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Growth and Care of the Community

Leadership and Worship

Having looked at some of the foundational dimensions of the mission church, we can now be more specific. How do the people of God who are one yet many, scattered throughout the world's cultures yet gathered together in Christ, govern their life and witness from day to day? How can spontaneity in the Spirit be maintained once administrative responsibilities grow, and how can a consistent standard of conduct be assured within such a variety of situations? We want to consider Paul's response in four areas where the mission church has to work out its life. In Paul's day, as in every mission enterprise since his time, four factors have either contributed to or hindered growth. These are leadership, worship, discipline, and finance.

Leadership

We have already seen that what set Paul's churches apart from many of those found in the modern missionary era was their willingness and ability to manage their own affairs right from the start. The congregations that Paul organized were self-governing, it appears, within a matter of weeks or at most months after the gospel was first brought to them. At the end of each stay, Paul left behind not dependent groups of worshipers or unorganized "chapels," but a line of fully self-governing congregations. What this says concerning his views and practice in regard to leadership is extremely important.

Paul's Own Background

Paul had an incredible ability to attract key people who in turn had the capacity for leadership. Paul never refers to anyone as his disciple, and he

probably would have objected to any such a designation had it been used. However, it is Luke, his very close friend, who reports that in Damascus Paul's disciples lowered him from the wall to allow him to escape his enemies (Acts 9:25). This is startling. He had been a convert for only a matter of days and already had his loyal group of trainees. Some scholars are so disturbed by the idea of Paul having disciples so soon after his conversion that they have chosen a weak textual variant in which the phrase *his disciples* becomes simply "the disciples." They would say it is unlikely that in so short a time a group had already gathered around him with such loyalties.

Yet Paul showed consistently that he could attract around him gifted and committed people, and draw from them qualities of true leadership. We can assume that Paul's own development as a leader began immediately at his conversion. His Damascus ministry (Acts 9:20-25) was followed by further activity in Jerusalem and Tarsus (Acts 9:26-30). The importance of his years in Arabia is difficult to assess (Gal. 1:17), though this period, Paul's "hidden years," was crucial to his own development as a leader.¹

For all his natural gifts and his impressive background, it would appear that Paul did go through an apprenticeship. There was evidently a succession of experiences—whether in Damascus, Arabia, Jerusalem, Tarsus, or Antioch—that formed what we might call his training period. Barnabas recognized his leadership qualities and brought him from Tarsus to help in the preaching and teaching ministry at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). It is fair to say that Paul came to apostolic maturity in an apprenticeship under the encouragement of Barnabas. With his tutelage, Paul taught large numbers of new converts in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Paul's training continued during the first missionary journey, since Luke made it clear that it was Barnabas who was initially sent out as the head of that first missionary team (Acts 13).

The transition from Barnabas' to Paul's leadership during the first missionary journey is striking. After Saul's confrontation with Elymas, the magician at Paphos (Acts 13:8-12), there is a shift in Luke's account. Paul becomes more prominent than Barnabas, and with one exception Paul is thereafter always named first. It was Paul who preached the sermon at Antioch (Pisidia) that resulted in many followers and converts (Acts 13:43). It is apparent that by the time Paul returned to Syria with Barnabas, his apprenticeship had ended.

The Need for Early Selection and Training

During this early period, a naturally gifted man, Paul, was selected by an astute and committed leader, Barnabas. Mission churches desperately need

1. Refer to Arthur F. Glasser, "The Apostle Paul and the Missionary Task," in *Crucial Dimensions in World Evangelization*, Arthur F. Glasser et al., eds. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1976), p. 25.

the foresight and trust that leadership selection demands. One of the most destructive habits of missionaries has been to assume, sometimes for years, that no converts, or at most very few, are able to assume leadership. Taking the initiative which Barnabas did with the controversial new Christian, Saul of Tarsus, not only produced the greatest of leaders but also set a pattern that Paul himself followed in his own ministry.

The reluctance to think in terms of potential leaders among national Christians is illustrated by a remark made to me in 1962 by a missionary who had been in Nigeria for forty years. He said, "How can I really believe in the idea that these people can lead the church? I have known them since they were children, and I know too much about their pagan history. The leaders will have to come in the next generation." How shortsighted and demeaning such an attitude is! The church where that missionary worked suffered in many ways—economically, educationally, and in discipleship. Much of the lack of growth and the internal tension that characterized that church can be traced to the resistance of missionaries to give over their positions to those who appeared to them to be backward and untutored.

By contrast, one of the first missionaries of another mission² will always be remembered for his insistence that leaders should be recognized very early. Training and responsibility should be given them, and the missionary must step aside at an early stage to allow for their development. Daddy Bristow, as he was affectionately called, is remembered for the gifted leadership that at least three of his "Timothys" have given over the years, both to the church and as Christians in government positions. Bitrus for sixteen years was the secretary of the Church of Christ in Nigeria; Barnabas is a highly respected leader in education, in state government, and in Bible translation; and Yusuho is a secondary-school administrator, a church leader, and a government officer. The spirit of urgency in leadership selection and training has always been a characteristic of this mission agency, and over the years this practice has resulted in both depth and creativity in the church that has been planted. Leadership must be fostered and nurtured. Converts will not develop the qualities necessary for leadership, when missionaries are reluctant to trust young Christians and refuse to invest time and energy in leadership development.

Leaders for the church must come from among the natural and trusted leaders the people themselves put forward. Obviously, no one can lead who does not have the support of his or her own people. It not only seems artificial, but also may be counterproductive, therefore, for the expatriate missionary to arbitrarily select and arrange for the development of leaders. Nevertheless, at the outset this may be the only way leadership will emerge. What is basic is the missionary's attitude. Will he hold tightly to the authority

2. Sudan United Mission (British branch).

and the status that his position as outsider often carries, or will he consciously and sincerely seek out those gifted people who can learn the art of leadership? Will care be taken by the missionary that he does not hold to authority or be found grasping for power for a single hour, as soon as capable, committed, indigenous people can be given these responsibilities? It was extremely important to Paul that the churches be fully equipped to carry on their own lives.

