the worldwide Church and the whole sweep of God’s purpose from its beginnings with Abraham to the consummation of it all in heaven.

The Church then is the people of God and as such is central to the purpose of God in both OT and NT. The importance of the church in Jesus’ ministry can be seen not by counting the number of times he used particular words, but by the place given to the disciples. Their call is not an afterthought. In Mark it is the first event after the programmatic announcement of the kingdom in Jesus’ preaching. Before a single healing takes place, or any teaching, some disciples are called. They continue to figure prominently in the gospel record. In the same way the result of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost is the emergence of a community. The final vision of the Bible is not (as we might have expected) the coming of Christ, but by the coming of the city, his Bride. But what can we say of the form the Church takes while on earth—what are sometimes called the structures of the Church? Structures there must be, since the Church lives in the world, but here we encounter a paradox. If the Church in the NT everywhere occupies a central place, her structures are only casually referred to. Towards the end of the 1st century Clement of Rome wrote:

Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the same name of the bishop’s office. For this cause therefore, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons, and afterwards they provided a continuance, that if these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministration. (1 Clement 44:1–2), Lightfoot’s translation).

Despite this it is plain that Clement is indulging in a good deal of wishful thinking, and that in fact he has to write as he does precisely because the apostles provided no such thing! When we examine the NT we find very little in the way of clear directions about the organization or order of the Church. Jesus himself established no hierarchy [p. 15](#) and permitted no titles ([Matt. 23:8–11](#)). His disciplinary teaching ([Matt. 18:15–20](#)) envisages no officers. During his ministry he practiced no ceremonial initiation, apparently discontinuing the practice of baptism taken over from John ([John 4:2](#)) and only restoring it to the church before his ascension ([Matt. 28:19](#)). He established no liturgy beyond the prayer with which all might draw near to God as children and brothers, and the meal that (in continuity with his own practice of eating with sinners) declared a new covenant. He gave his community no rule but the rule of love, and no task but the task of proclaiming the forgiveness of God. The ambivalence concerning the church which we find in the rest of the NT, both the importance of the community and its unimportance can be traced back point for point to the teaching of Jesus himself; and this ambiguity is carried forward from Jesus into the Acts and letters of the apostles.

ACTS AND LEADERSHIP

To take the witness of Acts first, and accepting that Acts was written by Luke the companion of Paul at a date nearer to 60 AD than to 90 AD, and that Luke knew what he was talking about (all of which I gladly affirm), what does Luke want to tell us about the Church? About the kind of life it should aspire to, he is clear ([Acts 2:42-7](#), [4:32-4](#), [9:31](#), etc.): unity, prayerfulness, generosity, joy are clearly set before us as a model. That the church lives by the power and initiative of the Spirit is clear. That the preaching of the gospel leads to the establishment of Churches, and that these churches are precious and important ([Acts 20:28](#)); that is explicit. Nor is Luke silent about the leaders the church has, any more than he is unaware of the magistrates different Greek cities had, but while we have to respect his accuracy in the latter case we do not read Acts as a text-book on secular government, and it will serve us no better on ecclesiastical government! In Jerusalem we learn of apostles, then of the Seven, and later of the elders and of James apparently in overall leadership; but what the relationship of these different offices is—whether, for example, as has been argued,¹³ the appointment of the Seven is really the origin of the eldership rather than, as has traditionally been maintained, of the diaconate—no one can say for certain. Moving on we learn that in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, and of the call and commission of **P. 16** some of their number to be missionaries, who themselves appointed elders in every church ([Acts 13:1-2](#), [14:23](#)). Elders then appear again at Ephesus, and they are said to have been made ‘overseers’ by the Holy Spirit ([Acts 20:28](#)). Now accepting the truth of all that Luke says, and believing that there is no fundamental disagreement with what Paul says in his letters (especially if we take seriously the witness of the Pastoral Epistles), and remembering that we are concerned with ‘essential aspects of the Church in *Scripture*’ with some reconstruction derived from setting one biblical writer against another—having said all that I think we will have to admit that Luke gives us no water-tight prescription for the Church’s order and that this must be because he did not think it necessary to do so. If he tells us anything it is that God can be trusted to give the Church the leaders that it needs. If we were going to find an ecology anywhere it would be the speech of Paul to the Ephesian elders, but to quote C. K. Barrett: ‘It was the Holy Spirit who appointed (*etheto*) them; not the churches, not Paul. It is a consequence of this that the speech makes no provision for the appointment of new ministers; the presbyters are not told that they must ordain successors, for the good reason that the Holy Spirit that appointed them can be trusted to produce more when more are needed.’¹⁴

In this speech, as in the Pastoral Epistles, the only ‘apostolic succession’ Paul knows is the passing on of the apostolic message. Before we leave Luke it will be good to notice what else he doesn’t tell us: he doesn’t tell us that the elders are paid or full-time; he doesn’t tell us what they do; and he says nothing whatever about sacrament with regard to them.

We have seen that Paul is the great theologian of the Church, but when it comes to the structures of organization of the Church, he has less to tell us than we might think. There is, of course, always the unmistakable leadership and authority of the apostle himself, but his authority did not lie in an office so much as in his historic relationship with the churches he had founded. He speaks of colleagues variously as ‘brothers’, ‘servants’ and ‘fellow-workers’, associating himself with them in a way that claims no special rank for himself. There is a marked reluctance to accord titles to those who lead in the churches. In Thessalonica they are called ‘those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord’,

¹³ A. Farrer, ‘The New Ministry in the NT’ in K. Kirk, *The Apostolic Ministry*, 1946, p. 133ff.

¹⁴ C. K. Barrett, *Church, Ministry and the Sacraments in the NT*, 1985, p. 52-3.

at Corinth the equivalent people are described as ‘those who have devoted themselves to the service of the saints’, and their relationship to the ‘first apostles, second prophets, third p. 17 teachers’ in [1 Cor. 12:28](#) is nowhere made plain. In Galatians there is a reference to ‘him who teaches’, in Rome to *ho prohistamenos* (probably meaning one whose gift is leading); in Philippi there is a greeting for ‘the overseers and servants’; Ephesians knows that Christ has given ‘some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers’, but how they are supposed to relate to one another in a local church, or in the wider Church, no one can be sure.

Nor is there any greater advance if we turn to the Pastoral Epistles. The leaders are variously called ‘overseers’ and ‘servants’ as in Philippi, and ‘elders’ as in Acts. These leaders have more prominence, because the letters are about their appointment and discipline, and are written to ‘fellow-workers’ of Paul to that purpose, but nothing is said to suggest that they have become priests or clergy. Reference to laying on of hands, whether *on* Timothy or *by* him, by no means proves that later ideas of ordination are present; and once again nothing is said about sacraments. The only clear task of leaders is teaching and preaching.

Whether we turn to the (probably) earlier or (probably) later letters of Paul two things are clear. First, there were always leaders. It was never the case that leadership was simply left to the impulse of the Spirit. There is accordingly no need to see the presence of elders as incompatible with the recognition of *charismata*; or to doubt that on the one hand leadership naturally lay with older people, or those converted first, or those in whose houses the church met; nor on the other hand that not all such people proved to have useful gifts, nor were the gifts found among such people alone. Secondly, while recognizing those who led, Paul did nothing to magnify their position or reserve any cultic or sacramental function to them. Finally, even in the Pastorals their presence and role is assumed; it is never argued for, and in no letter of Paul is space devoted to drawing up anything like a constitution of the Church or defining the ministry of the leader in terms of anything more specific or exalted than ‘labour’.

If this is all we learn from Paul and the Acts about the ministry of the Church, the remaining letters of the NT do not add greatly to the picture. Peter knows of elders who shepherd the flock and to whom younger members (or are they younger *leaders*, deacons in fact?) should be subject. James knows of elders who anoint with oil in the name of the Lord, but confession of sins is significantly ‘to one another’ and not to an elder. John introduces himself as ‘the Elder’ in his second and third letter, and speculation has raged around the pre-eminence beloved of Diotrefes, but otherwise neither the epistles nor the Fourth Gospel show any interest in church organization or leadership p. 18 at all. Finally Hebrews enjoins obedience to leaders who ‘keep watch over your souls’, but is otherwise notable for its exposition of the high priesthood of Jesus which explains why the Church has no other priests and offers no sacrifices for sins.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

What is the proper conclusion to draw from facts such as these? One possibility is that the different NT writers merely reflect the diversity of patterns of leadership in the NT church, that they cannot and should not be harmonized and that there is no more to be said. Another is that they are evidence of a historical development within the Church during the 1st. century, and that with care we can reconstruct the stages of its evolution. A third possibility is that all the details can be fitted together to form a pattern which can be called ‘the order of the church according to the NT’. I would not dismiss this out of hand. Differences between what can be learnt from Paul and Acts, between ‘acknowledged

Paulines' and the Pastorals, have been greatly exaggerated. I am willing to believe that the details preserved for us are historically correct and mutually consistent, but I would ask, *even if they are, what does that mean?*

For surely the clearest thing to emerge from our brief survey is that none of the NT writers thought it important to tell us more than they have, and that what they have told us falls a long way short of providing the sort of information that we would need to speak with confidence of a NT church order. All of them assume rather than prescribe patterns of government and organization. All of them leave large gaps in our knowledge which we can attempt to fill in with some detective work; but even if we succeed to everyone's satisfaction, would we then have the mind of the Spirit for his Church in every age? Would the result of our ingenuity in fact be *theology* as opposed to ancient history? If we could the silences of Scripture to be as inspired as its pronouncements, we have reason to doubt it.

God has chosen to reveal himself to the world through a people. He might conceivably have chosen to do so through a Book (as Islam for example holds that he did), or through an elite corps of angels, or priests, or prophets; but God actually chose to work through a nation. In the same way Jesus left behind no body of writings, no system of doctrine, no blueprint for an organization: instead he called a community into being and entrusted his mission to a group of ordinary people. The significance of this should not be missed when we ask what is the essential purpose of the Church. The first purpose of the [p. 19](#) Church is to be together, to meet, to belong, to love one another. John Taylor wrote:

Like a peal of bells the word *allelon*—'one another'—rings through the pages of the New Testament. 'Accept one another'-*allelon*, 'serve one another'—*allelon*, 'wash one another's feet', 'confess your sins to one another and pray for one another', 'forbearing one another and forgiving each other', 'teaching and admonishing one another', 'comfort one another and build each other up', 'bear one another's burdens', 'love one another as I have loved you'.¹⁵

So the Spirit falls on the disciples when they are all together in one place, and the result of his coming is new community. However the church does not exist for itself, to promote a sense of community for its own sake. The second and no less important purpose of the Church is to be God's witnesses. The two main contentions of this paper so far come together here. If the Church is the people of God in continuity with Israel, then it follows that its purpose is to witness; and if the purpose of the Church is to witness, then we see why so little is said of structures. A concern with structures and offices belongs to an organization that is more concerned with preservation than with proclamation, more concerned with itself than with the world. A concern with offering worship as an activity in itself leads to that worship being seen as the essential activity of such a Church, and those appointed to offer the worship come to be seen as the essential core of the Church. It is quite otherwise in the NT. In the first place, the essential task of the Church in the NT is witness; in the second, cultic language is used not of any liturgical activity of the church but of its preaching in the world; for, third, this witness is the work of the whole Church of the people of God as a people together.

That the essential activity of the Church is witness and proclamation can be seen in every part of the NT. This was Jesus' stated purpose in calling the disciples ([Mark 1:17](#)). The theme is continued in the mission discourse of Jesus ([Mark 6:7ff.](#) and parallels). The gospel is to be preached to the whole world ([Mark 13:10, 14:9](#)). This is the heart of the Great Commission with which the Gospels end ([Matt. 28:18–20, Luke 24:21](#)). The Father

¹⁵ J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, 1972, p. 126.

sent the Son into the world to bear witness to the truth (18:37), and Jesus has earlier said that the disciples are to bear witness along with the Holy Spirit (15:27). Witness is a key word in Acts also. The apostles are constituted witnesses by the coming of the Holy Spirit (1:8), and that is how they speak of their ministry (2:32, p. 20 3:15, 5:32). Witness is likewise the purpose for which Paul is called (20:24, 2:15, 23:11, 26:22). Paul himself does not use the word 'witness' so much as 'apostle', one who is sent to preach. This is his *ergon* and that of his team, his *sunergoi*. This is his obligation to all men (Rom. 1:14), beside which administering baptism is a very small matter (1 Cor. 1:17) but it is not a task reserved for him. The aim of his ministry is to generate other witnesses who will 'shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of Life' (Phil. 2:15-16). As we saw in Ephesians, the Church is founded on the apostles and the prophets, which means that it must always be an apostolic and prophetic Church, conscious of being sent to proclaim. Its task is to declare the wisdom of God to the principalities and powers (3:10) and this is its spiritual warfare (6:12) for which its only armour is the gospel and its only weapon is the word of God. The gifts of Christ to his Church are the characteristics of his own ministry: he is our Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher, these ministries are his before they are ours, and the Church continues them through his Spirit. They are all significantly ministries of the word. Even in the Pastoral Epistles, which are so often said to reflect a Church that is settling down and becoming concerned with preaching the gospel as preservation, there is a steady concern with preaching the gospel as the purpose of Christ's coming and of the Church's existence (1 Tim 1:15, 2:5-6, 4:10). And the underlying concern of its various practical admonitions is that nothing should hinder the gospel's progress in that world (1 Tim 3:7, 5:8, 6:1). As the household of God the Church is 'the pillar and bulwark of the truth'. Leaving Paul, we have seen that Peter has the same vision: the Church is 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, *that you may declare the praise of him who called you out of darkness into his glorious light*' (2:9-10). This last passage is apparently a reference to [Isaiah 43:21](#) (LXX) and reminds us that the theme of witness provides the link between the people of God in the OT and in the NT. Isaiah sees Israel, or the righteous remnant, the true Israel, as called to be a light to the nations (49:6). 'You are my witnesses,' says the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen' (43:10). At his baptism and in the synagogue at Nazareth we see Jesus stepping into this role, and so through Jesus the task of witness passes to his Church.

THE ONLY AGENDA

That proclamation is the essential task of the Church can be seen not only from its prominence throughout the NT, but negatively by the p. 21 absence of any other agenda. I do not mean that the Church's task is limited to speaking words, for Jesus declared the Kingdom of God in word and deed and so should we. The gospel is proclaimed by the life of the Church and by its works of kindness, as well as by the explicit preaching of the message, but what is missing from all the NT documents is any interest in the correct performance of worship, or the proper qualifications of those who are to make it happen. This is very striking against the background of 1st. century religion, at the heart of which was the offering of sacrifice, by the right people, in the right place, at the right time. None of this finds a place in the NT, where the only priest for Christians is Jesus, where sacrificial language is not of cultic activity but of the work of preaching the gospel (2 Cor. 2:14-6),

[Phil. 2:17](#)). To put it another way, what is missing in the NT is any idea of the 'religious specialist'. John Howard Yoder has written:¹⁶

There are few more reliable constants running through all human society than the special place every human community makes for the professional religionist. We may consult comparative religion, anthropology, sociology, or psychology.... The report is always the same. Every society, every religion, even the pluralistic and 'secular' civilization makes a place for the religionist.

He goes on to show that while there may be differences about how this person qualifies and what exactly he does, everywhere he does have to become qualified and there is something he alone does. It is his presence that is the presence of the Church, and society no less than the Church accords him an honoured place. Yoder continues:

If we come to the NT with this 'professional religionist' view of ministry, asking, 'What is said on this subject?' then we can add together something which Paul said about himself as apostle, some thing he wrote to Timothy and Titus about themselves, some other things he wrote to them about bishops and deacons, some things Acts reports about the leaders in Jerusalem and Antioch, salt the mixture with some reminiscences from the OT and come up with a quite impressive package as the 'Biblical View of Ministry'. But if we ask whether any of the NT literature makes the assumptions listed above:

Is there one particular office
in which there should be only one or few individuals
for whom it provides a livelihood
unique in character due to ordination [p. 22](#)
central to the definition of the church
and the key to her functioning?

then the answer from the biblical material is a resounding negation.¹⁷

It is not surprising that the early Christians appeared to some of their contemporaries to be atheists; they simply didn't do the things that religious people do! J. B. Lightfoot was not far off the mark when he wrote, 'The Christian Ideal is a holy season extending the whole year round, a temple confined only by the limits of the habitable world, a priesthood co-extensive with the human race'.¹⁸ Such an ideal means that the church, like John the Baptist, preaches her Lord's priesthood and not her own, content like him to be 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"' ([John 1:23](#)). It means that the church in every age must ask itself whether it has really faced the challenge of Stephen to its tendency to settle down and even trust in what God has not commanded: 'Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord?' ([Acts 7:48-49](#)). [p. 23](#)

¹⁶ J. H. Yoder, *The Fullness of Christ*, Concern No. 17, 1969, p. 33.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

¹⁸ J. B. Lightfoot, *Epistles of Paul: Philippians*, 1878, pp. 183-4.

The Free or Gathered Church

Alfred Kuen

Printed with permission

How do confessing churches, whose members have all made a profession of faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, justify their position?

First of all, on the conviction that Scripture is the only norm for Christian people, both for the constitution and the organization of the Church as well as for the salvation and the life of the individual.

According to the first Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*, Luther rightly said: 'Primitive Christianity is alone the true Church.'¹ Zwingli and Calvin affirmed similarly: 'In perfect agreement with the Fathers of the Church, all the Reformation confessions proclaimed Scripture as the "supreme authority in matters of faith and life" after which "all things must be examined, regulated and reformed"'.²

That the model of the Church presented in the NT is that of a confessing church is seen:

1) *In the names that are given to members:* 'those who believed' ([Acts 2:44](#)), 'the disciples' ([6:29](#), [1, 26](#); [11:26](#) ...), 'the saints' ([2 Cor. 1:1](#); [13:12](#); [Eph. 4:12](#)), 'the faithful, the elect and the beloved of God' ([Col. 3:12](#); [2 Thess. 2:13](#); [Rom. 1:7](#); [2 Peter 3:1, 8](#)). These titles are in opposition to those such as 'children of wrath' ([Eph. 2:3](#)), 'sons of rebellion' ([Eph. 2:2](#); [5:6](#)), 'strangers and enemies' ([Col. 1:21](#)), characterizing those who are outside the church. These names are to be found in the addresses as well as in the contents of the letters.

2) *From the details that the epistles give us concerning the spiritual state of the churches to which they are addressed:* these are men and women who have experienced a decisive crisis which has separated their lives into two parts, *before* and *now*.

Before they were 'slaves of sin', 'dead by their trespasses and sins', 'without hope and without God in the world', 'strangers', 'disobedient', 'enemies [of God]', 'people from outside'.

Now they are 'delivered from sin' and 'having become slaves of God', 'brought to life with Christ', 'washed, justified, sanctified', 'brought near', 'saved', 'fellow-citizens with the saints', 'people of the household of God' ([Rom. 6:20-22](#); [Eph. 2:1-6, 13](#); [Col. 1:21-22](#); [2:13](#); [Titus 3:3-5](#)).

