



F

"The Church in Cultural Change", a series of lectures given in association with the Rev. Dr. E.F. Carpenter by Rev. Dr. M.M. Thomas, Mr. V. K. Brown and The Rev. P.J. Hollingworth, to the Provincial Clergy School, June 1965.

I "The Church in Sociological Change" - by Peter Hollingworth.

The basic objective behind this lecture is to present to you some of the Church's most recent thinking and programming to do with its mission to 20th century society. As the Australian Church is in something of a general cultural backwater, most of my material comes from overseas.

My present job as Chaplain to the Brotherhood of St. Laurence has provided me with the opportunity to engage in some sociological study on an academic level, the opportunity to attend conferences, to read books and reports and to engage in dialogue with people who are trained in the social sciences.

Without making any pretences about being a sociologist, I have been taught how to use sociological insights, and to relate them to the Church's organizational life.

Let me describe the function of sociology both in terms of what it is not, and in terms of what it is. It is not one of the social science "gimmicks" that the Church has grasped in its desperate search for relevancy in the 20th century. It is not just a humanistic device to make the hard words of the Gospel more palatable, nor is it the rallying point of the 'avant-garde'.

Rather, sociology is a behavioural science which seeks to analyse the overall structure of any given society; it tries to analyse functional interactions between social groups themselves. It is a dynamic study in that the undergirding factor is always that of change, the effects of which have to be examined. Following the classic example of Max Weber and Karl Marx (with varying emphasis), social situations are usually examined in terms of class, status and power.

So far so good, but what is its use to the Church? Surely gospel and its 'spiritual' contents are beyond such worldly investigation.

The answer lies in the historical fact that The Word has embedded Himself in the structures of society, that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son." As the Body of Christ, the New Israel, the Church takes its place as a social grouping, and organises its institutional life in "The world". Furthermore, its Kerugma imbeds itself in the value systems of society. Sociological study then will help us to gauge the effective functioning of the institution (or otherwise) and also indicate whether its structural shape is appropriate both to its declared task and to the world which it is called to serve. The clear implication behind this is that we must first ask the question "Who is Jesus Christ and what is He doing in the world." As that is a

"Christological" and theological matter, I will leave it to Max Thomas. However, my sociological point is that we must be prepared to shape and reshape the institutional structure of the Church solely in terms of that Christological answer.

When the Church's work is viewed sociologically, it usually transpires that all our deepest fears and suspicions about its ineffectiveness and inappropriateness are firmly validated. Perhaps that is why Christian sociologists are saying the most radical things and conducting the most forward looking experiments in mission. They are claiming with strong evidence that the Church is both redundant and irrelevant to the mainstreams of life, that as a 'decision-centre' it has very little status, power or influence, that, at best, it is regarded as socializing cement for the preservation of established, conservative values and at worst an enclaved centre for private religious activities. In a word, its organized life has very little to do with Jesus Christ.

Now, if sociological analysis affirms that the Church is displaced in being on the side lines of 20th century life, those same tools of analysis might also prove useful in describing how it might rediscover its rightful place at the core and centre of life. Our modern society is both structurally complex and it is subject to constant social change, so that any "strategy" must regard those two factors with the utmost seriousness. What is being implied here is that the task of evangelism has now ceased to be a spontaneous activity (as in Wesley's day) both because of the world's complexity and change and because the Church is no longer that fruitful centre of the redemption of the world that our forefathers rightly took for granted.

Correspondingly, the task of evangelism is so complex that it has become a world wide study. The deliberate use of the word "structure" was included to ensure that any subsequent study or action was based upon the insights of sociology. It soon became clear that the task was nothing less than the critical analysis, the radical reformation and full-scale re-construction of the Church's institutional forms.

In a moment I will do an historical summary of the Church's institutional forms, but before doing so, allow me to "fire a shot across the bows" as people like Paul Kraemer and Peter Berger would correctly insist. Throughout the 40's and 50's a vast amount of literature has been written with a concern for "the revitalization of the local congregation." This, it has been argued, is the most urgent task of the Church. In all fairness to it, this literature has shown a keen awareness of the processes of rapid social change, of demythologized biblical insights, of liturgical reform of the key role of the Laity and of ecumenical participation. Frequently it has called for daring new approaches. However, when it comes to the question of the Church's institutional forms it invariably displays an essential conservatism and even a fundamentalism. Berger (a layman) adds this sharp rejoinder "since most of this literature is written by the clergy - that means people whose social existence is grounded in the religious

W.C.C. Conference at New Delhi 1961 "The Missionary Structure of the Congregation.

