

## TOWARDS A PASTORAL CHURCH.

E. G. HOMRIGHAUSEN.

### I

The term "pastoral theology" sounds strange to modern ears. Yet, it is one of the oldest disciplines in the church and in society. In fact, some kind of pastoral theology and ministry is found in every religion and culture. Even among modern non-religious societies some kind of guidance and therapy is to be found.

In its Christian connotation, pastoral theology is rooted in the Old Covenant with its moral, ceremonial and civil laws, its religious institutions, its official personnel, all of which were aimed to regulate personal, family and social life, to provide personal and social cleansing and reconciliation, to offer sound guidance in the conduct of life. The objective was holiness, or health of life through obedience to the commandments and statutes of Jehovah in the holy community. Kings counseled with prophets, and were accessible in cases of dispute. Prophets counseled the nation. Proverbs provided capsuled wisdom for the governing of the practical affairs of life.

The ministry of Jesus involved personal relations with individuals and groups. His Nazareth manifesto proclaimed the pastoral objective of his life and work. His ministry was pastoral in intention, as it was pastoral in expression.

"The cure of souls has been a vast historic enterprise."<sup>1</sup> It includes the pastoral efforts of the Apostle Paul, the restorative and healing ministry of the early Church through corporate discipline and confession, codes of behaviour and books of instruction for clergy and laity, the scrutinies and the penitentials, the confessional, and all the developments which have taken place since the Reformation through a succession of great pastors, through the emergence of a new kind of congregational life, through changes in theological and philosophical thought, and through new developments in medicine, politics, education, psychology, social work, missions, mental health and cult life.

Pastoral theology today has come into an embarrassing wealth of knowledge and techniques relating to human nature. It is in the midst of evaluating these findings in the light of its Christian heritage, assimilating what is of undoubted value in these fields and recovering its distinctive vocation and task.

---

<sup>1</sup>McNeill, John, *A History of the Cure of Souls*. P. 333. New York, Harpers, 1951.

Heretofore, pastoral theology has been associated with the "unending warfare against sin and sorrow of the teeming human generations, man by man," as McNeill puts it. It has been regarded as the ambulance division of the Church, whose business it is to minister to the casualties in the bitter warfare of life. In this respect, it has been associated with the office of the pastor. Surely, remedial and curative work is its master concern. And this task is especially urgent in a day when the casualty list is mounting, the field is replete with competitive counselors, the theories of "adjustment," "maturity," and "normalcy" regarding human nature are confusing, the impact of new currents in theological thought on the nature and destiny of man are unsettling, and the task of the Church in relation to medicine, education, professional counseling and community service is not too clear.

But, while this curative work is a special responsibility of pastoral theology, my contention is that pastoral theology is also charged with the responsibility of preventive therapy. The restoration of a pastoral Church would go far towards providing that spiritual health and mature wisdom which would prevent serious personality casualties and provide as well the pastoral care necessary for those who have been badly wounded in the warfare of life.

It is in the light of this background and the current situation that I have ventured to speak of pastoral theology and its relation to the realization of a pastoral church. This is not to imply that the church is not now pastoral, nor that this emphasis has not been stressed in the history of Christianity. Nor dare I propose that it is possible within the scope of this address to give a blueprint for a pastoral church. In keeping with the subject, I hope to suggest some ideas which may lead the church toward the fulfilment of its pastoral vocation.

## II

First, there is need for a pastoral church in our day. We have but to look at the personality crisis of our time to sense that the maladjustments of life have increased in number and intensity. The sordid story is all-too-familiar: Delinquency, suicide, murder, alcoholism, divorce, crime, drug addiction, violence, and war. These are but surface symptoms of the deep disturbances within the spirit of man which result even in physical breakdown. Karen Horney maintained that "the neurotic personality of our time" was but a "step-child of our culture."<sup>2</sup> The Gospel is the "way", the "truth", the "life." The radically disturbed framework of man's individual existence, together with his inability to understand himself and know the way in which his God-given powers of life may be creatively expressed, thrust him into a hell of guilt, hostility, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, despair and will-to-die. Who will help

him to freedom, to self-respect, to growth into maturity, to victory over evil, to meaningful community life, to a high sense of vocation in the economy of God? Who will be his neighbour? For modern man is lost from his true relationships; his distress, we believe, indicates that the loving judgement of God is prodding him to find the things that belong to his peace.

