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Parish Renewal and Parish Education

RICHARD J. SCHULTZ

The following essay in its original form was presented to the Alberta and British Columbia District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, April 22-25, 1968. The essay is reprinted below in somewhat shortened form.

IN HIS BOOK, *The Renewal of the Church*, William Adolph Visser 't Hooft states the theme of much that is being written about church renewal when he comments, ". . . wherever Christian men and women consider the task of the church in relation to the modern world, they come to the conclusion that it is only a radically transformed church that can fulfill its task."

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, in its 1967 New York Convention, took note of the call for parish renewal by passing Resolution 7 -01 which is entitled: "To Strive for Parish Renewal Through Education." The resolution was inspired by a position paper of the synod's Board of Parish Education which had appeared in the convention workbook. That call to action was entitled: "A Position Statement on the Kind of Parish Education Vitally Necessary for the Life and Mission of the Church."

This present offering is meant to be a contribution to the synod-wide study and discussion which will be necessary if the resolution is to become effective in bringing about salutary changes in parish postures and operations. It will elucidate some of the calls for renewal, point out areas of theological study which must undergird action, and indicate strategies to be reviewed in relating parish renewal and parish education.

The Call for Renewal

Through the years my family has had a number of discussions about "renewal." We've had to consider and take action on renewal of children's shoes, refrigerators, washing machines, and occasionally, a car. We've had to be adamant about not renewing that which will still serve. The same point may be made with regard to renewal of the parish. What's wrong with the parish? Does it really need renewal? In what way?

The next few paragraphs will have a pessimistic tone. It is, of course, not difficult to criticize the church. One of the most memorable barbs was discovered in a late medieval manuscript: "The church is something like Noah's ark. If it weren't for the storm outside, you couldn't stand the smell inside."

Perhaps it would be well to state the *essence* of the thesis before we bring out the criticisms. In the face of all the pessimism about the Christian parish ministry, and the calls for its abandonment, I believe that we have within our grasp the tools and knowl-

edge to renew the parish without discarding it. I firmly believe that the parish is not only to be tolerated, but that it is a God-given and truly viable instrument for achieving the mission of God's people in our modern world.

A. *The Attack on the Parish*

The parish form of the church is under heavy attack. We can begin with the *caveats* of the previously mentioned position paper of the Board of Parish Education. The evidences of serious weakness within the parishes are: 1) widespread Biblical illiteracy among church people; 2) most church members seem to be "audience" or "organization" rather than "disciples"; 3) Lutheran elementary schools are static in enrollment; 4) increases in Sunday school enrollment have dropped alarmingly; 5) most of our confirmed youth become Bible class "dropouts" before the end of their highschool years; 6) participation in adult Bible study has not kept pace with growth in church membership; 7) there is a large-scale neglect of the training of church officers and teachers for the schools of the parish; 8) family involvement in planned Christian nurture is missing in most parishes; 9) many congregations are not providing professional leadership for their programs of Christian education; 10) there is a persistent lag in the organizing of the Christian congregation for a comprehensive program of Christian education. These are serious indictments which ought to disturb us all.

Numerous sociological studies provide mountains of evidence that the church is less than successful in achieving her announced goals. Among the surveys we might mention specifically Gerhart Lenski's study of church effectiveness in metropolitan Detroit, Merton Strommen's *Survey of Church Youth* and the Johnstone survey of the effectiveness of Lutheran elementary schools. Sociologists maintain that whereas churchmen assume that the church has a great impact on the lives of people, this is often a delusion.

Prophetic voices from many quarters elucidate the concern about the parish church. Karl Heim writes: "The church is like a ship on whose deck festivities are still kept up and glorious music is heard, while deep below the waterline a leak has sprung and masses of water are pouring in, so that the vessel is settling hourly lower, though the pumps are manned day and night."¹

"It is hard," moans Elton Trueblood, "to exaggerate the degree to which the modern church seems irrelevant to modern man."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran martyr, touched a very sore spot when he wrote with irony: "The upshot of it all is that the only duty as a Christian is to leave the world for an hour or so on a Sunday morning and go to church to be assured that my sins are all forgiven."³ This is what Bonhoeffer means by "cheap grace."

Arnold Come raves about the situation: "There has been theological excitement about the recaptured vision of the church—the body of Christ, the *koinonia* ("fellowship") of the Holy Spirit—the household of God. There have been stirring declarations th

the church is to rededicate itself as the herald and spearhead of the coming of Christ's kingdom to all the world. But this vision and this rededication have scarcely been grasped at all at the level of the local congregation, and have barely affected denominational programming in any significant way. In other words, all of the new, ideal, theological theory has thus far borne little fruit because it has not effected any significant reformation in the definition and practice of the working structure of the church's life."⁴ Come adds: "Whenever a particular formation of the church's ministerial function fails any longer to impart to the whole membership a sense of mission to the world, then that formation lies under the judgment of God. The time for reformation is at hand."⁵

Francis Ayres pictures a pastor whose Ladies' Aid decides to "study the place of the laity in the church." He adds: "The clergyman who begins to see the possibilities groans, for he realizes that what is required is no mere tinkering with the church's program, but a revolution in the church's life. Those who have worked for renewal know something of the cost it will demand."⁶

