

# **CAN THESE BONES LIVE?**

**A STUDY AND CRITIQUE  
OF "THE CHURCH" OF TODAY**

**by  
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**CAN THESE BONES LIVE?**

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*'Indeed !*



## WHAT ON EARTH!

What follows has been written largely in despair of framing, in the time available, any consistent order out of the flood of new ideas with which the exhilarating inundation of 'new reformation' literature besets a layman of limited theological capacity.

The object has been, therefore, not so much to set down conclusion (even if it reads that way) but to summarise what at present seems to me most reasonable, with the hope that it may provide points of departure for discussion, and new ideas for those going through the same revolution as myself. Its omissions, limited scope and lack of penetration at vital points I find thoroughly frustrating. Its emphasis is that of the suburban citizen.

It is of course a presumption to write all this down for publication. My excuse is a conviction that the Church is up to its ears in a crisis and seems merely to echo the haunting cry of the idiot Neddy Seagoon: 'I don't wish to know that!'

There are rays - even beams of hope, such as reports from here and there of experiments in new forms of ministry, the Wayside Chapel, Australian Frontier, Church and Life Movement and, by no means least, the plans and hopes of the Lay Activities Council of the N.S.W. Methodist Conference. These are means of confronting Christians with God's question to Adam - "*Where art thou?*"<sup>21</sup> It is time we answered and confessed our nakedness, time we came out of hiding to face up to God's other question to Cain "*Where is Abel thy brother?*"<sup>22</sup> With some few notable exceptions it is Cain's answer we seem to be giving.

Sydney.  
December, 1965

Keith Bottomley.



## THE DILEMMA

*'Can these bones live?'*

The Bishop of Woolwich<sup>2</sup> reframes this question put to Ezekiel, in a form which is being used with increasing insistence about the Church we know: *'Is the Church not an archaic and well protected institution for the preservation of something that is irrelevant and incredible?'*

To apply to our Church the image of Israel, dead and decayed, its framework dry and useless is a harsh indictment. An overstatement perhaps? Something not to be taken too seriously?

There is a steadily increasing number of thinking Christians, ordained and unordained, who find it distressingly near the mark. More and more are concluding that it such a hindrance or contradiction to the life of Christ that they are leaving it. Those who remain, include the complacent or conservative majority - the frozen and petrified assets - and a growing minority whose faith is strong as Job's was and who at times, are provoked to cry out with his impatience *'Why is light given to a man whose way is hid?'*<sup>3</sup>

The pattern of mediocrity and failure in Church services and societies is widespread and well established, as is the inadequacy of most of the piecemeal "cures" prescribed along denominational lines. Steady decay is concealed behind a magnificent facade of bricks and mortar but, curiously enough, it is concealed mainly from those behind the facade.

The opinion of the 80% or more of the population who are not part of the Church (for whom it exists) seems to be that it is an anachronism, a dead cause which would not be greatly missed. This opinion is likely to be more strongly held by today's children and young people whose education instils into them an aversion to irrelevance, inefficiency and waste.

Nevertheless it is the common experience of church-goers that, with all its obvious faults, the Holy Spirit works through the Church. How much more power then could the Spirit exert through a vivid new 20th Century Church.

The situation is alarming to those who can see it. Warnings of the crisis appear to leave the councils of the Churches largely unmoved. The "ministry" does not seem to be alert to it. Occasional attempts to achieve some reform are usually so rooted in the existing structure as to be only apparently new. They turn out to be mutton dressed as lamb. The Layman who can endure it no longer fades away unnoticed or is 'forgiven' for his lack of faith.

The critical outspokenness of the frustrated is not unusually met, either with an indignant, or a benign, but equally infuriating response: 'Don't rock the boat' he is told in effect, 'the Lord will provide'. One strongly suspects that the Lord is sick to death of being depended upon to provide; that he is waiting with infinite and agonised patience while

we come to our senses and get down to doing something with what he has already provided. Jesus reproved Phillip 'Have I been all this time with you and you still do not know me?'<sup>4</sup>

The growing, disturbed body of Christians acutely aware of the crisis feel impelled to some action but their dilemma is three-fold.

Firstly, they do not know what they can do to put matters right.

Secondly, if they see any avenue of action, there is some doubt that it has any hope of success against the enormous inertia and fear of change in the Church, particularly of those who hold power.

Thirdly, even if reform can be achieved, it is increasingly questionable whether it will be in time to avoid mass desertion of the Church and its collapse as an institution of even the slightest consequence.

Is Ezekiel's prophecy for us? Is God waiting to reconstitute the body from the bones, to breath his Spirit into it, to show us our place in our own land?

The crucial point for all of us, complacent, reactionary, blind, frustrated - whatever our affliction as Churchmen - is that God did nothing in the valley of dry bones except through the Son of Man. He is the resurrection.



## THE CHURCH FOR OTHERS:

*'He has made known to us his hidden purpose'*

The author of the letter to the Ephesians goes on to state that this purpose is 'namely, that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ'.<sup>5</sup>

However, the gospel promise of unity in Christ is bedevilled by the Church's engrossment with the process of 'bringing in' to itself. From infancy to old age we are confronted with a diverse and sometimes desperate array of contrivances to get us to Church; attendance prizes, picnics, social and sporting clubs, door-knocks, speakers with curious subjects, films, preoccupation with technique and novelty in worship services. And for the infirm and the 'can't be bothereds' the product is canned and distributed by radio (all too often with singular lack of imagination) as a sample of what the unlucky listener is missing. It is true that many of these things serve or arise spontaneously from the fellowship to be found in local congregations but the pervading motive is to 'get them in' from the outer darkness of the secular world into the light of the 'Church world'.

God, it seems, is to be found only, or at least mostly, in all his special houses - the ones marked with a cross. We vainly try to keep him bogged down in the parish system.

We are steeped in this heretical attitude. Even when we are trying most earnestly to shake it off we find ourselves betrayed by favouring the concept of the Church as a family, with its real home in some particular building or structural order.

The ideal of the shelter and security of home life, from childhood, makes it easy to accept this outlook and difficult to finish with childish things. Jesus' words in Matt. 10: 37-39 and Mark 3: 33-35 are hard words. They demand that we get our relationships right first with him. Walking in his footsteps leads out of the security of home, out of the order of the temple to where people are.

For most of us this involves not so much new experience but new attitudes. We are members of a variety of different groups, in work and leisure time, in our day to day experience but our attitude towards the people in each group is determined by what we are convinced is most important for us. In one of our worlds, say home and family, is the focus of our efforts (or Church work, Rotary or a business enterprise) we are prone to reserve our purely personal relationships, those involving trust, spontaneous and unselfish concern, for that area of life. In our other worlds we are inclined to settle for more superficial relationships. Our fellows tend to become part of a social mechanism which, with a little subtlety and psychological cunning, can be induced to serve our objectives. The permeating 'science' of management at every level from the shop floor to the board room, from home to the higher councils of the Church, encourages the development of skills in rewarding techniques of manipulating the social mechanism; be it of government, commerce, industry, the Church or family life. Cordiality and co-operation being valued because they are useful. They are to be sought and learned but real concern is most likely an embarrassment

and a rather time consuming impediment except in that small world we give pride of place.

On the other hand if what is most important to us is that which Jesus commands and if our response is spontaneous obedience, then committees, clubs, companies, congregations and families all become people whom we love 'as I have loved you'.<sup>13</sup> This does not mean that we have to force ourselves into intimate personal relationships in all our worlds. Our capacity for this type of involvement is limited. It means that we see people as persons rather than things to serve our ends. Efficiency and achievement, financial success and fun, are seen in their true light as good only so far as they are vehicles for removing barriers and creating a community of concern between people. In this reversal of commercial values "The stone which the builders rejected has become the main corner-stone".<sup>14</sup> The impediment has become the driving force. We turn ourselves around to see our world from outside, on its own terms and not necessarily the way some unbalanced Church formula postulate it.

The process of reorienting ourselves to our compartmentalised lives is not easy and has no slick solution. It has to be worked at. The individual Christian is at a loss. The 'body' is the God given rescue of the lone swimmer. However at the moment it spends most of its time selling life belts with printed instructions.

## LESS TALK - MORE ACTION

It is essential to surrender the conceit that the Church gives us the answers to the world's problems. This is not what it is for. It is useless to recite to young people the 'Christian attitude' to sexual morality, to thunder about Sunday observance in pulpit and press or to adopt attitudes of 'unswerving hostility' to sundry industries, which surely must quake at the prospect. We must understand and help to resolve from her point of view, the fearful stresses we allow our society to impose on a young girl; shop assistant, office secretary or daughter. We must admit and share the value of fellowship of our friends and workmates at the pub or the club, get into our Apex project no matter what day of the week it is. In these and a thousand other secular situations we can find God already at work providing his 'lure of purpose'.<sup>15</sup> In the conscious lives of those we are concerned about. Our response to these situations, our actions and attitudes, the quality of life we unwittingly exhibit in them is our witness.

