

THE BODY OF CHRIST: PROPHET, PRIEST, OR KING?

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David Fisher has helped me to see that the flurry of ecclesial articles and books describe activity rather than define essence. Even theologians reflect on the Church more organizationally and functionally than ontologically and missiologically. We do word studies of *qāhāl* and *ekklēsia*, speak quickly of a few Biblical analogies, and move on to organization and ordinances of the Church. Our pragmatic preoccupation with the nitty-gritty running of the Church forces our ecclesiology to suffer from a lack of transcendence.¹ We must reflect first on the essence of the Church. The Church is essence taking form.

I propose to begin the process by defining the essence of the Church in terms of carrying on the mission of Jesus. I will develop this following the paradigm of the offices Jesus fulfilled while he was on earth. The preliminary level of my thinking means that this will be more an agenda with examples than a finished product.

I. THE HEART OF THE CHURCH

The key concept of the Church is that it is a Spirit-led people of God who carry out Christ's mission in the world. It works because he is present. Matthew's gospel begins (1:18) and ends (28:20) with the presence of Christ. The people who make up the Church are the concretely living body of Christ, which is his person turned outward in action. We are the temple where the risen and living Lord dwells. The Holy Spirit mediates the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ to his corporate people who make up his body, the Church. His Spirit empowers his body to continue his mission to reveal his Father and redeem the world.

Jesus tells the apostles: "As the Father has sent me, so send I you" (John 20:21). The same theme emerges in all the commissioning passages. He has been perfectly obedient to the Father who sent him and poured out the Spirit upon him (John 1:32; 3:34; 4:34; 5:19; 6:27; 10:36; 17:4). We who are children of God, empowered and directed by the Spirit poured out at Pentecost, must obey all that Jesus has commanded us as we teach others to do the same (Matt 28:20). This is a daunting task, to say the least.

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¹ D Fisher, *A Ministry for the 21st Century* (lecture series, Portland Western Seminary, January 20-23, 1993)

Jesus' incarnate mission focused on two tasks: (1) to reveal the Father (John 1:18), and (2) to reconcile the world (3:16; 2 Cor 5:14). In his second coming he will judge the world and establish the messianic kingdom as the promised messianic King (Mark 1:15; Luke 1:68–79).

The Church carries on the revealing and reconciling mission of Jesus. First, we carry on his revealing mission when we image God, individually and in community, by making visible the invisible characteristics of our Creator and Redeemer and as the corporate body prefigures the kingdom of God. Second, we carry on his reconciling mission when we proclaim Jesus as the gift of God's love so that those who believe in him might not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16), so that they might experience the new life as members of God's family (1:12), so that they might have freedom from the slavery of sin and growth from the Holy Spirit given to every believer.

I define the local church as an assembly of confessing believers, locally organized, Holy-Spirit-united-and-empowered for the purpose of glorifying God through (1) evangelism, which includes proclaiming the gospel and baptizing new believers, (2) edification of one another, which includes ministry of the Word, participation in the Lord's supper, fellowship, and discipline, and (3) worship, which includes praise, song and prayer.

Worship of YHWH—the holy, awesome God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel who is also YHWH Yeshua—inflames the church. Vital worship is the key for evangelism and edification. When unsaved people come to a congregation that worships, they are drawn by the beauty of the Lord and are enabled to see their sins in light of the grace of YHWH who will heal and forgive. Christians who come into his presence sense the wondrous privilege of being his children, his friends, and are drawn to maturity in order to receive more of the higher privileges of ministry that God will entrust only to mature people.

A church that worships will see change through both evangelism and edification. Seeing people change to Christ and toward Christlikeness will energize other members of the congregation. Wrestling with the problems real people bring to Christ will move people to seek help from the body, so our teaching will take on a qualitatively different flavor than the endless, informational Bible studies.

I am deeply concerned that the Church will substitute the complexities of political involvement or marketing strategies for the truth of the Church as the community where Christ is present. This would amount to exchanging spirituality for politics. Douglas Webster puts it well: "Like the Israelites in Micah's day, we're anxious to please God; but much of what we want to do for God, God doesn't want done." He believes that "through a profound rationalization, the American church is tempted to substitute marketing complexities for spiritual simplicity." "Ironically," he says, "this seems easier to do than to humble ourselves and return to the basics of prayer, worship, service and love."²

² D Webster, *Selling Jesus* (Downers Grove InterVarsity, 1992) 145 O Guinness proposes theologically nuanced cautions against uncritical use of management and marketing tools to induce growth (*Dining with the Devil* [Grand Rapids Baker, 1993])

II. DEFINING THE MISSION OF JESUS IN TERMS OF OFFICES

If the Church is the spiritual people of God who carry on the mission of Jesus, we could understand the mission of the Church in the same terms we use to understand the mission of Jesus. If the Church is his body making his work concretely visible throughout the world today, then the categories that elucidate his work illumine the Church's work.

