



# The Voice

*of the*

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Editor: HENRY VOTH

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**EDITORIAL**

**ON THE PRIORITY OF EVANGELISM**

Much has been said of late in our churches about evangelism and outreach, and about involvement for the purpose of evangelism. As in every generation, so in ours the command of Jesus thunders (or whispers) within our massive church walls: "Go to all the nations, and evangelize." How pathetic must that church become that stops its ears to this mandate!

Yet I have a concern regarding our response to the mandate. It is so easy for us to side with one facet of the truth over against others and to make it not only the bit and bridle, but also the blinkers for our preaching. If in our fellowship one emphasis comes into vogue, we tend to shame each other into drumming it incessantly. To justify the consequent miniscope in our preaching and teaching, we ascribe to this aspect of the truth a superior rank in the proclamation. In some such way, it seems to me, we have come to claim a certain priority for our preaching and teaching, we ascribe to this aspect of the goal of preaching, i.e. all that is done in the church is for the ultimate purpose of winning souls. Others see the priority in terms of the method of proclamation. They insist that confronting a man with the claims of Christ (commonly, and wrongly, come to be called 'witnessing') is the first approach to the unbeliever.

No doubt it is possible in some ways to put logic under these claims. One can insist that in the church's program cycle of winning, nurturing, equipping and sending forth (see Ephesians 4:11-12), winning comes first. But an equal claim can be made for each of the other segments of the cycle. After all, each follows upon the preceding. I propose to establish two points that must at least lead us to speak with caution of the priority of evangelism. Let me speak first of evangelism as to method.

1. The New Testament uses a large number of terms to describe preaching, (Some readers may be happy that I am citing seven). Of these terms, "to evangelize" is only one. Preaching is spoken of as speaking to another in a conversational way (*lalein*; Titus 2:15), or as telling another what one has experienced from God (*martyrein*; Acts 4:33). There is the kind of preaching that simply proclaims the great redemptive acts of God (*keryssein*; 2 Tim. 4:2), or the kind that seeks to instruct

the mind regarding these acts and their implications (*didaskein*; I Tim. 4:11). The New Testament also speaks of preaching as prophesying (*propheteuein*; I Cor. 14:4), and as exhorting or counseling (*parakalein*; I Pet. 2:11). And then, of course, preaching is seen also as the jubilant announcing of the great news with the purpose of persuading men (*euangelizesthai*; Acts 8:40). Clearly, there are preaching tasks of the church that are not geared immediately to convert men. It is inconceivable that a genuine conversion takes place in a mind void of understanding regarding that about which the decision is made. Clearly some proclamation of God's deed in Christ and some teaching must blaze the trail. And perhaps a witness, who simply demonstrates and articulates what God in his grace will do, must prepare the way for the confrontation that demands a choice. A zealot hurries through a hospital and finds two Indian children just flown in from the reservation. They know nothing of Jesus. He asks them, whether they are saved', and in response to their vague but negative answer, he leads them through a simple procedure to an affirmation of sorts. The Zealot claims he has 'witnessed' and two persons through it have 'found Christ'. In fact he has merely confused two children. There is nothing in their history or understanding on which this 'experience' can rest, and there is no provision for nurture. In terms of method, evangelism should not have been first here. To insist on the efficacy of this 'experience' to save the children, is to make of the procedure a means of grace and of regeneration very much as some denominations have made of infant baptism. Something has been done to the child, but nothing decisive has happened in him.

2. We turn now to evangelism as to purpose. It seems rather obvious that when the mandate is given to a body of believers, the prior requirement is a body of believers who can respond to that mandate. My understanding of Jesus' concern in his great prayer is that the church in fact be the church so that through it men will be drawn to its Lord. It becomes sufficiently clear that in the prayer Jesus' prior concern is for the oneness of the saints. The oneness will win men to the faith (John 17). It would appear, then, that the primary task is making the church what it ought to be. If it be countered that oneness finds its purpose in evangelism (John 17:20-23), and is therefore secondary in terms of significance, I would still maintain that the attaining of oneness in the church is primary as to the immediate purpose of the ministry. (And perhaps it is not wrong to say that it is primary as to God's ultimate purpose as well. See Rev. 21:9ff.) When the Jerusalem church was one in heart and soul, God added to its number (Acts 2:47). For all

## ARTICLES

### THE CHURCH AND SOCIAL ISSUES

For one who was born and raised in the urbanized industrial east with its significant Mennonite minority, the transition to the mid-west with its distinctive urban - rural environment and widespread Mennonite influence, is a challenging one. While it is true in one sense that people are persons wherever you find them, it is also true that we are products of the environment in which we live, both in the way in which we live and the thought processes which determine this way. However, for a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church, there is a common understanding of faith in Jesus Christ which provides the base for discussion with brethren from across Canada on the question of the implications of our faith for the particular community in which we live.

Even though we might use different language, we are united in the understanding of the Kingdom of God as central in the teaching of Christ in the establishment of the new covenant. The members of this kingdom are those who have committed themselves in faith to a relationship with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This commitment is both an individual matter and a corporate acknowledgment, as the Church of Jesus Christ continues the ministry of Christ in witness. However, if there is a point of departure in understanding, it is precisely in the practical aspects of this witness that we lack a consistent definition. We unequivocally contend that we are "in the world, but not of the world." But, when we are asked to define what it means to be in the world, we are prone to seek refuge in what

Paul's evangelism, he sees the ministry in the church as a ministry to the saints, to make them mature, and one. (Ephesians 4:11-13). It almost seems that when the church is what it ought to be, evangelism naturally follows. The church is seen in the New Testament as the context for evangelism. In that sense what the church is, has priority over what it does.