Paul E. Kraemer "A Missionary structural congregation in a Metropolitan setting - some pre-conditions."

people whose social existence is grounded in the religious institution - this is perhaps only natural". The age old problem of vested interests, and resistance to change!

We must honestly face the facts because our failure to do so will only serve to convince the modern secular man that we are only pretending to serve the world by throwing about some high sounding neologisms when, in fact, we are concerned only to preserve our steadily shrinking sacred domain.

Charles West reproduces a rather sobering piece of anti-religious propaganda from the East German Communist Press to drive home this truth. "There appeared..... a cartoon....picturing a tree named the Church. The tree had lost all its leaves - the fruit and flower of culture, politics, family and personal morality. But under it there scurried about priests, ministers and all manner of folk who were identifiably religious in their dress and attitude. They were gathering up the leaves, and some were attempting, like foolish children in a paper cut-out world, to paste them back upon the tree."

There is a discomfoting ring of truth about that cartoon which we must examine with open minds. Should we not first ask whether the tree (the present institutional shape of the Church) is actually dead or alive before we try to rejuvenate it. Robinson has described the Church as "an archaic and well-protected institution for the preservation of something that is irrelevant and incredible." If we simply bring it up to date and so remove those charges of irrelevancy and archaism, we might be making it better protected and more enclaved than ever - pasting it over with fallen leaves! This would merely help to divert it further from its main task of serving the world.

To leave our institutions untouched by assuming their appropriateness is to assume the question yet to be decided. Such a position cannot be the a priori from which we commence because this is begging the basic question which demands an answer. In other words, we must see whether our institutions really are Christological in shape.

A study of history will be useful in helping us to decide whether there is a need to change the shape of our Christian institutions.

1. THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH

This period was characterised by ad hoc structures which were by nature extremely flexible. The Church gathered only where the world provided opportunities for gathering. The following are three known instances -

- (a) The House Church. This was, however, a far cry from the typical modern suburban home which is based on a residence pattern; it was also the business establishment of a layman and was strategically placed at the trade's crossroads.

Peter L. Berger "The Noise of Solemn Assemblies" p.158
Concept VI Charles West "Changing Forms of the Church's
Witness" p.13

J.A.T.Robinson "The New Reformation" p.20
Ref. Colin Williams Lectures "The Service of the Church in the
20th Century" "where in the world" pp4...

Thus worship, service and business were geographically interrelated. It meant that the Lordship of Christ could be effectively proclaimed right at the heart of the world's "decision centres" which represented the total life of all mankind. Thus Paul was not exaggerating when he said that the Church was planted "in every place" i.e. every representative place. Thus, the Gospel could be effectively carried out into all the world simply because all men invariably gathered at such public places.

- (b) The Church in Captivity e.g. Caesar's household. Slaves had no opportunity to go elsewhere so the Church came and gathered where they were "where the world held them."
- (c) The Church as a Community of Alienation e.g. The Catacombs. Where the world would not allow the Church to gather and witness to Christ's Lordship, it gathered in secret. Here, they brought before God the life of the whole of mankind in Liturgy and then prepared themselves to go out into the world and witness to Him.

2. THE CONSTANTINE CHURCH.

In the fourth century, the Church was called upon by the State to christianise the total life of mankind. A correspondingly total change in her institutional structures was required, and we can still feel the shudder which went through the Christian community at the time. Yet the world had given it an opportunity to witness in a new set of situations and it had no right to refuse the offer whatever the subsequent problems of adjustment. Two new structural developments emerged:-

- (a) The Basilicas. The first step was to shift from individual structures like households to social, economic and political ones like the army, the market-places of the cities in the places of central government. Then the next step was the most overtly institutional in the sense that the "churches" were built; not residential ones like ours, but great Basilicas which were once again carefully placed at the crossroads of life. These great buildings symbolised the fact that the Church, for the first time, was taking direct responsibility for "christianising" (or bringing under the Lordship of Christ) the whole visible world of culture. The Basilicas likewise symbolised the Church's newfound power and influence.