Their experience of conversion has separated them from those who are outside the church and to whom the apostles set them in [p. 24](#) opposition, namely the 'heathen, the unfaithful, those who are nonbelievers, strangers to the life of God who are perishing'; but members of the church are told, 'You must not walk like them', 'Do not have any part with them', 'Come out from among them and be separate' ([Eph. 4:17-20](#); [5:7](#), cf. [1 Thess. 4:5](#); [2 Thess. 1:8](#); [2 Cor. 6:14-17](#)). For all the members of these churches, the new birth is a thing of the past, salvation a present reality. That is why we do not find any appeal to conversion in the epistles, but rather exhortations to progress in the faith.

3) *From baptismal practice in the primitive Church.* All members of the churches were baptised ([Rom. 6:3, 11](#); [1 Cor. 1:13](#); [12:13](#); [Gal. 3:27](#); [Col. 2:11-12](#)); therefore baptism was only given to believers: 'those who accepted the word were baptised'; 'when they had

¹ Vom Papstum zu Rom, 1520.

² Confession of Faith of the Reformed Churches of France, 1559.

believed they were baptised' ([Acts 2:41](#); [8:12–13](#); [18:8](#)). Therefore the churches consisted only of members who had confessed their faith at the moment of their baptism.

4) *From the practice of Holy Communion in the primitive Church.* The apostle Paul writes: 'We who are many, we are one Body, for we all share in the same loaf' ([1 Cor. 10:17](#)). All the members of the Church share in the Lord's Supper ([1 Cor. 11:27–28](#)); they all belong to the Body of Christ.

5) *From the exercise of discipline in the primitive churches:* the believer who did not live in conformity with the teachings of Christ ([Matt. 18:15–17](#)); [2 Thess. 3:614–15](#)) or who did not persevere in the faith transmitted to the saints ([Rom. 16:17](#); [Gal. 1:8–9](#); [2 Tim. 3:6–9](#); [Titus 3:10–11](#); [2 John 7, 11](#)) was excluded from the Church. How much more reason is there not to accept as a member someone who has not yet accepted this doctrine or resolved to live according to the norms of the Christian life ([1 Cor. 1:10](#); [10:17](#); [Eph. 4:3](#); [Phil. 2:2](#); [3:15](#)).

6) *The appeals to unity* in the Church together with the exhortation to separate oneself from unbelievers and false believers ([1 Cor. 5:11–13](#), [15:13](#); [2 Cor. 6:14–18](#); [Eph. 5:5–7](#)) show that the Church was homogeneous in its composition.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES

These six points give us a coherent picture of the primitive churches: their members had all passed through the *new birth*, by means of which they became *believers* and disciples of Christ, children of God. They bore witness to this by *baptism*, by means of which they became members of the local Body of Christ; which they express by **P. 25** participating in the *Lord's Supper* and by submitting themselves to the brotherly *discipline* of the Church. Thus they remain united to each other while at the same time being separated from the world.

Does that mean that there were never any false believers in these churches? Certainly there were ([Acts 8:13, 21](#)) but if this did happen it was by mistake and contrary to the norms that had been fixed. This is the great difference from the 'multitude churches' where believers and unbelievers are members by principle. In the same way this did not mean that church meetings were closed: [1 Cor. 14:23, 24](#) says clearly that 'an unbeliever or a man of the people' could come in to 'an assembly of the whole church' but he was clearly recognized, loved and addressed as such, without giving him the impression that he already was that which people hoped he would become.

This composition of the primitive Church is confirmed:

1) *By the name adopted for the Christian gatherings:* *ekklesia*, lit. 'called out group'; that is to say, in Greece, the assembly of citizens who separate themselves from the sum of the population (*ek*) at the summons of a herald (*klesia*, passive of *kaleo*, 'I call') in order to deal with the affairs of their city.

2) *By the titles used for the Church in the NT:* kingdom, flock, building, spouse, body—which show a certain identity of the members with each other as well as a living relationship with Christ.

3) *By the two occasions in the Gospels in which the Church is mentioned:* the first is linked with a profession of faith ('You are the Christ, the Son of the living God', [Matt. 16:18](#)), the second opposes the Church to the heathen and the publicans ([Matt. 18:17](#)). The Church is therefore the assembly of those who confess that Jesus is the Christ, and agree to submit their lives to brotherly discipline.

4) *By the importance of conversion and the new birth in the teaching of Jesus* and the disciples. This is the most important event in the life of each person, the beginning of the Christian life. If one can become a member of the Church, converted or not, it implies that

belonging to the church is more important than conversion. That is the teaching of the Church of Rome ('outside the Church there is no salvation') but Jesus said, 'If you are not born again you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven' ([John 3:3](#)). Conversion therefore must precede entry into the Church.

ADVANTAGES OF THE CONFESSING CHURCH

The confessing Church has a certain number of advantages over the multitudinist Church:
P. 26

a) It is in accordance with God's plan. Under the former covenant, God said to Moses: 'Make sure you build everything according to the pattern that was shown you' ([Heb. 8:5](#)), with regard to the tabernacle. He gave also a certain number of instructions concerning the 'house of God' ([1 Tim. 3:15](#)) of the new covenant, 'the pillar and foundation of the truth'. History has proved that this divine pattern was suitable for all time and for all places, that it has adapted itself to the most varied of situations, resisted persecution and offered the best possibilities of a fulfilled spiritual life.

From this basic advantage arise a certain number of others. The confessing Church enables the Church to realise her calling better than the multitudinist Church in regard to:

Worship. Those who have been redeemed in order to serve 'to the praise of the glory' of God and who have believed in Christ ([Eph. 1:12-14](#)) are alone desirous and capable of offering God worship that is pleasing to him. To worship him in 'spirit and in truth' ([John 4:23](#)) and to worship him 'by the spirit of God' ([Phil. 3:3](#)) one must be born of the Spirit ([John 3:6](#)).

The growth of Christians. The ministry of the Word may concentrate on teaching, edification and exhortation of believers; other ministries can be exercised 'for the perfection of the saints' ([Eph. 4:12](#)), 'so that they become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ' (v. [13](#)).

Fellowship. The exhortations to 'love one another', 'build each other up', 'instruct each other', 'console each other', 'watch over each other', 'take care of each other', identify *nature* and *aim*. A relationship as intimate as that indicated by the word 'Koinonia' is only possible between those who have 'participated in the divine nature' ([2 Peter 1:4](#)).

The priesthood of all believers can be better realised in the fellowship of believers. 'The priestly character of believers has its foundation in the new birth and in faith' (M. Jacob, *Die evangelische Lehre von der Kirche*, Lueneberg 1962, p. 430). Every believer has received a gift of the Spirit 'for the common good' ([1 Cor. 12:7](#), [Eph. 4:7](#)). The confessing Church functioning on the principle of the Body can validate these gifts by conferring a service upon each one of her members. Edmond de Pressense maintained that the multitudinist Church easily became a priestly and clerical Church, for it nullified the priesthood of all believers (*Discours Religieux*, 1859, p. 35); its consequent practice would render visible within the church the distinction between Christians and non-Christians. **p.**

27

Evangelism and mission. These are placed in a better perspective in the confessing Church. Evangelicals in multitudinist churches often see their church as their mission field. But how do you evangelize those who already consider themselves Christians? How do you bring them together after their conversion without breaking the principle of unity in the Church? It is much simpler in the confessing Church. Those who belong to Christ want to share their faith and privileges with those who do not yet know them, whether the people are near to them (evangelization), or far away (mission). They expect that, just as in the first days, 'the Lord will add to the church those who are being saved' ([Acts. 2:47](#)).

The attitude to the state. During the centuries of Christendom, the church has aroused a number of equivocal situations. Her alliances with the state, and the abuses that have resulted, have turned away from her many sincere people and have fed many of her adversaries with their arguments against Christianity. The confessing churches have

always been free churches, independent of the state, as were the churches of the first three centuries.

b) Confessing churches remain evangelical more easily. The multitudinous churches, inheritors of the national churches, have maintained some of their characteristics: training of pastors in 'official faculties' where the professors are chosen basically with respect to their intellectual competence; nomination of pastors on the basis of their degrees' as well as social and political considerations, and consequently doctrinal vigilance with regard to church members is reduced or does not exist. Mature Christians here are in a minority. The consequence is an official 'pluralist' theology, in practice liberal, which has removed from the faith proclaimed in the church all belief in the supernatural, in revelation, in scriptural inerrancy and in the authenticity of the biblical writings,—sometimes even in the divinity, the resurrection and the return of Christ. A church composed of Christians who personally have confessed their faith in Jesus Christ can better watch over the maintenance of 'sound teaching' among her leaders and members. Most of the confessing churches of Europe are evangelical churches affirming the supreme authority of the Word of God.

c) The freedom to follow one's convictions is more effective. The official churches who wish to be pluralist in theology are very concerned for unity and continuity with the past with regard to their practice: sacraments, ministry, pastoral activity. Since the 16th. century Christians have rediscovered a certain number of aspects of [p. 28](#) the church-life of the first Christians: baptism of believers; holy communion restricted to those who confess a personal faith in Jesus Christ; free participation of all Christians in the Sunday worship according to their gifts. At the same time, they question a certain number of practices in the major churches: confirmation, religious marriage for non-Christians, monopoly of the clergy in religious matters, participation of non-Christians in church councils. The confessing churches enable each person to follow his own convictions in these areas.

d) The confessing churches can better realise Christian unity according to the Bible. The major historic churches concentrate the main part of their efforts on the realization of an organized unity between 'all baptised people' and between all denominations. The confessing churches believe in the unity of Christians as Jesus defined it ([John 17](#)) and as the apostles stressed it in their epistles: the unity of the true children of God. That is Why they are somewhat reticent with regard to ecumenical movements, and attempts at drawing near to Rome, where it is desired to organize unity between 'those who believe, those who do not yet believe and those who no longer believe'. The confessing churches are also divided, no doubt. But in these recent times, there are more and more common enterprises and occasions of working together, manifesting more clearly the essential unity of all the children of God. The confession of faith required of all members on the occasion of their entry into the church facilitates these approaches.

During the first three centuries, the churches remained confessing churches. They became multitudinist, in fact, only in the 4th. century, when Christianity became the religion of the Empire. The faithful churches in the Middle Ages (the Priscillians, Paulicians, Bogomils, Vaudois) were organized on the principle of confessing churches. The Reformers discerned the true character of the church (as for example the 'Deutsche Messe' of Luther) but the political circumstances of their time did not permit them to realize their vision at this point. Their successors, more concerned to keep their work intact than to 'pursue that which is lacking' (Calvin) have remained in the framework of the Constantinian 'corpus christianum'. Although it did not correspond to the original plan of God—like the kingdom in the old covenant—it has borne nevertheless, by the grace of

God, positive fruit in previous centuries. But today we are living in a post-Christian era, in a context that is more and more similar to that which was in the first century.

We do however note that there is everywhere a movement of the multitudinist churches towards the style of confessing churches which, [p. 29](#) at present represent 'numerically the largest group within Protestantism' (E. Brunner). Theology, the messenger and interpreter of the *logos theou* can hasten an evolution that is certainly in accordance with God's plan. [p. 30](#)

Bucer: National and Confessing Church

Neil Britton

Printed with permission

I do not think that most Evangelicals would support the idea of a national church where converts could not together pray and study the Bible, witness and serve the Lord in his Church and in the world. The question is rather whether a truly biblical faith can be lived out in a national church. In this regard, we can study with benefit the ecclesiology of one of the Reformers who sought during his ministry to combine the idea of a national *and* a confessing church; namely Martin Bucer of Strasbourg, whose ministry lasted there from 1521 to 1549 (he died in 1551).

His ecclesiology requires structures that are *at the same time* national and confessing. In Strasbourg, the Reformation had handed the Church over to the city from the hands of the bishop, while at the same time integrating the civil authorities into ecclesiastical responsibilities.

The national church came into being in Strasbourg. It is here that Bucer sought to put into practice his vision of the church, re-working the medieval concept of the 'corpus christianum', applying it first of all to the tangible, daily reality, capable of being observed in everyday life. It is also here that the ministry of the Church was realized, namely teaching, pastoring and the diaconate, from which the true church community takes root. It includes all those who are baptised (including children, because for Bucer their baptism is paralleled in the OT, with circumcision being the symbol of belonging to the people of God). Within this territory there is:

a) the school, promoting and consolidating the Reformation and organizing a renewed church, Bucer required each believer to have the possibility of learning during his youth Hebrew and Greek in order to read Scripture in its original tongue, to allow the Holy Spirit to speak rather than to promote the teaching of the ancient languages. The school was first of all a training in church life before being a training in the reading of literature, the study of science and the practice of art. It was not the Church but a training ground for membership in the Church. [p. 31](#)

b) The parish. This became under Bucer the community where the ministry of each individual believer was exercised, and the corner stone of the National Church structure. It was the normal cell in the 'multitudinist' system in which all the baptised were to be found. As every citizen was a member of a family or guild, so every baptised person was a member of a parish, where the teaching of doctrine, exhortation, discipline and the

hearing of the Word took place. It was the primary community, where teaching took place during the liturgy, the catechism of children and young people. Like Luther Bucer recognised the importance of singing and its potential for teaching. However the parish was not the only place where the Christian faith was taught, since for Bucer it could not be a confessing community. These other places were to be situated not outside the parish but inside it and yet distinct from it.

Confessing communities (Gemeinschaften) were therefore necessary: one such was the family, a 'little community', where education and edification could take place. The parish structure being too large, Bucer argued, and the National Church gathering being insufficient for the nature of true Christians, the teaching of doctrine being impossible to limit to Sunday worship, the possibility must be offered for each member of the parish 'to decide once and for all if he wants to live as a "Christian" '. This nurture was offered in these *Gemeinschaften* (referred to henceforth as 'house groups'). The Church, according to Bucer, 'will not be happy to hear the Word of God preached because it is not the hearers but the doers who will be saved'. For these doers other places are required, not just the parish but a gathering of more limited members, *privata collegia*; these are indispensable to the life of the Church. His conception of the church is therefore a *corpus mixture* open to all, and at the same time a 'communio sanctorum' of those who confess 'truly the Christ, and who are a minority of mature, spiritual, solid Christians, growing up in the multitudinist field (*Volkskirche*) and justifying the existence of the latter'. Discipline and excommunication was to be exercised only in the context of the house groups, a proposal that from the outset caused concern to the civil authorities as well as to many pastors, who divided themselves into two camps, those for and those against. (This was one of the reasons that provoked the exile of Bucer in England and the failure of the house group in Strasbourg.)

What was the cause of the foundation of the house groups? Essentially, it was the political situation, as well as laxity on the part of the civil authorities—the political situation was the spark that set alight What he had always been teaching. p. 32

Because we have failed in making the Church more of a confessing church we are now like Israel under certain prophets under God's wrath. We are in the time of Jeremiah where God handed over his people, temple and city into the hands of the enemy and where a remnant of believers implored God to be gracious by means of their fasting, prayers, supplications and all kinds of good works. This small remnant, by recognising the people's error, saved it from perishing. (*Letter to the Church in Bonn*, 1547).

How did he create them? 1) By preaching the need to live a truly corporate Christian life, 2) by asking those who heard the call and responded to meet at a suitable place and at an hour clearly indicated after having been visited at home by the pastor, 3) by insisting that during this first meeting, the pastor should instruct them concerning the true Christian life and each should express his own intentions, 4) by ruling that all should choose from within their number two or three leaders who would form a committee responsible for teaching and disciplinary oversight together with the pastor and a representative of the city authorities (*Kirchenpfleger*), 5) by stipulating that the pastor should testify before these 'elders' as to the soundness of his teaching and commit himself together with the whole group to respect those in authority, the elders should do the same in return, and the names of the elders should be recorded in a register.

Once the superstructure was created, the group had to be constituted: 1) the pastor and the newly-elected elders summoned each participant at the first meeting and held a conversation with him (and with all his household) on the subject of sound doctrine, the sacraments, Christian ethics, and penitential discipline; 2) the head of the household, if he

was ready and willing, committed himself to them by the right hand of fellowship and was inscribed in the register.

What were the aims of the house groups? Doctrinal teaching and pastoral care; growth in piety, where the Christian 'will no longer live for himself but for the Lord'; where will be practiced penitence, absolution and excommunication. In them 'God will live, because they will be the body of Christ, his bride, his reign in which we also will be able to live according to his commandments and serve him.' They will be therefore the '*ecclesiola in ecclesia*' realizing in themselves the professing requirements of the community of the elect in the primitive Church.

Teaching was not just the work of the pastor in the pulpit but a brotherly exchange in which participants had the right to speak, question and propose. It was the place where the priesthood of all believers was practised, where lay inspiration might find expression, where adults, baptised and confirmed in the National Church, might [p. 33](#) undergo continuous training. Holy communion being the sacrament of the confessing community (baptism being that of the 'multitude'), an examination, freely accepted by all concerned, was necessary in the house groups before each celebration. Here the ministry of exhortation was exercised. Excommunication according to [Matt. 18](#) was therefore necessary but was practised only in the house groups where penitential discipline in private could be exercised. Sharing material possessions was the complement of spiritual fellowship. (This was a theme that concerned all the Reformers as well as the dissidents, on account of the wealth of the traditional church; and appeal was often made to [Acts 2:44-47](#) and [4:32-35](#).)

A '*Kirchenpfleger*' was one of the elders of each house group. Because the house groups were in the parish and not apart from it, the state had its representative in them. But he was not to hinder the house group in any way from being the body of Christ. In time, with other pressing duties laid upon town authorities, this part of their responsibility lapsed.

What were the reasons for the failure of the house groups? First, it was objected that they were sectarian. To this Bucer replied: sects propagate doctrines opposed to the word of God, refuse to submit them to the Church, and proselytize among native people; finally they separate themselves from others. Bucer explains that there are three categories in the city: those who accept membership of a house group, those who attend worship and the sacraments but who are not yet ready to take the step of joining a house group, and those who (unfortunately according to Bucer, the largest 'heap' [sic!] in the city) who come to nothing at all. Bucer explains that the house groups are not trying to set apart a kind of pure Christian but rather they seek to attract by their example those who are less advanced. The members of the house group must therefore remain in union with the parish, participate in worship and not celebrate holy communion in their houses, as this would be in fact sectarian.

It was objected that the house groups questioned civil authority, and it was also objected that the time was not ripe for this development anyway. Bucer's reply was that the Scripture requires house groups in the Church. Consideration of practicability was purely secondary. It was said that there was division among the ranks of the pastors. But the only point at issue was the biblical manner of working with the authorities of the state.

More serious was the evolution of the house groups during the short span of their existence in Strasbourg. Instead of being, as was originally intended, a form of new life for the Church as a whole, they [p. 34](#) became a place for the individual Christian to be instructed without any reference to corporate Christian living, so that they became places of individual elitism, rather than centres of loving worship and service for the entire Church. We can therefore summarize Bucer's ecclesiology as being that of a national *and* a confessing Church. The members of the house groups were not alongside the parish, nor

in a tenuous relation to it, nor opposed to it, nor separated from it, but within it. This is what kept them from being sectarian. Their failure is to be regretted.

BUCER TODAY

In his insistence on the reality and the beauty of the Church, Bucer is almost a high churchman before his time. He almost goes so far as to say that the Church is a sacrament of the incarnation. Though he lacks a marked theology of the cross as an element in the life of the believer and of the Christian community, his emphasis is a wholesome one; especially for reformed Christians, who often are not very sensitive to the beauty and the glory of the Church as she is presented in Scripture. The Church in the writings of Bucer is situated between that which is so identified with the world that she loses her identity, and that which is so separated from the world that she is no longer faithful to the will of God as shown in the parable of the wheat and the tares.

