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**The Paradox
of the Church, p. 3**

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—statement of faith—

This magazine is dedicated to three principal reference points of the Christian faith:

1. **The centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ:** The gospel centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ in history. Its principal modes of expression are those of law and covenant. In Jesus Christ God's final verdict on man has been rendered, and therefore the gospel anticipates fully God's decision in the final judgment. It is the window through which all life and history is to be seen and understood.

2. **The authority, sufficiency, and clarity of the Bible:** The Bible is exclusively authoritative in all matters of faith and practice. While its writers reflect their respective contemporary world views, these do not compromise the integrity of their witness. While we admit that all Scripture does not enjoy uniform clarity, we affirm that the Bible is essentially clear in its central message — the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. **The priesthood of all believers:** The gospel, through the Scriptures, is the central means by which God expresses himself in the world, and constitutes the basis on which all Christian fellowship is built. We believe that true fellowship is best expressed and preserved in a congregational setting. The primary purpose of church government is the orderly preservation, teaching, and promotion of the gospel message on the sole authority of Scripture alone, and we affirm all forms of government that prove compatible with this objective.

Our support of these objectives is without antagonism or prejudicial exclusiveness toward any individual or group. We feel a kinship with all who have embraced the good news of the cross, regardless of human distinctions such as race, color, denominational ties or forms of church government.

editor: calvin w. edwards

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—editorial—

Today I am breaking a habit. In fact, I'm violating a conviction. Editorials should not be trite space-fillers, nor gossip, nor merely an introduction to the obvious in the pages to follow. In the future, I will do that which I have done in the past — seek to bring you some brief, inspirational message from the Bible that centers in Jesus Christ. But this one is an exception — not trite, but not from the Bible either. I just want to have a word with you. OK?

I am excited about the ever-growing ministry of Good News Unlimited, and about this new magazine. To bear testimony to the love and grace of Jesus Christ is a joyous privilege. As we grow and share together there are moments of discovery, excitement, rejoicing as well as tension. We may even face some "back-to-the-drawing-board" times. But this is life. We are on a challenging adventure.

Held secure by God's love, accepted unconditionally by his grace, bound inseparably to fellow saints, we continue to seek to know and do God's will. A spring day is never so beautiful as when it follows a wild storm. The Christian's path to glory is always via the cross.

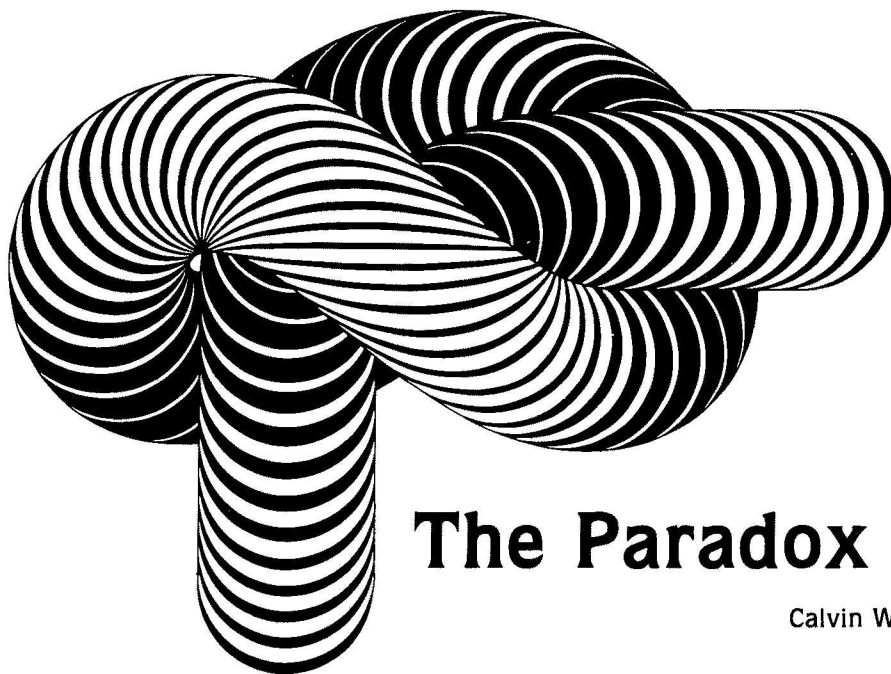
And so we all voyage on. Our differences of opinion are not so important as the bonds of unity we have in Jesus Christ. The church is a building, and while it is made of various bricks, they all rest on the common cornerstone, Jesus of Nazareth. As many things seem unstable around us, he is there as Savior and Lord.

A part of the progress and forward movement of life is to leave behind some things and introduce new things. You hold in your hand a new magazine, **Good News Unlimited**. Notice, it is no longer a "Bulletin." We have left the "newsletter" look and started the road to a magazine format. There will be twelve or more pages each issue rather than the eight which we have usually had in the past. We have continued its numeration consecutively with the **Bulletin** so as to avoid confusion.

We have two objectives in publishing this magazine, **GNU** for short. One, to provide spiritual information and inspiration, that we might appreciate what God has done in Jesus Christ and its implications for us today. Two, to act as an in-house communication organ — to tell you just what else Good News Unlimited is up to!

All of this is a build up to the following: if you have suggestions for improvements, additions or deletions, please let me know. We want this magazine to serve and please you. May God bless you with happy and safe sailing as we voyage on.

Calvin W. Edwards



The Paradox of the Church

Calvin W. Edwards

(Editorial note: This is the first in a series of three articles on the church. In this series we seek to analyze the nature and function of the church so that we may each draw personal conclusions applicable to our individual situations. Many invite our counsel on how they should relate to their church but there is no singular answer or pattern for all to follow. Hence we set forth these broad principles to assist those who find it necessary to evaluate their denominational status.)