"In this period of Constantine onwards down to the middle ages you have the Church building; its basilicas were placed at the political and sometimes the military and sometimes the trade centres of mankind. Still only at the central points! The structures of the Church were in many ways now made to match the structures of the world because they had to witness the Lordship of Jesus Christ throughout the whole hierarchy of Europe's life. So for example now you get the many ranks of the clergy representing the many ranks of a political society. You now get the Liturgy which had been fairly simple before, elaborated into the great western rites. In the Basilica, you have the steps

of the Byzantine Court up to the Throne of the Emperor which is now the Throne of God. You have the Bishop's throne and the Emperor's throne in parallel so that here the whole symbolism of the christianization of the totality of life is played out and in the drama of the Gospel, the ripples on the surface of life's water were taken up in the great tidal wave of the Gospel. So that now they use the court liturgy as the framework of the action of the Eucharist. Similarly the Church now became more complex than before. Now the Church began to develop all sorts of institutions - its early universities, hospitals and its various ways of bringing all learning of the arts and sciences under the control of the Gospel. This therefore is a tremendous change in the structure of the Church and its witness in relation to the world. Because now the world has called it in a new way to witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

- (b) Monasticism. Power and influence have their problems. The monastic movement emerged to witness to those problems (not against them). It should be seen, not so much as a reaction but as a counter balance. It was the 'via crucis' proclaiming a discipleship stripped of all power, wealth and authority to remind men that the Kingdom was not of this world.

But Monasticism had a second and seldom acknowledged function. According to the current mythology, the desert was the gathering place of the demons. There they planned their attacks as the "principalities and powers and world rulers of darkness" on the city. Their plan was to overthrow the city in taking over the ecclesiastical and political authorities. It was believed that they would make the thrust of their attack at the point of man's assured strength and wealth. Thus the Church had to counter them with frontline troops and these were the monastic orders. They made their attacking thrust right at the devils' lairs - the desert places. Thus they surrounded the cities with a protective ring of fortresses.

In this period, the terms "sacred and secular" were first used. The "secular" clergy were called to minister to the cities' secular structures while the "spiritual" or "religious" waged war on the front line against subversive demonic forces. Of course, they had their tensions; but by and large they gave the reshaped church the essential balance needed to relate appropriately to "the world" (in the sense of its being reconciled to God) but also to stand apart from it (in the sense of its being separated from God).

3. THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH.

A solution to the dangers produced by the wandering nomadic hordes of the Dark Ages was eventually found. It was to pin people down to the soil and put them all in village structures. The medieval solution, then, was to produce a rather static society. Three main

principles became operative - people were to be well dispersed in a number of small local communities, they were to be hierarchically structured from top to bottom (with effectual power residing at the top) and they were to have an internal autonomy. This new type of organism was described by the secular word "parish". It was the second enormous sociological change in Christian history which produced a new type of world. Once again, the Church was called to relate to that world in a new way. This time we hear no shudder in its institutional framework because the Church found itself (literally and metaphorically) "on clover".

Now the whole of life in all its orders - social, political and economic, and in all its structures - residential, work, leisure and service, was manifested in microcosmic form within the village structure. Such a conveyance and concentration of power made it extraordinarily easy for the Church to gather right at the centre of life. This new structural 'type' produced a radical shift in Clerical organisation because Priests were now tied to the Parishes and largely disengaged from their Bishops (in "western Europe though not in the East). The period produced a new emphasis in the Church's task which was "to create living local signs of God's ultimate transforming purpose for all life". Consequently, the Church sought to control marketing, to direct the family, to set just prices, to control industry and to develop the craft guilds, education and health. This was the time for worldly prestige, power and influence, and the Church 'never had it so good'. However, another aspect of its task became seriously overlooked. "It tended to obscure God's Dynamic mission pushing out to the ends of time and space, crossing all barriers of race, nation, language and culture." The Church was unfortunately required to accept responsibility only for its own local region. In adopting that posture, it has never quite been able to shake itself loose, despite vigorous efforts by groups like the early Franciscans or the Methodists. This type of social structure has lasted for 1,000 years. However, the Church's power and influence have begun to wane over the last 400 of them. The first reduction was not recognised due to great theological debates of the Reformation, but the fact remains that Henry VIII succeeded in stripping the English Church and making it a junior department of the State, and that by constitutional means and with very little protest from the Church itself! After this, came the steady stream of defections in the fields of law, science, economics, history and philosophy. However, none of these did anything to the Church's institutional position in society. It took the industrial revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to do that because, for the first time in 1,000 years, great population movements took place which were to change the total structure of society. Society again became dynamic and mobile but the Church had lost the necessary skills required to adjust to social change. Centuries of inactivity had hardened the structural joints - that social fluidity was missing, which alone would have made it possible to change its shape to fit the world. Likewise the Church's very power, which had always allowed it to "set the agenda" to the world, blinded it to the need to do the reverse in this new situation.