Paul's Practice: Training in Ministry

Whether or not Paul consciously set up an apprenticeship program, this is, in fact, what happened. It is accurate to say that Paul did not train anyone *for* ministry. The training he did was training *in* ministry. For those in the early apostolic teams, this meant apprenticeship under Paul. For the others who resided permanently in one place, this meant learning by doing. Elders, for example, were not elected after they had graduated from a prescribed course. Paul believed that Christians can best learn while serving, and this principle governed his practice.

Early selection

Matriculation into Paul's "course" took place at baptism, with appointment to ministry following almost immediately, even while people still were engaged, as it were, in the first courses of study. New converts not only were to be instructed but were to teach as well, beginning with the first days after their conversion (Rom. 15:14; Phil. 1:5; Col. 3:16).

This urgency to develop leaders and the trust placed in leaders are incredible by general standards of practice today. When Paul and Barnabas retraced their journey on the first missionary venture, "in each church they appointed elders" (Acts 14:23). When Paul first wrote to the Thessalonians, there was already a recognized and active group of leaders (I Thess. 5:12-13). Obviously, there was little time for any of those first leaders to be trained to carry out their ministry before they were appointed to office. This does not mean to say that there is special virtue in untrained leaders, but what is important is Paul's insistence on immediate care for local congregations by those who are indigenous to that congregation.

Paul's priority was to find authentic resident leadership rather than postponing the appointment of elders while he, or one of the apostolic team, continued to govern, teach, and control. But he did not abandon these newly-appointed leaders. He returned again and again to "strengthen" these brothers as they held the flock together (Acts 14:21-22; 15:32-35).³ He

3. See also Acts 15:4; 16:5; 18:23; 20:2.

affirmed them and encouraged them in their continuing ministry in the churches. Most of their teaching and training would have come after they had assumed their positions of ministry.

Qualifications

It was not of the highest importance in Paul's selection of leaders that they be doctrinally perfect or reputable Bible teachers, much less profound theologians. There was no way that these early Christians, especially those from Gentile communities, could have had an extensive background in Christian knowledge. Roland Allen observes that Paul must have been satisfied with

a more or less meager acquaintance with the Septuagint . . . and with a knowledge of the brief outline of Christian doctrine set forth in the epistles of Thessalonians and some instruction in the meaning and method of administration of the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁴

However, the training while *in* ministry did require certain moral standards as a first priority. The important characteristics were a converted life, a commitment to the redeemed community, and personal morality. These, therefore, were willing people, gifted people, and people who had been sanctioned by their fellow Christians. They were to be persons who had accepted the lordship of Christ and who sought to live by this standard. Paul was not inclined to set up regulations by which elders were to be judged. God alone knows the heart. The church probably will not always be right in leadership selection. Even Paul did not have a perfect record. Ultimately to try to judge the spiritual condition of a person, or to seek guarantees that he will not fail, is not man's responsibility. Morality of life and confession of the basic doctrine were what Paul had to work with. Missionaries have too often rationalized that because indigenous leaders must be exemplary almost to the point of perfection, they cannot be given responsibility too soon. But the missionary, also a flesh-and-blood person, is often blind to his or her own imperfections and yet continues in the significant role of leadership. Months become years and a syndrome of dependency on the foreigner develops, making change very difficult.

Autonomy

Paul of course was almost constantly on the move. His objective in each place was to appoint elders who would soon become familiar with all the facets of the ministry. In this way, they did not develop a dependency on

4. *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (1912; reprint ed. London: World Dominion Press, 1960), p. 101.

Paul. When he went away, the churches remained. The practice of training while in ministry becomes even more obvious when we look at Paul's mobile team. The New Testament calls our attention to more than thirty persons who ministered in various ways under the tutelage of Paul. Nine of these were women.⁵ Paul refers to these faithful people in a variety of ways: as brother, apostle, minister, servant, pastor, worker, fellow worker, fellow soldier, and fellow prisoner. Some of these were directly under Paul's authority as a teacher, while others were outside of his tutelage. Yet Paul trusted all of them with responsibility, fully and from the earliest moment.

At times, not surprisingly, this trust brought difficulties. It is possible that Timothy was not completely effective in his initial ministry at Corinth, so Paul wrote to him when he came to Ephesus, giving loving guidance and pushing him on to maturity. Others, such as Demas, who loved the world (II Tim. 4:10), disappointed Paul.

Yet Paul does not regret these experiences. He would rather see failure on the part of a few than try to manage everything himself. Not only would this have been impossible, but also without his boldness the amazing success that the majority of these new Christian leaders showed would never have resulted. He constantly encouraged and gave personal guidance to the appointed elders. He sent off his companions, young converts that they were, to minister without supervision in faraway places. They would no sooner join him than they left him again to prepare the way in a new place, or to follow up on some previous work, or perhaps just to be present in a place where Paul could not go.

Benefits of Early Leadership Training

Much could be written at this point about the methodology of leadership development. The question of what an effective leader of a young church is, and how that leader is to be discovered and encouraged, is one of the most important areas of current mission study. We see five reasons why Paul had no second thoughts about an early, autonomous leadership for the churches. Each reason is, individually, a factor that will benefit the new fellowship and will foster development in a number of important areas.