In his insistence on the unity of the Church, Bucer was open to other Reformation groups. One hears little of the polemic against others who differed from him and yet with whom he had much in common. For him, being a Protestant is not an aim in itself but a means of promoting the Reformation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. And he insisted on the importance of the training of the laity. Lay people were, for Bucer, contrary to the view of the civic authorities, competent to discuss matters of doctrine.

BUCER'S INFLUENCE

'It was Bucer's idea which, under Calvin's name, was spread abroad in Geneva and from there throughout the world. Bucer as Calvin's model in his thought and his activity must be placed where he has the right to be placed as far as the development of reformed thinking is concerned' (Jacques Courvoisier: 'La notion de l'église chez Bucer').

Philipp Jakob Spener, the founder of Pietism, was inspired by Bucer's 'Von der Kirche Mangel und Fehl'—he printed and used it to support his creation of '*collegia pietatis*'. Bonhoeffer, in his 'Sanctorum p. 35 Communio', affirms many Bucerian ideas. To quote another thinker: 'I choose the example of the Protestant Church in Strasbourg as one of the wisest of the entire Reformation, as the one that we would commend from the very first as a model of discipline.' (J. Bossuet, 1691 ... who was not after all very gentle in his attitude to Protestant Christians).

Can we however continue to affirm our allegiance to a National Church today and remain faithful to Scripture and to our Lord? One of the reasons for remaining in a National Church, which I often heard during my university days, and which has since been severely criticised among evangelical Anglicans since Keele, is that National Churches are often 'the best boats to fish from'. It is true that evangelicals are not members of such churches purely by accident or by human choice and they must give good account of themselves as faithful sons of their own particular tradition. But in Switzerland recently, during a referendum on the separation of the Church and State in those cantons where a church is still a state church, more than 70% of the population voted to maintain the status quo. Sociologists will continue to study the reasons for this attitude but can evangelical Christians, concerned for evangelism and witness, ignore this openly expressed wish? I think not.

Secession from a National Church should be considered only when continued membership is incompatible with faithfulness to Scripture. In the Church of England, there is a Bishop of Durham who does not believe in the corporeal resurrection of Jesus. The Archbishop of Canterbury seemed to be saying recently that all religions could

possibly lead to God when he prayed with representatives of other faiths in Assisi. But the Church of England has not *officially* rejected her Reformation principles enshrined in her charter. Until she does this, and until other National Churches do so officially, it seems to me that there is no reason to abandon ship. Further, a National Church is in a unique position to be the conscience of the nation. In Switzerland, the pastor is often invited to speak to the entire town or village, and this is an unparalleled opportunity of reminding the populace of the requirements of our creator God.

The arguments of Bucer are of course typical of Christians in what we have come to call Christendom. We now live in what is acknowledged to be a post-Christian era. Do we still need National Churches? It is clear that they can be justified only where the State is anxious to fulfil its responsibilities as servants of God in the light of [Rom. 13](#). In fact, we are seeing most National Churches becoming progressively more confessing. To the best of my knowledge there is [p. 36](#) no national Church that does not practice infant baptism. Is there not a good reason in the light of the present day post-Christian situation, where many non-believers require baptism for their children out of tradition, for those who believe that the baptism of children is biblical to refrain from baptising them as a form of witness?

Neil Britton is the General Secretary of the Fellowship of Evangelical European theologians (FEET) and is a pastor in Switzerland. [p. 37](#)

The Church in Europe

Peter Cotterell

Printed with permission

INTRODUCTION

There is general agreement that the Church in Europe is in a poor state of health. It is not difficult to find statistics to support that contention: for example it is said that some 1.8 million people in Europe leave the Church each year.¹ This appears to mean that according to some system of counting church members or church attendance there is a net decline each year of 1.8 million. Even if we accept the figure of 300 million as representing the total nominal membership of the European churches it is clear that such an enormous defection cannot long be sustained without seriously undermining the effectiveness of the Church's outreach.

Nor must we be lulled into a sense of security by the developments within the House Church movement, or the proliferation of conferences which attract thousands of people. These features of contemporary life are, in fact, the visible evidence of the malaise within the churches, an unheard protest against the general irrelevance of what passes for

¹ Press release from the Association for the Promotion of Church Growth in Europe, now the European Church Growth Association, ECGA, January, 1987.

church in contemporary Europe. In a vivid characterization as far back as 1974, Jan van Capelleveen referred to the attitude of the younger generation about the churches: 'they speak warmly about them, like one speaks about his own grandmother who spends her last days in a room full of portraits of the past. It is wonderful to visit her for just a short time; it would be impossible to live with her.'²

HISTORY

Perhaps the greatest burden borne by the Church in Europe is its history. Four aspects of that history may be noted:

The Ecumenical Councils It was the Councils (particularly of Ephesus and Chalcedon) which identified heresy and codified orthodoxy, leaving us with creeds which expressed the agreed doctrines of the church, particularly in the area of christology. However, the credal statements are today in good measure irrelevant in their scope. Not that the creeds do not deal with vital issues, nor that p. 38 those issues are settled beyond dispute. But the non-professional Christians have learned to repeat them without understanding them, and many professional Christians have learned to repeat them without believing in them. There are new issues confronting the church today, of which the creeds necessarily say nothing: oppression, racism, poverty, abortion, euthanasia, AIDS, homosexuality and so on, scarcely find even a passing mention in them. And this is no fault of the creeds: rather it is the fault of the Church which has been content to allow the creeds to remain unchanged, petrified witnesses to arguments long past. The creeds lack bite: we have learnt to affirm them without any challenge to contemporary secular values.

The Reformation It could be argued that the Reformation gave shape to the church in Europe, a shape which was to continue essentially unchanged for four hundred years. The Lutheran and the Reformed churches in Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavia, the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholic Church still virtually monopolise Christian resources in Europe. And yet in spite of the very Reformation terminology that is traditionally used to describe European church history it would not be difficult to argue that the churches remain with the task of Reformation barely begun. Clericalism remains, and the dichotomy between clergy and laity still firmly in place, and the magical element within the liturgies not exorcized.

In his foreword to Leonard Verduin's *The Reformers and their step children*,³ H. L. Ellison comments of the Anabaptists of the 16th. century, 'It is an error to call them reformers, for it was a new beginning they wanted', and goes on, 'Until recently their history has been known to us mainly through vilifications of their opponents, both Roman Catholic and Protestants.' In 1981 came invaluable work on the Anabaptists by Walter Klassen, *Anabaptism, neither Catholic nor Protestant*.⁴ Franklin Little of Temple University, in the foreword to Klassen's book, confirms Ellison's assessment of the Anabaptists:

The Anabaptists were condemned and defamed by spokesmen of the sixteenth century establishments because they refused to support the power systems then emerging.... Today we can see that the Anabaptists/ Mennonites' testimonies were very important for both church and state. While much of the teaching of the Roman Catholic and Protestant

² 'Western Europe in the Seventies', in J. D. Douglas (ed.) *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, Minneapolis, Worldwide Publications, 1975.

³ Grand Rapids, Eerdmans; Exeter, Paternoster; 1964.

⁴ Ontario, Conrad Press, 1981.

p. 39 theologians of the sixteenth century is today unreal and irrelevant, what the Anabaptists thought about mutual aid, peace, discipline, religious liberty, lay witness, etc. is as fresh and important as it was fifteen generations ago.

The World Wars Two world wars have left their mark not only on Europe in general, but on the Church in particular. The clergy of both sides in both wars blessed the weapons and lent a religious gloss to the policies of the politicians. Padres earned a confusing reputation: for extraordinary devotion and heroism (one actually winning two Victoria Crosses), and for being 'wet'. Some saw through the intentions of the politicians very quickly and refused to be used. Others were pliable under the flattery of officer status, privilege, badges of rank, medals and ribbons and apparent influence. The British General, Montgomery, explicitly employed his padres as part of his resources: the troops were to be urged on as crusaders, and lacklustre padres who could not produce the necessary rhetoric were soon dismissed by him. However, during the war the combatants on both sides had time to think, and even to become philosophers of life. Their padres were often unable to give intelligible answers to the often cynical questions they were asked, and there was no other authority who could give such answers. There was a widespread abandoning of religion after the First World War, and continuing through and beyond the Second, and it was abandoned because it was seen to be irrelevant and unbelievable.

The rise of Marxism Karl Marx was a German, who spent much of his life studying social conditions in England, and whose theories were put into practice first in Russia and then in Eastern Europe. Marxism made its appeal primarily to the working classes, although there were some intellectuals too who were attracted to it. Its later development, Marxism—Leninism, provides the primary division within Europe, between East and West, and the church has a totally different image in these two contrasting Europes. In the West it is irrelevant, in the East it is perceived by believer and unbeliever alike as representing the major challenge to materialism, offering a new and powerful alternative dynamic. It simply cannot be denied that under persecution, Christianity has shown a power to survive; and more than survive, to outlive and outlove the strengths of Marxism—a power it has not demonstrated under the threat of affluence in the West.

CHURCH IN EUROPE NOW

Although the United Nations recognizes four Europes, the suggestion P. 40 made by A. Morgan Derham of a division into five zones⁵ has generally received approval amongst Christians. The five are:

Nordic: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland. The high percentage of the population nominally associated with the Lutheran Church in these areas is characteristic: Norway and Denmark 92%, Finland 93%, and Sweden an astonishing 96%, astonishing primarily because it is freely admitted that in fact at most 5% of the population actually attend any church more than once a year.⁶ The Pentecostal churches with a membership of just over 100,000 have been growing steadily over the past decade, and there are several with attendances of more than a thousand. Sweden has an Institute of Church Growth.

Norwegian Lutherans have developed a unique but potentially confusing dual system, with evangelical Prayer Houses (or 'Mission Halls') operating alongside the official

⁵ See the MARC Monograph number 11, *European Churches and Western Missions*.

⁶ W. Detzler, *The Changing Church in Europe*, p. 15.

Lutheran Churches. They operate their own schools and at Fjellhaug a fine seminary, and represent the abiding values of Lutheranism. Norway has a Church Growth Association.

Germanic: West Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Although there are clear cultural ties between these countries, there is no common pattern of church life. Switzerland is the richest country in Europe, its population of some 6.5 million diluted by almost a million foreigners. Almost one half of the population is notionally Protestant, and 96% of those would associate with the Reformed Churches.

Austria represents a sad commentary on the history of the Reformation: in the decades after the Reformation the country was 80% Protestant, but is today 83% Catholic.

The church in Germany is a major employer of labour, with an estimated quarter of a million employees. But it is typical of the Lutheran Church in Germany that the majority of these owe only a nominal allegiance to Lutheranism. The Church Growth Movement will almost certainly have a major role to play in the coming years: *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Gemeindeaufbau* (AGGA), based in Giengen, has led parties of German pastors to visit growing churches around the world, and plans a Ministers' Conference this year which is expected to attract up to 5,000 Lutheran Ministers.

Western: U.K., Republic of Ireland, The Netherlands. Again, despite some measure of cultural affinity between the three members p. 41 of this group, church life in each is very different. Holland has three dominant churches, the Roman Catholic, the Netherlands Reformed Church (the NHK), and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (the Gereformeed, or GNK Church). This last has remained plateaued at about 9% of the population in membership, but with a steadily declining pattern of attendance. The general mobility of the Dutch peoples makes leaving the church relatively simple: on arrival at the new location the head of the household registers at the City Hall but denies church membership.⁷ The Roman Catholic Church in Holland faces a massive decline in clergy: from 1970 to 1981 a decrease from 3433 to 2285, a drop of 33%. This reflects a massive defection from actual belief: only 54% of Catholics indicated a belief in Christ as Son of God, compared with 70% of the Reformed, and 94% of the Gefformeed.⁸ Holland has joined those countries which have their own Church Growth Association.

In the U.K. the principal churches continue to show a decline in attendance of the order of 1–2%, although it is possible that the Salvation Army and the Baptist churches in England (but not in the U.K. as a whole) are growing slightly.⁹ The House Church movement has grown so that in membership it probably equals the Christian Brethren; but the movement is splintered, with some 21 separate groups. Indeed this splintering is typical of the U.K. church scene: although there are fewer members and fewer churches, there are more denominations than ever before. Perhaps the most valuable commentary on the Church of England is *The Church in Crisis*, by Charles Moore, A. N. Wilson and Gavin Stamp,¹⁰ the title of which speaks volumes. Of all its crises there is perhaps no one more poignant than that confronting its theological colleges which have been radically criticized steadily over the past two decades for their general irrelevancy.

Latin: Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Malta. In this grouping the theme must be that of fragmentation. It may be that we have simply a

⁷ K. G. Pederson, 'Wearing Joseph's Coat in a Secular Society', unpublished paper Circulated from Lelystad, June 1986.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ See Paul Beasley-Murray and Alan Wilkinson, *Turning the Tide*, London, Bible Society, 1981, and the Bible Society's *Prospects for the Eighties*, 1980.

¹⁰ London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1986.

manifestation of the individuality of the Latin Character, but it is a fact that in these countries it is exceedingly difficult to obtain anything in the way of an overview of the Church. p. 42

In France all of the Protestant groups together constitute less than 2% of the Christian community,¹¹ and yet there are some 60 such groups! And it is estimated that 32,000 towns and villages have no Gospel witness. By contrast it has been estimated that there are one hundred mediums to each Christian worker in France.¹² We must take seriously the growing influence of the occult throughout Europe.

Eastern: Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia. This division is probably the most significant of all those associated with European Christianity. The problems of the West are not those of the East. What is of enormous importance, however, is the clear evidence that the Church has outlasted doctrinaire Marxism in Russia and China, and the changed politics of those nations as far as religion is concerned must now inevitably be worked out in the European satellites. In this respect Hungary has led the way. In June 1988 the Hungarian Communist Party not only dethroned the veteran party leader Janos Kadar, but appointed as president a non-Communist intellectual, Professor Bruno Straub. It is significant that this movement actually *preceded* the Moscow Communist Party Conference, anticipating the new liberalizing policies of Russia, where since Mr. Gorbachev came to power some 300 religious communities have been officially recognized.

SIX PROBLEMS FOR THE EUROPEAN CHURCHES

A number of problems for the church in Europe have been noted in the brief survey above. Just six have been selected for further consideration.

1. The problem of the State Church

The problem is highly complex, but contains a number of strands:

a. *The identity of the 'Christian' is confused.* In Norway, although a theoretical 97.6% of the population belong to the Lutheran Church, a mere 3% actually attend the weekly service in the State Church (and probably some 10% of the population regularly attend a weekly service in some kind of church). In England, although there are some 8 million confirmed members of the Anglican church, the average p. 43 weekly attendance at Anglican churches is only just over 1 million.¹³ Indeed a comparison often quoted is that proportionately more Russians attend church than do Britons!¹⁴

b. *The church becomes part of the social services of the country.* The distinction between Christian marriage and marriage as a social convention is lost. Baptism becomes a safety net, used by irreligious parents just in case there might be something in religion after all. Christian burial is offered for those who have shown no outward sign of involvement with the church, and expectations expressed at the funeral services which lack any biblical or theological foundation.

¹¹ Information from Howard Foreman, *Sous la colletière*, Catillon d'Azergues, January 1987.

¹² Information from Jean-Marc Lepillez, 425 rue Marcel Champion, Portes Les Valence.

¹³ See my *The Eleventh Commandment*, Leicester, IVP, 1981, p. 116.

¹⁴ Wayne Detzler, *The Changing Church in Europe*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1979, p. 30.

c. *The state may be involved in making church decisions.* In Britain Bishops are appointed by the Prime Minister¹⁵ or, more precisely, by the Queen (but then ultimately in Britain it is possible to blame the Queen for almost anything done by her government).¹⁶

d. *Church taxes are demanded of unbelievers.* This practice has increasingly been resented in Germany. The problem for the uncommitted is that burial under the Lutheran rites is still very much valued. Paying the tax is not. An increasing stratagem has been for the husband or wage-earner to leave the Lutheran Church while the other partner remains in the system, preserving the right to Lutheran burial.

e. *There is a division amongst Christians.* Those who belong to minority Christian denominations are in some sense discriminated against.

f. *The state may control or at least strongly influence the training of clergy through the universities.* This presents the church in Germany with a major problem: evangelical Christians called to Lutheran ministry find themselves confronted by a long, largely irrelevant, and spiritually disruptive period of what is termed theological training.

In Britain the appearance in 1965 of the Council for National Academic Awards opens up the way for a second stream of p. 44 undergraduate training for Christian ministry: but at the same time it has tended to extend the grip of academic theology at the expense of the no less important practical training. A great deal has been written and said on the subject, particularly from the Anglican church, but so far virtually no move has been made towards a comprehensive solution.¹⁷

Here we have a major problem to be addressed by the leaders of the evangelical churches of Europe: to find ways of adequate training for evangelically minded candidates for ministry. Theological colleges in the United Kingdom *may* be in a position to help. Methodologically what is needed is the introduction of a curriculum *from below*, to replace that which imposed *from above*, that is to say by academics whose interests are necessarily different from ours. We are interested in a persuasion elenctic, not mere dialogue, in missiology and not in a mere comparison of truth claims.

2. The problem of nominalism

This is clearly related to the first issue. The existence of a State church, and the formalized mode of entry into the State church, inevitably leads to nominalism. The high proportion of nominal Christianity in Europe has no parallel anywhere else in the world. The decline in church membership *may be* no more than the long overdue shedding of non-Christians, the removal of the tares from the wheat. But what is now needed is a rediscovery of what it is to be a Christian. The answer to this vital question could be expected to come from one of the following:

a. *From Western orthodox evangelicals.* But so often we find ourselves the prisoners of our own histories, unable actually to discern from Scripture (and apart from the cultural

¹⁵ For details of the procedure followed in the appointment of Bishops in the Church of England see Paul A. Welsby, *How the Church of England Works*, London, Church Information Office, 1985, especially chapter X, 'Church and State'.

¹⁶ Anyone who still holds to the concept of an established church but who heard the brief debate between Mr. Wedgwood Benn, a left-wing politician, and the Bishop of Petersfield, in May 1988, must have had that belief severely shaken. If Mr. Benn knew why the church should *not* be established, the Bishop showed no sign of knowing why it *should*.

¹⁷ See for example *Theological Colleges for the Future*, Church Information Office, London, 1968, the report of a Working Party set up by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York; C. Moore, A. N. Wilson, G. Stamp, *The Church in Crisis*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1986.

and historical accretions inevitable in churches with a long history) the true nature of what it is to be a follower of Jesus.

b. *From missionaries to Europe from the 'Third'*¹⁸ *World*. Third World Christians are almost invariably disillusioned when they p.45 actually encounter European Christianity: to them, as to their colleagues from Marxist Eastern Europe, Christianity is holistic, it makes its demands on every part of the life of the disciple.

c. *From Eastern Europe*, where it has become clear that Christianity must have relevant comments to make on virtually every subject: on criminal law, on oppression, on bribery, on divorce, on free trade unions and so on. The Christianity of Eastern Europe is *not* irrelevant.

