REX D. EDWARDS

Every Believer a Minister

Ministry Releases

Every Believer a Minister

Rex D. Edwards

The Ministerial Association
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
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Dedicated

to all the unheralded witnesses
who with artesian resourcefulness have proclaimed
and lived their faith at the frontiers of the little worlds
where they have functioned vocationally and professionally
as "kingdom persons."

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Preface

No age since the first century has offered Christians better opportunities for advancing their faith throughout the world than the present one. The technological revolution of our times has facilitated the proclamation of the Christian evangel "to all the world."

A wheel turned no faster in George Washington's day than in the time of Hannibal, but today wheels and machines turn so fast that man can cover more distance in a few days than he once could in a lifetime. Countries hitherto inaccessible to the gospel are now open to Christian evangelization. In contrast, the Christian advances with such languor as to validate the charge that civilization is in danger of moving into the post-Christian era. When we try to find reasons for this inertia we can only conclude that few Christians actively and consciously seek to propagate their faith at the frontier of the world where they spend their lives vocationally.

"Not one in a hundred among us is doing anything beyond engaging in common, worldly enterprises. We are not half awake to the worth of the souls for whom Christ died."[1] This judgment was made against the church more than seventy years ago. The recent publication, *Patterns of Seventh-day Adventist Church Growth in America*,[2] indicates no significant change since this testimony was given in 1904. One is reminded of a certain Billy Bray, who sat beside a dying man who groaned, "If I had the power, I'd shout 'Glory to God.' " Billy answered, "It's a pity you didn't shout 'Glory' when you had the power." The plight of this paralytic describes the experience of many Christians who have failed to understand fully

both their role and function in the world and the nature of the church.

My purpose in setting forth these pages is to review the spiritual privileges and responsibilities of Christian laymen from the perspective of both biblical and historical insights. Specific functions and activities of laymen are not within the scope of this work. Rather, it is limited to an effort to interpret the basic biblical principles that directly affect the laymen's understanding of his ministry in the common walks of life, at his work or in his neighborhood. If the laity should possess an adequate understanding of the church and their calling in it, the responsibility for carrying out their ministry would not need legislating. Rather, it would be a spontaneous outgrowth of such an understanding.

In the New Testament the church is seen in vital and daily contact with every element of the world through the lives of its members. Whether assembled together for study and worship or in dispersion, the first-century Christians continually sought to perform every task in the light of their living relationship with the risen Christ. The New Testament churches were ministering fellowships and in the communities ministering agencies. No difference in rank or status divided the people of God. Church leaders were primarily responsible for preparing the congregation for productive service and witness to the people about them. The church was not viewed as a musical society which hired the performers and sat back to enjoy the performance. The church was the orchestra in which each member was assigned his part to play.

Christ committed His ministry to the whole church.

> *The Saviour's commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone upon the ordained minister.*[3]

And inasmuch as "every follower of Jesus has a work to do as a missionary for Christ, in the family in the neighborhood, in the town or city where he lives,"[4] then every member is a Christian minister. The demand then for an informed, educated, and equipped laity is self-evident. The question remains: Is there a solid, biblical basis for interpreting the layman's role of ministry? This book is an attempt

to reveal just such a foundation.

In performing library research I have come to agree with Hans-Ruedi Weber's conclusion that "the predicament facing anyone who assembles a bibliography on the laity is due to the great uncertainty which presently exists about the right criteria for judging which publications should be included." [5] I acknowledge that many authors other than those that appear in the list of references at the end of the book have influenced my thinking, and I am grateful for the assistance of these contributors even though I have not listed them.

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[1] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 148.

[2] Gottfried Oosterwal, *Patterns of Seventh-day Adventist Church Growth in America* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1976).

[3] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 822.

[4] Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, p,18.

[5] Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Laici in Ecclsesia: An Ecumenical Bibliography on the Laity in the Life and Mission of the Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, Department on the Laity, 1961), p. vi.

Chapter 1

I Have Sent Them Into the World

Winston Churchill was once asked by an admiring lady if he was a pillar of the church. Churchill replied that he was more like a flying buttress: "I support it from the outside." Did this sage English statesman give to idle church members a lesson in activity? Workers in all lines could well add Christian witness to their daily work. Elton Trueblood, who has strongly influenced such a lay movement on the contemporary scene, has described "the rising tide of interest in *lay religion*" as "the revolt of the laymen."[1] Though nothing as violent as revolution is evident among Christian laymen, many indications of their changing interest and concerns reveal that we are living in an age of ecclesiastical transition. Agitating for a need of radical change in the understanding of the church members' work, one writer suggests:

> *The need to restore the broken connection between the Church and life as actually lived demands a radically new understanding of the place and function of the lay members of the Church. . . . A revolution is needed in the present outlook of the Church.*[2]

Architects of ecclesiology know that the great commission (Matthew 28:20) cannot be fulfilled by members of a ministerial elite, many of whom are administratively imprisoned in the system of a modern complex parish. The tradition that assigns to the pastor

exclusive rights to preach has deprived the laity of its legitimate role of ministry. The work of the layman and the work of the minister should be viewed as synonymous. Yet, the majority in the "comfortable pew" of denominational "Do-Nothingsville" sit uneasy and restless.

The problem is not unrelated to the vocabulary of a religious culture. What do you call a Christian who is not professionally or vocationally in church-related work? A "layman"!

The word "layman" enjoys a wide differentiation of meaning, a common characteristic being that they are stated in contrasts. One definition posits the contrast in terms of the person's employment *outside* the church:

> *By 'laity' we mean, . . . the vast body of church members who spend their lives in what is called a* secular *occupation, which absorbs the major part of their time.*[3]

Another definition of laymen expresses the contrast in terms of the persons' employment *inside* the church:

> *The term "laymen" is here used to distinguish the role of the other church members from the minister's role as a professional one and not to imply that there is any distinction between them as to basic Christian vocation. . . . The pastor is the employed minister of the church, giving his full time to the church; whereas, the layman is a volunteer minister of Jesus Christ devoting a part of his time to the ministry of the church in performing definitely assigned roles.*[4]

A biblical precedent for these contrasts has been established by another scholar, who declares,

> *In the Bible* ho laos *(the laity) is used of the Jewish people, as distinguished from their priests and rulers, in Mt* 26^{5}, *Acts* 5^{26} *etc., and especially as distinguished from the high priest and the priests in Heb* 5^{3}, 7^{5}, 7^{27}; *so in the Old Testament, in Ex.* 19^{24}, *2 Ch* 24^{10}. *Similarly* ho laos *is frequently used in Greek liturgies to denote the congregation as distinguished from the officiating priest.*[5]

Later biblical scholarship has focused attention on the contrast as that between those constituted *as* the people of God from those who are *not* the people of God. Hendrik Kraemer points out that "the word 'lay' goes back to the Greek word *laikos*. . . . It means originally: belonging to the *laos*; that is the chosen people of God, both in the Old and the NT. In this light all members of the Church are *laikoi*." [6] Thus, if *laos* means the people of God in the root meaning of the word, the ministers are laymen too.

What we have here is a heavy semantic hangover from the Romanist concept of priesthood. And Luther's recapture of the concept of the priesthood of all believers combined with our historic tribute to the same truth ("Not upon the ordained minister only rests the responsibility of going forth to fulfil this commission. *Everyone* who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellowmen.") [7]—this has not yet influenced the dictionary.

Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms lists *secular, temporal,* and *profane* as parallel to the term "lay," while *spiritual, religious,* and *sacred* are spelled out as contrasting words.

A mere cursory glance at this usage of words in obvious conflict reveals a basic inconsistency which has held us captive for years. If by our words we will be justified (Matthew 12:37), then perhaps we had better look deeply at what really underlies this verbal schizophrenia about the contemporary religious usage of the word "layman." I am convinced our words really do reveal our inner and subconscious attitudes.

The New Testament clearly teaches that all Christians are to be ministers. Anything else clearly violates the demands of discipleship which our Lord presented. When He spoke of self-denial, a daily taking up of the cross, and comradeship with Him, He never even vaguely hinted that He spoke only to a select upper crust of professional Christians, and that a second stratum of amateurs existed for whom a lower level of dedication was acceptable.

Not only do the demands of discipleship hit hard at our traditional thinking on this issue, but the structure of the New Testament church was formed for the equipping of the saints (all of us) for the work of the ministry. Ephesians 4:12, RSV. God has reconciled us to Himself by the cross and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:15-20. If reconciliation is

for all, then obviously the ministry is for all as well.

In the profoundest sense none of us has been called to a work, but to Christ Himself. This fact is central. Within the context of our life in Him, we are given our work and callings. Some are designated pastors, teachers, and evangelists for the building up of the total ministry of the church and the extension of the kingdom.

The Fourth Presbyterian Church of Washington, D.C. with Dr. Richard Halverson as pastor has more than 1500 members. What is the purpose of God for his congregation? Is it that they have a single minister and 1500 members supporting his ministry? No, God has called 1500 ministers, each witnessing, each ministering, each supporting Dr. Halverson and each other in their mutual ministries.

The clergyman on the front lines, fighting the lonely battle for God; the members in the rear areas sending up supplies so that their paid representative can fight harder—this is a parody of the New Testament teaching. It makes the preacher a public relations man for God while the layman serves as the silent if not unseen partner, offhandedly supporting the church but feeling detached.

This may appeal to the selfish, lazy, and materialistic inclination of some church members. It may appeal to that pastor who is getting his ego satisfaction out of his position of religious authority, prestige, and recognition. But it has manifestly abandoned the scriptural principles of Christian witnessing and the mobilization of the church. The layman is out on the front lines *away* from the church building, in his home, office, shop, and club. He is there being God's man in the middle of the everyday life. Such a recognition of religion in life prompted Ellen G. White's exhortation written in 1901.

> *Let the businessman do his business in a way that will glorify his Master because of his fidelity. Let him carry his religion into everything that is done, and reveal to man the Spirit of Christ. Let the mechanic be a diligent and faithful representative of Him who toiled in the lowly walks of life in the cities of Judea. Let everyone who names the name of Christ so work that man by seeing his good works may be led to glorify his Creator and Redeemer.*[8]

The pastor is in the fighting too, but he concentrates on his function of training and equipping the troops for the battle they fight.

"The greatest help that can be given our people is to teach them to work for God"[9] whatever their vocation. Today's pastor will find his life only by losing it in the ministries of his lay people. To push the pastoral analogy, the shepherd doesn't give birth to the sheep. The sheep have the sheep. The shepherd keeps them in shape so they can produce other sheep.

Elton Trueblood feels so deeply about modern confusion between ministry and laity that he has an expressed antipathy when talking about laymen. He prefers to talk about the "ministry of common life." Arnold Come goes a step further by contending that an abrupt abrogation of the pastor-layman distinction is necessary. He appears unrealistically revolutionary in stating,

> *If the mere word "laity" is preserved at all in our ecclesiastical terminology, all the traditional distinction between clergy and laity will re-assert themselves. . . . The church is now ready for, and its God-given mission now demands, the complete abandonment of the clergy-laity distinction.*[10]

A check and balance to this extreme position is projected by H. H. Walz who concludes,

> *At all events, a solution cannot be found by declaring either that there are in principle no laymen in the Church, or that all members of the Church are laymen because they belong to the people of God. This affirmation is no better than doctrinaire.*[11]

I have not yet abandoned the use of the word layman, for it bespeaks a distinction that we have no other term to convey adequately. But I eagerly hope for a better one, a word that would restore the biblical meaning of the laity and describe the facts, yet rebuke the error. Every believer a "lay-minister"—this at least stabs at it.

I happen to be convinced that an awakening will come when we assault our generation with a really mobilized Christian army. In the words of Bishop Paul Moore, "Many persons who have never been remotely interested suddenly catch fire when the church begins to look like a church." In such an army, I am sure, the laymen

constitute the troops. Generals don't win battles by themselves. I confess I'm tempted to identify with Ernie Pyle's comment during the war: "I'm a rabid one-man movement bent on tracking down and stamping out everybody in the world who doesn't fully appreciate the common frontline soldier." Maybe I don't quite want anybody *stamped* out who doesn't appreciate the potential of that common frontline layman, but there is such a thing as Christian *straightening* out.

In the name of the incarnate Christ, we defy the concept that because a man makes his livelihood in the secular world God expects only a partial commitment of his life. In medicine, technology, and science the word layman means the casual, indifferent, uninformed amateur contrasted with the dedicated specialist. If this is what you mean by lay Christianity, then I am unalterably opposed and favor abolishing the word.

An officer served in the military intelligence during the war, specializing in classified documents. After the war he entered a seminary and became a Methodist preacher and later a bishop. Today he has two piles of papers on his desk. One, letters from preachers in his conference marked SACRED; the other from his fellow bishops marked TOP SACRED. For every Christian all life is *top sacred.*

Many people conceive of a graduation of dedication represented by rungs of a ladder: At the top is the missionary, particularly the one who goes overseas in service to the kingdom of God. Just below comes the pastor; then the professional religious worker. Finally, down on the bottom rung of the ladder is the lowly layman sometimes looking as if he is barely on the ladder at all. The layman thus becomes a sort of also-ran Christian whose chief function is to pay the bills for the pastor and fill up the pews for the public services of the church.

This is the age of the spectator. In athletics the participation sports like swimming, tennis, or handball draw modest attention and small crowds. The stadiums sporting events (football, boxing, basketball, etc.), where most of us adults merely watch others perform, draw the big sensational interest and fill the news pages. We ourselves don't play. We only observe others.

But the age of the spectator has marched from the athletic field into our houses. It has conquered the American home. If I chance to

find my younger son studying his lesson by the flickering light of the television screen (though such duplicity is summarily terminated), I say to myself, Who knows, maybe we're raising a whole generation of Abe Lincolns who dig out knowledge under adverse circumstances?

We are a nation of TV addicts, professional watchers. The average American family spends six and one-half hours a day with television. From birth to high school, children spend far more than twice as much time viewing TV as they do in school.[12] From the circles and arrows of the channel patterns in the morning till the bright dot in the middle of the screen fades out at night, we sit there bug-eyed, glued to our chairs, dumb, mute, minds in neutral and emotions in gear. The consequences of such addiction are not difficult to predict: a race of people whose heads are dominated by huge saucer-sized eyes, our brains having shriveled away to nothing, and posteriors unseemly and inordinately grotesque. We will look something like Al Capp's Schmoo—all bottom, no head, just big eyes on top. And that is the end result of the spectator age, the living end.

We can still smile at these possible consequences for watchers instead of participants. But the result in our churches is not humorous. It is cause for lamentation, tears, and repentance. We have developed a spectator Christianity in which few speak and many listen. The New Testament church commenced with Jesus saying to everyone of His followers, the apostles and ordinary believers alike, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel." These words were not spoken in a pastor's conference or a seminary classroom. They were spoken to all His disciples.

> *The dissemination of the truth of God is not confined to a few ordained ministers. The truth is to be scattered by all who claim to be the disciples of Christ.*[13]

But what started a lay movement has deteriorated into what has been acidly but accurately termed a professional pulpitism financed by lay spectators.

One of Christianity's most serious evils may be the sin of "sermon listening." Ellen G. White diagnosed this problem in 1897, when she published *An Appeal to Our Churches in Behalf of Home Missionary Work*

and indicted the church for hearing but not acting.

> *For years they [the church members] have complacently listened to the most solemn, soul-stirring truths, but they have not practised them.*[14]

Further, she warned that

> *The members of the church are trained to rely on preaching, and they do little for Christ. They bear no fruit, but rather increase in selfishness and unfaithfulness. They put their hope in the preacher, and depend on his efforts to keep alive their weak faith.*[15]

"Doers of the word, and not hearers only" provide living sermons daily. The church God intended is a vibrant, redeeming community of compassion, mission, service, witness, love, and worship. It is not a fraternity of fans of the faith.

Professional spectators almost always turn out to be professional critics. The football fan becomes the Monday-morning quarterback; the professional theater attender develops into an amateur Brooks Atkison. The perennial occupant of the baseball bleachers is the expert who knows when to kill the umpire. The professional observer of government who never becomes personally involved is the cynic who informs us learnedly that all politicians are crooks anyway.

Spectator Christianity ultimately becomes critical and contemptuous, cold, cynical, sterile, and unproductive. It observes and criticizes others but never gets committed into life with Jesus Christ. It reminds me of the boy who hitched his dog to a lawn mower. Frequently the dog stopped pulling to bark at the passersby. The boy would say, "Don't mind the dog. He is just barking for an excuse to rest. It is easier to bark than to pull this mower!"

It is easier to criticize than to become involved. The spectator Christian, therefore, is not a Christian even though he sits in church.

Theodore Roosevelt described those timid souls who refuse to become involved.

> *It is not the critic who counts, pointing out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The*

credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again, but knows great enthusiasm and great devotion and spends himself.

The Christian is involved. He cannot avoid it. He is participant in the redemptive mission of God through the church, not a critical onlooker. He is involved in the world, its business, its culture, its hunger, its travail, its tears, because he loves its people. Here he cannot be a spectator either. Jesus said, "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world. . . . As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." John 17:15-18. The layman is sent into the world in exactly the same way Christ was sent—as an agent of redemption. A sure preventive against the spread of the gospel is to isolate its carriers—Christians— from everyone else.

Upon . . . the missionary nurse, the Christian physician, the individual Christian, whether he be merchant or farmer, professional man or mechanic—the responsibility rests upon all. It is our work to reveal to men the gospel of their salvation. Every enterprise in which we engage should be a means to this end.[16]

This question nags at the conscience of those who have a burden to see the layman ministering at the frontier of his vocational world: Will the layman's role be recognized by the church? Hendrick Kraemer is correct in observing:

Notwithstanding the often great, even crucial significance of the laity, they have never become really theologically relevant in the Church's thinking about itself.[17]

However, he may be too pessimistic in stating:

The laity or the body of lay membership of the Church has never in Church history enjoyed the distinction of being treated with care and thoroughness as a matter of specific theological importance or significance.[18]

Continuing the same mood, he writes,

> *A systematic attempt at a theological foundation and motivation of the laity's place and the meaning as inherent in the nature and calling of the Church, had not so far been undertaken. At least, in the non-Roman part of the "Christian" world.*[19]

One of the major emphases, however, at the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954 was a study report on the laity. This was "the first time in the history of the ecumenical movement that the subject 'The Christian in His Vocation' or 'The Laity' has been put before an ecumenical gathering with such great emphasis." [20] And as a result of this interest the significance of the laity for the church is being explored in various countries in Europe—the European Evangelical Academies and the Parishfield Community at Brighton. And in the United States, the Yokefellow Institute in Richmond, Indiana; the Christian Faith-and-Life Community in Austin, Texas; and Christian Men Incorporated in Corpus Chrisrti, Texas. But no Christian denomination, *per se*, is known to be conducting studies and experiments in these areas of interpretation and action on a large scale, though it is obvious they are crucial to the life of every denomination. The great problem is that the theological significance of the church's laity has not been generally understood or practiced among Christian people since the first century.

