

# THE SPRINGFIELDER

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# The Shape of the Church and Ministry in Christian Social Action

## A Discussion Outline

HENRY J. EGGOLD

### I. Presuppositions which undergird the cry in our time for Christian social action:

A. The sense of *failure*: Much of the literature in the area of church and ministry today reflects the mood that the institutional church and the social industrial, and political worlds in which people live are divorced.

We are told that both the fundamentalist church and the liberal church are irrelevant, the former because of its preoccupation with doctrine, the latter because of its identification of the aims of the church with the aims of the social order in which it is found.

The church is described as being bent in upon itself, busy in recruiting members and in keeping them busy in serving the institution. As Wilmore says: "it has become too easy to be a "soldier of Christ" in a stained-glass USO while the battle rages in the streets."<sup>1</sup>

There is a growing sense that the residential congregation is no longer the only vehicle through which the church is to carry out its mission to the world. New forms of church and ministry must be devised to speak the Word of judgment and mercy. Only in this way can the church hope to make its impact felt on the individuals and institutions which have largely tolerated and ignored it.

B. The sense of *responsibility*: There is today a growing sense of the church's responsibility for the whole man. Our own Detroit and New York affirmations declared that the church is concerned about social action not because it has forgotten the Gospel, but precisely because it has remembered it. As our Lord went about preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every sickness and disease among the people, so the church must be concerned not only about what is happening to the souls of men, but also to their bodies. The whole of man's life is under the Lordship of Christ. Christian social action, therefore, is not an adjunct to the church's mission in the world but is a vital part of its mission to the whole man.

C. The sense of *challenge*: There is a growing awareness that the Church can make its impact felt if it assumes

the servant role, attempting to speak God's Word of Law and Gospel in every arena of man's life. The accent here is not on recruitment of members, building large edifices, or self-aggrandizement, but on ministry.

- II. The question of *method*: Obviously the methods the church employs as it attempts to carry out its servant role is of vital importance. It is significant that there is awareness that the renewal of the Church is not a matter of programs, methods and techniques, but of:
  - A. Fidelity to the Word of God: In much of the literature there is a positive accent on reexamining the Biblical foundations for the church's activity in society. Langdon Gilkey, *How the Church can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself*, for example, says that the Church cannot in any sense maintain transcendence over the culture unless it concerns itself with the doctrines of the Scriptures.
  - B. A universal sense of the implications of servanthood. Dr. Hoekendijk puts it this way:  
 If someone asks where the church is, then we ought to be able to answer: there, where people are emptying themselves, making themselves as nothing; there, where people serve, not just a little, but in the total service which has been imitated from the Messiah-Servant and in which the cross comes to view; and there, where the solidarity with the fellowman is not merely preached but is actually demonstrated.<sup>2</sup>
- III. A pattern of renewal for the local congregation:
  - A. The congregation as a *fellowship*: The congregation of Christians is more than the sum total of the Christians. It is a fellowship united not on the basis of economic status or ethnic background, but on the basis of the unity of the Spirit. This fact needs to be made articulate.
  - B. *Preaching*: It is to ready people for their encounter with the world. Hence preaching must be doctrinal, relevant, and pastoral.
  - C. *Evangelism*: Evangelism must become a way of life for the whole congregation. We must be interested in conversion rather than in recruitment.
  - D. *Social welfare*: The social welfare committee could serve both to minister in cases of physical need and in representing the congregation in community concerns.
  - E. *Teaching*: The accent in teaching must always be the implications of the new life in Christ. Doctrine is for life.

- F. The *professional staff*: The staff must be viewed not as those who are called to do the work, but as those who are there to equip the saints for their service.
  - G. *Budgets* at times reflect something different from our profession. Churches at times involve themselves so heavily in building programs which actually impede their real work.
  - H. *Cooperation*: Cooperation with other churches is at times desirable and necessary, as in some forms of community organizations.
  - I. *Small groups*: This is the church in the home, with small groups of Christians gathering for Bible study and discussion. The small group is also used as a beach-head for evangelism.
- IV. Emerging forms of ministry: It should be noted that these forms of ministry generally endeavor to converse with segments of society with which the institutional church has evidently been ineffective. The intent of these forms is to incarnate the servant role of the church rather than to gain advantage for a particular congregation.
- A. *Metropolitan parishes*: To counteract the parochialism of the local parishes, a group of members from all metropolitan parishes unite to form their own congregation, working together for a period of two years. The goal of this endeavor is the training of a lay elite who have learned from their association with one another.
  - B. The *sector parish*: This is Gibson Winter's idea. He recommends that church boundaries be set not on the basis of a circle around the church, but on the basis of a sector of the city extending from the inner city to the suburbs. His plan is obviously another attempt to break through the parochialism of the average parish.
  - C. Ministry to *high-rise apartments*: The purpose of this ministry is a) to serve as a listening post for the church; b) to witness to Jesus Christ and His meaning for life; c) to train Christians to serve as the Church in that place. Discussion groups move from a discussion of art, great books, or philosophy to theology.
- From Rev. Roy Blumhorst's report on his experimental ministry in Marina Towers, Chicago, the following items seem significant: Two-thirds of the residents are single, many of them divorced, many of them pre-marriage. They are not isolationists, but they do seek independence. Many do not see a real connection between Christianity and local churches, which they consider to be agencies of exploitation.<sup>3</sup>