Initiative

Developing leaders at the early stage of a mission church fosters initiative. This means the burden for the total church—its growth, the quality of its witness, and the administration of its life—is not seen as the responsibility of an outsider but is accepted by the church itself. Paul left no question in the

5. Francis Badcock lists thirty-five associates in Ephesus alone. *The Pauline Epistles* (London: Macmillan, 1937).

minds of local Christians, wherever he went, as to who was in charge. By insisting that authority lies with the Christians themselves and by appointing elders,⁶ Paul made the message of independence and responsibility understood. The church in each place belonged to the local people. They, not the apostle or the apostle's helper, had the care of all in their charge. In this way new Christians took action by responding to their own needs and felt the excitement of responsibility. Churches and congregations that Western missionaries tend to oversee and dominate are the very churches that tend to take little initiative for their own affairs. They are consequently judged as not being "ready" or as being uncreative and dependent. Dependent and uncreative they may be; however, the fault lies not with the people but with the missionary who "cares for and feeds" them, and who, by his domination, gives no signal that God desires to call out, direct, and inspire his own people. Allen deplored the control of ministry by missionaries. ★

Where a superior order consists almost wholly of foreigners, the result is often deplorable. Catechists, teachers, deacons, and priests are wholly independent of the one authority which they really understand—native public opinion; solely dependent on the one authority which they seldom can understand, the foreign missionary.⁷ ★

Equality

Developing leaders at the early stage of a mission church teaches equality. The young Christians must understand that this body, the church, has many members and that all have gifts and opportunities for service (Rom. 12:5; I Cor. 12:18). It has already been shown that it is all too easy for the gifts of ministry to be overlooked when the missionary or a few powerful leaders dominate the church. Recognition of the worth of each Christian and the potential of each to serve is basic to the development of the ministry. In fact, some will be apostles, some prophets, and others teachers. The areas of need for special leadership and the office required will become apparent to the body. These developments are natural and good for the church. The gifts for various kinds of leadership should be sought as early as possible by the members themselves, so that the various ministries arise from within the fellowship.

All Christians, regardless of social rank or educational qualifications, must see each other as equal in Christ. The recognition of offices of special leadership is not forced by an outsider or managed arbitrarily by a few.⁸

6. Though this appointment was not made on his own, but in consultation with the Christian group. See Allen, *Missionary Methods*, p. 99.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

From the beginning, the church must learn that not only is it the responsibility of all members of the body to regulate the life of the body, but also that all have a function, whether large or small, and all are equally regarded by God and by each other.

Independence

Developing leaders at the early stage of a mission church encourages independence. Jerusalem did not control Paul's churches. The same Spirit who was given to the Jews was given also to the Gentiles. Peter saw this and witnessed to it at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:8). Independence for each church and interdependence are in harmony with the gospel of freedom and can be discovered early, or can be frustrated and denied to the church's experience. Says Harry R. Boer,

If we transmit to others the life of the Spirit, we must not hinder them in fully expressing the freedom and joy of life: If we are eager to see them gather knowledge in the Spirit, we should also be eager to see them express the knowledge they have gathered. If we exert ourselves to give them the Spirit of holiness and life, we should be eager to give them the Spirit of liberty through which that life comes to expression.⁹

The facts of mission history show all too clearly and painfully that Christians are not trusted with responsibility. We have the same worthy end in mind as did Paul, that of autonomy and independence for the churches, but Paul "achieved immediately what we hope to achieve after an extended period of time."

Where we begin with independence, we shall end with independence, and this independence will express itself in the framework of the communion of the saints which is a holy interdependence. But when we begin with dependence, we shall end independence and as we have indeed so often ended.¹⁰

Spiritual growth

Developing leaders at an early stage promoted spiritual growth. Maturity is what Paul wanted most for his churches. When new Christians develop a sense of dependence on the Lord who redeemed them, rather than on human persons or institutions, and when Christians are given the right to be free in the unfettered Spirit of God, then we will begin to see the growth Paul hoped for. The problem with the Corinthian church was that it had become a prisoner to human ideas about what the church is. The members

9. *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 222.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

had become so selfish and ingrown that Paul could not address them as people who had the Spirit (I Cor. 3:1). Little wonder there was no growth. They had to be fed as babies, with milk rather than with solid food (I Cor. 3:2). They lacked maturity. Paul expected the churches to find their own solutions and to work out their own problems. Certainly they would make errors in judgment. But they would grow by doing, not by imitating or by pleading ignorance or inexperience.

God's people, however recent they are in the faith, must understand for themselves the reasons for things and exercise their own intelligence. In turn, they will become more sure in their own faith and will be able to help those who are less courageous or less experienced. In this way those who have noticeable gifts for special leadership will emerge while all grow in the faith. Paul taught that spiritual growth is stimulated when the members of the church accept their responsibility to minister to each other. It is by urging the church into Christian service and building up the body of Christ that Paul believes Christians will become more mature, "no longer . . . children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind," for "we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head" (Eph. 4:14-15).

The church cannot be indigenous if it does not develop spiritually. An indigenous church is a self-functioning church, the interacting and interdependent parts working together as a body. Growth enables function and the function in turn promotes growth (Eph. 4:16).

Contextual Christianity

Developing leaders at an early stage emphasizes contextual Christianity.¹¹

The greatest gift a missionary or a mission agency can give to a young church is the right to think out and act out the Christian life for itself. Alan R. Tippett raises the issue of self-image as the first mark of a truly indigenous church.¹² This is a church that sees itself as "mediating the work, the mind, the word, and the ministry of Christ in its own environment. Does the church see itself as the body of Christ in a particular place?" All we have said in the previous chapter concerning the contextual church—that expressions of life and worship radiate from the very center of being—takes hold here. Those who are Christians in the local situation are the persons best suited to know what the shape of the church shall be in that place. If no emphasis is placed on early thinking by leaders from within the indigenous

11. An ideal book that gives the rationale and various methodologies for leadership training in various churches is Kenneth Mulholland's *Adventures in Training the Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976).

12. The five additional traits of an indigenous church are its self-functioning, self-determining capacity, self-supporting nature, self-propagating fervor, and devotion to self-giving. *Verdict Theology in Mission Theory*, revised edition (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1973), pp. 155-158.

Christian group, forms can develop that are alien and irrelevant because they have been instituted by a foreigner. It is almost impossible to change things once the pattern is set. Tippett regretfully cites the church in China as an example of a church that never was established on contextual principles. "We shall probably never be able to measure the extent to which this threw the populace into the arms of Communism, but if the archival data were open to us, I believe we would find this a major factor."¹³

As the church worldwide considers modern China, it would be incredible if we were to repeat the failures of the past. It is the people there in that place, the Chinese Christians who have suffered and endured so much, who will now determine the course for the future. Paul would have insisted that those Chinese Christians develop a contextual Christianity from the very beginning.