3. The problem of materialism

The world of Islam has criticized Western society in general for being irreligious, materialistic, humanistic, and without community. In measure these accusations must also be seen as directed against the church in Europe. Our Christianity, other than on Sunday, is almost invisible, where the Muslim is almost ostentatious in his display of his religion. And we are materialistic: the contemporary success of Prosperity Theology, open in the teaching of Kenneth Copeland and T. L. Osborn, implicit in the ministry of Reinhard Bonkke, and proclaimed to large congregations in London and Stockholm, bears witness to the success of the surrounding culture in penetrating the church.¹⁹ There is a need, here, for theological reflection: not so as to produce a theology of suffering for the sake of suffering, but so as properly to understand the extent to which the Christian is to expect to share in the ills of the world, and the extent to which his faith delivers him from them. Material, physical and spiritual prosperity are currently being offered in many churches as a guaranteed return for faith. Tragically many are abandoning their faith because it is clearly inadequate to the contract offered.

4. The problem of fragmentation

This problem is particularly associated with France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece. In each of these countries a multitude of small groups is at work, but there are no leaders strong enough to claim the support of the whole. Missionaries sent in to France from America and Britain often operate in splendid isolation from existing churches. Jean p.46 Lukasse speaks of missionaries being, as it were, 'parachuted' into Europe, often quite unaware of existing mission activity and unwilling even to seek help in language study.²⁰ The inevitable consequence of these activities is frustration for the missionary who retires from Europe after only a few years, leaving behind at best an embattled and leaderless congregation.

We desperately need a doctrine of the Church which will tell us from a biblical, and not merely from a historical, point of view, what the boundaries of evangelical association are. In particular guidance is needed with respect to the Roman Catholic Church, again

¹⁸ There is at least this to be said in favour of the alternative term 'Two-thirds World' that it reminds us of the numerical priority of this part of our world.

¹⁹ See, for example, Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, Fort Worth, Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974, on the one hand, and on the other, Jacques Ellul, *L'Homme et l'Argent*, Lausanne, Presses Bibliques Universitaires, 1979 (English translation, *Money and Power*, London, Marshall Pickering, 1986).

²⁰ See Monica Hill (ed.), *How to plant Churches*, London, MARC Europe and British Church Growth Association, p. 91.

guidance that is more than a mere recapitulation of history, more than a reputation of outworn slogans.

Here particular attention is drawn to David Edwards' very important book *The Futures of Christianity*,²¹ especially Chapter Six, 'in Secular Europe'. Europe's malaise is so great that we cannot be expected to be taken seriously when our energies are dissipated in attacking one another.

5. The problem of pluralism

Two quite distinct problems must be recognized here: the problem posed by the macro-presence of Islam in Europe, and the problem of the more general phenomenon of eastern mysticism appearing actually *within* Christianity. On the former problem a vigorous debate has been taking place for half a century and the relevant literature is abundant.²²

However, it may well be that the second is the greater problem, since Islam is, at least, clearly *external* to Christianity. In an important new book Allan Brockway and Paul Rajashekhar deal with the multitude of New Religious Movements, and demonstrate a common origin in eastern mysticism, especially Hinduism and Buddhism.²³ But the significance of these movements is that they occur within Christianity, and represent a new option, Christianity *plus*. New p. 47 techniques are offered which relate directly to the contemporary demand for so-called 'counselling'. These techniques in turn build on theories of the nature of humanity which are highly speculative, subjective, and unrelated to any biblical doctrine of the human personality. There is much to be done by evangelical theologians in developing that biblical doctrine so as to protect believers from the sheer manipulation of many contemporary counselors.

6. The problem of the occult world

We have noted the growth of the occult influence in France, but there is no doubt of a growth throughout Europe. There appears to be a new strategy on the part of the Second Kingdom, a strategy of open challenge to Christianity. The new developments are an indication of a fresh interest amongst the peoples of Europe in the world beyond this world, in existence after death. Many of the leaders in the occult world are women, and Professor Ian Lewis has hinted at the possibility that where women are excluded from the main stream of spiritual leadership in a society it is very likely that there will be a compensating leadership in, say, spiritism.²⁴ This could direct attention to the current discussions on the ordination of women, and to the need for a biblical re-appraisal of ordination. Michael Green was surely wrong when he said:

When we talk of the Christian ministry today, we instinctively think of a man ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacraments: you either are a minister or you are not. The New Testament knows nothing of any such distinction.²⁵

²¹ London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1987.

²² See, for example, Paul Knitter, *No other Name?*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1985, and the excellent work by Gavin d'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986. Both of these have valuable guides to further reading.

²³ *New Religious Movements and the Churches*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1987.

²⁴ *Religion in Context*, Cambridge, CUP, 1986, p. 27.

²⁵ *Obedying Christ in a Changing World*, London, Church Information Office, 1968, vol. 3, p. 69.

There is a clear biblical doctrine of laying hands as a sign of separation for specific ministry, but there is less clarity in the evangelical understanding of it.

In the matter of the occult, however, we need an understanding of the limitations of the power of the Second Kingdom, and we also need a doctrine to express the measure in which the Church has authority to withstand that power. The current practice of 'binding' that power (and even more the 'releasing' of the Spirit) raises many questions which demand biblical, and not merely pragmatic and existential, answers. p. 48

The issues raised in this paper are so great that we cannot reasonably expect any comprehensive response to emerge within the time scale of our conference. But a start may be made, and it may be that some way might be found so that the churches could be helped forward through these crucial times. p. 49

The Future of Australia's Evangelical Heritage

David Parker

Evangelical Protestantism as it was founded in Australia in the middle part of the 19th. century produced good results in a remarkably short time. Despite the notoriously degraded nature of the society in the days of the penal colony and the low level of church affiliation, by the end of the century, most of the country's 3.7 million citizens were at least nominal Christians (96.5% by the census figures), churches and denominations were firmly established across the entire continent and Protestantism was recognized as broadly evangelical, although, even then, there were signs of changes to come.

To jump a few decades to the middle of the 20th. century, despite widespread secularization of society at large, evangelical Christianity still seems to be thriving with scores of organizations, many church buildings, colleges, missionary bodies and evangelistic groups. Admittedly, it did not share the same prosperity and popularity on a national scale as evangelicalism in the United States, and it had no history of large-scale awakenings which had shaped the culture of the country, but it was still an impressive result. All the same, by the time of the bi-centenary, some leaders spoke of the apocalypse of secular humanism while others, perhaps surprisingly, have gone on as seeing signs of a coming nation-wide revival.

There is no doubt that, in the 1880s, when the churches were firmly established, Protestantism was at the height of its power as a social force. It was also strongly evangelical in character, clearly aware of its own nature and universally recognized as such. But 'evangelical' is a notoriously slippery term, especially in the hands of the secular media and others who do not understand it! It may mean evangelistic, reformed, fundamentalist, revivalist, neo-evangelical, Protestant, wowserish, a 'Bible basher' or just simply someone who reads the Bible for inspiration and guidance. It is time to look at this term more closely in the context of Australia's Protestant heritage and to try to define its local form.

In the first place, Australian Protestantism is evangelical because it has formal *historical links* with the 18th. century evangelical revival through the Anglican church and

the various Protestant denominations which were established in this country, including especially the various branches of Methodism. In a wider sense, Australian Protestantism is evangelical through its heritage in the Reformation, although it is not common to use the terminology of Europe and Latin p. 50 America where 'evangelical' merely signifies 'Protestant' in contrast with 'Catholic' or 'Orthodox'. There is also a narrower sense: evangelicals often show firm loyalties to the organizations, missions and churches in which they have been converted and have found fellowship, nature, training and service even long after the event. This is true especially where there is a significant proportion of converts from a previously unchurched background.

But more significantly, Australia's Protestantism has certainly been evangelical in the sense of being *evangelistic*, at least in intention, and to a large extent in fact. Personal and corporate evangelism have been the norm for the scores of local churches which dot the country where their programmes are oriented to sharing the gospel in every possible way and where their members are schooled in the need to bring their friends and contacts to a personal knowledge of Christ. Not surprisingly, there have been many specialist evangelistic organizations led by well-known individuals such as Lionel Fletcher, who are well-appreciated even overseas for their ministry. As already mentioned, this has resulted in the growth of the Church from its early stages to the point where virtually the whole of the country has been covered, even if every person has not yet been reached or won for Christ. In some cases, revivals matching in intensity some of those overseas have been reported in limited areas. According to many observers, significant sections of the nation were on the point of a classic awakening during the first Graham Crusades in the late 1950s.

Closely connected with this evangelistic zeal at home has been a concern for *overseas or foreign missions*. Despite the fact that Christians in Australia were faced with an enormous task in evangelizing and christianizing their own countries. So from Samuel Marsden's early efforts amongst the Maoris of New Zealand and the ill-fated work amongst the Australian aborigines, until the massive effort in the Pacific Islands (especially Papua New Guinea) following the Second World War, missionary work has featured prominently on the Australian Protestant agenda. This is seen especially in the establishment of large numbers of inter-denominational missionary societies which have often secured the support of leading churchmen also. There is a large infra-structure for recruitment, training, prayer and financial support lying behind these groups. Closely linked in with this effort are the Bible and Missionary colleges, 'Keswick' Deeper Life Conventions, and student ministry of Inter-Varsity Fellowship (or AFES) which help the missionary effort in various ways as well as fulfilling their own special functions.

An essential dynamic for this evangelistic and missionary effort was p. 51 the *characteristic spirituality of evangelism: pietism*. Ever since the days of John Wesley's vital contacts with the Moravians in the 18th. century, evangelicalism has focused its attention on the 'religion of the heart'. Authentic personal faith in Christ, a definite conversion experience and a continuing sense of God's call and guidance channeled through personal, family and corporate prayer and Bible study: these were the marks which identified the evangelical. So 'revival' (conversion, moral renewal and an awareness of God's presence) was expected, prayed for and often experienced at least in measure. As Bollen has noted, Protestantism came to this country already revived and this remained the norm. Thus evangelicalism can be distinguished quite clearly from other traditions, especially sacramentalism, forms of Christianity which focus on social and moral issues and even pentecostalism, which has been so influential of late through the charismatic movement.

Pietism, which came into evangelicalism from its German roots, found a receptive soil because already there was a strong element of intense personal religion in English

Protestantism as a legacy of 17th. century Puritanism. These two movements reinforced each other to produce a form of Christianity which placed a great deal of emphasis upon individual experience and the 'serious call to the devout and holy life' and less upon purely intellectual, social and ecclesiastical concerns. In Australia they were further aided by the demands of the pioneer situation which first of all called for a religion that was practical and relevant. There was little future for a purely formal or abstract faith.

THE PURITAN ETHIC

But in the moral degradation of the Australian penal colonies, it was the *Puritan ethic* which was most significant. Called upon by the governing powers to fulfil the utilitarian role of 'moral policemen', the clergy, supported by their Puritan theology, willingly cooperated. Although many fair-minded people acknowledged the need for serious moral and social reform, the 'wowsers' impulse was planted early, and its fruits have lasted long, giving evangelical Christianity the doubtful reputation of a rather over-zealous and legalistic watch-dog on the nation's behaviour. As important as it was to express a concern for Christian moral values, this line of approach did little to manifest the spiritual power in the gospel in touching the lives of even the most hardened with redeeming grace. John Newton's evangelical experience of 'amazing grace' did not seem to be typical of early Australian P. 52 Christianity, and once set in its mould, the pattern was hard to break. The English 'free church conscience' never quite manifested itself as a positive social force in Australia where the emphasis was much more on personal issues.

Australian Protestantism was, of course, also evangelical in a *doctrinal sense*. First of all, it was biblical in theological method, giving ultimate authority to the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. It was also biblical in doctrinal content, basing itself upon the orthodox creeds of the early church and the evangelical teaching of sin, grace and salvation through Christ's atoning work as formulated in the Reformation confessions.

Although there were differences of emphasis and interpretation amongst the various Protestant denominations (often quite serious), there was wide agreement on the basic doctrines and messages of Christianity, as the host of co-operative inter-denominational ventures in evangelism, missions, holiness teaching, Bible training and social welfare work indicate. In fact, certainly in regard to the biblical truth evangelical teaching sometimes came close to militant fundamentalism which defined orthodoxy too narrowly and took an offensive attitude to those who differed, even in the slightest degree.

Liberal views were common enough, especially in later times, to warrant an evangelical reaction but generally in Australia, pietistic influences were stronger, so that doctrinal differences were ignored as long as evangelical experience was not undermined. There were only a very few occasions where a genuine fundamentalist-modernist controversy took place, and even some of those were not followed through with the same zeal as in the United States where churches and whole denominations were split over the issue of modernism. But the firm commitment of Australia's Protestants to traditional evangelical doctrines did contribute to an often ugly sectarianism which was one of the most serious and long-lasting blemishes in our history. It had far-reaching consequences for the society as a whole, and it is not surprising that in more recent times, by way of reaction, interdenominational and ecumenical activity have been major forces in Australian Christianity. But it may be questioned whether the older doctrinal differences and tensions have been satisfactorily resolved or merely by-passed. Evangelicalism has some distance to make up in developing a properly worked-out theological position and method to cope with this legacy.

Finally, as a result of these causes Australian evangelicalism has exhibited a strong voluntarist tendency in ecclesiastical polity, i.e. the belief that the church should be spiritually independent of the state p. 53 and other structures of society. For example Dr. John Dunmore Lang was persuaded of the value of this approach during the course of his ministry, thereafter seeing it as harmonious with evangelical beliefs. But it was already a key factor in the establishment of the 'free' or 'dissenting' church groups. Even in some evangelical Anglican churches, not only are the 'high church' and 'sacramental' doctrines of some of their sister churches rejected, but there are also distinct tendencies in a 'voluntarist' direction in church structures and attitudes to ecclesiastical authority.

But this tendency is most clearly seen in evangelicalism generally in the enormous proliferation of voluntary associations for almost every conceivable purpose. However this voluntarist principle operates within an overall ecclesiastical structure which is heavily bureaucratic. This means that one is identified by organizational affiliation rather than by confessional belief, which causes consternation to those who do not understand the dynamics and who prefer it otherwise. In such circumstances, voluntary organization, independent churches and also smaller denominations which are not integral parts of the main denominational structures operate in a world of their own. Thus there has also been created in Australia a situation of separate development where the various organizational groupings pursue their own programmes and exist under their own guidelines with little reference to each other.

The implications of the voluntarist tendency need to be studied carefully. If evangelicalism focuses on God speaking through his Word and the evangelical experience, rather than upon ecclesiastical structures and authority, then there can be no place for a loyalty to a denomination and authority that over-rides fellowship with believers of other traditions. This principle could have a radical impact on church life if carried to its logical conclusion. But evangelical groups working on an inter-denominational basis have so far generally skirted around the problem by the traditional policy of focusing on issues where there is agreement rather than following through the implications of their evangelical theology.

So in defining evangelicalism in Australia, it is important to take these factors into account and to recognize that it is a complex movement. Although in practical terms there has been a good deal of outward unity, it is probably more accurate to refer to it as a coalition centred on a common evangelical experience of God's saving grace in Christ.

Accordingly, 'it is not yet possible to judge the standing of an individual or a group in relation to evangelicalism merely on the basis p. 54 of their attitudes to one of these factors, because there may be major differences with regard to others. Currently, the coalition shows signs of instability, and so evangelicalism does not exist as a strongly unified movement except on the basis of experience, which is a notoriously unreliable basis for long term relationships. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that evangelicalism should be fragmenting.

Also, like the rest of the Church in Australia and early society generally, evangelicalism has been on the whole derivative and secondary rather than creative. The Church was transplanted from its original British setting for the migrant people it served. In the pioneer, colonial context, a practical response to the needs of the day seemed to be called for rather than something creative or even adapted to these new surroundings. As Hugh Jackson has put it, 'Originality was not the need of this generation. Reassurance was.'¹ Thus the church (and evangelicalism along with it) was strongly conservative, but the weaknesses soon showed up when in the 20th. century changes began to take place in the

¹ *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand, 1860-1930*, Wellington, Alien and Unwin, 1987, p. 47.

local Australian culture and in the nature of the Christianity which was being imported from overseas.

Australian Christians responded to these changes in various ways. Some accepted them easily and modified their own beliefs and practices accordingly. Thus almost unnoticed there began the gradual trend towards a 'formless liberalism' (Jackson) which became distinctive of large sections of the church. Others reacted strongly against the 'modernization' of traditional Christianity in areas of doctrine, biblical scholarship, morals and spirituality. In some cases there were loud protests, but they were generally ineffective in halting the process because they were usually made from too narrow a base and lacked strong conceptual foundations. At best, these protests affected only the small segment of the conservatives within the churches and served only to confirm them in their views. Thus the trend towards 'separate development' was greatly accelerated until the division between 'evangelical' and others was absolute.

Both liberalized and evangelical sections of the church were quickly becoming peripheral to the community generally, because on the one hand there had been a loss of the distinctive messages of Christianity, and on the other Christians had become reactionary, defensive and inward-looking. Despite valiant attempts to reverse the trend by means of new efforts in Christian education, youth work, stewardship, the use of the media, ecumenism, church extension and evangelism, the p. 55 church was becoming more isolated and irrelevant to the day-by-day lives of the people. The outcome of this process of change was solidified in the 1960s and 1970s. By this time the conservative evangelical momentum of the earlier part of the century had almost subsided, and Australian society at large had thrown off its nominal adherence to Christian values, becoming quite secular.

THE 1980S

Foremost in the new developments were attempts by the new generations of highly educated Christians to come to grips with the changes in society. This produced a long list of sociological and historical studies of the Australian people and church. This provided fertile soil for the introduction of the Church Growth School, which relied heavily on sociological principles for its success, and at the same time satisfied the characteristic pragmatic evangelical drive for speedy, tangible results in outreach and church planting. It also meant a new awareness amongst evangelicals of socio-political activity and encouraged a more holistic approach to Christian witness and ministry. Some interpreted this in a politically and socially radical sense, but others reacted strongly against many of the developments and therefore became part of a 'new Christian right'. Study of society also brought with it a vivid awareness of the unmet needs of people, especially in Australia's large urbanized centres, and the churches' historical inability to cope with them. This spawned new initiatives in community-oriented ministries, and the restructuring of churches to emphasise small group activities. There was also an attempt to develop a 'theology of everyday life' to buttress some of these developments intellectually and in practical terms.

Attention was also given to education in these new developments. Concern over some apparent trends in the public arena caused some conservative Christians to turn again to Christian schooling as a serious option. Despite the cost and inconvenience, primary and secondary schools, often attached in traditional form to local parish churches, were established and conducted on any of several different principles. In some cases, attempts were made to move into the tertiary area as well; but with little prospect of success. Groups such as the Creation Science Association tackled the fundamental philosophy

underlying the humanism they believed was permeating public life by proposing new ways of approaching science, while groups like Scripture Union successfully marshalled the devotion and creative skills of the new generation of Christian teachers to develop innovative methods of [p.56](#) evangelism in the state school system. In the theological area, churches and missionary societies again saw the value of recognized degrees, and re-structured their colleges to take advantage of new opportunities to provide their students with effective training. Other individuals, as part of the growing intellectual elite, took up higher studies in secular institutions and sought to bring Christian principles to bear upon business and professional life, although widespread success in this area has not yet become apparent.