Traditionally, theologians follow Calvin in speaking of the work of Christ in terms of three OT offices that relate God and man: prophet (Deut 18:15; Luke 4:18-21; 13:33; Acts 3:22), priest (Ps 110:4; Heb 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5-6; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1) and king (Isa 9:6-7; Pss 2:6; 45:6; 110:1-2; Luke 1:33; John 18:36-37; Heb 1:8; 2 Pet 1:11; Rev 19:16). The qualifications, authority and duties associated with each office have been used to understand Christ's work in part because the OT offices are typical of Christ. All three offices involved mediatorial roles between God and humanity.

One wonders why other offices are not considered. Judge, warrior, shepherd and sage are all possibilities. Although all Scripture speaks of our Lord using all these terms and could be useful to my task, I will limit my remarks to the traditional three.

To my knowledge no one has attempted to define the Church in relation to the offices of Christ.³ I am aware of the danger of thinking new thoughts this late in the dispensation. But if I am correct in my basic thesis that we can understand the Church better by seeing it as the spiritual people of God who carry out the ongoing mission of Jesus, then this approach should be helpful.

I will consider the offices in alphabetical order for the simple reason that I do not believe any one of them has priority over the others. I will consider the basic character of each office, reflect on the nature of the Church in light of those characteristics, and consider some implications for the Church's relation with the world under each office.

III. KING

The king rules the people in the name of and with the authority of YHWH, guiding the life of his people by justice, restraining, judging and subduing all enemies, and promoting righteousness, order, peace and prosperity for the glory of YHWH and the benefit of his people.

As a premillennial theologian I join many others from the postmillennial and Hoekemian variety of amillennial positions in believing that Christ rules the nations in a providential but not in a fully messianic sense today. I join with other progressive dispensational scholars such as R. Saucy, C. Blaising and D. Bock in believing that all the OT covenants,

³ J E Johnson is preparing an article defining ministry in terms of the offices of Christ. He and I have talked at length on these issues. He deserves much credit for stimulating my thinking. We have both profited from T C Oden, *Pastoral Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983). Even though he focuses his reflection more narrowly on shepherd, he shows how Biblical roles may shape our understanding of the Church and her ministry.

including the Davidic covenant, have been inaugurated. Jesus Christ is anointed as Davidic king. Even though his reign has not yet been established on the earth as a whole, he is presently reigning over his Church, which is the recipient of many kingdom blessings and should display the firstfruits of kingdom righteousness.⁴

It helps us understand the Church when we consider it in relation to God's working with the people of God throughout history—that is, the kingdom of God. I appreciate G. Lewis' suggestion that we focus on the unity of one redeemed people of God throughout history and on the diversity of the various administering institutions that God establishes and endows to strengthen his people collectively and through them to bring blessing to the whole world.⁵ The point is that "God gives different administering orders for the world at different times, and new orders institute a new dispensation."⁶

Throughout the whole of history there is one way of salvation: by grace through faith in the promises of God based on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. If there is one way of salvation, one God, one Messiah, one Spirit, then there can only be one spiritual people of God throughout all time. Though physical, ethnic and institutional differences remain, there are no essential walls between God's people. Though people living after the death and resurrection of Jesus have seen many OT promises inaugurated with resulting advance in their relationship with God, they are spiritually related through Jesus Christ with God's people in other ages. In the sense of their spiritual unity all saved humans are in Christ. We see this unity in the common designation of saved persons as the seed of Abraham (Rom 4:12; Gal 3:29) who share the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant (Rom 4:16; Gal 3:7–9). This stress on the spiritual unity of the people of God is an important step forward in dispensational thinking.

God works out his kingdom program through a progression of revelatory acts and administering institutions. As his plan progresses he organizes the one spiritual people of God into distinctive social institutions. Lewis suggests four: family, nation, Church, and messianic rule in the millennium. They are distinguished by such matters as organizational structure, form of government, manner of worship and membership requirements. For example, Israel had a national structure with a king, a capital city, an army—none of which should be found in the Church. Each institution has varying responsibilities and endowments for carrying out its specific mission. For example, Israel's mission focused on being a holy

⁴ It should be noted that the Davidic covenant is thoroughly nationalistic in regard to Israel. It will be fulfilled only when Israel is reestablished as God's holy nation with Messiah reigning as King. The inauguration of the covenant has to do with Jesus anointed as King, awaiting the time for his reign to begin. We find an astonishingly strong similarity with David anointed as king long before he began to reign over Israel.

