

THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY:

THE WESLEYAN WAY

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It is the unique responsibility of a division of practical theology in an evangelical seminary to provide young people with the skills, techniques, and insights which they will need to make their ministry more fruitful in the modern world. They must have training in the principles and applications of communication, inter-personal witnessing, evangelism, counseling, teaching, organizational behavior, community involvement, human relationships, and social action.

Our young people must be trained to adapt the biblical message to the needs and understandings of diverse cultures and social classes. They must be prepared to reach the rich and the poor, the ignorant and the learned, the black and the white.

THE URBAN MINISTRY

With 70 per cent of America's population now living in the great urban areas, and with the concentration in these areas of alienated and hopeless human beings, our future ministers must understand not only the needs of these people but must empathize with their longings, their fears, and their anger. They must learn to go to the people where they are, the way they are. For the day is past, if it ever existed, when the city pastor could frequent only the places of unimpeachable respectability and then expect the masses to throng to his church on Sunday morning. *The battle is out there!* The man of God is not *of* this world but he surely must *be in* it.

The crushing and sickening anguish of today is not apparent in the congregation of a Sunday morning worship service or a Wednesday night prayer meeting. The problems of human distress ferment in the squalor and wretchedness of decaying tenement houses, at the back table of a "gin mill" on State street, and boil in the core of a frenzied mob seeking vengeance on its oppressors. As Nietzsche has written, "*Great problems are in the street.*" So Christian witnesses must go into the streets with compassion for the victims of sin, and with holy indignation against social, economic, and political structures of evil.

MINISTRY TO THE "WAY OUT"

But the down and outer, the slum-dweller and the impoverished minority member are not alone in their urgent need of the grace of God. There are minorities of another sort that are almost untouchable. Many intellectuals and artists live in a world so far removed from the average seminarian's view of life and speak a language so foreign to his ears that he can find no common ground on which to approach them. Yet there is hunger there, a sense of lostness among them, and an endless but fruitless search for identity and meaning. For at the end of every quest there is the inevitable fact of death. Camus writes of the artists' and intellectuals' rebellion against God: "The rejection of death, the desire for immortality and for clarity are the mainsprings of these extravagances." Our task is to reach them with the message of "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live," and the clarity of the divine affirmation, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me." This calls for the translation of the simple and efficacious Gospel into terms that clarify God's purposes in human affairs, and answers the philosophy of the absurd with a redemptive gospel of hope, purpose, and meaning.

MINISTRY TO THE MIDDLE CLASSES

There is yet another class whose needs our seminaries must be prepared to meet. They are the faceless ones of our great middle class. They live neither in the realm of the spirit, *nor* of the mind. Their lives are patterned by the expectations of those who hold their social and economic destiny in their hands. Their rule of life is, "the right face in the right place." They are role players *par excellence*.

They drink because it is expected, not because they like it. They affect cultural tastes they do not have, and secretly detest; they entertain guests they despise and maintain friendships they abhor. Church affiliation and attendance is as much a part of their social accouterment as their membership in the country club and the downtown knife and fork fraternities.

We overlook them as an object of need because they sit beside us on Sunday morning—they are well-dressed—*relatively* well-mannered, and they are not on the relief rolls. In their religious life the principle of the "Golden mean" governs them, just as in their public life: "Don't rock the boat," "Take it easy," "Don't overdo it," "Sure, religion has its place in life just like everything else, but business is business."

Many of this "Lonely Crowd," as David Riesman calls them, find relief from the stifling strictures of middle class conformity in a social life of sophisticated debauchery that would be the envy of

every patron of the eighteenth century French salons. Here are pagans at our doors that must be reached with the conviction of their lostness.

MINISTRY OF INVOLVEMENT

These, briefly, are but a few of the areas of our society where the Gospel is so sorely needed, where special training is imperative to help our young ministers in this most crucial of all tasks. Some, by natural endowment and social background will be better qualified to minister to one group than to another, but the seminary program must not be class bound; rather it must be geared to a comprehensive outreach that leaves no segment of humanity outside its concern.