Gibson Winter, one of the more violent critics of the parish, writes: "The introverted church is one which puts its own survival before its mission, its own identity above its task, its internal concerns before its apostolate, its rituals before its ministry. These contrasts distinguish the church as a structure and the church as a living power—its static and dynamic aspects."⁷

Abbè Georges Michonneau, a French Roman Catholic parish priest, is just as critical of the Roman parishes: "What is the worth, as Christians, of this crowd that we see in church? Do they love one another? Are they a unified element in the community? Do they even know one another? Once out of the church, what ideas will they exchange? What influence on one another will they have? Do they have the idea of belonging to one and the same living Body? Of being members one of another? Has the ceremony they have just come away from united their minds and hearts in one, identical hope and thought? Do they go out with the burning desire of making Christ fill their lives and of seeing Him reign in their environment? Did they come to fulfill an obligation for their own salvation, or did they come to strengthen and feed a life which they want to spread? What kind of an example are they going to be to the great mass of indifferent souls among whom they live? Will they be a family recognized for its charity, loyalty, faith in Christ, confidence, joy, courage under hardships?—Or will they be pretty much like everyone else around them, except for a weekly habit peculiar to them? When others look at this band of the faithful, will they have a mind to become Christian?"⁸

Tom Allan, in Scotland, suggests that the problem exists in Glasgow, also: "The embourgeoisement of the churches has gone so far that, except in certain vital and progressive ventures and among the Pentecostals or the Salvation Army, the proletariat have

deserted the churches, or else by staying in the churches they have deserted their class.”⁹

James Smart, a powerful advocate of renewal through education, writes: “Here we touch one of the most acute problems of our American Christianity—that such high percentage of those who call themselves Christians are members of an audience or of an organization but not disciples, not students of the faith in training for some kind of definite service. But before we criticize them too severely for this, we should recognize that they are the direct product of a ministry that concentrates on preaching and organizing and leaves teaching to someone else. And most likely the preaching they have heard has not even made them aware that a Christian needs not only to hear the Gospel and respond in faith and obedience but also to embark on a course of study through which alone he can find his true growth in faith and knowledge and power for action. It is clear, then, that preaching which is divorced from teaching misrepresents the claim that Jesus Christ makes upon the person who responds to Him and who desires to enter into fellowship with Him. . . . But in the Gospels, Jesus says that to be in communion with Him is to be a disciple, abiding in His word, and with His word of truth, and with His word of truth abiding in us, liberating us from our ignorance and blindness, and from all that incapacitates us from His service. How can there be communion with Jesus Christ if there is no thought, no intention, of entering upon a life of discipleship?”¹⁰

Robert Long, editor of a book of essays entitled *Renewing the Congregation*, points up the problem: “. . . critics argue that the present congregational structure developed in a society where the village and the countryside were the typical setting for human activity and that it is unsuitable for mass urban society. In a mobile, urbanized society decision-making usually takes place in a variety of communities which are far removed from the place of residence. The residential parish is therefore considered incapable of exerting significant influence in the public realm. Too often, it is declared, congregational autonomy is so interpreted that no meaningful ecumenical or cooperative ministry can be developed at the grass roots. Others point out that the structure of the congregation has so involved the laity in building up the institution that there is no time or interest for carrying on God’s ministry in the structures of society.”¹¹

Wallace Fisher, renowned Lutheran author of *From Tradition to Mission*, and pastor of a large “dowager” congregation of the Lutheran Church in America in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, writes: “The critics have a legitimate target in the twentieth century church, and some of their shots hit dead center. The Word of the Lord is muted in many corners of the church by “success”-oriented official boards, cautious pastors, and organization-minded ecclesiastics. No clear-cut conviction on the nature and purpose of the church has emerged from the parishes and theological centers. Too

often the blind are leading the blind, the bland are counseling the bland, and 'perplexed' clergy are following perplexed parishioners. There is talk about 'Mission' in the institutional centers of the church, but the evidences of a missionary church are spotty. Responsible churchmen, pastors and parishioners alike, know that. Consequently, some are facing up to reality, accepting the demands and promises of Christ, and participating in God's mission to save this world."¹²

J. C. Hoekendyk reflects a Netherlands viewpoint on the matter: "To put it bluntly, the call to evangelism is often little else than a call to restore 'Christendom,' the *Corpus Christianum*, as a solid, well-integrated cultural complex, directed and dominated by the church. And the sense of urgency is often nothing but a nervous feeling of insecurity, with the established church endangered; a flurried activity to save the remnants of a time now irrevocably lost."¹³

We could add dozens of other voices to our *catalogus testimoniorum*. Let the last one, however, be a Missouri Synod voice. Richard Sommerfeld, church sociologist of our Senior College in Fort Wayne, writes in *The Church of the 21st Century*: "Many Protestants conceive of the greatest potential danger to the church as lying outside the church. For them it lies in the order of our society, in the claims and actions of world communism, or in what they feel are the grand designs of Roman Catholicism for the world. But the greatest danger to the church in America lies in many of the church members themselves. It lies in members thinking of their membership as socially special rather than spiritually unique. It lies in people refusing to confront the Gospel while living what they are certain are religious lives. It lies in congregations characterized by social activities, in and out of the church building, but always with a veneer of religion, rather than by personal priests before God whose life is distinguished by a unique relationship that God has granted them. Congregations today give evidence of being busier than ever, but busyness is not necessarily an indication of spiritual life and work in Christ."¹⁴