I recently heard of an entire denomination in Australia which dissolved itself because its leaders came to believe that one of its central doctrines was incorrect. Presumably its thousands of members will be left abandoned to find a new church home. Perhaps whole congregations will unite with other denominations — but who will decide with whom they will join? How will such an important decision be made? This shattering experience for the church at large cannot help but be tremendously traumatic for each individual member.

The church in which I grew up has, in recent years, seen some of its cardinal doctrines challenged. What adds sting to such a shaking is not simply that various dogma are being re-examined, but that the very intellectual concepts which give the church identity are faltering. About 120 of its ministers have left the church's employment because of conscientious objections to certain theological ideas.

Many other churches are presently encountering unprecedented internal turmoil. A popular American magazine recently had a major article on the conflict waging within various Baptist denominations. The Church of Christ group is divided over its response to

the Restoration Movement. Mormonism is troubled by recent dissent against its authority over members in secular matters. Several churches have had considerable publicity over a number of financial scandals infecting their public image and credibility. Scores of churches are troubled over issues such as the inerrancy of Scripture, the ordination of women, the church's view of homosexuality, and so forth.

As a consequence, thousands are asking questions: What should I do? Shall I seek a new church in which to worship? Will I try to reform my church? Will I be a silent objector to some of my church's stands? How important are these issues? Perhaps I should just remain where I am and not "upset the boat?" Or am I just fearful of change?

Such questions frequently plague the serious-minded and deserve thoughtful answers. It is not our purpose here to propose such answers, for every individual has a unique set of circumstances which must determine his or her response to a specific situation. We do, however, wish to set forth some observations on the **nature** (and in coming issues, on the **function**) of the church which may prove helpful in providing guidelines by which to evaluate one's church. Our task is not to sit in judgment on either denominations or persons, but to attempt to provide a realistic concept of what the body of Christ truly is.

What Is the Church?

In the broadest sense the church consists of all persons



Calvin W. Edwards

who have received Jesus Christ and entered his kingdom. It is that subset of all of humanity who confess that Jesus is the Christ and place faith in his merits alone. Turning from self they cast themselves upon Jesus as Savior and Lord. This group of persons was called "the church invisible" by the Reformers. They stressed the importance of this group of pilgrims who have a heavenward glance as they tread their earthly paths. It was not necessary, they declared, to be a member of the Roman Catholic Church; God has his children even if they are invisible to earthly institutions and powers.

The church visible is the sum total of all those associated with various churches on earth. Some are devout, some are hypocrites, some are old, some are just children, some are learned, some are simple — this mass of humanity that attaches itself to a religious organization (church, missionary society, "movement," cell group, etc) — this is the church visible. It is marked by varying degrees of sincerity. Sadly, not all who belong to the church visible also belong to the church invisible. We admit some into our fellowship whose heart God can read and who are not true children of the kingdom.

The church is a community of believers whose citizenship is in heaven yet whose existence is here on earth.

Then too, the word "church" is frequently used to refer to a denomination. We speak of the Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Methodist Church, etc. But even this language is hardly precise, for each of these three (and many other "denominations") actually consists of an amalgamation of several "sub-denominations." It is a tragic but unavoidable fact that Protestantism is riddled with innumerable factions and parties each propounding its own version of "truth." In common usage we probably most frequently refer to the local congregation of our own denomination as "the church" or "my church." This local church may have its own character which sets it apart largely from other local churches in the same denomination, but it also has certain points of continuity with a larger group in which it gains a certain identity.

It needs to be said very clearly that as one finds oneself in doubt as to one's spiritual home, the appropriate question is, "How are things with my local congregation?" and not, "How are things in the denomination to which I belong?" The latter question must be asked and will impinge on the first, but it is not crucial. Each of us needs a sound, positive, healthy spiritual home and how that home relates to a larger, more abstract entity is not so important as how one's immediate needs for worship, growth and fellowship are met. One can find a Christ-centered, gospel congregation amongst a denomination of triumphalistic bigots. One can also find a congregation of bigots

amongst a denomination that truly knows the love and tolerance of Jesus.

The Nature of the Church

Now let us seek to discover something of the nature of the church. As we contemplate the church we have in primary focus the local congregation, though the broader outline we have noted must always be kept in mind.

The church is a paradox. It is a community of believers whose citizenship is in heaven (Php 3:20) yet whose existence is here on earth. These believers have tasted of the powers of the age to come (Heb 6:5) yet still live within the present evil age (Gal 1:4). They have been delivered from the dominion of darkness (Col 1:13) but have not yet received their full heavenly inheritance. They have received forgiveness of sins (Col 1:14) and are to consider themselves dead to sin (Rom 6:11) and yet they continue to sin (1 Jn 1:10). They have the Holy Spirit but their spirit is not holy. They are not at home in this world, yet they have no other home in which to make their abode.

It seems that when speaking of the nature of the church this may best be done by noting some of its paradoxes — both personal and corporate.

Personal Paradoxes

Wicked or Righteous? Each Christian is confronted with the personal dilemma of his own wickedness and yet his righteousness before God. Because God "justifies the ungodly" (Rom 4:5) and because, "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Rom 5:10), we are now faced with the reality of standing acquitted before the Great Judge but also being cognizant of our personal depravity. While it is indisputable that God's radical grace brings radical transformation, all men nevertheless remain by nature children of wrath, despite God's favorable verdict over them.