Worship

At no time is the church more keenly aware of what it means to be a redeemed community, or better able to express the meaning of membership in Christ's body, than when it is at worship. The significance of worship for the mission church may be compared with that of breath for the body. All the body's activities, the thinking process as well as physical movement, depend on the inflow of oxygen. Each limb and organ, literally every part, functions only as respiration continues. When Christians worship, they are making the most open statement possible about God: that he is God and that he is truly worthy of the praise being ascribed to him.¹⁴ For their corporate worship, God's people need to set aside the special times and conceive the appropriate forms by which they can render to God the honor he deserves.

Worship is always the central focus of the life of Christians together. It is at worship that leaders are most visible. Theology is taught through preaching and singing. The community of believers is joined with Christ through the sacraments. The variety of gifts is shared, and the invitation to discipleship is made.

During our years in Africa, we saw how the very essence of the Christian life is expressed in worship conducted in meaningful ways. In Ibadan, for example, the whole spectrum of different forms of worship can be experienced without ever leaving the city. At one extreme are those congregations that have first copied, then exaggerated, Western forms. Highly

13. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

14. See Ralph P. Martin's discussion on the term *worship*. *Worship in the Early Church*, revised edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 11-12.

ritualistic, with every possible vestment and formality, worship is an expression of an entirely new subculture. There is very little of such sophistication and rigidity found in any part of the traditional culture. On the other hand, worship in one of the many independent churches is intensely emotional, informal, seemingly unorganized in both content and structure. Most of the churches fall somewhere between these two contrasting expressions, but in each church one is always aware of the special differences.

Worship in Paul's Churches

In a way, rather like witnessing, worship in Pauline churches was something that was going on constantly, even though comparatively little was actually written about it. Yet a considerable amount of indirect material helps to shed light on the subject. Paul uses the word *worship* (*latreia*), only twice; once (as Herman N. Ridderbos points out) "as a denotation of the Old Testament worship of God (Rom. 9:4), and once of the life of the New Testament believers (Rom. 12:2). He does not apply it to the 'meeting,' but to the daily walk of the church."¹⁵ Yet the meetings of the church were very important, and what happened when the body met was of foundational significance for the life and the growth of Christians.

The spirit of the gathered community

Paul does not describe worship gatherings in his epistles, except for the teaching that he gives in I Corinthians 14. Luke's accounts of what took place when Christians met together are almost as infrequent. He evidently did not consider detailed descriptions of worship gatherings to be of special importance; however, in three places we do have brief, candid pictures, which provide us with a summary of the spiritual components of early Christian worship.

Acts 14:27 Paul and Barnabas have just completed that notable first missionary journey in Galatia. They have retraced their steps, strengthening the believers and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. Now they have returned to their home church, Antioch, to give the report. The narrative reads, "When they arrived in Antioch, they gathered the people of the church together and told them about all that God had done with them and how he had opened the way for the Gentiles to believe." At first this may seem to convey very little, but closer study reveals that three elements are present. The congregation is gathered for the purpose of hearing what God has done in other places, and how he has used two of their own number in the ministry. The leading features are witnessing, sharing, and fellowship.

15. *Paul, an Outline of His Theology*, J. R. DeWitt, trans. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 481.

Acts 15:30-33 The scene at Antioch is now changed. The controversy over the admission of Gentiles into the church has been discussed at Jerusalem. The decision would be important to Antiochian Christians, since they had inaugurated the mission and there were many Gentiles among the Christians in Antioch itself. The whole group of believers gathered and once the letter had been read, "they were filled with joy by the message of encouragement." Two of the local prophets, Judas and Silas, spoke a long time, "giving them courage and strength." The picture again is one of sharing, with the added dimension of joy, and a strong feeling of concern for one another.¹⁶

Acts 20:7-12 Paul is now on the last leg of his third journey and returns to that memorable place, Troas, where first he had received the vision to preach in Macedonia. He is spending a week here after having crossed the Aegean Sea from Philippi. The gathering is on a Saturday evening, first for the fellowship meal, and then to hear Paul speak. It is a long meeting that actually lasts until sunrise. One can only imagine what Paul's sermon must have covered. He would have reported on all that had happened since the last meeting, and no doubt would have reviewed the truths of the faith and encouraged the Christians at Troas. It is an interesting account, including the incident of the accident suffered by Eutychus and his healing by Paul. Leading features are the fellowship of eating together (possibly followed by the Lord's Supper), the exposition of the word, and a heightened sense of love and concern for one another.

In summary, the spirit that prevailed in the early churches is demonstrated by the sharing of and rejoicing in the Word, by mutual concern and love for the fellowship (expressed in various ways), and by flexibility and freedom as to forms, all in a context of ascribing glory to God through Christ. But these gatherings did not just happen without precedents. The first Christians in Jerusalem, for example, could not have conceived of the church outside of the framework of the ancient Jewish tradition. So in each place where Paul planted churches, the worship had both rich elements of the Jewish faith and distinctive new components that set their communities apart from all others.

Continuity with Jewish forms

The fact that Christian gatherings did have continuity with synagogue and even temple worship shows how worship, wherever it takes place in the world, will have similar features everywhere. Even the Gentiles, who had little or no precedent for worship, accepted forms that were of Jewish

16. Martin notes that "nothing is more characteristic of the Apostle's [Paul's] sacramental teaching as a whole than his use of the term 'fellowship' (koinonia)." *Worship*, p. 122.

origin. At the same time, the inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian worship brought some new and fresh practices that set early Christian worship apart from the services conducted in the synagogue. "Christian worship as a distinctive, indigenous thing arose from a fusion, in the crucible of Christian experience, of the synagogue and the Upper Room."¹⁷

Jewish historians give a reasonably reliable picture of what synagogue worship was like, even though we do not have the picture in detail. Ralph P. Martin sums up the three main elements of synagogue worship as praise, prayer, and instruction.¹⁸ Fasting, a common Jewish practice, was also carried over into the church. All of these major elements of worship were important to the early church and took on a new and deeper meaning.