The general confusion in our time concerning the clergy-laity dichotomy is having a paralyzing effect on the laity finding its role in ministry. Kraemer evaluates the missionary potential of the laity as a "greater and deeper cutting potential than evangelistic 'campaigns' and 'crusades.' " Certainly, Seventh-day Adventists' understanding is that a "finished work" is contingent upon the mobilization of the vast battalion of laymen, for—

> *The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work. and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.*[21]

Denominations other than Adventists are taking seriously the

implications of Christ's commission to His church as it is recorded in Holy Scripture. An Anglican study group has pointedly stated:

> *The charge of Christ at His ascension and the subsequent gift of the Holy Spirit were not confined to the twelve apostles, an ordained ministry, but were given to all the members of the infant church. Thus, upon the* whole *Church of Christ, clergy and laity alike, the duty to witness is equally laid, and the power to witness is equally bestowed.*[22]

The conclusion of this study was predictable:

> *It is not, therefore, as a matter of expediency that we put the mobilization of the laity for the work of evangelism in the very forefront of our recommendations. It is a matter of simple obedience to a Divine command.*[23]

Such recommendations have been vigorously promoted by Seventh-day Adventists from the days of Ellen White to Gottfried Oosterwal's classic publication *Mission: Possible* in 1972 and subsequently reaffirmed in "A Study on the Laity's Role in the Mission of the Church" during the Fall Council of 1976. For the church the acceptance of the full ministry of the laity will be a demonstration of "the proof . . . of love." For the individual Christian it will be showing "my faith by my works." The thrust of Kraemer's word is inescapable, "It is a matter of 'do or die,' 'behave yourself according to the divine privileges and calling in which you stand and are set, or acknowledge your unbelief.' "[24]

A fundamental, biblical basis for understanding the nature of the church and its work must be stated in fresh and persuasive ways. Responsibility for the church's functions must be determined and assigned to the proper individuals. Every Christian is obligated to discover his place within the church's life, within the territory where he lives and where he is engaged occupationally, until "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ." Revelation 11:15.

[1] Elton Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), pp. 9, 35.
[2] J. H. Oldham, *Life Is Commitment* (New York: Association Press, 1952), pp. 97, 98.
[3] World Council of Churches, Preparatory Commission VI, *The Laity—The Christian in His Vocation* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1954), p. 1.
[4] Franklin M. Segler, *A Theology of Church and Ministry* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1906), p. 75.
[5] James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 8, p. 766.
[6] Hendrick Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 49.
[7] Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 110.
[8] Ellen G. White, "The Use of Talents," *The Bible Echo*, vol. 16, no. 24, p. 372; quoted in *Christian Service*, p. 27.
[9] Ellen. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 19.
[10] Arnold Come, *Agents of Reconciliation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 99.
[11] Hans Herman Walz, "Lay, Theology of the Laity, Layman's Work (A lexicographical study)," *Ecumenical Review*, July 1954, p. 472.
[12] "T.V. Violence Is Harmful," *Reader's Digest*, April 1973, p. 37.
[13] Ellen G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 68.
[14] Ellen. G. White, Manuscript 151, 1897.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p. 48.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[20] W. A. Visser't Hooft, ed., *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1949), p. 153.
[21] Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p. 136.
[22] Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 352.
[23] Church of England, prepared by the Archbishop's Commission on Evangelism, *Towards the Conversion of England* (Westminster, England: Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly, 1945), p. 39.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[25] Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p. 171.

The Continuing Education Unit •

Assignment

1. *The author argues that "ministers are laymen." What evidence does he cite in defense of this position?*

2. *What is the biblical meaning of* laos? *How is the word "layman" understood in the secular world? How is the "laity" understood in the traditional ecclesiastical terminology?*

3. *Analyze your pastoral style. Do you have a congregation of "ministers" or "spectators"? Describe a strategy you could implement to avoid the latter.*

Chapter 2

They Went Every Where Preaching

The late Dr. W. R. Inge, the reputed "gloomy dean" of St. Paul's in London, was once invited to write a manuscript on the life of Christ for a series of handbooks published by a well-known firm. He sent his answers on a postcard to this effect: "As there are no materials for a life of Christ I regret that I cannot comply with your request." [1]

The same paucity of information exists in our attempts to define the role and function of the laity, utilizing the meager sources available from the period following the death of the apostles. Notwithstanding the extent of our ignorance, it is unmistakably clear that the church of the first century was a genuinely missionary church. Even before the last apostle finished his work, the light which rose in Palestine had struck the three great peninsulas of Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy; in another generation it had reached almost the whole coast of the Mediterranean, then the great highway of the nations. It followed in the track of the Jewish dispersion—wherever there was a Hebrew colony, there was also a Christian church. Merchants brought back from their journeys the news of the Pearl of great price. The messengers of peace followed in the track of the Roman armies, and liberated captives carried to their homes the tidings of the new religion which was pervading the empire. Everywhere, from the workshop to the palace, were found devoted men working quietly yet earnestly for the furtherance of the gospel. By the end of the first century, Christianity had moved up from the

lower strata of the Roman population. It had survived the initial attempt to suppress it and was beginning to infiltrate into the most noble families, even into the imperial family itself. There is reason to believe that one of the important women in the empire, niece of Domitian and mother of two sons designated to succeed him as emperor, was a Christian. Says Harnack:

> *What a change! Between fifty and sixty years after Christianity reached Rome, a daughter of the Emperor embraces the faith, and thirty years after the fearful persecutions of Nero, the presumptive heirs to the throne were brought up in a Christian house.*[2]

The early church had few great preachers like Apollos and Barnabas. But it "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) because it could "count on the anonymous and unchronicled witness of all the faithful."[3] The church at Antioch was established by volunteer missionaries who fled Jerusalem after the liquidation of Stephen (Acts 11:19-21). But these were far from being the only ones. When Paul came to Rome, he was welcomed by believers. How they got there we are not told, for over all this, time has cast the mantle of obscurity.

What is clear is that every Christian was a witness. Following the persecutions in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4) "the scattered Christians went abroad throughout Judea and Samaria; *nolens volens* they acted as missionaries."[4] Where there were Christians, there would be a living, burning faith, and before long an expanding Christian community.

Faced with the alternative of death, some of the early Christians denied who were expected to confess, but some confessed who were expected to deny. A play was enacted before the Emperor Diocletian in mockery of the Christians. One of the actors was clothed in white in order to be baptized. "I feel so heavy," he cried, and lay down on the stage as if ill. "I want to be to be made light."

How are we to do it?" asked his companion. "Shall we shave you like carpenters?"

"Idiots. I want to be a Christian and fly up to God."

Then they sent for a sham minister, who began to use some of the Christian words. Now it happened that the actor when a small boy had been brought up in a Christian home in Gaul (France). When

these words were said in sport and all the people were laughing, he remembered his mother and father and what they had taught him as a lad, and he shouted out: "I want to receive the grace of Christ. I want to be born again." The people laughed louder, but the actor said to the emperor, "Illustrious emperor and all you people who have laughed loudly, believe me; Christ is Lord." When Diocletian learned that he meant it, he caused him to be tortured. His sides were torn with claws and burned with torches, but he kept on saying: "There is no king but Christ, whom I have seen and worship. For Him I will die a thousand times. I am sorry for my sin and for becoming so late a soldier of the true King."

In later times great churches were much set on claiming apostolic origin, but, in point of fact, few if any of the great churches were really founded by the apostles. Nothing is more notable than the anonymity of these early missionaries. In the second century there were three outstanding centers of Christian life in the Mediterranean—Antioch, Rome, and Alexandria. Luke, author of Acts, fails to mention a single name of those pioneers who laid the foundation of the church at Antioch. Peter and Paul may have *organized* the church in Rome. They certainly did not *found* it. The earliest Christians of whose sojourn in Rome we have any authentic account are Aquila and Priscilla. Acts 18:2. They were Paul's companions. And of the foundation of the church of Alexandria we know nothing at all—neither when nor whence nor by whom. St. Mark was regarded as its founder and first bishop. Dionysius, who became bishop in 246, was one of the most famous men of the age in which fell the Decian persecution.

So it was that Christianity in three centuries had penetrated the greater part of the Roman Empire and even in some cases passed beyond its boundaries. We ought not perhaps to understand quite literally the rhetorical expression of early apologists when they tell us that the Christians, the growth of yesterday, had filled the courts, the camps, the council chambers, even the very palaces of the Caesar;[5] but it is clear that in the time of Constantine, if the Christians did not form the most numerous portion of his subjects, they were the most powerful; in the decline of Roman patriotism no other body of men was left that was as numerous and widely spread as the Christian church, animated by one spirit and subject to one rule. In the words of Bishop Neil:

That was the greatest glory of the Church of those days. The Church was the body of Christ, indwelt by his Spirit; and what Christ had begun to do, that the Church would continue to do, through all the days and unto the uttermost parts of the earth until his unpredictable but certain coming again.[6]

Eusebius Pamphilii, bishop of Caesarea (A.D. 315), attests to the fact that Christianity penetrated into every corner of the Roman Empire.

Thus, then, under a celestial influence and co-operation, the doctrine of the Saviour, like the rays of the sun, quickly irradiated the whole world. Presently, in accordance with divine prophecy, the sound of his inspired evangelists and apostles had gone throughout all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. Throughout every city and village, like a replenished barn floor, churches were rapidly found abounding, and filled with members from every people.[7]

If asked to give reason for this incredible expansion of "the doctrine of the Saviour," Eusebius would testify that many "anonymous and unchronicled" witnesses took the place of the apostles.

These, as the holy disciples of such men, also built up the churches where the foundations had been previously laid in every place by the apostles. They augmented the means of promulgating the gospel more and more, and spread the seeds of salvation of the heavenly kingdom throughout the world far and wide.[8]

Contrary to this third-century witness, the lay members of the ancient churches were *not* conspicuous for sustained missionary activity either at home or as itinerants. Latourette writes:

It would probably be a misconception to think of every Christian of the first three hundred years after Christ as aggressively seeking converts. Such pictures as we have of these early communities in the New Testament . . . warrant no such conclusion. In none of them does any hint occur that the rank and file of Christians

regarded it as even a minor part of their duty to communicate their faith to others.[9]

But if none arose having the same dedications as the first apostles and evangelists, the fact remains that the expansion of Christianity in the hostile environment of the first three centuries, and its eventual conquest of the seats of political authority, has ever since been considered so phenomenal as to be one of the clearest proofs of the divine credentials of this new people, this third race under God, neither Jew nor barbarian.

Despite Latourette's stricture, and recognizing the meager documentation, I feel that the witness in life and death of unnamed multitudes of lay members contributed as much to the spread of Christianity as the writing and preaching and the valiant martyrdom of their more articulate clerical leaders. Concerning the latter, one of the best known is the witness and martyrdom of Polycarp, the aged bishop of Smyrna, early in 156. Polycarp was a venerable figure, forming a last link with those who had seen Christ in the flesh, for he had sat at the feet of John, the beloved disciple. A letter written by the Smyrnaean church shortly after his martyrdom tells how, during an outbreak of anti-Christian activity in the province of Asia, the mob raised an outcry for Polycarp.

The reason for the hostility toward the Christians must be understood. We must be fair and try to imagine what caused the Christians to appear heretical to the Romans. The Romans worshipped their emperor and burned incense on his altar. Because the Christians desisted, they were branded "atheists" not accepting the reality of the "gods." The Christians absented themselves from the theater because the plays were cruel and coarse. They would not patronize gladiatorial combats, in which the Romans, merely for the amusement of the crowd, forced prisoner of war and slaves to fight each other to the death. The Christians would not go to the law court because the apostle Paul had said that when Christians quarreled they should settle things among themselves. One might have supposed that the Christian could see no harm in going to a hospital. Nor would he, except that the pagan hospitals were under the protection of the god Aesculapius, and while the sick man lay in his bed, the priest went down the aisle chanting to the god. One would

have assumed that the Christian could have no difficulty in going to school. Nor would he, except that the schoolbooks told stories about the pagan gods—not just as stories, but as true.

Even a Christian sculptor found himself in difficulties, for he would almost surely be called on to make idols for the pagans. I recall seeing a funeral stone outside a Roman catacomb, where a Christian sculptor is shown making lions' heads. On another stone he has carved whales. Such sculpturing was perfectly legitimate, except lions and whales by themselves were not easy to sell. The pagans wanted, in addition, carvings of their gods. But when these were ordered, the Christian sculptor had to say No.

Strange tales circulated about the Christians intensified the bitterness toward them. The Emperor Nero charged them with setting fire to Rome, and many were summarily nailed to crosses, lacquered with pitch and burned as torches in his gardens. In a letter from a governor in the provinces to the Emperor Trojan, the charge of cannibalism was stated. The story started because the Lord's Supper was practiced in secret. The word spread that in these "secret meetings" somebody was being eaten. Jesus had said at the Last Supper: "This bread is My body. This wine is My blood." "Very well, then," said the pagans, "the Christians must be eating and drinking human flesh and blood."

One can see why the pagans thought of the Christians with such disfavor, even as enemies of mankind. If allowed to live, they would surely stir up the gods. The cattle would die; the Tiber would overflow its banks. They must go. "Let's throw them to the lions!"

Polycarp was a case of this sort. A police squad went to fetch him, and the police captain—whose own sister happened to be a Christian—probably wishing to spare the old man the indignities which awaited him, talked to him as they rode together into the city, "Why, what harm is there in saying, 'Caesar is Lord' and offering incense and saving yourself?" But Polycarp refused to listen to his plea and went on to the arena, where the proconsul of Asia in person tried to persuade him. "Have respect for your age," he said; "swear by the divinity of Caesar; repent and say, 'Away with the atheists.' " "Away with the atheists," said Polycarp solemnly, waving his hand toward the pagan crowd. But the proconsul pressed him further: "Take the oath and I will let you go; revile Christ." Then the old man

made his noble confession: "Eighty-six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my Saviour and King?" Further argument proved equally fruitless, and Polycarp was sent to the stake, having "scorned the beasts" to which the proconsul threatened to consign him. His dying prayer reflects his awareness that his sacrifice would be another witness to his faith.

> *Lord God Almighty, Father of Jesus Christ, I bless Thee that Thou didst deem me worthy of this hour that I shall take a part among the martyrs in the cup of Christ to rise again with the Holy Spirit. May I be an acceptable sacrifice. I praise Thee, I bless Thee, I glorify Thee through Jesus Christ.*

All Christians of this first era were aware of being not only a third race, the peculiar people of the Lord of Hosts, but also a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) with a divine commission to bring salvation to the world. Hence the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers emerges as a basic concept for the interpretation of the laymen in the ancient church and their mission.

Again it requires underscoring, when the missionary role of the ancient layman comes under scrutiny, that our deductions must be restrained because of the scarcity of documented information. Therefore, we shall examine *all* the functions of the ancient layman, content with an occasional glimpse of specifically missionary lay activity as it may open up for us in the sparse documentation.

Our understanding of the laity will be shaped not primarily in terms of ordination and the lack thereof, or of theological education and the relative want thereof, but rather in terms of the church gathered for worship, instruction, and deliberation over against the equally important "church" diffused or scattered or seeded in the workday world as leaven in the lump (not as wheat among the tares!). On this view even the ordained cleric is, in a sense, in his action as husbandman and citizen a "laic"—layperson. As it turns out, however, we shall not be able to sight the role of the laity in the gathered community (*ekklēsia*), as distinguished from the laity scattered in the world (*diaspora*), because our largely clerical sources give us relatively little about laymen outside the meeting! The

historian R. W. Southern had similar problems when he probed the period from A.D. 600 to A.D. 1000, and he admitted:

> *The first thing to emphasize about the religion of the laity during this period is the extent of our ignorance. Almost nothing written by a layman has come down to us; and even when we can be sure that our documents contain expressions of lay intentions, some allowance must be made for the fact that a monastic hand has almost always prescribed their form and given definition to their thought.*[10]

In this chapter we shall limit our sketch of the evolution of the layman in *ekklēsia* and in *diaspora* from Pentecost to the end of the persecutions. The recognization of the Christianity by Constantine, as for so much else in church history, clearly *ends* a period in the evolution of the laity as a true order with its own distinctive liturgical, constitutional, and witnessing role; and marks the climax of the gradual differentiation of the "people of God" into laity and clergy, and the accompanying atrophy of lay functions.

Before going on to discuss further the nature and functions of the pre-Constantinian laity, we must first ascertain the theological conception of the rank of the layman in the church.

Clement of Rome was the first to use the term *lay man*. About A.D. 95, concluding his brief reference to participants in the liturgy with the assertion that "the lay man is bound by the lay ordinances."[11] It must be understood that Clement in assigning the "layman" a subordinate role in liturgy is reflecting the general Greek usage of the word "lay" and turning it in a specifically Christian direction. The Greek usage up to this time was used in its adjectival form to distinguish the mass of the people from their leaders. In translations of the Old Testament Hebrew into Greek it was commonly used to distinguish the secular from the sacred. Clement used the term in such a way as to insist upon the liturgical competence of the layman, however limited it might be. However, let it be reaffirmed, regardless of the humble role of the layman, that he *is* from the beginning a *participant* in liturgical praise of the Creator and the Redeemer and not merely a spectator in the thanksgiving offerings of bread and wine.

Clement further accented the growing distinctiveness between

the congregation and its leaders by differentiating between the responsibilities of four orders in the conduct of the liturgy: the "high priest" (bishops?), the priests (elders?), the Levites (deacons?), and the laity. A short time later, probably in the first or second decade of the second century, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch who described himself as also called "Theophoros" ("bearer of God"), went so far as to say that you cannot have a church without bishops (overseers of local congregations), presbyters (officers of a local congregation), and deacons.[12] He further states that the bishop, or someone he authorizes, must celebrate the Eucharist, and further that he must authorize baptisms and love feasts.[13] It should be noted, in defense of this delegate authority, that one of the reasons for this setting up of authoritative officers was Ignatius's concern that the church not be corrupted by heresy. Such heresies as Gnosticism and Docetism (the latter considering the humanity and sufferings of the earthly Christ as apparent rather than real), as reflected in John's Gospel and Epistles, were already of some consequence; and due to a generally unlearned congregation, the leaders had as one of their chief functions the preservation of pure doctrine as well as keeping the church from schism.