B. *The Need for Renewal*

Certainly, the church needs to gird up its loins in the face of external danger. The prevailing philosophies which are shaping the minds of men today are either logical positivism in one of its forms, or existentialism. These two philosophical trends are referred to as "The Logicians" and "The Lotus Eaters." On the one hand we have a rejection of anything which cannot be measured by man's sense experiences. This leaves the teaching of the church in the same category as Santa Claus and the Easter Rabbit. It makes all of our witness about God, inspiration, miracles, soul, spirit, virgin birth, deity of Christ and eternal life into what the linguistic analysts call "non-sense." On the other hand, existentialism rejects any objective reality and claims that man must define him-

self as he goes along. Existence precedes essence. Revealed knowledge and absolutes are unacceptable. It considers only *that* life as authentic which accepts responsibility for its own choices and rejects all external pressures on what a man ought to do. At best it offers a life which makes a leap and has the "courage to be", and at the worst it sees all of life as absurd and nauseous. The doctrine of the church of Christ is, indeed, under severe attack. All of the forces of secularism, materialism, scientism, humanism, behaviorism and depersonalization of the mass society face the ministry of the church today. Once the world listened on its knees when the church whispered. Today she shouts herself hoarse in the marketplace of ideas and is ignored. Yet, these are not the causes for needed renewal. It is that the church herself loses her way. We can expect and endure the enmity of the world, yes, the very gates of hell. But we are in real trouble if we do not understand and implement the nature, function and mission of the church. Then impending demise awaits us.

C. *Three Strategies*

In the face of the need for renewal, three basic strategies are offered to the church:

1. Keep "nagging" the laity to "be the church."
2. Abandon the parish and turn to "para-parish" agencies.
3. Do something to renew the parish.

First, some suggest that we keep hammering away at the laity to be the church. Concerned laity are confused by this approach and others are deaf to it. One young man put his finger on the problem when he observed, "The trouble with our church is that they stir us up to do something but never give us anything definite to do." A solution was suggested by a Lutheran lady who wrote: "Many people will be happy to participate actively in church life if they know what they're getting into and for how long they'll be expected to serve." It sounds practical, but it has disturbing overtones. What does she consider "church life?" And what can she be thinking of when she views participation as something that has a "how long" clause attached to it?

We can deceive ourselves by living with slogans in this matter. Trueblood offers a couple: "A church is not something to which you go. It is something in which you are in."¹⁵ "To be an effective Christian, it is not enough to be an individual believer."¹⁶

A clever pastor, at the end of his service order bulletin, added: "End of Worship—Beginning of Service."

Trueblood does come up with a wise conclusion: To accept the lay ministry in a mild form is as harmful as rejection of the lay ministry. To tell them to "support" the church or "help" the pastor is a trivial conception. The pastoral ministry is to support the general ministry. Most pathetic of all is the attempt to provide a ministry for the laity by allowing them to lead some portion

of the public worship. Few are able to do it. Moreover, it leaves a wrong impression. It is not amateur preachers and worship leaders that are needed, but full-time Christians working at their vocation where they are.

Hendrik Kraemer notes that "there is going on a constant prodding of the laity out of their passivity and spectator attitudes."

Romanists, such as Congar and Michonneau of France, are hard put to say more than that the roles of the laity are "collaborative" with the clergy. They're still stuck with a church defined in terms of the hierarchy.

The evident lack of results after more than twenty years of emphasis has led many to take *position two*—let the parish perish—and replace it with other forms of ministry.

Here we come to the radical young turks. They write interestingly. Gibson Winter in his *New Creation in Metropolis* is a chief proponent of the "replace the parish" view. He predicts that new forms of ministry will not be auxiliaries of the residential parish churches. Instead, these para-parish structures will become the *normative* form of the church in our emerging megalopolitan society. In his opinion, the local church is utterly incapable of sustaining a ministry of Christian community within the structures of government, community planning, and public administration, all of which he considers crucial areas for the church's witness.

Gordon Cosby, pastor of small but world-famous Church of the Savior in Washington, D. C., reports his despairing conclusions about the local church. "The present institutional structures of the church must give way to new structures that will be the church on mission. . . . I am convinced that the institutional structures are not renewable. . . . When the structures get as rigid and resistant to change as they are now, perhaps the wisest strategy is not to try to renew them. It may be wiser strategy to bypass them and let God do with them what He will."¹⁷

We could quote more such prophets of doom, but the point is clear. They tell us that parishes such as are represented in this convention are fighting a rearguard action in a lost battle. It is only a matter of time. The "action" is no longer in the parish. It's too late. We've missed the boat. Or, God has decided to move beyond the parish.

You can imagine that we at Concordia Seminary in Springfield have been watching this movement closely. Our major *raison d'être* is still to provide leaders for the parish ministry.