Every thoughtful church member knows that he or she sins. Not one of us lives up to God's ideal. In a profound way, we are estranged from God and our faith is but a weak link to a mighty Savior. But the gospel assures us that despite our true **state** as sinful humans, we have a perfect **standing** before the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. Paul uses this fact as a basis for some of his ethics. "You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:20). "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph 4:32). Should we reject those whom God, in Christ, accepts? Should we expect impeccable behavior, unfaltering doctrine and perfect church discipline from those who, like ourselves, are sinful? Conversely, what a tragedy when church leaders do not acknowledge this same spirit of tolerance in their dealings with their flock.

The Sinner Overcoming Sin. The first paradox gives rise to another. The Christian is called to undergo change and, though counted as righteous, to seek the eradication of sin and the establishment of personal righteousness. He is to "put off" the old nature (Eph

4:22) and "put on" the new nature (4:24). He is to consider himself dead to sin (Rom 6:11) though he is not. He is called upon to prevent sin from reigning (Rom 6:12) though it certainly will remain. Although the Christian is no longer a slave to sin but to righteousness (Rom 6:18), he frequently is unrighteous and sinful. Hence the imperative: "now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification" (Rom 6:19). In this dilemma the Christian has to try to become that which he is not, and to deny that which by nature he is.

A church which recognizes its own position, not as God on earth, but as a humble band of followers of Christ, will not arrogantly affirm its dogma to be truth itself.

Hence the church as a congregation of individuals is ever involved in an ongoing struggle. It is a community on the move. Each member is never satisfied with his or her present condition. We see progress in others but despair of it in ourselves. We rise and fall, ever stumbling forward, sharing our joys and sorrows with those who, with us, strive towards Christlikeness. As we seek to more fully reflect our status as parts of the body of Christ, others who participate in the same struggle support, encourage and share. Christ beckons us to become that which he is. A true church recognizes this invitation and seeks to assist its members to reach the goal of their high calling in Christ Jesus (Php 3:14). A church which seeks to translate the gospel into its everyday life also refrains from damning those who falter.

The Now and the Not Yet. One final personal paradox the Christian faces is the tension between the now and the not yet. This includes the preceding two paradoxes but also moves beyond them. The whole of Christian existence is conditioned by the fact that God's eternal kingdom has been established on alien territory. The present evil age and the age to come overlap in the Christian era. Consequently the Christian is aware that the End (eschaton) has invaded the present, that salvation history and human history have intersected, but the enemies of the kingdom have not yet been vanquished. The principalities and powers of darkness still fight against the Light which has come into the world (Jn 1:4). Though the ultimate victory of the Lamb is certain, this does not make the battle against evil powers any less real or less fearful (Rev 17:14).

Because the kingdom has not yet been consummated, Christians have but the "downpayment of their inheritance" (Eph 1:14). They have the Holy Spirit now (Rom 8:26), but their own spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:44) they have not yet. Death has become a sleep but all must die. They know Jesus, but shall one day see him face to face. They have access to God (Eph 2:18; Heb 4:16; 7:19; 25; 10:19-22) yet one day shall live in his very presence.

In light of the incompleteness of our spiritual inheritance we must ever hold our convictions with a degree of tentativeness. "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall understand fully" (1 Cor 13:12). A church which recognizes its own position, not as God on earth, but as a humble band of followers of Christ who struggle to do his will and express his word, will not arrogantly affirm its dogma to be equivalent to truth itself. As we realize the "otherness" of God and the weakness of human rationality, we will pause before being dogmatic about our convictions or denouncing those of others.

Corporate Paradoxes

The Weak and the Strong. Within the church there are persons of varying degrees of spiritual maturity. This is a somewhat presumptuous observation to make, for it suggests that someone is sitting in judgment upon the spirituality of church members. But this is not the basis for the present observation. We can, however, make such an affirmation on the basis of the New Testament (1 Cor 3:1-4; Heb 5:11-14) and one's own personal experience. Paul argues that concern for one's weaker brother is an important ethic (Rom 14).

The church contains those easily offended and those impervious to criticism, those shaken by false doctrine and those firmly established in the faith. Does this not advise us to **expect** errors, and to be cautious lest we be the ones who err?

The paradox of the church is that when it is most pious it is still sinful and when it is most sinful it is still pious.

Diverse Gifts. The church as a corporate entity possesses leaders - theological and administrative - and laity. God has placed various gifts within the body of the church that each might serve in a unique capacity, but the very presence of these gifts involves the creation of different spheres of vocation and operation. Not all are theologically informed, not all are administratively astute, not all are sympathetically aware of others' needs, not all are eloquent preachers. There is a paradox here for the church possesses plurality of talents yet it is called upon to cooperate wholeheartedly and to find a common unity in Jesus Christ.

This diversity calls for great tolerance. An "administrator" (1 Cor 12:28) may not comprehend the unique problems faced by a "teacher," and vice versa. A teacher not having the gift for administration, may err in his or her evaluation of one who administers. The reverse is also true. The church must live with the paradox created by diversity of gifts and talents — and find unity amidst the plurality. This unity must surround Jesus Christ and his gospel, the foundation stone of Christianity (1 Cor 3:11), and not some idea of less than crucial significance. A wheel which has its hub somewhere other than center is useless.

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DANIEL through the Eyes of Jesus

David Waterworth

It seems that Daniel is the book that attracts every budding exegete. The story is told in the book, **Miracle On The River Kwai**, of hopeful British prisoners of war spreading the "good news" that the war was just about over and soon they would be released. When asked how these men knew and who had told them, they replied, "We worked it out from the prophecies of Daniel!"