By the time of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons in the late second century, the stratification had become clearer, so that he writes:

> *Therefore it is right to obey the presbyters in the Church, those, that is, who possess the succession from the apostles, as I have shown, who, together with their succession in the episcopate, received the sure gift of truth according to the good pleasure of the Father.*[14]

Even so, Irenaeus seems to have had no intention of establishing a completely sacerdotal view of the ministry, for in another place of the same work he asserts, "I have shown that all the disciples of the Lord are Levites and priests."[15] Shortly thereafter, in the early third century, Cyprian further widened the division between clergy and laity when he clearly set forth the divine institution of the episcopacy.[16]

By the mid-third century the bishops had assumed supervisory power over the lesser clergy, and the clergy had assumed more

control over the laity. To be sure, there could still be a lay teacher such as Origen was during the early part of his life—though it is significant that he was removed from his position three times by Bishop Demetrius, largely because of alleged insubordination, and he finally accepted ordination, perhaps to make his status more secure. George Williams's statement about Origen indicates what was happening, or perhaps had already happened, in the church: "Origen was, in a sense, the last of the Christian charismatic and independent teachers."[17] Perhaps Seeberg is also correct when he concludes that with Callistus, the bishop of Rome in the early third century who assumed the right to declare the forgiveness of sins, the idea of the church as the holy people of God came to an end—at least in Rome.[18]

Let us now return to Clement's interpretation of First Peter 2:9, 10: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, . . . that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God [*laos theou*]." Clement called this passage the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Not only are Christians the new Israel, but also the only authorized or effectual priesthood. Corporately they are the successors of the priesthood in old Israel, with the right of direct access to God through the unbloody or spiritual sacrifice of thanksgiving made possible through Christ. Justin Martyr, a Christian apologist of the second century who was the first Christian thinker to reconcile the claims of faith and reason, restated the principle of the priesthood of all believers when he wrote:

> *Being inflamed by the word of His [Christ's] calling, we are the true high-priestly race of God.*[19]

The Athenian apologist Aristides went all the way with astonishing specificity when he asserted that all Christians could trace their genealogy from the High Priest, Jesus Christ.[20]

Baptism was the occasion for the laics "ordination" to ministry by the accompanying anointing (unction). In the baptismal unction catechumens were enrolled in the "royal priesthood," for it was likewise by anointment that Israel's kings and priests had been consecrated. Tertullian, an African church father and the first

Christian theologian to write in Latin, stresses the priestly character of baptismal anointing when he writes:

> *Thereupon as we come forth from the laver, we are anointed with the holy unction, just as in the Old Dispensation priests were anointed with oil from the horn of the altar. Whence the term Christus, from the chrism which is the anointing, a name that is now appropriated to the Lord.*[21]

Tertullian held that baptismal "ordination" qualified the recipient of grace to baptize in his turn, for "what is equally received can be equally given."[22] At the same time he argued for the sake of order that what was lawful might not be expedient, that lay *men* only should perform the sacrament and only in the absence of a cleric, and that lay *women* should never presume to baptize in any circumstance. But he admitted—with some distaste—that some women ventured "to teach, to debate, to exorcise, to promise cures, probably even to baptize."[23]

On the prophetic role as well as on the royalty and the priesthood of every baptismally anointed layman, coheir with Christ, the divinely anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, Chrysostom, the noted fourth century "doctor of the church" and bishop of Constantinople, is particularly precise:

> *So also art thou thyself made king and priest and prophet in the laver (of baptism): a king, having dashed to the earth all the deeds of wickedness and slain thy sin; a priest, in that thou offerest thyself to God, and in having sacrificed thy body, and in being thyself slain also, for if we died with Him saith he Paul, (II Tim. 2:11), shall we not also live with Him; finally a prophet, knowing what shall be and being inspired of God and sealed. For as upon soldiers a seal, so is also the Spirit put upon the faithful. . . . Knowing then all this, and considering our high status, let us exhibit a life worthy of grace.*[24]

Besides his ordination as royal priest, the layman in some quarters, notably in the Alexandrian tradition, could aspire to the status of the ideal Gnostic, whose gradual post-baptismal

illumination and growth in inner discipline enabled him to go through the spiritual grades of deacon, presbyter, and bishop.

To sum up, the layman in the apostolic age had an indelible "ordination" as priest, prophet, and king, no longer in bondage to the world, but freed through Christ to know the truth, to exercise sovereignty over the inner temple of self and to join in the corporate thanksgiving of the redeemed.

And in this period what were the laity's rights and duties—liturgical, constitutional, disciplinary, charitable, and evangelical?

We have already quoted Tertullian on the lawfulness of the lay performance of baptism in the absence of a cleric. Long before him the oldest church manual of discipline, the *Didache* ("Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"), assumed that any Christian, including a laic, might baptize provided he fasted just like the candidate, "for one or two days beforehand."[25] The fourth-century Ambrosiaster, looking back on the early days, says "everyone baptized";[26] and his contemporary Jerome remarked that, "if necessary so be, even laics may and frequently do baptize."[27]

It should be added for completeness that in the baptism and anointing of female catechumens, widows and deaconesses who were essentially *lay* person had from the beginning taken an active part in helping the bishop or presbyter in all but the anointment of the head.

The laity, by virtue of their baptism, we have noted, became participants in the royal priesthood and accordingly could baptize in the absence of a cleric and could also perform the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Justin Martyr in talking with Trypho the Jew specifies the role of the laic therein:

> *We are now the true high priestly race of God. . . . God therefore has long since borne witness that all sacrifices offered by His name, which Jesus the Christ enjoyed, namely, at the eucharistia of the bread and the cup which are presented in every place on earth by the Christians, are well pleasing to Him. But those that are made by you and by means of those priests of yours He utterly rejects.*[28]

What was the constitutional role of the laity? The choosing (in Acts 1:15) of a successor to Judas in the presence of precisely *"one hundred and twenty* of the multitude," and (in Acts 6:5) the choosing

of the deacons, also by the whole multitude (though this narrative need not necessarily be an etiological account for the beginning of the diaconate), served as a pattern and apostolic sanction for the lay election of clerics throughout the apostolic period. The *Didache* confirms this procedure; and Hippolytus, a second century theologian, in the *Apostolic Tradition* (formerly known as the "Egyptian Church Order") records that the bishop is still "elected by all the people." [29]

So well known was the power of Christian laics to approve or disapprove their leaders that even the Emperor Alexander Severus (222-235), who was sufficiently well informed to know about their golden rule and who desired to erect a temple to Christ as one of the gods, adopted from the Christians the practice of posting the names of his nominees to public office for the sake of securing public testimony as to their character. He said it would be a "monstrous" thing if such a precaution should be omitted in the case of provincial governors to whom were committed the "lives and fortunes of men."

The laity also participated with the presbyters and bishops in the corporate discipline of the church. Admission to the communion of saints, of course, was effected by baptism. Dismissal of the faithless and the wayward members, an originally unforeseen disciplinary action, as well as constitutional procedures for the readmittance of the penitent, developed slowly. Paul commanded by letter (1 Corinthians 5) that the Corinthian church assembled disfellowship a particularly "diseased" member, consigning him to Satan. Authorization for such communal action had its pattern prescribed previously in Matthew 18:15-20. Eventually, of course, the apostolic-episcopal pattern—in which the pastor, through the sacrament of penance, assumed responsibility for the excommunication and readmission of the subordinate members of the church—came to prevail over the communal action.

Although the clerical control of disciplinary action comes to prevail, a sample of the strong persistence of the communal voice in constitutional matters is evidenced by Polycarp of Smyrna, who gave clear indication that the whole church, and more specifically the laity with their presbyters, have the right to depose and excommunicate not only a lay person but also one of their presbyters. Apparently a certain Valens, and his wife, had fallen into error in connection with

defalcation of the communal funds. Polycarp urges the whole church to restore the couple if theirs proves to be a true repentance.[30]

The laymen of this era also distinguished themselves in Christian service. Luke describes in Acts (2:44; 4:32 to 5:11) the communalism of the saints, and the Jewish-Christian Ebionites longest retained the ideal of the community of goods. Although the pre-Constantinian church for the most part abandoned the absolute community of goods, they continued to recognize the community of things made holy in the fellowship of the liturgy. The liturgical offerings of olives, cheese, and oil mentioned in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus had as their destination beyond the altar the poor and the needy of the parish.

The charitable acts are recorded of a later date and in another tradition as Tertullian describes the voluntary character of the offering for the "common chest":

> *Though we have a kind of money-chest, it is not for the collection of official fees, as if ours were a religion of fixed prices. Each of us puts in a small donation on the appointed day in each month, or when he chooses, and only if he chooses, and only if he can; for no one is compelled and the offering is voluntary. This is as it were the deposit fund of kindness. For we do not pay out money from this fund to spend on feasts or drinking parties or inelegant sprees, but to pay for the nourishment and burial of the poor, to support boys and girls who are orphan or destitute; and old people who are confined to the house; and those who have been shipwrecked; and any who are in the mines, or banished to islands, or in prison, or are pensioners because of their confession, provided they are suffering because they belong to the followers of God.*[31]

The altruism of the churches was recognized among the Gentile communities. Dionysius of Alexandria describes the nursing and burying of those felled by a plague, and he contrasts the action of the "presbyters, deacons, and many of the laity transferring death to themselves" to succor others, with the ignoble behavior of the pagans, who left even their closest loved ones in selfish haste.[32]

Justin Martyr, among many others, refers to the converting example of Christian lives.

For we can prove this even in the case of many who once were of your way of thinking, but have changed their violent and tyrannical disposition, being overcome either by the constancy which they have witnessed in their neighbors' lives, or by the extraordinary forbearance they have observed in their fellow-travelers when defrauded, or by the honesty of those with whom they transacted business.[33]

One recalls a later writer who recognized the irresistible force of kindness personified in deed as an unequaled evangelistic agency when she wrote:

If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.[34]

From this tribute to lay workers in time of plague we turn to the quite specialized religio-medical practice of exorcism in the ancient Church and the role of the laity therein. Exorcism and the renunciation of the devil and all his works was an integral part of the baptismal rite, and the bishop pronounced the formulas. But besides this solemn, sacramental exorcism there was the kindred therapeutic exorcism carried on by charismatic and common lay practitioners. The healing ministry of prayer to Christ to drive out devils of insanity and sickness on the apostolic pattern is briefly referred to sickness on the apostolic pattern is briefly referred to by Origen, who says, "It is mostly people quite untrained who do this work."

Irenaeus was impressed with the multiplicity of gifts being exercised both within and without his congregations.

Wherefore, also, those who are in truth His disciples, receiving grace from Him, do in His name perform [miracles], so as to promote the welfare of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some do certainly and truly drive out devils, so that those who have thus been cleansed from evil spirits frequently both believe [in Christ], and join themselves to the Church. . . . And what shall I say more? It is not possible to name the number of

> *the gifts which the Church, [scattered] throughout the whole world, has received from God . . . and which she exerts day by day for the benefit of the Gentiles, neither practising deception upon them, nor taking any reward from them. For as she has received freely from God, freely also does she minister [to others].*[35]

Effective cures were among the most convincing credentials of Christians seeking to convert their pagan neighbors. To the role of the laity in the communication of the gospel by example and precept we now turn.

As we turn from good works and the exercise of discipline to the communication of the tradition by missionary evangelism, instruction, and teaching, we find that here too, after a period of rather full participation with the ordained clergy, the role of the laity declines, until it is virtually extinguished by the opening of the era of the great councils.

Originally, "everyone taught" the redeeming faith that was his, says Ambrosiaster, looking back into the period before the bishops as successors of the apostles came along to exercise the magisterial function in the church.[36] To the compiler of the *Didache,* for example, the divinely called prophet and teacher is clearly to be supported by the laity. The *Apostolic Constitutions,* a collection of ecclesiastical law dating from the latter half of the fourth century, reflects the coming to a close of the tradition of the charismatic teacher when it grudgingly orders that, "even if a teacher is a laic, still if he be skilled in the word and reverent in habit, let him teach."[37] In between the *Didache* and the *Constitutions* we may place the transitional emergence of the teaching order as the *choros* intermediate between the clergy and the laity. Justin Martyr and Origen were notable members of the "choir of teachers."

Justin Martyr, born of pagan parents in the first century, studied everything in philosophy from Stoicism to Platonism and finally embraced Christianity in A.D. 130. He taught at Ephesus but later moved to Rome and opened a Christian school. Twenty-five years later, during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, he and some of his disciples were denounced as Christians; and upon refusing to sacrifice to the "gods" they were scourged and beheaded. Teaching and preaching were an accepted part of Justin Martyr's role. Origen,

a century later, did not fare so well. On a visit to Palestine he was asked by the bishops of Caesarea to preach. As he was only a layman, this was regarded as a breach of the Alexandrian ecclesiastical discipline, in consequence of which he was recalled by his bishop, Demetrius, and rebuked for preaching and teaching, on invitation, in the presence of the bishops. In good grace he accepted the scolding and for the next twelve years devoted himself without interruptions —like teaching assignments—to literary activities. Then in 230 he went again to Palestine, where he was ordained priest by the same bishops who had invited him to preach on his previous visit. Again the pompous Demetrius exerted his ecclesiastical displeasure by not only depriving him of his chair in Alexandria and defrocking him, but also by sending him off into exile, not, as later opponents asserted, because of doctrinal offenses but for the irregularity of his ordination. Again he found sanctuary in Caesarea, where he established a school which enjoyed fame, and where he continued his literary work and devoted himself to preaching. Later (250) during the persecutions of the Emperor Decius, he was imprisoned and subjected to prolonged torture, which he survived only a few years.

Incidentally, Origen's bishop, Demetrius, also rebuked the responsible bishops (of Jerusalem and Caesarea) for permitting a laic to preach and to sit in the episcopal *cathedra*, the chair in which the bishop sat in order to decide disputes. (Later when the chair was placed in a church, that church was called a cathedral.) The bishops' self-defense is preserved by Eusebius—bishop of Caesarea and often called the "father of church history" because of his celebrated work *Ecclesiastical History*—in a document suggesting that such usage of the chair, despite the bishops' magnanimity, was indeed on the way out. They report that Demetrius added, in his letter to them:

> *Such a thing had never been heard of, nor taken place hitherto, that laics should preach in the presence of bishops; though I do not know how he comes to say what is evidently not true. For instance, where there are found persons suited to help the brethren, they also are invited to preach to the people by the holy bishops, as for example . . . in Iconium Paulinus by Celsus, and in Synnada Theodore by Atticus, our blessed brother bishops. And it is likely that this thing happens in other places also without out knowing it.*[38]

More significant than the feats of such learned laics as Origen was the role of the unnamed and less tutored laity who seem to have participated rather actively, not only in the disciplinary sessions of the church, but also in the synods convened for the clarification of the faith and practice received. Our most interesting and conclusive material happens to center in actions connected with Origen and more generally with Egypt.

In a stenographically recorded papyrus on the debate of Origen with Heraclides we have firsthand evidence of the modest but essential part played by the simple laity in doctrine formulation; for we can literally overhear the great (essentially lay) theologian himself solemnly asseverate in an Arabian synod (called to deal with problems of the Trinity and the final resurrection):

> *Accordingly, with the permission of God and secondly of the bishops, and thirdly of the presbyters and of the* laity, *I say again what I think on the subject.*

Then after summarizing his position he again takes cognizance of the laity:

> *If you agree to these statements, they also with the solemn testimony of the* laity *shall be made legally binding and established.*[39]

It appears that at the end of the synod the doctrine formulations were formally set forth, the whole assembly, including the laity, ratifying them. Moreover, the laity probably had a good deal to do with initiating the original petitions which occasioned the synod.

The doctrinal competence of the laity in the sense of their feeling responsible for an explicit faith and of having the right to demand clarification on disputed points of tradition and Scripture, comes out vividly again in a letter of Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria preserved by Eusebius. A certain Nepos, on the basis of the book of Revelation, had been teaching a rather fleshly millennium. The church's view of the kingdom and the place of Revelation in the still incompletely clarified canon of New Testament Scriptures was thus at stake. The bishop tells how he went out to the center of the affected region, Arsinoe, to discuss the whole problem reasonably and with charity:

> *Now when I came to the (area) of Arsinoe, where, as thou knowest, this doctrine of Neops had long been prevalent, so that schisms and defections of whole churches had taken place, I called together the presbyters and (lay) teachers of the brethren in the village—there were present also such of the brethren as wished; and I urged them to hold the examination of the question publicly.*

Then follows a description of a friendly give-and-take. Dionysius expresses—

> *Greatest admiration for . . . their firmness, love of the truth, facility in following an argument, and intelligence, as we propounded in order and with forbearance the questions, the difficulties raised and the points of agreement, on the one hand (their) refusing to cling obstinately and at all costs (even though they were manifestly wrong) to opinions once held; and on the other hand (their) not shirking the counter-arguments, but as far as possible attempting to grapple with the questions in hand and master them.*[40]

Dionysius goes on to admit he could not always understand the book of Revelation and acknowledges further that "if convinced by reason" on the part of these nimble-witted and earnest presbyters, lay teachers, and simple laics, he was not "ashamed to change our (episcopal) opinions and give assent."

Besides their teaching in catechetical classes and their limited but significant doctrinal comptetence in synod, the laity were also engaged in the direct communication of the gospel, each believer on his own, and not infrequently in the course of his or her martyrdom.

Harnack makes this observation:

> *The most numerous and successful missionaries of the Christian religion were not the regular teachers but Christians themselves, by dint of their loyalty and their courage. How little we hear of the former and their results! how much of the effects of the latter! Above all, every confessor and martyr was a missionary; he not merely confirmed the faith of those who were already won, but also enlisted new members by his testimony and his death.*[41]

There was the Gallic slave girl, Blandina, whose moving story is

told by eyewitnesses in Vienna in A.D. 177, and their letter was reproduced almost in full by Eusebius.[42] She was a recent convert, and her mistress was fearful not for their lives, but lest Blandina should draw back in the face of death. She need not have worried. Tortured with fiendish ingenuity, she quietly maintained, "I am a Christian woman, and nothing wicked happens among us." Put on the gridiron, thrown to the wild beasts in the arena, forced to watch the murder of her Christian companions, impaled upon a stake, this remarkable girl, "weak and despised though she was, had put on the great and invincible athlete, Christ, and through many contests gained the crown of immortality." She was finally dispatched by being put in a net and tossed by a bull; but not before she had nerved a fifteen-year-old boy, Ponticus, to martyrdom by her example and had prayed lovingly and persistently for her persecutors. If women like this were at all typical throughout the varied social strata of the church, it is hardly surprising that the gospel overcame the enormous obstacles in its way and began to capture the Roman Empire.

Several other examples will serve to reinforce the penetrating testimony of lay witness. Papylas, presumably a lay member of the church in Pergamon, during the persecution under Marcus Aurelius proudly addressed the interrogating proconsul who had asked whether he had any children: "In every district and city I have children in God. Yes, and many of them, thanks to God!"[43] The Phyrgian physician Alexander, renowned in Gaul for his love toward God and his boldness of speech, "for he was not without a share of the apostolic gift," encouraged the confessors and then was himself seized and taken with them into the amphitheater.[44] The martyred centurion Marcellus (died 298), in court-martial under the prefect of the praetorian guard, but his Christian "soldierly" example in responding to the enraged examiner, converted the court stenographer, Cassian, who threw down his notebook in disgust and followed the Christian way.[45]

Of the missionary teachers, most of them in his day laics rather than clerics, Origen has the following description:

> *As far as they are able, Christian leave no stone unturned to spread the faith in all parts of the world. Some, in fact, have done the work of going round not only cities but even villages and country cottages*

to make others also pious towards God. One could not say that they did this for the sake of wealth, since sometimes they do not even accept money for the necessities of life, and if ever they are compelled to do so by want in this respect, they are content with what is necessary and no more, even if several people are willing to share with them and to give them more than they need.[46]

But a more eloquent observer is Celsus, the philosophical foe of Christianity, to the refutation of whose charges Origen devoted a major work. Celus's disdainful caricature of the little people (men, women and children) ever ready for a martyr's death, who carried the gospel into the recesses of society and who, though nameless and dispised by such cultured and informed observers as this philosophical publicist, probably did more even than bishops, apologists, and theologians to prepare for the sudden conquest of the Greco-Roman world in the fourth century. Celsus writes:

In private houses we see wool-workers, cobblers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels, who would not dare to say anything at all in front of their elders and more intelligent masters. But when they get hold of children in private and some little old women with them, they let out some astounding statements as, for example, that they must not pay any attention to their father and school-teachers, but must obey them; they say that these talk nonsense and have no understanding, and that in reality they neither know nor are able to do anything good, but are taken up with the mere empty chatter. But they alone, they say, know the right way to live, and if the children would believe them, they would become happy and make their home happy as well.[47]

Disparagingly, a philosophical writer here describes better than he knew how in fact it was the little people, the lay men and women of the post-apostolic period whose spontaneous witness accounts for the astonishing spread of Christianity.

The eighteenth-century anti-Christian historian Edward Gibbon recognized it was intrinsic to Christianity to evangelize, and he affirmed: "It became the sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends and relations the blessing which he had

received." [48] "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily." Acts 16:5.

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[1] A similar story was told by Dean Inge himself in the *Evening Standard* (London) of Aug. 14, 1944.

[2] Adolf Harnack, *Princeton Review*, 1 (1878), p. 269.

[3] Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Aylesbury Books, Hazell Watson & Viney Ltd., 1971), p. 24.

[4] Adolf Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Son's, 1904), vol. 1, pp. 57, 58.