With what do the radicals propose to replace the church in its parish form? By and large they propose the development of the "evangelical academies." A number of these exist today. One operates in Parishfield, near Detroit. Austin, Texas, has its Faith and Life Community connected with the university campus. In Italy it is the *Agapè*. In Greece it is *Zoè*. In Germany it is *Bad Boll*. Essentially these are schools and disciplined communities which seek to train Christians for vocational evangelism.

Over the exposition of the *third position* regarding parish renewal we place a phrase from David Ernsberger: "... the local parish must be the major locus for lay renewal. . . ." ¹⁸

Howard Grimes in *The Rebirth of the Laity* takes the trouble to propose programs of parish renewal, so he fits under this position.

David Schuller in *Emerging Shapes of the Church* still sees possibilities in the renewal of the parish, if for no other reason than because the parish "is there."

Martin Marty is an eloquent spokesman for the renewal of the parish rather than its necessary demise before it achieves relevance. God can still breathe life into its dead bones, he argues in his *Death and Birth of a Parish*.

Père Michonneau states: "However forceful or generous or ingenious may be specialized methods, it will always be the parish which represents the main strength of the attack. Like the infantry, it will be beaten if it fails to use new armaments and tactics, but it remains the indispensable means of holding any point of attack."

Wallace Fisher, a Lutheran parish pastor, speaks loudly for renewing the parish: "The American parish, poised geographically for witness and dear to the hearts of many people, can be an effective instrument for exercising Christ's ministry. It is evident that the unconverted church will perish as a finite center in a perishing culture, but the judgment that its demise has taken place is premature. The church could have perished in the 16th century; it did not because of inner renewal and outer reform. Parish renewal is possible at mid-twentieth century. The parish's pious platitudes can be transformed into flaming truth. Its stained glass attitudes can be transformed into fervent love for God's creation. The personnel and machinery to execute God's mission are now at hand.

"Bypassing the parish is unrealistic; institutional forms are inescapable. The human disposition to overspiritualize is as unbiblical, and therefore as hurtful, as the disposition to be preoccupied with institutional forms. Committed, knowledgeable, sensitive clergy and laity are at work in their parishes, disciplining themselves, reaching into the resources of the Word, orienting to the Biblical image of ministry, confident that the Holy Spirit will transform their parishes." ¹⁹

Hear still more of Fisher: "The impasse between theology and activism in the American parish can be broken. The unconverted parish—a complex of human piety, biblicism, theological naiveté, uncritical devotion to an institution, and parish activities—confronted by the Word in multiple personal relationships, can be transformed by the Holy Spirit into a dynamic community of persons who employ theology as a tool in fashioning the church's effective ministry. A dynamic theology aids in parish renewal; correct or static theology stifles it." ²⁰

In yet another pungent statement, Fisher opines: "On the other hand, many critical shots at the church in general and the parish in particular are *not* dead center. The pervasive fear, subtly and openly voiced, that parish renewal is impossible ignores reality and denigrates God's grace. *The parish cannot be bypassed.* The notion that its billions of dollars of equipment can be scrapped, its vast personnel ignored, and its foundation Book rewritten is nonsense. More significantly, this view doubts God's promises. If one accepts Jesus' word and the apostolic witness, he accepts the called-out, witnessing community as God's idea and handiwork. Unless the clergy believe *that*, they cannot preside over parish renewal."²¹

What needs to be pointed out is that when we talk about parish renewal we are not proposing another optional little program. Facing up to the demands of our age upon the parish will require hard, serious work. The process of diagnosis, identification of needed change, confrontation and rugged correction must rest on the commitment, the faith, the theological acumen and the churchmanship skills of clergy and lay leaders.

The Theology for Renewal

It is not theological fussiness which leads me to insist upon discussing, next, the theology for renewal. We need to review what we believe about the laity and the parish and the church. Education in the parish is a strategy which flows out of what the church is and what it is to do. An entire ecclesiology underlies renewal of the parish.

Renewal is a strange and recurrent theme of the Scriptures. In Romans 7:6 we are told that the Christian *is* a new man. In Ephesians 4:23 we are told that he should *seek* renewal. In 2 Corinthians 4:16 we are told that he is *being* renewed. This is part of the paradoxical nature of the new life in Christ, the "already and not yet," the ongoing struggle of the old man and the new man. The letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 ought to remind us that the whole church, too, and congregations in particular, are called to daily repentance and renewal of life. Thus, John Calvin could say that the story of the church is a story of many resurrections. Again and again men have declared the church dead, have penned her obituary and planned her obsequies. The corpse, however, refuses to cooperate. Again and again she disturbs the solemnities, outrages the mourners, and scandalizes the morticians by dancing at the funeral. It is only when the church ceases to be the church that she need fear permanent death. The church *as church* cannot die. The promise of her Lord stands sure. The gates of hell shall not prevail against her. She may need new clothing. She may need to learn new skills. But she will be around to welcome the Lord when He comes in glory with His holy angels.

A. *Theology of the Laity*

Theology of the laity has been and continues to be a matter of concern to many Christian thinkers. What has produced the emphasis?