The training must be practical as well as academic. The student must learn by involvement in human affairs. We may assign readings about the peculiar problems of a quarter of a million Americans who live in prisons and reformatories, but the student will never understand until he has had an opportunity to live close to these people and to some extent feel what they feel. The student may read of racial problems and the horrors of the inner core of our cities, but until he becomes a part of its sickening life and feels its hopeless misery, he is *unprepared* to minister to its victims.

Nor is it enough to hope that after the student leaves these halls he will somehow acquire these experiences. Instead, we need an extensive internship that will send these young men and women out to the prisons, the psychiatric hospitals, the city slums, the university campuses, the plush resorts, to the coffee houses, to middle class suburbs, and to the rural slums.

Then, with these raw experiences, they will come back to the classroom for re-orientation and further help in integrating these pieces of real life into a scriptural image of the ministry.

THE QUALITY OF THE MINISTER

We must exhaust every means of human understanding and competence, that our ministers be prepared for their high calling in Christ Jesus. But let us not in our enthusiasm be misled into substituting skills and training for the quality of the man and the validity of his message. For we will not save one soul, much less the world, by the power of rhetoric or the conclusions of the social sciences. These are tools—useful means—but the man of God must be armed with a Christian philosophy and theology that has been translated into cogent and meaningful appeals to the haughty, the debased, the cynical, and the disinherited.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE MINISTRY OF CONCERN

Here the Bible and theological departments must provide a solid unshakable biblical and theological foundation on which to build a

superstructure of godly concern and action for the suffering, frightened masses of our world. All the techniques and social action, all reform efforts, are but houses built upon sand unless it is God's plan.

The man or woman of God who goes out, as has been suggested, must be a man of prayer and devotion; he must be filled with an evangelistic zeal; he must carry a soul burden for the lost.

The department of prayer and spiritual life and the department of evangelism bear an even *heavier* responsibility in the training of the ministers we envision. For this minister must have a vision and an unlimited confidence in God's power and will to save the world. His message is to bring individual men into a personal experience with God through Christ, and to lead the believer into the fulness of the Spirit-filled life.

THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL ACTION

But this is only the beginning—for transformed men must transform the institutions of men. As E. Stanley Jones has said, "A religion that does not start with the individual, does not start!" He then went on to warn, "A religion that stops with the individual, stops." We must never be guilty of the accusation of the Marxists who say that we preach "pie in the sky when you die" and then turn a deaf ear to the cries of human misery in the here and now. We must be careful of our motives. We must never undertake a program of social involvement simply because we have been falsely called "fundamentalists" and desire the favor and forgiveness of the religious humanists.

But there is even a more subtle temptation for us to attempt to relieve human suffering for the *sole purpose* of improving our proselytizing advantage. Jesus would never countenance the withholding of "a cup of cold water" unless it was spiked with an evangelistic "Mickey Finn." And in this regard, we may wonder if the Good Samaritan ever got that poor fellow saved and into the Church!

The Spirit-filled Christian has a compassion for the *total* man, and his concern is for his *total* relationship with God—*body, mind, and spirit*.

Any who may have been unduly influenced by a morbid, deterministic dispensationalism, and have no faith in God's power or will to save the world, are urged to read more history along with the Bible. In spite of the moral and spiritual decadence of our day, eighteenth century Europe was even worse. But a knight with a burning heart rode across the pages of English history, and by the grace of God, changed the moral and spiritual ethos of the British Empire. He won souls to Christ by the thousands, and the power of his influence joined by others, vanquished human slavery, reformed the prison system, inspired child labor laws, founded labor unions and credit unions, built schools, orphanages and homes for widows. Fifty years

after John Wesley's death, his mighty influence was still felt for good in the British Parliament and his evangelistic fervor had swept two continents.

These paraphrased lines from Mary Alice Tenney, *Living in Two Worlds*, are well worth reflection.

"Can Methodism change history once again? God is the same, but are we willing to be used? If in the mighty ranks of Methodism there could arise a host of men and women who recognize humbly but confidently our heritage, and resolutely put it to work in our tottering world, God might break through, and history might change again!"