By taking the mystic numbers of Daniel and using them like sacred algebra, even the novice can predict the end of the world, the third world war, or any of a number of catastrophic events. But, as many others have ably pointed out, the focus of Daniel is the coming of the Messiah to usher in the kingdom of God. And it is not surprising that the One who is Daniel's focus is also Daniel's best exegete.

When we survey the four gospel accounts of the life of Christ, we can see that many of his key themes were drawn, in essence, from the book of Daniel. It appears that Jesus had a special regard for this little book of the Old Testament, out of proportion to its size. It is, in fact, the only Old Testament book to which he specifically pointed his hearers, "So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) . . ." (Mt 24:15).

Daniel consists of both history and apocalyptic prophecy. In the historical sections of the book, chapters 1, 3, 4-6, we find the key theme of judgment and deliverance.

In Daniel 1, Daniel and his friends are tested by the king and found to be wiser than all other students in the king's school. In chapter 3, the three friends are tested over matters of worship. They are judged and condemned to execution. But God intervenes to change defeat to victory, death to life. In Daniel 6, Daniel faces trial over the worship of the true God. Once again, victory comes from apparent defeat and the God of heaven is vindicated. Daniel 4 and 5 present a picture of two wicked kings being judged and the sentences carried out.

In these sections of the book of Daniel, judgment always brings exaltation and deliverance to the people of God. Daniel's diet is under fire in chapter 1, but he and his friends demonstrate that a correct diet is not only beneficial to the body but also to the mind. In Daniel 3, the friends come forth from the flames without even a hair of their heads singed. In Daniel 5, Daniel is given glory and honor, and even made third

ruler in the kingdom. In Daniel 6, he is exalted above his enemies, who are then cast to the lions.

Similarly, in the prophetic visions given to Daniel, the theme is judgment. Now we see earthly affairs from God's perspective. It is not the saints being judged by the world, but rather the world being judged by God. In Daniel 2, the stone crushes the image of the kingdoms

Although Jesus brought the good news of salvation, we should not neglect some of his strong words of coming retribution.

of this world, grinds them to powder and ushers in the kingdom of God. In Daniel 7, judgment is given on behalf of the saints, and the little horn is cast down by the heavenly Son of Man. Daniel 8 shows the sanctuary services restored. Daniel 9 anticipates Israel's release from Babylon and the establishment of righteousness and atonement for sins. Daniel 10 and 11 tell the story of the wicked one who comes to an end and none help him. In chapter 12, the advocate for the people of God stands up to give rewards to the saints and everlasting contempt to the wicked.

It is interesting, then, to go to the New Testament and see how Jesus develops these themes. Throughout the Gospels there are strong warnings of judgment. Although Jesus brought the good news of salvation, we should not neglect some of his strong words of coming retribution to those who rejected his message. Of his favorite city he could say, "And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you" (Mt 11:23,24).

Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming the immediacy of the "kingdom" of Daniel 2. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). He saw himself as that stone which would crush those on which it fell (Lk 20:17,18). The Messiahship of Jesus was the rock on which the church was built. He told the waiting Pharisees that the kingdom of God was among them (Lk 17:21). It was present because he was present; and he was the King of the Jews.

Although the idea of the kingdom of God pervades the Old Testament, it is only in Daniel 2:44 that it is specifically referred to. The mystery of the kingdom is that it has arrived with the coming of the King. And

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the good news of the kingdom is that this King accepts sinners, forgives them and claims them as his subjects (Col 1:12,13).

Daniel 7 points us to a heavenly "Son of Man" who comes to his Father to claim his kingdom. Jesus constantly called himself the Son of Man, preferring this title above any other. He also alludes to Daniel 7 in his parting remarks to the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18; see also Lk 22:69; cf. Dan 7:14).

It is significant that during his ministry, Jesus cleansed the Temple. This act is recorded by all four Gospels, and was a significant display of his authority. He not only restored the temple to its rightful state, he also brought in true worship, delivered God's people from the bondage of Satan and offered the one true sacrifice.

He was the Anointed One who, by his death, brought in everlasting righteousness, atoned for iniquity, finished transgression and sealed both vision and prophet (Dan 9:24). He established the New Covenant with many, and was "cut off" that it might be ratified with blood (Dan 9:26,27).

He presented himself as the Judge (Jn 5:22) who would call forth all men from the grave, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt (Jn 5:28,29).

The prophecies of Daniel were sealed to the end. No one could understand the full import of this mysterious book until the end time should come. But when we read the New Testament closely, we find that the authors of those documents understand their age as the last age, even the end of the ages (Heb 1:2, 1 Cor 10:11). The Christian era is the last era, Christ is the last man. Who could best interpret the prophecies of Daniel but the One who sealed those prophecies? All of Daniel's key themes, the judgment, the kingdom of God, the Son of Man, the cleansing of the sanctuary, and everlasting life, find their culmination and best expression in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. □

Pastoral Care or Evangelism? Another dilemma the church faces is the tension between nurture and mission. The problem is one which poses a dichotomy between the outward directed look of the church and its inward directed look. Which is first priority? How does one meet the needs of the world and yet ensure that the world does not invade the church? To what extent should church members be concerned with evangelism "beyond" and to what extent should they focus upon bearing one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)? This tension between responsibilities within and without is a recurring problem and takes many forms.

The Church as a Congregation of Sinners. Finally, and most fundamentally, we must note a point analogous to the first we noted as a personal paradox — that of righteousness before God in the face of personal sinfulness. The church as a whole is composed of pious sinners. Bonhoeffer, in a plea to acknowledge ourselves and others as sinners, comments powerfully on this point.

... The final breakthrough to fellowship does not occur because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everyone must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners!

