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The Church in Tension —
In Teaching the Truth
RICHARD JUNGKUNTZ

The Christian and Social Responsibility
ROBERT J. WERBERIG

Homiletics

Book Review Article

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Editorial ✠

TENSIONS WITHIN THE CHURCH IN MISSION

In the lead article in this issue, Richard Jungkuntz asserts that a primary concern underlying all Christian activity is "the teaching of the truth." This is true, he insists, not only when Christians are specifically engaged in the formal teaching of the content of Holy Scripture; it is equally true when Christians concern themselves with matters in "the field of social concern, civil rights, interchurch relations, and others besides." His essay goes on not only to provide examples of tensions which arise in the church as it exercises its primary concern but also to offer Gospel-oriented suggestions for the resolution of these tensions. His insights and suggestions deserve the earnest consideration of churchmen who have an evangelical concern to foster the God-given tensions that lead to Christian growth and to work toward the elimination of the man-made tensions that are disruptive of the church's life and work.

The reference in Mr. Jungkuntz's essay to the church's activity in such areas as the field of social concern and civil rights provides a convenient bridge to Mr. Werberig's article summarizing a seminar's opinion on "The Christian and Social Responsibility." This article may be viewed as one attempt to implement aspects of the "Affirmations on God's Mission" adopted in 1965 at the Detroit Convention of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod. In its resolution titled "The Church Is Christ's Mission to the Whole Society," the Synod resolved "that Christians be encouraged to seek the peace of the city, as God commands, working together with their fellow citizens of the nation and of the world, whatever their race, class, or belief"; also "that Christians be encouraged as they attempt, under the judgment and forgiveness of God, to discover and further His good purposes in every area of life, to extend justice, social acceptance, and a full share in God's bounty to all people who are discriminated against and oppressed by reason of race, class, creed, or other unwarranted distinctions. Christians recognize that all their fellowmen come from the Father's creating hand and that His Son's nail-pierced hands reach out in love to all of them."

Another resolution titled "The Church Is Christ's Mission to the Whole Man" gave expression to the further affirmation: "Wherever a Christian as God's witness encounters the man to whom God sends him, he meets someone whose body, soul, and mind are related in one totality. Therefore Christians, individually and corporately, prayerfully seek to serve the needs of the total man. Christians bring the Good News of the living Christ to dying men. They bring men instruction in all useful knowledge. They help and befriend their neighbor on our small planet in every bodily need. They help their neighbor to improve and protect his property and business by bringing him economic help and enabling him to earn his daily bread in dignity and self-respect. Christians minister to the needs of the whole man, not because they have forgotten the

witness of the Gospel but because they remember it. They know that the demonstration of their faith in Christ adds power to its proclamation."

Among the difficulties facing Christians in the execution of their mission to the whole society and to the whole man is that of securing agreement in matters of methodology. Should, for example, the problem of assuring equal civil rights to all citizens be attacked by individual Christians — or by groups of Christians acting corporately, as associations of individuals or even as congregations or denominations? And when Christian groups agree on desired goals in fields of social concern, which specific course of action shall be pursued when varied and sometimes conflicting proposals are urged with equal fervor and sincerity?

The Detroit mission affirmations offer no ready-made answer to such questions. Nor do they give any assurance that tensions will not develop as a result of divergent opinions and methodological proposals offered by Christians as they carry out Christ's mission in areas of activity where the Word of God does not outline clearly defined courses of action. But the resolution affirming that the church is Christ's mission to the whole society does offer this wise counsel: "That we recognize the difficulty of understanding in every instance whether God desires Christians to act corporately or individually or both in His mission to the whole society; they will, however, seek His will through prayer and mutual study."

In the article by Robert Werberig we are given the opportunity to listen in on the conversations of a group of concerned Christians prayerfully engaged in such "mutual study." They would, we believe, be the last to insist on the finality of their findings and conclusions, and their studies are offered by this journal in full recognition of their tentative character. With the publication of this seminar study goes the strong hope that this article will serve to stimulate similar study on the part of our readers, individually and in groups. Such study dare never be regarded as some kind of ivory-tower luxury for graduate seminars on a seminary campus. It must become part of the life of all in the church who desire, "under the judgment and forgiveness of God, to discover and further His good purposes in every area of life."

An appropriate prelude to the reading of the first two articles in this issue might well be this excerpt from the prayer which prefaced the presentation of the mission affirmations to the Detroit Convention:

Help us to see ourselves as Thy mission to men in their every need, to society in all its tensions, to the church in all its tribulation, and to the whole world in all its futile struggles to find its peace without Thee. Give us, who are Thy sent ones, Thy compassion for Thy lost ones.

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Hear our prayer for the sake of Him who ever liveth to make intercession for us, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

WALTER WEGNER