The most obvious defection of persons from the Church's institutional life was of course the industrial work force of the industrial revolution, who were settling in the cities and towns. In spite of the efforts of the Methodists to minister to this new social grouping, widespread meaningful contact was lost. In turn, Methodism became the gathering point of the "nouveau riches". Eventually all the Churches handled this new problem by ignoring it. One only had to say that the components of this new class were "poor immoral types" who disliked the Church. Then the book could be closed. As we know, over the last 50 years, the process of defection has affected every social group till now (in the non-authoritarian Churches) the exodus is almost complete.

It is thus very hard to escape the conclusion of that East German cartoon - that at least institutionally, the Church is dead! At best, we can only soften the blow by saying that its traditional institutional forms of Parish life are now inappropriate and ineffective. As tools of mission, they are of little use; indeed they were never designed for that purpose. At the most, they will help us to hold on to a small portion of what is left.

What was it exactly that has made the parish system inappropriate to mission in modern industrial society? What sorts of changes have emerged? Clearly, the main shift has been away from the practice of local village autonomy towards the great city or the metropolis. In effect, the fourth stage of social development has now emerged. The scandal is that the writing has been on the wall in some places for 100 years, and in Australia for 60 years, yet it is only quite recently that the Church has begun to recognise it and the implications for its own institutional structures. The longer reform is left, the more difficult and radical it has to be. The task now lying before us is an examination of the shape of our present social structure. This will give us the second necessary ingredient for reform; as we must take Christology seriously, so we must give serious attention to the shape of our world.

4. THE URBAN TECHNOLOGICAL PERIOD.

This type of society is characterised by its complexity, its fluidity, its dynamic open-ended form and its international nature. Change is the key word; with the general thrust being centrifugal in nature. The old parochialisms are being disintegrated and are being replaced by "mass" oriented structures. The old local social structures and value systems are giving place to "world" ones. Thus local institutions have lost their power and influence. In their place, these matters are now "mass-mediated" from a number of centralised, national and international "decision-centres."

In a word, the parish has given place to the metropolis as the centre of life. In that sense, our society is a "mass society"; yet in another sense it is pluralistic (although I have the feeling that the W.C.C. "missionary structure" people are using it rather too loosely as a technical term). Attention is often drawn to the fact that the metropolis consists of a number of autonomous plural "worlds". We talk, don't we, of "the world" of industry, of commerce, of public health, of social welfare, of parliament, of the mass media, of residence, and so on. By and large, they do represent

"pyramids of power" at top levels, although I would not go so far as to say that there is such a personal concentration as to form what C. Wright Mills called a "power elite". Most people are answerable to democratic processes which do serve to restrict them in some degree.

Perhaps all this is best summed up in what Dr. Paul Kraemer⁴ has to say about contemporary "Western Society and the forces which determine its make-up :-

"With good reason, contemporary Western Society has been labelled the Great Society. Horizons have widened, distances have shrunk, possibilities have been opened up, partitioning barriers have been torn down. It is a society in which almost everything acquires an aspect of hugeness, and simultaneously, of perplexing complexity. Boundaries are not only expanding, but also diffusing; contents are not only enlarged, but also lumped together and thoroughly reshuffled with the result that levelling tendencies go together with diversifying ones, that uniformity competes with pluriformity. The Great Society is one big melting pot of ideas and goods, of values and forms, of interests and loyalties that continuously change and often clash. And of this melting pot the exponent is the Metropolis. The Metropolis is the dynamic pace-setter of the industrial-urban way of life, the spheres of influence of which are reaching out further and further. It is the complex power centre of modern civilisation, the pull of which is drawing ever growing proportions of territory and population into its orbit.

In short, today's Western society is preponderantly a Metropolitan society, and consequently, the lives of the bulk of us Westerners are decisively conditioned and structured by the paramount processes of which the Metropolis is both the product and the generator." **

and again -

"The complex society is a great society which is universal. The time when customs and practices were expressed in national terms is either gone or very rapidly going. The great society has been so influenced and determined by the development of commerce and industry that its culture has now become a world-wide culture to which every culture within it has made a contribution.

Characteristic of the emergence of the great society is its dynamic and open-ended form. It is a great melting pot of conflict and change which at the same time embodies a great deal of hope that the realisation of the full richness of human possibilities may come about for the first time in history. The Metropolis is the pace-setter for the great society. With its three basic processes of concentration, differentiation and mobility the Metropolis invites the development of new human patterns of life which are open-ended and cross

⁴ Kraemer is from the Sociological Institute of the Netherlands Reformed Church

** Concept V, W.C.C.

cultural while expressing man's organic unity and general humanity. Because of the nature of the forces and the speed with which they are emerging, three specific phenomena may be observed: one, a weakening orientation towards transcendental symbols; two, a loss of continuity; and three, a vacuum of authority.