But it is the grace of the gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that ... confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you. He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work: He wants you alone ... He loves the sinner but He hates sin.

... Through him men could be sinners and only so could they be helped. All shame was ended in the presence of Christ. The misery of the sinner and the mercy of God - this was the truth of the gospel in Jesus Christ. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pp. 110-111)

The paradox of the church is that when it is most pious it is still sinful and when it is most sinful it is still pious. It cannot escape its own ambiguity.

Conclusion

Our conclusion is simple. A church is a complex thing. It is full of inevitable paradoxes. The tension this creates is healthy and proper. It is the absence of this proper tension which is the sign of a sick church. The church which is so concerned with pastoral care of the congregation that care for the desperate needs of its own community is unknown, is a church which has lost an important ministry. The church which elevates the gift of administration so that the gift of teaching or preaching is not given a rightful expression is heading for disaster. A healthy church knows the tension of living with its own paradoxes. It does not try to resolve them one-sidedly.

As for you and me, and our churches — let us be slow to judge and merciful in assessing the character of our denomination or congregation. Just as the church corporately needs to recognize the paradoxes with which it lives, we as members need to be tolerant because of the tensions that being a church means. □



The Paradox of the Church . . .

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Theory or Practice? The conflict between theory and practice is another tension the church faces. What is its obligation to have a theological base for what it perceives to be right action in a given situation? What is its obligation to move beyond the act of theorizing and proclamation to active involvement in social movements which represent the logical outgrowth of Christian principles? How should a congregation respond to the legitimate concerns of organizations formed to espouse women's rights, black rights, solutions to world hunger, nuclear disarmament, etc? Is the church to stop at the point of spiritual matters? Or are these to flow over into practical participation en masse in the world? Such questions constitute yet another paradox with which the church must live.

Q. Last month you discussed "the priesthood of all believers" and stated that this expression denies any difference between ministers and laity. Doesn't this insult the ministry? What place does a minister have in the church?

A. The purpose of Peter's argument (see 1 Pet 1:5,9) concerning Christians as priests is certainly not to downgrade the ministry. As we noted in the answer last month, "Peter employs this concept by way of encouragement for his readers. He is telling them that they are special in God's sight, as special as the priests in Israel" (*Bulletin*, July 1982, p. 5). Peter certainly does not have in view a minister-laity distinction.

So we need to turn to other passages to find the way the New Testament writers evaluated the role of the minister. In writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote concerning the gifts that the ascended Christ bestowed on the church, "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11, see also 1 Cor 12:28). The purposes of these gifts included: to equip the saints for ministry, to build up the church, to lead persons to maturity, and to stabilize persons in the face of heresy.

Our modern day minister is probably a combination of all the above roles except the apostle who was an immediate witness to the Christ event.

These gifts God has graciously bestowed on the church with the object of service. "Apostles and prophets do not spring up at random. . . . The church has not been left an orphan by her Founder to make headway as best she can by manipulating auspicious circumstances, courting diplomatic alliances or adopting inflated titles. A spiritual house must grow, not by astuteness of tactics, but by spiritual agencies and methods" (E.K. Simpson, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 94).

Those with leadership gifts are not to rule the church, but to serve it. In 1 Corinthians 12-14

Paul rebukes those who wish to use their gift to promote some kind of spiritual advantage over other "ordinary" church members. In this context he specifically declares that it is far more important to have love than the gift of tongues (12:31, 13:1) or prophecy (13:2,8, see also 14:1), and that love is the greatest virtue (12:31, 13:13).

But our point is this: true ministers have a commission from God. He is the source of their gift. As such they must be valued for the service they provide. So too should every other member for the gift he or she has and the service that may thereby be provided (1 Cor 12:27-31).

Yes, ministers are important. They are ordained of God. None may lessen the task they have been assigned. But they are not a class of rulers who dispense salvation upon whom they please. Their authority is only that which God has granted and which the church, as Christ's body, recognizes. "The New Testament affords no hint of a priestly caste, 'commanding all the approaches of the soul to Him,' usurpers of the title they clutch at; but the universal priesthood of believers, each occupying his proper place in the body of Christ, has its clear authorization. In the theocracy of grace there is in fact no laity" (*ibid.*, p. 95).

Ministers are servants. In fact every member is likewise a servant. Ministers are tremendously important, so too is every member of the body of Christ.

— Calvin Edwards

Q. Does Rev 14:11 teach an ever-burning hell?

A. The text reads: "And the smoke of their torment goes for ever and ever; and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

This is the most fearful warning in Scripture. It discusses the penalty for those who fail in the eschatological test over worship (see 13:11-18). The only people

who will survive the crisis are described in the verse which follows our problem passage. 14:12 says, "Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith (teachings) of Jesus."

To understand the reference to a punishment which lasts "for ever and ever" it is essential to compare similar passages of Scripture. Rev 14:11 is quoting God's dealings with ancient Idumea. See Isa 34:9, 10 which speaks of devastating fires in that land which would never be quenched, and the smoke of which would ascend forever and ever. But the fires are not raging in that land today, nor have they for many centuries. Jude 7 speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah being punished with "eternal fire."

The key to the problem lies in the meaning of such terms as "for ever and ever" and "eternal." Both these terms in the Bible signify "to the vanishing point," or "as long as the thing spoken of can exist considering the circumstances." The Bible is full of examples. Nebuchadnezzar was admonished to live forever. Jonah was in the great fish forever. Slaves could serve their masters forever. Samuel was given to the Lord forever, but the nearby parallel passage says, "for as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." (See Dan 5:10; Jon 2:6; Ex 21:6; 1 Sa 1:22, 28). The Bible does teach everlasting punishment in the sense that the loss of the wicked will be an eternal loss never to be reversed. But nothing in the Scripture should be interpreted as teaching everlasting punishing. Such a concept is contrary to true exegesis as well as to the character of God.