Colin Williams<sup>17</sup> takes up Harvey Cox's use of the concept of the present time as the 'Age of Postliterate Man'. This is the day of the T.V. screen, movie film, picture magazine, headline, comic strip. 'It's no longer the world of logical rational development it is the world of immediate image.'

The visible behaviour of the Christian community is vastly more significant than its pronouncements. Evangelism for our age is 'VISUAL ENACTMENT OF THE MESSAGE'. When we surrender primary emphasis on haranguing and holy name dropping we are more acutely aware of a world full of risk and insecurity. It demands faith ultimately and only in the image of God Jesus has given us. He turns us around and leads us to meet and know someone who sits in the next office, who might shamelessly invite us for a swim and a barbecue on Sunday morning or to some people in the next pew who would be a lot better off for the fellowship if we did the same to them. Just to be challenged in a group of non Christians on the hard facts of some social issue or to be involved in a discussion of say, Australia's involvement in South Vietnam - these can be disquietening experiences both because of our own inadequacies and because they are open questions with no packaged Christian answer. These are trivial examples and the difficulty grows with the degree of consequence of the experience. We quickly discover we are not properly equipped as Christians for our task, but



even were this remedied by the radical persistence of enough of us we would still discover that what we are called to 'is to struggle with a fog of ethical uncertainties, to face the misunderstanding of both friend and critic, to face accusations of being 'disloyal', and 'worldly' on the one hand - and yet on the other to be thought oddly scrupulous, something of a 'sucker', and someone to be exploited, and this is our true vocation.'<sup>16</sup>

#### MOTIVE AND RESPONSE

The common image of the Christian as one who has things cut and dried, an answer to every problem, is a terrible handicap. To prove the rightness of our Christian opinions we are tempted to expect or to need the encouragement of 'results'. But the distinctive feature of the Christian's attitude to a life of service and sacrifice must surely not be a concern for its effectiveness and extremity (in this we would fail by comparison with many non-Christians). It is that these very aspects are of no consequence. The Christian is caught up in a helpless response to human need, centred on obedience to Jesus' commandment to love the God he has revealed in the quality of his life 'with infinite passion',<sup>6</sup> without preconditions or guarantees. Were it not so, Jesus ought to have been the most bitterly discouraged of men. But the triumph of Palm Sunday or the agony of Good Friday were not, as the world thought, what he deserved or had earned. His actions were demanded by love, regardless of the consequences. He forgave those who thought they had paid him out, who thought that results mattered.

Nevertheless there is a conflict which can easily arise between the spontaneity of our response to the needs of others and our organisations of it. Enthusiasm and dedication are lost without reason and technique and these latter two imply a process of judgement of the effectiveness of the response. Our weakness is that enthusiasm and dedication easily fail us if we discover our reason and technique to be faulty, or feel that we deserve better, like the vineyard labourers (Matt. 20:12) or the Prodigal's brother (Luke 15:29).

If, for example, there is a crying need for something to be done to help the elderly in our local community to a fuller and less anxious life, we may feel compelled to add our ingenuity and skill to making the most of the manpower and money which can be mustered. Physician, psychiatrist, occupational therapist, accountant and a score of other talents will devise the best means of achieving the needs of the old people. The Christian will participate, knowing that reason and knowledge are gifts to be used with judgement, not because there is any degree of uncertainty of success but simply because the need exists. Should the scheme fail we might easily react by turning away from the need in disappointment. In this situation we then flee with Peter, unable to face the music, virtually denying that the need exists anymore; as though our failure has removed it just as effectively as the success hoped for would have done.

A curious inversion of the relative merits of motive and response is frequently used to persuade disgruntled Christians to endure the Church as it is. Where repeated failure is encountered in any efforts towards meeting the need for renewal, and where the dejected individual is on the point of shaking the dust of it off his feet, it is suggested that he should keep attending foolish meetings and tiresome services because, not to do so, would somehow show feebleness of faith. Enduring the unendurable is suggested as a virtue. The need which the Christian is concerned about becomes incidental. The recommended response becomes an end in itself. The implication is that if the Christian "deserts" the Church his values immediately become suspect and his opinions are not to be taken too seriously. But the stones cannot be turned into bread. Failure is failure, endured or spurned. The only true and possible

motive for staying is, that the need for renewal of the Church still exists, no matter what degree of success may be expected or how often failure may be repeated.

When a layman rejects the need for renewal of some particular part or even the whole of the Church as he finds it, because he has come to see it, with some anguish, as irrelevant, incredible and past possibility of being Christ's body for this age, then he has no alternative but to leave it, wiping off the 'very dust - that clings', to find the new Church elsewhere. Our difference with such a person is then one of judgement not of faith, a difference of response rather than motive. He may very well be right.

Centuries of inversion of the consequences of Jesus commandments have stamped us all with many strange and unjustifiable ideas of what is of intrinsic value in our Church work. If we are inclined to count heads as a measure of the success of the Church; if we tend to think of us as 'in', and them as 'out'; if we imagine that Church work, Church property, Church attendance, saving souls or any particular religious form or order has any merit in itself, if we tend to think that truth and goodness is available only or especially through the Church, then we delude ourselves and stand condemned with the Churches at Ephesus, Sardis and Laodicea.

In the suburbs the Church has its local council meetings, all too often forsaking matters of real spiritual concern for the trivia of where to put a notice board or whether the number of communicant members is up or down. Extraordinary investment programmes are haggled over and launched with apparent oblivion to the fact of real and urgent distress in the neighbourhood and, seemingly, with a dedicated determination to ignore the fact that several other 'sister' churches within hooting distance are doing exactly the same thing.

One would not guess that 'He has made known to us his hidden purpose'.

#### FACING UP TO HUMANITY

It is easy enough to be negative and critical of the Church structure and attitudes we have, but not so easy to see what might be done about them. How can we restate the meaning and purpose of the Church in real terms for our day? How can we re-equip it and order it to fulfil its purpose? What will it mean for each of us?

These questions presume 'we' and 'us' to mean the whole laos - not just the theologians, the ordained ministry or the elite laymen of the councils of the Church but the whole 'community of those who affirm that Jesus is the Christ',<sup>9</sup> together with those who Tillich points out 'belong to the Church, but doubt whether they belong'.

The hope given in the early chapters of Ephesians and Revelation 21 is that 'the full stature of Christ' is available to the whole of mankind. In John 17:14-26 and Matthew 28:18-20 is the record that we are sent out to present this hope to the world. Somehow the world is not getting the message in a form it can swallow. The Church, the faithful gathered together, is not fulfilling its purpose. The gospel is heard but rarely seen. It has turned in upon itself and lost its first love.

Colin Williams comments on a W.C.C. study by George Casalis that the traditional marks of the Church - Word, Sacrament, brotherly love are not given 'for its own internal satisfaction, or for its own separate institutional life; Christ gathers his people, speaks to his people, feeds his people, in order that they bring his reconciling love to the world - the Church is a segment of the world which exists for the world'.



The Church exists for others not for ourselves. The Church can only serve its purpose if it's form and order, its preaching and teaching and administration of the means of grace, grow out of the needs of the world in which it is immersed. It must shape itself around the world's needs and join God already at work in the world, or betray its Lord.

This is not to say that the world takes over and dictates the terms of the presence of God. Need must not be confused with want. Jesus showed us how the love which, in its completeness, is beyond our understanding, is to be revealed to our world. He sought out men, healed them when they asked in faith, perceived unconfessed needs and dealt with them as person to person in terms of the world as it was, cutting through the religious overburden of law and doctrine without any conditions or distinction of time or place. He met the needs of the strong and secure as well as the weak. The source of the love he expressed was and is the same but the means of expressing it had to be in a form that the loved one could freely react to. The form was unmistakeable everyday language, and action but the motive and objective was unerringly and always the infinite love of God; love so great that it could go to the limit in apparently delivering itself into the power of men.

In the crucifixion above all, it could be claimed, the world was dictating the terms of the presence of God but, there above all God was using the ways of men, his own creation, to show us his love and our freedom to reject it - not on our terms after all but on his. Out of Jesus' faithful acceptance of this dreadful worldly situation came new life and with it power to persuade men that God will stop at nothing to show his love for us, and to meet our need to acknowledge it.