References to the worship of Christians that bears resemblance to that of the Jews are scattered throughout Paul's epistles. These are important because they show what was foremost in his thinking when he was instructing the young churches. When writing to Timothy, he speaks of prayer with upraised hands and mentions three kinds of prayers: "supplications," "intercessions," and "thanksgivings" (I Tim. 2:1, 8). Worship was expected to be an orderly exercise. He instructs Timothy to know "how we should conduct ourselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God" (I Tim. 3:15). Again, Paul's advice to the Corinthian church is that "everything must be done in a proper and orderly way" (I Cor. 14:40).

There is an emphasis too on teaching, which was always important in Jewish worship. Teachers were set aside from the very earliest at Antioch (Acts 13:1), and Paul seems to have spent considerable time in each place as a teacher (Acts 15:35; II Thess. 2:15). His instructions to Timothy frequently refer to the need for (the provision of) corporate teaching (I Tim. 4:6, 11, 16; 6:2).

New elements and new meanings

The new covenant that Jesus instituted in the upper room means that no form of worship can ever be the same again. In addition to changes in the old forms, new and distinctly Christian practices appear. Probably the most striking new feature is exhortation and proclamation as an aspect of teaching. There is an urgency and a depth of emotion added to what had become pedantic and formal. The term for "exhortation" (*noutheteō*) was rarely used in the Old Testament.¹⁹ It now describes the care and the discipline needed by Christians in order to live in an unfriendly world. The word *taught* is synonymous with "admonish" (RSV). Paul reminded the Ephesian

17. W. D. Maxwell, *An Outline of Christian Worship* (Oxford: At the University Press, 1945), p. 5, quoted by Martin in *Worship*, pp. 26-27.

18. See *Worship*, pp. 24-27; and Ridderbos's discussion on worship in *Paul*, pp. 480-486.

19. Only in wisdom literature.

elders that "with many tears, day and night, I taught every one of you" (Acts 20:31). We can assume that it was at large meetings that Paul taught "with all possible wisdom," and in which he warned and taught the Colossians "in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature individual in union with Christ" (Col. 1:28). He also asked the Colossians themselves to "teach and admonish one another" (Col. 3:16, RSV), and told the Romans that it was their responsibility to "instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14, RSV). He stresses that all exhortation is to be "in the Lord" and "by the Lord" (Phil. 4:2; I Thess. 4:1; II Thess. 3:12).²⁰

A second new element was preaching of the Word. The church was begun by preaching and its very existence depended on continued preaching (I Cor. 15:1-2; Col. 2:7; I Tim. 6:14). Paul expected that his own epistles would be read aloud in the church assembly (Col. 4:16; I Thess. 5:27).²¹

A most notable addition, and one that was a mark of the church wherever it met, was the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Paul mentioned this joyful aspect of worship frequently (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).²² The whole idea of "melody in the heart" suggests that the psalms must have been brought to worship as testimonies of joy, whether by the whole congregation or by individuals. Singing was a mark of Christian worship from the inception of the church. How else could the excitement of Pentecost, the joy of thousands of changed lives from every strata of society, be released, if not by song? There had always been singing in temple and synagogue worship. Many of the Psalms were intended for singing, and antiphonal choirs were well known in Judaism,²³ but the old psalms are now sung with understanding. It may well be that some of the poetic references that Paul makes to Jesus Christ in his epistles are, in fact, well-known New Testament hymns (Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; I Tim. 3:16).²⁴

It is difficult to distinguish between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Psalms were connected with the Old Testament, hymns with the Christian community and those who may have carried them from place to place. Sacred or spiritual songs were those songs taught spontaneously by the Spirit and sung perhaps by the entire congregation, groups, or individuals. The overall impression is that such music affirmed both an identity with God's people everywhere and a spontaneity and freedom. This is extremely important for our concept of indigenous worship, for music is universally the way in which God's people express themselves in the Spirit.

The worship also included the beginning of Christian affirmation or the

20. See also I Corinthians 4:14; I Thessalonians 5:11, 12, 14.

21. The word used is *anaginōskō*, which is the technical term for the cultic reading aloud of the Old Testament in the synagogue (see Luke 4:16; Acts 13:15; 15:21; II Cor. 3:14-15). See also Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 483.

22. See the helpful treatment on these classifications by Martin in *Worship*, pp. 37-52.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-52.

recital of simple creeds, of which Romans 10:9 is probably the best illustration. "If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved." Other traces of early creeds are found in I Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:5-6, and Philipians 2:6-11.

The most foundational change in worship was the remembrance of the Lord's death through the Eucharist (I Cor. 11:23). How frequently the Supper was observed cannot be concluded from what Paul writes. The church, however, apparently observed the Eucharist in close connection with a fellowship meal (Acts 2:42; 20:7; I Cor. 10:25-26). Considering the intimacy of worship and the fact that the believers usually met in small groups, the eating of the fellowship meal, in association with the Eucharist, probably became quite a regular practice.²⁵

The public expression of spiritual gifts would have been something new in the meetings. The variety of the *charismata* made the worship experiences something radically different from anything the Jews had known before. What would a Jerusalem conservative have thought when attending worship at Corinth, for example? Here "one person has a hymn, another a teaching, another a revelation from God, another a message in strange tongues, and still another the explanation of what is said" (I Cor. 14:26). As we have seen, Paul expected that the different gifts would be used for the common good as the Spirit directed (Rom. 12:6; I Cor. 12:4-7). It would seem that while both elements of Judaism and these new features were commonly present in early Christian worship, there was no set pattern that all congregations followed. The specific forms, the times and place depended on local situations. Worship meant the presence of God in the midst of his people and the people's response, in a variety of ways, to this divine presence.

The Nature of Christian Worship

When the church gathers together, God is in the midst. Recognizing this holy presence and responding as God desires is the way each new group of Christians grasps the meaning of its new life. Worship services are also opportunities to instruct, to empower, and to confront needs, all in the spirit of giving praise to the Lord. Worship, by the very fact of gathering together the members, is meant to give support and spiritual help to the whole body. It is to create an atmosphere in which the casual attender or the stranger can be led to immediate receptivity and be drawn into the fellowship.