John 3:16 says all who believe shall have everlasting life (and the context has to do with fellowship with the immortal God and therefore "everlasting" can be understood literally — there is no vanishing point where God is concerned), but those who refuse to accept the love of God shall perish. To perish does not mean to live on in pain.

— Desmond Ford

Life Together

reviewed by calvin w. edwards

(Editorial note: "Books in Review" is not just another book review column. It is not simply a critical analysis of various works. Rather, it is a kind of sample, or hors d'oeuvre, of books we especially recommend. This column is run in response to requests that we advise on what books are worthwhile as one starts a Christian library.)

Life Together, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, published by Harper and Row, New York, 122 pages, \$1.95.

Bonhoeffer is known and loved by thousands of Christians. The famed BBC commentator, Malcolm Muggeridge, called him "a wonderful man." Those who read his *Life Together* leave the book feeling they have gained an insight into the big heart of a warm and sensitive pastor. His life was tragically ended in martyrdom at the hands of the Gestapo in 1945, but his perceptive insights and gentle flowing language still speak to thousands of grateful readers.

Life Together is a kind of manual on how a Christian community should live together. It has an idealistic tone to it which makes it all the more appealing, especially when one contemplates that such elevated ideas could emerge from the cruel world of a war prison.

It is a book with a practical bent to it. It does not toy with theory but immediately translates its ideas into everyday practicalities. Its concern is the preservation of the Christian life — both privately and in groups. Topics such as how to start the day, prayer (private and public), Bible study, communal singing, fellowship at the table, the work day, meditation, confession, church administration and much more are creatively dealt with.

What is so overwhelmingly refreshing about the book is that Bonhoeffer never says the commonplace or the expected. He is always new, always original, always challenging. He turns the most mundane affairs of life into sacraments that enable celebra-

tive communion with God. Consider, for example, his comments on sharing a meal together. "Christians, in their wholehearted joy in the good gifts of this physical life, acknowledge their Lord as the true giver of all good gifts; and beyond this, as the true Gift; the true Bread of Life itself; and finally, as the One who is calling them to the banquet of the Kingdom of God. . . . God cannot endure that unfestive, worthless attitude of ours in which we eat our bread in sorrow, with pretentious, busy haste, or even with shame. Through our daily meals he is calling us to rejoice, to keep holiday in the midst of our working day" (pp. 67, 68).

One of the reasons the book is so successful and valuable is that it commences with a thorough discussion of the nature of and basis for Christian fellowship. Here the author states unequivocally that the gospel of God's acceptance of all humanity in Jesus Christ is the only basis for true spiritual fellowship. He speaks of the goal of Christian community: "they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God permits them to meet together and gives them community. Their fellowship is founded solely upon Jesus Christ and this 'alien righteousness.' All we can say, therefore, is: the community of Christians springs solely from the Biblical and Reformation message of the justification of man through grace alone; this alone is the basis of the longing of Christians for one another" (p. 23).

In his brilliant chapter on "Ministry," Bonhoeffer starts out with a warning of the danger there is when a person looks for a "strategic position he can assume and hold over against" another (p. 90). Again the author returns to the gospel as the cure for human striving with one another; "self-justification and judging others go together, as justification by grace and serving others go together" (p. 91). Wisely he recommends

that it may be best to combat evil thoughts by refusing to give them verbal expression. He insists that the first service we owe others in our fellowship is listening to them, "listening can be a greater service than speaking" (p. 97).

Not hesitating to reverse the tables of tradition, Bonhoeffer sets forth his counsel chiseled out in the womb of an underground seminary in Nazi Germany. With similar sensitivity he discusses the ministries of helping and bearing others' burdens (Gal 6:2).

In a brief but incisive section on the ministry of authority, the author states, "Jesus made authority in the fellowship dependent upon brotherly service. Genuine spiritual authority is to be found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing and proclaiming, is carried out. Every cult of personality that emphasizes the distinguished qualities, virtues, and talents of another person, even though these be of an altogether spiritual nature, is worldly and has no place in the Christian community; indeed, it poisons the Christian community. . . . The church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren" (pp. 108, 109). Over and over, Bonhoeffer challenges us to rethink our categories and priorities. In his quiet, unprovocative style he infects our minds with a whole fresh, new outlook on the Christian community.

It is a book full of quotable quotes. It speaks with a deep sincerity that flows forth from the author's intimate experiences with life and with his Savior. To read this book means to never again see the Christian life as mundane and to be confronted with a richness of ideas to enhance the quality of our spiritual lives. Most of us will feel quietly shamed by this man's sincerity, humility and depth of experience.

Ford and Rea on National TV

John Ankerberg of The John Ankerberg Show recently contacted Good News Unlimited to arrange for Dr. Desmond Ford and Pastor Walter Rea to appear on his national television program. Ankerberg produces and hosts a half-hour weekly show where he endeavors to defend Christianity against secular opposition and to expose errors of various religious cults.

Ankerberg wishes to interview Ford and Rea in an attempt to inform his viewers of the Seventh-day Adventist views on Ellen White and to provide them with a critical evaluation of these. Adventists believe that Ellen White was a modern-day prophet who received divine revelation from God and hence is authoritative as a source of truth. In practice her extensive writings are used widely in both pulpit and pew of SDA churches.