⁵ G. Lewis and B. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

⁶ J. S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988) 75.

nation, whereas the Church focuses on making disciples of all persons throughout the world.

The progress of revelation and divine working through the ages has implications for qualitative advance in relation to God and completeness of salvation. For example, those living after Sinai have the privilege of the Mosaic Law that earlier believers did not have. Paul makes it clear that this is a great advantage (Rom 2:17; 3:2; cf. Deut 4:8; Ps 147:19–20). Those living after the death and resurrection of Christ have the further advantages of knowing their justification (Rom 3:21–26; 4:24–25), not having to do the continual sacrifices, and having full access to God through the completed work of Christ (Heb 10:15–22). These advantages flow out of the inauguration of the new covenant at Pentecost, as the writer of Hebrews delineates carefully. As Saucy notes: “Surely some added measure of enabling grace is included in the new covenant that was absent under the old economy.”⁷

G. Lewis’ economic definition of dispensating institutions helps us see how the Church can be a purely temporal organization and yet be distinct from Israel. The people of God during a specific age are organized into a corporation, an institution, with specific endowments, authority and mission. When its purpose is complete the corporate institution dissolves and the people are reorganized into a new institution. With the completion of Christ’s work and the coming of the Spirit a new corporate institution, the Church, is inaugurated. Israel is dissolved. It is set aside as the mediator of God’s redemptive work. The believing remnant of Jews is incorporated into the new institution, the Church.

Theologians from many perspectives, including those of us who represent a progressive dispensationalist perspective, usually teach a multifaceted, inaugurated kingdom. We often distinguish a universal kingdom where God reigns providentially over all the universe (Pss 47:2, 8; 83:18; 103:19; 110; Dan 4:2, 17, 25) from a redemptive kingdom where God reigns over his covenant people. The kingdom involves reign, a realm in which the reign is exercised, and subjects over whom it is exercised.

Most dispensationalists affirm that the redemptive kingdom involves mediatorial aspects where God exercises his rule through individual humans or through human institutions such as Israel or the Church. This mediatorial aspect begins with Adam and Eve who are commanded to rule over the earth as God’s vice-regents in God’s image (Gen 1:26, 28). This rule is disrupted by the fall. God then sets himself to progressive reestablishment of that kingdom through his grace.

He begins the redemptive kingdom work first through individuals, the patriarchs, then through the nation Israel, then in the presence of his Son, and now through the Church. Finally he will reign in the millennial kingdom where he will establish his kingdom fully, completing his work in history. Aspects of the millennial kingdom are manifested both in Israel and in the Church.

⁷ R Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 17

A class assignment I gave at Western Seminary led to the following definition of the redemptive, eschatological kingdom:

The dynamic activity of the sovereign God to manifest His authority in His sin-alienated creation, by redeeming it from the domain of evil, judging all enemies, and bestowing the blessings of His beneficent reign on and through His people in fulfillment of all His promises to the praise of His glory.

Its similarity to the definitions held by others who affirm an inaugurated eschatology, such as Ladd, Marshall and Ridderbos, is obvious. The difference from nondispensationalists lies in the understanding of the fulfillment of God's promises, especially in the reestablishment of Israel as a messianic nation in the millennium. Dispensationalists affirm more aspects of the eschatological kingdom than do most nondispensationalists.⁸

C. Blaising synthesizes these aspects in a helpful way, seeing political, earthly and spiritual aspects of the redemptive, eschatological kingdom.⁹ It is political in that God reigns personally, messianically and visibly over all the nations. It is earthly in that God redeems the earth from the curse, disease, and demonism and establishes his city in Zion. It is spiritual both individually and corporately in that God gives eternal life to his people, establishes righteousness and justice, judges and destroys the wicked, and works in grace and forgiveness so that the world can again be characterized by peace, worship of God, holiness, obedience, joy and blessing. This is what Jesus and the apostles preached.

Many contemporary dispensationalists argue that God works progressively throughout history preparing, presenting and proclaiming his kingdom through human administrators. Saucy describes the present age "as the first phase of the fulfillment of the one promised Messianic kingdom."¹⁰ The key description is that phenomena belonging to the eschatological kingdom of God are present now. This is an inaugurated eschatology with an inaugurated kingdom rather than a wholly postponed kingdom.¹¹ The kingdom comes in phases throughout history.

