



Faithful Christian Witness in the Space Age in our Church Activities.

The age in which we live can be called the space age. Ever since the Russians launched "Sputnik" various nations, including ours, have attempted to excel in Space programs. This daring approach has carried over to the moral standards which are set, the type of clothing worn, and the desire to be different. Through it all the church still stands as the agency instituted by Christ to care for the spiritual welfare of the people of the world.

The church is running scared. Everytime someone levels a criticism at it and makes enough noise in the process, we would like to satisfy them by at least feeling guilty and promising that we will amend our ways. We are told constantly by the critics that the church is not doing its job. It is a result of the age in which we live that one must be immediately ready for change, if one is criticized, whether such change is justified or not. The space age philosophy states that as long as there is change, one is doing something. Starting with the false premise that all change must be progress, people are duped by the idea that as long as there is change, there is progress.

Who are some of the critics condemning the church for not doing its job. One example is a Father Boyd who according to a recent news-release stated, "Churches should be destroyed" because of the cost of operation of a few which he selected. In the next breath according to this newspaper account this man said that the Barnard College coed who openly shared board and bed with her boyfriend is a "rather healthy example of the new personal morality. Instead of a furtive, back-seat relationship, they had theirs out in the open." Others tell us that young people are not coming to church because the churches do not relate to them. People do not come to church in the inner core areas, because the church is aloof. Again it does not relate. I'm quite sure that a number of us gets mail every week from some movement here or there trying to impress us that the pastor is not doing the job

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Christ intended for ^{him} it, if he ^{is} not leading a march someplace, or protesting social injustices in another. Last week over a WGN radio program a Lutheran pastor of a formerly conservative body diligently tried to get his point across that the church's true responsibility in the world was social action.

There is much turmoil in the world today in the field of education, wars, social injustices, poverty, and immorality. People ask, "What can be done? What is the cause of all this? They have spent a good share of their effort and time trying to impress people with the idea that there is no God but science, the intellect, and knowledge. Then they still ask, "What is the cause of all this turmoil?" Religious leaders have gone all out encouraging civil disobedience with the argument that one does not have to obey ^{what they consider} an unjust law and then they express surprise over the violence and disregard for law and order.

The problems in the world are present because of the sinfulness of men. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. People may come up with programs with which to solve these problems. These are only stop gap measures, however. The real problem is with man's innermost being, with his heart, with his very nature. Man's heart has to be changed. He has to know that by nature he is a damnable sinner who is completely dependent upon God for all things, including, of greatest importance, his salvation. He has to know that he is saved only by the blood of Jesus Christ and thus through this faith he becomes a child of God and learns to know the will of God. This is the solution for the problems of this world. It is the church's responsibility to teach these truths. The church must witness to these truths also in this space age. As far as man is concerned it doesn't make any difference whether he is in the time of Abraham or in the space age. He needs these same truths, this same witness.

It behooves the church to at all times examine itself to see if it is carrying out the function for which it was established. Is the church really failing in this space age to bear Christian Witness? We will readily agree that where a church has forgotten its function, it is failing. Are we? We will grant that Christian witness merely by words simply gives strength to the saying that "Talk is Cheap." What kind of witness does Christ expect His Church as such to bring?

Jesus gave the command to the church, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." He said, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." The apostle Paul tells us, "Other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, namely Christ Jesus." When Paul gave directions to Timothy regarding his ministry, he stated, 2 Timothy 4.1 - I charge thee, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, ~~r~~rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine: but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables." To Titus Paul said, Titus 2.1 - But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" and then continued to show what effect this should have in the hearers. The Word which they are domanded to preach and which is committed to the church is the Word of which Paul writes, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furneished unto all good works."

Certainly social action is necessary, but the church was not estab-

lished for this action. To the church was entrusted the Means of Grace through which the hearts of men are to be changed by the working of the Holy Spirit. As we have indicated, only if the hearts of men are changed are we going to have an end to social injustice, wars, poverty, and the many other ills of our present society, which ills, by the way, have always been present. The church was established so that through the Means of Grace entrusted to it, men are led to faith in Jesus Christ and are saved for all eternity. We have to keep impressing this fact, however, that Christianity is not a stagnant thing. We have been saved to serve. When we confess in the 2nd Article of our Creed that Jesus has redeemed us, we continue, "That I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness." Jesus also said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." James tells us, James 2.14 - "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body: what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

The church's responsibility is to proclaim the Word of God in all of its truth and purity. We have to show men that being saved for all eternity is being saved already in this life and this will show itself by loving God above all things and their neighbors as themselves.