Francis O. Ayres credits the burgeoning interest in the theology of the laity to the influence of World War II in Europe. "During the Nazi regime in Germany before the war and during the Nazi occupation of such countries as Holland after 1939, it became obvious that a church whose ministry was confined to what the clergy could do was hopelessly inadequate to meet the demands of the times."²² The clergy was easily decimated by drafts into the army, labor camps, or even concentration camps. Furthermore, the real resistance to the Nazis had to occur in factories, homes and political structures. "Unobjectionable" preaching could continue in the churches. Preaching which erupted into action (helping Jews, for instance) brought violent repercussions. After the war, the lesson was not forgotten. The ministry, it was learned, did not stop at the conclusion of the Sunday service. Real ministry went on throughout the week in the encounter of believers in the world.

Ayres admits that his concern with the theology of the laity is largely attributable to the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Suzanne de Dietrich, and Hendrik Kraemer. These, together with Fathers Yves Marie Joseph Congar and George Michonneau probably form the major group of original thinkers in this concern. They have influenced the thinking of also the Missouri Synod. A casual reading of Hendrik Kraemer's *Theology of the Laity* reveals its close affinity to the "Mission Affirmations" of Synod's Detroit convention. The work of George Vicedom, *The Mission of God*, has also been influential.

Speaking of the term "the ministry of the laity," Ayres comments: "In the United States it has become a slogan of our time, and one's enthusiasm for the concept a test of one's openness and mobility."²³

"Almost all astute observers agree that the growth of the lay or universal ministry," writes Trueblood, "is the growing edge of the vital ministry of Christianity today."²⁴

I would submit that for the parish pastor and the concerned lay leader of today, the area of greatest theological concern is *not* found in the shadows of Bultmannian demythologization, or even in the precise definition of inerrant or the influence of cognate cultural context on the interpretation of the Old Testament. It is rather in finding ways to implement the "priesthood of believers." The parish pastor should be aching to find some ways to release the potential of the people of God who are now in our parishes. Dear God, we do not want to stand in the way of the people of God! But where do we get a handle on this thing? If we fail to make this area of theology truly operative, the other theological issues will become as academic and obscure as the pronouncements of the oracle of Delphi.

Let us turn to the Scripture passages which are pertinent for a theology of the laity.

Ephesians 4:11-12

Although Luther and the Confessions refer repeatedly to 1 Peter 2:9-10 (the "royal priesthood" passage) in writing of the priesthood of believers, Ephesians 4 has become a strong seat of doctrine for the theology of the laity. In verse 2, the removing of a comma from the Authorized Version text tells the story. God "calls" all of His people. He then gives them pastors and teachers as needed to equip the saints, God's people, for ministry in building up the body of Christ. *Eis ergon diakonias*, "for the work of service," are key words. Here is the ministry, the diaconate of the laity. Richard Caemmerer has well pointed out that the parish is not to resemble a spear thrust into the community. That is, it is not the one pastor who witnesses, supported by his congregation at the end of the spear handle. Rather, we are to think of the parish as a many-tined pitchfork. The witness belongs to all of God's people. The pastor's place is at the end of the handle of the pitchfork. Actually, the cultural situation today may mean that the pastor's direct witness is the least effective of all. And at least he has limited access to places and situations where the witness needs to happen.

I have a suspicion that our "Hymns of the Ministry" which we sing at installations may leave a wrong impression. "Forth may *they* go to tell all realms Thy grace." "Send workers forth, O Lord, the sheaves to gather in that not a soul be lost which Thou art come to win." "Endue *their* tongues with power; what *they* should boldly speak, Oh, give *them* in that hour." "And let *them* speak Thy Word of Pow'r as workers with *their* God." Now, I don't want to invalidate the distinction between the clergy and the laity. Yet, it seems to me that there is too much "they" in our hymns of the ministry. There is something askew theologically, and we tend to reenforce the impression that unless God sends pastors, the work of Christ won't get done. This may explain the strange limbo of the "vacant parish." It isn't vacant at all! We need some new hymns which mirror the New Testament doctrine of the proper place of clergy and laity. You can begin to see what I'm getting at. A laity which sees itself responsible for the work of God will need and will understand a totally different emphasis in its preparation through parish education.

1 Peter 4:10-11

In this passage the ministry of the laity is elaborated. Incidentally, *laos* means just that—people of God. It does not mean one who is uninformed or incapable of work. Each saint has a gift (*charisma*) for the purpose (*eis*) of ministering (*diakonountes*) one to another. God's people are to serve one another in the gathering, and not merely *be* served.

Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12

In Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 the idea that every Christian receives his own specific *charisma* for the benefit of the function and mission of the body of Christ is elaborated by Paul. By very virtue of being a believer, a Christian has a specific talent which he would not have if he were not a believer. In the congregation, to be sure, the gift needs to be identified, sharpened and assigned. As I see it, this is what we ought to mean by "stewardship."

Donald Heiges in *The Christian's Calling* draws these conclusions about the ministry:

1. The ministry is general, rather than restrictive and includes a variety of services.
2. The ministry, being of a general and inclusive nature, belongs to the body of Christ as a whole.
3. The ministry of the church is a ministry which its members can bring to each other.
4. Because the ministry belongs to the whole body of Christ, the church can designate certain members to perform special offices in its behalf, provided the people meet the qualifications.