Traditional church organization and functions also came under intense scrutiny, and were regarded by many as incapable of handling the new demands. This led to the application of secular management principles of church activities, in some cases resulting in the creation of strongly hierarchical, monolithic structures centred around a dominant, highly-gifted personality and a stream-lined system of administration which was geared to marshal the laity into more efficiency and greater impact. But the 'superchurch' syndrome has its own problems and is not of universal appeal. In other cases, churches turned to various forms of inter-church cooperation to share the limited resources more effectively. In most cases, classic doctrinal statements on church polity and the ministry need to be radically reworked if they are to take account of these changes.

While re-structuring of the externals of Christian activity was an important (if somewhat traumatic) exercise, considerable attention was also being given to the spiritual dimension. Most prominent was the development of the charismatic renewal movement which affected virtually every denomination and also produced the unusual phenomenon of fast-growing mega-churches. To the surprise of many this movement (which had much in common with classic Pentecostalism) attracted ordinary Australians because of its contagious spiritual intensity, apparent spontaneity in worship, a highly organized, business-like approach to ministry, visionary leadership and an element of novelty. But even so, it was still only a small movement in comparison with other Christian traditions and the community as a whole and it remained rather volatile. In the 1980s, there were some signs that the movement as a whole was maturing, but despite its contribution in invigorating sections of the main-stream churches, its long-term future as a force for renewal is still not clear. But there were other responses as well, including renewed efforts in revivalism, the development of the Christian music industry and for some, the reexamination of classical forms of Christian spirituality centred upon such activities as retreats, meditation, spiritual direction and the sacramental life. [p.57](#)

Attempts to engage Christians in more effective, organized Bible study should also be seen in association with these developments. New organizations were commenced providing systematic instruction, courses, seminars and literature, while theological and Bible colleges found many lay people willing to undertake quite advanced courses of study. Some apparently fruitless attempts were also made to contextualize theology itself to the Australian scene, but there was also a significant recovery of interest in classic, confessional theology, which was, in some cases, a reactionary movement with little to contribute for the future.

Undoubtedly, some worthwhile results flowed from all this activity, but for many it must have seemed confusing. It certainly resulted in fragmentation and an apparent loss of direction and purpose as groups and individuals vied with one another for the support of the limited evangelical public. It seemed that, despite the frenzied activity within evangelicalism, the movement as a whole was muscle-bound. There was no longer any prior commitment to a particular theological position which could be identified as

'evangelical', but only a general orientation which, in true Australian style, was judged pragmatically by its immediate outward effectiveness and was therefore subject to superficial modification as the occasion dictated. In some cases this was because people were aware of the dangers of unwarranted dogmatism; but for others it was simply a matter of ignorance, *naïveté* and even apathy. In any case, the community at large was still as far away as ever from a living faith in God!

THE FUTURE

So what about the future of Australia's evangelical heritage? Australia's history has been unfavourable to the growth of a large high-profile doctrinal movement, such as evangelicalism. As a self-conscious, crusading force for renewal, evangelicalism was never very welcome, even from the beginning. As John Barrett observed, 'A tolerant support of the denominations was the positive characteristic of the Australian colonist, just as his negative qualities were skepticism of exclusive denominational claims and phlegmatic moderation in spiritual things generally.'² Apparently, there was no room for religious crusaders then, or now! **P. 58**

Some would advocate that evangelicals should keep going about their business in much the same way as always, implying that the old is good, and that resistance to the truth can always be expected! But it is difficult to find much evidence today for the existence of a cohesive evangelical movement with clearly defined common beliefs and objectives to inspire and guide it. There is only a historical tradition and some half-remembered clichés to call upon. It appears that evangelicalism as an identifiable movement for renewal and growth has been eclipsed by other more virile and appealing forces (such as ecumenism, fundamentalism or the charismatic movement). Consequently, it seems in danger of disappearing altogether. If this is so, the question must be raised, 'Should something be done to prevent this happening, and if so, what?'

For many the answer is, 'No, let it die. It has served its purpose and outlived its usefulness.' There is no room in today's busy world for mere tradition and sentiment, so let there be no sadness for its passing. In any case, this era needs a new mode of Christianity, and does not need the re-creation of the kind of context in which evangelicalism flourished. Today, it is enough to be Christian without concern for additional identification—it is authority that counts. The future must be open-ended, not fettered by a prior commitment to party ideals.

Perhaps there is something to be said for this assessment, especially when one keeps in mind the contemporary ethos and the historical origins of evangelicalism as a movement for reform or renewal within the wider church. Its role then was as clear as it was urgent. Certainly, if the context and needs have changed with history, so too may the response. There is no excuse for keeping a movement going just for its own sake. But it may be argued that the central message of historic evangelicalism is still not fully and clearly represented in other existing Christian traditions, although they may have re-discovered one or another of its emphases, such as the need for personal faith or the importance of private prayer and Bible study. It needs to be stressed that, at its best, evangelicalism also stood as a more biblical alternative to a ritualistic and sacramental version of Christianity, barren scholasticism, liberalism, sceptical biblical scholarship and the social gospel movement. If this be the case, there is still a need for a mature evangelicalism.

² *That Better Country*, MUP, 1966, p. 192.

But it also must be admitted that the ideals of evangelicalism need working out afresh for the contemporary situation. Thus 'wowsers' may have expressed a vital and necessary conviction about the ethical concerns of the day, but now evangelicalism must address itself to such intricate questions as bio-ethics and justice in a nuclear age. [p. 59](#) Similarly, it is not enough merely to assert the authority and sufficiency of Scripture; the significance of these affirmations must be articulated in relation to the questions of modern biblical scholarship and hermeneutics. Voluntarism is no longer expressed in terms of a protest against establishment and patronage, but needs to be examined in the light of leadership of the church in the 'global village' of the 20th. century and the place of spiritual gifts. Then there are moral issues that face Christians living in the 'lucky country', such as employment, industrial relations, wealth and poverty; Christian family life; the handling of leisure, recreation and entertainment.

To cope with such issues, theology is needed, and sophisticated skilful theology at that! Evangelicals should be relieved to hear this; but how should it be done in an Australian context? The deductive, rationalistic approach of traditional orthodoxy so well practised by evangelicals is foreign in a climate where you act first and then think about the meaning afterwards, if at all. It is equally foreign to an attitude that despises theory, principles and ideology (even in political concerns, to allude to a recent well-publicized prime ministerial utterance) and gives recognition only to practical issues and contemporary relevance. It is not immediately clear how this kind of thinking can be reconciled with a system like evangelicalism that takes as its starting point such a notion as the authority of Scripture, and in all its thinking makes allowances for the fallen state of humankind. And so it seems that the evangelical's love of theology turns out to be a considerable liability in communicating with Australia. But evangelicalism cannot compromise its beliefs in this area without destroying itself.

The key lies not in the theological arena alone, but also in the realm of the practical—which is also a classical evangelical strength, at least in principle. As a reform movement, evangelicalism has laid great stress upon the vital importance of genuine faith and authentic Christian living. In fact, this is what gave it meaning over against the nominalism and moral laxity of English Christianity in its early years. It was also a major 'plus' in colonial Australia, although often misunderstood and mis-handled. It will also be the secret of communication with modern Australia.

As history has demonstrated, when Christians of any persuasion live out the radical demands of Christian faith in integrity and spiritual power, there is no shortage of inquirers. Evangelicals in Australia need to re-learn this lesson. If their faith still has the meaning they profess, let that meaning be demonstrated in daily life with greater strength of personal character and integrity, with a better apologetic for the faith [p. 60](#) in the 20th. and 21st. century and with deeper compassion and greater commitment to the real lives of men and women in this world. When this occurs, there will be many opportunities to explain the 'reason for the hope that lies in us' as people feel compelled to search after the secret of such moral and spiritual power. In this way, the future of Australia's evangelical heritage will not only be assured but will prove to be the benefit we all believe it is, under God's good hand. [p. 61](#)

The Church amidst suffering in Sri Lanka

Charles R. A. Hoole

Printed with permission

The following article reached our office some months ago before the present truce, and so needs a slight updating. The Christian population is 7.8% of the total Sri Lankan population of about 15.5 million. 67.4% are Buddhists (all Sinhalese), 17.6% are Hindus (all Tamils), 7.1% are Muslims (Tamil-speaking Moors), 6.4% are Catholics and 1.4% are Protestants. 93.5% of the Sinhalese are Buddhists and 6.5% are Catholics or Protestants. Of the Tamils, 81% are Hindus and the rest Catholics or Protestants.

Editor

RELIGIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Contrary to what the tourist advertisements claim, Sri Lanka (formerly known as Ceylon) was not known as a paradise island in earlier times. Sadly, it has now become an island smeared in blood. The situation is grim in the Tamil-dominated north of the island. The declaration of a 'no-man's land' from Mannar to Mulaitivu, including 'free fire' zones, has brought life virtually to a standstill. Even the sea has been declared out of bounds, affecting the livelihood of 25,000 fishermen.

The growing crisis in Sri Lanka can be traced back to the assimilationist ambitions of Sinhalese nationalism. A deliberate policy of assimilation is being pursued by successive Sinhalese governments not only against ethnic minorities—the Tamils and the Moors—but also against religious minorities—the Hindus, Muslims and Christians. This has been combined with the policy affirmation that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist nation, which by definition means a *Sinhalese* Buddhist nation. Today in Sri Lanka the term 'Buddhist' implies 'Sinhalese', and these two cultural labels are constituent elements of a single identity. Although all Sinhalese are not Buddhist, all Buddhists in Sri Lanka are Sinhalese.

Sinhalese self-perception and the resultant attitudes towards national minorities have been shaped by legends or historical myths found in the sacred Chronicles of the Sinhalese, the *Mahavamsa* and *Culavamsa*, as well as literary works of the 13th. century. These mythical discourses are not devoid of historical facts. However, as myths, they are only overstatements about reality.

The mythical claim that the island belongs to the Sinhalese is not [p. 62](#) open to either debate or verification. The crux of the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict is over this claim. A Sinhalese prose work of the 13th. century echoes this sentiment:

This island of Lanka belongs to the Buddha himself; it is like a treasury filled with Three Gems. Therefore the residence of wrong believers in this island will never be permanent, just as the residence of *Yaksas* [demons] of old was not permanent.

The *Mahavamsa*, which records the sacred history of the Sinhalese people, repeatedly confirms this claim. The Buddha, states the chronicle, visited Sri Lanka three times, flying through the air from India, and implanted his footprint at the top of the highest mountain *Sri Pada* (Adam's Peak). Prince Vijaya, grandson of a lion and a princess, and the legendary founder of the Sinhalese race, landed in Lanka on the precise day the Buddha passed away, but not before the Buddha had designated Lanka the chosen place where his religion would be established, entrusting it to the protection of the king of the gods. In this way, the chronicle vests the origin myth with a religious significance. Even more important is the assertion in the chronicle that Buddha just before his death summoned Sakka, the king of the gods, and the divine protector of the *Sasana* (The Universal Buddhist Church), and

instructed him, 'Vijaya, son of Sinhabahu, is come to Lanka ... together with 700 followers. In Lanka, O Lord of Gods, will my religion be established; therefore carefully protect him with his followers and Lanka.' By such injunctions of the master, the chronicler represents the legendary founder and his descendants the Sinhalese—as a chosen people with a unique mission: to preserve Buddhism in its pristine purity and to make its light shine out to the world.

This basic myth is the psychological foundation of Sinhalese Buddhist civilization. The national myth of Buddhist reconquest is one such facet of the basic myth. It addresses a specific problem—the problem of unbelievers—that has threatened the existence of the Sinhalese civilization ever since its foundation. Yet it maintains its connections with the basic myth by revealing the deep significance of the civilization. It lends the basic myth a brilliance, colour and a resurgence of vitality.

The myth of reconquest is embodied in the story of Dutthagamini, who to this day is regarded as the greatest national hero of the Sinhalese people. A respected Sinhalese scholar, Gananath Obeyesekere states:

The mythic significance of Dutugemunu as the saviour of the Sinhalese race and of Buddhism grew through the years and developed into one of the [p. 63](#) most important myths of the Sinhalese ready to be used as a powerful instrument of Sinhalese nationalism in modern times.

From a Sinhalese Buddhist point of view, Sri Lanka is a sacred isle, designated as a *dhamma dipa*, the land of the Buddha's doctrine. The present crisis and the Sinhalese government's campaign in the North may be described as a dramatic twentieth century re-enactment of the Buddhist reconquest. Twenty-two centuries ago Dutthagamini, a young prince launched his Buddhist reconquest against a Hindu Tamil army with the war-cry 'Not for the kingdom but for Buddhism'. In the handle of his spear, which served as the royal sceptre, he placed a Buddhist relic. Then Dutthagamini secured 500 monks to march with his army; the sight of the yellow, he explained, would bring blessing and protection to the warriors. After defeating the Tamils, thus reuniting Sri Lanka under one royal umbrella, the chronicle claims that Dutthagamini was in remorse over the lives lost in war.

He thus addressed eight *arahantas* [Buddhist saints]: 'How shall there be any comfort for me, O venerable sirs, since by me was caused the slaughter of a host numbering millions?'. The *arahantas* replied, 'From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings were slain by thee O Lord of men.... Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest.'

Today clerical support is no less important in the campaign against the Tamils; and the expanding Sinhalese frontiers are marked by the erection of Buddhist images and edifices. (Tamil churches too have become a target in the campaign. I personally witnessed the destruction of a Tamil church by cannon fire in April, 1984).

As in the past, political religion plays a dominant role in the self-perception of the Sinhalese, and the revitalized religious myths motivate government policy towards religious minorities. Contrary to expectations, the process of secularization has not weakened religion. Socio-economic changes did lead to a loosening, if not disintegration, of local identities of family, kinship, caste, region and the ideologies of values that centred on those identities. But the weakening of these identities enhanced the individual's commitment to the all-inclusive religious identity. It is now the religious identity revitalized and reinforced by myths which gives meaning and coherence to the individual existence. Today every issue, be it economic or social or anything else, is settled within the parameters of such theocratic polity.

In spite of these advances, the Buddhist reconquest is far from complete. The campaign in the north shows that there are important p. 64 objectives still unrealized. A conscious deliberate policy of assimilation generally brings about an opposite reaction. From 1956 there has taken place a drawing together of ranks among all segments of Tamil society, for they have a shared historical experience, a continuous linguistic and cultural tradition, a common way of life and a defined territory as homeland. In addition to the Tamils and the Moors, the Sinhalese Buddhists will have to deal with the Sinhalese Christians. Until recently there were a large number of Marxists who had rejected their Sinhalese identity, but these have now reverted back to it having betrayed the truly poor. The sight of a leading Marxist doing *puja* (worship) at the Dalada Maligawa shortly after the general elections of 1970 was an example of this. Here, it is not so much a matter of a secularization process as of its opposite!

CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

The position of Sinhalese Christians is still ambiguous. Sinhalese Buddhists today perceive the Sinhalese Christians as not only non-Buddhists, but also in a sense as non-Sinhalese; which makes them appear as aliens, like other minorities. Their presence poses a serious identity crisis for the Sinhalese. The introduction of Christianity caused a major split in the old identity, for the historic equation of 'Sinhalese = Buddhist' ceased to have the kind of universal validity it once had. It split into contrasting sets: Sinhalese Buddhist versus Sinhalese Catholic, Sinhalese Buddhist versus Sinhalese Protestant. According to one myth, a new Sinhalese hero Diyasena will arise, kill all Christians and re-establish the glory of *Buddha sasana*. But this attitude has changed since independence. To affirm their Sinhalese identity, Christians have adopted national dress for their services, have taken up Sinhalese (but not strictly Buddhist) calendrical rituals like New Year, and in many ways have implicitly recognized Buddhism as the dominant religion. The cultural markers that distinguish Sinhalese Buddhists from Sinhalese Christians have to some extent been evened out. So the Sinhalese Christians are no longer regarded as aliens; but their status remains ambiguous. My personal view is that those Sinhalese churches which are vigorously evangelistic, that take up the cause of the oppressed minorities, will continue to remain in a state of conflict with Sinhalese Buddhists, because such actions are opposed to Buddhist interests and will raise questions about Sri Lanka's status as a Sinhalese Buddhist nation. At least *some* churches are nevertheless likely to move further towards accepting an all-inclusive Sinhalese Buddhist identity, giving recognition to Buddhism as a civil religion. In P. 65 return they may be tolerated in continuing with their peculiar cultic practices—a position similar to that of the Syrian Christians in pre-modern Hindu India.

FEAR NOT, LITTLE FLOCK ...

The so-called 'resurgent' Buddhism is spiritually bankrupt, a spent force, and that will in the end seal its fate. Sri Lankan experiences show that Buddhist teaching on non-violence combined with abstract values such as *karuna* (compassion), *metta* (loving kindness), *mudita* (sympathetic joy) and *upekka* (even-mindedness) is far removed from the Buddhist ethical way of life. The abstract ideas of Buddhism live in a world of their own. Westerners frequently make the mistake of evaluating Buddhism solely on the basis of its ideology; Buddhism is primarily a way of life. Jesus Christ said, 'You will know them by their fruits' ([Matt. 7:20-24](#)). Sri Lanka is desperately in need of Christ and his gospel. Both in the south

and in the north of the country, in very different ways, the value of life is rapidly depreciating.

The church in Sri Lanka is responding to these needs. The largely nominal church has been going through a period of renewal. It may be seen as God's preparation for a time such as this. The 'forces of chaos' are undoubtedly at work, as never before, leaving behind a trail of death, destruction and despair. Yet the one who is greater, who defeated the powers ([Col. 2:15](#)) is also at work, saving and building. Out of the ruins and desolation God is building his church on the unshakable rock ([Is. 28:16](#)). p. 66

The Renewal of the Church

Klaas Runia

Printed with permission

I am sure it will not be necessary to deal extensively with the *reasons why we need a spiritual renewal of our churches*. In a Dutch doctoral thesis I read the following illustration: 'The future of God in the Netherlands evokes the image of a camping-ground in the autumn. In the green pasture there are still a few trends, on the edge there are a few immovable site caravans. Here and there is a car with a foreign number plate. There is a lonely boy carrying a rucksack and looking for the Manager. The latter gives him a searching glance and asks: For how long?'¹ It is a splendid but also a shocking picture. There are still a few tents, a few churches, but they do not mean much any more; they are only 'tents'. There are a few immovable site caravans, a few old-fashioned chapels that did not move along with the times. There are a few cars with foreign number plates, a few sects that came from across the Atlantic Ocean or from the Far East. There is a lonely boy with a rucksack, the image of young people who are still looking for God (the Manager—with a Capital M!), but he has little faith in their search and therefore asks: 'For how long?'.

I believe this picture of Holland applies to other Western European countries as well. In West Germany church attendance has dropped from 7% in 1968 to 4% in 1983. Among young people it has even dropped from 9% to 2%! In the big cities it is still worse: not even 1%. Since 1970 some two million people have officially broken with the EKD (the Evangelical Church in Germany). In Great Britain, in the seventies, a million people stopped going to the church. In the same period a thousand church buildings were closed and the number of clergymen dropped by 2500. In the last thirty years the Free Churches lost 700,000 members.

Particularly alarming is the fact that so many young people drop out. The churches seem to be completely losing their grip on their future members. And this dropping out of the young people does not happen only in families that are on the edge of the church, but also in families that are actively participating in church life. There is hardly any church family nowadays that does not experience the sad fact that one or p. 67 more children do not show any interest in the church and in the Christian faith. Apparently secularization

¹ Paul Schnabel, *Tussen Stigma en charisma. Nieuwe religieuze bewegingen en geestelijke volksgezondheid*, 1982, 186.

is not only a threatening force attacking the church from the outside, but it is also active inside our families and churches.