To faithfully witness, the Church must carry out its purpose. I believe that the purpose of the Church is clearly defined in the Purpose and Objectives of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod as proposed in the District Report. Purpose: The continuing purpose

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of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, as a gathering of Christians, is to serve all people in God's world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of the Holy Scriptures. Objectives: 1. To share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people. 2. To uphold the Truth of God as fully revealed in the inspired, infallible Holy Scriptures and set forth in the Lutheran Confessions. 3. To provide a preaching and teaching ministry qualified to proclaim the Word of God faithfully, effectively, universally in accord with the Lutheran Confessions. 4. To assist in counseling and equipping all members of the Synod for every greater service to the Lord, to each other, and to the world. 5. To assist all members of the Synod in being active in deeds of love toward our fellow men in need. 6. To foster confessional unity of faith among Christians throughout the world.

This is the witness the church must bring. Is it any different in this age than in any other age? One might point to the theme of this Panel Discussion as Faithful Witness in the Space Age, and in this part of it, in our Church Activities. This is the Activity of the Church, to witness and bring the life saving Gospel to souls sitting in the darkness of sin and to build up those in the faith who are already entrusted to its care.

It is true that conditions in the world have changed. When the Word was first proclaimed many, many years ago, people went about on foot; there was no formal education; people lived far more leisurely and simple than today. Today we can span continents in a couple of hours, talk to people thousands of miles away in a manner of minutes, beat the heat through air conditioning, combat disease and do electronic marvels. More and more people are receiving a good education. Since this is the case more and more people can understand the problems facing the world. Through our modern means of communication we have become more aware of the problems of poverty, social injustices, and horrors

Is it called upon to get into social action? Does the cry of the critics that the church is not fulfilling its responsibility justify the change which is taking place in more and more churches every day as they become more social minded and less interested in the Gospel of Christ? By no means!

I don't see how the church can change its message and still call itself a faithful witness, regardless of the age in which we live. The sad conditions of our day show us that man hasn't changed. He is still the same damnable sinner today as he was after Adam and Eve fell into sin. He has to confess with David, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me." With Isaiah of old he must say, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rages." With the apostle Paul he must acknowledge, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. For to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do."

Every single individual, whether he walks, rides, or flies; whether he is well educated or with no education at all; regardless of color or social position; comes under the condemnation of God, "The wages of sin is death" and needs the forgiveness of sins which Christ won for the world and which is brought to him through the Gospel of Christ. Only then are conditions going to change, "For if any man be in Christ he is a new creature. The argument that the message of the church to man must change because he is better educated cannot stand. At the time when Paul came to the university town of Athens with all the philosophers, he still had to chide them for the fact that they had erected an altar and had to inscribe on it, "To the unknown God." All of their knowledge brought them no closer to the true God. Man at all times needs the same message. He is a sinner. He is saved only by the

Today in the space age in our proclamation of the truth we must take cognizance of the fact that lawlessness and violence are on the increase. We must emphasize the fact that we are obligated to obey God's Holy law whether there is a policeman on the corner or not. We must declare what the scriptures declare, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God.

II

If we still need to proclaim the same message to maintain faithful Christian witness in the Space Age in our church activities, perhaps a change can be beneficial in our presentation and approach.

When we speak of change in presentation, I am certainly not in sympathy with the present trend of trying to make the Gospel palatable to our young people by wrapping it up in rock and roll music, having the rock mass, folk music, and the like. Please not this old cliché -- "Show me in the Word of God where it is forbidden." I believe that we are cheapening the Gospel in this way and selling our young people short in believing that we have to drag everything down in order to make it acceptable. Our young people may go for music which we find difficult to digest. Anyone with a teenager is convinced that his child has ear trouble when the radios or stereos are in operation, but one shouldn't immediately conclude that we have to change the entire presentation of the Gospel for them. Let's credit them with more sense than we do.