⁸ A McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake BMH, 1968) 217-254, finds six facets of the kingdom in the prophets (1) *Spiritual* This includes the salvation by grace begun with repentance and belief looking forward to renewal as a part of the new covenant (2) *Moral/Ethical* Moral values will be affirmed and established in the lives of all humans This moral economy will be established worldwide (3) *Social* Peace will be affirmed and justice will reign (4) *Political* The righteous king (Messiah) will reign from a central capital (Jerusalem) over a regathered Israel through whom all the nations will be blessed (5) *Physical* There will be both cosmic and geologic changes Waste places will be fertile and fruitful Disease will be ended (6) *Ecclesiastical* A group of people will be gathered in the name of Jesus over whom God will be ruler and who will belong to God To these six I would add a seventh (7) *Doxological* God will be praised throughout the world Most dispensationalists would agree in concept if not with every specific element in this list

⁹ C Blaising and D Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton Victor, 1993)

¹⁰ R Saucy, "Contemporary Dispensational Thought," *TSF Bulletin* (March-April 1984) 11 His thought is available in full expression in *Case*

¹¹ I think the error of the Scofieldian theory of the total postponement of the kingdom until the millennium comes from an all-or-nothing type of thinking Since not all elements are present today, the kingdom is not present at all

We see phenomena of the kingdom present in the reigns of the kings—especially David and Solomon—over Israel. We find other aspects present in Jesus. Jesus affirmed that the kingdom of God had come upon his followers (Matt 11:4–5; 12:28; Luke 10:1–24) when he conquered death, disease and demonism and pacified the earth. But this is not the fullness of the kingdom, for Jesus also spoke of the coming time when the kingdom in its fullness would be established (Mark 13; Luke 17:22–37; 21:5–36).

The theme of the nearness of the soon-coming kingdom is found in OT prophets who proclaimed the nearness of the day of the Lord. John the Baptist follows that same theme, proclaiming that the kingdom of God is at hand (Matt 3:2) with Jesus echoing those words at the beginning of his ministry (4:17; Mark 1:15). Many miss the point that Jesus uses these exact words for the establishment of the kingdom at the end of the age at the time of his second coming (Luke 21:31; cf. Matt 24:33; Mark 13:29).

The scenario of Luke 19 describes Jesus going into heaven to receive a kingdom from the Father and then coming to establish it on earth. Most scholars—dispensational and nondispensational alike—affirm that Jesus will not exercise his kingly authority until his return. Meanwhile his disciples are to do business, proclaiming the soon-coming kingdom, making kingdom phenomena visible in the Church, and commanding people to repent and believe so as to be revealed as members of that kingdom when it is revealed as summarized in Acts 26:18.

The manifestation of the presence of the kingdom in some form in the Church age is clearly taught in the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven (Mark 13:31–33). The kingdom is present as a hidden spiritual force in the “word of the kingdom” (13:19). It is present as “righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). Believers have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col 1:13) who gives present redemption and full forgiveness, having triumphed over all the spiritual authorities (1:14; 2:13–15). Believers who belong to the kingdom of Christ will inherit that kingdom when it is established on earth (1:12) because their citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). Meanwhile believers enjoy such benefits of kingdom citizenship as the presence, gifts and fruit of the Spirit, forgiveness, regeneration, justification, and authority to proclaim redemption from spiritual bondage.¹²

¹² Saucy summarizes this well “The establishment of the kingdom in relation to the earth is yet future. The believer is related to this kingdom through faith in the King and is therefore an heir and already a citizen of the coming kingdom. The King has already bestowed some of the blessings of the kingdom on its citizens so it is possible to speak of the presence of the kingdom now. This presence is described in terms of righteousness, peace and joy (Rom 14:17), the forgiveness of sins (Col 1:13–14), and power (1 Cor 4:20), but never in terms of a present ‘reign’” (Case 110). In an earlier version he added “But the power must be qualified by the other expressions of the manifestation of the kingdom. It therefore refers not to an overt power of reign, but to the power of the Word and the Spirit” (“The Presence of the Kingdom and the Life of the Church,” *BSac* 145 [January–March 1988] 44). The discussion in his book indicates that he still holds the concept even if the expression has changed.

I believe that the kingdom message today is very similar to the one Jesus' disciples preached: Repent and believe, for present phenomena of the kingdom in the community of the King are the firstfruits of the coming kingdom, demonstrating that the full revelation and establishment of the kingdom of God is near.

The Church prefigures and pictures the messianic kingdom. It should be a place where nonbelievers can look to see what kingdom life will be like when Christ reigns and the Spirit directs and empowers. It should be a place of grace where sin is brought to light so that the sinner may experience forgiveness and healing. It should be a place typified by joyous celebration and awe-filled reverence for the awesome majesty of YHWH. Its people will be motivated by gratitude for the grace of the omnipotent, just God. They will respond to him with a sense of privilege and joy,¹³ as friends rather than servants. When the Church fulfills this office, its people will not ask "What *must* we do?" but "What *may* we do?"