Heiges goes on to point out that the special ministry of Word and Sacrament is an office which must of necessity be part of the ministry of the church. The Lord has ordained it. But it is not the *whole* ministry. Therefore, the role of the "professional" (as Heiges calls the clergy) is to *prepare* and *support* the laity as they discharge *their* direct responsibility to witness to the secular world. The role of the laity, then, is not to assist the pastor (or the professional) because this is a reversal of the role which each is intended to take. The real brunt of the ministry is that of the laity in the world in which they live and work.

This concept is echoed again and again. Oswald A. Waech, at that time Synod's secretary of evangelism, wrote in *The Lutheran Witness* (January 21, 1964): "There aren't enough 'professionals' to do the job—nor was that ever God's intention. Church . . . members are not a group to be *served*, but a force to be *trained* for active mission work." Hoekendyk is even more forceful: "I would venture the thesis that a minister has become *unsuited* for the apostolate by virtue of his ordained status. He must try to equip the laity for their service."

The question is, What have we done with this teaching? R. Benjamin Harrison has a refreshing analysis:

More than four centuries ago a battle was fought over the question of what a clergyman is. The company commander, as it turned out—though he did not aspire to the post—was a man named Martin Luther, a squat German priest of pithy speech and fiery tongue. There was a good deal of charge

and counter charge, of invitations to peace talks and subsequent altar-pounding. Demolition of statues was not successfully banned; nor was the heaving of bricks through church windows in Birmingham-on-the-Rhine. Here and there some blood was shed. And, though it was not often phrased this way, a big chunk of the disagreeable business had to do with the questions, 'What is a priest anyway, and how in God's name did he get that way?'

It was generally held in those days that there were several classes of Christians as there are, for instance, numerous grades of beef. Prime cuts were the monks. Grade A were the princes of the church, cardinals and bishops. Quality and tenderized were the priests. Stew-meat—the kind of thing you use for goulash, making do as best you can with leftovers—was laymen. Christians were divided into greater and lesser, higher and lower, extra-ordinary and average.

It cannot be said that Luther put a stop to all this, but he did put up one long, fierce, church-shaking howl. Eventually quiet settled on the land. People went back to their prayer-saying, book-writing and baby-having. They went back with a difference, however, for now a new idea—or rather a very, very old one—had come to occupy the place once owned by the beefsteak concept of Christianity. The new-old idea was this: Functionally there are indeed many kinds of Christians, but spiritually these are of equal merit, equal importance and equal value in the eyes of God. A priest is not a layman, only more so. A layman is not a weekend priest. Each is different. Both are necessary. So where is the heresy? The heresy is that, for a very, very large number who call themselves Protestant, this whole battle might as well not have been fought. They believe and act as if they believed exactly what Luther deplored.²⁵

Hendrick Kraemer traces the original confusion as far back as the papal bull *Unam Sanctam*, which crystallized the clergy-laity dichotomy. Therein, Kraemer points out, is expressed a neo-Platonist philosophy which actually quotes Dionysius the Areopagite. It develops the idea of the church according to a cosmic gradation of spheres from divine being to matter. Thus—the world, secular, the laity were all devalued and placed in a lower sphere.

Incidentally, neo-Platonism has plagued the church for centuries. It results in a separation and elevation of the "spiritual" over the physical. Our problems with sex education, for instance, relate to the emphasis of neo-Platonism. The whole idea that marriage is somehow "less holy" derives not from the New Testament, but from neo-Platonist church fathers, notably St. Augustine, though there were others.

Luther, as we have seen, reacted vigorously against the stratification. His doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers

counteracted the Roman restriction of the priesthood to an elite. This was a startling theological change.

Why was the doctrine of the priesthood of believers not carried into action? Opinions vary.

In the Preface to his *Deutsche Messe* Luther seems to have an idea of starting congregations in homes, separate from the established parishes, so that a living, vibrant, committed, disciplined ministry of the laity could be developed. Such groups would be real study groups and witnessing groups. The strategy would be process of disciplined education as preparation for service!

Those who seriously want to be Christians and to confess the Gospel in word and deed ought to write themselves in by name and perhaps gather by themselves in a home for prayer, Scripture reading, Baptism, Holy Communion, and other Christian exercises. In this kind of order one can know those who do not behave as Christians, punish them, reform them, cast them out, or excommunicate them according to the rule of Christ (Matt. 18:15f.). Here one could also impose common alms upon the Christians, which would be contributed willingly and distributed (2 Cor. 9:1,2,12). One would not need a lot of grand singing there.

Here one could also conduct Baptism and Communion in a brief and fine manner, and direct everything to the Word, prayer and mutual love. One should have a good, brief catechism. . . . In sum, once one has the people who seriously desire to be Christians, the orders and procedures could be quickly brought about. However, I cannot and may not yet establish such a fellowship, for I do not yet have the people for it. And I do not see many who are urgently seeking it.