—J. Regehr

it means to be not of the world. The supposed "justification - works tension," in the definitions of faith in the writings of Paul and James, finds practical expression in our ability to define "The Church in Mission" from the standpoint of proclamation, without considering a social involvement, which could also be termed mission or witness.

Our desire to consider the topic of "The Church and Social Issues" is a tacit acknowledgment of our concern to begin to probe into the responsibility of the Christian and his church for a witness, which can be properly called mission, in the world—a witness that is different from, and separate from, our usual understanding of proclamation. This may be illustrated by means of the following questions: "To what extent is it the Christian's duty? . . . To what extent should individuals or the church try to influence? . . . What methods of influence are acceptable? etc." The validity of these practical concerns cannot be denied. However, until one is clear on the frames of reference for such evaluations and judgements, any decision would lack the strength of conviction, seemingly in favour of a tentative expediency. Thus it is imperative that we develop our understanding of the meaning of the state, the role of the church, and the manner of our witness. Then the individual himself can grapple with the practical application of these understandings. While this author's age and experience obviously militate against a mature private interpretation, the wealth of printed material available is more than adequate for our purposes. The appended bibliography may be useful for further study.

### 1. The Meaning of the State.

While sociological definitions which understand the state as either the sum of organized humanity, or as social contract, are interesting and useful in certain disciplines, the only definition suitable for our purposes is the theological. The question, "What does the New Testament say about the State?" is most relevant. Can one find a word from Jesus, or a teaching of Paul in this regard?

In the Gospels we are aware of the historical situation, but only at a point of tension does Jesus react to the demand of the state for taxes. And then, the "Render to Caesar . . . and to God" reply, is a definition of personal responsibility rather than an inherent right. Only in the final conflict when Christ stands accused as the King of the Jews, before the Roman representative of the state, does he make clear that Pilate's power is given from above. The Old Testament promises, to be realized in the age to come, are those which Christ fulfills, in His person and the coming of the Kingdom. The absolute obedience of the Christ reflects the age to come which is characterized by the doing

of God's will. The present age, in contrast, is characterized by a self-centered disobedience.

In writing to the church at Corinth Paul enlarges on this meaning of the state. The victory of Christ, as detailed in I Corinthians 15, includes a triumph over the powers. The final consummation of the present age will come when "he has put all his enemies under his feet." The paradox of our age rests in the realization that the Lord of history reigns, while all enemies are not yet subject to Him. John Howard Yoder finds the answer to this paradox in a functional definition of the state within the divine economy, whereby the state channels violence by turning it against itself, and thus preserves that order which is the precondition of human society and a vehicle for the work of the church (p. 12). The judiciary and police machinery of the state then has the ultimate purpose of preserving the fabric of the human community as the context within which the work of the church can be carried on.

By means of this definitive understanding Mr. Yoder neatly escapes that dilemma which places the state outside the redemptive plan. It is precisely through the maintenance of an ordered society that the state furthers the evangelization of the world. Paul, in Romans 13, strongly urges respect for this police power of the state as the agency of God's wrath in an evil society.

In conclusion, we propose that Mr. Yoder's definition of the state as sword is true to the Biblical evidence (p. 59). Any evaluation of the meaning of the state in its police function, or the coordination of social cooperation, can best be understood when we ask how the sanctions of the sword are involved.

### 2. The Role of the Church

As the victory of Christ includes a triumph over the powers, so the focus of that victory is the body of Christ, the Church. In contrast to Israel which God dealt with as a religio-civil state with a given body of civil law, the Church finds itself under a secular state. The law given to the Church is the law of love. To determine whether the church is the Church the one sure criterion is its obedience to the standards of discipleship. Only in this way can the witness of the Church be validated. Any other measurement, especially when it defines success by the achieving of specific results, errs in understanding the command and the nature of God.

Historically the Church has defined the problem of a Christian's relation to the state in four different ways:

(1) Lutheran - the Christian as an individual is fully responsible for his moral actions, but when he acts on behalf of the state to meet its demand of full participation and obedience, he is no longer personally responsible.

(2) Calvinist - since man is under a double government, and the spiritual and political laws of government are equivalent to the demands of God, the Christian is obligated to take full political responsibility.

(3) Neo-orthodox - every man must accept personal involvement in the guilt of the state and its political action, although the Christian is freed from this guilt by the grace of God.

(4) Anabaptist (nonresistant) - does not admit an ethical dualism but considers each act in the light of personal moral responsibility. The law of love serves as a standard for personal ethical action. Here the ultimate question is that of an absolute obedience to the will of God.

This summary by Archie Penner (p. 17) indicates that most evangelical churches have adopted the Lutheran definition. We might examine our own hearts to see if the way of the cross is real to us, and if we maintain the ethic of the New Testament in every phase of life.

It is exactly at this point that the question of social involvement becomes acute. Can we dare to promote and implement the correction of injustice in the world through the way of love, of suffering, and of the cross? Some would avoid such a supernatural order by proclaiming a gospel without a social message, while others would accept the complex social order as the frame of reference, to the neglect of the Gospel message. Guy Herschberger (p. 20) judges both as an under-evaluation of the redemptive power of Christ.

In reply to his own question, "What does it mean for the Church to be the Church?" Paul Peachey (p. 98 f.) makes three assertions:

(1) The tension of redemption - in which there is a radical acceptance of the thrust of redemption as reordering the total existence in the world, including both personal salvation and social eschatology.

(2) The quest for community - where the members share a concern for the church as the community of common care.