1. *Inaugurated kingdom as a pattern for Church-state relations.* Inaugurated eschatology also impacts how one sees the relation between Church and state. Even if the Church cannot work the wholesale transformation of society, inaugurated eschatology gives the pattern of partial working: Its "already but not yet" pattern of kingdom theology applies to the Church continuing the mission of Christ in the world. In terms of Niebuhr's¹⁴ classic categories, I advocate an approach somewhere between Christ against culture and Christ transforming culture.¹⁵

I do believe that Christians will have an impact on culture. The lifeboat mentality, traditionally associated with dispensational premillennialism, where we grab a few folk from a world that is sinking into hell is one extreme. The postmillennial triumphalists who believe their work of preaching the gospel and proclaiming righteousness will bring the millennium is another.

On the one hand, the Church is one aspect of common grace. 2 Thessalonians 2:7 makes it clear that the Church serves as a restraining force in society, keeping evil forces from taking over the world. This understanding of an inaugurated kingdom keeps the progressive dispensationalist from the bleak, undue pessimism often attributed to Scofieldian dispensationalism.

When the Church speaks prophetically for righteousness in word and deed, she calls all people to a righteousness they have some knowledge of by virtue of their general-revelation-enlightened conscience (Rom 2:14–15). Even if that knowledge be terribly perverted and suppressed, enough

¹³ W Strickland has pointed out to me the number of times words based on the concept of joy appear in the Greek text of Luke 1, a basically kingdom-oriented passage

¹⁴ H R Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York Harper, 1951)

¹⁵ I am indebted to C Clough, "A Dispensational View of Christ and Culture Opportunities and Limitations to Christian Cultural Transformation," *Biblical Perspectives* 4/6 (November–December 1991), for helping me clarify my thinking on this point

remains for the prophetic light to find at least a glimmer of response. I will develop this further in my discussion of the prophetic office below.

On the other hand, the Church cannot do millennial renovations in our world. It cannot depose the forces of evil wholesale, it cannot make the geo-physical changes Scripture describes, it cannot change the hearts of society as a whole. Therefore it cannot transform society into a perfect society.

Both Scripture and history affirm the impact of the Church in the fallen world. When the Church brings people to the life-changing experience of regeneration and conversion, their lives change. Zacchaeus repaid four times over the money he cheated people of (Luke 19:8). Philemon changed the way he treated Onesimus. Elders of a church must have exemplary reputations in the community of unbelievers as well as in the community of the saints (1 Tim 3:7). The revivals have transformed society as well as the Church. The Wesleyan revival and the great awakenings stand as witness to the impact of a renewed Church.

History and Scripture also affirm the implacable resistance of sin to large-scale societal transformation. The millennial hopes of old-line liberalism in the late nineteenth century were shattered by the terrible evil of World War I. The terrible manifesto signed by ninety-three leading German intellectuals affirming the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II with its rampaging violation of Belgian neutrality ravaged the chimera of the moral uprightness of European liberalism.¹⁶ The brief revival of hope in the 1920s crashed into the overwhelming evils of the great depression and of the holocaust—only to be followed by Vietnam. Scripture's picture of the earth prior to the return of Christ is very bleak. Even the great awakenings soon drifted back to the sleep of depravity.

Some say one cannot legislate morality. But every piece of legislation represents moral values. When society declares burglary or racism illegal, it is legislating morality by declaring certain behaviors wrong. What society cannot do is legislate moral sensibilities. But even there it can legislate curriculum that produces moral values. The change in attitude toward racism since 1963, abortion since 1973 and homosexuality since 1983 are obvious examples of this.

On the other hand, I believe that political legislation can never stop cultural drift. Only the prophetic call to revival and renewal can do that. There are not enough police officers and jails in the whole world to stop drugs and gangs, robbery and murder.

The irony comes when the conservative Church sees government as an instrument of societal transformation and legislation as the key to righteousness. Those with the most pessimistic theology of government have recently become the most ardent advocates of a legislative agenda for pursuing morality in society. They charge government with the role of protecting morality and do it with the most ardently negative tenor as they state their view of government.

¹⁶ See E. Busch, *Karl Barth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 81–83, for Barth's response

They do it with a crusading spirit. "The religious right has correctly been accused of a triumphalism that seeks to use political power to coerce biblical standards for both individual and societal behavior."¹⁷

Many use manipulation to achieve their political ends. Manipulation is hardly linked to political liberals. I heard about one abuse recently that should embarrass us. A well-known televangelist said something like this: "We need twenty dollars a month from every viewer in order to stop a horrible repeat of history. What Nazi Germany did to the Jews, so liberal America is doing to evangelical Christians! It is happening here and now." That is too much even for a crusading TV evangelist to claim. He is using a false analogy of incredible proportions. Such overstatement helps one see why Christians are viewed as idiots by the liberal society.