But society, too, is in need of a pastoral Church. In the words of L. K. Frank, "Our culture is sick, mentally disordered, and in need of treatment . . . Society, not merely the individual, is portrayed as the patient."<sup>3</sup> A scientific civilization may offer the individual many and varied comforts, immunization from ancient and dreaded scourges, release from tyrannical and cramping superstitions, and an enlargement of his senses and power, but it produces depersonalized cities, mass-mindedness, concentrations of economic and political power and other dangers which may cause man to forfeit his life even as he gains the whole world.

The individual, feeling that his existence is threatened, may protect himself from anxiety by meekly submitting, by lusting for power, by taking recourse to past tradition, by kow-towing, or by sheer withdrawal. Walter Horton has called attention to the social consequences of our personal situation: Escapisms ranging from alcoholism to sex licence to a desire to run off to the South Sea Islands; high-pressure religious emotionalisms; exclusive loyalties (Hitlerism, Communism, and other isms); war, which is the violent outburst of mass emotional tension.<sup>4</sup>

These cry out for the pastoral community. Nor can we escape an unrelieved sense of worry. It is related to man's age-old fear to "look God in the eye", which is a kind of existential evasion which results in guilt, that deepest of man's ills, the only cure for which is humility (honesty) and repentance (self-judgment) before God. Until man is reconciled to the Ground and Succor of his existence, he is not man.

Peter Drucker made the astonishing statement a few years ago that the social problem is the problem of our time. All of the revolutions in this century have been social in intention (fascism, national socialism, and now communism). And he went on to say, in effect, that each one of them represents man's search for "church". The philosophy and the methodology of these pseudo-churches are false, dangerous and even demonic, but the basic human urge and the corporate drive which in-

---

<sup>2</sup>Horney, Karen, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. Norton, New York, 1937.

<sup>3</sup>*American Journal of Sociology*, 1936, p. 355ff.

<sup>4</sup>Crag, Clarence T., *The Challenge of Our Culture*. Pp. 105-125, Harpers, New York, 1946.

itiates them should humble the Church which claims to be the beloved community, and it should impel the church with repentance and love to become for mankind what God intends it to be. These new collectivismisms, these new counselors and pastoral guides (Overstreet, for example), these new sects and cults, which express themselves in books, in movies and television, on the stage, in journals, and in new human orders, are appealing to the anxious spirits of our time who have suffered from our anarchy of values, our rootlessness, our loss of social ritual, our failure as a pastoral community.

For some time many churchmen have called attention, and with reason, to the professionalism of the pastorate and to the institutionalism of the church. T. S. Eliot calls for a distinction between the Christian community (The Church) and the Community of Christians. Nels Ferre writes, "The deepest failure is not failure of organization, but the failure of the Christian Church to be a vital fellowship." (Return to Christianity.) And Emil Brunner in *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, maintains that all too often we have been falsely identified with the ecclesia (the supernatural fellowship or koinonia) of Jesus Christ and the Church or the historical institution.

Surely, everyone here believes the Church to be an eschatological community, but he also believes that the church in history is called to become a pastoral community with the spirit of *agape* throbbing within its members and expressing itself in the total human community in which it is set. Time forbids an examination of the ways in which the churches have been unduly influenced by secular standards, class strata, race discrimination, professional clericalism, impersonal institutionalism, and other factors which have tended to make them less or other than pastoral communities.

### III

What then, is the nature and function of a pastoral Church?

It is not my intention to enter upon a theological discussion of the Church. That there are differences of opinion on the subject can be seen by reading the Faith and Order reports of the ecumenical movement. There are indications that the emphasis of the last century upon the church as an association of Christians is now giving way to the conception of the Church as created "from above and not from below." Its source is in God and not in man. God wills the Church; Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it; the Spirit creates, indwells and uses the Church. It is "the people whom God has called into being to be the bearer of hope, the sign and witness of God's mighty acts, the means of His working and the field wherein His glory is to be revealed."