(3) Evangelization and participation - established by the readiness of the believing community to have its own life continually shattered and transformed by grace; and by being accessible to the men who are to be reached by the Gospel. Mr. Yoder (p. 16) in answer to a similar question sees the role of the Church from two other perspectives. In the first, the inner life of the Church as a society is to be a lesson for the outside world. This would necessitate a sober realism about the temptations of power and the persistence of sin, an acknowledgment of the diversity of ministries leading to a sharing of

responsibilities, and the making of decisions through convinced consensus as a result of common study. In the second, the directing of the creative impulse from a service to the larger community. Rather than conscientious objection we should stress conscientious participation.

### 3. The Manner of Our Witness

The state is the sword, and the Church is to fulfill the law of love. If we can agree that, as illustrated above, these are acceptable working definitions, then we are ready to consider some guidelines for the manner of our witness in today's society.

The communication media of our day have exposed us to the forms of radical pacifism. We have watched those who disregard segregation go to jail, and those who oppose war or favour free love gather in public places with prominent placards. Now and then the white collar of the clergyman is dramatically apparent. No doubt some of us have wondered about the implications of such a witness. Surely one ought to consider the clarity of the witness, the danger of pharisaism, and the moral appropriateness of such actions. Do these forms of witness fulfill the law of love, or do they entail an involvement in the power struggle itself?

Mr. Yoder (p. 55) suggests that to be most effective a witness should (1) coincide with a clear prior moral commitment, (2) propose alternative action, (3) seek to create a climate in which the individual is more free to do the right, and (4) be directed to a person with discretionary responsibility. We will always be tempted to ignore the function of witness and to pursue a self-satisfying participation in the power struggle. On the other hand, however, we must avoid the temptation to judge the meaningfulness of the witness on either a certain numerical strength or the willingness to listen. The example and teaching of Christ, found in His passion and the Sermon on the Mount, need constant re-examination in the light of our new patterns of life.

Finally, when the question of direct involvement is raised: "May a Christian be . . . ?" it would seem that there is a false orientation in life. Just as the Christian is called to be an agent of reconciliation, so he is to determine his calling in any and every involvement. Where he is convinced of a particular calling he must be willing to present evidence to the brotherhood to justify such an action as discipleship. For those who dare to challenge the social order, and this would include all who have heard Jesus say, "Ye are the salt of the earth, and the light of the world," there will follow persecution. The servant is not above his Master. But, with Peter and John we can then rejoice

## HOW ABOUT CAESAR?

### Towards a Biblical Assessment of Social Action/Political Involvement

To question whether the church has ever demonstrated social concern and/or participated in political involvement (social action) is to ignore the history of the church, particularly of the last three centuries: Shaftesbury and child-labour legislation; Wilberforce and slavery-abolition; Wesley and Booth with rehabilitation-concerns; Kingsley and Christian labour; Ryerson and church-prompted education in Canada; George Fox, Elizabeth Fry and John Howard with prison reform. Within our own Mennonite background we can think of the sums given by Dutch Mennonites for relief of the Huguenots and Waldenses. More recently, we became very politically involved with government-directed petitions and requests when it was our own "people" involved, as **Mennonite Exodus** and **Lost Fatherland** so amply illustrate.

If the "church" is understood, in part at least, to mean a body of Christians carrying out consciously the total mission of reconciliation committed to them by God, we cannot ignore the preceding, although the preceding does not provide its own justification apart from other considerations. Still, we cannot say, "The church didn't do it; only individual Christians were involved." If we do this, we seriously undermine the corporate nature of the body of Christ, segmenting the Christian into what

knowing that we have been counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name of Jesus who is the Christ.

Herbert Swartz

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he does as a Christian and into what he does as a member of society. At the deepest possible level of meaning, what he does "as a member of society," he does **because** he is a Christian. At the same time, I do not hereby imply that there is no priority in the tasks performed, nor that everything that a Christian is, is **ipso facto** of the essence of the church. But I do imply that where the Christian, conscious of his being responsible to God and to his community of believers, is carrying out the task assigned and supported by both these, there the church is also involved.

Such work, such involvement, is set in the context of the political community, which is particularly in our western culture, highly pluralistic; it is involvement set in the context of the state.

The state can be viewed from different perspectives. In terms of a political philosophy, it can be defined as the "organization which maintains order and suppresses violence through the possession and use of coercive restraining power;" which presides over, and controls the struggle for, social change; which promotes and protects common interests (however this latter is determined or defined).

In terms of the Biblical perspective it can also be variously interpreted. Certainly no form appears to be favoured. The tribal association, the amphictyony of the judges, was certainly viewed with a great deal of nostalgia; the theocracy is viewed as a limited monarchy, with the priests (or more particularly, the prophets) functioning as constitutional interpreters! However throughout the OT, there is a strong skepticism about claims to totalitarian control; the rulers are constantly reminded of their accountability to God, and citizens take it upon themselves to remind the king and his court of social injustice (David and theft of another's wife, Ahab and theft of Naboth's vineyard, the northern court at the time of Amos—these are the outstanding examples of such reminders).

The NT reinforces the view of the state's accountability to God. Jesus' word, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" does not establish the autonomous nature of the state. Rather, as the coin bears Caesar's image, so the man of the kingdom bears God's image (restored after the Fall). Ultimate obedience and primary commitment are God's; the state has no absolute claim to any part of the man of the kingdom. Paul, in Romans 13, reinforces this concept by pointing out that the powers are ordered, i.e. set within limits by a higher authority. As such, they are responsible to God and must remember that they have only a derivative authority. They are, at best, regulative in function. The persecutions of Diocletian had expanded these powers beyond their regulative function to a coercive one, and so the Apocalypse refers to the state as a rampaging "beast"

(ch. 13). (These views are echoed by some early church fathers. Origen and Clement, both of Alexandria, view the state in Paul's concepts; Origen had more to fear from his bishop than from the state! Cyprian of Carthage, writing during Decius' pogroms, sees the state as a totally decadent force, and despairs of its ever re-assuming validity).