Triumphalism depends on overcoming all enemies and bringing them to the truth. The politics of democracy depends wholly on building constituency and consensus. Triumphalists must hold to the pure standards of Scripture. But democracy does everything by compromise and gradualism. Politics is the art of getting everything you can get fifty-one percent of the people to agree to on a particular issue. This means that people who radically disagree on one issue may join forces on another. The aphorism that "politics makes strange bedfellows" is true.

I think the essence of democracy is to bring people to consensus. It is not power politics, which tries to impose cultural agendas. The nature of politics is to do everything you can to persuade people to vote your way, to convince people to join your side.

All it takes to win in a democracy is fifty-one percent of the vote. The goal is to achieve the most we can for that percentage. If we ask for the moon and get only forty-nine percent, we get absolutely nothing. If we get sixty-five percent of the vote, we probably did not ask for enough.

We must be willing to compromise. But people who work from a crusade mentality cry accusingly, "Christians don't compromise!" Of course we do. We are for getting the absolute most from a measure that has a solid chance for fifty-one percent of the vote. Maybe all this does not sound particularly spiritual, but political life is about compromise. And that is one way Christians can fight wisely for righteousness within society.

This means that we will cooperate with Roman Catholics and Jews, Mormons and Muslims, to achieve a moral majority. This majority may be able to persuade people that life is precious while dissuading them concerning their cultural values of absolute autonomy and narcissistic hedonism. That is hard to do when we crusade for freedom of choice to maintain racial discrimination in religious schools and sign up for expensive excursions to the Holy Land.

Another glaring problem in our camp is that we are often so busy criticizing government proposals that we have no time to propose realistic alternatives. "We need to spend less time writing hate-mongering appeal letters that stigmatize the 'demonic forces' of the left and spend more time

¹⁷ R. Zwier, *Perspectives* (November 1993) 5.

as salt-and-light candidates on school boards and public libraries.¹⁸ We ought to be credible people speaking positively for what is right, engaging in political debate without playing the old religious trump card: calling people unsaved because they differ with us politically. We must remember that if religious voices want to be welcomed in the debate they must accept vigorous dissent without identifying it with antireligious prejudice. Christians who make people feel they are condemned because they disagree commit moral arrogance, something Christians should never be guilty of.¹⁹

The gospel must not be identified with predictable political agendas. In issues like abortion I believe there is a definite Christian position. But our agenda is bigger than closing abortion clinics and overturning *Roe v. Wade*. We must speak for the sanctity of life both in and out of the womb. If Christians are to follow the lead of Jesus we must speak for justice for the poor and oppressed in issues such as health care.

As we do so, we need to be extremely careful about identifying the gospel with a right-wing political agenda. At that point we alienate people unnecessarily from the gospel because we are so busy condemning their politics. Political orthodoxy is anathema to prophetic integrity.²⁰

I would not want the Church to get so involved in political agendas that we have little creative energy left to present the gospel and bring people to maturity in Christ. Neither would I want people to withdraw from society. Rather, we need to speak in word and deed for righteousness in our society. I will expand on this in the prophet section of this paper.

As we compare our political activities with the mission of Jesus, testing our motives as well as our agendas, we will transform our society to the limits of an inaugurated-kingdom eschatology.

2. Territorial spirits and kingdom ministry. Strategic-level spiritual warfare against territorial spirits²¹ is another area of misapplication of the kingly work of Christ. This relatively new emphasis focuses on the discerning, naming of and praying against demonic spirits over cities, regions and nations who are then bound and evicted, allowing the work of evangelism to proceed.

Advocates of this work base much of their theology on the reference to the celestial warfare between God's angels and the angelic prince of Persia in Daniel 10. From this passage they draw the principle that angelic agents are apparently assigned to sponsorship and control of certain cities or regions.