Certainly, in Luther's day a laity so long kept in spiritual immaturity was not ready to function in spiritual adulthood. Luther doubted that he could find enough people to get a group working saints operating. Thus, the Reformation stresses fell vehemently on preaching (*die reine Predigt*). It was needed in the midst of such darkness. Yet, it tended to create a gap between those who preached and those who listened. In the Reformation congregations the old emphasis on the sacerdotal office was replaced by the ascendance of the preaching office.

There may have been other reasons for the inoperability of the priesthood of believers doctrine. Heiges feels that the feudal society in which Luther lived made him socially conservative and fearful of change. The revolt of the peasants probably made him suspicious of a liberated laity.

Moreover, Luther had a vivid sense of eschatology. He believed that Christ's return was imminent. Any change would provide only a short-run benefit, hardly worth the effort. The "one thing need-

ful" in the midst of the desperate ignorance was to "get the word out." The layman continued to be served, to be an audience. Luther did consent to letting the lay princes serve as emergency bishops. Here I would dissent from the view that because "laymen" signed the Confessions the Reformation was a lay movement. I would see these so-called "laymen" in the category of what some call "clericalized" laymen, who did not truly represent the laity, the "great unwashed."

The conclusion one reaches is that the theology of the laity has never truly been operative in the church of the reformation. It never became truly efficacious in the Old World. It was an ensign, but not an energizing principle. The laity of the reformation remained objects rather than subjects. In fact, while we are belaboring ourselves, we may note that probably we have made more progress in this regard in North American Lutheranism than has been made anywhere else, except in our emerging expatriate missions of recent years.

If Kierkegaard's picture of church life in the 19th century is at all accurate, we may judge that uncommitted, noncommittal, formalized practice of Protestant Christianity is not a new phenomenon. Kierkegaard devastatingly criticized the church of his time and place as being like a flock of geese which talk about flying and every week listened to a grand speech about how geese once flew all over the sky on great, gray wings, but who themselves never flew, "because the barnyard was secure and the corn was good."

If we may sum up what we have said about the theology of the laity, and cast a hook forward into what we'll be saying about parish education, this is the point: Every single one of God's people is called to a life of dedicated, committed, intelligent, capable service. The reason for a sound program of Christian education in the parish is to have a worthy training school for all. As little as a man studies plumbing for three years just to be able to stop a leaking faucet, so little is any significant program of education sensible for one who sees his Christianity only as a matter of personally getting to heaven.

Richard Sommerfeld writes in *The Church of the 21st Century*: "The laity is the great 'frozen asset' of the church. Thawed out, it has, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, tremendous potential. As far as human factors are concerned, the laity will probably be the single most important influence for better or for worse, in the church of the 21st century."

B. *Theology of the Parish*

We need also a sound theology of the parish. This need not be involved, but it is important.

First, we note that a Lutheran parish exists to carry out the functions of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is The Church "in this place and at this time." The parish is always a means and never an end. It is expendable. Schuller reports that historically the

parish as we know it is only about two hundred years old. The church has existed without it and may be embodied in different forms in the future. The form and shape of the parish is not sacred in itself. It receives significance only in the light of what it does to functionalize the Church.

A handful of words from the New Testament spell out what the Church is to do. Proclaim. Teach. Provide a Sustaining Fellowship. Witness. Serve. Worship. (*Kerygma. Didache. Koinonia. Martyria. Diakonia. Leitourgia.*)

The parish has a double ministry. First, there is the ministry to and for the people of God who belong to the parish. Second, there is the ministry through the people of God to those who are not yet the people of God. These ministries are correlative. In order to provide these services, structure and form are needed. Sociologists refer to the "maintenance" functions and the "task" functions. Trouble enters when task functions are neglected for maintenance functions.

A parish is a collection of ministers. Each has a specific gift. Each willingly and joyfully submits to the judgment and direction of fellow members in identifying, sharpening and then using the gift for the building up of the body of Christ (*oikonomia*). The brotherhood has, indeed, a privilege and responsibility to assist each Christian to shape his life. For this reason it is impossible that a parish should be a collection of individuals who happen to "shop" at the same "spiritual supermarket." This body of believers assembles, joins hearts and hands, unites destinies in order to be capable, strong, wise, and courageous in carrying out the mission of Christ to re-establish the human race according to God's original blueprint for humanity.

There is always a double IN ORDER THAT in what the parish does. Whatever the parish does it does IN ORDER THAT its members may be built up IN ORDER THAT they may work in the vineyard. The whole parish is directed toward the world.

Roland Seboldt offers a slightly different picture. He subsumes the theology of the parish under the picture of two arrows. One points into the parish and one points out of the parish. The inward pointing arrow is *edification* and the outward pointing arrow is *evangelism*. We edify in order to have the edified evangelize!

My students seem to understand better the schema developed a number of years ago by Pastor Carl Hiller. He puts it all under three headings:

1. Bring In—evangelism
2. Build Up—education
3. Send Out—stewardship

This then becomes an endless belt. It puts stewardship and education in the proper functional relationship to evangelism. It gives Scriptural significance to stewardship. Stewardship does not

include only money. Part of me (my "crystallized sweat"), to be sure, gets assigned as I give of that which is committed to my care in order that I may go also where my body cannot go. The theology of the parish does not mean that everyone gets his fingers directly into every pie. Not every one does everything. But every one is to do something. All are responsible together for the entire mission of the church.