Empirically, the state (in whatsoever form—whether the Kaiser Kurios, the Heil Hitler, or the Oath of Allegiance) has shown itself hostile to God. It has recognized that God's totalitarian claim on the life of the believer is not compatible with its own. Under past or present formulations of the "state," no state can consciously admit that it is at the basis of its institution not supreme. To recognize this, giving each citizen the opportunity to opt out with impunity in time of crisis, would be political/philosophical schizophrenia. Hence, an element of totalitarianism exists in every political formulation, although such an element is reached much sooner in some formulations than in other. "Political power," suggests C. F. H. Henry, "has shown itself historically to be mainly corrupt and hostile to the claims of God."

There are, then, ultimately the two kingdoms, the "two cities"—even the theocratic state, that claims it rules as of God, is placing its role as interpreter above that of God as sovereign of history.

And yet the Christian cannot remain aloof from his society. Religion is never purely personal; it always involves us—if it be alive—in social relationships, and social relationships with their interaction provide the occasion for political supervision and arbitration. We are actually, existentially, involved; to be neutral is to vote in favour of the *status quo*. "For evil to triumph," a sage has commented, "it is only necessary that we do nothing." In the words of Watchman Nee, "What shall this man do?"

There is a strong Biblical basis for social concern, as Moberg's *Inasmuch* demonstrates. A brief summary would emphasize the following:

- ITEM God's sovereignty extends to all areas of man's life, including social problems (themselves the direct result of conflicting social demands)
- ITEM man is created in God's image and is monogenetic (one blood, cf. Acts 17:26); while there may be differences in type of hair, colour of eyes, shape of nose, extension of jaw, these are not barriers; in any event, the differences are not in *essence* but only in accidents
- ITEM redemption involves the healing (salvation) of relationships both with God and with man

- ITEM the prophetic tradition's theme is one of justice (Mishpat—as in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos)
- ITEM the teachings of Christ indicate compassion, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan
- ITEM God's example in love indicates that he loves those who even now are his enemies

Probably most of the foregoing is unessential. The major question most of us have in connection with social concern/action is not "whether" but of "what kind" and to "what extent."

The difference between social concern and social action, not "whether" but of "what kind" and to "what extent," would appear to lie on a continuum and not have clearly agreed-upon demarcation. The following paradigms might be illustrative.

It is one thing to tell a man that as a Christian he should live with his wife; it is another thing to inform him that as a citizen it is a pragmatic concern, useful for society, for him to live with his wife; it is yet another thing to have (as a citizen or as a representative of my church) legislation enacted to ensure his remaining with his wife on pain of imprisonment, fine or both.

It is one thing to refuse to go to war oneself; it is another thing to counsel others not to go to war; it is quite another thing to make attempts to stop the state from acts of war.

There are differences among the stages indicated; whether the use constitute differences in degree or differences in kind is not our primary concern here. What they do illustrate is that they are all manifestations of social action where the social-political resources of the individual or of his group come into tension with the structures of the state, which, as I said, before, attempts to arbitrate disputes between conflicting social-political pressures.

The social-political resources of the individual or of his group take various forms, and also fall along a continuum. These resources may involve direct voting (either on plebiscites, referendums, or legislature-elections). In our large, impersonal society, this is not the most meaningful confrontation, where, as Carlyle says, one has one-millionth of a vote in Whitehall (or Ottawa, or Winnipeg, etc.). But in a kind of exaltatory continuum; there are other resources: letters and formal representations, obstructive devices (burning draft cards, leaving the country as did the Swiss Mennonites of Pennsylvania during the American Revolution, non-payment of taxes), parades, marches and armed revolution.

It is on this continuum that the church should be able to focus meaningfully. Certainly, Rev. 13, set in the worst kind of totalitarian state conceivable, suggests no attempt at armed

revolution to right social ills. At the other levels, considerations such as the following might be **apropos**.

Certainly, it is exegesis of an extremely low order that interprets the Exodus and the Triumphal Entry as protest marches or demonstrations or peace parades. Further, the attempt to focus public attention on the rights of a dissident group via a march involves us in power politics, in force politics, and not necessarily in moral persuasion. Of obstructive devices there is also no unequivocal opinion. An example of our situationist ethic is the action of one who, on a visit behind the Iron Curtain, pretended not to understand the questioning of a customs official (although he knew the language well) as to the nature of his luggage's contents, which he knew to contain contraband (Bibles). He was, after all, subverting the agents of the powers of darkness. At the same time, such a person could deplore actions on this side of the Iron Curtain when such actions seek to call into question the moral values of a state's decision or the validity of a state-official's action in relation, for example, to voter registration. Such a person sees great differences between the legitimacy of a state's forbidding the importing of Bibles, and a state's setting up two standards for voting privileges, these two standards being based on a concept of racial discrimination which, in view of our monogenetic origin, is contra-Biblical. While the state, acting with the fuel of force, has the **power** to do as it pleases, this does not automatically imply that it has the **authority** to do what it pleases. (While I might not have the **power** to get an elephant out of my bath-tub, I would certainly have the **authority**, the **right**, to ask it to leave).