This is the sort of love we must learn to live out in our world, which the Church must be seen to stand for. It needs a new start, a new grounding, a new idea of God for the Church. In Robinson's words: *"Indeed, if there is a phrase which provides a bridge across into the theology I am concerned to advocate it is Karl Barth's own recent title, 'the humanity of God'. There is nothing further from its spirit than an air of self confident humanism. Its call is rather to go with Christ outside the camp, to be with him in his humiliation."*

*"For this theology starts from Christ as the way in to the Father. Indeed, if any text proves central to the New Reformation, as Luther's sola fide was to the old, I predict that it will be John 14:9, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father'. For this is its point of entry. To talk about God may, to many be meaningless; to ask, with Philip, 'Show us the Father' may appear a futile metaphysical question. But all the old questions of theology can find their focus and come to rest in this man."*

*"But we cannot stop there. For it is not enough to say, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father'. This generation goes on to ask the further and equally biblical question: 'But, Lord, when did we see you?'<sup>20</sup> And the answer to that question is given, in the class 'parable' of the Sheep and the Goats, in terms of the Son of Man incognito - in other words, in terms of the 'gracious neighbour'. If men are to see Christ, and therefore God, they can only do it through the one who comes to them, in the first instance, not as a messianic figure, but as one of themselves, as Fred or Harry or the man across the street"*

The circumstances of the world as it is provide the means through which God will act. As part of these means we have to be ourselves in our own world. One of the consequences is to recognise that *"man has learned to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis."*<sup>12</sup>

This is particularly true of those at the upper and lower ends of the working scale in our society and increasingly so of those in the middle. Bonhoeffer suggests that we should gladly accept this situation as what God requires for us. The Christian *"must therefore plunge himself into the life of a godless world, without attempting to gloss over its ungodliness with a veneer of religion or trying to transfigure it. He must live a 'worldly' life and so participate in*

*the sufferings of God. He may live a worldly life as one emancipated from all false religions and obligations."*<sup>12</sup>

Robinson stresses that this is a shrewd age demanding evidence of experience rather than authoritative edicts, acutely suspicious of creeds and formulae for Jesus as Son of God, demanding to know him first as Son of Man which is the manner in which Jesus preferred to be known by his contemporaries. *"Men of our time, trained in an empirical, scientific discipline, are requiring again to see before they believe."*

There is no longer a quest for God but a primary concern for meaning and understanding of the marvels and tortures of the world about us. The gospel will come to modern man as it did to Thomas, *"out of the fires of experience"* meeting the Son of Man, touching the evidence of his sacrifice for men, seeing his conquest of it and then knowing him as the Son of God.

This is not watering down the Christian gospel but bringing it to life.

#### TIME FOR RECONNAISSANCE

The challenge of the worldly life is to open to question all the values and articles of faith and order we have inherited, and to re-examine them in the light of the scriptures and the world as it is - to allow God to confront *"what is actual in the world with what is possible for it."*<sup>15</sup> In order to achieve this, a new emphasis is needed on communication "among (a) theologically trained Christians (b) Christians involved in concrete worldly structures, and (c) involved non-Christians." The establishment of Australian Frontier and the Church and Life Movement are of tremendous importance and potential to us in this type of encounter. Here are means of starting at both ends of the 'double life' for the churchman of the new Reformation. In this type of working together, divisions of ordination, denomination and religion break down and a sign of our promised unity appears.

This process will undoubtedly involve (it is already happening) some rude shocks to the system. Our faith will be tested severely not only in the internal consequences to the Church but in the external consequences of the new challenges Christians will have to face in living *"a new life for others"*.<sup>12</sup> *"The thing that keeps coming back to me is what is Christianity, and indeed what is Christ, for us today?"*<sup>12</sup> What is involved in translating our hope for a world which rejects religion?

We are well behind the times in attacking these questions in Australia. It is of great importance for us to carefully read and evaluate the ideas put forward in the recent books of men such as John A. T. Robinson (*'Honest to God'*, *'The New Reformation'*), Colin Williams (References 10, 17 also *'What in the World'*), Harvey Cox (*'The Secular City'*). In books like these, and the writings of others that they draw on, the signs and guidelines of a new reformation are appearing.

Although there is an increasing awareness of the need to bring these heavenly portents down to earth, there is perhaps a tendency to claim that we are not ready, that we are not properly equipped; we need training. Dr. H. H. Walz<sup>19</sup> warns of the danger in this way of thinking: *"the two verbs train and equip suggest equally that there is a real thing: the life of the Christian or the fight of the Christian in the modern world. Before the real thing happens, something else must be done. Soldiers must be trained before they go to war. They must be equipped with the right kind of arms before they march to battle. This is the wrong imagery. It makes of the Church or the lay*



centres a kind of barracks outside civil life or the rest of the world. Unfortunately, sometimes the Church and its institutions seem to be not much more than this. This outside situation of the Church is not changed by the fact that the Churches now begin to train and equip their laity in order to send them as conquering warriors into the outside world. It is only changed if the Church, or let us now say, the Christian people realize that they are inevitably, and as I add - happily in the world. The only thing which is not of the world is the message which they have to proclaim and - oddly enough - to represent by their very being part of the world.

'It is not as if the one thing was preparation for life and the other life itself, the one thing halting place and the other the front. Therefore the entire life of a Christian is an "exercise in Christianity" as Kierkegaard has put it. Training and equipping is something which comes to an end. After it has been finished something else begins. Perhaps it must be repeated or completed, yet always it is a special thing. Exercise in Christianity is no special thing; it is life itself. It is an unfinished and unfinishable process of an experimental character.'<sup>19</sup>

Gibbs and Morton point out that when Jesus sent them out two by two, he did not take pains to see that they had got the doctrine right as we would have done'.<sup>16</sup>

The 'training', the evolution of the new Church, the witness and the life for others are simultaneous. They all happen where we are in the new encounter of the Church for others - 'the house of God' which 'is not the Church but the world'.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT IS MINISTRY.

It is conventional in the 'new talk' of the Church to baulk at words like minister, clergyman, laity and layman because their true meanings and commonly accepted meanings are in conflict.

'In the New Testament, (Kleros - share or portion) and laity (Laos - people) refer to the same persons. Clergymen are part of the people of God. Laymen are also clergymen.'<sup>24</sup>

In order to clarify the intended meaning in what follows the words will be used with the meanings.

Minister, Christian	One who affirms that Jesus is Christ.
Clergyman, (clergy)	A minister who has been ordained to preach, teach and administer the sacraments, who is nevertheless first a layman.
Layman (laity)	A minister (male or female) who has not been so ordained.
Church	The recognised institutions generally (or one of them specifically) characterised by specific codes of law and order, property ownership etc. (e.g. Methodist, Anglican).
<u>Church</u> , Laos	The body of Christ, the whole people of God in the broadest sense, gathered together or dispersed - wherever they happen to be.

The New Testament indicates differentiation in the types of disciples who followed Jesus and also among those who made up the post-Pentecostal Church. There were those who had no other employment but preaching and teaching and "building up" the far greater member whose income was earned in secular employment but who confessed faith in Christ. Among this greater number there were varieties of "gifts" developed and used in God's service.<sup>23</sup>

The New Testament is vague about the relationship between the different types of disciples and of the principles of order in the early Church. There is no sound evidence of appointments to life-time offices having an 'undeletable' character.<sup>23</sup>

The structure of the early Church appears to have been flexible and adaptable, exhibiting a system of order which varied with time and place.

This situation appears to have existed up to the time of Constantine. Colin Williams<sup>17</sup> outlines three forms of the Primitive Church during this period as:-

- those which formed among groups which would naturally meet at specific places because of some communal or occupational tie, 'very often the business establishment of the layman on the trade's crossroads'.
- the Church among captive groups such as the slaves in Caesar's household.
- the groups who met secretly when the Church was outlawed.



At the time of Constantine in the early fourth century, the Church on the one hand had thrust upon it power, influence, wealth and prosperity, followed by great institutional complexity. On the other hand, it witnessed the reaction of the development of monastic orders. The clergy were thus divided into 'secular' and 'spiritual' groups, the latter not aiming to minister to any separate spiritual life of man but, by their discipline of self denial and retreat to the 'spiritual' life providing a balance to the temptations of power and authority presented to the others. Nevertheless in this period the Church was subordinate to the State. <sup>27</sup> *The bishops were appointed by the kings and obedient to them, even if the kings themselves were heretics.*

Through the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century and the Dark Ages the Church led this dual existence, the one growing richer and increasingly diverted from its Christian purpose, the other seemingly remote and on the fringes of life but with its self-contained cell-like structure able to preserve *'the seeds of western life through the grim winter of the Dark Ages'*. <sup>27</sup> Europe became increasingly isolated due to the incursions of nomads from the east, the Huns, Slavs, Lombards and the Avars and finally by the rise of Islam which destroyed the Byzantine empire and flooded through North Africa and Spain into southern France. The churchmen who fled before the Moslems to the remote monasteries of Ireland and England found themselves menaced by the Vikings hunting for slaves to trade with the Moslems.

In the latter eighth century Christendom faced complete destruction. It was saved by Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charlemagne. Charles Martel enforced *'a massive secularization of church property'* <sup>27</sup> and founded a well housed and equipped system of feudal knights who turned back the Moslems at Poitiers. Around these knights, who were well endowed with confiscated Church property, grew up a new Europe, new in military power with important new inventions like the stirrup, new in its social and economic systems and moral values. Into this situation Charles Martel *'summoned monks from England and Ireland to reorganise the Frankish Church'*. <sup>27</sup>

He and his successors set in train a process of freeing the pope from secular control *'and ultimately, puritan reform of the papacy'*. <sup>27</sup>

With the rising of feudal culture and the Medieval Church throughout Europe the local congregation became the focus of the church's structure.