Authority symbols in three of five cases are losing or have lost their authority. The responses of individuals to divine, ancestral and hereditary authority is either fading or gone. This leaves the two remaining traditional authority symbols; the bureaucratic institution and response to a charismatic leader; the only symbols of authority available to people."

In their outward projection, these movements are affecting and will affect town and country alike - nothing will escape the influence of the Metropolis.

I could say a great deal more, but it would be much better to mention that people like Gibson Winter have outlined most of what can be said at the moment. The only thing that is really lacking is an attempt to relate these sociological observations more specifically to the Australian scene. But the distressing fact is that our Universities have very limited facilities for sociological study and research. Consequently we are acutely short of sociologists to do the necessary analysis. This will in turn mean that any subsequent attempts at re-structuring the life of the Church here is bound to be something of a hit and miss affair.

However, I am now jumping ahead of myself, because the next task is to consider where the Church stands in relation to all this change.

In a nutshell, the answer is where it has stood for the past 1000 years. For a number of complex historical reasons, it has failed to change its structural shape for the first time in its institutional history.

Perhaps the best way to tackle the next task is to place what we know of the Church and the world beside each other. This, in turn, will serve the purpose of heightening the sense of contrast. The functioning of 'church' and 'world' can be examined through the use of common categories. Here are but a few:-

(a) The Situational - The Church has become a 'fringe-dweller' in residence whereas most meaningful activity now takes place under the aegis of the Metropolis. As people commute from home to work, their functions and

"Our Complex Society" W.C.C. p. 42

(Observed in this way, the new "emerging" nations of the Afro-Asian Bloc are often "charismatically" oriented - Nkruma of Ghana is the best example, while the older Western nations have become bureaucratized or "routinized."

G. Winter "The New Creation as Metropolis" and "The Suburban Captivity of the Churches".

An analogy between the Church and the aboriginal populations around typical country towns is intentional.

roles are compartmentalized and so are their thought processes. Correspondingly, the Church is 'pigeon-holed' as a "place" at residence, where some of one's leisure time is spent. The Church is now one part (and a shrinking part) of one pluralistic world (which is itself declining in influence) and is thus not seen as relating to any of the public worlds of decision making.

(b) The Ideological - Instead of being two integral parts of the one function, 'the sacred' and 'the secular' have parted company. Because the public, plural worlds are avowedly and sometimes aggressively secular, the Church has felt the need to react by emphasizing its sacred nature and by seeing itself as apart from and in competition with "the secular world". The question which is seldom asked is whether "the world" does in fact have some genuine 'sacred' qualities of its own.

(c) The Organisational - As a result of this ideological schism (which is probably not Biblical) the Church has accordingly shaped its organisational life. "The parish priest is lumbered with parochial machinery designed for fighting, or at least standing over against, the secular front. There is very little machinery available to him for responding to it." All the parochial organizational machinery is designed to take people out of the world and into the Church, thereby heightening the existing ideological segregation; whereas "the great society" seeks to be "open-ended" the Church has taken the reverse course in that its general ethos tends to be closed. There is also a re-enforcing psychological principle at work; the more the Church becomes a minority group (given its present structure) the greater the tendency for it to enclave and for its members to be inward looking.

(d) The Direction of Movement - "whereas the metropolitan world has a 'centrifugal' movement with ever-widening circles of interest and influence, every force working on the local church is 'centripetal' or inward-thrusting. Put another way, the world is a "go" structure and the Church a "come" structure.

(e) The Social (Class) - Since at least the 18th century the proletariat have been alienated because the Church failed to move with them into the new industrial towns and erect "care structures" appropriate to their changing needs. At best it has been used by the upper classes as an aid to preserving the status quo and as a class they are shrinking due to the general 'levelling' processes of the great society. This leaves us with the bourgeoisie. In the nineteenth century, they made the Church the gathering point through which they could affirm their personal value systems. Max Weber, Professor R. Towney, and David Riesman all develop this point. But such matters, I will leave for Val Brown to examine. Today the Protestant "inner-directed" man has become "other-directed". The Protestant

* Christopher Byers "Secularization and the Parochial Machine"
"Prism" Feb. 1964 PP. 18-21.
Weber "Protestantism and the Capitalist ethic."
Towney "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism."
Riesman "The Lonely Crowd."

ethic has given place to the social and secular one so that even this group is also steadily defecting from the ranks. All this means that the only groups who are likely to be attracted to the Church (apart from a few exceptional non-conforming individuals) are the weak, who need protection from the rigors of modern society, the conservative who take fright at the processes of rapid social change and the "pressurized" - businessmen who need a safe place to which they can retreat and recuperate. None of these groups is likely to be interested in radical structural change, and here is the dilemma of the local suburban congregations. Thus, the "strong" tend to be world-oriented and the "weak" Church-oriented.