The worshipers themselves are to be edified and helped by each other. This quality of mutual up-building stands out above all others. All that takes

25. Ridderbos, *Paul*, p. 484.

place comes under this test. Is the body being strengthened? Are the weak being supported and the strong sharing their strength? Everything—whether a hymn or a teaching message—must be of help to the church (I Cor. 14:26). Paul was distressed by the tendency to individualism. He was against anyone who made a show or who got help only for himself at the expense of others. This tendency seemed to arise most frequently in connection with speaking in tongues. Therefore, Paul called for caution, because strange or unknown tongues minister only to one or two, “but the one who proclaims God’s message helps the whole church” (I Cor. 14:4). This does not mean that the gift of tongues is to be excluded but that the whole body must profit by it, or it would be better not permitted. It is the principle of up-building that controls worship. When a form or a practice does not function for the good of all, it is out of place. The expression of gifts must be organized in such a way that the entire gathering is edified. Gifts that contribute the most to the entire community are the ones to be preferred. Paul ranks the value of prophecy, therefore, higher than the value of tongues, because it is better suited for edification.²⁶

For Paul, worship was not an ecstatic, esoteric exercise that is unconnected to real life. Relevant worship is fashioned from life and prepares for life. For as J. G. Davies states, “Forms of worship can only be made relevant by those who fashion them from their situation in the world.”²⁷ Those who attend worship come from various levels of society and from various religious backgrounds. The strong Christian ought to give way to the weaker. No one is to pressure another into accepting a style or form of worship that will be hurtful to others. Each one is to be accepted for who he is and what his particular background has made him. He is to be understood and helped on those terms. So the argument of Paul, especially in I Corinthians, keeps coming back to the use of gifts. There is no reason, but for the good of the whole (I Cor. 14:12), why a Christian should seek to excel in spiritual gifts. The leaders must plan every part of the worship gathering so that it embraces and lifts up all.²⁸

But worship is also a communication to the “outsider.” Just as the building up of all the members is one dimension of worship, a second, equally important dimension is the need to give a clear message to those who come in off the street, so to speak. If the ordinary person who has no background in what Christians do and say in church were to tell how he felt about some of our services, it would be an incredible report. This is also painfully true of the majority of overseas mission churches.

One man who entered an Anglican church in the Nigerian town of

26. O. H. Schmidt, *St. Paul Shows Us How* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1950), pp. 45-46.

27. *Worship and Mission* (New York: Association Press, 1967), p. 148.

28. Romans 14:9; 15:2; Ephesians 4:12, 16; I Thessalonians 5:11.

Bukuru said afterward, "Is this a group of people who are already in heaven?" I asked him why he should say this. He replied, "There was a lot of language used which I think will be spoken in heaven, but which I have never heard here on earth." In another case, one of the respected old men of the Sura tribe finally went to Sunday morning worship. He said he was not able to control his disappointment during the singing of the hymns. When I asked him why, he replied, "My people who knew our music well and who are some of our best performers were in the service. But as I saw them singing, they were very unhappy. There was nothing in their words which sounded anything like us. I don't know why, but they seemed like strangers to me." I recalled that two of the hymns that morning were word-for-word translations of "When Morning Gilds the Skies" and "Bringing in the Sheaves." A quick study of many older hymns, dear to those who have been brought up in the churches of Europe and America, will reveal anachronisms and clichés that no longer speak to the unchurched.

Paul had a term for visitors and casual attenders. The word *idiōtes*²⁹ is usually translated as "outsider" or "unlearned." However, Today's English Version translates this word as "ordinary person," which comes closer to the point. If someone whose heart and mind are right and really wants to understand and accept the Christian way is in the service, how important it is that he is reached and touched by the worship service itself. For worship has an evangelistic function. In the synagogue it was customary for those who had not yet learned the forms and the customs of Jewish worship to be segregated from the others. Paul insisted that both the ordinary person and the unbeliever (I Cor. 14:24) who happen to attend worship must understand all that takes place. Every component of the worship must be readily grasped by everyone.³⁰

To illustrate his point, Paul referred to the gift of tongues, which tended to cause disorder and lack of communication in Corinthian worship. It is easy to see how one of the untutored, ordinary people might leave in confusion. Paul's ideal was that when the "outsider" slips in from the street, "he will be convinced of his sin by what he hears. He will be judged by all he hears, his secret thoughts will be brought into the open, and he will bow down and worship God, confessing, 'Truly God is here among you!'" (I Cor. 14:24-25).

How carefully balanced, then, must be the nature and the form of Christian worship. It includes both a building up of the members themselves and a reaching out to those who are not yet in the fellowship. This latter function applies to all aspects of worship. In I Corinthians 14, Paul is concerned with communication. Language, symbols, forms, and attitudes must

29. See I Corinthians 14:16, 23, 24.

30. Davies, *Worship and Mission*, p. 149.

never shut out the unbeliever. Rather, when the unbeliever is touched by the power of the fellowship, this will best bring praise to God, so fulfilling the highest aim of worship. It becomes clear why truly indigenous forms and effective verbal communication are so important in mission-church worship.

Worship As Mission

Worship is not meant to be an ingrown, self-enhancing cultic act done by, and on behalf of, a select group. Worship is a celebration of what God did in Christ. What he did is best summed up by the incarnation. By the incarnation, says Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "God makes himself known as he who wishes to exist not for Himself, but for us. Hence those who worship God in Christ do not do so just for their own sakes but for God *and other people*."³¹ Worship is a celebration of God's mission through Christ who came to serve. Worship, therefore, never ends with the lives of the worshipers but ends in mission. Mission and worship are rarely joined in theology, yet it is the product of mission that any group of believers will worship together. When the redeemed community meets for worship it is in mission. To understand this could work a revolutionary change for the weak, hesitant, often untrained new churches that think only of themselves and their immediate internal interests as they worship.