This means that we have to see ourselves as under discipline in the parish. We have spoiled the word "discipline" by referring exclusively to its negative aspects. Discipline comes from the word "disciple." As a member of my parish, I see myself as under discipline, submitting to my brethren. Together we help equip each other. The pastors of my church are the chief equippers. I may feel a *personal* call to certain aspects of kingdom work. However, I must then see whether I have also a *providential* call—that is, has God provided me with the gifts needed for what I want to do? And I am still subject to the *ecclesiastical* call, the assignment by my brethren. And if the parish has the function of assigning, it must also provide significant and thorough preparation for the work. We take this for granted in the case of the clergy. But why not also in the case of the other ministers?

What this theology of the parish says about parish education is that we commit a double error when we encourage individualism. If parish education is aimed only at providing John or Mary with what they need "to get to heaven," and to stay out of trouble in this life, we have a difficult time selling much of the program. Or if we spend large amounts of time, energy and money on an educational program which is conceived as beneficial chiefly to the individuals who get it, we have a severely truncated program. For instance, parochial schools ought to say forth rightly that a result of such an education is *intended* to produce people who are able to dedicate their lives and well-trained talents to the service of Christ. In our Sunday schools we need to be very direct in telling people that we FULLY INTEND to make committed disciples of their children. Some people would be aghast if we told them that this is what we intend to do with their children. They have great plans for their children, but the plans include only a veneer of religion. They do not want their children caught up in the strange crusade of Christian discipleship. They would say, "We don't want the children to become fanatics." Furthermore, our adult education program would get some direction if we tied it to our theology of the laity and the parish.

Our parish education has much more to do than merely communicate our Christian heritage. Especially adult education wanders aimlessly because it is not seen as equipping for ministry.

Perhaps what I am saying in all of this is that we need to re-examine our whole philosophy of parish education. What we do in parish education is important. How we educate is important. But above all we must give attention to why we educate.

Questions for Parish Education

To enter into a full discussion of detailed strategies of parish education demanded by commitment to a New Testament theology of the parish would require another paper. We can, however, list a number of "problems for study" which parish leaders need to work at.

1. Are we clear about our objectives in Christian education? The stating of proper objectives in education is the most rigorous task of all for the teacher and administrator. It may seem to be pious to say, "We teach the Word of God and trust the Holy Spirit to make something happen." Without denying the inscrutable ways of God, or the power of the Spirit in the Word, a good workman with the Word bears responsibility to determine specifically what he is attempting to accomplish in the learner. His objectives, furthermore, should relate to the function and mission of the Church. Our task is to "make disciples." This requires not only additions to the store of cognitive knowledge, but also changed attitudes and the development of specific skills for doing the work of God. Christian growth cannot be equated with mastery of facts.

2. Do we appreciate that education for Christian action requires much time and repeated exposure? Limited, purely cognitive objectives may be attainable with small exposure. The total objectives of Christian education require long periods of uninterrupted nurture.

3. What kind of teachers are required if we honestly seek to attain the kind of objectives which lead to renewal? Are we courageous and insistent enough in demanding adequate preparation from those who presume to do the work of Christian education? We need to set inviolable standards for the office of teacher in the church, adhere to them with courage, and provide opportunities for some of God's people to achieve certification according to those standards.

4. Do we understand the relation of methodology to objectives? In adult education, for instance, we need emphasis on a whole new set of objectives. We need to teach adults how to learn. We need to prepare God's timid people for dialogue with the world, for that is their calling. We need to train God's people for social acuity. We need to prepare them for Christian family living. Monological, transmissive, telling methods simply will not accomplish such objectives. The science of education faces many unanswered questions. Yet, it has made some progress. We can state with confidence that to achieve the kind of objectives needed for a renewed church, new methods are required. We must break up the old role syndrome that pastors tell and people listen. Inductive learning, dialogical methods and procedures which require

God's people to wrestle with the Word are no longer the playthings of a few educators. The changes we desire to bring about in people do not happen with authoritarian, transmissive methods. We are faced with a call to test our faith that the Holy Spirit will, indeed, lead God's people into all truth, *even when the pastor does not preempt the learning by telling "the correct meaning" to people before they have even had an opportunity for encounter with the Word.*

5. Do we see the exciting possibilities of new administrative techniques in Christian education? We would hope that the day when people are urged to "join the Bible class" are over. Short term, terminal courses directed to the needs of specific individuals to quip them for *their* ministry bring more responses.

In heeding the call for renewal, we need to remind ourselves that we have at our disposal a powerful means of renewal. We do not work with human ingenuity alone. Our Lord has promised to be with us to the end of time. In the face of dangers and terrors, the Lord of the Church is still on His throne. He has given us His Word and His Sacraments. He sends His Holy Spirit as our teacher and guide. He has called us to the household of faith and gives us each other. Armed with His gifts and His powerful Word, we may boldly and confidently move forward in the crusade of bringing the salvation of the Son of God to the world. We are come to work in difficult days, but also in a time of opportunity.

NOTES

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