¹⁸ S McFarland, quoted by J Loconte, *Christianity Today* (October 25, 1993) 77

¹⁹ W Bennett, "Virtue Man," *Christianity Today* (September 13, 1993) 33

²⁰ J Wallis, *Sojourners* (May 1979) 13

²¹ The literature on this is growing quickly Cf e.g J Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for Christ* (Lake Mary Creation House, 1989), T B White, *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Ann Arbor Vine, 1990), G Otis, Jr, *The Last of the Giants* (Tarrytown Chosen, 1991), C Jacobs, *Possessing the Gates of the Enemy* (Tarrytown Chosen, 1991), C P Wagner, *Warfare Prayer* (Ventura Regal, 1992), *Breaking Strongholds in Your City* (ed C P Wagner, Ventura Regal, 1993)

This is supported by references to the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 and the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28, which seem to transcend human kings and move into the heavenly realm Revelation 2 13 with its reference to Pergamos as “the place where Satan’s throne is” further confirms the angelic assignment to geographical regions

These advocates interpret Eph 3 10 to teach that the Church proclaims the lordship of Jesus Christ to the principalities and powers by asserting his authority over the dark forces hindering his work This leads to the interpretation of the “rulers and powers” and “world forces” in Eph 6 12 as territorial-level spirits

One searches in vain, however, for the work of strategic spiritual warfare in these passages—or indeed anywhere in the Bible

Daniel, while supporting the idea of territorial identification of certain angels especially in chap 10, does not support any sort of human involvement in angelic warfare Far from finding Daniel involved in warfare prayer, discerning and praying against regional spirits, we find him frustrated in the absence of response to his prayer to God Daniel is wholly unaware of angelic warfare until the angel’s apologetic explanation for the slowness of God’s response to his prayer The vision from God (chaps 11–12) is not of warfare in angelic realms but of the rise and fall of evil world kingdoms until the eventual victory of God Daniel is given the vision not in response to a request or by means of spiritual discernment but in response to his personal faith and love of God coupled with a sense of abandonment Daniel’s part is to encourage people by prophetically reminding them that God will overcome the forces of evil at the appointed time This victory will occur when God’s Messiah destroys the evil kingdoms like a rock crushing a statue and filling the whole earth (2 34–35), when one like a Son of Man annihilates the dominion of the evil one forever (7 10–28) There is no hint of discerning, binding or praying against cosmic evil spirits

Ephesians 3 10 does not teach that the Church proclaims a message to demonic powers The key verb (*gnōrīsthē*, “might be made known”) is passive Instead of active involvement in warfare against spiritual powers, the very existence of the Church testifies to the helplessness of the dominion of darkness to stop the work of God Arnold puts it well

Plagued by a fear of the “powers,” the readers would find great encouragement in knowing that the “powers” can see that they have been devastatingly foiled by the emergence of the body of Christ, the church This would also give the readers added assurance of victory over the “powers” as they engage in spiritual warfare and await the consummation of the age to come²²

The work of God’s grace in calling out a people for himself, making both Jews and Gentiles fellow heirs of the promise, demonstrates to the powers that they are powerless to destroy the work of God even in their own realm

²² C Arnold *Ephesians Power and Magic* (Grand Rapids Baker, 1992) 64 He suggests correctly that 1 Cor 2 6–8 is a parallel to this passage I want to express my appreciation to Arnold for his help to me in this area by private correspondence

While there is mention of a variety of evil spirits in Ephesians 6, there is no hint or encouragement of discernment of the hierarchies. Paul's emphasis could not be further from esoteric speculation about the nature, names or functions of these demonic powers. His point is that the gospel gives everything necessary to stand and resist the tempting activity of the spiritual forces of darkness. The battle in Ephesians is not territorial but personal. As we proclaim the gospel in order to bring people to salvation through Jesus Christ and engage in the edification of believers so that they are built up to the measure of the fullness of Christ, we wrestle with spiritual forces. Arnold again summarizes well:

The struggle/warfare can best be described in terms of an offensive aspect (making known the gospel) and a defensive aspect (resisting the temptation; endurance). The demonic "powers" are bent on regaining their control in the lives of believers. Through a variety of means they attempt to block the progress of the gospel and cause believers to walk according to the pattern of their former manner of life. Victory over the "powers" is not assured apart from the appropriation of the power of God. Failure to resist allows the devil to reassert his dominion.²³

Again we see the inaugurated nature of the kingdom. The powers of the age to come are here so that believers may evangelize and resist personally and corporately the tempting, accusing and deceiving work of the demons. But the work of the evil forces continues until the consummation. The kingdom work proceeds through building the Church rather than through territorial-level spiritual warfare.

Nowhere in the NT do we find a territorial view of demons. Jesus never casts out a territorial demon or attributes the resistance of Nazareth or Jerusalem to such entities. Paul never refers to territorial spirits, nor does he attribute power to them—despite the paganism of cities where he established churches.²⁴

I am worried that the emphasis on discerning information about demons—including their names, hierarchies and functions—is akin to a pagan, magical worldview where discerning a name gives one control over the being.²⁵ The Biblical emphasis in Eph 1:21; Phil 2:10 is that Jesus has been raised high above every name that can be named. Names of demonic spirits at any level are quite unimportant as demonstrated in the lack of interest in names of demons in the NT exorcisms and discussions of demons.