[5] See: Tertullian, *Apologet*, 37; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho*, c. 117; Irenaeus, *Haeres*, I. qo; Arnobius, *Dis. adv. Gentes*, I. 16.

[6] Neill, *A History of Christian Missions*, p. 25.

[7] Eusebius, *An Ecclesiastical Histor*, trans. Rev. C. F. Cruse (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1867), bk. II, ch. II. p. 72.

[8] *Ibid.*, bk. III, ch. xxxvii, p. 140.

[9] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity* (New York/London, 1937), vol. 1, p. 117.

[10] R. W. Southern, "The Church of the Dark Ages (600-1000)," in *The Layman in Christian History*, ed. Stephen Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 88.

[11] See: Clement of Rome, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: William Heineman, 1928), vol. 1, pp. 48-51.

[12] Ignatius, *To the Trallians*, 3.1, 2; in Cycril C. Richardson, ed. and trans., *Early Christian Fathers*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1953), p. 99.

[13] Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans*, 8.1, 2; in Early Christian Fathers, p.113.

[14] Ignatius, Adversus Haereses, IV.xxvi.2; in S. L. Greenslade, ed. and trans., *Early Latin Theology*, The Library of Christian Classics, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 72.

[15] Ignatius, Adversus Haeresus, V.xxxiv.3; quoted by George H. Williams, "The Ministry of the Ante-Nicene Church (ca. 125-325)," in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, ed. H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Day Williams (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), p. 36.

[16] Anthony Hanson, *The Poineer Ministry: The Relation of Church and Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1961), p. 117.

[17] George H. Williams, "The Ministry of the Ante-Nicene Church (ca. 125-325)," in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, ed. H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Day Williams (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), p. 45.

[18] Reinhold Seeburg, *History of Doctrines in the Ancient Church*, Textbook of the History of Doctrines, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), p. 177.

[19] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho*, cxvi; in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), vol. 1.

[20] Aristides, *Apol. II.*

[21] Tertullian, *De baptismo*, 7.

[22] *Ibid.*, 17.

[23] Tertullian, *On Prescription Against Heretics*. xli.

[24] Chrysostom, St. John. *Homily on 2 Cor.*; in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series 1, vol. XII, trans. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), 111, 7.

[25] The Didache; in J. B. Lightfoot, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 126.
[26] Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Ephesians*, in *Texts and Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Cambridge: University Press, 1905), iv. 11.
[27] Jerome, *Dialog contra. Lucifer.*
[28] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho*, cxvi-cxvii.
[29] B. S. Easton, trans., *Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (Cambridge: University Press, 1934), p. 33.
[30] Polycarp, *The Letter of St. Polycarp*, 11.
[31] Tertullian, Apol. 39; quoted in *A New Eusebius*, ed. J. Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1968), pp. 174, 175.
[32] Dionysius, *A Letter to the Brethren*, c. 252; in Eusebius, *Ecclesistical History*, vii, 22, 7f.
[33] Justin Martyr, Apology i.16; quoted in Stevenson *A New Eusebius*, p. 61.
[34] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 189.
[35] Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* ii, 32.4; cf. Aristides, *Apol.* xv (Syriac version).
[36] Ambrosiaster, Commentary on Eph. 4:11.
[37] *Apostolic Constitutions*, viii. 31.
[38] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, vi, 19, 18.
[39] Jean Scherer, ed., *Library of Christian Classics*, vol. 2, p. 128.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 134.
[41] Harnack, *Princeton Review*, 1 (1878), p. 458.
[42] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, v, 1, 1-61.
[43] E. C. E. Owen, *Some Authentic Acts of the Early Martyrs* (Oxford, 1927), pp. 42f.
[44] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, v, 1, 49.
[45] Owen, *Some Authentic Acts of the Early Martyrs*, p. 121.
[46] *Contra. Cel.* iii.9.
[47] Quoted by Origen, *Contra. Cel.* iii.55.
[48] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: The Heritage Press, 1946), vol. 1, p. 352.

The Continuing Education Unit •

Assignment

1. *Explain how Christianity flourished in the hostile environment of the Roman world. What do you think was the key factor in this phenomenal growth?*

2. *Describe the gradual differentiation of "the people of God" into laity and clergy. When did it begin? What influence did Irenaeus have on this trend that stratified the church into an "upper" and "lower" class of believers?*

3. *By what act were third century "laics" enrolled in the "royal priesthood"? Identify the church father who advocated this rite. Would the reinstitution of such a rite increase the participation level of new believers? How would you incorporate such a ceremony into the traditional way the rite is practiced?*

Chapter 3

We Are Ambassadors for Christ

A young curate was nervously pacing the floor the night before he preached his first sermon. Suddenly he moaned, "I am unworthy of this high honor. It is sheer presumption for me to think I can commend to others a better way of life." His wife took him in warm embrace and said, "My dear, all you have to do is tell about God, not *be* God."

The question which comes to mind is this: What is a minister? A three-year project costing more than $500,000 has pinpointed the qualities that American and Canadian church people are looking for in their young ministers and priests. A preliminary report summarizing the findings says,

> *God's people are not looking for a small god or one who must pretend to be perfect. Rather they are looking for one who is able to face all human limitations and yet be a vehicle of God's witness and service in the world of need.*[1]

In 1960, under the leadership of the American Association of Theological Schools, a center was established for *The Study of Theological Education in the United States and Canada.* The commission, directed by H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Day Williams, had previously probed the enigma of the churches' inability to say what a minister is intended to be.[2] Students in seminaries seem to have only vague notions about the nature of congregational life and the demands of the ministry in their future parish situations.

There is no scarcity of persons who are quite confident that they can define the role of the "minister," but when their explanations are on paper, they merely add new evidence that the church is in deep confusion about its ministry. "What is a minister?" James D. Smart asks as he attempts a definition.

> *He is an evangelist. He is a preacher. He is a priest. He is a religious administrator. He is a social reformer. He is a director of worthwhile enterprises for the community. He is a species of amateur psychiatrist. He is an educator. He is an interpreter of life somewhat in the fashion of a poet. He is the voice of the community's conscience. He is the custodian of the values of democratic civilization. He is a man of superior wisdom and virtue whose task each week is to show men and women how to live more wisely and virtuously.*[3]

Is it any wonder that young ministers, and some not so young, find themselves dragged in a dozen different directions trying to fulfill the claims of the ministry?

Of course, these high demands upon the ministry are not without frightful consequences. A certain sexton was instructed by his pastor to place the title of his sermon on the bulletin board: "Are Ministers Cracking Up?" The old man was a little hard of hearing, and the bulletin announced the upcoming sermon as "Our Minister's Cracking Up!"

It has been argued that the claims upon the minister have always been great. If you happened to be a minister in the bishopric of the fourth century Chrysostom, you would have had in your library a copy of his "Tract for the Priesthood." There he clearly defined the role of the minister as—

> *The instructor of his people through the pulpit; a skilled theologian, he must be able to refute the heretics and the pagans. As a preacher he will have to compete with tragedies and musical entertainment's [the ancient counterpart for television]. He has a pastoral function and must be able to mingle with men in all walks of life. If he does not make a round of visits every day, unspeakable offense will ensue. He must distribute his smile with utter impartiality and not beam inordinately on anyone in particular. The virgins are under his care,*

and he must endeavor to confine them to their homes, save for inexorable necessity. The widows will try his patience since they are garrulous and querulous. The married women he must visit when sick, comfort when sorrowful, and reprove when idle, and in all of this scrupulously guard himself, recognizing that chaste women may be even more upsetting than the wanton.

With such a formidable array of qualifications, how could one man fulfill all the expectations demanded by a complex modern parish!

The answer to this many-sided problem may be in a more *integrated* approach to ministry. Such a concept is endorsed in the New Testament and suggests that the Christian ministry is in one of its aspects best understood as a "ministry" to ministers. Therefore "ministry" belongs to the whole church and is not the sole responsibility of an already overburdened clerical elite. The overall tasks of the church fall into two categories—edification and witness. The task of edification—the mutual sharing and upbuilding of Christians—devolves upon each Christian as a member of the body of Christ and is implemented by a variety of processes such as worship, conversation, family life, and business associations.

Witness, the other dimension of the church's task, concerns outreach into the world. The term applies to the Christian's manifesting the faith and life begun in him through Christ. Hence it applies to the work of edification, but in particular it refers to the winning of men for Christ, as the Christian first recommends the gospel by his life and then speaks it for his neighbor's hearing. But let it not be argued, "Which is more important in witnessing, the life I live or the words I say?" This question throws the consistency of our lives and our verbal witness into a false antithesis. It's like asking which wing of an airplane is more important, the right or the left! Obviously both are essential, and you don't have anything without both. Life and voice are inseparable in an effective witness to Christ. In fact, "when the love of Christ is enshrined in the heart, like a sweet fragrance it cannot be hidden," and "no sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving, sanctifying truth *cannot be shut up* in his heart. . . . We shall not be able to hold

our peace. If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, *we shall have something to tell."* [4] Thus, speaking the gospel that it may edify the fellow believer as well as win the nonbeliever is a natural if not logical extension of the Christian's own personal experience, a duty which need not be legislated.

The reluctance of many ministers to share their "ministry" is well illustrated in an experience of Charles Wesley with a certain Archbishop Robinson of London. The archbishop, speaking of Charles's brother John, remarked: "I knew your brother well. I could never credit all I heard respecting him and you; but one thing in your conduct I could never account for, your employing laymen."

"My lord," retorted Charles, "the fault is yours and your brethren's."

"How so?" asked the archbishop.

"Because you hold your peace, and the stones cry out."

"But I am told," the primate continued, hoping to have the last word, "that they are unlearned men."

"Some are," replied Charles, "and so the dumb ass rebukes the prophet."

But the archbishop was not the only one to whom lay ministry and preaching was revolting. At first John Wesley himself thought it scandalous. Laymen were restrained from "pulpit" duty, even when the "Bands and Societies"—the gatherings of the followers of Wesley—were left in their charge during the absence of John and Charles. On one occasion, John was on an itinerant journey, and the group in London was under the superintendence of a layman, Thomas Maxfield. Maxfield's duties had been limited to reading and explaining the Scriptures. But under no circumstances dare he presume to preach. However, on this occasion he did an unprecedented thing—he preached. When John got wind of this license, he hurried back to London. The imperious leader of Methodism was in no good mood. As he burst into the foundry in Mill Hill, he collided with his mother. His face betrayed marked displeasure. Suzanna asked the reason, and Wesley curtly replied, "Maxfield has turned preacher, I find." His mother countered, "John, take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him also yourself."

Thus wisely did Wesley's mother counsel him when he would have discouraged a young convert who, filled with a zeal for the gospel, had begun to exhort others. John's high-church sacerdotalism was ever battling against the leading of the Spirit, but he soberly admitted, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seemeth good. Who am I to withstand God?" Later he was further constrained to say, "We think that they who are only called of God and not of man, have more right to preach than they who are only called of man and not of God. Soul-damning clergymen lay me under more difficulties than soul-saving laymen."

In many respects the church today has inherited this tradition of ministerial exclusivism. However, one continually has to evaluate current practice with the biblical notion of "ministry."

Although the New Testament is particularly rich in synonyms for the act of serving, the characteristic word for "ministry" is *diakonia.* It is the favorite way of referring inclusively to the church's fundamental activities. Two passages in which *diakonia* is found will be summarily examined.

The first is Second Corinthians 5:16-20 (RSV) which reads as follows: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view. . . . If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, . . . and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. . . . So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." This passage is recognized as the charter for the ordained minister as a proclaimer of the Word of reconciliation. Is it possible to see this statement as also a possible charter for the ministry of *all* Christians, laymen and clergy alike?

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled *us* to himself and gave *us* the ministsry of reconciliation." What shall we make of these plural pronouns? Whom does Paul recognize as commissioned with the ministry of reconciliation? With astonishing unanimity commentators refuse to see in the second "us" an inclusive use of the plural pronoun. Paul means either himself or himself together with his co-workers; he does not, however, include his readers. Moffatt even translates the plural with the singular: "It is all the doing

of the God who has reconciled *me* to himself through Christ and has permitted *me* to be a minister of his reconciliation." That Paul *does* refer to himself with the plural pronoun on many occasions is obvious. That he refers to himself in the context is also clear. Note verse 16: "From now on . . . we regard no one from a human point of view." Also notice verse 20: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us." Yet the immediate context should render Moffatt's translation at least doubtful. "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled *us* to himself." Moreover, "the world," which in verse 19 is referred to as being reconciled to God in Christ, appears to be the "us" of verse 18 extended to its ultimate limits. It seems strange that the numerous commentators, while recognizing the inclusive function of the pronoun in the first half of Second Corinthians 5:18, nevertheless restrict the second "us" to Paul or to Paul and his companions. Such mental gymnastics surpass reason! We move from the very general "any one" of verse 17 to an inclusive "us"in the same verse and in the same syntactical segment and proceed immediately in the next verse to "the world." That the majority of commentators choose to support this view bears strong witness to the force of dogmatic preconception. They make the ministry of reconciliation the exclusive function of the ordained clergy and they cannot concede that Paul is teaching otherwise.

The second selected passage in which *diakonia* occurs is Ephesians 4:8-13 (RSV, first edition), which reads as follows: "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men. And his gifts were that some should be evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." Once again there is a certain ambiguity in the use of the word in its context, but here the majority of commentators believe that Paul is ascribing the "ministry" to all believers. The punctuation in the RSV as well as the KJV suggests that the *three phrases* in verse 12 are to be regarded as parallel. Christ has given His servants to the church for *three closely coordinated reasons*: (1) "for the equipment of the saints," (2) "for the work of the ministry," (3) "for the building up of the

body of Christ." The variation in the prepositions between the first and the second clauses (*pros* and *eis*) does not necessarily indicate a lack of parallelism of thought. Commentators who believe that *diakonia* here as well as in Second Corinthians 5 refers to an *official ministry* of the Word naturally favor this rendering. In such a context it is asserted that where offices of the church are in question, *diakonia* can only mean official service; and this does not belong to the saints in general. As already noted, however, the majority of commentators prefer to see progress and development of thought in this passage, the second phrase growing out of the first, and the third suggesting the ultimate goal of Christ's ministration through His servants. Christ, then, has given His servants to equip the saints themselves for the work of ministry.

The absence of punctuation in the Greek text between the first and second phrases adds weight to this interpretation. But—and this is a curious thing—if *diakonia* here is ascribed to all the saints, then, we are told, it refers to the *mutual ministratiom of saints* through deeds of love and does *not* refer to the "ministry of reconciliation." Why not? Because this is an official function!

So you can have it both ways. If the *diakonia* in question is the ministry of the Word, then it must refer to the *official servants* of Christ in the church; but if the context suggests the ascription *diakonia* to all the members of the church, then it must be some *secondary ministry* that is meant.

One or the other of the interpretations of these two passages may or may not be correct. It is not my purpose to argue the meaning of a single word in two given contexts. Exegetical truth is never found along that path. But my purpose has been to point to two fundamental assumptions that underlie most of these interpretations and that dictate the understanding of the ministry in the minds of most of us most of the time. These fundamental assumptions are as follows: (1) There are two ministries: one is the ministry of the Word; the other is the ministration of love. (2) The *ministry of the Word* is tied to the office of the ministry; the *ministration of love* is a general ministry among all the saints.

With some hesitation and with full awareness that the truth here cannot be confined to any set of propositions, I would offer two counterassumptions or theses: (1) The essential ministry of the church

is the ministry of reconciliation. (2) The ministry of reconciliation belongs to all the saints of God both as a privilege and as an obligation.

If these assumptions should prove correct, or at least approximately so, then the *official* servants of Christ indeed might well be regarded as "ministers" to ministers!

Ellen G. White positively defines the role and function of the "official" minister with startling specificity when she writes,

> *Christian ministers . . . have a broader work than many have recognized. They are not only to minister to the people, but to* teach them to minister. *They should not only give instruction in right principles, but educate their hearers to impart these principles. . . . Every church member should be engaged in some line of service for the Master.*[5]

Then the writer locates the reason for the nonparticipation of many of the members when she says, "Many would be willing to work if they were *taught* how to begin."[6] Here is reflected with shocking candor a sentiment previously expressed: "The work of God is retarded by criminal unbelief in his power to use the *common people* to carry forward his work successfully."[7] Was Ellen White aware of a tendency on the part of the "official" ministers to "corner the market" and exclude laypersons from an active role of "ministry"? If the counsel "every church should be a *training school* for Christian workers"[8] is heeded, then indeed the *official* minister will be a "minister" in the business of training ministers.

But to return to the interpretation of *diakonia* in our test cases. It is true that the emphasis often does lie on the deed of active love. 1 Corinthians 16:15; Acts 21:19. This is in keeping with the original meaning of the word. *Diakonia* basically denotes service at a table; a *diakonosos* is a table servant. Thus when in Acts 6 a service of the Word is contrasted with service at a table, it is likely that some of the original meaning adheres to the former concept of service as well as to the latter in this context; it is the cup of life that is offered in the gospel proclamation. Especially instructive is the cluster of passages in which *daikonia* or one of its cognates refers to the apostolic collection for the needs of the Jerusalem congregation. (See Acts 11:29; 12:25;

Romans 15:30-32.) *Diakonia* refers here to a very specific deed of love.

The word, however, can properly be used of any and every deed of service such as Jesus did: "Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not *minister* unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." Matthew 25:44, 45. There is then a certain validity in isolating a ministry of active love from other conceivable forms of service.

It is also true that *diakonia* is employed to refer to specific church offices, especially the office of *apostle.* (See Acts 1:17,25; 20:24; 21:19; Romans 11:13; 2 Corinthians 4:1.) Moreover the service of the *Word* and the service of *love* are sometimes paired in a manner which might suggest a division of labor. Notice First Peter 4:10, 11 (RSV): "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who utters the oracles of God; whoever renders service as one who renders it by the strength which God supplies." The varied grace of God seems to resolve itself into *utterance of words*, on the one hand, and the *rendering of service*, on the other.

The clearest example of a division of labor, of course, is the already mentioned passage in Acts 6:2-4: "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. . . . Look ye out among you seven men . . . whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." The verb *diakonia* is used of the service at tables; the noun *diakonia*, of the ministry of the Word. Although the title *diakonia* is *not* employed for the seven, most commentators and many church historians see in this account the first beginnings of the later *diaconate.* This may be correct. Yet it would be wrong to assume an absolute division of labor between the seven and the twelve, the *former* confining themselves solely to the physical welfare of the congregation, the *latter* to the spiritual welfare. Luke's chief purpose in telling this story is *not* to give etiological account for the *diaconate;* his main concern is to introduce his readers to Stephen and Philip, two of the seven. Stephen, far from confining his activity to welfare service, might well be regarded as the first creative

theologian of the apostolic church. It was he who first drew the universalistic implications from the gospel, and it cost him his life. He was hated, not for what he did but for what he said. He was liquidated not for being a Dorcas leader, rather for being a preacher! "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law" (Acts 6:13, RSV)—and from a Jewish particularist point of view the false witnesses were right. As for Philip, he is the first missionary to be singled out for mention. "A great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered . . . , except the apostles. . . . Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word." Acts 8:1-4, RSV. Philip went down to Samaria and there proclaimed the Christ. It is noteworthy that so little is the ministry of the Word the sole responsibility of the twelve apostles that one of the seven is specifically singled out as the first missionary. What is even more noteworthy is that he is only one of an unnamed host of lay missionaries. John R. Mott makes this observation:

> *The converted trader shared with members of his guild the knowledge of his new-found Savior. The soldier told other members of his legion of the wonderful Christ. The disciple discussed with his teacher and fellow students the Christian truth which had laid powerful hold on him. The slave who had fallen under the spell of the One who had come to proclaim release to the captives could not refrain from pointing to the Great Deliverer. Wherever the Christian disciples scattered, the evidence multiplied Christianity as a leaven working quietly for the conversion of one household after another.*[9]

It is of singular interest to read the description Christ gave of His followers. For instance, "He that is greatest among you shall be your *servant*." Matthew 23:11. "If any man *serve* me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my *servant* be: if any man *serve* me, him will my Father honor." John 12:26. In a germinal study of this subject we read that:

> *All Christians are* daikonia, ***ministers, called to a ministry.*** *. . . All the stress is on the* diakonia, *the ministry of the whole membership, because the church as a whole stood under the same token of its Lord, i.e. servantship.*[10]

With that we reach the heart of the matter. All of Christ's followers are ministers and servants because He who came in servant's form has called them to follow in His steps. "I am among you," said He, "as one who serves." Luke 22:27, RSV. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave." Matthew 20:26,27, RSV. What is the argument for this imperative rule? "Even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for man." Matthew 20:28, RSV. This imperative is thus not an imperative at all; it is a *description* of any life lived in fellowship with the suffering Servant.