The parish clergy no longer moved freely from village to village under a Bishop but became tied to a particular place. The local church became integrated with every aspect of village life. Villagers had no lives apart from the village. New vision was inspired by Anselm, who travelled from continental Europe to England to become Archbishop of Canterbury. He stimulated new uncluttered thought and issued the direct challenge of faith to the doubts and insecurities of the eleventh century. His theological stimulus persisted for some two hundred years after his death.

But the new insights and the new patterns of the Church's relationship with the secular world contained the seeds of corruption.

In the early part of the fifteenth century men such as Cardinal Francis Zabarella, motivated by the scandals of the papacy, brought the Pope under the jurisdiction of the general council. Having thus defined relationships among the hierarchy, his successors hesitated to follow the process logically and define the relationship between ordained and unordained Christians. Reaction prevailed, the Pope regained his power and the Church decayed to the point where Luther could bear it no longer. The tragedy and suffering of schism was preferable to the betrayal of unity.

Luther proclaimed the priesthood of all believers but finding, the indispensability of ordained priests, as the Church seems to have done in all ages, he in turn failed to lay down guide lines to prevent clericalism reasserting itself to the hindrance of Christ's work in the world.

The parish system of the Medieval Church has survived as the basis of order through the ordeal of the Reformation (which virtually eliminated the monasteries), to the present day Church, although the culture and social system in which it attempts to function has changed radically. Our Reformation inheritance is that we have now a multiplicity of parish systems of numerous denominations superimposed upon each other. Each layer of this laminated Church exhibits most of the structural features of each other. There is a similar pattern of Sunday worship, plus mid-week society meetings, Church council meetings, normally with an ordained minister officiating or presiding over the gathered laymen. There is very little cross linking between the layers, Methodists having time only to be Methodists etc., so that the layers of the laminate relate to each other more like cards in a pack than the plies in plywood. The Churches frequently behave as though they have something to keep from each other rather than something to share.

This very sketchy historical review reminds us of two eras in Church development when it surged forward in a new form; the Byzantine Church and the Medieval Church. In these cases the renewed Church took up a form which matched the society of the time so that in each aspect of a man's life the church was there witnessing and teaching - at the centre of defence, political control, learning, marketing, organised labour etc. Unfortunately the Church tended to attach sacred significance to forms of liturgy, order and ministry which it borrowed directly and wholesale from the secular world. Tradition became hallowed for its own sake and the flexibility of the Primitive Church was lost.

#### HERE AND NOW - FEEBLENESS AND CONFUSION

At present we have an overwhelming emphasis on an income segregated, residence centred Church, when what happens in the world of residence has ceased to be of primary importance to the lives of most people in our society. The role of the family has changed markedly since the Church settled for it as its main sphere of influence. The family is no longer a primary source of values for life. It is no longer a complex of kinship but is now confined largely to the nucleus of parents and children. Children are sent out to learn their basic skills, trades and professions. Children are sent out to 'learn about God'. These used to be primarily family responsibilities. Members of the family go out for worship, go out separately for employment, organised leisure time activities, sports, music, theatre, dancing. Home entertainments are now predominantly the passive and silent absorption of TV, radio or recorded music. Conversation is a lost art. Wives and mothers are inclined to complain that their families 'treat the place like a hotel' unless or until they decide to 'liberate' themselves and become outsiders too.

But though most of the values and influences flood in from outside, the family, particularly the mother, plays a vital role in shaping these into a coherent and consistent pattern, so that children can learn to cope with their increasingly complex environment earlier and earlier in life. The family depends upon and must come to terms with the influences of school, factory, press, university, Church and so on. If the Church is unable to show the way to an exercise of Christianity which makes a whole thing out of these fragments, if it behaves merely as another



fragment, it eventually, no matter how reluctantly, becomes recognised as an unnecessary appendage and is dispensed with.

The suburban clergyman can only rarely grasp the complexity and subtlety of the ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by the layman in his job or trades union, his children at school or university, his wife at her part time job or in coping with the tremendous stresses on the family resulting from these outside influences. *'With the withdrawal of the father from many areas of family living, a heavy burden is imposed upon the mother, and, despite the introduction of numerous labour-saving units, she is probably now working harder and under greater strain than her own mother and grandmother did.'* <sup>26</sup>

This 'head in the sand' attitude of our Church to the world of which it is part seems to spring from its emphasis on

*'coming to Church' rather than 'going to be the Church'; as though 'the complex problems of our society can be solved by narrowly religious methods, by a little more prayer, a little more Bible reading, a little more application of the teachings of Christ.'* <sup>16</sup>

This is the enervating and arid burden of the vast majority of sermons on the subject. And many prayers from the pulpit are at least as bad with their 'story book' patching up of the world's problems apparently based on the notion that God is in his heaven awaiting our humble requests with bated breath.

Not only is the Church not coping with this 'pluralistic world' <sup>17</sup> but its parish emphasis is a tremendous drawback in any attempt it may make. Its multi-layer form is evidence that it doggedly professes that each suburb or town can be peeled off into Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, etc. etc. worlds of residence. To attempt to subdivide the spheres of industry, entertainment and the rest in this way is obviously nonsensical. The world has no tolerance for this sort of approach.

Church schools give the impression that this is being attempted in the area of education but the idea of Church schools should be recognised as a relic of the days when the state did not cope adequately with the community's education needs. There now seems to be little need for the continuance of Church sponsorship, unless it can be justified as part of its mission to the privileged, or unless it is believed that the Church's concept of an education system should be continued as an example of what the State should emulate.

#### CLERGY AND LAITY

At this point it is as well to remind ourselves that in criticising and condemning the Church we are denouncing ourselves, clergy and laity alike. It is a fact that *'the mystery of the Church is simply that it is people. It is a divine society, not because of an infallible doctrine or an incorruptible organisation, but because Jesus called men to follow him, and still does. It is not a religious society. It is a lay society because it is made up of the men and women Jesus calls'* <sup>16</sup>

The normal form of existence of the Church, the normal pattern of behaviour of Christians, is not to be gathered together in one place, be it a church building or a house meeting, but to be going about our everyday lives in our different worlds 'filling them with the content of the gospel'. These are the terms of our bondage to the love of God, that we should bring it to life for others. (Matt. 22:40)

<sup>2</sup> Robinson uses Tillich's distinction between the 'manifest' church and the 'latent' church. This is roughly equivalent to the distinction made here between the 'Church' and the 'Church', 'between the Christ acknowledged and the Christ incognito'.

The latent, incognito Church is our right and proper place. It is for this that the manifest, acknowledged Church exists, *'to equip God's people for work in his service'* <sup>28</sup>

This has been written and said with increasing force in our generation and it has provoked turmoil among clergy and laity alike. *'What are the forms that will direct the life of the Church to its intended goal of penetrating every geographic and social realm?'* <sup>10</sup> What should the role of the laity be?

Dr. Keith R. Bridston believes that when we ask questions about the role of laity we are probably asking the wrong questions and should rather be concerned about the place, function, purpose of the clergy. He contends that the history of the Church shows that *'unless the place and function of the clergy in the church is properly defined theologically, practically the relation between laity and clergy will be unsatisfactory.'*

The history of the Church provides us with no authoritative answer as to what should be the relationship between clergy and laity. On the whole this relationship has been unsatisfactory, more often than not to the detriment of laymen and if this is true today we have only ourselves to blame.

There is an analogy between the 'setting apart' of the Church and the 'setting apart' of the clergy within the Church. We are cursed with the perverted concept of 'setting apart' as from the world or the laity instead of within it. The clergyman, in being set apart, is immediately under a tremendous pressure towards clericalism because his distinctive office is also a distinctive occupation, his livelihood. The words, 'delegated' and 'commissioned' serve the true meaning of the biblical word (aphorizein) far better than 'set apart'. <sup>29</sup>

It is interesting to note that *"To be set apart" translated into Aramaic means 'a Pharisee'; whoever uses the term is in danger of Pharisaism.'* <sup>29</sup> The Pharisee's origin was in the conflict between Greek and Jew in the second century B.C. They rose and stood firm for the faith. *'At the beginning they were the pick of the people, when they were identified with revolt. But they degenerated into a party of talk and no action, though there remained "good" Pharisees among them.'* How many of us can think out the full implications of Jesus' withering blast in Matthew 23 and then stand on trial with Paul (Acts 23:6, 26:5-7) and profess Pharisaism as a defence!

The 'call' to be 'set apart' within the laos is no easy thing. Its purpose is *'to equip the saints for their work of ministry'* <sup>37</sup> but it is constantly beset by the temptations of Christ in the wilderness. Tradition is leant upon, subtle attitudes of mind go unchallenged, so that the ideas that ordination endows a person with special capabilities or exclusive powers are reinforced or at least not greatly weakened. The slave forgoes mastery and authority but is 'famished' for them. The security of order is more attractive than the risks of acting in faith.

In the inescapable tension between faith and order, perhaps it is not surprising that the latter has tended to be favoured through the history of the Church. Predigested 'holy' truths have been parcelled up and issued as 'instant' faith kits in promise of eternal salvation and temporal stability. To give some sort of categorical answer is easier than facing up to the working out of a conditional solution.