The Church, is the witness and evidence of what God has done and the sign of what He is doing and will do; it is the means, the Body, through whose members—united in and obedient to Christ—He continues the work of the risen Lord and Saviour; it is the field where the glory of God manifested in Christ is being partially and imperfectly reflected and will be fully revealed to the whole creation. Though composed of finite, ignorant, and sinful men, the Church is still able to proclaim judgment and forgiveness to the world because it is the object of both. It participates in the work of God for the whole world between the first and the second Advent. If this, then, be the nature and function of the Church, the Church is integral to the Gospel, and “its mission is the most important thing that is happening in history.”

Surely this implies that the Church is not a society of morally perfect people; nor is it a society which is organized for the sake of promoting religion or patronizing God. It is composed of persons who have stood under the burning light of God’s judgment and mercy, and have done with self-justification and humanly-generated religiosity. They are human beings, who are not ashamed of their humanity, afraid of their sinfulness, resistant to their finitude, isolated from their neighbours, or unwilling to face the realities of their situation. They have been emancipated by the miraculous grace of God from their prison-house of pseudo-life and have accepted themselves as they are because God-in-Christ has done so. They have been—and are being—saved. The Church is pastoral when it affords in its imperfection such a fellowship to persons who are searching for real life.

The worship of such a Church is not entertainment, nor is it a religious exercise to develop aesthetic feelings. Rather, it will be the corporate response of persons to God’s act and gift. It will begin with adoration and move on through confession and cleansing to petition, intercession, reception, and issue in glad commitment. Such worship unites persons, transforms life and work into a sacrament; it is a witness and a therapeutic act. All preaching in this context of worship, even though it be disturbingly prophetic, must of necessity be pastoral and helping in purpose and seek to bring persons in the community to the free response of faith and love.

Such a church will be a community of love and freedom. Since its members are recipients of the grace of God known in the humility of him who did not grasp after position, they will partake of his lowly mind and serving spirit. Only the love of God can deliver men from self-love and set them free to love their neighbours and move them to shed for each other “the sympathizing tear,” and “bear one another’s burdens.” One cannot be forced to love his neighbour; he can be led to accept him as a brother only in the love of Christ. “The church is the

sphere of free relations of mutual love and trust between persons.”<sup>5</sup> And this kind of love is not to be directed only to the membership of the Church; it is to be exercised toward all kinds and conditions of men. It is the source of Christian charity, the fountain of concern for all men to whom the Gospel belongs, the dynamic of compassion for all who suffer and are troubled, the destroyer of human barriers, the support of those who need protection and security, and the encourager of the timid and faint-hearted.

Such love is the dynamic of social action because its aim is to heal and reconcile group tensions and release the captives of an unjust order into the liberty of the sons of God. It seeks the conversion of the non-Christian, not because it is proud of its election or desirous of the church’s statistical success, but because it is pained to see men live outside the love of Christ, ignorant of the glory of God, and separated from the true community of faith, hope, and love. The nurture of a pastoral community will be solicitous and wise as it seeks to initiate and mature the people of God of all ages into a growing knowledge of love for, and participation in, the past heritage and present adventure of the Christian community.

A pastoral church will be person-minded. It will be done with rigid conceptions of the Christian life and community which are untrue to the organic and personal nature of the Church and its Lord. It will realize that Christian truth is essentially personal, and that the life in Christ takes place in interpersonal relationships. For that reason, it will not use or lose the individual for the sake of the organization. And it will be keenly concerned about that most personal nucleus of all human relationships, the family.

A pastoral church will rethink discipline which has been integral to the life of the Church from the beginning and which has become more legislative than pastoral. However, its corporate concern will not be negative and legalistic, but positive and redemptive.

Where such a pastoral conception obtains, committee meetings will not be mere business sessions to promote programs but mutual fellowships seeking to work out a group decision for the growth of God’s people. Its prayer meeting will not be a place where people listen to a polished address, but a group that seeks through prayer, Bible reading, sharing, petition, intercession and thanksgiving, to grow in discipleship with Christ and in fellowship.