Mission is, in essence, what God himself is. Mission is not a fabricated doctrine of the church.

Mission is no more a department or a derivation of the church than are the concepts of grace, and mercy and forgiveness. Mission is central to theology because it springs out of the character of God. It is not the consequence of a command, but the outgoing expression of divine love.³²

In the same way, worship, rightly conceived, is not an act that begins with man and is afterward directed to God, but results from the fact that God has done something for man. Mission is the proof that God has already taken the first step, and that redeemed people have been changed because of God's initiative. Therefore, worship cannot be separated from mission, for in worship Christians are participating in truth, in what Christ has done and is continuing to do.³³

31. *Ethics*, Eberhard Bethge, ed., N. H. Smith, trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 297. Italics added.

32. Davies, *Worship and Mission*, p. 31, quoting D. Webster, "Should an Image of Mission Go?," *Prism Pamphlets*, no. 15, n.d., p. 4.

33. See F. W. Young, *Worship in Scripture and Tradition*, World Council of Churches, Commission on Faith and Order, M. H. Shepherd, Jr., ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, n.d.), p. 90.

The New Testament churches kept alive the saving acts of Christ by continued interaction with the outside world. Worship was a time when God's Spirit moved freely among Christians, calling them to serve. It was while the Christians were at prayer at Antioch that the Spirit broke in upon them and said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul, to do the work to which I have called them." [The church members] fasted and prayed, placed their hands on them, and sent them off" (Acts 13:2-3).

What a difference it would make if new Christians were to see the mission of God in every aspect of worship! This would mean the believing community would become a vibrant center for outreach and ministry. It is not enough that the occasional sermon or hymn reminds believers that God wants to reach those outside his grace. Mission must become the very essence of worship.

By worship that is mission, the sacraments become symbols of God's intention for the world, as much as they are symbols of what he has done for the church. Take, for example, the Lord's Supper. In my experience, this most sacred, intimate act of worship has failed to teach or motivate young Christians in the way Christ intended. Instead of opening the hearts of worshipers to the unredeemed around them, the Lord's Supper has become a cultic observance that reinforces, or even hardens, the self-awareness of a group of select people in a society. What is worse, among Christians whose lives have been saturated with animism, the Lord's Supper can easily be used to meet personal needs by taking the place of former symbols that represented magical powers. What goes on in the mind of the worshiper may be very different from that which the words of the institution, or the teaching of the sacrament, intends.

One missionary who worked in Upper Volta³⁴ explained that when people there first became Christians, he allowed several years to pass before he planned a regular celebration of the Lord's Supper. While this may seem strange, he was reacting to distortion that the Lord's Supper caused. He had observed that it was primarily an occasion for demonstrating divisions and making judgments among Christians, since, for example, polygamists and those who drank beer were always excluded. Until a more scriptural basis could be taught, it seemed unwise to continue in a faulty and even destructive practice.

It is not uncommon that the withholding of the Lord's Supper becomes a way to exercise discipline over Christians for various sins. What, therefore, should be an intensely spiritual act, one that brings the worshiper into a participation with Christ in all that he did, becomes a hindrance to unity and service—a veritable withdrawal from the world outside. This is precisely

34. Brian Woodford, working with Worldwide Evangelization Crusade.

the opposite of what the sacrament intends! The work of Christ as reconciliation is the summation of the gospel and is at the heart of mission. Mission is the "actualization of this [reconciliation] on a world-wide scale."³⁵ The Lord's Supper, celebrated in the church, is a sign of the flesh given "for the life of the world" (John 6:51, RSV) and of the "blood . . . poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28, RSV). The Christian who partakes of the emblems of the Lord's death remembers before any other meaning the God who reconciles and who "through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and *gave us* the task of making others his friends also. Our message is that God was making all mankind his friends through Christ. . . . and he has given *us* the message which tells how he makes them his friends" (II Cor. 5:18-19; italics added).³⁶

Far from being an ingrown, magical ritual, which the Eucharist can so easily become, it is meant to be an act that reaches out, declaring Christ as the Savior of the world. Paul taught the Corinthians that "every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26). Says Davies,

Thus Eucharist and mission have the same content and intent as the first fruits of the Kingdom, the church is to reveal the actualization of reconciliation and to declare it to all men by participating in the mission of God. It is a community of reconciliation not of alienation and its proclamation is one of reconciliation. . . . We give thanks, not because we have been reconciled but because Christ has given Himself for the life of the world whereof we are witnesses.³⁷

In the same way, baptism also teaches mission. The emphasis must be that baptism is the sign that the newly recreated person is now enabled to participate in Christ's death for the world and in the newness of life that God intends for all. Paul does not consider baptism to be an external condition for entering the fellowship of Christ. It is rather evidence of one's willingness "to be numbered with those who are sent out to be a suffering body in the world showing forth the Lord's death till He comes."³⁸

Worship in Context

The churches of Paul did have a certain uniformity about them. They were not free to pursue every whim without responsibility. We have seen

35. Davies, *Worship and Mission*, p. 101.

36. See also Romans 5:10; 11:15; Colossians 1:19, 22.

37. *Worship and Mission*, p. 101.

38. Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1950), pp. 15ff. Compare Rudolf Schnakenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of Paul*, G. R. Beasley-Murray, trans. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), p. 157.

that worship had a basic content. There is always the need for mission churches to show a seriousness about worship. Perhaps it is this seriousness that made Paul send Timothy to Corinth so that he could "remind you of the principles which I follow in the new life in union with Christ Jesus and which I teach in all the churches everywhere" (I Cor. 4:17). It was that the climate of worship should allow for everything to be done in a proper and orderly way (I Cor. 14:40), and that everywhere the purpose of worship be realized, that the body be edified and helped (I Cor. 14:5). Apart from these central considerations there is an openness among the various churches to worship in the way best suited to each place.