Fundamental is this insight which realizes that the very life of every member of the church is, to use Manson's phrase, "a continuation of the Messianic ministry." [11] This means its continuation *by* the Messiah. To be a Christian at all, to be in Christ and in His body, means to be a minister.

> *God's messengers are commissioned to take up the very work that Christ did while on earth.*[12]

Our first thesis that the ministry of the Word is basically *one,* namely the ministry of reconciliation, is confirmed by our Lord. He was among us as a *diakonos*—a servant, a minister. And as He was a *diakonia,* so all His life, both in word and in deed, was a *diakonia,* a ministry. Our second thesis, that all Christians share in the essential ministry of the church, is also affirmed by the imperious Word of the Lord of the church. This is best seen in the cross.

> *All aspects of Jesus' ministry come to their climactic expression in the cross. Strangely it was in His dying that His ministry was fulfilled with the profoundest power. Again we meet the oneness of the Gospel, ministry, and person. The cross, with which men thought to silence Him once and for all became the unveiling of the mystery of who He was and the instrument whereby He completed His ministry of reconciliation.*[13]

In the church the good news and the good deed cannot be separated—the ministry of the Word and the ministry of active

love. All Christian ministry is basically one; it is a ministry of reconciliation. In Kraemer's sharply pointed phrase, "the church does not have a ministry, it *is* ministry." [14]

The essential ministry of the church then is this: "the ministry of reconciliation." All Christians are empowered with this ministry. But what is the relationship of this universal ministerial function to the office of the ministry? Or, differently put, What is the relationship of the *called minister* of the Word to the *ministering congregation?* This question has been variously answered. We shall confine ourselves to presenting two sharply antithetical views, both of which must be regarded as false, and we shall seek a synthesis in the understanding of the office as a ministry to ministers.

First, what might be labeled the *low Protestant view* is explained by Donald Miller:

> *The office of priesthood is shared by all Christians. Consequently, the official ministry of the church has no different status from that of the layman. The difference is one of function only. Furthermore, the special function of ministering the word and administering the sacrament belongs to the ministry only by virtue of the fact that the church has dedicated them as its representatives in this regard. Apart from practical considerations, there would need to be no order of ministry set aside in the church. But to give men time for prolonged study of the faith in order that they might preach and teach the Gospel, and to have order and decorum in services of worship and in the administration of the sacraments, the church ordains ministers to do these things in their name. But this in no way exalts them to status different from others.*[15]

In this view the office of ministry is merely a prudential arrangement of the church and is in no way essential to the life of the church.

Second, there is the *high Catholic view* articulated by J. V. Langmead Casserly:

> *Wherever the laity is able and willing to accept its proper measure of pastoral, evangelistic and theological responsibility, it is both futile and wrong to deny such representation. On the other hand it is in no way essential to the life and integrity of the church militant,*

and there exist areas of the church's life, for example missionary churches ministering to simple and underdeveloped peoples, in which nothing of the kind is for the moment even possible. It is always desirable; nowhere is it essential.[16]

Notice then the contrasting positions. Miller wants to remove all distinction of status between pastor and people, clergy and laity. Casserey remains with the pre-Reformation understanding of the church wherein the clergy in a special sense are the church and the laymen merely belong to the church. If the church is *diakonia*, and if all essential *diakonia* is the sole prerogative of the clergy, then in a sense the laity are not the church.

Does the truth lie between these two views? Fortunately, we are not forced to choose. Both views are correct in what they affirm, but both are wrong in what they tacitly deny.

Miller is right in affirming the universal priesthood of all believers. However, he is wrong in denying any ultimate authority and importance to the special ministry. Paul's enumeration of the gift in Ephesians 4:11, 12 sets the seal on both the legitimacy and necessity of the ordained and appointed ministry for church. Casserley is right in affirming that the ministry is essential to the church. He is wrong in denying the ministry of the laity as being essential to the church.

Paradoxically, the *low Protestant* view in seeking to demean the clergy succeeds in demeaning the laity. The members of the congregation hand over what are essentially their prerogatives to their ordained servants. They deliver their ministry into the hands of the minister. But if we want seriously to encourage all members of the congregation to become active ministers of the Word, then we should try to find some better way of expressing the relationship of the pastor to his congregation—a way which will neither deprive the pastor of his authority nor the congregation of its vital ministry. "That's your job, pastor" is perhaps not so much a remnant of the *high Catholic* view of the ministry, in which the functions of the clergy are radically distinct from those of the laity, as a product of the *low Protestant* view, in which there is an almost mechanical transfer of prerogatives.

According to the *low Protestant* view, the relationship between

the ordained minister and his congregation is too casual, almost accidental; according to the *high Catholic* view the relationship is too remote and distant. The corrective to both these extreme views is in the main thesis: The ordained servant of the Word is a minister to ministers. The emphasis is upon mutuality of service in the common life of the one body of Christ. (In most New Testament references to the ministry the emphasis clearly lies on functioning relationships within the Christian community. See 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4.) Thus the *function* of ministry is in no way equated with the *office* of the ministry. It is the *function* that gives sanction to the office, not the *office* to the function. If this is correct, then to ask the question of status is to indicate that we have not understood the mind of the Lord. The relationship between the *called* and the *uncalled* ministers is not one of relative rank or position in a hierarchy of status. The narrative in Luke brings into sharp focus the mind of Jesus: "There arose also a dispute among them [the disciples] as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors." But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.' " Luke 22:24-27, NASB. The implication of Christ's words is unmistakable—ministers to ministers—there is no higher status!

What would happen if we took this posture of lowly self-effacing servants? What would it mean if we made this concept of ministry to ministers the integrating factor in our work? What if the ordained ministers addressed the congregations with "My fellow ministers"? Would there be a radical revision of our ministries? Would there be less emphasis on programs and organizations and promotions? Would there be more emphasis on teaching and training and encouragement—training for the work of ministry and encouragement of our fellow redeemed to be what they are, ministers of reconciliation? The task of the laity is infinitely more difficult than that of the ministry. The laity are on the front line where the church meets the world. Someone remarked that "the world rarely meets the church with a trained theologian present." It is through the

average member that God would confront the world with the ministry of reconciliation. The church's job, then, is to be in the business of training ministers. This is its *primary* function. Such a concept has been urged upon the church in explicit terms.

> *Every church should be a training school for Christian workers. Its members should be taught . . . how to work for the unconverted.*[17]

> *Christ intends that His ministers shall be educators of the church in gospel work.*[18]

I do not imagine that the majority of the church members would be anything but displeased if they would be appealed to on this basis. They are generally quite satisfied with their contributory and secondary function in the church. While they appear to be content, we should not be. Nobody will ask the ministers to share their pulpits with the laity, but it is the Lord who asks the ministers to share their ministry.

The role of the laity in the life of the church is being reevaluated:

> *Possibly we are experiencing a new awareness of the nature of the church as a ministering institution, a body which ministers to the needs of the world through all its members. The minister may function as the leader, a source of inspiration, an organizer, and administrator, but he cannot singlehandedly, or even with a staff, carry on the service which is the church's vocation. The complex and pressing demands . . . have brought with them a renewed awareness of the role of the church as a ministering body in which both lay and ordained ministers are called as servants of the Gospel, not only in the church but also in the world.*[19]

We hope that the day will come when such sentences are more an expression of fact than of wistful prophecy. At least we cannot talk seriously of a "finished work" in our generation until this prescribed formula of an integrated ministry achieves the fruitage of realization:

> *The work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men*

and women comprising our church membership rally to the work, and unite *their efforts with those of ministers and church officers."*[20]

Such a union of uncommon effort for a common end will make the seemingly "impossible"—a finished work—possible!

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[1] Art. "Qualities Sought in Clerics Listed," *New York Times*, April 4, 1976.
[2] See H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Day Williams, ed. *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956).
[3] James D. Smart, *The Rebirth of the Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 17f.
[4] Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 77, 78.
[5] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 148, 149.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, July 16, 1895.
[8] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 149.
[9] John R. Mott (Ayr Lectures, Rochester Theological Seminary, 1931), *Liberating the Lay Forces of Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1932), p. 2.
[10] Hendrick Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 139.
[11] T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1940).
[12] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 130.
[13] Smart, *The Rebirth of the Ministry*, p. 28.
[14] Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity*, p. 137.
[15] Donald Miller, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (Richmond, 1958), p. 89.
[16] J. V. Langmead Casserley, *Christian Community* (London, 1960), p. 34.
[17] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 149.
[18] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 825.
[19] Robert Michaelson, *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, p. 266.
[20] Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, pp. 351, 352.

The Continuing Education Unit •

Assignment

1. *Develop a Bible study showing that "ministry" is the responsibility of all believers.*

2. *From the New Testament book of Acts describe how the "laymen" of the New Testament church participated in missionary outreach.*

Chapter 4

A Royal Priesthood

Martin Luther wrote,

> *We are all priests insofar as we are Christians, but those whom we call priests are ministers selected from our midst to act in our name, and their priesthood is our ministry.*[1]

Throughout our history Seventh-day Adventists have held the doctrine of priesthood of believers as one of our cardinal beliefs and most cherished distinctives. Yet in spite of our profession we have seriously misunderstood and certainly inadequately expressed the full meaning of this doctrine. In breaking with the sacramental and ecclesiastical view of the church, Seventh-day Adventists in general have interpreted this doctrine to mean only that every believer has free and direct access to God without the intermediation or necessity of a priestly ministry. While this interpretation is certainly true, it expresses only half the essential meaning. What we have failed to understand adequately is that the priesthood of believers also teaches that every Christian is a priest or minister and thus has a ministry to perform. Elton Trueblood has pointed out:

> *Most Protestants pay lip service to the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of every believer, but they do not thereby mean to say that every Christian is a minister. Many hasten to add that all they mean by the familiar doctrine is that nobody needs to confess to a*

priest, since each can confess directly to God. The notion that this doctrine erases the distinction between laymen and ministers is seldom presented seriously, and would to some be shocking, but it does not take much study of the New Testament to realize that the early Christians actually operated on this revolutionary basis.[2]

Writing in a commemorative essay on the four hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, William Dallmann notes:

The Old Testament distinction between priest and people, clergymen and laymen, is at an end. Christ, our high priest, has made all Christians priests unto God. All Christians are God's clergy, and there is no special clerical order in the church. The ministry is an office, not an order, much less a threefold order of bishops, priests, deacons. . . . The church is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, and all the Christians are the people.[3]

Another contributor, C. Abbetmeyer, wrote:

The external organization and administration of the early church was such as befitted the royal priesthood of God's children. In that community of brethren all were of equal dignity. Each member had for himself access to the Word and heart of God, and to all conjointly had been given on office, the ministry of the Word.[4]

In the centuries subsequent to the Reformation many articulate leaders in world Christendom have reissued the call for a functional use of the laity in the life and mission of the church. However, Franklin Littell presents this caution:

A church which proclaims the priesthood of all believers but does not in fact provide ways for the general priesthood to express itself will teach not initiative but docile obedience as the Christian stance.

There are those who feel that the priesthood of believers can be interpreted only in a collective sense.

The expression "priesthood of believers" is an unfortunate one as it

carries with it a ruinous individualism. "Priest" in the singular is never found in the NT applied to the believer, any more than "king" in the singular. In the singular these words would only apply to Christ himself. Like the term "saint" used only collectively in the NT, "priest" and "kings" apply corporately to the whole membership in the church.[5]

There are others, however, who feel that this doctrine has both individual and corporate aspects. That is, it may be viewed both from the perspective that each individual Christian is a priest and also from the perspective of priesthood of the congregation.

The priesthood of believers mean each believer offering his own body: it also means Christ the high-priest offering his body, the Church. These two aspects of the one perpetual offering may be distinguished in thought: they cannot be separated in fact.[6]

Whether it is of primary importance to view this distinction individually or collectively we will leave to the polemicist, but the *essential* purpose is always the same—ministry.

The need at present is to give the doctrine of the priesthood of believers a theological foundation. Hendrick Kraemer predicts that lay movements will ultimately fail without such a "backbone."

It will appear in the future mere temporary effervescence or a passing eruption of activism . . . if it is not undergirded by a well-thought-out theology of the laity on a biblical basis.[7]

It means that a clear understanding of the nature and life of the Christians must find its roots in nothing less than the eternal purpose of God. It means that the laity of the churches must come to understand that the Christian life is a ministry, and this ministry is performed in response to the call of God and under the judgment of God. The issue for the church today is not that here is a vast, untapped source of man power that needs to be captured and put to work; the issue is that the church must come to know what is God's design for the laity in His eternal purpose. It is this that gives the direction to the layman's ministry. It is this that gives the layman motivation for

his ministry. No program of promotion can take the place of this basic biblical understanding.

What, then, is the New Testament view of the ministry of the laity that will provide this theological foundation? The most direct references to the priesthood of believers are found in First Peter and Revelation. John in Revelation 1:5, 6 says: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God." In the "new song" sung in praise to Christ, Christians are referred to as "kings and priests." Revelation 5:10. In Revelation 20:6 it is said of Christians, "They shall be priests of God and of Christ." In First Peter, Christians are referred to as "an holy priesthood" whose function it is "to offer up spiritual sacrifices" (2:5). They are a "royal priesthood" whose task it is to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9).

What is the nature of the sacrifices that are to be offered? It is important that this be clearly understood, for the nature of the sacrifices will determine the nature of this ministry. A part of the answer is found in Hebrews where the uniqueness of the sacrifice of Jesus, the Great High Priest, is magnified. "His sacrifice is defined as doing God's will. It was his body that God desired, not sacrifices and offerings."[8] What, then, is the nature of the sacrifice of the priesthood of believers? They are to offer themselves. They are to present their bodies a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) to be instruments of redemption as they "shew forth the praises of him who hath called" them "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Thus when one unites with the community of believers, when one enters the priesthood of believers, he is thereby uniting with Jesus in God's redemptive purpose in the world.

In the small village of Upfingen, nestling in the Swabian Alps of southern Germany is a very old church. At the close of World War II it was decided to renovate the old structure. While the workmen were removing several coats of paint, a fresco of a "Christopher," painted in pre-Reformation days, was discovered. St. Christopher is the patron of wayfarers. One of the popular legends around his name represents him as a powerful giant who earned his living by carrying travelers across a river. On one occasion he numbered among his passengers a small child who somehow caused him to bow beneath

his burden. The child was none other than the Christ, and His weight that of the whole world. The fresco on the wall of the Upfingen Evangelical church reflects a medieval custom of placing a large mural painting of the saint opposite the south door of the church, in the belief that the sight of it would safeguard the passerby from accident that day. The name Christopher literally means "one who bore Christ." The business of the church is to make "Christopher's" of its people. The church individually and corporately is to be the "carrier" of Christ to the world.

Throughout the New Testament one finds this emphasis on the ministry of the laity. Paul's letters were addressed to the churches and to all the members, not just to the apostles. He reminds them of their "holy calling" (2 Timothy 1:9) and their "ministry (2 Corinthians 5:18,19). William Robinson points out that "the New Testament is full of expressions referring to 'calling,' 'being called,' 'to be called,' and they always refer to *all* Christians and not what we style 'ministers.' All Christians are ministers, 'called' to a ministry."[9]

It is true that both *klēros* (clergy) and *laos* (laity) appear in the New Testament, "but, strange to say, they denote the same people, not different people."[10] For example, in Second Corinthians 6:16 we find, "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (*laos*)." While in First Peter 5:3 we find the writer exhorting the elders not to view themselves as being "lords over God's heritage [*klēros*], but being examples to the flock." This, of course, is not to suggest—as reinforced in the preceding chapter—that there was not some type of "official ministry" in the New Testament. In the passage just cited the elders would be viewed as the "official ministry." Yet they were warned about the danger of making too wide a distinction between themselves and the lay people so that they would tend to "lord it over" them.

It is to be readily admitted that in the New Testament community there was no office that corresponded to the Jewish concept of priest.

> *The only priests under the Gospel, designated as such in the New Testament, are the saints, the members of the Christian brotherhood.*[11]

T. W. Manson points out that when priests were converted (Acts 6:7), they did not thereby perform the function of priest (in the Jewish sense) in the Christian community. In the catalog of church ministries in First Corinthians 12:28-30 and Ephesians 4:11, 12 no mention is made of priests. Therefore he concludes that in the New Testament church "there was not room for a regular priesthood, as priesthood was understood in that time."[12] However, the tendency toward institutionalism in this area is recognized, for he admits that by the end of the second century the office of bishop had become "a sacrificial office, as was that of the Jewish priests." He goes on to say,

> *The fact is that there is here a parting of the way: priesthood is on the way to be completely bound up with the right of a specialized group within the Church to offer the eucharistic sacrifice of bread and cup identified with the body and blood of Christ. The priesthood of all believers, on the other hand, is on the way to becoming a godly sentiment with little or no relevance to the day-to-day practice of the Church at worship.*[13]

So conspicuous was this division by the third century that the church historian Williston Walker admits,

> *It is evident, however, that though the ancient doctrine of the priesthood of all believers might still occasionally be remembered, it had purely theoretical value. In practical Christian life the clergy, by the middle of the third century were a distinct, close-knit spiritual rank, on whom the laity were religiously dependent, and who were in turn supported by laymen's gifts.*[14]

The church of the first two centuries had been a small and closely knit body scattered through the cities of the Roman Empire. So long as it remained such, the laity retained an important role in its organization and liturgy. When in 197, Tertullian described the church in Roman Africa, he calls it "a society with a common religious feeling, a unity of discipline and a bond of hope."[15] "Where three are together," he says elsewhere, "there is the Church, even they are laymen."[16] The Holy Spirit imposed an equality on priests and laymen alike.

The laity took a leading part in the liturgy. The congregation met "to read the books of God" and then "each from what he knows of the Holy Scripture or from his own heart is called upon before the rest to sing to God."[17] Behind these practices lay an ecclesiology which regarded Christianity less an organization than as a way of life under the continuous guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The third century was to see some radical changes in this point of view, changes which affected adversely the position of the laity in the church. By the middle of the century the monarchical episcopate had become the universally recognized system of church government. The deacon was tending to become more pronouncedly an administrator, and thus encroaching on the functions which laymen were performing in the service of the church. Half a century later the senior deacon of Carthage had become the heir presumptive to his bishop's see. The Holy Spirit was being firmly guided into ecclesiastical channels.