Radical Christians are confronted with a network of dogmatic formulae and defensive arguments for the status quo. Criticism and complaint against it are readily interpreted as lack of faith rather than



the birth of new zeal. Dreadful distortions of Romans 8:28 are preached (see N.E.B. rendering). Special appeals are made for a little death and destruction, in the form of a military victory, here or a temporary stopping of the universe for a special drop of rain there; these are typical of the absurdities of modern clericalism that splits the Church in two and tragically divides the Church from the world.

In 'God's Frozen People' it is pointed out that *'It is our failure, our weakness, our sin that cuts us off from other men, that makes divisions between men. We often think that it is the other way round; that it is the touch of sinful nature that makes all mankind kin: that it is our faith that makes us different'*.<sup>16</sup>

If, for example, privilege, awe, peculiar habits of dress, domination of or a personal power of veto in Church councils, an expectation of reward for burying the dead or solemnizing matrimony, - if any of these flow from ordination they are points of division and failure.

If it is hoped or expected that people ought to behave differently towards an ordained person than towards another, then this is one of the most insidious forms of clericalism.

Whatever guilt is to be born for this false 'setting apart' of clergy and Church is to be born by all of us. The laity are not the least responsible for encouraging clericalism, or failing to discourage it. It is true as Charles Birch<sup>15</sup> says that the theology delivered from the suburban pulpit is one hundred years out of date, it is also true that laymen shed their 1965 world when they sit down in a Church service and permit, even encourage, this refurbishing of cherished and antique clerical attitudes which are grotesquely out of place in a world 'come of age'.

The Church is people and the vast majority of the Church's people are laymen. The responsibility for the present condition of both Church and Church, and for putting it right, is predominantly a responsibility of laymen. However, most laymen these days seem to be content with a fairly inconsequential demand on their faith resources. The attitude of a large proportion is fundamentally 'What's in it for me?' in the way of meeting spiritual or leisure time needs. There is a willingness to maintain the inherited attitude that the local Church pivots on the clergyman.

Even in strongly "lay" minded Churches it is assumed that a "poor" minister can mean a severe rundown. A "Good man" can "make" a Church. This is the language and the logic of lay councils (Quarterly Meetings, Kirk Sessions etc.) responsible for inviting new ministers. It is difficult, almost impossible, for the clergyman to get out of the middle even if he wants to.

Laymen who shrug off their responsibilities on to the shoulders of the clergy scarcely have any right to complain when the clergy fail to cope. And the chances are that any person trained and ordained for parish work these days is beaten before he starts by the devotion or tolerance of the laymen for the "setting apart from" concept rather than "setting apart within"; the assumption that ministry is the work of clergymen with a little help from laymen rather than the work of laymen with the help of theological specialists.

It appears that most Churches are debilitated by an addiction to clericalism. The use here of "addiction" implies incapacity for self help and the absence of a know reliable cure. It is also interesting to note that the recognised marks of addiction are, (a) dependence on a continuous supply for apparent well being, (b) toleration of high dosages which would produce dangerous reactions in the non-addicted

(c) acute withdrawal syndrome when the supply is removed, its symptoms being opposite to the characteristic "benefits" sought by the addict. The most successful rehabilitations are accompanied by radical changes in way of life and surrender to the help of God and one's fellows.

Recent publications of the W.C.C. on the condition of the Churches read very much like the proceedings of a "Churches Anonymous". In this there is some hope provided, as a Church, we confess our failure and accept the challenge of the W.C.C. and other similar stimuli.

#### WHAT IS MINISTRY?

The answer to this question then is set in the framework of 'the Church for others' and 'the Church for the Church'. It can be rephrased 'How do we go about being the members of Christ's body in our world and how do we use the gift of the Church to sustain the body?'

It is obviously a good deal easier to examine ourselves and say how we should not go about it but from this first essential step the going gets tough. The way ahead offers no guarantee of success, no obvious answers a strong likelihood of failure, a prospect of crucifixion before resurrection. It demands the surrender of all but faith as it did for Job,<sup>32</sup> engulfed by his world and near despair -

*'Oh that I knew where I might find him,  
Behold I go forward but he is not there;  
And backward, but I cannot perceive him:  
On the left hand, when he doth work, but I cannot behold him:  
He hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him  
But he knoweth the way that I take'.*

Our problem is the more difficult because having stayed long enough, we are facing a new journey. We have to decide not only how it seems best to go but how to start.

Robinson<sup>2</sup> describes our condition as 'living in the overlap' between the old Reformation and the new reformation and is convinced that in this situation we must begin at both ends.

Firstly, *'we must begin where we are - with the plant, the liturgy, the ministry, the money and the organisation we have got. We must be prepared to involve ourselves in the burden and the struggle of seeing that it is less irrelevant, less wasteful, less sheerly frustrating than it is. Nothing is gained by simply cutting oneself off from the main body and getting out on a limb. Indeed, it is essential to have the humility to see oneself as part of the sin and irrelevance that has to be overcome - from within.'*

Secondly *'one has to start from the other end at the same time', 'we must recognise the fact that man's question is in the first instance a question about man and not about 'God' - a word which is becoming increasingly problematic to our generation and which has to be 'brought in' more and more unnaturally into any discussion'. 'How in this situation is the Gospel of Christ to be preached and what is the place of the Church? Is it possible for Christians to accept this shift in the entire frame of reference - and not to sell out?'*

Acceptance of the double life of starting from both ends is an uncomfortable experience for the churchman of the new reformation; *'it is a most confusing and, in the proper sense of the word, distracting situation'.*



## STARTING FROM THE CHURCH

An attempt has been made to set down, in the broadest terms, the purpose of the Church and to argue that a new approach to the working out of this purpose for our age is urgently needed. The process of learning how to go about it, of defining the forms in which it should be attempted is not a prerequisite for a relevant Christian life but part of that life. It involves trial and error, frustration and failure, forgiveness and hope.

We cannot yet see the broad picture of the Church as it should be and, without it, it is impossible to be confident that any particular stroke of the brush will make or mar it. Any redeployment or structural change can only be justified, therefore, if it is exploratory and conditional for its continuance upon being demonstrated consistent with the emergence of forms of the Church will allow it to fulfil its purpose.

Since the best form of the Church will depend upon the historical and social circumstances in which it finds itself, and since these are constantly changing, it seems essential that the Church must constantly remain flexible in all aspects.

Every facet of the Church's organisation should thus be considered as experimental or conditional no matter how long or short a time it has been in practise.

An important and essential part of this process of constant renewal is the establishment of new working relationships between theologically skilled clergymen, and Christians and non-Christians, who are deeply involved in working out their secular responsibilities. The feed-back from our efforts to bring the Church to life is vital in establishing the Church forms which will support them.

A useful analogy is the relationship between scientist, engineer and society. The truth revealed by the scientist (though the search for it may satisfy him personally) is of no value to society unless applied in some way by the technologist. Society, of which scientists and technologists are part, responds to new science, or new technique, by accepting or rejecting it as desirable or undesirable through economic and political means. Society also indicates areas in which new research and development may be useful or profitable. Thus an automobile factory, a gold mine, a synthetic ammonia plant become the embodiment of scientific truth in the service of society. The fundamental truths of the chemical and physical processes cannot be changed but the manner in which they are used depends entirely upon the needs of the society, of which the discoverer and the applier of the truths are part. The technologist needs the university or technical college to prepare him for his profession, to provide refresher and extension courses and to keep him alert to new discoveries. But these institutions are pointless unless they in turn remain alert to the feed back from the scientists, technologists and economists in industry and business and relate their research programmes and curricula to society's changing needs. Learning not related to man's comfort and ennoblement is sterile and hopeless. Every student has undoubtedly had the experience of learning and being tested in something, either boring or fascinating, which is utterly useless for any purpose other than satisfying the teacher's unreasonable obligation to teach it.

It is worth noting in this analogy that many technologists are fully

employed in research institutes and universities and many research scientists are fully employed in the 'applied' world of industry. Free exchange between industry and institution is vital for both.

Similarly, exchange of clergymen, laymen and non-Christians between full time Church employment and secular employment is vital if the Church is to be brought down to earth as relevant and credible. This exchange is the bridge of communication-by-experience which is of inestimable value to both Church and world.

It matters tremendously to the Church to have the benefit of experience of what the world is thinking and doing. However intangible, God is working in the world whether or not we are with him and the interchange between Church and Church is essential so that his word to his Church may be heard. Jesus' ministry shows us that God will work in the world, if need be, in spite of what the Church does. He pointed a confused churchman to a heretic Samaritan, of all people, as an example of God's love in action.

An increasing number of laymen are seeing their voluntary Church work as part of this bridge. There are new ventures opening up e.g., with the availability of State subsidies for properly trained clergymen for chaplaincy and rehabilitation work in hospitals and prisons. One of the most encouraging aspects of this new opportunity is its ecumenical nature and one of the most discouraging, the doubt that the Methodist Church can 'afford' to participate.