The life and action of such a church will be structured by a historic and living theology, and conducted in decency and in order, but its theology and its order will be directed toward the fulfillment of God’s

---

<sup>5</sup>Oldham, T. H. and ‘t Hooft, W. A., *The Church and its Function in Society.*, Willitt, Clark, Chicago, 1637.

will here and in the age to come. Such a pastoral Church will see itself as the pioneer community set within the common life for the healing of all peoples and all nations. For what it is, and is called to be, God desires the whole world to become.

As the body of Christ, the pastoral community will partake of the spirit of its Head, who as the Suffering Servant was bruised for the iniquities of men and whose stripes were for the healing of life. It will channel the spirit of Him who came "not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give His life a ransom for many."

The implications of this thesis are applicable to denominational bodies and to councils of churches. There is always the danger that institution and organization, program and system of thought will subordinate the pastoral character of the Church. Little Christian unity is to be realized if the dynamic witness and the pastoral nature and function of the church are subordinated to a conception of Christianity which is conceived only in terms of faith and order.

#### IV

But—how shall this pastoral Church be realized?

For one thing, it cannot be achieved by sheer human effort. It is given by God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—as the Community of Christians comes into an ever-growing and transforming response in understanding and obedience to the Gospel in the light of the present situation within and without the Church. The Church becomes pastoral only as it continually confronts and responds to God-in-Christ. Through life-in-the Spirit it is transformed more and more into the holy and healing community. Any static pattern of a pastoral church is a snare and a delusion! The important matter is that pastor and people alike understand that the Church is a part of the redemptive action of God and not an annex to personal piety, that the Church is the "germ" (Schmidt, Karl Ludwig) or frontier of the Kingdom of God, and that the vocation and task of the Church is an extension of the ministry of Jesus Christ who came "to seek and to save the lost".

Then the churches must enter into serious thought about themselves. We may be encouraged, however, in the fact that the Spirit is striving with the churches everywhere in various ways, thrusting them out of their traditional complacency and cultural conformity. This critical evaluation of the churches is evident on the Continent, in Great Britain, in the younger churches, and in America. Daniel Jenkins has posed two penetrating questions, one to the Churches in Europe and the other to those in the United States. The former he asks, "How can an old Church be born again?" The latter he asks, "How can a rich man get into the

Kingdom of God?" Current studies are being made and experiments conducted with a view to restoring the apostolate of the laity, to overcoming the ghetto-like isolation of the Church from the masses, to breaking through the semantic barrier between church and world which makes communication difficult, to democratizing the churches through group and neighbourhood work, to redesigning church architecture so that the church may become more of a fellowship, to bringing the church and community agencies and services (like medicine, education, social work) into closer relationship for the salvation of the whole man in the total community, to attempting to restore the parish so that the Church will again be set within the life of the community, to establishing "radical" experimental groups outside the church to provide conversation places with those who will not come near the institution. Several studies along this line are worthy of note: Tom Allan's, *The Face of My Parish*;<sup>6</sup> The World Council's study on *Evangelism in France*, and Abbe Michonneau's, *Revolution in a City Parish*<sup>7</sup>. Today, the churches are inclined to listen to the world as they are inclined to listen to Jesus Christ, the Word become man. Books on the Church by Flew, Dillistone, Ferre, Brunner, Newgigin, Trinterud, and others reflect this concern. This interest is manifest especially in large congregations, as well as denominational headquarters, the National and the World Council of Churches. The supreme manifestation of it in the World Council of Churches is the Ecumenical Institute of Chateau de Bossey. To be sure, this emphasis has its perils, for we must go beyond a Protestantism which tends to obscure the Divine Society in sectarianism and subjectivism and a Roman Catholicism which tends to obscure the Divine Society in sacramentalism and hierarchialism.

The realization of a pastoral church also demands a leadership of peculiar qualifications. For as Richard Baxter rightly put it, "all churches either rise or fall as the ministry doth rise or fall . . ."<sup>8</sup> Since the ministry and church are organically related and the ministry is in a sense the Church in personal reality and function, and each depends so much on the other, the pastoral leadership of the church must possess theological convictions, personal attitudes, and vocational skills of a unique kind.