(f) The Variability - "The world" has many modes of operation, each individual public world having its own unique organisational structure to fit its functional requirements. By way of contrast, the Church has (until recently) had only one organisational shape - the Parish (or the Congregation) with a paid Priest-manager and some lay helpers into which it projects about 90% of its money, manpower and energy. Thus we see contrasted a rigid monochromatic structure with a multitude of more flexible ones, designed to fit specific tasks.

(g) The Denominational Divisions - Although the urban technological society tends to fragment persons through 'role compartmentalization', it also has managed to break down a number of local divisions and is steadily projecting the world towards a unifying type of internationalism - witness the United Nations and the international information conveyed through the Mass Media. Yet, by way of contrast, the Church is fragmented denominationally and is in fact an active agent of social division and separation.

Two striking facts arise from this exercise of setting Church and world side by side - firstly, the Church's overall pattern of life amounts to structural heresy, or rank disobedience to the Gospel. Secondly, the emerging shape of the "Great Society" is at several points more in line with the spirit of the Gospel than is the Church itself!

When we put the local Church under even closer scrutiny, the picture gets somewhat blacker. Firstly it has its own private 'religious' shape which indicates that it is not prepared to allow itself to be shaped by the world. Secondly, its 'thos' is fundamentally 'village green' as its symbols and language of worship indicate. It has made few attempts to address itself to the new urban circumstances. Thirdly, it is thus culturally and geographically remote from the urban power centres and has no means or ability to minister to them. Fourthly it is perceived as an essentially leisure time activity for one's private life. Fifthly, its declared work is largely focused upon 'the family' and yet its club activities are designed to minister to isolated individuals in isolation from the family. Furthermore, there have been few attempts to understand and adjust to the changes in the structure of the modern family. Sixthly, its main activities are fellowship and worship while its mission and service structures are negligible; where they exist they are oriented towards the Church rather than the world.

* Typical score sheets in P.L.M.'s indicate this

Lastly, it is "Priest-centred", buttressed by the cult of personality, while the function of the laity is to "help" the Priest to "manage the business". For its "success" it is largely dependent upon the skills and personality of the Priest.

What this all adds up to is that the Church is perceived by most people as functioning on the same sort of level as the Service Clubs, the Sports Clubs, the Lodges and the like. Indeed, the outsider can hardly be blamed for completely failing to understand the nature and function of the Church - when he mostly sees demonstrations of tired flabbiness and quasi-religious conformity to this world.

Now all this has been thoroughly destructive. But there is a purpose, and that is to suggest that institutionally the Church is steadily dying. What we have to do is to stop rationalizing, face the truth and accept its death. Indeed it is only when we face death that we can discover the exciting possibilities of new life. We are always preaching that from pulpits in spiritual matters, so why not in structure matters? The other day, I was asked to speak to a Church vestry - provided that I had something constructive to say. Now, on the surface, that statement looks like a piece of positive thinking, but underneath is the sub-conscious desire to retain the status quo and to justify the present institution. To speak in a purely positive fashion will, in the long run, serve only to tell people that all is well and they need only go on as before, yet with more endeavour. This will only prolong the process of eventual death; at considerable wastage of time, energy and cash.

If we had sufficient time to wrestle together with the problem, I would conclude my talk at this point in order that we might come to a "point of dereliction." But this conference has a fairly considerable agenda and such a course is not possible. Therefore I had better balance things up with some pointers towards reconstruction.

But first let me make this point clear. As the Editor of "Soundings", Alex Vidler, pointed out, the time is not yet ripe for "major works of theological construction or reconstruction. It is a time for ploughing, not reaping; or to use the metaphor we have chosen for our title, it is time for making soundings, not charts or maps. If this be so, we do not have to apologise for our inability to do what we hope will be possible in a future generation. We can best serve truth and the Church by candidly confessing where our perplexities lie, and not making claims which, as far as we can see, theologians are not at present in a position to justify."

Now, if that is true of theology, how much more so is it of sociology because sociological reconstruction of the Church must first be rooted and grounded in theology with special reference to Christology.