On the top of all this we observe the fact that many churches are weakened by the phenomenon of pluralism. There is no longer a united witness. In fact, the churches often seem to be quite uncertain about their own message. From the pulpits the people who still come to church hear contradictory messages, not to speak of the conflicting views propounded by the theologians. In many local churches there are very few, if any, signs of true spiritual life.

This is a sombre picture indeed, but it is the picture of *Western Europe*. Of course, it is not the picture of the total church as it is spread all over the world. There are continents where the church is growing by leaps and bounds. This is particularly true of the church in some African and Asian countries. But however comforting and encouraging this may be, it does not alter the fact that we here in Western Europe are experiencing a strong decline of church attendance and church membership. Moreover, there is little reason to think that this decline is only temporary. It is simply impossible to compare our situation with that in other continents. While in the other continents people experience the Gospel as something entirely new, we are facing the fact that in Western Europe people are abandoning Christianity because they see it as something totally antiquated and therefore useless. While in Africa and in Asia people are more or less in a pre-Christian situation, we are moving towards a *post-Christian situation*,² with all its terrible consequences. One of them is that people who have gone 'through' Christianity seem to have become immune to the message of the Gospel. They are like persons who have had a smallpox vaccination. After they have received a tiny bit of vaccine they have developed sufficient antibodies to be immune to a real 'attack'.

It is obvious that this sad situation cannot be changed by a few simple tricks or structural alterations. What is necessary for the churches in Western Europe is a *complete spiritual renewal*. They really have to be made 'new' again. p. 68

A SUGGESTION FROM THE SIXTIES

But how can this happen? What should we do? Some twenty years ago many church leaders thought they knew the answer. In his booklet *The Humiliation of the Church*, published in 1967, Albert Van den Heuvel, then Director of the Youth Department of the World Council of Churches, mentioned quite a number of *renewal theologians*, such as Bonhoeffer, Visser 't Hooft, Rahner, Kueng, Kraemer, Ebeling, Weber, Congar, MacLeod, Gollwitzer, Hoekendijk, Newbigin, Margull and many others. He further mentioned quite a few names of theologians and sociologists who stressed the need for the church to relate to society; such as Wickham, Wendland, Simanowski, Gibson, Winter, and Peter Berger.³ All these people, in one way or another, stressed the necessity of a 'total' renewal of church and theology. They were all convinced that the present structures of the church are altogether outdated. What we therefore need is not a renewal of the wallpaper of the church, but of the walls themselves (Ernest Southcott, 184). Van der Heuvel himself says: 'Perhaps first of all everything must be razed to the ground so that something new may be built from the rubbish.' But what is the blueprint of the new building? It must be a church that is directed towards the world. 'Society (the world) is rediscovered in renewal theology as a laboratory of God, in which he carries out his experiments. Pagans are the

² Cf. Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, 1980.

³ *Op. cit.*, 48, 183.

bearers of the promise, and within the circle of the renewers there are open eyes and open ears for what Christ says to them through the world'. Within their own church they often feel ill at ease. They rebel against the dogged complacency they find there. They are often also bad churchgoers. Even though most of them still attend, they feel like the kitchen chef of Louis XIV, who had to eat dry bread in the Bastille. They believe that the church and its people are far too 'inner-directed' and do not know the despairing feeling of the spiritual void, a silent God, and the breakdown of a personal morality. What we have to learn again is that Jesus never became a Christian; he became a man. Therefore we are not called to become Christians and we are not called to create Christians. Our calling is to help people to become men. The church has to take on the 'form of a slave' and to get away from its 'morphological fundamentalism'—that is, the fundamentalism of one particular outdated structure which is regarded as ultimate and final. Rather we should let the world have its own forms and fill these forms **p. 69** with the content of the gospel. For this reason, sociology is not just helpful but essential for the church. To put it in the words of Hans Storck: 'The church can be really present and function in a culture only if she synchronizes her *calendar* with the calendar of that society.' Or in the words of one of the documents of the wcc in those very same years: if the church is to have a future, it must be the 'church for others' or 'the church for the world'.

WRONG DIAGNOSIS

It cannot be denied that these views of the so-called renewal theologians have really helped the church to get a better view of itself. It is a fact that in the past the church has often been too inner-directed, and it was salutary for the church to be reminded of its responsibility for the world. And yet we must also say that this theology of the sixties and seventies has not brought about a true renewal of the church. The decline of the church has not been stopped by it. On the contrary, the churches that followed the guidelines given by the renewal theologians, and devoted much of their time and energy to the matters of the world, have suffered more from this decline than the churches that continued to concentrate on the preaching of the gospel itself. Why was this so? Because the calendar or the agenda of the world first of all deals with political, social and economical matters, which do not belong to the primary task of the church. I do not mean to say that the gospel itself has nothing to do with politics or economics. On the contrary, as a man who belongs to the church of which Abraham Kuyper was also a member, I believe that the whole world belongs to Christ and that we have to serve him also in our political, social and economic life. But this is the task of the individual believers rather than of the institutional church. The latter has its own, very special task: to be a community of believers who come together for worship, for instruction in the Christian faith, for mutual pastoral care, and whose first task towards the world is the spreading of the gospel through missionary and diaconal service.

Undoubtedly, the church is part of the world. It is one of the many organizations that we find in this world. Its structures are, just as in the case of all human organizations, worldly structures that can clearly be discerned. They are also open to criticism and in constant need of renovation. But the church is also more than just a human organization with worldly structures. It is also the body of Christ, the people of God. We should never forget that the church has its place in **p. 70** the Christian confession of faith and that in that confession we say: 'I believe in a holy, catholic and apostolic church.' In its deepest essence the church is an object of faith. It has its origin not here on earth but in heaven. As the Heidelberg Catechism says concerning the holy catholic church: 'I believe that, from the beginning to the end of the world, and from among the whole human race, the son of

God, by his Spirit and his Word, gathers, protects and preserves for himself, in the unity of the true faith, a congregation chosen for eternal life.' And that this article of faith is not a mere abstraction appears from what immediately follows: 'Moreover, I believe that I am and for ever will remain a living member of it' (Lord's Day 21).

CHURCH AND SPIRIT

The church, however, is not only an article of faith, but it also has its place in the *third article* of the Apostle's Creed. This means that in dealing with the church we find ourselves in the sphere of action of the *Holy Spirit*. Of course we have always known this and yet we are confronted by the fact that especially in Protestant theology the relationship between the Spirit and church has often been a neglected aspect. Usually the main emphasis was on the work of the Spirit in the individual believer.⁴ I remember that, when a few years ago I was asked to give a paper on 'the Holy Spirit and the church',⁵ I checked a great number of theological works on this topic and soon discovered how poor the harvest was. And yet we cannot understand the reality of the church if we do not constantly see its relationship to, and dependence upon, the Spirit. Rightly it has been said: 'Without the *pneuma* there is no *soma*.'⁶ The church owes not only its coming into existence to the Spirit, but also (and no less) its continued existence. Otto Weber has pointed out that in the New Testament 'body' and 'Spirit' are almost synonymous concepts (cf. [1 Cor. 12:13](#); [10:3](#), [4](#); [Eph. 2:16](#), [18](#); [4:4](#)).⁷ This does not at all mean that the church therefore 'has' the Spirit. The Spirit is nobody's property, neither the individual believer, nor any congregation or denomination. As David P. 71 Watson puts it: 'There is no guaranteed bestowal of the Spirit at baptism, confirmation or ordination.... The Spirit will not be tied to the church, nor to any ecclesiastical office within the church.... The church which tries to tie the Spirit to its institutionalized forms, to its traditional patterns, or to its doctrinal statements, will quickly find itself moribund and powerless. True spiritual life and freedom will come only insofar as the church submits to the Spirit, listens to the Spirit and obeys the Spirit. At every stage we must learn to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches, even if that word sometimes is a word of rebuke, or a warning of judgment. God gives the Spirit to those who obey him.'⁸

The last expression is taken from [Acts 5:32](#) and is very important for our understanding of the Spirit and his work. On the one hand, it clearly says that *God gives the Spirit*. No one can dispose of the Spirit. No one can 'grab' the Spirit and force him to act. On the other hand, we also see that we ourselves are 'involved' in this giving of the Spirit, for he is given to *those who obey him*. Precisely at this point we encounter the essential difference between the work of Christ and that of the Spirit. In Christ's work we are involved only as objects. He does everything, we do nothing. He does everything for us, but also without us. Paul makes this quite clear in [Rom. 5:8f.](#): Christ died for us while we were *still sinners*. Yes, we were *still enemies* of God, we were reconciled to God by the

⁴ Cf. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 1979, 322, 340ff. Berkhof mentions some exceptions, such as John Owen, Abraham Kuyper and Paul Althaus.

⁵ Klaas Runia, 'The Holy Spirit and the Church', in *The Holy Spirit down to Earth*, 1977, 29–29.

⁶ Rene Padilla, 'The Kingdom of God and the Church', in *Theological Fraternity Bulletin*, No. 1 and 2, 1976, 7.

⁷ Cf. O. Weber, *Versammelte Gemeinde*, 1975, 24f.

⁸ David Watson, *I believe in the Church*, 1978, 166–67. Cf. also Peter Kuzmič, 'The Church and the Kingdom of God', in *The Church, God's Agent for Change*, edited by Bruce I. Nicholls, 1986, 71ff.

death of his Son. In the work of the Spirit, the relationship is quite different. Although the initiative is and remains always his, he at the same time and from the very beginning *involves us actively* in his work and uses us in his service. He wants and expects us to work together with him. For this reason Paul can speak of himself and his helpers as co-workers of God ([1 Cor. 3:9](#); [1 Thess. 3:2](#); cf. [Col. 4:11](#)). This does not mean a pneumatological synergism, a division of labour between the Spirit and us, something like 50–50 (or, if that is much honour for us, 90–10; or, if we are still more humble, 99–1). No it is quite different. On the one hand, we must say that the Spirit does everything, the full 100%. And yet the sum total is not 200% but 100%, for he works in and through us. He employs us with all that we are and have. He never uses us as robots but always as living people who are in his service. We find this pneumatological mystery well expressed in Paul's words in [Phil. 2:12](#) and [13](#)—'Work [p. 72](#) out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.' Here we have the 'twice the 100%' which nevertheless remains one single 100%, and the secret lies in the little word 'for'.

All this is of great importance for our subject: it means that when we speak of the renewal of the church, we do not only speak about the work of the Spirit, but at the same time also about our own task!

STRUCTURES AND RENEWAL

This task first of all involves our own *personal renewal*. I do mention this first because I believe that here is a certain chronological order in personal renewal of the church. Sometimes one hears people saying that the members of the congregation must *first* be renewed personally and that only *after* that can we begin to think about the renewal of the church. I believe this is a mistake and that it is based on a wrong dilemma. A similar dilemma one often encounters with regard to the change of social structures. Quite often the argument runs as follows: 'if people would change, the structures would improve automatically'. I totally disagree with this argument. In the first place, nothing happens 'automatically' in the realm of social and economic structures. They are far too strong and too tough. Secondly, wrong structures often imprison people and therefore obstruct personal renewal. A company with dishonest practices often has a corrupting influence on its employees. In a different and yet similar way a church with antiquated forrealistic and authoritarian structures may have a negative impact on the personal renewal of its members. Likewise a modern church that has a strongly bureaucratic centre, staffed by theological or social professionals who are constantly trying to 'brainwash' the local congregations and their members, may impede the spiritual renewal of its members. What we really need is a *combination of personal and congregational renewal*. For its renewal the congregation needs renewed people, but in order to attain personal renewal the members also need a renewed congregation.

CONSTANT RENEWAL

From Scripture it is perfectly clear that personal renewal is a permanent need. To become a Christian may be a once-for-all event, but having become a Christian one is in constant need of ongoing renewal. Paul writes to believers in Rome, who were Christians [P. 73](#) already: 'Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed [N.B. the present tense! It is a constant process] by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' ([12:2](#); cf. [2 Cor. 4:16](#)). This renewal means a new orientation, due to which the 'power of critical judgment' (Greek: *nous*) is able to

test and discern what is the will of God. But this, naturally, has consequences for the whole way of life. To the Colossians Paul writes that they 'have put off the old nature with its practices and put on the new nature' (3:9, 10). This undoubtedly refers to their baptism in the name of Christ. But it is not just a once-in-a-life experience, for the apostle immediately adds that this new nature 'is being renewed [N.B. again the present tense!] in knowledge after the image of its creator'.

The source of this renewal is the *gospel of Jesus Christ*; that which once was proclaimed by the prophets and the apostles and now is being proclaimed in the Sunday services. This gospel alone can renew us from day today. The power of renewal does not reside in us. In his letter Peter quotes the following words from [Isaiah 40](#): 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the words of the Lord abides forever'; and then he immediately adds: 'That word is the good news which was preached to you' ([1 Peter 1:24, 25](#)). The secret power of this proclamation is the *Holy Spirit*, who causes this word of the Gospel to penetrate into the heart and to permeate our whole existence. The Gospel of John calls this a 'new' birth or a birth 'from above' (3:3). Without the presence and activity of the Spirit nothing will happen, even if we go to church twice every Sunday and read the Bible daily. The Spirit must open our ears and our heart to the gospel, and he must do this time and again. In the New Testament personal renewal is not only a once-for-all event (this is undoubtedly true of the initial act of renewal as in [John 3:3](#) and [5](#); [Eph. 2:4, 5](#); [1 John 2:29](#); [3:9](#); [4:7](#); [5:1.4.18](#)—in these cases the aorist or the perfect is being used), but it is also a life long process (cf. [Romans 12:2](#); [2 Cor. 4:16](#); [Col. 3:10](#); [Tit. 3:5](#)). In the spiritual realm we can never live off the interest of the capital we once acquired. Every day we have to go to the bank of the Holy Spirit to receive renewing grace from his riches.

The same is true of the *congregation*. It, too, is in constant need of renewing grace. No more than the individual believer does it have a capital hidden somewhere in a secret vault in the church. Sometimes we may make this mistaken assumption. We see our nice church, we look at our smoothly running organization and at all the people that belong to it and all the activities that are going on, and we conclude p. 74 that we have a living church. Or we pride ourselves on the orderly way in which things are going in our church. We have a 'good' minister who conducts the worship service in a very nice and dignified way, who is a talented preacher, who is a good pastor. What more could one ask? And so we smugly look down upon other congregations where things are not as good as in our parish. But is it really so good? Is our congregation really alive? James I. Packer says in his book *Keep in Step with the Spirit* that many churches today are orderly simply because they are asleep, and with some he fears it is the sleep of death. It is no commendable thing to be orderly in a cemetery!⁹

THE RENEWAL OF THE CONGREGATION

But how does a congregation come to real life? It is striking that the *New Testament* does not say much of the renewal of the congregation. I think this is due to the fact that most authors address congregations that are still in a *missionary* situation. For this reason the main emphasis in the New Testament letters is on the *building up* of the congregation. It is only in later parts of the New Testament that we read about the *renewal* of the congregation. In these cases we have to do with older, sometimes second generation congregations, which already have to be warned against the slackening of their faith and love. We find such warnings, for instance, in the seven letters of the exalted Christ to the

⁹ *Op. cit.*, 1984, 249.

churches in Asia Minor ([Rev. 2](#) and [3](#)), in the letter to the Hebrews, the letter of Jude, the second letter of Peter, and also in the last letters of Paul, the so-called Pastoral Epistles.

It is noteworthy that all these letters are always addressed to the *presbyteroi*. Luther grasped the essence of the New Testament view of the congregation very well when he spoke of the ‘priesthood of all believers’. The same is true of the (Reformed) Heidelberg Catechism that first speaks of the threefold office of Jesus Christ and then immediately continues with the threefold office of the Christian (Lord’s day 12). The New Testament does not know the phenomenon of a ‘pastor’s church’. In such a church ‘the spiritual gifts of the laity have [usually] atrophied, while the responsibilities of ministers and administrators have hypertrophied’.¹⁰ We may even go so far as to say that the so-called ‘pastor’s church’ has a deadly effect on the [p. 75](#) congregation.¹¹ The congregation can come to renewal only when it begins to realize that it is itself responsible for its own spiritual life and therefore also for its own renewal.

In the New Testament this renewal is always linked with the *Spirit*. All letters to the seven congregations in Asia Minor close with the words: ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches’. This expression is the more striking, when we realize that Jesus Christ himself, so to speak, dictates the letters. And yet at the close of each letter he refers to the Spirit as *speaking* to the congregation. A twofold truth is revealed here: in the first place, the exalted Christ does all his work through the Spirit; and secondly, the congregation can hear and come to renewal only through the very same Spirit.

GOD’S WORK AND OURS

But *how* does renewal happen? And what happens in such a renewal? As to the *how* we must always realize that the renewal of the church is *God’s work*. Visser ’t Hooft, who made a thorough study of what both the Old and New Testaments say about renewal, states unequivocally that all the Scriptures teach us ‘that the renewal of the Church means first of all the creative work of God among his people, the victories won by the new *aion* over the old *aion*. The church does not renew itself: it is the object of God’s renewal. ‘Be ye renewed’ does not mean: ‘Get busy and find some different and better method of Christian action.’ It means: ‘Expose yourself to the life-giving work of God. Pray that he may make the dry bones come to life. Expect great things from him. And get ready to do what he commands.’¹² Visser ’t Hooft calls this a very ‘practical truth’. For it implies that renewal does not begin with solemn declarations and decisions of synods or conferences or committees, but with ‘an encounter of God and men, in which God takes hold of the situation and empowers them to serve as his instruments of renewal’.¹³ Must we then simply wait till God takes action? Visser ’t Hooft says: Yes, indeed. But he immediately [P. 76](#) adds: ‘Our waiting must be waiting in the biblical sense.’ That is, ‘as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hands of the mistress, *so* our eyes wait upon the Lord our God’ ([Ps. 132:2](#)). Again we see that from the very beginning *we ourselves are involved*.

¹⁰ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 1979, 17.

¹¹ Johannes Berewinkel, ‘Ausbildung und zuruestung von Gemeindemitarbeitern’, in Theodor Schober and Hans Thimme (Hrsg.), *Gemeinde in diakonischer und missionarischer Verantwortung*, 1979, 129—‘Eine sogenannte Pastorenkirche wirt fuer die Gemeinde toedlich’.

¹² W. A. Visser ’t Hooft, *The Renewal of the Church*, 1956, 90–91.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, 91.

It is from this perspective of our own involvement that I want to mention the following things we ought to do.

(1) First of all we must *repent*. This is not a particularly popular word in our day. For many people, even in the church, it evokes all kinds of negative feelings. And yet we cannot avoid it. Renewal, both personal and congregational, always begins with repentance of our sinful past. It is striking that the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor mention the verb 'to repent' eight times! The Greek word used is *metanoein*. This is not a merely intellectual change of mind or of ideas, but indicates a real 'turning around' of the whole person.¹⁴ It means that we repent of our own self-opinionated ideas, our own self-willed works, our own self-righteousness; and that we return to the heart of the gospel, to our first love ([Rev. 2:4](#)), to our first works ([Rev. 2:5](#)), when we were still ablaze for the Lord, expecting everything from him and willing to give ourselves completely to him.