Crippling the freedom of the exchange between secular and Church employment are the salary and status discrepancies which exist, the shortage of Church funds to pay decent incomes to its employees or to even make up the balance of State subsidised salaries, and the shortage of adequately trained clergy to tackle new secular opportunities.

It is intolerable that the full time occupation of clergymen or laymen in the Church should take on any aura of sanctity from any financial or other sacrifices it may demand. Work in the Church for its own sake is a deceit. It has no unique holiness.

The concept of ordained ministers serving in secular employment is virtually as old as the Church and has been rediscovered with varying degrees of success in recent years (e.g. Catholic worker priests in France). Colin Williams<sup>17</sup> points out the necessity for the clergy to close the gaps between the realities of the layman's world and their idea of it. The teaching of the New Testament is that *'what is needed is apostolic men who will pioneer, who will lead the way into these public worlds, finding the forms of Christian ministry around which the laos can gather'*. He also states that in the present crisis in the Church:

*"God is using the crisis as a judgment on the Church, recalling it from the false separation of the ministry of the word (verbally abstract) from the ministry of the style of life (the ministry of 'presence')"*.

Williams sees this unity of the laos in the secular sphere as the promise of Pentecost - the "first fruits".

It is plain that a radical reassessment of the training of the clergy is essential. The evidence of the times is that training men primarily for work in the 'parishes' has become a very bad habit.



## FAILURES OF COMMUNICATION IN THE PARISH

A little analysis seems to indicate that the commonly accepted local Church situation provides a series of excellent examples of how to spoil the prospects of effective communication between people.

1. There is no scriptural support and little logical justification for the concept of training the great majority of clergymen specifically for a lifetime of local church work. There is an appalling wastage of talented and devoted men, cloistered by day in the semi-deserted suburbs, struggling with hopeless schedules for religious instruction in schools, banal Church meetings, impossible pastoral demands and the obligation to prophesy at least twice on Sundays. The picture becomes more ludicrous the more one contemplates the consequences of denominational multiplication of these activities. The suburban clergyman is well insulated from the lives of the laymen he is called to minister to and the layman is forced to become a little schizophrenic so that he has some hope of tuning in to whatever it is the clergyman is trying to say to him.

Communication between clergymen and laymen is hindered in this way. The relevance of theological truth is lost and the penetration of pastoral work becomes severely limited.

Harvey Cox<sup>34</sup> in discussing points of failure of the Baptist Jubilee Advance programme in the U.S.A. comments on the limitations imposed by the inherited form of the Church and the training of local pastors: 'Perhaps the atrophied view of the pastors role which is now built into theological education is what must be challenged first of all'.

2. It is the almost unquestioned objective of each local church to build up or maintain an array of societies which primarily serve the interests of its members and adherents and their children. Sunday School, youth club, ladies' and men's (segregated) and couples' organisations and so on, make their demands for leaders, buildings and equipment. It is frequently the demand for leadership man hours and cash arising from this complex of societies which determines the minimum size of the congregation which can comfortably support it. A good deal of the control in Methodism at the local church and circuit level is in the hands of the leaders appointed to these societies. Much good has come from it but it is a system or organisation which has its origin in Victorian times and was probably well suited to the predominance of localised communities of that day. Now, when we are dispersed out of the places where we live for much of our conscious lives, there is very little scope for continuity of the associations and fellowship which these societies aim to provide. Even in a congregation of no more than fifty people the chances of getting to know more than half of them on terms of any sort of intimacy is remote. The fact that congregations divide naturally into groups is considered sinful. The special common interests of different groups are treated with suspicion. They are seen as cliques. Factions and misunderstandings inevitably arise, communication becomes inhibited and gives way altogether, at times, to suspicion and nastiness. The not unfamiliar pattern of hostility, bickering and manoeuvring for petty advantage grows up. The loving community becomes a mockery and a living hell too easily, too often.

The need for a congregation of a certain minimum viable size to sustain the familiar type of local church in our type of society thus has inherent in it the seeds of frustration to its more fundamental purposes of fellowship and 'building each other up'.

3. This minimum sized organisational complex also demands a self centred concentration on building investment which screens off from its clergy and laity the full impact of the needs and opportunities facing the

central Church departments, and of the community in which it exists. Competition for circuit funds between churches can be shameful. Small minded circuit support of departmental budgets and meagre or non existent support for urgent secular needs can be heartless when viewed against the appropriations for property maintenance and new buildings which financially successful stewards campaigns make possible. Characteristically, new buildings are planned as endowments to the next two generations at least; generations which may have good cause to regret their forebears thoughtless generosity.

The true objective and inspiration of a stewardship canvas too often is betrayed for the silver that pours in. It turns out that people who have been challenged to give sacrificially to the work of God, in fact have merely given into the hands of property trusts whose existence is justified by the property for which they are trustees and who, very often, cannot or will not see beyond the limits of local church real estate. Luke 12:32-34 is invoked to inspire the givers, and the receivers behave as though they have never heard of it. But the truth remains 'where your wealth, is there will your heart be also.' The message of the outside world's needs somehow doesn't easily penetrate the walls of the local church.

A few financial facts relating to Methodism in N.S.W. in 1965 and 1966 are very sobering indications of this type of communication failure. These figures relate to money originating from collection plates and from the response of church people to departmental appeals for direct giving.

Cash spent and commitments made on circuit churches, halls and activity centres, parsonages and land in financial year 1964/1965 (extracted from N.S.W. Conference Agenda 1965 and stated to nearest £10,000) can be summarised.

New commitments entered into	£400,000
Actual cash spent during year on	
(a) maintenance and improvements	100,000
(b) new commitments	110,000
(c) reduction of debt	<u>160,000</u>
	£370,000

Approximate figures for disbursement of connexional levies and direct giving to various departments for 1966 are as follows. The total indicated is high because of rounding off of individual amounts. It represents about 90% of what was asked by the departments etc. concerned

Overseas Missions	57,000 (1)
Home Missions	41,000 (2)
Dept. Christian Education	9,000 (3)
Dept. Christian Citizenship (including chaplaincies)	10,000 (4)
Leigh College	35,000
Removal and General Expenses	20,000
Childrens Funds (Assistance for families of clergy)	9,000
Connexional office expenses	2,000
Development in Canberra	<u>1,000</u>
	£184,000

(1) N.S.W. Share after General Conference budget had been cut by 30%

(2) Bright Bequest income £22,000 extra



- (3) Additional income from sale of literature etc.
- (4) Note that institutions such as Iandra produce appreciable additional income in their own support.

The figures may have added point when compared with a total membership in N.S.W. of 50,000.

This second tabulation does not reflect the new and pressing opportunities which present themselves to overseas missions or in the spheres of Christian Education or social service. They are 'bare minimum' figures enforcing a frugality and a denial of dire need, which makes the expenditure on buildings and real estate appear prodigal. This is especially so when it is considered how frequently the building programmes of two or more churches, in the one circuit and within a few minutes of each other by car, are duplicated - not to mention the apparent determination of most other denominations to pursue the same course.

The way out of this snare is not easy. Jesus' instruction to 'sell your possessions and give in charity' is applied to the Church by Bonhoeffer. There are more and more examples, particularly in Victoria, of joint Church enterprises using common buildings and team ministries, where this, in effect has happened; of others facing up to the shocking waste of the Church's assets, which stand locked and empty for 90% of the useable time, by putting them to the service of the community as Counselling centres, pre-school kindergartens, gymnasiums etc. An excessive Church debt can at least force this type of thinking upon property trusts, at times, even if the motive is primarily financial.

4. A fourth type of communication failure, assurance of which is built into our denominationally divided local church structure, arises from the inordinate demands it makes on the congregation for individuals of experience and skill in leadership. It is more than likely that, for as long as any of us can remember, Sunday Schools have been short of teachers, or any one of several other organisations has been short of a secretary or treasurer. An individual of some leadership talent might easily be lumbered with four or five different jobs. Capable people become entrenched in particular jobs and vegetate for years on end because they are considered indispensable or simply because they are less inclined to resign, or less skilful at avoiding re-election, than other candidates. Sentiment frequently overpowers common sense in 'democratic' elections.

The continuous outcry from the Sunday Schools is made earnestly but little thought or tolerance is given to combining operations, leaders and equipment with other nearby Churches, even those that use exactly the same syllabus and lesson book. Our devotion to doing it ourselves inevitably leads to the employment of untrained, unskilled teachers who fail to communicate with the children. The resulting boredom is only tolerated until parental pressure to attend is removed. A dusty and unsatisfying image is taken away of a God of lesson books and catechism who requires special behaviour when in 'his house' but is not much bother outside it.

5. One of the most patiently endured and tedious failures of communication in the local church arises from the traditional concept of preaching as a pulpit monologue delivered 'six feet above contradiction, in terms of the gracious God of the old Reformation'.<sup>2</sup>

It is instructive to look up 'preaching' in the dictionary and see reference to associated words 'preach down', 'preachy', 'preachify'.