It is true that when one says something like this, he is accused of being ultra-conservative or even reactionary. You find a lot of broadminded people in this world as long as you agree with what they say.

Another strong approach in the world is this, that the church in a few years will not exist as we know it today. Recently I read reports about a Catholic church which was striving to do the job it has set for itself in small group meetings. It is true that the early Christians did meet together in homes, but this was due to the conditions and was not an indication of the only way in which the Gospel could be spread. We will readily agree that witnessing for Christ is most effectively done eyeball to eyeball. Nevertheless, we know that Christ spoke to multitudes of over 4000 and 5000. We hear the

encouragement of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "Let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." Having a central location where children can be taught the wonderful truths of God's Word in the Christian Day School, the Sunday School, and Bible Classes; where adults and children can gather together to worship God, to discuss and learn His Word certainly is a most effective way of exercising good stewardship over our monies as more and more people get to hear the Word. This by no means makes smaller group meetings of no effect. Let's keep the entire work of the church in proper perspective, however.

One of the products of the space age is the ecumenical movement. Many church bodies are consulting together to decide where a church should be located with the argument that they don't want to misuse funds. Even stewardship is used as an argument to agree to disagree. We must also witness to the truth by refusing to compromise the Word of God in any way at all and therefore by saying no to such proposals. Certainly we will not build a church across the street from another Christian church, and particularly not from one that calls itself Lutheran, but we are not going to compromise the truth of God by such a system.

We have many modern means of communication. We don't advertise enough. This modern age is an age of selling the product. We have a most wonderful product to sell. Let's market it. Let's use radio, television, ^{movies} newspapers, and whatever news^{+ information} media we can afford. Public relations used to be almost an off-color word in our circles, but it is something we need. It is true that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, but we do have to contact the people so that we can bring it to them.

Many years ago, when congregations were confined more or less to a certain area, it was a rather simple matter to state that the pastor

had the responsibility to build the congregation. Today this would be impossible. Every member has to be a witness for Christ. Every one has to watch for newcomers into his neighborhood and has to contact them. Every member has to be an evangelist. As we mentioned, the eyeball confrontation is best, but every Christian can at least give the invitation to a lost sinner which Philip gave to Nathaniel, "Come and see." It is our responsibility as a church to organize them and train them. We must impress upon them the urgency of bringing people to see Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

One of the big problems is High Rise apartments. People go into these things for privacy, and that means privacy from everyone. We would have to contact them by a mailing program. If God in His grace and mercy gives us members in these buildings, then we have an "in" and can perhaps work through them.

We hear much about dialogue today. Haven't church groups always had the responsibility to get together to discuss doctrine and life? Sure, there is fellowship and enjoyment even in social activities, but the main function of a church group ought still to be to grow in faith and knowledge. Your Y.P.S. may get an idea that listening to some musical "group" is a necessary part of their youth function. Don't get too excited about it. This is the music they like. Every organization in the church, however, must be an agency for growth in Christian knowledge and life.

How far are we responsible for social action? Here again I believe that the objectives and policies suggested for adoption to our synod are relevant. 2. To assist all members of the Synod in being active in deeds of love toward our fellow man in need. 5.1 - To alleviate physical suffering caused by catastrophe. 5.2 - To counsel and encourage its members in establishing and maintaining Church-related

welfare agencies. 3. To alleviate endemic needs where necessary in our world mission fields. Surely we will agree that there are many problems in the world and we will serve as a church within the sphere of our responsibility. Does the church, however, have to change its doctrine based on the truth of God's Word, to be relevant to the community. No. The problems are there and they will be solved by the individual Christian in showing forth the fruit of his faith. The work of the church remains the same, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with all people and to uphold the truth of God, as fully revealed in the inspired, infallible Holy Scriptures.

Those who do not understand the work of the church accuse us of taking such a position, because we do not want to get involved. We want to stand on the sidelines. This is not true. In our day it takes a great deal of courage and conviction to cling to the true purpose of the church. The church with all of its activities is to serve for the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God. We join the hymn writer in singing, "Change and decay in all around I see; O, Thou, who changest not; Abide with me. The old slogan coined by another church body years ago still has a lot of truth in our space age society, A changeless Christ for a changing world. Let our witness never be watered down or changed. W

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