In the earlier part of the fourth century the *Apostolic Constitutions*—eight books that provide a valuable witness to the religious practices and beliefs of the first three centuries—defined the role of the layman:

> *The layman should honour the good shepherd (the bishop), respect him like a father, lord and master, as the high priest of God as a guide in piety. . . . He who hears the bishop hears Christ.*[18]

The bishop is described as—

> *The keeper of knowledge, the mediator between God and you in the several parts of your divine worship.*[19]

By the time of the Reformation the biblical concept of the priesthood of all believers had been eroded by a hierarchical and priest-centered church. Luther's reaffirmation of the principle was a protest against clerical power.

Of course there are many and widespread echoes of this doctrine even before Luther. The semi-Christian group known as the Cathari was characterized by its emphasis on lay Christianity, lay preaching, and the lay apostolate.[20] The groups spread throughout much of south central Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

During the same period an orthodox movement arose, at first in France, later in northern Italy, under the leadership of a merchant of Lyons, Peter Waldo. Desiring at first only to do missionary work within the church, the group was later ousted, and so the Waldenses formed themselves into a separate entity with considerable lay emphasis.

The movement of mystical piety of the fourteenth century, which had its genesis in Meister Eckhart and Johannes Tauler, remained within the church and placed its emphasis not on sacramental salvation but on the inner life of the individual. Brotherhoods such as the "Friends of God" and "Brethren of the Common Life," consisting of both clergy and laity, advocated a way of life relatively free from the many abuses of the Middle Ages. Living in simplicity and poverty and devoting themselves not only to preaching, but also to a devotional study of Scriptures and to deeds of service, they left behind them a fragrance out of proportion to their numbers and were precursors of a pre-Reformation individualism.

Another reform movement came in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with men of the stature of Marsilius, Ockham, Wyclif, and Huss. In pre-Reformation days they made pleas for the independence of the church and state, the vesting of authority predicated by the individual's service to God and man instead of through a sacerdotal office, viewing the Scriptures and not the pope as infallible.

These stirrings were mere harbingers of an inevitable but radical break with Roman Catholic ecclesiastical power, and with its exclusive status of the priesthood.

The very interesting patristic handbook of the Reformers, the *Unio Dissidentium* (1527),[21] had great vogue in the Rhineland, in France, and in England. In it there is a section entitled "That all Christians are priests, kings and prophets—but not all are ministers of the Church," and this is supported by texts, mainly of the Greek Fathers, Origen, Cyril, Chrysostom, Eusebius.

A contemporaneous echo is reflected in the Fraubrunner disputation in Switzerland (1522) when the Catholic Dean flung the following remark as a taunt at Luther: "Yes, you Greek-learning grammarians, you are a fine royal priesthood!" [22]

In the English vestment controversy Nicholas Ridley neatly turned an argument of John Hooper:

> *I do . . . count it no more an inconvenience, that some be called men of the clergy and men of the laity, than in the University, that some be called "scholars" and some "men of the gown," . . . but St. Peter calleth all men priests. What then, pray you, . . . will you gather that all men must have . . . one apparel!*[23]

John Knox senses the revolutionary implications of the doctrine, in his great letter to the Commonalty of Scotland (1558),

> *I would ye should esteem the reformation and care of religion no less to appertain to you, because ye are no kings, rulers, judges, nobles nor in authority. Beloved brethren, ye are God's creatures, . . . and this is the point wherein I say, all men are equal.*[24]

Luther found his doctrine of the priesthood of the believer in such scriptural passages as First Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6. His references to this doctrine even in later life (e.g., Sermon at Torgau, 1544) show that it remained an important truth.

The theologian-historian Philip Schaff refers to Martin Luther as "the chief leader of the Reformation which carried Christendom back to first principles, and urged it forward to new conquests." Luther championed the general priesthood of believers. Said Schaff,

> *This principle implies the right and duty of every believer to read the Word of God in his vernacular tongue, to go directly to the throne of grace, and to take an active part in all the affairs of the church according to his particular gift and calling. . . . The principle of general priesthood of the Christian people is the true source of religious and civil freedom.*[25]

It must be kept in mind that Luther developed the expression "the priesthood of the believer" to meet a very definite historical problem: a priestly tyranny. In one of the major treatises of 1520, *The Address to the Nobility*, his concept comes to clear statement, "All Christians are truly of the 'spiritual estate.' " "Through baptism all of us are consecrated to the priesthood, as St. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, 'Ye are a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom,' and the book of *Revelation* says (v. 10), "Thou has made us by Thy blood to be priests

and kings.' "[26]

The church, then, *is* a priesthood. This is both more fundamental and more accurate than to say that the church *has* a priesthood. But where did Luther place the accent? On every Christian's "right" to approach God without any priestly intermediary? Not at all! Here Luther's *Treatise on Christian Liberty* is instructive. Here the "Oak of Saxony" expounds the paradox that a Christian is *perfectly free*, subject to none, and at the same time *perfectly a servant*, subject to all. The first member of the paradox describes a Christian's faith; the second member describes his love. But as we look closer, we find a discussion of what "priest" means, and why, therefore, Christ is the one true Priest, and in what sense, then, a Christian is a priest.

> *That we may look more deeply into that grace which our inward man has in Christ, we must consider that in the Old Testament God sanctified to Himself every first-born male, and the birthright was highly prized, having a* twofold honour, *that of PRIESTHOOD, and that of KINGSHIP. For the first-born brother was a priest and lord over all others, and was a type of Christ. . . . He [Christ]* reigns *in heavenly and spiritual things and consecrates them. . . . Nor does His* priesthood *consist in the outward splendour of robes and postures, like that human priesthood of Aaron and of our present-day Church; but it consists in spiritual things, through which He by an unseen service intercedes for us in heaven before God. . . . Nor does He only pray and intercede for us, but within our soul He teaches us through the living teaching of His Spirit, thus performing the two real functions of a priest, of which the prayers and the preaching of human priests are visible types.*
>
> *Now, just as Christ by His birthright obtained these two prerogatives, so He imparts them to and shares them with everyone who believes on Him. . . . Hence* we are all priests and kings in Christ, *as many as believe on Christ, as 1 Peter 2:9 says. . . .*
>
> *The priesthood and the kingship we explain as follows: First, as to the* kingship, *every Christian is by faith so exalted above all things that by a spiritual power he is lord of all things, without exception, so that nothing can do him any harm whatever, nay, all things are*

made subject to him and compelled to serve him to his salvation . . . (Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 3:22f). Not as if every Christian were set over all things, to possess and control them by physical power—a madness with which some churchmen are afflicted—for such power belongs to kings, princes and men on earth. . . . The power of which we speak is spiritual; it rules in the midst of enemies, and is mighty in the midst of oppression which means nothing else than that strength is made perfect in weakness, and that in all things I can find profit unto salvation, so that the cross and death itself are compelled to serve me and to work together with me for my salvation. . . . Lo, this is the inestimable power and liberty of Christians.

Not only are we the freest of kings, *we are also* priests *forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, because as priests we are* worthy to appear before God and to pray for others and to teach one another the things of God. *These are the functions of priests, and cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has obtained for us, if we believe on Him, that we are not only His brethren, co-heirs and fellow-kings with Him, but also fellow-priests with Him, who may come boldly into the presence of God in the spirit of faith 'Abba, Father!', pray for one another and do all things which we see done and prefigured in the outward and visible works of priests. . . . Who then can comprehend the lofty dignity of the Christian? Through his* kingly *power he rules over all things, death, life and sin, and through his* priestly *glory is all powerful with God, because God does the things which he asks and desires . . . (Ps. 145:19). To this glory a man attains not by any works of his, but by faith alone.*[27]

One cannot escape being elevated in thought and encouraged in spirit by this reminder of the "lofty dignity" of the Christian's status. But notice that Luther deals with the priesthood-of-believers principle in terms of faith rather than love, because this principle indicates primarily what God *does* in making us believers, rather than what man does. This priesthood, indeed, becomes in those who receive it a "right," but in a quite unusual sense. For "king" is the better word to emphasize the believer's *rights*—and even these are construed as the power to undergo suffering victoriously; the

word "priest" emphasizes his privileged *responsibility,* toward God and hence toward all his neighbors, his divine calling into service rather than his human approach to God. "Priest" indicates the difference between interceding with God and cajoling God, and the difference between Christian love and even the most enlightened self-interest. It indicates the crucial connective between faith and the doctrine of Christian love, where we are told—astonishingly from one who had so high a Christology—that "each should become as it were a Christ to the other, that we may be Christ's to one another and Christ may be the same in all; that is, that we may be truly Christians."[28] One is reminded of the Latin term *pontifex*, bridge builder. All of God's people are to be building bridges to people. They are the "bridge" over which Christ Himself comes to men! But Luther's emphasis indicates a crucial corrective to individualism. This priesthood, in the first place, is no human performance, adding to or repeating Christ's sacrificial reconciling priesthood, but Christ's gift which He has obtained for us: Christ alone is the high priest;[29] second, it pertains to the church corporately, not to any individual privately; third, it is used only in service for others, never for oneself.

As applied to the daily tasks of life, this principle was illustrated in Luther's admonition relating to the sale of wares. The Christian man, he urges, should carry out a sale in such a way that the seller be more concerned about the individual to whom he is selling the product than with making a substantial profit.[30] From this perspective, whatever work is performed in an attitude of confidence in God and in a spirit of repentance can legitimately be considered Christian vocation. There is no duplicity here since devotion to God and service to neighbor are inseparably bound together in the concept of calling, and "the call of God comes to each man at the common tasks."[31]

> *A cobbler, a smith, a farmer, each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops, and every one by means of his own work of office must benefit and serve every other, that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, even as all members of the body serve one another."*[32]

Thus we see how Luther developed the idea of the church as a royal priesthood—priesthood applying to all its members in common. Does this mean that the church has no special clerical priesthood? Luther was challenged on this very point by one of his bitter opponents, Jerome Emser, secretary to Duke George of Saxony. Emser admitted that there was indeed a sense in which all Christians constituted a "spiritual priesthood" but argued that the New Testament also established a "consecrated priesthood." [33] Now, Luther had already set forth his positive position in 1520 *before* he wrote his long rebuttal against Emser. The Reformer asserted that the New Testament says not a word about a "spiritual estate" above the laity, marked with an indelible character, equipped by divine right to dispense divine grace and rule the laity. Nevertheless, he clearly insisted that an ordained ministry is necessary in the church, not simply because it would be a prudent arrangement, but because it is an apostolic, Christ-established ministry.

Such a "spiritual estate" is derived from and responsible to the universal priesthood of believers.

> *Who ever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already* consecrated *priest, bishop and pope, though it is not seemly that everyone should* exercise the office. *Nay, just because we are all in like manner priests, no one must put himself forward and undertake, without our* consent and election, *to do what is in the power of all of us. For what is common to all, no one dare take upon himself without the will and command of the community; and should it happen that one chosen for such an office were deposed for malfeasance, he would then be just what he was before he held office. Therefore a priest in Christendom is nothing else than an* office-holder. *When he is in office, he has precedence; when deposed, he is a peasant or a townsman like the rest.*[34]

Luther now differentiates between the role and function of the "called" and the uncalled.

> *There is really no difference between the laymen and priests, princes and bishops, "spirituals" and "temporals", as they call them except that of* office *and* works, *but not of "estate"; for they are all of the*

same estate—true priests, bishops, and popes—though they are not all engaged in the same work, just as all priests and monks have not the same work. This is the teaching of St. Paul in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and St Peter in 1 Peter 1, as I have said above, viz., that we are all one body of Christ, the Head, all the members one of another. Christ has not two different bodies, one "temporal", the other "spiritual." He is one Head, and He has one body.

Therefore, just as those who are now called "spiritual"—priests, bishops or popes—are neither different from other Christians nor superior to them, except that they are charged with the administration of the Word of God and the sacraments, which is their work and office, so it is with the temporal authorities—they bear sword and rod with which to punish the evil and to protect the good.[35]

To be more explicit about the nature of this office, Luther urges:

We are all priests, as we call them, are ministers, *chosen from among us, who do all that they do in our name. And the priesthood is nothing but a ministry, as we learn from 1 Cor. 4:1, "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."* [36]

Against Emser, Luther insisted:

The Holy Scriptures, particularly in the New Testament, where types are at an end, speak only of one, a spiritual priesthood, *just as I said when discussing the papacy that the Scriptures speak only of one, a spiritual church. . . . And I hereby make this challenge: If Emser will bring forward a single letter of Scripture in which his churchy priesthood is called a priesthood, I will give in to him. But he will not take the challenge.*[37]

And then with all the definitiveness of the scholar which he was he presses the point:

The Scriptures make us all priests alike, as I have said,

> *but the churchy priesthood which is now universally distinguished from the laity and alone called a priesthood, in the Scriptures is called* ministremium, servitus, dispensatio, episcopatus, presbyterium, and at no place sacerdotium or spiritualis. *I must translate that. The Scriptures, I say, call the spiritual estate and priestly office a ministry, a service, an office, an eldership, a fostering, a guardianship, a preaching office, shepherds.*[38]

Now when Luther calls the ministry nothing but an "office" does he depreciate it? Does he ignore its unique holiness and reduce the ministry to a purely utilitarian conception? Indeed not! When he suggested dropping the name "priest" for "those who are in charge of Word and Sacrament among the people,"[39] he did so not because he wanted to eliminate the word from Christendom, but because he wanted to exalt it and protect it from sacerdotal misuse. Actually, "there is no greater name or honour before God and men than to be a priest."[40]

He further insists that the "ministry" cannot be thought of as a mere rationale. The Christian community cannot be without the Word of God, and "it follows therefore logically that it must have teachers and preachers to administer this Word."[41] This is the office through which Christ does His work; it may even be said that the minister actually does Christ's work. "So many souls are daily taught by him, converted, baptized and brought to Christ and saved, redeemed from sins, death, hell, and the devil, and through him come to everlasting righteousness, to everlasting life and heaven." The minister does "great miracles," perhaps in a bodily way, but most certainly "spiritually in the soul, where the miracles are even greater." Then he adds, "Not that he does this as a *man!* It is his office, ordained by God for this purpose, that does it, that and the Word of God which he teaches; *he is the instrument for this.*"[42] This is to say that if one must distinguish between the person of the minister and the office of his ministry, so must one distinguish between the *office* committed to the minister and the "success" of the minister's service.

Thus the ministry as a God-given order is one of the church's constituent factors. This is the apostolicity of the Christian ministry. It is not simply a human contrivance to assure the continuity of the church. The office is antecedent to the faith.

Continent then with Luther's view, Christians are essentially and radically equal in dignity within the Church, and there is no room for the notion that the clergy "rules" the laity, or that the clergy is necessarily graded internally for purposes of rule. Luther insists that the apostolic ministry, according to the New Testament, is in essence *one order*, the priesthood which belongs equally and commonly to all believers, and which hence is assigned in a special way, for the sake of decency and order (1 Cor. 14:40), to special "ministers chosen from among us, who do all that they do IN OUR NAME."[43] This is the "ministry of the Word and sacraments" or one may say more briefly, "ministry of the Word," not in the sense simply of custody of the Bible, but the office of "stewards of the mysteries of God." His ordination makes him a "servant of priests; . . . a servant and an officer of the common priesthood . . . ; the representative of the whole church."[44]

Luther recognizes that the terms deacon, presbyter, and bishop are scriptural, though he insists that "presbyter" and "bishop" were originally interchangeable. He also acknowledges that the church may arrange these ranks as it finds most useful, according to the twin principles: that it "edifies the Church," and is in "decency and good order." But men's rules about the clerical ranks dare not be proclaimed as divine necessity.

The authority that the minister has is to *serve*, not to rule. It is an *office*, not a privilege:

> *All their [the Romanists'] boasts of an authority which dare not be opposed amount to nothing at all. No one in Christendom has authority to do injury, or to forbid the resisting of injury. There is no authority in the Church save* for edification.[45]

He admits that "if Christ Himself and all the apostles had no other power than to *help* souls, and have left behind them no power in the Church,"[46] priestly tyranny would be conspicuous by its absence.

In summary, Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers can be compressed into four points:

1. Before God all Christians have the same standing, a priesthood in which we enter by baptism and through faith.
2. As a comrade and brother of Christ, each Christian is a priest

and needs no mediator save Christ. He has access to the Word.

3. Each Christian is a priest and has an office of sacrifice, not the mass, but the dedication of himself to the praise and obedience of God and to bearing the cross.
4. Each Christian has a duty to hand on the gospel which he himself has received.[47]

Luther tried to steer a middle course to avoid both ecclesiastical tyranny and mere secularized rationalism or opportunism. No man, he insisted, ought to be entrusted with unlimited, uncorrected authority—ecclesiastical or political. If Christ is the Head of the Church, all human arrangements and actions must be provided with checks and balances. Faith and church order are both divinely given. The arrangements Christians make of them are an ongoing, living challenge and dare not be hardened into rigid forms. Luther's understanding of the position of the Christian laity as holding active responsibility in the church; and his conception of the minister as a "spiritual father," not a sacerdotal authority on the one hand, or a spiritual virtuoso or a mere nondescript chairman of a religious committee on the other—these views are an integral part of the Protestant heritage.

But what are the present-day implications of the cry for "the priesthood of all believers"? At the very least the doctrine anticipates the full participation of all Christians in the evangelistic action of the church. No pastor can fulfill the ministry God gave to each believer. One of the major attacks of the Reformation was centered at the point of recapturing the ministry of the laity. Yet, ironically, this was one of the areas where a sufficiently radical break was not made by the Reformers and those who followed them. It is here that the modern church can make a significant and unique contribution, if, indeed we are sufficiently daring. Elton Trueblood points out that one of the central characteristics of the first Reformation was in opening the Bible to the "ordinary Christian," and—

> *Now, after more than three centuries, we can, if we will, change gears again. Our opportunity* for a big step lies in opening the ministry to the ordinary Christian in much the same manner that our ancestors opened Bible reading to the ordinary Christian. *To do this means, on one sense, the inauguration*

of a new Reformation while in another it means the logical completion of the earlier Reformation in which the implications of the position taken were neither fully understood nor loyally followed.[48]

The conclusion of Dr. Cyril Eastwood,[49] who undertook the most comprehensive historical treatment of this subject, is sobering:

The priesthood of all believers has never been entirely lost nor has it ever been fully received.

We catch a glimpse of this doctrine externalized in the conduct of the early Christians as documented in the book of Acts. J. B. Phillips in introducing his translation of this book, says of those Christians:

These men did not make acts of faith, they believed; did not say prayers, they really prayed. They didn't hold conferences on psychosomatic medicine, they simply healed the sick. . . . But if they were uncomplicated by modern standards we have ruefully to admit that they were open on the God-ward side in a way that is almost unknown today. . . . Consequently it is a matter of sober history that never before have any small body of ordinary people so moved the world that their enemies could say that these men have "turned the world upside down." [50]

The future will record whether we will be successful in recapturing and applying the doctrine. This is not simply a desirable doctrine; this is the key by which we can accomplish our mission in the world and make the impossible possible. At least, to capture the New Testament emphasis on the ministry of the laity "would mean no less than a revolution in the conception of the Church, in relation to its members and in its relation to the outside world, if it were realized in its full consequences." [51]

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[1] Quoted by Wilhelm Pauck, "The Ministry in the Time of the Continental Reformation," from Luther's *Works* (Weimar edition), vol. VI, p. 564 in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, ed. H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Day Williams (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), p. 112.

[2] Elton Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), p. 30.

[3] William Dallmann, "Justification by Faith" in Philip Schaff, *Luther as a Reformer: Four Hundred Years* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1917), p. 70.

[4] C. Abbermeyer, "Formation—Deformation—Reformation," in *Luther as a Reformer: Four Hundred Years*, p. 3.

[5] T. F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1955), p. 35, note 1.