The dictionary defines preaching as an action with little hint of its purpose. It seems obvious that preaching has been missing the point for long enough to become commonly understood as one of the less desirable human experiences.

Educationists assure us that preaching from the pulpit is a tenth rate means of instruction. As a means of counselling it is equally low grade because it is not a suitable medium for mutual confidence and the subtle interplay of personalities which successful counselling usually depends upon.

The normal order of Sunday service implies the belief that people come to Church mainly to hear what the preacher has to say. This is extremely doubtful. It would be most instructive to see the results of a proper analysis of people's motives for going to Church. It is almost certain that a very high proportion of Church goers are well conditioned to having little to hope for from the sermon, at least this would be true of the majority who are permanently on the receiving end. Those whose main motives for attending Sunday Service are other than to 'listen to' the sermon become a captive audience whose tolerance must have an end. The preacher, particularly if he is a clergyman, is in all probability a captive too. It is an exceptional man who can cope effectively with the excessive demands of the pulpit week after week, and no doubt all those who can't are not insensitive to the fact.

A number of excuses is made for the continued over-emphasis of preaching from the pulpit, apart from attempting to justify it as a primary means of teaching or counselling. A need is seen to unquestionably satisfy the demand of those who have become completely conditioned to expecting what is normal; who, it is thought, would be lost without it. Some are convinced that sermonising is the right and proper privilege, obligation and medium of those ordained to 'tell the story of the gospel', who see the congregation as so many empty vessels to be filled, or at least topped up, with the Spirit by golden words from the preacher. Others are convinced that repeated verbal hammering is essential to get their special insights or a new revelation of God - a 'conversion' through to the people. Discussion of its pros and cons with preachers leaves the habitual listener with the impression that 'preaching' at least does the preacher some good but at what cost!

It must be said, however, that there is probably no Christian of more than a few years experience of Church-going who has not been taught or counselled from the pulpit, who has not felt a new infusion of the Spirit or new insight during a sermon. A not insignificant number have been forced to decide the merits of the demands of Christ by pulpit evangelism. Even a mere discipline of silence is not entirely bad. For these reasons, preaching from the pulpit, radio, television screen etc. will and should continue but surely not as its almost exclusive form nor without some recognition that, where more effective means are available of achieving some of the traditional objectives of preaching, they should be used in preference.

Preaching, in Barth's words 'rests upon the profound principle that God never acts upon men directly, but always through a human personality touching men through men'. Preaching then is bringing the gospel to life, making the Word known as flesh - making the Resurrection tangible as it was for Thomas, so that men will respond as he did; 'My Lord and my God!'<sup>3</sup> Discussion, drama, music, films and the delivering of sermons are all valid means of preaching. The whole of the Christian life is preaching.

6. A final example of the failure of communication in Churches is the language in which the creeds, liturgy, public prayers, hymns and scriptures are couched. The New Testament, of course, is now



commonly heard in modern English but this is not so of the rest. One has to learn to speak and hear the language of the Book of Offices. The creeds are a wilderness of words to many. Readings from the old testament glance off the mind, listened to but not heard. Most hymns, sung even at a dreary pace, cannot be well understood and become merely an exercise in mouthing a series of syllables tunelessly. The leading of public prayer is often lost in imagery or strange talk which makes it difficult to stop wondering if the roast will burn or to avoid a welcome doze. The remedy for some of this is in prospect but there is a sluggishness of response of theologians and clergymen to translate and make plain what they have been specially trained to understand and appreciate.

#### FALSE DIAGNOSIS

1. In the complex interplay between radical and conventional points of view, both within and between the minds of contemporary Christians, there is not infrequently a tendency to mistake a symptom for the disease. The preoccupation with getting more people 'in' is an example. Very often there is a sense of urgency about this arising from the belief that people are falling away from the Church and must be brought back. Whilst there may be a strong possibility of appreciable dwindling within the next ten to fifteen years, with the phenomenally rapid changes sweeping through our society, there is little evidence, according to K.S. Inglis' study 'Religious Behaviour',<sup>26</sup> that there has been much variation in the proportion of church goers in Australian society from early Colonial days. In 1839 it was estimated by Judge Burton that Sunday worshippers represented a little over 10% of the population. A select committee of the House of Commons observed, in 1812, that 'the religious feelings of the Colony appear to have been weak'. Those devoted to the cause of 'bringing them in' can draw little comfort from the past.

2. Like the stereotype of the British traveller we may be inclined to shout the language we understand louder so that the foreigners will understand. Meticulously organised evangelistic campaigns broadcast the seeds of salvation without regard to the season. Most fall among the crop which has already grown. Of those that do shout there are many that find the soil of the Church stony and withered away. K.S. Inglis observes that *'revivalism, on American lines and often conducted by American visitors, has been a normal part of Protestant evangelism here for more than a Century; but there has never been any solid evidence that it shifted for long the boundary between the Church and the world. At most it has helped to keep warm those people who are already inside the house of God.'*

3. Another symptom which is often singled out for treatment is the lot of the overworked parish clergyman. If only he could be relieved of his pastoral burden, helped with his correspondence or assisted with his work in the local schools - if only he could get on with his 'real' job - things would be alright. Lay assistance, full time or voluntary is suggested as the remedy. No doubt there is much to be said for increased lay participation and administration in the Church but, when a layman is employed specifically to relieve an ordained man, we must be very clear on what is being done and why. The predicament of the clergyman is a symptom of the diseased ministry of the laos. The correction of this disease must be the objective of any increased involvement of the laity in the Church.

Without the objective clearly in view any stimulation of full time lay involvement in the Church could lead to the development of "Laism" every bit as undesirable as clericalism, and far more terrible than the tyranny of many circuit stewards.

4. The paucity of candidates for the ministry was noted and deplored by the 1965 N.S.W. Methodist Conference. A campaign to raise more

recruits was advocated, one fears, for the purpose of pouring them into the parishes. But the reluctance of men to offer for this service, and the increasing number of pulpits to fill, are both symptoms of the increasing irrelevance and unchecked spread of the existing multi-layer parish system. How many of the new candidates will be trained for work in new forms of the Church; in tackling the dozens of pressing social needs of the community? How many will be commissioned to untried exploratory forms of ministry? How many will be 'returned to the world' to earn their living in industry and commerce and politics and to find there the forms of Christian ministry around which the laos can gather?<sup>17</sup>

There are numerous other points of attack on the condition of the Church which go astray if the objective is confused. New ideas in worship services can degenerate to gimmickery. Undue concern about the language and symbolism of the liturgy can result in its neglect or misuse. Pre-occupation with making a Godly architectural impact has resulted in some regrettable edifices. Stewardship canvasses can be justified as helping "them" to see their responsibility to the Church - in hard cash of course.

#### HOW TO START

Through all the continuing maze of analysis and critical appraisal it is difficult, as yet, to see new patterns to attempt to follow, new forms of the manifest Church which will serve where the present Church fails. It seems likely that an extraordinary variety of forms will arise when the heretical structures have been dismantled and the worlds of country town and suburb, of business, entertainment, health institutions, the arts, communities of alcoholics, isolated racial and refugee groups and many more have been explored afresh. As the barriers are broken down the first fruits of the unity of God's people will begin to appear in ways which cannot occur in the present Church forms.

At the time of writing (Dec. 1965) there is a most important conference in progress in Canberra specifically concerned with studying new forms of the local church in a variety of situations in Australia. The conference is organised by Australian Frontier and involves ordained and unordained Christians of six denominations, men and women, from five states. A report on the proceedings of this conference will be available in February or March, 1966 and will be a most important source of guidance and stimulation for the whole Church in this country.

It is therefore with some uneasiness that the following ideas on possible variations of the suburban Church are set down. They are intended only as stimuli for discussion at the January, 1966, N.S.W. Methodist Lay Activities Convention. The author suspects that after having participated in the Canberra Conference he will regret having been so rash as to have put them to paper.

Perhaps in the local suburban Church scene it would be useful to explore the use of small groups of ten to twenty lay people, meeting in private homes, calling in the help of theologically informed clergymen, and others with specialised knowledge, as required. The 'house' Church idea has been tried in a number of places with variable success but it may be that a more informal approach; one less rigidly oriented to worship, would have greater possibilities. With well led groups of not too large a size mutual confidence and fellowship quickly grow to a point where candidness is not mistaken for insult, where ideas can be attacked without involving persons. Participation in such a group need not be an obligation of indefinite duration if, within a congregation, they are formed and reformed as the need is felt to study and discuss specific issues, or for training for some responsibility (e.g. parental).



House groups need not have any particular parish Church association so that several denominations can be represented and non-Christians can join. This type of communication can result in awareness of unrealised avenues for service and compelling insights into new possibilities for the Church in areas other than the world of residence.

The first essential is the availability of training for group leadership, and some form of stimulus in the way of study material related to issues of consequence to laymen. The current and timely Church and Life Movement provides both of these. If its ideas are properly grasped and the opportunities it presents taken up, it could be of very great value in the new reformation in Australia. The continuation of a similar source of training and stimuli would be of great importance.

