

BUILDING THE CHURCH THROUGH DIVERSIFIED MINISTRIES

At a moment of unparalleled opportunity, perhaps a second fullness of time, we are ill pre-pared to respond. Like the foolish maidens in the parable, we are running for oil! Various solutions are given as to why we are not ready for this moment. Some say we need a new way of interpreting the Bible; others, that we need to "free the women," and yet others that the idea of Restoration was a bad idea to begin with. If your tire is flat, changing the muffler will not fix it! The Church has a problem which literally paralyzes us...the clergy-laity system that we have developed (even while decrying such a system!). We urgently need to return to the New Testament concept of the fully functioning Church.

1. The Biblical view of the Church:

- a. The church is an organism (Christ's body), not just an organizational unit. Every member of Christ's body (the church) is to fulfill his/her God-given function in order that the church's work is done (Eph. 1:18-23, 1 Cor. 12:12-27). Historically, churches which have lost their "grass-roots" vitality have sought to offset this by increasing their organizational structure.
- b. Christ, the Head, directs His body toward His purposes (Luke 19:10, 2 Peter 3:9).
- c. Christ has endowed and placed members in the Body to achieve its functions (1 Cor. 12:4-6, 1 Pet. 4:10-11, 1 Cor. 7:7, Rom. 12:6-8, Eph. 4:4-16).
- d. No part of the Body exists or functions for its own benefit. Selfism (the religion of our day) is rejected. As indicated above, each Body part should be able to say what his/her function (work) in the Body is (1 Cor. 12:12-27, Gal. 1:10).
- e. There is no way a part of the body can do the work of the whole Body (1 Cor. 12:21).
- f. Only the whole organism working as it should will be able to achieve the goals of Christ (Eph. 4:8, 16).

2. Our reality:

a. Many churches appear "preacher bound". Most progress comes from the minister's efforts. In the process, what should be a ministry to the world, becomes a ministry to the Church. "By making it a ministry of the clergy to the people, there are two losses: loss of a ministry to all the people (now only to the church), and a loss of joy, freedom, spontaneity, and variety of Christian ministry" (Training the Ministry the Church Ought to Have", Inter-national Review of Missions, Jan. 1977).

b. Churches often emphasize in reach more than out reach. As a result, members never get around to practicing the truths they hear. Paul speaks of those who are ever learning and never understanding the truth of their mission (2 Tim. 3:7). The truth of the matter is that we learn best by doing the things we study!

c. Many churches appear to be on the defense (should we say retreat!), rather than being on offense...consolidation, rather than attack (Eph. 6:10-18).

d. We tend to be building and assembly centered in our concept of work and faithfulness, rather than being centered in the individual lives and ministries of the members. F. Yeakley in "Why Churches Grow" cites Roger Barker's Behavior Setting Theory which shows that a group offers a limited number of jobs relative to its public function (a congregation of 2000 would have 400 public roles which means that at a given time, only 20% would have a role to perform). Clearly, our concept of the work of the Church must go beyond the public roles and the organizational structure (which largely have to do with what occurs in the building).

e. By and large, the church is not progressing as it should, even though our reports are frequently very optimistic.

f. Some of the uninvolved are leaving....often including some of our own children.

g. We are being outdistanced by a number of denominational groups. It is easy to take comfort in being doctrinally correct, but, can doctrinal correctness excuse the immorality of not being active in Christ's mission to save the lost?

3. We need to take some corrective measures by getting rid of myths which lead to failure!

a. "There is a special category of persons which is to do the preaching and missionary work of the church." According to the Bible, every Christian is to be involved.

b. "Mission work begins at home...we have to do a lot more here before we can go abroad." This is wrong thinking! There are plenty of us who can do the work at home while we support those who are willing to go abroad !

c. "The priority of self-edification...what will it do for us!" See Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 20:35.

d. The myth that involvement somehow equals progress. or that words without deeds get the job done.

4. The solution to the problem:

a. We need to get Biblical. The Church has never functioned as successfully as it did at the beginning. See Acts 8:1-4. God has given us all that we have...made us what we are. We will either use or lose our talents. God will eventually call us all into account for the fulfillment of our missions. 2 Cor. 5:10.

b. Every member has God-given gifts for ministry. One missionary said, "Try great things for God, expect great things from God."

c. We need to get our priorities straight. See Esther 4:14, Amos 6:1ff.

d. Let's get our people out, even while we give sacrificially to support more full-time workers. Let's send our youth on campaigns and apprenticeships, our members on short-term missions, and our retirees to mission fields. Let's raise an army of vocational missionaries going all over the world with their professions, preaching Christ at their own expense.

e. Let's institute a world-wide ministry of prayer for missions and for the lost of the world. We can, we must do better!

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