[6] T. W. Manson, *Ministry and Priesthood: Christ's and Ours* (London: The Epworth Press, 1958), p. 64.

[7] Hendrick Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), pp. 13, 14.

[8] Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), p. 100.

[9] William Robinson, *Completing the Reformation* (Lexington: The College of the Bible, 1955), pp. 19, 20.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[11] J. B. Lightfoot, *The Christian Ministry* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1901), p. 6.

[12] T. W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1940), p. 44.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

[14] Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*)Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1918), p. 91.

[15] Tertullian, *Apology*, 39:1.

[16] Tertullian, *De Exhortarione Castitatis*, 7.

[17] Tertullian, *Apology*, 39:3, 8.

[18] *Constitution of the Holy Apostles*, 16, 21.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 410.

[20] See Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Church*, (New York: Macmillian Co., 1939), vol. 1, p. 350.

[21] See J. Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (ed. Pratt), IV, pp. 607, 685, 764.

[22] Guggisherg, *Bern. Kirchenges*, p. 68.

[23] J. Bradford, *Works* (Parker Society, ed.), II, p. 386.

[24] J. Knox, *Works* (ed. Laing), IV, p. 526.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 302f.

[26] Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, "Address to the Nobility" (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Co., 1925), vol. II, p. 66.

[27] Luther, *op. cit.*, "Christian Liberty," II, 232, 235.

[28] Luther, *Works*, "Christian Liberty," II, 338, cf. 337.

[29] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, "Concerning the Ministry" (American Ed.) ed. Conrad Bergendoff. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), XL. 14.

[30] *Ibid.*, IV, p. 15.

[31] Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955), p. 156.

[32] Luther, *Works*, II, p. 69.

[33] *Ibid.*, "Answer to Goat Emser," III, 319f.

[34] *Ibid.*, "Address to the Nobility," II, 68f.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid.*, "Babylonian Captivity," *On Ordination*, II, 279.

[37] *Ibid*, "Answer to Goat Emser," III, 321f.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] Luther, *Works*, "Concerning the Ministry" XI, iv.

[40] Luther, "Commentary on Ps. 110" (1535), XIII, 294. The entire exposition (pp. 228-348) concerns the relation of Christ's high priesthood and the priesthood of the church.

[41] *Works*, "Light and Power of a Christian Congregation or Community to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers" (1523), IV, 79.

[42] *Works*, "Sermon on Keeping Children in School," IV, 146.

[43] *Ibid.*, "Babylonian Captivity," II, 279.

[44] *Ibid.*, "Answers to Goat Emser," III, 326f.

[45] *Ibid.*, "To the Nobility," II, 75.

[46] *Ibid.*, Treatise Concerning the Ban," II, 42.
[47] cf. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845-461), bk. 3.3.42; bk. 2.15.6; bk. 4.18.17.
[48] Elton Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952), p. 32 (emphasis his).
[49] Cyril Eastwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962).
[50] J. B. Phillips, *The Young Church in Action* (New York: Macmillian, 1955), p. vii.
[51] H. H. Walz, "Adult Christianity," *The Shane Quarterly*, October 1954, p.107.

The Continuing Education Unit •

Assignment

1. *What reason did Henrik Kraemer give for predicting that "lay movements will fail"? Do you agree? State your reasons pro or con.*

2. *Identify the biblical references that validate the doctrine of the priesthood of believers.*

3. *Explain Luther's fourfold teaching on the priesthood of believers. Explain his differentiation between the role of the "called" and the "uncalled."*

Chapter 5

Use for the Good of Others

Scene 1

Church members on a weekend retreat have been asked to introduce themselves by sketching a "coat of arms." Each sketch is to deal with the question: "Where do you fit in the body of Christ?" One of the group shares his drawing—a page filled with a big "2." When asked for an explanation he replies, "Why, I'm the layman, of course."

Scene 2

A young man has come to my office to talk about changing his prospective career from electrician to "pastor, missionary, or something." "It's time I begin to serve the Lord seriously," he announces, revealing the frustration of a person who cannot connect his current vocational life with ministry.

Scene 3

A middle-aged dentist calls me to expound on his favorite thesis: "Sabbath school has nothing to do with being a dentist." The class members are interested in his occupation, but they fail to provide any support for his efforts to minister through the business of medical care.

Today's Challenge

These three Christians, and many others like them, continue to

demonstrate that the much-heralded "lay renaissance" of the 1950's presents the church of four decades later with a sharp challenge. We're still having trouble moving from concept to practice. There is no doubt that during the past forty years some Biblical concepts have been restored to the church's thinking. Books like Hendrik Kraemer's *The Theology of the Laity,* Francis Ayres' *The Ministry of the Laity,* and Gottfried Oosterwal's *Mission: Possible* have left their mark. It would be difficult today to begin an argument over the following concepts:

1. The Biblical use of the word *laos* has nothing to do with amateur or part-time status but instead describes the entire people of God (including pastors).
2. All baptized Christians are ministers.
3. The direction of ministry is toward the world, and in this ministry the so-called "laity" are the key personnel.

The problem is that although so widely accepted, many of these concepts about lay ministry have little impact on the typical church member. He does not identify himself as a minister or know how to fulfill ministry within the context of his daily life. Somehow the practice of the church appears to be working against these lay ministry concepts. Put more positively, attempts to apply the concepts have helped us to identify some deeper problems.

Problems

Perhaps the greatest problem for that member of the church who tries to understand ministry is how the concepts can actually be applied in his or her life. The pastor preaches that church members are ministers in the neighborhood, at work, among friends, in the voting booth, and other places. But *how*? Does he mean talking about Christ at every opportunity? Does he mean always being honest and ethical? The role of the pastor can be easily defined. He preaches. calls on the sick, teaches, baptizes, conducts the Lord's Supper, and is involved in many similar activities. But what are the outlines of other ministries?

Another part of the problem in actually moving from the concept of lay ministry to its practice is the dispersed nature of any ministry outside the congregation. We do not go to work for a company as a team of Christians, or buy houses as a Sabbath school class. Eberhard Mueller has said that sending a person into the structures of society

as an individual Christian is like sending a single soldier to meet the enemy alone. Sabbath school teachers sense the importance of working together and have regular Sabbath school teachers' meetings. But how much attention is given to support systems for church members who are dispersed through the week?

A third problem lies in the organizational dynamics of congregational life. Congregational leaders easily get trapped into being *controllers* of ministry rather than *supporters* of ministry. Thus the concept of every member being a minister means a frantic effort by the leader to find something for everyone to do, resulting in a profusion of questionnaires, new jobs, and frustrations. The common lament of church council members—"If only we could get more members involved"—betrays the assumption that ministry is done only within the confines of the congregational program or at least in some way determined by the congregational leaders.

The problem is not easily solved. The very nature of congregational life tends toward consolidation—members need each other, they enjoy working together, and common endeavors require their closeness to each other. The very term *congregation* indicates those who have congregated. However, defending congregational life does not eliminate the need to look for ways to strengthen centrifugal forces.

Possibilities

In the face of such formidable difficulties, how can the ministry of the laity happen? If recent attempts to apply the concept have deepened some of the problems, they have also helped to identify some creative starting points.

At the top of the list, especially for those who are not pastors, is the discovery that one *already* is a minister! The impression often given in sermons and church literature is that one *could* be a minister, or that one *should* be a minister, and the result is that members spend a great deal of time struggling to *achieve* ministry. They think if they perform a certain action or take a particular stand, they will then be ministers. The usual result of such legalism is a great deal of guilt and a continual dissatisfaction.

In contrast, the Biblical teaching is that Christians *are* ministers. Francis Ayres points out that the New Testament uses the word *must*

only 203 times, and *ought* only 50.[1] On the other hand, Scripture has much to say about what Christians *are*, often in spite of some rather interesting situations. The members of the Corinthian church, torn by factions and including many who were immoral, proud, hypocritical, dishonest, and self-centered, were not told, "You *could* be a letter from Christ." Paul writes, "You are a letter" (2 Cor. 3:3, RSV).

Christians begin to get excited when they realized that the question is not, "How can we be ministers?" but "How did our ministry go last week?" They begin looking at the lives they are leading and begin to see possibilities for satisfaction, areas in which they would like help, and times when they failed. They are no longer trying to achieve status but are simply dealing with matters of application.

We Christians discover that they are ministers, another recent emphasis becomes important—ministry begins with the person, not the job. Since you are a minister, find ways to "use for the good of others the special gift . . . received from God" (1 Peter 4:10, TEV). Ministry has often been constricted because needs were stressed and gifts were forgotten. A member becomes a Sabbath School teacher, for example, because the Sabbath School Council has laid out the glaring need and no one else will do it. Actually, a balanced formula of need and resource spells ministry. If I were to see you drowning 100 yards from shore, I would not jump in to save you, because I cannot swim. I would do better running for help, or yelling. Many efforts at ministry are simply futile attempts to do something one is not equipped to do rather than identifying personal gifts and abilities so that they may be put into action.

When Peter says, "Use for the good of others the special gift . . . received from God," there can be two levels of meaning for the word "gift." On the one hand, that gift is the Holy Spirit, which we have received. On the other hand, the effect of the Holy Spirit in us causes the full unfolding of the person whom God created. And that unfolding has specific application in each life.

Each of us represents a unique part of God's creation. When I die, I will not be replaced. I am a gift and my primary challenge is to identify what I have to offer. In fact, one result of sin is that this original gift gets confined and distorted. To be redeemed is to be

liberated for the unfolding of that person that God originally intended.

So one way to identify and fulfill one's ministry is to identify one's own uniqueness—what one likes to do, what one sees in the world, what one can offer. Then begin looking for situations in which to make that offer. Gordon Cosby says,

> *I think all of us had best find out what we really want to do and start doing it and whatever it involves. If you have to give up your responsibility, give it up; if the church goes to pieces, so be it. But we've got to find what we want to do,* really, *because nothing else is going to help anybody.*[2]

Implications

Congregations can be the arena in which Christians identify their gifts and offer them to others. We'd like to suggest two ways congregations can be especially helpful.

First, the calling forth of gifts is not necessarily best done alone. In the community of believers the individual Christian can explore what he really wants to do. The surrounding group provides support, feedback, clarification, and insight. A congregation could be a place where small groups of people meet to identify their gifts and find ways of offering them "for the good of others."

In so doing the groups would have to steadfastly resist two temptations. The first temptation is to look within the congregational structure only for possibilities of utilizing the gift. If our mission is the world then we need to be especially imaginative in finding ways to send each other, with our gifts, into situations outside the church. A second temptation is to control the offering. When the congregation determines the value or significance of a service, this reduces the infinite variety possible through the Spirit.

A second challenge for congregations is to create support systems for ministers. Ministry is not a problem to be solved in a Bible class but a lifetime of discipleship to be constantly shared.

Congregations need to stop asking, "How can we get more people involved?" and instead find out what kinds of support its members need for weekly activities. Many persons simply need to talk with others about what is happening. For others, the needs probably

cannot be met in the congregation at all. Let me explain. Mark Gibbs has pointed out that the entire people of God (the laity) include three general categories of ministers. About one percent are what we normally call professional clergy. About 10 percent might be called "churchly" laity, those persons whose gifts are indeed well offered primarily within the institutional church. They are indispensable to the life of the church and need to be encouraged to fulfill their ministry with joy. But more than 80 percent are left (Gibbs calls them "secular laity") who are not basically involved in the structure of the institutional church. Some are rather nominal church members, but a sizable number "do wish to serve God faithfully in one way or another; they will not do this primarily, in church organizations, but in the other secular structures of their lives."[3] The best support for such ministers will probably involve setting up consultations and other forms of dialogue within those structures. Professional competence, emphasis on dialogue rather than pronouncements, agendas set by the members of the profession rather than by the church, would all be a part of this kind of resourcing. Can such members be encouraged by the congregation to move out and do such ministering in concert with other Christians in the same community or occupation?

It has been said that the more effective the leader of a group is, the less the group will look to him. Perhaps it could be said that the stronger the ministry of God's people becomes, the less the ministry will be controlled by church leadership and more varied and unrecognizable it will often be. For when the concept moves to practice it will no longer be neat, uniform, or manageable. Each unique child of God will be fulfilling his or her ministry.

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[1] Francis O. Ayres, *The Ministry of the Laity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 27.

[2] Gordon Cosby, "The Calling Forth of the Charisma" (mimeographed sermon, Church of the Saviour, 2025 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington D. C. 20036, 1963).

[3] Mark Gibbs, "The Structures of the Church and the Different Kinds of Laity," Audenshaw Papers #26 (Audenshaw Foundation, 1 Lord Street, Denton, Manchester, M34-2PF, England, 1974).



Assignment

1. *Why is there tension between the nature of congregational life and the church's being a witnessing community?*

2. *Why does ministry begin with the person and not with the job?*

3. *Mark Gibbs identifies three categories represented in the church. Describe how you would go about training the "secular laity" for ministry in the world.*

Chapter 6

Ye Shall Be Witnesses Unto Me

Martin Luther suggested that his city, Wittenberg, ought to be divided into four or five sections with a minister and several deacons for each, charged with the responsibility of preaching, distributing material aid, visiting the sick, and generally serving the needy, but sadly concluded that the persons for this were not available and "therefore, I do not trust to start it until our Lord makes Christians."

Obviously, if there is to be any large-scale lay ministry and witnessing, then there must be large-scale conversion within the church. The word is conversion.

I do not care about doctrinal hairsplitting there. I think there is broad agreement, in theory at least, that genuine Christian faith is contagious. When we have really got it, someone will catch it from us. Halverson in an article "The Tragedy of the Unemployed" expresses it in a striking manner:

> *The authentic impact of Jesus Christ in the world is the collective influence of individual Christians right where they are, day in, day out. Doctors, lawyers, merchants, farmers, teachers, accountants, laborers, students, politicians, athletes, clerks, executives . . . quietly, steadily, continually, consistently infecting the world where they live with a contagious witness of the contemporary Christ and His relevance to life.*[1]

The conversion may be from an unregenerate, nominal church

membership to a personal experience of grace. Or it may be from a lukewarm, defeated Christian life to a life of power and victory. In either case a radical transformation is demanded.

During the days of Oliver Cromwell, England faced a financial crisis of serious dimensions. In attempting to solve the problem, Cromwell and his staff of financial advisers thought of the statues of the saints in the churches and their gold and silver ornaments. The call went out, "Melt down the saints and put them into circulation." Such a radical transformation is necessary in the church today.

Believing Christians have been categorized into five types:

1. The strong, silent type. He says he just lives his faith.
2. The "casual-remark" type. He happens to drop the fact the he has been to church or says his prayers.
3. The "won't-you-attend?" type. He invites people to a service to hear someone else say what he does not have the courage to say personally.
4. The public-speaking type. In classes, meetings, services he speaks forthrightly in a way he is not quite able to do individually.
5. The one who shares his faith conversationally.

Much modern exhortation to witness is futile and may actually be harmful. If men do not have a vital, up-to-date relationship with Christ, witnessing can become pharisaical religious proselytizing so we can hang up more scalps on our ecclesiastical belts or pad our religious pride by the number of visits we made.

Jean de Joinville, in one of his biographies, tells the story of a monk who saw a Saracen woman walking down a street of Damascus with a pan of fire in one hand and a pitcher of water in the other. When the monk inquired what she proposed to do with these things, she replied that she intended to "burn up Paradise and put out the fires of hell so that man could do good for the love of God alone."

While we take issue with this woman's theology, we are in total agreement that motives are exceedingly important in our service for God. What prompts religious behavior such as missionary endeavor? What lies behind our self-denial, our selfless service?

A failure to engage in some high-pressure witnessing activity may pile up layers of religious guilt for not witnessing. Consequently, when we do speak to others for Christ, it is out of fear and guilt

more than out of faith and guidance. The result? Not much! Compulsive witnessing may have the thrasher going wide open, but not much wheat comes out.

The answer lies in our relationship with CHRIST Himself. If we are totally committed to Christ, and His life is being lived through us, *He assumes the responsibility for our effectiveness.*

> *When we give ourselves wholly to God and in our work follow His directions, He makes Himself responsible for its accomplishment.*[2]

The promise came to the apostles: "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me." Acts 1:8. Christ says that Christian witnessing is not optional. But neither is it mandatory. It is inevitable.

I must confess my longtime subconscious confusion over the nature of a Christian's witness. I thought witnessing was something for us to *do.* So I tried to do it, and I exhorted others to do it too. "Let's get in there and witness" was the gist of the cry. Along with urgent pleas to be consistent in conduct to match the verbal effort. Great professions demand a corresponding walk. I urged my congregations—and rightly—to:

> *Remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling. . . . Men will believe, not what the minister preaches, but what the church lives.*[3]

Now I realize that perhaps I missed the point. Christian witnessing is not something we *do;* it is something we *are.* It is a relationship with Christ through the Spirit which produces the fruit of Christian character. And this, unconsciously, even more than consciously on our part, draws men to Christ. It alone overcomes the terrible priggish self-consciousness which stifles our true holiness and effectiveness.

Jesus said, describing the mighty work of His Spirit in our personalities: You shall *be* witnesses to me. Not you shall *do* witnessing.

If we do it, we can be proud of it. Ellen White sensed the danger when she warned:

> *The steady progress of our work and our increased facilities are filling the hearts and minds of many of our people with satisfaction and pride, which we fear will take the place of the love of God in the soul.*[4]

Is this evangelical Christianity's own form of works-religion? Like the foolish Galations, we, having begun in grace, now think we shall carry on by human effort. Sobering is this reminder:

> *Men make the work of advancing the truth tenfold harder than it really is by seeking to take God's work out of His hands into their own finite hands.*[5]

If our current straining, striving, evangelistic promotion is God's way, why doesn't the New Testament have the same tone? Did Paul try to pistol-whip the Christians at Rome into soul-winning activity? No, he clarified the quality of life produced in Christ as we, rescued from certain death, put ourselves "in God's hands as weapons of good for his own purposes." Romans 6:13, Phillips.

In a life filled with God there is a calm, continuous outflow of witness. Sometimes it is in the silence of a friendly visit as we take time to listen to others' problems. Sometimes it is in the openness of admitting our own failures, telling how Christ has worked in them. We often help others most from our weaknesses, not from our strengths. Christ's grace is perfected in our inadequacies. Strong saints are not ashamed to own up to problems.

Most certainly it will be manifest in personal relations for evangelism and edification. Christian service then climbs down off the podium. The pulpit can become a coward's corner. And so can the Sabbath School class lectern. If a man is not bold, open, frank, across the table, he makes a short-circuited presentation whether in the sanctuary or the classroom. Can we confront men in the real-life, face-to-face personal encounter with the same courage we use on the platform? Only Christ gives this—it is a matter of relationship, not nerve, technique, or a dominant personality. The Holy Spirit's work is characterized by calm boldness. This makes easy, natural conversation about the things of God.

Sam Shoemaker describes this kind of witness:

They have lost completely all shyness about speaking of these things. Shyness usually means you are pretty shy on religion itself. When your heart gets full of it, so too does your talk. You don't talk dogmatically or self-righteously, but you lard [mix] your spiritual experience into your ordinary talk, and people get intrigued.

The Christ-filled life produces durable relationships. Patience is essential, and it comes hard to the impetuous activist. Often the culmination of evangelism takes place only after the long-term cultivation of a friendship. This is new birth. God set up nine months gestation for a human infant. May we be forgiven for the times when we have wanted the whole process spiritually to take place in nineteen minutes—from conception to delivery. Growth really gets started in friendship.