What, then, can the Christian do? C. F. H. Henry, in *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis*, points out that man finds his roots in three families: in God, in the home, in the social order. The Fall, however, places him in radically different perspective to each, and necessitates the introduction of a radically new concept into the social order. The fuel of the state—force, power—is necessary as a result of the fall; this fuel is the coercive element which enforces obedience and fills in the gaps between the consent of the governed and the conflicting interests of pluralistic groups. The state, then, which consists of a social order made cohesive by force as a result of the fall, and because of the fall a force frequently applied **against** the wishes of a sovereign God, is “outside the perfection of Christ,” as the Schleithem Confession states; it is not divinely ordained as is marriage, for example. It is placed for the correction of sinful and sinning men, but is at the same time under judgment; it, too, is “ordered.” “What holds down the performance and the standards that apply in the world is the weight of sin, not a divinely revealed lower order for secular society. God's only

ultimate will is what he has revealed in Christ.” (*Christian Witness to the State*, J. H. Yoder, p. 72)

What we will do, then, is to keep reminding the state of its ultimate accountability. In a paraphrase of Cullmann's summation in *The State in the New Testament*, we must loyally give the state everything necessary to its existence and functioning as an agent in fallen society; we must oppose anarchy and Zealotism. We must be watchmen, remaining in principle critical of every state, ready to warn it against transgression of its “ordered” limits. We must deny to the state what it demands in excess of these limits, and in our preaching show that such excess is opposition to God.

Frequently, when Christians and/or other concerned persons attempt to relate such functions of the state meaningfully to inter-personal relations, one hears the statement: we cannot legislate morality. Such an assertion reveals interesting concepts about the nature of morality, or ethical choice. This suggests that ethics (morality) is a matter of motivation **only**, and not of action, whereas the Christian stance would probably suggest it includes both. The view, that morality cannot be legislated, suggest that if I do not daily walk past licensed premises and am not actually tempted to enter, I have not made an ethical decision in relation to drinking. It is a view which suggests that when the state performs an act, it thereby deprives man of a moral choice: that when the paving crew puts blacktop on the street, the state has deprived us of the moral dignity of making our own choice about whether we ourselves should freely blacktop the block. Of course it is true that one cannot by legislation create a moral act, but one can legislate for conditions under which moral decisions may be made more meaningful and meaningfully.

How about Caesar? Let's be thankful for him, but let's keep him in his place by remembering both his and God's.

V. Ratzlaff

## IN SEARCH OF NEW HYMNS

In recent years, church music authorities, ministers and laymen alike, have given strong expression to the apparent stagnancy of present-day hymnody. Stagnancy, because the humdrum repetition of many favorite hymns has reduced them to mere cliches, their frequent use out of context has made them into exercises rather than experiences. Stagnancy, also because of the lack of fresh materials flowing into the existing sea of hymnody. How many twentieth century hymns are there in any

hymnal you know? The productivity of hymnologists in the past fifty years has been nil in the light of creativity evidenced since the reformation. This is particularly astounding when compared with the present day advances in the arts and sciences. Why are composer and poet dormant? Do they feel that the field of expression in hymnody has been fully exploited or that a hymn is limited in its expression? Or are we all content with the availability of the wealth of hymnody; content that we have ample materials to draw upon for generations to come? Why do young people reject hymns which were a basic part of the preceding generation's faith, regarding them as antiquated, and obsolete if not heretical? Why are they being attracted to the creative processes outside of the church—the songs of Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul and Mary, songs which many believe to be profoundly Christian?

Hymnbook committees presently meeting are asking even more disturbing questions. Because of the neglect of the church regarding its hymnody, is the hour in fact not too late already in bringing our congregations into a meaningful worship experience through music? That is, because we have reduced a good portion of our hymns to powerless utterances, have we not trained our people to expect very little of hymns. Can a common-place hymn still make an impact? And, because of the rapid pace in which we are living, are the hymnals, which take years to prepare and publish, not out-dated even before they appear on the market? In order to keep pace with our time, would it not be wiser to prepare less-costly, dispensable paper-back editions?

The realization that a new day has dawned in which a new expression is required, is resulting in anxious moments for all responsible church workers, whether they be ministers of the word or of music. The frustration of not being able to find a suitable hymn to the thought of the message or the theme of the service, is becoming a much too frequent experience. Added to this is the lack of common sense to dispense with a hymn entirely or to delete certain stanzas if unsuitable, but the compelling force of tradition demands a hymn, which if not relating, is sung out of context. A juxtaposition of a strong hymn such as "A Mighty Fortress is our God" with a powerful sermon on the beatitude of the peacemakers can rob both expressions of their potential power to speak, whereas in the right setting either of the two could unleash unlimited force.

Seemingly the world of experience in our hymnbook no longer overlaps with the existential experiences of the day. This may in part be due to the fact that the majority of hymns existant in our hymnals were written a hundred or more years ago, in a time when all conditions important to living were

indeed different from those of this day. Many of these hymns were born out of adverse conditions, such as war, persecution, famine and sickness—conditions totally foreign to many of us. The high mortality rate brought on by these conditions created an eschatological outlook on life; a strong hope in the world to come, not in this one. Most of our so-called "Kernlieder" are products of this type of thinking, and at one point in history were very meaningful to the Mennonite people, and rightly so. Today however, they seem somewhat unrealistic in that they project our thinking away from this world to the heavenly kingdom, whereas I would think the New Testament thrust to be that of building a Kingdom of God here on earth. Too many congregations center their worship experience around a nucleus of this type of hymn, which helps us escape the real situations of life. There is a place for hymns of comfort and hope, but if intended to be used meaningfully, they have to be used with discretion.