The format of the show utilizes two parties, who have fundamental differences of opinion on some matter of significance to the Christian church. With John Ankerberg as host, these two parties present their points of view so that the audience can evaluate for themselves how they feel about the issues. Ankerberg has invited leaders from the SDA Church to present their side of the case. At the time of writing they have refused to appear on the show with Ford and Rea.

The program will be recorded at Chattanooga, Tennessee, in the evening of August 2 before a live audience. The exact time of broadcast via the CBN and PTL Satellite Networks is not yet available. Watch GNU next month for more details.

The John Ankerberg Show — A Unique Television Ministry

We all know that the Christian faith is being attacked and discredited in our schools and across America via television, radio and the press.

Who is speaking out to refute this challenge?

John Ankerberg believes that Christianity properly presented can stand up to the toughest scrutiny. He also holds that a position — any position — can best be articulated by someone who actually believes the position he is presenting and defending. This is the underlying challenge John issues to all of his guests on the Chattanooga, TN based, nationally distributed John Ankerberg Show — that each position put forth its best evidences for discussion and scrutiny.

Non-Christians are invited to come on the show and present their positions. Leading Christian scholars are also invited to appear and present evidences for the biblical position. As a result the guest list includes prominent leaders and personalities from a wide range of religious points of view. Thus the two opposing positions appear in head-to-head discussion of the evidences, giving the program a wide appeal and giving the audience an opportunity to interact and evaluate each of the positions individually.

Rev. John Ankerberg has been producer/host for the program for two-and-one-half years. The program has been aired nationally over the CBN satellite network for two years and negotiations are underway for broadcast of the show on another major cable network. Several independent stations also carry the program in some major cities. Estimated weekly viewing audience is around forty million people.

Hello, Goodbye

After a little more than one year, Pat Hoffman left Good News Unlimited to return to Alturas,

California. It was a sad day when it finally came to parting, but all understood that Pat's commitment to her family meant she had to leave. She has been an outstanding typist and meticulous record keeper. Her dedication, honesty and spirituality are equalled by very few.

Janie Coon has been employed to fill Pat's position. Janie is married with two teenage daughters. She comes to GNU with extensive background in typing, shorthand and office management. Like her predecessor, she is associated with the Baptist Church. Janie will be responsible for distribution of reels and cassettes in association with Dr. Ford's radio broadcast. She also carries the main load of office typing.

Tape of the Month

The Tape of the Month for September will be mailed to everyone who donates \$25 or more during the month or has asked to receive it regularly. This cassette will contain the second part of Noel's sermon, "The Jesus Behind Dogma" which so many appreciated last month. The other side has on it Desmond Ford's "The Gospel in the Apocalypse". If you are not a part of our regular Tape of the Month service then you may obtain this cassette by requesting it. We suggest a \$3 donation.

Less Than 5 Cents a Day!

Yes, that's all it costs. Less than 5 cents a day to give your children their very own gospel magazine. *Good News for Kids* is published twice a month, and a subscription is only \$18 (surface postage included). The issues are not dated, so you can start in anytime. Because the magazine comes from America, there will be an initial wait of 3 months, but after that the magazine should arrive regularly all the time. Send your \$18 today to P.O. Box 65, Chadstone, 3148 — this subscription could make a worthwhile Christmas present for your child!

Should We Leave Our Local Church?

This is a question which has come to us increasingly in recent days and we hasten to answer it. First of all, let us say that if you had asked, "Shall we leave the church?" we would have immediately concluded that you had apostatized from Christ for Christ and his church and Christ and salvation are inseparable.

From the beginning of all time all faithful souls have constituted God's church. The latter has been defined correctly as "... a body of persons called out of the world and separated from sin by the power of God to faith in a crucified and risen Christ, having had wrought in them by the Spirit, through the Word, the nature of the risen Christ, being indwelt by the Spirit, made members one of another, and linked by that Spirit to the risen Man in the heavens — see Jn 4:23, 24; 15:19; Acts 15:14; 20:28; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor 10:32; 11:22; 15:1-4,9; Eph 3:10, 21; 4:17; 5:24-26; Phil 3:3; 1 Tim 3:5, 15, 16; 2 Tim 3:16, 17; 1 Pe 1:18, 19; 1 Jn 2:15-17" (E.H. Bancroft, *Christian Theology*, p. 289).

It is true that the term "church" is often used today for a body, sect or denomination of Christians having the same general doctrines, organization, and historical background, but this meaning is never found in the New Testament.

Now, to come back to the question. The general rule for Christian stability is that found in 1 Corinthians 7:17 where Paul advises all to abide where God's providence has placed them. But he goes on to say that there are exceptions to this rule. If providence indicates a place of greater service and other matters are equal that new position should be occupied. Similarly, we must follow the examples of Paul and the disciples who for questions of conscience were forced to separate from their former associates who

refused to follow Christ. But at this point we need to exercise great care.

It is a mistake to think that some error in doctrine is sufficient validation for forsaking one's local church. There are no churches whose doctrinal structure is perfect. In the first century heretical believers suggested that Christ only seemed to have a human body and that in reality he was entirely divine. The same type of error is perpetrated when believers assume that God's church never manifests humanity's proneness to error. Doctrinal error is not sufficient reason for leaving a church unless that error repudiates Christ and his gospel, makes the performance of Christian duty impossible, or destroys true worship and fellowship with God and man.

The Reformers in the sixteenth century said that one should forsake a church if: it forbade the free expression of the truth of Scripture; it failed to practice the acted parables of the gospel — the ordinances — the Lord's Supper and Baptism; it neglected to carry out church discipline (the rebuking of open sin by its members). These are still excellent guidelines.