Thus the place of worship was flexible: in homes as well as in synagogues (Acts 13:14-43; 14:1-3; 17:1-4), at the riverside (Acts 16:13-14), or if need be, right at the center of the city (Acts 17:17). Paul did not want to stereotype the place of meeting, but always wanted people to meet where they could best be reached and in an environment that was congenial. His concern was also the appropriate use of forms that would best convey the message and guarantee freedom. Spontaneity was expected. Opportunity was given for "free words," whether impromptu prayer, prophecies, exhortations, speaking in tongues, or interpretations. With this transparent, honest moving of the Spirit, worship must have been a remarkable experience of joy. Martin notes that "no fruit of the Spirit was more characteristic of the early church than the possession and display of joy in the Lord."³⁹ (See Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:4.)

Freedom to innovate

Worship that is in context will, in the first place, guarantee the freedom to innovate. Freedom is the essence of the gospel itself, and leads to creativity in the Spirit. No worship pattern that does not fit Ephesus or Philippi is allowed to be exported from Jerusalem. Paul did not expect any such imitating, nor did he foster it. In Africa we have wondered many times if self-expression in worship might not more readily be achieved out of doors. Sitting in rows to worship may be what is accepted as correct by most orthodox churches, but who is to say that this is the only "Christian" form? J. H. Nkeita once commented, "So long as we continue to worship in pews we can have no place for dancing as a means of worship."⁴⁰ Obviously, the prior question, already settled with a negative response by most mission groups, is, "Should Africans dance in worship?" Freedom to innovate will say, "Yes, dance, but dance to the glory of the Lord Christ."

39. *Worship*, p. 39.

40. "The Contribution of African Culture to Christian Worship," *International Review of Missions*, vol. 47, 1958, p. 269.

Expression of theological concepts

Worship in context will, secondly, express the theological concepts held by the people. This very important mark of indigenous worship will depend on how much "thinking through" the faith has been done by the new Christians. Prayer should show patterns of address and content arising from the everyday needs and habits of the people. There is evidence that certain quite local creeds were beginning to develop by the time Paul wrote his pastoral epistles. He quotes one of these "faithful" or "true" sayings in II Timothy 2:11-13. A confession of faith that Paul speaks of as the "secret of our religion" stands out in I Timothy 3:16; there is a doxology in I Timothy 1:17; and the various hymns are referred to in several places (Eph. 5:14; Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20). It is sad that mission churches that have used Western theological concepts and liturgies often object to change simply because they have been using the foreign form for so long that truly indigenous concepts and texts would be unfamiliar. What we Westerners have given to churches many places in the world is Christianity "in the mild form."⁴¹ G. C. Oosthuizen has not overstated this when, calling for creative theology, he says, "Our liturgy in many respects is very poor indeed when compared with the heathen cult."⁴²

Demonstration of universal and local aspects of worship

Worship in context will, in the third place, show both the universal and local aspects of worship. As I have mentioned, Paul expected continuity among the churches. The mission church is a part of the kingdom of God wherever it is in the world and it must have those qualities that identify it readily as the church. The sacraments are faithfully observed and the proclamation of the Word is central. Without these elements, practiced in a way that builds up, the orthodoxy of the worshiping group is in question.

Use of best forms from culture

In the fourth place, worship in context is worship that utilizes the best forms available from the culture or creates appropriate forms where none exist. Nothing is needed more in the newly-formed Christian congregations than to allow the Spirit to teach and lead in worship. Even where there is conviction on the part of the missionary that worship must be "indigenous," it is too often the missionary who makes the decision about which forms are acceptable and which are not.⁴³ In a sort of cultural paternalism the mis-

41. Isaac Delano, *One Church for Nigeria* (London: U.S.C.L. Lutterworth Press, 1945), p. 16.

42. *Theological Discussions and Confessional Developments in the Churches of Asia and Africa* (Franeke: T. Wever, 1955), p. 418.

43. John V. Taylor speaks of these judgments by missionaries as risky and unacceptable. "The hesitancy of many Africans to share our [the Westerners'] enthusiasm for indigenization

sionary is tempted to pick and choose the elements of culture that can be adopted to worship. But the "outsider" can never fully apprehend the meaning of local symbols and forms. Drums in Africa were ruled out of worship for many years on the false premise that all drumming is tainted with the demonic. One African pastor said, "We know the difference. Some drum beats belong in church and some must never be sounded before the Lord. But," he continued, "the missionary could not tell the difference, so we were not allowed to take our 'souls' to church. The beat of the drum reveals who we are." It is the church in each place, the redeemed people of the Lord, who by the guidance of the Holy Spirit must take up the task of filling cultural forms with Christian substance.

The independent churches represent one of the fastest-growing movements on the African continent. The literature about "separatist" churches is impressive. Denominational churches and mission-related churches are finally taking note of a phenomenon that has been building for more than fifty years. It is in worship perhaps more than in any other area where these "nonmission" churches have the most to teach us. In many cases the independent churches give us a model for worship that is close to the taproot of the African soul. Though often inadequate, the worship is both contextual and honest, revealing an unsophisticated rebellion against a Christianity that has been handed over from the West.

The pastor of a Methodist church in the town of Jalingo, Nigeria, planned a harvest festival that would include all the active Christian groups in the area. When the time came the church building was decorated brightly and everyone was to bring a harvest gift. The African National Church was one of the independent churches invited. Members of this church presented their own number in typical fashion. Lines of singing dancers, swaying and shaking castanets, headed the procession, while drummers beat out chants and psalms. Others prostrated themselves, shouting in rhythm. Then all joined in a large circle and opened Bibles, even though some could not read. They listened attentively to the Scripture passage, then joined in singing an original song, after which the Lord's Prayer was recited with loud voices.

While all this was going on I thought of the formal and very predictable way the church would have normally conducted this harvest service. As a missionary, I wondered if the "pure" tradition could allow such activities, yet I felt rebuked that this group had been cut off from our fellowship. I also was brought to consider whether in fact our ideas of what an indigenous church should be had not been held over the views of the African. Our customary forms often fall short of meeting real needs because the channels of communication between man and God are distorted with so much that is foreign.

stems from the unspoken question "Do they know what they are asking for?" *The Primal Vision* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), p. 24.