We cannot exaggerate the importance of hymns which are relevant to the present teaching of the church. It would appear to me that the concept of the role and purpose, or possibly better said, the mission of the church has undergone considerable change. Today we seem to object to the time-honored terms "foreign missions" and "home missions" and rather speak of services on a broad basis. Our hymnody however has not caught up with us on this point. We go on singing "Far, far away in Heathen darkness dwelling" and "From Greenlands Icy Mountains" when maybe one in six hundred does go abroad. Presently we deem it more important to speak of the mission of the church and its individual member in the community rather than the somewhat superficial concept of service in far-away lands, but unfortunately, few hymnals contain missionary hymns other than the "heathen-darkness" type.

Another problem plaguing present day hymnody is that of unauthentic language. There was a time when the vast majority of the Mennonite community was rural but today this is no longer the case. To what extent does the imagery of the rural populous communicate to the city dweller? Can someone without a rural background comprehend "Sowing in the Morning," "We plow the fields and scatter the seed" or "Bringing in the Sheaves"; the latter a concept too out-dated for even the present rural generation to grasp. Can those living in congested unknown quarters fully appreciate the symbolism of the wanderer, the pilgrim in a barren land, and the stranger? Or how does the imagery of the haven of rest, the lighthouse of hope, or being tossed about on a stormy sea communicate with one living in central Canada? True, there is little difficulty for the person who is well versed in hymnody to understand the

analogies being made, but how does the new convert find his way through the maze of nineteenth century terminology such as the "Ninety and nine" and "Shall we gather at the river"? Or how can a "non-tradition Christian" understand the biblical concepts of the rifted rock, the heavenly manna, the Rose of Sharon, the bride and bridegroom and so on, without having a full understanding of the Bible. I've often wondered too, how we reconcile our concept of pacifism with vivid battle imagery used in so many hymns. Suffice it to say that many of our prosaic analogies should be replaced with twentieth century language which is in keeping with our space age, lest we give the wrong theological understanding and concept of God. Another problem inherent in many of our hymns is the extremely unhappy marriage of words and music. Why mismatch unequals? Some hymns having strong texts are burdened with weak music. On the other hand, hymns with strong melodies seem to flourish in spite of weaker texts; "Guide me oh Thou Great Jehovah" being a case in point. Perhaps hymnbook committees should feel freer in administering separations and match the better halves with stronger counterparts. Such an interchange may be a painful experience for many traditionalists, but in the light of the future, a meaningful move.

Many nineteenth century gospel hymns have the unique combination of composer and poet in one individual. Those involved in the creative processes of either composing music or writing poetry know that a high degree of competence is imperative if a sizeable contribution in the respective fields is to be made, and such a grace is rarely bestowed on one individual. Interestingly enough, this type of hymn shows up many weaknesses.

The criticism of present-day hymnody does of course not exclude the existence of a large body of hymns which were written once and for all, and needless to say, most hymnals contain a good many of these. Our strongest hymns have been the containers of our faith, solidifying the Christian community of believers through their teaching and preaching to the extent where they have replaced catechisms and other liturgical practices previously adhered to. Ministers and theologians are continually talking about new theological insights, the many modern-day versions of the Bible being evidence of that, but I fear that unless we transfer these insights into our hymnody, our congregations will continue in the well-trodden path of traditional thought. History bears out that the strongest contribution to our present hymnody was made by poetically gifted ministers. The musician gave it an added dimension after having been stimulated by the text. Presently our Mennonite Brethren conference is appealing to its constituency at large to become

involved in the creative process of writing hymns. Although many of our laymen are very capable, I feel our strongest contributions might be made by ministers who are saturated with the necessary theological backlog and who are poetically inclined. A good text, no doubt, will inspire a musician's imagination to enhance it with a deserving musical expression. Even though we have revised our hymnal occasionally in recent decades, nothing radical has happened, because, as I see it, we have been engaged in a process of restoration rather than renewal. It is not sufficient to upgrade a few hymns harmonically and poetically, or to translate them from the German into the English; we need a more contemporary expression if a renewal is to take place within a church. What we need is new hymns for a new day.

Wm. Baerg

## SERMON

### CERTAINTY IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Philippians 1:6, 9-11. "being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ: And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are; through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." American Standard Version

We are today facing tremendous pressures of change. These are squeezing our society and our world into new shapes and forms—some hideous and repulsive, others constructive and attractive.

Technologically, our age is advancing at an unprecedented pace. By the time an aircraft reaches the assembly line stage, the draftsmen are already hard at work on its successors. In the sphere of culture we grapple with changes as well. How does one react to musical compositions spued from the mouth of a computer? Do we find significant artistic meaning in the splattering of a container, full of goat's blood, on the modern stage?

The student who spends years preparing for a vocation graduates into a world which is replacing him with an increasing variety of mechanical and electronic marvels.

Change—rapid and frequent—is with us whether we like it or not. What shall we do in the face of change? Retreat into the simpler way of life of the past? Establish the status quo as the point of reference? Adapt to each new change when it confronts us?

The text before us embodies principles which help us face and penetrate our changing world. The church at Philippi was being challenged by Paul to face the issues of life which confronted it. Politically it had to recognize the growing imperial displeasure with Christianity and face the increasing tensions. Resulting from this was the prospect of losing the apostles through martyrdom (1:20). Added to this danger were the flow of new ideas and philosophies which the fledgling church was forced to win now (3:1-3). For this reason, this Biblical text can also give us confidence in times of change.

#### A. The Source of Confidence (1:6)

Change usually creates an element of uncertainty and insecurity. For this reason it is necessary for us to realize that there are some things which don't change. Fixed points of reference provide a point of orientation. They can dismiss uncertainty and help us to see the flexible and variable issues of life in perspective.