However, "the missionary structure of the congregation" movement has provided for action - study groups throughout the world (except Australia) and some interesting new developments

* The Induction service of a Vicar to a Parish "At the moment, all over the Anglican Communion, in one form or another a perverted doctrine of the Church and its ministry is being proclaimed every time a new Vicar is inducted" Layman's Church P.18.

"Soundings" Essays concerning Christian Understanding
Edited A.R.Vidler.

are emerging. People are now saying that first and foremost, the Church must find and adopt the right stance in relation to the world. "Not only must its theology be open-ended, it must itself be a genuinely open society..... being and being seen to be "the accepting community"..... prepared to meet men where they are and accept them for what they are."

The next step is to recognise the positive value of secularism (which I hope Max Thomas will develop). Although the word refers to a process of political and social differentiation and also to a psychological climate which operates without reference to the "God hypothesis", it also has a very positive interpretation. This has been described as "...sharing in society on an equal basis. In this sense the Church is seen as refusing to contract out of the world. Thus understood, secularization is best defined as identification. The secularization of the Church then is its identification with the world, even as the Son of God identified himself with men." Or again "of or belonging to the present or visible world."

Having got its sights properly adjusted, the Church must begin its reformation from both ends - within the existing traditional structures and in new "world" structures.

As the initial processes are rather different, these two "ends" will need to be considered separately.

Let us begin with the known - the Parish structures. First of all, the Parish must cease to regard its structure as being the norm of Church life with a few extra auxiliary ministries to the other worlds tacked on as subsidiaries. That seems to be about how the average Church man sees it at present. Instead, we must all acknowledge two things - that the Church will have to adopt as many different shapes as there are situations, of which the residence pattern is but one, and that the residence Church will itself have to undergo radical structural change. I underline this second point: The Parish can no longer remain the same because residence is now an isolated island in a mobile society of modern urban life whereas it was originally designed to be the whole Church in microcosm.

Secondly, it must never forget the needs of "the weak" (so long as they really are weak and cannot engage in mission). For them, more effort must be put into local "care structures" whose programmes are designed to help people grow in personality. Perhaps skilled group work is the key to this area.

Thirdly, it must be prepared to encourage its exclusive clubs (which help to separate their members from society) to wither away.

J.A.T. Robinson "The New Reformation" p. 46 and also the chapter on "The gracious neighbour."

Bulletin of the Division of Studies W.C.C. Vol 1X No.2 Autumn 63

Daniel Jenkins "Beyond Religion."

This type of thinking is not "anti-parish" nor does it advocate its abolition. It simply asks that we take "residence" seriously and shape our "parish" life around it.

From a welfare agency's point of view this is how the local church could best serve its many clients. At present the local churches are simply not geared to serve that kind of need.

Fourthly, it should disperse its people, sending them to all the local community structures with the question, "How can our Church most effectively serve the community through your organisation?"

Fifthly, the academically trained should be engaged in ongoing study with a view to examining the ways in which society is changing and new shapes which could be adopted to meet those changes. From all this they could then delineate the main "areas of local concern."

Lastly, we might expect to see a network of "little congregations" - small groups of interested lay people gathering together around their chosen task or "function": gathering for Eucharist, study and exposition, and scattering to an involvement in their worldly tasks. These could include areas like community renewal, social action, the ministry of healing, the care of youth, the integration of migrants or Aboriginal welfare.

This type has been called "the functional congregation", which takes its shape from that of a predominantly "functional" world. It needs to be recognised that the concept of function is by itself ~~too~~ one-sided. Thus "the little congregation" must be fulfilled in "the great congregation". Here the totality of the Church's work world can be summed up in the Eucharist. The role of the ordained ministry would be that of representing the catholicity of the Church to the little congregations. But now let us return to the little congregations. They should endeavour to be "open-ended" - this is likely to mean three things. Firstly they would be world-oriented in that the local community would "set the agenda" for their life; secondly, they would seek to participate in the world's structures at a local level; and, thirdly, they would seek an ecumenical dimension to their life. This final point initially means "joint action for mission". *** The three steps delineated by the W.C.C. are those of "joint survey", "joint planning" and "joint action".

Then it is up to the Holy Spirit to lead the Church to full organic unity.

When moving into new outer suburban areas, we should begin to think ecumenically from the outset. Then we should think of the community, its shapes and its needs, and of how we could be of the greatest use in serving it. Last of all, we should think of ourselves and what buildings we need. In fact, the real question is "What buildings does the community need?" This surely is the fundamental ethical implication behind the business of "living for others". After all, the Altar ought to be where the people are because this is a fundamental incarnational principle! "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

Now finally let us examine the question of "being the Church" in the new "world" situations. This is a very difficult task indeed, particularly as it is not a simple

Ref. e.g. The Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

Hans-Jochen Margull - "Structures for Missionary Congregations" in "Laity" Nov. 1964.