A moment's thought about such small groups will result in several obvious questions about their relationship to the local Churches. These groups would to some extent prevent people from participating in Church societies. The local Methodist minister may not be as well equipped to help some groups as one from another suburb or the local Rector or Pastor. Groups concerned with the problems of particular occupations or of local areas would have to cross denominational borders. Ecumenical groups finding fellowship and learning together may wish to attend worship services together at one or other of the Churches represented. The emphasis in what is desired of a worship service may shift perhaps towards the sacraments away from the conventional teaching and preaching order of service. A whole lot of redundancies of societies, ministerial appointments, Church buildings may begin to show up in this new unity. Upsetting new ideas on the use of these latter or their cash equivalent may be voiced.

There is, on the other hand, the danger of small groups becoming introverted and failing to see themselves as set apart within the total Church. Preparation in the right attitude of participation in the groups would thus be important if they were to properly share their insights and support each other. The setting apart of men and women within the body to maintain this oversight, combined with theological instruction and the administration of the sacraments would remain essential but something nearer a joint ministry of ordained and unordained Christians could evolve.

To be still more fanciful, the complex of parish Churches may become rationalised to a properly planned system of urban centres of worship and study shared by several denominations, providing the resources to support the satellite house groups. Larger but less numerous, they would make possible the sensible planning of financing and provide an economy of organisation and manpower from which laymen and clergymen could be called as needed to serve suburban, industrial, occupational or other group needs. The development of team ministries would provide a continuity which would permit an individual member, ordained or unordained, freedom to move into or from secular employment.

An essential component would be the contact with the forms of service of the latent Church. This is the vital feedback from Christian and non-Christian through group consultations, the movement to and from secular employment of its fully employed laymen and clergy, the world orientation of the house groups and the secular involvement of its laymen.

This daydream of what might be would not dominate the Church scene but form part of a pattern with lay academies and other specialised ministries developed for new areas of service. Denominationalism would fade away. Clerical and lay training, Christian involvement, financial management would become more and more ecumenical and radical.

Daydream it is however, although based on indications of what is being tried in some places and on ideas which might avoid the more obvious pitfalls of our present Church system, it has great dangers. Any forecast of what might be, however encouraging or important to planning new departures, has some of the qualities of a mirage. The image can be a long way from the true object both in distance and faithfulness. The security and certainty of knowing the answers have no place in working towards a new Church, nor has the Walter Mitty attitude which produces great depths of contemplation and mountains of words but not a ripple of action.

#### NOURISHMENT FOR EXPLORERS

Any new start requires new training and new equipment; although the difficulty which arises from the use of these words has already been referred to.

Ecumenical training may not only be a desired objective of a new Church. There is evidence to indicate that it may be an essential beginning.

<sup>34</sup> Harvey Cox has described what must surely have been one of the most lavish and carefully planned denominational lay training schemes to have been carried out: the 1959-1964 Baptist Jubilee Advance in the U.S.A. He indicates that

1. The assumption that the inherited denominational structure could be used was wrong. *'These structures developed at a period when the whole idea of the Church's mission through its laity in the world had not yet made its appearance'.*

To make use of them in their present form *'to attempt a lay training programme would appear to be exceedingly difficult indeed'.*

New ventures become tacked on to what is already there. The appendage, like a dog's tail, is activated only if there is sufficient energy and inclination or the incentive of an obvious reward.

2. The average local congregation, even if it has the leadership resources, is too small to allow groups of common secular responsibility to be formed (e.g. medicine, trades union, local government). To attempt to combine with a congregation of the same denomination in the next town or suburb can give rise to problems of differing local interest or different level of wealth.

*'Lay ministry in the modern world must be from its outset radically ecumenical, because, for example, to bring Baptist or Presbyterian doctors, school board chairmen or shop stewards together in any community will inevitably be divisive, especially if permanent groups emerge, and in my opinion do more harm than good.'*

3. Local pastors are hindered in participating in a lay programme because they are not educationally prepared and 'they are burdened down with a multitude of enervating duties as administrators of their parishes'.

*'We found that the weakest 'link' in our training chain was always the local pastor who, though often well intentioned, inevitably views any lay training programme as another way of getting more people into his Church'.*

4. It is very difficult to set out for new ecumenical 'world' objectives from a starting point which is neither of these things and where they may be given only lip service or no respect at all. The real discovery of the importance and significance of these objectives only comes with trying to achieve them; by pastors and laymen of various denominations in the same locality working together to develop lay training programmes.

The Church and Life Movement offers some hope of outflanking these points of failure but a good deal depends on the laymen involved. It is ecumenical at all levels from national to local and, while being a national programme its organisation of local leadership and initiative



allows adequate flexibility for it to be adjusted to local circumstances. Its programme involves the training of thousands of laymen and clergymen as leaders and it stresses the theme of Church - would encounter through participation of Christians and non-Christians in the local groups.

However although Church and Life is basically aimed at encounter rather than training it could spark new ideas of ecumenical co-operation in lay training e.g. at the local church or district level, through the theological colleges.

#### STARTING FROM THE CHURCH.

The emphasis which has been placed on the inadequacy of Christians to make their faith relevant to their everyday lives should not be misunderstood. Many have the advantage of example, opportunity or natural capability which helps to overcome difficulties too great for the remainder.

In every sphere of industrial, commercial, political, professional and institutional life and in many other unexpected places, Christians are showing qualities of living which obviously bear the stamp of Christ.

Nevertheless, these are largely lonely personal ventures which would both gain and give great benefit if they could be brought into some pattern of co-operation with each other, and with non-Christians sharing similar interests and difficulties. These are the areas of Christ incognito of evangelism by example rather than by 'naming the name', of simple living for others.

Social and political issues become the focal points. The needs of the elderly in the community, questions of our political attitude to Rhodesia or Indonesia, our attitude to other races in Selma or Moree town planning, education, the derelict humanity in our cities, the unequal battle against the road toll, sexual ethics and the teenager, the effect of the incredible note of change of our society and the accumulation of new knowledge - the list is endless. These are the needs which shape the form of expression our God prompted, love should be given. Too few Christians see direct involvement in matters like these as of major significance compared with doing the right thing at the office or factory and hopping into a bit of work at the Church.

One example of what is being attempted as a new start in the latent Church in Australia is the work of Australian Frontier.

The initiative in the establishment of Australian Frontier was taken by the Australian Council of Churches. On its establishment it was given complete autonomy. It is governed by a Commission which is self-perpetuating. It is incorporated in Canberra where its central office is located. A full time director was appointed in 1963 and since that time a good deal of preliminary work has been done to establish suitable methods of approaching its objective. The objective in the words of the constitution is the promotion of 'effective contact, communication and relationships among people that they and the Churches may better undertake their responsibility in Society'.

Australian Frontier itself has no doctrine to promote, no political alliance, no Church control. It does not aim to duplicate the activities of any existing organisation but to bring together Christians and non-Christians who share common responsibilities so that they can communicate with each other in a way they may not have had much opportunity for previously. From this free exchange of fact and opinion comes new understanding and a stimulus to a renewed attack on the problems facing the nation.

Frontier's activities fall into three main phases.

#### 1. REVEALING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

For example, bringing home the fact that town planning is an urgent issue for all of us. Within the lives of most of us the number of dwellings in Australia will be doubled. The planning of the town or suburb we live in has a good deal of influence on our lives. The work of revealing or spreading the awareness of the community's needs is done through Frontier's publications, consultations and through the supporting body of Friends of Frontier.

#### 2. INITIATING ACTION ON THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

This phase is handled mainly by advisory panels which are now set up in most capital cities. A panel will pinpoint a particular issue of concern such as the community's responsibility for its young people. It then invites representatives of responsible bodies together e.g. educationalists, local government, youth organisations, sports clubs, chamber of commerce, police, social workers, Churches etc. A joint consultation is held under the leadership of an expert in the field in such a way that no attitudes have to be struck and fact, common sense and opinion based on experience dominate the discussion. Frontier provides neutral ground for the consultation, the responsible group itself determining what further action should result. Consultation reports are published maintaining anonymity of the views expressed.

#### 3. EQUIPPING PEOPLE TO COPE WITH THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY.

None of the consultations held have proceeded very far without coming up against the shortage or non existence, of sociological data concerning some aspect of the Australian community. Davies and Encel claim that sociology is the Cinderella of Australian universities. Few Christians can be long involved in the crossfire of a consultation without realising a need for a firmer grip of the theological background to their belief and a better understanding of how to relate it to the problems under discussion. To meet these needs Australian Frontier intends to employ the services of first rate sociologists and theologians; to expand its programme of study courses (Colin Williams, 'The Service of the Church in the 20th Century' is the collected lectures from the first of these); to involve itself in leadership training (e.g. for the Church and Life Movement) and to explore whatever ways and means it may use to serve the community broadly along the lives of the European Lay Academies with which it maintains close contact.

It is chastening to realise that Australian Frontier, the only organisation of its type in this country is still in its infancy. We are at least fifteen to twenty years behind the times by European standards and in our age this is a tremendous gap.



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