We were crossing the Gulf of Alaska in a small fishing boat when a storm blew up. After three days of battering against the seas at 5 knots or less we asked the skipper, "Where are we?" He replied rather casually, "I don't know. With the action of wind, waves, tides and currents, we might be anywhere from 25 to 200 miles from the nearest island."

"Then how do we determine our location and chart our course?"

"Well," he explained, "we could do a number of things. We could shoot the stars if necessary. But, since our electronic equipment is in good order we'll use the loran. This instrument picks up electrical impulses emitted from shore-based transmitters all over the earth. By getting points of intersection we determine our location to within a quarter of a mile. From there on it's simply a matter of charting a course and moving on by use of compass."

The ship uses known and fixed reference points—the magnetic poles, land-based stations, the stars—to determine its location and maintain its course in a constantly changing, fluid environment. What are some of the reference points by which we may orient ourselves? What's the source of certainty in times of change?

A primary source of confidence lies in the fact that God is unchanging. "I change not," is the divine affirmation. With God, light never becomes darkness, truth does not change to the lie, nor does love turn to hatred. God can be depended upon to remain the same Person. Yet, this does not mean that God is inflexible. God never becomes other than God. He never ceases to be holy and, therefore, to judge sin. But in His mercy He has made available a means of forgiveness and so He never turns a deaf ear to the repentant's cry for mercy and restoration. He not only hears our prayers (namely, is perfect in knowledge) but answers them as well (is amazingly gracious). And in Christ, He shares that knowledge of humanness which we are tempted to think God knows nothing about.

A second reference point is His unchanging Word. The Scriptures record how God made Himself known in deed and word, and ultimately in His Son. We can't know God—the Person—unless He makes Himself known; "Can man by searching find out God?"—No!

The Scriptures, then, reveal God to us both who He is and what His purposes are. The will of God is expressly stated. Not every circumstance of life is plotted for us but the destination, is clearly defined since the major obstacles and dangers are charted. The changes of wind, wave, tide and current are described in general principles, frequently illustrated by describing the experiences of many who have travelled this course before.

A third source of certainty lies in our possessing an historical perspective (v. 6). He "began a good work in us." There are points in our own past which give confidence for the present and future. We must have a historical perspective to face changes. It is obvious that change in itself is neither good nor bad. We cannot reject the experience of the past in order to determine what our stance ought to be concerning issues which confront us. These include our own experiences as well as those of others.

Two dangers confront us in regard to change and an absence of historical perspective. The first is that we become static and fail to adjust with our society. This happens to groups as it happens to individuals. If you have had opportunity to speak with the type of person who frequents city missions you will concur that these men have lost historical perspective. They live in the past but the past does not lead to new experiences and changes of their way of life. The other extreme is represented by the radical student revolters who reject the past because it has not changed rapidly enough. In rejecting the past they end in total subjectivism. Such lack of proportion the Christian cannot afford.

## B. The Expression of this Certainty

The certainty of the Christian lies, then, not in the things which change, but in that which is unchanging—the person of God, the expression of His will and the knowledge that God has in times past dealt personally, and creatively in his own life and in the history of the church and the world. The present and the future, however, are composed of more than this. We also face very concrete situations of change. How do these fixed points of reference serve us in regard to the complex and often frustrating changes we face, individually and collectively?

This certainty expresses itself in faith. Faith that the God who began a good work will bring His good work to completion and will perfect it. Inability to cope with contemporary problems or even to attempt a solution, usually leads to pessimism concerning the future. This is a dominant theme in much of the non-Christian appraisal of life. Unfortunately this spirit of the age has enslaved many Christians as well. We must be realistic—the Christian church will not produce a millenium—but God has promised that He will perfect that which He has begun. He will build the church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Nothing can separate us from the love or purposes of God. It is with this in view that Paul can say “I am confident that he who began the good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

Our faith rests in God and His mighty acts.

This certainty also expresses itself in the prayer for and practice of love (vs. 9-10).

Becoming a Christian does not mean that God has raised our I.Q. 10 or 15 points, or that we have become, at the moment of re-creation, able administrators, pastors, evangelists, or teachers (I Cor. 12), psychologists or doctors. Rather the encounter with Christ is the occasion of resolution of the past and an infusion of love (I John 4:7-12). The one thing which we as Christians can do better than anyone else is to love. That's where we ought to be specializing!

This love becomes the controlling element in all knowledge and discernment. We need knowledge and discernment in facing the issues of life. That knowledge and discrimination is not coldly factual. Every change demands decision. To remain without conscious, deliberate decision is still to have decided. To ignore the Indian problem in Canada is to give assent to the status quo. To dismiss the spiritual need of an unregenerate friend or neighbour is to reject for him the healing power of Christ.

At the same time, knowledge and discernment may, for the Christian, never be coldly factual. Hitler's painless disposal of

those who were non-productive “parasites of society” may be defended on purely economic grounds but could never be justified on humanitarian terms. Love must temper all knowledge and discernment. It is in this respect that the Christian makes his contribution. The knowledge of man's high calling and end must be met with the loving response of witness and proclamation of every form. The knowledge of man's nature prompts us to exalt personhood and work toward the resolution of society's ills. The awareness of man's sinfulness warns us not to expect instant perfection in the life of a sinner touched and transformed by God.

## C. Love Expressed in Discrimination

The Christian faces a world of flux in an attitude of love. This love is expressed in true discrimination. Sometimes we give the impression, as individuals and as a church, that because we are Christians we can more easily resolve social, economic and political problems and evils of our day. We forget, however, that the way of love is often more difficult than any other solution. The way of love is not necessarily attractive to the person whose values and purposes have not been transformed by a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. So what does the Christian do in times of change? How does he approach his world?