(2) All this is possible only when we become a *praying* congregation. Prayer is the secret of a congregation that is alive. In the Acts of the Apostles we read again how much and how earnestly the early church was engaged in prayer. In ch. [1](#), after the ascension of the Lord his followers devote themselves with one accord to prayer (v. [14](#)) In ch. [2](#), with the outpouring of the Spirit the new congregation devotes itself to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (v. [42](#)). In ch. [4](#), when they are persecuted they engage in prayer, and 'when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness' (v. [31](#)). Peter and John pray for the new converts in Samaria that they may receive the Holy Spirit (v. [15](#)). In ch. [12](#), when Peter is imprisoned the congregation prays for him (vv. [5](#), [12](#)). In ch. [13](#), when Barnabas and Saul are commissioned for mission work, the congregation fasts and prays (v. [3](#)). In ch. [15](#), while in prison Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns to God (v. [25](#)). In ch. [20](#), when Paul takes leave of the elders of [p.77](#) Ephesus, he kneels down and prays with them all (v. [36](#)). In ch. [21](#), the same happens at Tyre, where they pray on the beach (v. [5](#)). A congregation that seeks renewal must be a praying congregation.

(3) The *worship service* is of paramount importance for the renewal of the congregation. Unfortunately, too often people go to church out of habit and tradition. They do go, but actually expect little and consequently receive little too. Quite often there is a lack of preparation. The worshippers do not prepare themselves through personal prayer, nor do they pray for the minister who has to proclaim the word of God and lead the congregation in the prayers. How then can they expect anything worthwhile to happen in their worship? For such is possible only if and when both the congregation and the minister are fired by the Spirit.

(4) Only then will the congregation also hear *preaching* that is charged with the power of the Spirit. The history of the Christian church makes it quite clear that such preaching is at the heart of every revival. The 16th. century Reformation, which perhaps was the greatest revival of all times, was due to the rediscovery of the Gospel of free grace by an obscure monk, who taught Bible in one of the small universities of Germany. When this discovery was shared by others, a wave of new preaching swept over Western Europe and in thousands of cities and villages a renewal of the church took place. The same is true of the greatest revivals of the 18th. and 19th. centuries: preaching in the power of the Spirit was the driving force behind them. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones more than once remarked: 'Great preachers produce great listeners and great congregations.'

¹⁴ Cf. 'Conversion', by J. Goetzmann, in *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 358.

In his book, *The Renewal of the Church*, W. A. Visser 't Hooft writes: 'Every true renewal of the Church is based on the hearing anew of the Word of God as it comes to us in the Bible.'¹⁵ Why? 'Because the Bible is the authentic record of the only radically new event that has ever taken place in this world.' If we seek to renew the church by taking our lead from some new religious or cultural development or some new technique, we remain in fact 'within the closed circle of the old world'. If we turn to some period of our own past, such as the 16th. century Reformation or 17th. century Pietism, we are not yet 'directly in touch with the source'. We can only get into touch with the new world, if we submit ourselves to the judgment and inspiration of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, and this revelation is given to us through the Scriptures. In true preaching which is based on these Scriptures and is p. 78 made into the living Word of God by the Spirit we are put in direct touch with this source. Rest assured that renewal will take place when the Word is preached, as Paul puts it, 'in demonstration of the Spirit and power ([1 Cor. 2:4](#)).

(5) A congregation that is made alive by this kind of preaching will also become a true *fellowship*. It will no longer be a random collection of unrelated individuals, but it will be a *koinonia* in which there is a place for all: for the older ones and the young, for those who are healthy and those who are sick and handicapped, for families but also for single and lonely people. In such a fellowship the members will care for each other and actively assist each other in their mutual needs. They will suffer together and rejoice together and, when the need arises, even admonish each other (cf. [1 Cor. 12:12-26](#)).

(6) Such a congregation will again become a 'charismatic' congregation and pay attention to the *gifts of the Holy Spirit*. According to the New Testament each believer receives one or more *charismata* from the Spirit (cf. [Rom. 12:6, 8](#); [1 Cor. 12:28-31](#); [Eph. 4:17](#); [1 Peter 4:10, 11](#)). The problem in many congregations is that the members do not even know that they have received gifts, nor do they know how to use them. If we seek the renewal of the congregation one of our first tasks may well be to look for these gifts (mind you, not first of all in ourselves but in others!) and encourage others to make use of them for the building up of the congregation. The statement of the 1983 Wheaton Conference on 'The Nature and Mission of the Church in the World' says: 'Each believer has gifts given by the Lord that form a pattern which marks out our identity as individuals and our form of service in the body of Christ and in the world.... The Lord's gifts are discerned in use.' Since we are new creatures in Jesus Christ, even our 'natural' gifts are renewed by the Spirit. Gifts are discovered, developed and recognized in a task-centred setting.

(7) Next to the *charismata* that are given to all believers, there are also the *offices* of the church. This is not the place to discuss the intricate relationship between *charismata* and office in the New Testament.¹⁶ I agree with Ronald Fung when he says: 'The existence of some kind of specialized ministry, or more specifically of church officers, is attested for the primitive church in Jerusalem, for all the Pauline churches with the [possible] exception of Corinth, and for some of the churches in p. 79 the General Epistles (1 Peter, James).'¹⁷ I also agree with his view that *charisma* and office need each other and that there should always be a healthy tension between them. But what is of paramount importance in our present discussion is the great need for the spiritual renewal of the office-bearers themselves.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, 91f.

¹⁶ cf. for instance Ronald Y. K. Fung, 'Function or Office?—A survey of the New Testament Evidence', in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 8 (April 1984); Ulrich Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt*, 1975.

¹⁷ *Art. cit.*, 36.

The exercise of an office is not just a matter of natural capacity, even though such a capacity may well be used by the Spirit. According to the New Testament the office-bearer should be a man or a woman 'full of the Spirit and of wisdom' ([Acts. 6:3](#)). We should always remember that the office also belongs to the sphere of action of the Spirit and can function effectively only when the office-bearer himself is continually open to the working of the Spirit, and therefore is being renewed continually by the Spirit.

(8) The last aspect to be mentioned here is the renewal of *theology*. Even though the congregation does not depend on theology for its existence—the congregation was in existence long before there was any official theology—it cannot be denied that the congregation is often deeply influenced by the prevailing theology. If this theology goes its own self-willed, unscriptural ways, it will lead the congregation into a spiritual desert. If it is healthy, because it is both scriptural and contextual, it can be a real asset for the renewal of the congregation. On purpose I speak not only of the need for scripturalness but also for contextuality. God's revelation as it speaks through the scriptures always addresses us in our own particular historical and cultural situation and wants to be understood within the context of that situation. A renewed theology will not simply repeat what has been already said by former generations—such a pure repetition may well be the reason why so many orthodox churches are so little alive—but such a theology will listen with 'new' ears because of the 'new' situation. It will undoubtedly hear the 'old' gospel, but it will also discover that this 'old' gospel has a 'new' relevance, and when this relevance becomes manifest in preaching, the congregation will again be captivated by the gospel and be led on the way to renewal.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Does such renewal also mean that the *structures* of the congregation must be thoroughly altered? My answer is: this *may* well be necessary. On purpose I put it so cautiously, because too often one encounters [p. 80](#) the idea that the congregation will be renewed, if only we renew the structures. I disagree totally with this idea. Such a structural automatism is entirely foreign to the New Testament. It is out of harmony with the Spirit and his work. Moreover, a new structure that is imposed on a congregation usually fails to take hold in the congregation. Most often such action causes violent reaction with little accomplished.¹⁸ We should not, however, go into the opposite direction either, and assume that spiritual renewal and structural change are two totally unrelated things. This, too, is an oversimplification. Spiritual renewal means that things begin to move in a congregation and this movement certainly also includes its traditional structures. We see this quite clearly in the Reformation of the 16th. century. When Luther rediscovers the gracious nature of God's righteousness and publishes it in his first short writings, he himself does not think for a moment of changing the structures of the church. But this change becomes unavoidable. The place and the function of the office-bearer simply has to change. The priest has to go and the minister of the Word has to take his place. In fact, the whole hierarchical structure of the church can no longer be retained and has to be replaced by a much more democratic structure. Something similar happened in the case of Methodism.

We should not be surprised by this. The Spirit is also the Lord of structures of the church. He is not bound to traditional, antiquated patterns, but simply renews them according to his own will. It is possible that, when he starts the work of renewal in our

¹⁸ Ronald Beyer, 'A Communion of Priests', in *The Reformed Review*, Vol. 22 (May, 1969), No. 4, 17. The whole issue is devoted to the theme of 'The Renewal of the Church'.

congregation, he will push us on to new forms of congregational life, which are better suited to the new spiritual life and also the new task.

THE PURPOSE OF RENEWAL

For we must not forget that spiritual renewal has a purpose that goes far beyond the renewal of our personal spiritual life. The purpose of renewal is that the congregation becomes what it ought to be, namely, a *missionary* and *diaconal* congregation. The Christian congregation has a twofold task: first of all, as the first-fruits of God's creation it should praise him in the liturgy and serve him by its sanctified life. Secondly, it is called to participate in the *missio* of Jesus Christ in this **p. 81** world. All four Gospels inform us that after his resurrection Christ commissioned his church to go out into the world and to disciple all nations ([Matt. 28:19](#); [Mark 16:15](#); [Luke 24: 47](#); [John 20:21](#)); and the Book of Acts begins with this very same commission, not as a matter of words only, but including the deed. In this respect, too, the congregation has to follow the example of its Lord. He not only preached the gospel of the Kingdom, but also demonstrated it by liberating deeds. Likewise he charged his twelve apostles 'to preach and to have authority to cast out demons' ([Mark 3:14, 15](#)). Some thirty years later the apostle Paul speak of what Christ has done through him, namely, 'to win obedience from the Gentiles, by *word and deed*, by the powers of signs and wonders, *by the power of the Holy Spirit*' ([Rom. 15:18](#)). This combination of word and deed, of the missionary and diaconal activity of the congregation, also explains the tremendous expansion of the early church. The Dutch theologian Dr. J. Van Oort said: ' "Someone" spoke "somewhere" with "someone else".... The Christian faith was propagated from mouth to mouth, from home to home, from city to city, from province to province. After 110 AD Pliny stated that "this monstrous faith spread like a contagious disease".' But it was not just a matter of words alone. The English church-historian Henry Chadwick writes about the early Church that 'the practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment, 'See how these Christians love one another' (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death in the mines, and in social action in time of calamity such as famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war'.¹⁹

Spiritual renewal of the congregation will undoubtedly issue in new missionary and diaconal activities.

I dare say that this is bound to happen. The Spirit for whose coming we pray when we seek the renewal of the congregation is the 'Spirit of mission'. As Hendrikus Berkhof puts it: 'The Spirit forms the unity of the christological and the eschatological pole of God's saving work. He is the expansion of the divine saving presence over the earth. He is the way from the One to the many, from the middle to the end of the **p. 82** times, from the centre to the ends of the earth.'²⁰ And in this world-embracing activity he wants to use us. In [John 15](#) Jesus says that not only the Spirit will bear witness to him, but 'you are also witnesses' (vv. [26, 27](#)). Here we encounter the same reciprocity which we mentioned before. Within the sphere of action of the Spirit *we* may be active too. But we remain—to our comfort and humiliation—always dependent upon the initiative of the Spirit. On another occasion Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not be anxious how you are to speak or

¹⁹ H. Chadwick, *The Early Church*, Penguin Church History, 1967, 56. Cf. my article 'The Church's Mission Today—The Unity of its Task', in *International Reformed Bulletin*, No. 51, Fall 1972, 2-14.

²⁰ Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 1964, 35.

what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you' ([Matt. 10:19, 20](#)).

THE DENOMINATION

So far we have dealt largely with the local congregation. This is, I believe, the correct starting point. When the New Testament speaks of the church it usually means the local church. Paul writes that church life takes place at the local level, and when we speak about the renewal of the church we should indeed first of all think of the congregation *in loco*. But the local church is usually also part of a *denomination*. Is there any ground to expect the renewal of an entire denomination? I find this a difficult question to answer. As we all know that the New Testament does not know the phenomenon of the denominational church. The word *ekklesia* refers either to the local church or to the universal church (especially in Ephesians and Colossians). Denominations are the result of history, and usually the fruit of a schism that occurred in a certain church. Although in some historical situations such a schism may be almost unavoidable and even may be an act of obedience to the Lord of the church, I cannot get away from the feeling that the Spirit cares much less for our beloved denominations than we do. I am also afraid even that he finds it hard to renew an entire denomination! For unfortunately denominations are often dominated by all kinds of bureaucratic structures, which tend to oppose every attempt at change. This is true, not only of churches of the catholic type, with their hierarchical structures, but also of many Protestant churches, proud of their 'low' ecclesiology. Visser 't Hooft points out that 'many Reformation churches defend their specific P. 83 systems of organization or their ecclesiastical customs with a zeal that ought to be reserved for the defence of the faith itself'.²¹

And yet we should not lose courage. When the winds of the Spirit begin to blow, even the most solid structures cannot withstand them. When people and congregations within the denomination are touched by the renewing power of the Spirit, the denomination undoubtedly will notice the change and may open up to these new winds. When renewed people begin to work within these bureaucratic structures, even these structures may begin to serve the cause of the Spirit. A good example is the Second Vatican Council. Prior to Pope John Paul XXIII's announcement of a new ecumenical council no one would have believed that any real change was still possible in the R.C. Church. After the first Vatican Council in 1870, with its declaration of the infallibility of the Pope when he speaks *ex cathedra* concerning matters of faith and morals, the structure of the R.C. church seemed hardened, so that most Protestants believed that renewal had become impossible. And yet it did happen. New winds of change, undoubtedly caused by the movement of the Spirit, began to blow and new doors were opened. It is equally amazing to see how the so-called charismatic renewal has been more prominent in the R.C. Church than in most of the Protestant churches. Even denominations are not a lost cause, as far as the Spirit is concerned. This is not to deny, however, that most of the larger denominations today are in such a spiritual state that renewal seems *well nigh impossible*. The greatest problem perhaps is the *plurality* or, even worse, the *pluralism* that is dominant in them. The message of the church, both in its preaching to its own members and in its speaking to the world, has become so blurred that people both in and outside the church hardly know what the message of the church is. If the denomination is to be renewed it is first of all necessary for it to submit again to the Word of God and to learn how to communicate this Word in all its clarity. As Visser 't Hooft puts it: 'It is in listening to the Word of God in the

²¹ *Op. cit.*, 111.

Scriptures that the Church discovers again and again what God's design is and what its own place is in that design. Where else can it find out about the total plan of God and come to know what particular mission he has assigned to the Church? Where else can it come to realize the full contents of its own life and come to understand its own past and its own future?'²² We may add: Where else can it find the criterion for true renewal? Where else can it find the renewal itself? p. 84

THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

But even denominations are not the last word. As a result of the missionary movement of the 19th. century the modern *ecumenical movement* came into being, issuing in 1948 in the World Council of Churches. To some evangelicals the WCC may be the least promising object of renewal. Some evangelicals regard it even as the prime example of apostasy and as the temple of the antichrist. I have no desire to enter into a discussion of the WCC and to offer a defence of it. As a matter of fact I share many of the misgivings and criticisms that are voiced in evangelical circles. And yet it cannot be denied that the modern ecumenical movement, notably in the form of the wcc, has brought to light essential aspects of the biblical teaching concerning the unity and renewal of the Church.

Unity and renewal are closely related in the New Testament. Paul speaks to the Ephesians of the unity of the Spirit and goes on to mention the sevenfold character of this unity: 'There is only one Body and one Spirit, as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above us all and through all and in all'. And then he immediately adds: 'Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of God's gift.' indeed, unity and renewal belong together.

But for the ecumenical movement just as for the local church and the denomination, it holds true that renewal is possible only when there is a return to, and obedience to, the *Word of God*. Already in the Old Testament we read that the people will be gathered from among the nations when they return to the Lord their God and obey his Voice ([Deut. 30:2](#)). Later on Nehemiah appeals to this word of Moses when the people are in exile ([1:8, 9](#)) and the Lord himself says through his prophet Ezekiel that the unity of the people under the coming of messianic king will be a unity in following the ordinances and observing the statutes of the Lord ([37:24](#)). In the New Testament we find the high priestly prayer of Jesus himself in which he asks his Father: 'Sanctify them all in the truth' thy word is truth' ([John 17:16](#)). The apostle Paul calls the church of the living God 'the pillar and bulwark of the truth' ([1 Tim. 3:15](#)). It is one of the greatest weaknesses of the wcc that it has never stressed this aspect. It has never warned against those teachings that are in conflict with its own basis. I cannot recall ever having seen a statement of the wcc or any National Council speaking out against the new liberalism.²³ On the contrary, the wcc p. 85 has always been very open to the latest theological fashions, including nearly every genitive theology under the sun.²⁴

CONCLUSION

²² *Op. cit.*, 93.

²³ Cf. my books *Reformation today*, 1968, 67 and *De Wereldraad in Discussie*, 1978, 19ff.

²⁴ See my *Wereldraad in Discussie*, 34ff.

True renewal is born of the union of *Word and Spirit*. Both are indispensable for true renewal. The Word tells us what the Gospel is about. It tells us of God's mighty acts of redemption in both the history of Israel and that of Jesus and his church. It tells us of God's eternal plan of salvation and his will to unite in Jesus Christ all things in heaven and in earth ([Eph. 1:10](#)). But the activity of the Spirit is necessary as well. The human heart, left to its own devices, refuse to accept this gospel of renewal. This stubborn heart has to be opened by the regenerating power of the Spirit. The canons of Dort describe this regenerating work as a supernatural work, most powerful and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation and the resurrection from the dead (III–IV,[12](#)). People thus touched by the Spirit 'actually believe and their will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by the will of God but in consequence of this influence becomes itself active'. This is true renewal indeed.

This same renewal will take place in the church when Word and Spirit become active in her. For such a renewal of the church we also need both the preaching of the Gospel in all its fullness and a resurrection of the dead. One cannot help thinking here of [Ezek. 37](#) where we hear the Lord saying to his prophet that he has to prophesy to the dead bones in the valley (symbol of the people of Israel who are in exile and have lost all hope), so that they may live again. And indeed bones come together, bone to its bone, and there are sinews on them, and flesh and skin. But the bones are still without life. Then the prophet is commanded to prophesy again and call the breath, the *ruach*, from the four winds, 'and the *ruach* came into them and they lived and they stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great host' (v. [10](#)). This prophetic picture is not, as often has been suggested, a prophecy of the eschatological resurrection of the dead,²⁵ but it speaks of the *spiritual rebirth* of Israel. It is striking to note that this rebirth takes place in two stages (as in the case of the creation of the first man, p. 86 according to [Gen. 2:7](#)). During the first stage their bones are addressed and then something wonderful does happen indeed: they become bodies again. But they are not yet alive. This happens only when the '*ruach*', the Spirit, comes. Preaching alone is not enough. The Spirit must add his power to the preached word so that hearts of stone are made alive and people stand (spiritually) upon their feet.