- D. *The team ministry*: We are experimenting with this form in Detroit. The team is composed of clergyman, educator, social worker, and youth director, who plan activity jointly, with each specialist contributing ideas from his perspective. At times, lawyers, doctors, and psychiatrists contribute their services.
- E. *Ministry in the market place*: The United Church of Christ has opened an office, called Agora, in the Oakbrook Shopping Center, located in the suburbs of Chicago. It is a ministry of listening to the business population and to other individuals who stroll into the office to discuss their problem in the atmosphere of anonymity which Agora provides.<sup>4</sup>
- F. *The metropolitan missionary*: This clergyman coordinates church work in the central city and makes the acquaintance of leaders in the various segments of the power structure of the city.
- G. *Inter-parish projects*: A number of parishes unite to bring the Word to neglected groups in the city. I recall reading about a traveling Vacation Bible School experiment in Detroit, complete with inter-racial literature.
- H. *The store front mission*: We are presently operating such a mission in the Robert Taylor apartment district of Chicago. These missions are conceived of as door steps to the congregation.
- I. *Worker priests*: These are clergymen who take jobs in industry, with a view to using their skills also in ministering to individuals, to labor, and to management.
- J. *Loiterers*: These are clergymen who loiter with groups in ghetto areas. The Central Illinois District sponsored such a program in Quincy, but has since abandoned this effort.
- K. *Coffee houses*: This is a ministry to the lonely and sometimes disaffected young people. There are over 100 coffee houses located throughout the country. Even the names of the coffee houses seem to have a beat: The Dialogue, Potter's House (Washington, D.C.), The Exit (St. Louis), Hungry I-Thou (University of Illinois).<sup>5</sup>
- L. *The industrial missionary*: This clergyman works in industry helping people solve their problems and acting as the conscience for labor and management. In the Detroit Industrial Mission, ministers of the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopal churches visit men at work, attend union meetings, and confer with management.
- M. *Training of cadres of workers*: This is the program of the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago. Cadres are disciplined

groups of clergymen, teachers, social workers, and others to be agents of renewal within local congregations. The objective of the Ecumenical Institute program is "reaching for ways of discovering the meaning of creative involvement in history."

On the assessment of the validity of these new forms there is bound to be some sharp disagreement. Some will cry, "Let the church be the church," implying that the only viable form is that of the gathered congregation. At the opposite pole are those who cry, "The church (*i.e.*, the congregation) is dead." In their eyes, the church must come alive to its servant role in all arenas of human existence. Doubtless, a sober view recognizes the validity of the flock gathered for Christian nurture but looks with equal favor upon the scattered flock, bringing its Christian witness to all arenas of life.

PILOT PROJECTS AND STUDIES OF THE  
LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD  
(Compiled by Reuben Schmidt)

I. Urban-Inner City

*Pilot Projects—Inner City*

"Mid-Week Clinic"—Detroit (professional help e.g., lawyer, doctor, psychiatrist, social worker)

"Larger Parish—Team Ministry"—Detroit (social worker, youth leader, educator, clergyman)

Church of the Atonement, Washington, D.C.

Church of the Good Shepherd, Norfolk, Virginia (Negro community)

"Social-Community Outreach"

"Community Programs"

"Inner City Congregations"

"Downtown Ministry"

"Nite Ministry"—San Francisco (a Lutheran clergyman is on call to administer in emergency situations)

"Store Front"—Detroit-Indianapolis (In Detroit an old congregation died. The store front serves as porch for the congregation.)

"Public Housing Ministry" — Robert Taylor Homes, Chicago

"Metropolitan Association of Philadelphia"—Philadelphia (an ecumenical endeavor. Trying to find a witness to metropolis, the approach includes: 1. clergy in the power structures; 2. worker-clergy; 3. lay theologians.)

*Pilot Project (Suburban)*

Columbia, Maryland

O'Fallon, Illinois

*Christian Education*

"Ebenezer"—Chicago

- "Travelling V.B.S."—Detroit
- "Mid-week School"—Detroit, St. Louis
- "Curricular Materials"—Detroit
- "Director of Education"—Chicago
- "Day Care (Nursery) Center"—Denver
- "Apartment Meetings"—Church in Thy House—St. Louis
- "Tutoring"—Lighted School House—Chicago

### Youth

- "Team Ministry Approach to Children and Youth"—Detroit
- "Prince of Peace Volunteers"—Dallas, Baltimore, Detroit, Brooklyn, etc.
- "Youth Village (Halfway House)"—Detroit (ministers to runaway children, ages 11-15)
- "Youth Center"—Dallas
- "Youth Key Club"—Detroit
- "Community Center" (Kinloch is a ghetto in suburbia near the airport. The strategy here is to have a clergyman mix with the loitering groups on street corners.)

## II. Intercultural (Minority Groups)

- Negro (Summary Inner City Projects)
- Indian—South Dakota
- Spanish Speaking—New York-Milwaukee-Chicago
- Chinese—Vancouver-San Francisco
- Finnish Immigrant—Vancouver
- French—Montreal
- Migrant Workers—Michigan

## III. Town and Country

- Declining Population Area Ministries (Iowa, South Dakota, etc.)
- Recreation Areas (North Minnesota)
- Larger Parish Lay Ministry (Manitoba-Saskatchewan)

## FOOTNOTES

1. Gayraud S. Wilmore, *The Secular Relevance of the Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 2.
2. David S. Schuller, *Realigning for Mission*, an essay delivered to the Thirty-Sixth Convention of the English District of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at Ann Arbor, Michigan, June 20-23, 1966, p. 11.
3. Roy Blumhorst, "Six Months . . . an experiment in Christian Highrise Living," *New City* (November, 1965), pp. 4-7.
4. Lillian Pompian, "Minister in the Marketplace," *Reader's Digest* (June, 1966), pp. 29-35.
5. "Coffee House Ministries," *Seminary Quarterly* (Fall, 1966), pp. 1-2.