The pastor must be a person who knows from experience—at least in some degree—what it means to be shepherded by the Good Shepherd himself. To quote Richard Baxter's counsel to ministers regarding *The Reformed Pastor*, "Above all, see to it that a work of saving grace be

---

<sup>6</sup>London, S. C. M. Roess.

<sup>7</sup>Geneva, World Council of Churches.

<sup>8</sup>Baxter, Richard, *The Reformed Position*, Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Publication. 1839.



thoroughly wrought in your soul. Take heed to yourselves lest you be strangers to the effectual working of that gospel which you preach . . . Be that first, yourselves, which you persuade your hearers to be; believe that, which you daily persuade men to believe; and heartily entertain that Christ and Spirit, which you offer to them." He continues by saying, "It is a dreadful thing to be an unsanctified professor; but much more to be an unsanctified preacher." Until the pastor knows what it means to be ministered unto he will not have the passion, the power, or the skills to minister to others, nor will he be able to communicate to the people of the parish the vision of a ministering church in which each member will exercise his pastoral vocation to the neighbor in family, congregation, community or society.

What the commencement speaker said to the graduating class of a theological seminary may seem simple, but it carries a penetrating truth: "If you haven't heard anything, seen anything, experienced anything during your years of preparation you do not have anything!" If preaching, as Bishop Quayle once said is "the art of making a preacher and delivering that," then pastoral work is the art of making a pastor and delivering that. "It is no trouble to preach", said Quayle, "but a vast trouble to construct a preacher."

The pastor will also need to understand the ways of God with man. With all the help he can receive from the social sciences, and practical experience, and above all from a study of the living encounter between God and men in the Scriptures and in Christian history (all of which must be filtered through his own experience), he may come to know the varied and profound realities of the pioneer human encounter. Thus, he will be a constant observer of and participant in humanity. He will make himself an expert in the dynamics of pastoral care and equip himself to be a physician of the human spirit.

In this connection, he will need to know the meaning of the great doctrines of the faith, such as justification by faith, atonement, sanctification, adoption, revelation and inspiration, and others in terms of the personal experience of salvation which they symbolize.

His conception of the ministry will be of the essence. If he conceives of his office as solely that of an administrator of an organization, an instructor whose business it is to pre-digest saving truth and "put it across" so that people will accept it, a liturgist who conducts worship for and not with the community, a kind of moral and theological expert who can give men all the answers without patiently listening to or helping them with their questions—then a pastoral Church will never result. The ministry is exercised in, for and through the Church of God's people; and it is intended to build up the Church into a ministering Body which exercises the prophetic, priestly and kingly ministries of Christ. Under

the Head of the Church, the ministry is to strive to make the Church a working, growing, praying, worshipping, witnessing, serving, and loving force.

This vocation to which the Church is called is humbling indeed. Yet, through the power of the Spirit the work of revival may take place. But even though the church fails to be the Church, even though "its members fall short of their calling, or supposes themselves to have already attained, or are blind to their faults and proud of their virtue and insight as Christians, or despise their fellow-men and speak self-righteously to the world, or refuse to seek the glory of men and refuse the reproach of the Cross . . . nevertheless God is God, and He cannot deny Himself. In spite of assaults from without and flaws within the Church stands as the Rock and the gates of hell do not prevail against it. By God's ordinance and through His power it remains witness, instrument, and field of action for Him while history lasts, and will stand before Him at the end to be made perfect through His final judgment and final forgiveness."<sup>9</sup>

I close with a paraphrase, with apologies to the Apostle Paul and J. B. Phillips:

Though a Church speaks with the combined eloquence of men and of angels it should stir men like a fanfare of trumpets or the crashing of cymbals, but unless it had love, it should do nothing more. If it had the gift of foretelling the future and had in mind not only all human knowledge but the secrets of God, and if in addition, it had that absolute faith which can move mountains, but had no love, I tell you it would be nothing at all. If it were to sell all its possessions to feed the hungry and, for its convictions, allowed itself to be burned, and yet had not love, it would achieve precisely nothing.

In this life we have three great lasting qualities—faith, hope, love. But the greatest of them is love.

---

<sup>9</sup>Evanston Report, "Christ the Hope of the World."