By lovingly exercising the gift of true discrimination—truly Christian values—for the purpose of **approving what is excellent** (v. 10). In this respect, the Christian welcomes change. We expectantly appraise all things with the purpose of assimilating those things which are of inherent worth, which contribute to the welfare of individuals and society, and which promote the message of the crucified and resurrected Lord.

This confidence will not be dampened by the Lord. The guarantee of that lies in the fact of the coming Day of the Lord (v. 10). Here is an added dimension of reality of which men outside of Christ know nothing. The **Day of the Lord** is the guarantee of full and ultimate divine control over history—that which we today see as full of flux and frustration.

Confidence and certainty for the Christian in today's rapidly changing world are not the product of his own abilities or in human achievements. It is not created by a cram course on “how to be a well-adjusted person.” It is not the outgrowth of an unbridled optimism. Instead, Christian stability in the face of instability lies in our orientation to fixed reference points. We move from the “known's” to the “unknown's.”

A mathematician solves problems by putting the variable into a formula with certain known or absolute factors. So also the Christian knows of God's unchanging person and purposes.

Through participation in His love we are able to examine the issues of our day, to approve the excellent and leave the rest.

Then we will be "pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness, which come through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God." (v. 10, 11).

Allen R. Guenther

## BOOK REVIEW

### The Integrity of Church Membership

Russel Bow, Word, Waco, 1968, 133 pages, \$4.35.

As a result of the impatience of our times with existing structures and institutions, many have begun to draw attention to new structures, new institutions as the hope for the church's continuing existence. The function of larger gathered groups is being called into question, and, increasingly, emphasis is placed on individualism, on near-mystical and highly-pietistic-oriented movements. While church renewal certainly can utilize a wide variety of insights and encompass many dimensions, this reviewer is still uneasy with the emphases and implications of an approach which depends entirely, say, on insights set forth in books such as Miller's *Taste of New Wine* which has, in circulation at least, become the most important book of the decade in the search for church renewal.

A most welcome antidote to this, existing structure, is Russell Bow's for church renewal *within* the an antidote which cites possibilities *The Integrity of Church Membership* (Word, Waco, 1968). For Bow, he church renewal characterized particularly by re-emphasis of the

reformation concept of the priesthood of the believer, is evidence of the vitality of God's remnant breaking through the sterility of hardened ecclesiastical arteries. And "unless the conventional churches of today experience a reformation of church membership that is flexible enough to contain the dynamic new wine of the Spirit, the institutional church will be left a desolate home." (p. 13) Such a "reformation of church membership" is possible only by seeking "integrity of membership," by avoiding "cheap grace" against which Bonhoeffer warned.

Bow mentions his own attempts at church renewal: he prepared and mailed a 12-page summary of commitment-needs to all his members, using it as a basis for discussion in adult church classes; small groups for depth Bible study and discussion were started; some of his members attended laymen's retreats and encouraged others to attend; his preaching emphasized deep commitment; yet all of this seemed to fail because "the more we talked . . . the more resistance we met." (p. 15)

Then, attending a special course

in Television Preaching (!), Bow came into contact with a pastor who told him of the church renewal initiated by one of his laymen members. The approach was a simple one-month experiment: meet once a week to pray together, give two hours time each week to God, give one-tenth of earnings to the church, spend 5:30-6:00 each morning in prayer-meditation, witness for God to others. Bow comments that tithing seems to be ". . . a minimum level of commitment necessary for honesty. If one does not want his life changed enough to be willing to make this kind of commitment, not much is likely to happen." (p. 18)

A commitment such as that outlined will remove from the church lists those who have been added as a result of ". . . the lowering of our standards for church membership," (p. 27) ". . . a low concept of the church." (p. 41) A commitment such as this will help restore integrity of church membership, as against ". . . membership which permits people to claim the privileges of membership without involvement in the minimum discipline of participation." (p. 57)

A commitment such as this might also mean a re-evaluation of our practise of accepting children into church membership: obviously more training, greater preparation, is required; also, it is necessary "to create a new image of what membership involves . . . . It is difficult . . . to ask more of new members than is practiced by many already on our rolls." (p. 65)

One of the most exciting chapters is "From Birth to Maturity," in which Bow emphasizes the need for careful church nurture through the Christian education program: by information, by behaviour (ethics), by the walk in the Spirit. And if

church membership is to be meaningful, the individual must understand that "membership in the body of Christ implies participation in a number of meaningful situations where nurture can take place . . . . Being a member of the household of God involves nurture in the means of grace ordained of God." (p. 83)

He then indicates how these "means of grace" can be made relevant to the membership, so that there can be meaningful participation: strong pastoral preaching, "lay" speaking, talk-back (dialogue after shortened sermons), church agencies meeting and discussing their program on Sunday evenings, books and reading promotion.

Another revealing section deals with discipline; here Bow's redemptive concern is much in evidence. Excellent suggestions are those of "annual recommitment" (p. 105) and therapy through the concerned work of each church agency (p. 111) For example, when a young couple experienced serious marital problems, men's and women's prayer-study-share groups and couples' club acted as concerned communities in supportive roles.

Integrity of membership will involve us in the church's mission, Bow affirms. He emphasizes that this mission lies in many areas: in fellowship with other Christians, in grappling with social issues (e.g. open housing), in work with an inner-city church, in contacts with attempted suicides.

The "search for integrity is that we may be equipped to fulfill our part in the total mission to the world." (p. 130) Russell Bow's thinking will be helpful to us in our search for integrity of church membership as we concern ourselves with church renewal.

—V. Ratzlaff