When this happens another picture of Ezekiel becomes reality. I am thinking of the picture in [Ezek. 47](#), the picture of the new river of paradise that rises from the spring in the temple. It is a remarkable picture. It starts as a trickle coming from the temple. But soon the trickle grows into a brook. At first this brook is only ankle-deep, but in just over a mile it is a wide and deep river which can be crossed only by swimmers. And then a second miracle happens. The river flows in the direction of the deep landscape of the Dead Sea region and it transforms it completely: the stagnant waters of the Dead Sea become fresh and swarm with fish (vv. [8, 9](#)), and trees flourish on its banks, bearing new fruit every month (v. [12](#)). Renewal often starts on a very small scale, but owing to the Spirit it has its own inherent, multiplying power. It produces new fruit in a landscape that so far was dead. And this fruit is not only for food, but also for healing.

Undoubtedly this picture is of an eschatological nature. It points, far beyond the return of Israel from the exile, to the total renewal of the earth. The river of paradise and the marvellous effects brought by it signify the transformation of this world into the garden of paradise.²⁶ But it is at the same time also a picture of every act of renewal which the Lord brings about in his church. It always originates in the 'temple', in the act of reconciliation by Jesus Christ; it starts from a small beginning but then grows into a wide

²⁵ Cf. John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel*, 1969, 236; Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 1970, 509.

²⁶ W. Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, 585.

and deep river; eventually it penetrates even into the barren world around the church. On the banks of the river of God's renewing grace there grow all kinds of trees, which produce fresh fruit, giving food and healing to all who come to this river. The renewal of the church is a blessing not only for the church itself, but also for the world around it.

Dr. Klaas Runia is the President of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET) and is ministering in Holland. p. 87

The Servant Church

David S. Lim

Printed with permission

*The following article by David Lim is based on his doctoral dissertation, The Servant Nature of the Church in the Pauline Corpus (1987). The research shows that servanthood not only provided the theoretical framework of Paul's doctrine of the Church, but also served as an important basis for the interpersonal relationships and communal structures in his churches. Servant-ecclesiology is revealed theologically in the use of the terms *ekklesia*, *soma christou* and *diakonia* in the Pauline corpus, demonstrated historically in the official ministry of the church leaders, the simple meetings of the house-churches and the egalitarian ideas of social relationships in the Pauline communities. The author demonstrates that for Paul, the church (1) exists by its very nature as the servant of the Triune God, (2) manifests itself in history primarily in the form of assemblies where its members serve one another in love, (3) develops functional offices and flexible structures through the free-yet-orderly exercise of Spirit-endowed gifts, (4) serves in non-authoritarian ways, just as its leaders follow the model of Christ's voluntary self-sacrificial service, (5) aims at egalitarian relationships, which ensue in non-clerical and decentralized forms of congregational life, (6) identifies with those of low status, and thereby also is characterized by simplicity and smallness, (7) exhibits the holism of God's eschatological plan which extends to all areas (not just the religious sphere) of life, (8) demonstrates the inclusiveness of divine redemption through its service of all humanity, and (9) flourishes in the flexible pluriformity and contextuality of its structures.*

Editor

We are living in exciting days. God is moving his Church towards another reformation, to complete the incompleteness of the 16th. century Reformation. The first Reformation focused on our *doctrine of salvation* (*sola gratia, sola scriptura, sola fide*), but failed to proceed to apply the implications of this biblical truth in our *doctrine of the Church* (especially 'the priesthood of all believers'). Protestants are not Protestant enough. We still maintain the vestiges of the hierarchical, paternalistic, clergy-centred 'heresy' of the medieval Church (with its post-Constantinian Christendom model of superchurch, cathedral, p. 88 basilica structures). What will happen in our churches if we become more faithful to the teachings of the Scriptures? I envision at least three important features:

(1) *Church Structures*. We will develop into the 'servant church' model. We will become a loose network of small communities/ churches organized as simple Christ-worshipping Bible study groups which live out the radical demands of the Gospel in non-hierarchical, non-paternalistic and non-clerical ways in our worship, fellowship and community service (*leitourgeia*, *koinonia* and *diakonia*). Each 'local church' (or 'house church' or 'Christ group') will be any believing community which claims a clear Christian identity (in the essential doctrines) built upon a base-community (such as neighbourhoods, schools, factories, or government offices). Each will live out, confess, theologize, communicate and celebrate their faith together with some regularity (and some may specialize in one or two of the churches' functions). Present church structures will be transformed into decentralized networks of house-churches or cell-groups which serve as dynamic centres for evangelism and community involvement (rather than just for lip-service love of God, self-congratulation and parochialism); each small group will have a local locus (working for contextualized witness) and a global vision (working for social transformation).

(2) *Church Growth*. The spontaneous expansion of the Church will then be viewed in terms of 'quantity *through* quality', statistics based on radical discipleship and suffering servanthood. We will be concerned not just for short-term goals of winning a few converts one by one, but especially for the long-term reputation of Christ's Body in the locality, nation and world. (It is very possible 'to win a few battles, yet lose the war'.)

Our messages and lifestyles must never be compromised. Our churches clearly stand for what our Lord Jesus called for: 'radical disciples' and 'suffering servants' who repent from selfishness, pride, materialism (which means greed and covetousness), and self-righteousness, and obey him in love, truth, justice and equality, peace and freedom. Hence smaller committed Christian communities are necessary visible expressions of these commitments.

Thus rather than aiming to make small churches bigger (by addition) we must seek to increase the number of small churches (by multiplication). We should work for an ever-growing number of small churches instead of a smaller number of ever-growing churches. Is there any better way to mobilize the totality of the membership in Christ's Body? [p. 89](#)

(3) *Church Leadership*. Our church leaders will be models of 'radical discipleship' and 'suffering servanthood'. Though they may come from different backgrounds (some coming from the upper class like Paul and Barnabas), they will heed Christ's call to 'renounce all' in order to prioritize the work of spreading the good news of the Kingdom of God, especially among the poor in the rural areas and urban slums.

Our main leaders will be itinerant (and hopefully theologically-trained!) 'servants of the churches', who live simply and serve sacrificially, since they see their nation and the world (not just their own churches) as their parish. They will have developed their spiritual gifts in the context of a committed community, and will be sent forth by their respective 'home base' to be transient short-term 'pastor-helpers' or 'church-planters' (with full financial support) or incarnated long-term missionaries (with gradually decreasing support) serving in other areas. This is 'incarnational mission' in contrast to modern 'mission by affluence'.

The overall framework of this vision is the biblical teaching that the church is the 'firstfruits' or vanguard of God's kingdom (his new creation and new humanity), where love and righteousness (justice, equality) prevail, where every person treats other persons as equals (as friends, as co-servants) created in the image of God. As long as the Church actively pursues the priority of following her Lord on the way of the cross, the forces of evil will not be able to overcome her assaults in the 'spiritual battle [between good and evil]' that is going on in heaven and on earth.

'For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God ...' ([1 Pet. 4:17](#)). 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our Lord and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death' ([Rev. 12:10, 11](#)).

ADVANCING THE SERVANT-CHURCH MODEL

One of the major causes of stagnation in most of modern Christianity is the dilution of the new wine (i.e. propagating the 'gospel' of cheap grace), and the confinement of it in old wineskins (in the Christendom model). Throughout church history revivals have occurred only when the gospel is proclaimed in its radical transforming freshness, and when Christians have allowed it to break old wineskins. **P. 90**

Comparison between Christendom and Servant-church Models

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Christendom</i>	<i>Servant-church</i>
Key theological theme	special clerical ministry	priesthood of all
Key concepts	institutional church	community/organism
Main services	pastoral, spiritual care	total-person care
Emphases	quantity, magnificence	quality/simplicity
Stewardship priorities	institutional assets	sharing in need
Leadership style	centralization	decentralization
Decision making	top-down hierarchy	democratic
Primary structure	super church	house-churches
Leadership	hierarchical pyramid	inverse pyramid
Leadership roles	administration, sermonizing	modelling, enabling
Church Growth	planned for bigger church	spontaneous multiplication
Main strategies	mass evangelism	personal evangelism
Buildings	cathedrals	community centres

Missions	sending by donations	by personal support
Ordination	makes one 'holier'	discovering gifts

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Those who are committed to the servant-church model will try to the following:

- (1) If put in leadership roles, they will serve as models of facilitating, discipling, and training 'faithful people who will be able to teach others also' (cf. [2 Tim. 2:2](#); [Eph. 4:11-13](#)), while serving as *one among equals*, or even as *first among equals* (corporate leadership team with rotating 'chairmanship').
- (2) They will work for the decentralization of churches and Christian organizations into smaller independent units which are *each* self-governing, self-supporting (with their own budgets) and self-propagating.
- (3) They will start house-groups, Bible study groups and fellowships (viewing each as a church), while discipling two or three leaders in each group.
- (4) They will teach (without imposing) how these groups should spend their resources, on *people* (rather than on buildings), especially the needy, and on community serving projects. Every ten adults should be able to support one adult to serve 'full-time' as coordinator of the community or as church-planter in these communities.
- (5) They will encourage these groups to 'network' with other Christian groups, through co-sponsorship of *ad hoc* meetings and projects, and the formation of more permanent, loose associations or alliances (e.g., monthly prayer meetings for leaders).

Dr. David S. Lim is teaching at the Alliance Bible Seminary, Manila, Philippines. p. 91

Book Reviews

THE DREAM THAT WOULD NOT DIE: THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP 1846-1986

by David M. Howard
(Paternoster, Exeter, 1986)
Pp. 239, £6. 95

Abstracts of reviews by David P. Whitelaw, in *Missionalia*, Vol. 15 No. 1 April 1987 and Dr. Fritz Laubach

The attractive paperback tells the story of world-wide co-operation among evangelical Christians from 1846-1986 focusing primarily on the formation of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) in 1951 and its subsequent development. The writer is David Howard,

present General Director of WEF, an organisation linking evangelicals worldwide in a variety of enterprises: theological education, common action on world needs, women's concerns, mission, renewal and communications.

Howard defines the term 'evangelical' and clarifies its current usage. The centrality of basic beliefs (plus social concern and missionary union) distinguish 'evangelicals' from 'fundamentalists' and 'modernists'. He describes the founding (London, 1846) of the Evangelical Alliance: 'a voluntary alliance of individuals rather than a confederation of churches'. The idea of an international ecumenical alliance foundered upon the issue of slavery which 'scuttled the attempt to build a truly representative body of evangelicals on a global basis'. Autonomous national alliances were formed instead. The achievements of this international, loosely-knit confederation are listed.

The founding of WEF (1951) and its growth is described, noting the debate over the use of the word 'infallible' in relation to Scripture, which led to the separate formation and existence of the European Evangelical Alliance from 1952–1968, when it joined WEF. The roles of leaders and transition to a genuinely representative world leadership are discussed, together with the constant refrain of lack of funds. The statement that 'lack of finances invariably has been the major reason for failure to progress' is probed. The evangelical proclivity for drawing lines of distinction rather than forging channels of cooperative action is not adequately confronted, though the author honestly faces the tensions between various styles of leadership and over issues such as the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism, LCWE, and internationalising the WEF.

The book clearly delineates the shift from disproportionate Western influence to a more balanced global partnership, and WEF's efforts to break out of the rigidity of an exclusive stance into the 'open space' of a more inclusive attitude. This is reflected by increasing attention to [p. 92](#) the role of women, to the poor and Third World concerns, to social ethics and transformation.

The book raises fundamental questions. Is it possible to tell the story of world evangelicalism without reference to the WCC? Can the label 'evangelical' be monopolised by a group of Christians who have found it very difficult to demonstrate 'spiritual unity in action'? Does WEF reflect a balance between the conviction that truth is important and the recognition that all perceptions of biblical truth are incomplete? The book has value for those who identify themselves as 'evangelical' and for those concerned with these questions.

Dr. Fritz Laubach, President of the German Evangelical Alliance writes: Howard describes the contribution of the WEF to the life of the church. In church history it is the first such fellowship comprised of different churches and has formulated a clear concrete goal of Christian unity. The Alliance's week of prayer has had enthusiastic participation of Christians all over the globe since 1861 and has concretely helped the co-operation for world evangelization. The publication of evangelical literature is another significant contribution of the World Fellowship. The book brings, according to Laubach, two insights to the European Evangelicals: 1. It shows the future directions in the life of the church of Christ are evolved not in the European Christianity but in the Latfricasian Christianity. 2. Though the alliance supports the local evangelical fellowships, it aims primarily at evangelical fellowships at international levels cutting across cultures and geographical and other barriers. As such the Christian Unity expressed in the WEF has become a great and significant fact of modern evangelicalism:

The book is not only an excellent summary of the history but also of world wide perspectives of Evangelical developments. With well documented historical events as well as of theological analyses, the book is a mine of valuable information on World Evangelicalism.

EXEGETICAL FALLACIES

by D. A. Carson
(Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984)
Pp. 153, £7.95

Reviewed by Tom Schreiner in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 29 No. 1 March 1986

The author focuses on some major exegetical and methodological [p. 93](#) flaws that plague the serious exegete. The book is an adaptation of lectures first delivered at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary in Portland, Oregon, and thus it is not a highly technical discussion but one that is comprehensible for pastors and seminary students. Nevertheless even the expert will probably find at least some of his or her faults reflected in these pages.

The organization of the book is clear and easy to follow. The book consists of an introduction, four major chapters, and a brief conclusion. The introduction functions as an apologetic. Carson admits that a concentration on fallacies can be dangerous: The one who does the criticizing may become inflated with pride, and the beginner may be paralyzed by the fear of making an error. Nevertheless he thinks that an exposé of exegetical fallacies is justifiable because the end result should be a more precise and sensitive interpretation of the Scriptures. The expert will not find in this work an attempt to catalogue all of the major exegetical fallacies. Indeed, in the conclusion of the book the author briefly suggests some other areas (e.g. the use of statistics and structuralism) that may be used improperly, and he suggests that the areas listed should be discussed more fully in the future.

The heart of the book is found in chaps. 1–4. The following issues are discussed: (1). word-study fallacies, (2). grammatical fallacies, (3). logical fallacies, and (4). presuppositional and historical fallacies. Forty-eight different fallacies are identified, and thus it is clearly impossible to detail them all in brief review. The book is literally full of specific examples that illustrate the particular fallacy being discussed. This part of the work could engender some controversy, for the author cites many well-known authors (mostly evangelical) and demonstrates how they are guilty of the specific exegetical fallacy that he is analyzing. Mercifully, the author shares with the reader two of his own exegetical flaws. The citation of mistakes by other scholars clearly gives the book a controversial flavour, but it also makes the book more interesting and applicable, for the reader can see in a specific Biblical text the impact of an exegetical fallacy.

The most extensive discussion relates to the study of words. Here Carson identifies sixteen different errors. Most of these will be very familiar to the expert: the root fallacy, anachronisms, verbal parallelomania, etc. The author concludes this chapter by emphasizing that words must be understood in their context and that at least an elementary knowledge of linguistics is necessary for responsible word study.

The chapter on grammatical fallacies discusses the significance of the aorist tense, first-person aorist subjunctives, the middle voice, the [p. 94](#) article, conditional sentences, etc. Carson rightly points out that grammatical studies have received little attention recently, and thus this part of the book, in my opinion, is particularly valuable. He emphasizes that the aorist tense does not necessarily indicate ‘once for all’ or ‘completed’ action; instead, the aorist must be carefully interpreted by taking all the contextual factors into account. The middle voice is not always reflexive, nor does it always indicate that the subject is acting of itself. The author concludes the chapter with a very insightful discussion on the article, the Granville Sharp rule, and the Colwell rule, emphasizing that

the latter two must be used cautiously and in a qualified way, for many have applied these rules beyond credible limits.

In the chapter on logical fallacies Carson defines what he means by logic (see pp. 92–93) and argues that logic is by its very nature universal. Different logical fallacies are explored: the excluded middle, sloppy syllogisms, non sequiturs, inadequate analogies, etc. The chapter on presuppositional and historical fallacies is quite brief. Two of the five areas Carson discusses are uncontrolled historical reconstruction and fallacies of motivation. The former is methodologically suspect, according to Carson, because it spins out an historical schema for, say, the NT period and in doing so argues that the proposed reconstruction demonstrates the historical unreliability of large parts of the NT. But how can this be methodologically defensible since the only evidence we have—viz., the NT—is discounted because of a speculative reconstruction? Carson says that the error of the motivational fallacy can often be detected in radical redaction critics, for the latter ascribe a theological motivation to virtually every change in the synoptic accounts, thereby detecting a theological agenda when the evidence is too slim to support such a view.

This book, in my opinion, is a must for teachers, pastors, and serious Bible students. Carson's methodological approach is full of wisdom, it is penetrating, and it is clearly expressed. Most will agree that the exegetical fallacies the author describes are prevalent, but there will undoubtedly be more disagreement on the specific examples drawn on to illustrate the fallacy under discussion. For instance, he cites fairly often the methodological flaws of those whose exegesis leads them to view positively the ordination of women. Clearly, all will not agree with some of Carson's exegetical conclusions, even if they are sympathetic in principle with the methodological flaws he details. Such inevitable disagreements reveal the complexity of the exegetical task and the need for further work on methodology, for the author does not solve (or even attempt or claim to solve) all the methodological [p. 95](#) issues that face the interpreter. But the book is an insightful and provocative methodological study, and it should stimulate more discussion on this crucial area. For that alone we should be grateful.

UNFINISHED AGENDA

by Lesslie Newbigin

(WCC Publications, Geneva & Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1985)

Pp. 8+263 £7.50

Reviewed by Willem Saayman in *Missionalia* Vol. 14 No. 2 August 1986.

Lesslie Newbigin can be said to belong to the second generation of twentieth century ecumenical pioneers, those who, under the leadership of Visser't Hooft, carried the vision of Mott, Oldham, Söderblom and others to fruition. As last General Secretary of the IMC and the Associate General Secretary of the WCC after the integration of the WCC and the IMC, he was certainly very strategically placed in the ecumenical movement.

This autobiography is told with grace and charm, striking the right balance between the private person and public figure. Like so many of the ecumenical pioneers, Newbigin's career started off in the Student Christian Movement. Then he moved to India where as a missionary he became deeply involved in the preparation and planning which was to lead to the establishment of the United Church of South India. Before he was forty years of age, he was named one of the first bishops of the new church. During all this time he was also deeply involved in the world-wide ecumenical movement, so that it came as no surprise that he was appointed General Secretary of the IMC. In this capacity he steered the Council through the difficult years preceding its integration with the WCC. After integration, he stayed on as Associate General Secretary (with Visser't Hooft) of the WCC and first

director of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism. After four years in Geneva, he returned to the Church of South India as bishop of Madras for nine years, before retiring to teach at the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham.

At the heart of the book is Newbigin's passionate concern for Christian unity and the mission of the church. In his own words, he has always seen 'unity and mission as two sides of a single commitment'. Sadly, he goes on to say, 'I have lived to see them systematically separated and opposed to each other' (251). Equally sad is his evaluation of the present state of the process of unity: 'Visible unity is, p. 96 for the present at least, far down in the list of agenda, and the Church of South India and its sister churches are no longer challenging models but only remote oddities' (252). Unfortunately it seems as if Newbigin is right in his evaluation.

Of great interest is Newbigin's opinion that the WCC is seen by many First World churches as a threat because of its sustained insistence on justice for the poor, the oppressed and the forgotten. 'The hostility which it [the WCC] now evokes among many church people in the rich world is a piercingly clear evidence of the repented sin of our society' (253).

This outstanding autobiography is not just the record of an amazingly varied life; it contains many insights which are important for the church today.