Thus a witness must be a Christian involved in other people's lives. Some pastors enjoy aloofness from their congregations. That is a sure way to produce nothing: nothing of depth, growth, or reproductive capacity. Such a posture succeeds in promoting the clergy-laity dichotomy and limiting the total ministry of the church to the capacity of the pastor. When a Norwegian theologian left America after an extended visit, he was asked: "What did you find the church in America to be?" He replied, "I found it to be a pastor's church."[6] However, it ought to be said that even churches which are not monarchical in structure, and feel theologically close to the ministry of all believers, have nevertheless abdicated their "priestly" tasks to their pastors. Many churches are thought of as merely institutions which have to be maintained rather than brotherhoods of people personally at work in mission.

A seminary professor of church history writes:

In spite of its affirmation of the priesthood of all believers, there is perhaps no function which Protestantism has so much neglected. Not only have Protestant laymen not assumed the priestly role, but until recently even the clergy have shunned it. A major task for Protestant churches today, not merely the clergy, but the whole church, is to understand and accept their priesthood.[7]

As reinforced in a previous chapter, the *pastor* holds the key. His

leadership determines whether his people will be merely members on a church roll or member-ministers.

Dr. Kenneth Cober says:

> *There is no such thing as being a member of the church without also being a "minister" and a "missionary." . . . Essentially, the layman and the clergyman do not belong to different categories. But both have received and responded to the call of Christ and have given Him a basic commitment of their lives. The major differences lie in the fact that the clergyman gives his life in service to the church as his occupational vocation, spends more time preparing for his ministry, and performs certain functions that the church requires of its pastoral ministers. Otherwise the layman has no less responsibility for fulfilling his ministry than has the pastor.*[8]

In the primitive church of the first century the word "pagan" had the connotation not only of a villager but also citizen. The baptism, the status of the individual Christian, while not removed from civilian responsibilities, was further advanced to that of a soldier "actively engaged in Christ's battle for the world. The New Testament and the early church never admitted a distinction between active and passive members."[9] When that commitment is made to God, the individual sees that "God does not desire 'something' from us—He desires us, ourselves; not our works, but our personality, our will, our heart."[10]

The church will be unfaithful in its mission to the world if it continues to think of itself in static terms with the clergy or the professional religious worker doing the "real" work of the church.

> *The ministry of the laity as a corporate ministry will make clear that the church in mission is a servant church. At present the servant character of the church is compromised because of the dichotomy between clergy and laity. Hence "ministry" when applied to the clergy points to* service on behalf of Christ, *but it lacks social context in relation to the needs of the world. On the other hand, "ministry" when applied ot the laity points to* service to the neighbour, *but cannot make clear the source and authority of its service. The integration of the two aspects of ministry centered in*

the laity as the reference group for mission will allow the missionary congregation to bear clear testimony to the authority for, as well as to the authenticity of, its ministry.[11]

Ideally, the service that God is getting done through the ministers should be precisely the service that God is getting done through all His Christians.

The primary ministry of the laity must be performed in the world. This does not mean that there will be a neglect or a minimizing of the church and its ministry. It simply means that the doctrine of the priesthood of believers "implies a relation of the church to the world which is of the utmost significance."[12]

The loss of this emphasis on the ministry of the laity is one major reason why the attack of the church has been blunted, for the laity is the spearhead of the church in the world. This was true in the New Testament: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the world." Acts 8:4. It was also true—as we have seen—in the early church:

The first prominent theological thinkers on behalf of the Church, were laymen of great ability. To mention only a few of the very prominent: Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine. Cyprian and Augustine, having become bishops so to speak by surprise, were essentially, by their whole education and long "secular career," laymen. The reason why such an obvious fact has to be stated expressly is that their position as Church Fathers has put them so forcefully in the theological, i.e., non-lay category that the simple truth of their being thinking Christian laymen is entirely forgotten or ignored.[13]

As emphasized in chapter 1, the New Testament term "laity" and the modern term "laymen" are quite different in meaning. In modern terminology a "laymen" is one who is a nonprofessional in a particular vocation. That is, a "layman" in medicine means one who is untrained and not a professional in medicine. The implication is always present that the professional is the one who has the primary responsibility for doing the work. This is not the case in religion or in the teaching of the New Testament. Nowhere in the New Testament

does it say that the primary responsibility for accomplishing the purpose of God in the world rests in the hands of the "official ministry." The primary responsibility is always upon the shoulders of those "called to be saints," "the people of God." Thus, in religion it is the layman who must do most of the work in the world.

This is true, first of all, because, as has been pointed out, it is the teaching of Scripture. In the second place, it is true because it is in the world that the ministry of the Christian can best be expressed. That is, this is where he works; this is where most of his time is spent. Therefore, the layman must have primary responsibility for giving the witness of God in the world. Third, the minister, because he is only one person, is limited in the number of places he can be in the world. There is a witness that needs to be given in the shop, in the service station, in the home, in the office, and on the farm. It is humanly impossible for the minister to be in all these places. But there are Christian laymen in these places. Therefore, contrary to prevailing opinion, it is the laymen who have the primary responsibility to do most of the work in the world, not the clergy. This is not meant to minimize or excuse the clergy. It is simply an attempt to get the laity into proper perspective.

In the fourth place, it is in the world where the witness for God is most desperately needed. "It is the universality of human sin and corruption which makes it necessary that there should be in the midst of the world a priestly body which can 'stand on the Godward side' on behalf of men." [14] This is where the people are. Even with the best programs of enlistment and the most effective approaches to mass evangelism yet devised, the church has been able to reach only a relatively small percentage of the total population of any community (particularly in large urban centers) with anything like a continuing ministry. Increasingly the church is simply ministering to "its own," and the masses are left untouched by what goes on within the walls of the church. It is in the world and only in the world that the majority of the people will ever be touched with a Christian witness. In this connection the observation of Walz concerning the "gathered church" is most intriguing in its suggestiveness.

> *I have often wondered in recent years whether it has not been a mistake to concentrate the doctrine of the Church so much on its*

being gathered. I think that the Church will appear to be gathered from the four winds of the earth only at the end of history as we know it. For the time being the Church is not a gathered community, but, to use the paradoxical phrase of one of the Reformers (Melanchthon), "the community of the dispersed." Without dispersion there is no savor. It is the laymen not gathered in the church building, but busy everywhere in the world, who must truly represent the Church as an element of stimulation, of creativeness and criticism, as a challenge demanding response which means life *for the world.*[15]

In this particular emphasis the doctrine of the priesthood of believers is closely related to the Christian doctrine of vocation which means that the totality of one's life is to be lived under God, and for that the totality of life is bound up in Christ. His work and his play must be "in Christ." It means that how he earns his money and how he spends his money is just as sacred an obligation and just as spiritual a ministry as the tithe he gives to the church. The witness he gives as he makes his living is just as spiritual an obligation as the witness he gives on the Sabbath.

When a church is not making satisfactory progress, the membership usually feels that it needs to change preachers. Sometimes what is needed is a radical change in the congregation. The "Word" must become flesh in the minister, but it must be clothed by the lives of the congregation if it is to be taken to the slums, the stores, the office, to the world that stands in desperate need of a "Word" from God.

The world's great heart is aching, aching fiercely in the night,
And God alone can heal it and God alone give light;
And the men to bear that message, and to share the Living Word,
Are you and I, my brothers, and all others who have heard.

Can we close our eyes to duty? Can we fold our hands at ease,
While the gates of night stand open to the pathway of the seas?
Can we shut up our compassion, can we leave one prayer unsaid,
Till the lands which hell has blasted have been quickened from the dead?

We grovel among trifles and our spirits fret and toss,
While above us burns the vision of the Christ upon the cross,
And the blood of Christ is streaming from His wounded hands and side;
And the lips of Christ are saying, "Tell poor sinners I have died."

O voice of God, we hear Thee, above the wrecks of time,
Thine echoes roll around us, and the message is sublime,
No power of man shall thwart us, no stronghold shall dismay,
For God commands obedience, and love has led the way."

The talk about "love for God" may just be empty mouthing unless the members of the congregation express their love for God not only in the church but also in their work, in the community, in the world.

We sing "Onward Christian Soldiers!"
and wait to be drafted into His service.
We sing "O For a Thousand Tongues,"
and we don't use the one we have.
We sing "Serve the Lord With Gladness,"
and gripe about all we have to do.
We sing "I Love to Tell the Story,"
and never mention it all year.
We sing "The Whole Wide World for Jesus,"
and never invite our next-door neighbor to church.
We sing "Throw Out the Life Line,"
and content ourselves with throwing out the fishing line.

There are two major barriers which tend to stand between the modern organized church and the world of which it is a part. One is sociological and one is psychological. From the sociological perspective, our churches are coming increasingly to be identified with the middle-class, white-collar attitudes, standards, and values. There are exceptions, of course. But in the main the lowest economic group is largely being untouched. Likewise, the chief executives and the wealthy persons are by and large unreached.[16] The church must break out of the middle-class, white-collar shackles in its concern for the ministry to all people of all classes.

The psychological barrier is related to the "official ministry." When preachers speak, when they visit, when they witness, there is always the conscious or unconscious awareness on the part of the recipient that "they are paid to do it." The ministry undoubtedly is fruitful, but its effectiveness is limited by this very real difficulty. The solution to both these problems is the ministry of the laity in the world.

> [The only way to overcome these difficulties] *is to decentralize the life of the church. . . . If . . . we force Christian people to engage their Christian "capital" in living together with those outside the church, e.g. their colleagues at work, their partners in business, their political friends, their fellow members in professional associations, instead of clinging together with their Christian brothers five evenings a week, we shall not only help them to be witnesses of the Gospel to those who do not know it, but also to overcome for themselves the peculiar atmosphere prevailing in the church and to be Christians breathing the air of modern life.*[17]

Two questions remain to be faced. How well is the church fulfilling its ministry in the world? How well qualified is the laity for carrying out its ministry? On the first question, there would undoubtedly be overwhelming agreement that the modern church is not in any adequate measure "in the world" through its laity in those spheres of the world (factories, shops, government agencies, etc.), where the real issues of the faith are being taught today.

> *The field is not the church, but the* world. . . . *There are practical overtones for this truth in the deadly struggle of Christianity with Communism. Communism got its start and derives its strength from a ghetto Christianity. When Karl Marx said that religion was the opiate of the people, he meant that religion, by wrapping men's minds in the mists of worldliness, insulated men from the struggles and problems of our common life together in the world. When people say, "Let religion stay out of politics," "Let religion stay out of everything but a little narrow corner of things which we will gladly assign it," "Let religion stay out of business"—when people say such things, they are giving voice to the Communist interpretation*

of the function of religion in society. To constrict the function of the Christian faith in the world in this fashion would fatally wound our witness and falsify the mission which we have been given.[18]

Yet, unfortunately, this is what is happening in the modern church. There are those who say the church should be concerned only with "spiritual" matters, and by this is meant that the church is to be concerned only with man's relation to God. Man's religion is to be expressed primarily in the church. The more dedicated ones will assume some leadership responsibility in the church. In the world he is expected, of course, to be "good." But the fact that he has a ministry which must be performed in the world as a fundamental part of his Christian faith is almost completely foreign to the understanding of the average church member. The model of Jesus' ministry should leave no doubts as to the comprehensiveness of the Christian's witness.

The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. . . . There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled.[19]

On the second question, it would not be an overstatement to say that the average church member is both spiritually illiterate and powerless in giving his Christian witness in those areas in which most of his life is spent. Therefore, in the program of our churches there must be a far more specific emphasis, in teaching and in practice, on the ministry of laity in the world. The curriculum must be designed with this emphasis in clear focus. It must begin in our schools. Ellen G. White counseled:

It is a perilous mistake to imagine that unless a young man has decided to give himself to the ministry, no special effort is required to fit him for the work of God. Whatever may be your calling, *it*

> *is essential . . . to become colaborers with Him, going forth to save those who perish. . . .* Every one *who has espoused the cause of Christ, who has offered himself as a soldier in the Lord's army, should place himself where he may have* faithful drill.[20]

Seventh-day Adventists, who hold the doctrine of the priesthood of believers as one of their distinctives, must understand that the unqualified teaching of New Testament concerning this doctrine is that every Christian has a ministry which, under God, he must fulfill. He cannot pay someone else to fulfill this ministry either by buying indulgences or by tithing. "To every one work has been allotted, and no one can be a substitute for another."[21] "To everyone who becomes a partaker of His grace, the Lord appoints a work for others. . . . Upon the minister of the Word, the missionary nurse, the Christian physician, the individual Christian, whether he be merchant or farmer, professional man or mechanic—the responsibility rests upon all."[22] Therefore, every individual who is called by God to join the Christian fellowship and church membership should understand that as a Christian he has this ministry to perform, and in uniting with the fellowship he must understand that thereby he is covenanting with God that he will accept and fulfill this ministry. It is necessary that the individual understand and accept his responsibility for performing this ministry *before* he unites with the church.

If the emphasis here is correct, then the emphasis in the program of the modern churches is seriously in error. That is, almost everything that is done in the present program points toward what is to be done on *Sabbath in the church* as its climax. The minister and church staff make their plans, a visitation program is promoted, the teachers and other church leaders make their preparation—all pointing to Sabbath as the climax. All of this is good as far as it goes. Certainly the worship of God and the study of the Bible are important. But the doctrine of the priesthood of believers indicates that for Christian the *climax* is what is done *in the world during the week*! What happens on Sabbath is to prepare him for this ministry in the world during the week. It is recognized that this is what the present church program intends to do. But the fact is that a rather significant revolution will be needed if this concept is to be seriously undertaken in the life and work of the churches. The seed of such a

revolution was planted almost a century ago when the church was counseled:

> *The best help that ministers can give the members of our churches is not sermonizing, but* planning work for them. *Give each one something to do for others.*[23]

> *The members of the church, trained to rely upon preaching, do little for Christ. . . . This condition of weakness must not continue. Well-organized work must be done in the church, that its members may understand how to impart the light to others. . . . The idea that the minister must carry all the burdens and do all the work is a great mistake.*[24]

> *The greatest help that can be given to our people is to teach them to work for God, and to depend on Him, not on the ministers. . . . The church members are not to expect a sermon every Sabbath.*[25]

Obviously, the present mind-set and attitudes of the pastors and church staff members will have to be drastically changed if such counsel is taken seriously. We will have to change our method of evaluating the "success" and effectiveness of our work from how many "attended" on Sabbath to what those do in the world who attended on Sabbath. The church members will have to change their understanding of their responsibility for, relation to, and ministry in the world. They will also need to change the manner of evaluating their loyalty and devotion to Christ from the number of meetings they attend on Sabbath to what they do in the world during the week. Yet these are precisely the changes that must be made if our church is to implement the practical meaning of the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

But to have a deeper understanding of their ministry is not enough. They must also have training for this ministry. To provide this training in any adequate sense will call for a new curriculum. Christians will need the opportunity to study specifically and in depth the relationships in which they engage in the world. The factory worker should have the stimulation and the opportunity to study what is his ministry in the world and how it should be

expressed in normal relationships—in the home, in society, in the factory, etc. The doctor, the accountant, the lawyer, the farmer, the secretary—all should be provided the same opportunity. This is not to suggest that one's ministry in the world will be expressed only through his particular vocation. Often a Christian's ministry will be expressed quite apart from his vocation. At a given time he might give himself to an intensive effort to reach the unreached through visitation, or he might desire to give special study and work for the world mission task of the church, or he might give himself to the elimination of some of the social problems in his environment.

> *Every follower of Jesus has a work to do as a missionary for Christ in the family, in the neighborhood, in the town or city where he lives.*[26]

Therefore, the objective of the church and the emphasis of its program must be changed to whatever degree is necessary so that it will point specifically toward helping the membership to understand the essential mission God has entrusted to those whom He has called to be the people of God and to lead them to accept and fulfill this ministry *in the world.*

The categories into which church members will fall as witnesses of the church are analogous to three witnesses of an auto accident, complete with tangled steel and shattered glass. One witness stood on the sidewalk and saw the wreck take place. He was an objective observer. The second witness was in the wreck, wounded but not seriously. Recovered but badly shaken. His is a firsthand, subjective witness. The third witness was in the wreck and killed by it. He was *really* a witness; it took his life.

Christ does collide with our human lives. Then men set about to communicate this. We call it witnessing.

1. The Sidewalk Witness. Some of us have seen it happen. We love to talk about other people's conversions. We discuss it objectively, but somehow the impact is remote, because we are describing somebody else's wreck.
2. The Wounded Witness. Most of us probably fall into this category. We know it happened because we were there and have the scars to prove it. The wreck was so real that we walk

with a Christian limp as a result. We have had enough contact with God to ruin us for anything else. We work hard, dragging ourselves along through life in Christian service.

3. The Exchanged Witness. There are only a few of these. He died in the wreck. And his old life has been buried as a consequence. But out of the crash, a new self was born—in fact, it was like a resurrection. This man demonstrates today what Paul described: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Galatians 2:20. This man is not just witnessing; he seems dead to all religious activity. He is letting Christ witness through him. He lives an exchanged life.

When Christ is ministering to men through us, in His way of calm, shattering honesty, outflowing concern, and transforming power, we can expect anything to happen. And it will. For "when we have entire wholehearted consecration to the service of Christ, God will recognize the fact by an outpouring of His Spirit without measure."[27] The earth will be lightened with *His glory;* the work will be finished. The "impossible" will have been "possible"!

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[1] R. C. Halverson, "The Tragedy of the Unemployed," *Christianity Today*, Sept. 12, 1960.
[2] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 363.
[3] White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 21.
[4] *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 535.
[5] White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 191.
[6] Ole Christian Hallesby (d. 1961), Oslo, Norway. Professor of the Independent Theological Seminary for forty years.
[7] E. Glenn Hinson, *The Church: Design for Survival* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1967), p. 95.
[8] Kenneth L. Cober, *The Church's Teaching Ministry* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1964), p. 31.
[9] World Council of Churches, *The Renewal of the Church*, report of the Yale Consultation of July 1957, p. 10.
[10] Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Unwin Brothers, Ltd., 1951), p. 188.
[11] William R. Forrester, *Christian Vocation* (London: Luttenworth Press, 1951), p. 197.
[12] E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillian & Co. Ltd., 1952), p. 292.
[13] Hendrick Kraemer, *A Theology of the Layman*, p. 139.
[14] E.. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, p. 293.
[15] H. H. Walz, "Adult Christianity," *The Shane Quarterly*, October 1954, p. 192.
[16] See Robert G. Wearner, "Mission to the Privileged," *Review and Herald*, April 29, May 6, 13, 20, 1976.
[17] H. H. Walz, "Adult Christianity," *The Shane Quarterly*, October 1954, p. 189.

[18] Culbert C. Rutenber, *The Reconciling Gospel* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1961), p. 114 (emphasis his).
[19] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.
[20] White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 216, 217.
[21] White, *Review and Herald*, Dec. 12, 1893; quoted in *Christian Service*, p. 10.
[22] White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 148.
[23] White, *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 49.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 434, 435.
[25] *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 19.
[26] *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 632.
[27] White, *Review and Herald*, July 21, 1896; quoted in *Christian Service*, p. 253.

The Continuing Education Unit •

Assignment

1. *Describe your view of what it means to be a "witness" for the Christian community.*

2. *Explain how the doctrine of the priesthood of believers is closely related to the Christian doctrine of vocation.*

3. *The apostolate of the laity is clearly a doctrine of Scripture. Describe how you propose to apply the concept and make it a reality in your church.*

Rex D. Edwards, D.Min, director of Continuing Education for the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, is recognized as the provider of excellence in resources for building up the ministry. His work with clergy of all denominations has led him to conduct practical, professional growth seminars on virtually every continent. In his books and articles, Edwards consistently emphasizes his personal commitment to empowering laity for ministry.