W.C.C. Commission on World Mission and Evangelism "Joint Action for Mission" pamphlet.

question of countering the alienation of modern secular man from the institutional Church. Rather, it is the institutional Church which has lost contact with the actual areas of human responsibility. Therefore, the prerequisite is that we, the Church, must accept the blame, and that is no easy task! Furthermore, our long-standing removal from the world means that we simply do not know the answers.

Having accepted the framework of knowing nothing, where do we go from there? Let me offer some tentative suggestions -

First, we should release as many clergy who have other professional skills from parish work and let them take professional jobs in the public world. **

Second, and as a direct result, two things should happen - possibilities for dialogue on a functional level with non-Christian colleagues should develop. This in turn will encourage the existing Christian lay people to further their own attempts at dialogue with others at work.

Third, the priests and laymen together should grapple with what it means to be the Church in that particular situation, accepting any shape that their employing institution would allow them to take. This could vary from informal discussions on matters of mutual concern to the gathering of The Laos for Eucharist. Where the latter is possible, the groups should be given the maximum freedom to shape the Liturgy around the situation, both in symbolism, ritual and words. **

What all this amounts to is a new model of ordained ministry which is different from those of the Parish Priest, the Hospital Chaplain or the Industrial Chaplain. Its essential difference lies in the fact that it is not a chaplaincy. Antony Hansen has described it as the "pioneer" or "reporting" ministry. * The sorts of tasks we might expect from it are as follows -

1. The discernment of the signs of Christ's presence, already at work in the secular situation (whether latent or manifested).
2. The attempt to identify and become involved at those points either by direct employment or through "cut of hours" dialogue with those already involved - Christians and non-Christians together.
3. The interpretation of the agenda of "decision making" from a Christological viewpoint (when and if his role as "worker priest" has been accepted on all levels of management and labour).
4. The reporting back to the Church, in residence and in other world structures, of the meaning of those activities and decisions. As such, he becomes a very

It remains to be seen whether this is a pragmatic expedient in order to initially gather the Church and then leave the situation, or whether there is a legitimate, ongoing cunition for the Ordained Ministry.

** e.g. As well as prayer books, perhaps board reports and the like could be the new resources of prayer.

useful bridge between Church and world and also within the several public, plural worlds.

5. The gathering of the Church within the situation for Eucharist and prophetic exposition of the Word as it relates to it.

Let me conclude this section of the discussion by emphasizing that in all these situations the Church's main posture will be one of disciplined listening.

A further matter for consideration is the specifying of the areas of public life where the Church ought to involve itself. The working groups of the W.C.C. have presented a list of very tentative areas which need further investigation. These are worth listing.

1. Direct sociological structures giving rise to continuing institutions - such as political structures, business, vocational groups, communications and entertainment media, educational and health institutions.
2. Communities of concern (e.g. the "world" of the arts) and communities of need (e.g. drug addicts). Unlike the first group these are not so much organised institutions as changing communities gathering around the concerns and needs.
3. Major social crises necessitating structured responses e.g. race, housing, poverty, war.

There are some exciting examples of how groups of people have adopted this new "stance" in the world. Colin Williams, in his lectures and his books, does cite some of them. He describes them as enacted "parables of missionary obedience", and these are the only authoritative directions that can be given to the Church.

Thus the task lies before us all, wherever we are involved in the world's activity, to give substance to these parables through the particular shape of existence where we find ourselves at that point of time. Above all, we must learn to be obedient and sensitive to the call of God in the same sort of way as Abraham.

Indeed I believe that the note on which to conclude this address lies at two points. First, the Church of the twentieth century has now passed right out of the "promised land" period (when law and settlement are the orders of the day) into the Abrahamic period (when faith obedience and uncertainty are the new orders).

Secondly, that Christians must cease to "paste the fallen leaves" back upon the tree. Instead, we must plough them into the earth (which is God's) and wait patiently for them to do their work of fertilization. Eventually new shoots will be raised up which will be more appropriate to the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

The implication behind all this is that many of our attitudes in future will be agnostic and much of our work will be performed incognito. The value of this dual stance is that it will leave us open to hear what God the Holy Spirit is saying and so make it possible for us to re-shape our institutional life in obedience to the Living Jesus.