Christ's body is characterized in Scripture as "those that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12). The cherishing of the gospel of Christ and the loyalty of obedience to all the will of God that we know should ever be a guiding star as we contemplate such questions as this one. If the gospel is freely preached in your present congregation and you are not hindered from following conscience, we would advise you to thank God and remain where you are.

— Desmond Ford

A Word from Smuts

Some have inquired as to the full significance of the interview I gave in *Evangelica*, May 1982. Of special concern has been my comments on the necessity to re-study the Sabbath.

My family and I keep the seventh day Sabbath. My statement in the interview was not that we should abandon the Sabbath. To the contrary, it was that we need to give it special attention, that it needs to be studied and considered very carefully. No part of our belief system should be treated as non-negotiable. Non-sabbatarians should continue to study their position, just as I feel I should study mine.

What is needed is a book-by-book study of the New Testament to determine each writer's attitude to the Sabbath. We also need to engage in a careful examination of law and covenant in the New Testament and ascertain how these affect Sabbath obligations. All of this must be done with proper hermeneutical methods neglecting altogether the "proof text" approach.

Rather than linking the Sabbath with a remnant concept, as has often been done, and with eschatological events, we need to obtain a perspective on the Sabbath granted by Jesus Christ and his gospel of grace.

It would be premature to anticipate the outcome of such study. My statement in *Evangelica* was simply that the study must be done; it is others, not myself, who project what the results may in fact be.

One final point. The interview was given several months ago and was not originally intended for publication alongside other material suggesting that persons should leave Adventism. From my point of view it was intended to stand on its own and not to deny or endorse other statements with which it appeared at the time of publication.

— Smuts van Rooyen

Success

Sirs:

Just last Friday I talked with Bill Maddox of KBHS, Hot Springs, Arkansas. He said he absolutely loves Dr. Ford's program. So we talked about times and decided on 8:30-9:00 Sunday morning. The half-hour slot will cost \$75.00 a week, which I feel is well worth it to get the "Good News" on the air. Praise our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for answered prayer. Thank you so much for your prayers. The Lord has renewed my strength. I have been so thoroughly blessed by all the GNU tapes I have been listening to.

May our Lord richly bless you for all your hard work spreading the "Good News," which is really good news indeed.

Gayle Williams
Royal, Arkansas

No Time

Sirs:

Would you please stop sending your paper "Good News"? We have our own church papers and don't have the time to read any more.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Rowlands
Mt. Vernon, Ohio

A New Tree of Life

Sirs:

I am continually delighted at the freshness and joy expressed in the articles published in your Bulletin. They have been a real source of strength to me, my family, and my friends. I am requesting that you add the name of a close friend to your mailing list. We have shared your Bulletins with him, and he asked me to pass his name and address on to you in this letter.

The gospel here in Miami is usually either accepted or rejected with equal vehemence. With so many people living right on the edge, and drug wars, violence, and terrible inhumanity towards our refugees becoming so common as to no longer be newsworthy, the message of a loving, forgiving Savior is either seized with tremendous relief and happiness or else seen as so far from reality

that it can only be foolishness.

Our small work here, which consists mostly of passing out New Testaments with an outline of the plan of salvation (with plenty of texts) written in the back, has brought us to realize how many, many people there are in this world who are crying out for the gospel of Jesus, and our new Tree of Life — the Cross.

Daniel Lee
Miami, Florida

Appreciation

Sirs:

Thank you very much for your visit to Scandinavia. I know that we have more gospel believers in Sweden than I had thought.

Again, thank you very much and welcome back. God bless you and the gospel.

Name withheld
Rimbo, Sweden

From Sweden

Sirs:

Just a few lines to briefly express my wife's and my mighty gratitude for your excellent Christian spirit and fine meetings "over here." Your missionary tour certainly inspired the saints in our nations. This was a good beginning for an important work for the gospel.

Yes, Gill and Des, we certainly appreciated having the privilege to have you as our guests for a few days. We hope that this won't be your last visit to our place. May God bless you both in his work in America and everywhere.

With our love and Christian greetings,
Dr. Ingemar Linden
Rimbo, Sweden

Still Counting Blessings

Sirs:

This is a little "thank you" letter. We gained so many blessings from last weekend in Norway that we are still counting them! We are so grateful that we could be there and

meet you and other gospel-minded brothers and sisters. Words cannot really express the gratitude I feel to God for showing me the gospel in all its simplicity and beauty. Everyone we spoke to at the conference agreed with us that they had never heard the gospel proclaimed before in such a convincing, yet simple way. It was so difficult to say goodbye to you both — you are like old, dear friends to us. But at least it is not a "goodbye" forever — what a wonderful hope we have!

May our Heavenly Father bless you both as you continue to work for him. Our prayers are with you.

Names withheld
Bollebygd, Sweden

Terrific!

Sirs:

The tapes you sent by Desmond Ford on Understanding the Bible, the Spiritual Identity Crisis and the Peril of Christian Bureaucracy, were absolutely terrific! They will be passed on to a Spanish pastor and with God's help will bear much fruit. You are doing a great job for the Lord, and our prayers are with you!

Dave and Diane Brownstein
Corona, California

Revelation over the Radio

Sirs:

We started listening to Good News Unlimited on WZZD when Elder Ford was on the sixth seal. Is it possible to obtain tapes of the whole series — The Visions of Patmos? I will be glad to pay for them if you will kindly notify me what the cost is.

My husband and I try not to miss any broadcasts now. These sermons should be examples for the ministers in our churches. It's been a long time since we have had such in ours.

Karen Stephen
Warminster, Pennsylvania

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