I am equally troubled when prayer stops being family fellowship and becomes a warfare weapon. Christian prayer brings communion and intimacy with God as well as unity to the body. It is never a weapon of warfare against some person, ideology or demon. Extending the armor imagery in

²³ Ibid 121

²⁴ R A Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare Jesus, Paul and Peretti," *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 13/1 (Spring 1991) 33–64

²⁵ There are many examples of this. Otis cites the "need for more specific targeting coordinates. In short, people want answers to the riddle of the invisible world so they can minister more effectively" (*Strongholds* [ed Wagner] 34)

Eph 6:12–17 to praying against demons fails on two fundamental accounts: (1) The armor is primarily defensive resistance, not offensive praying against; (2) prayer is the confident attitude of believers that God's power will be sufficient for them to stand against the wiles of the enemy. Prayer is not a work the armed believer does but the attitude of the believer as the armor is put on.

The whole concept of strategic-level spiritual warfare misses the point of the kingdom work of Christ. Both Satan and demons must be seen in light of the coming of Christ and his work on the cross. Christ has bound the demons at the cross. We do not bind demons but plunder the dominion of darkness, using the power of the proclaimed gospel. The Bible describes warfare against demons at the personal level, never the cosmic level.

A proper awareness of the kingly work of Christ will lead us to a proper ministry pattern. We will not fall prey to the temptation to use a form of Christian magic depending on knowing demonic names or using ritualistic prayers to control spiritual forces. We will avoid fascination with occultic information inquiring into demonic hierarchies, names, responsibilities and the like, depending on unverifiable discernments, and leading to fearfulness in the face of powers claimed by demons and affirmed by credulous ministers or to spiritual pride rising from the supposed knowledge of the demonic realm. Rather than following un-Biblical patterns of ministry, we proclaim the triumph of the cross (Col 2:13–15) to tear down anti-Christian-worldview thinking (2 Cor 10:4–6), bringing every thought captive to the truth of Jesus Christ. We will cast out demons from those who have involved themselves in demonic worship wittingly or unwittingly (1 Cor 10:19–22) by the powerful word of Christ's gospel and his triumph (Acts 16:16–19). We resist the deception, accusation and temptation that lead us to return to acting as if we were not creatures of the new age (Col 3:1–16) by letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly.

IV. PRIEST

A priest does work before God in place of another. He is an intermediary, representing another person in the presence of God and bringing the presence of God to the person. He also pronounces the blessing of God on the person(s) represented when the work is done.

The duties—privileges, really—of a priest included direct, unmediated access to God, praying to God on behalf of people, performing redemptive sacrifices on behalf of people, hearing confession of sins and announcing forgiveness for them, and giving God's blessing to his people. In addition priests applied YHWH's revelation to everyday life, giving spiritual guidance to the people. Vriezen summarizes:

They were also the mediators between God and man. They offered up the sacrifices in behalf of the people, gave the blessing to the people in the name of God, and, by the sacrifices, made sure of the goodwill of God towards His

people. . . As the mediator the priesthood represented the people before God and God before the people ²⁶

One of the great blessings in the NT is that all believers are priests before God (1 Pet 2:5, 9–10; Rev 1:5–6; 5:10; 20:6) in fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (Exod 19:5–6). Thus everyone can do the work of spiritual service for themselves and also on behalf of others. Priesthood is for others, even as it is a great personal privilege and joy.

Why does God appoint priests? When people know their sinfulness they rightly feel estranged from God. They need someone to represent them to God, to intercede for them, to find out what God thinks of them. Universal priesthood means that we do these things today.

It saddens me that the Church has abandoned the great truth of the universal priesthood of all believers. This principle has been dramatically altered by the American individualistic context. Reductionism has done its damage once again when priesthood is limited to an individual believer's direct access to God. The concept of universal priesthood correctly teaches that all believers are ministers. But it is often extended to an unwarranted leveling of ministry in the congregation, denying the reality of leadership gifts and the legitimacy of the ministry office of elder.²⁷

1. *Prayer.* Direct access to God by every believer is commonly taught as a NT privilege, and so it is. Passages such as Heb 4:14–16; 10:19–21; Matt 27:51 make it clear that every believer may personally and boldly draw near to God in prayer and worship.

Direct access to God does not exhaust the priestly prayer work of the believer. There are often times when we act as substitutes for another person. An obvious example is intercessory prayer. German *Furbitte* expresses the idea much more naturally than the rather formal American term.

The believer priest does more than intercede for others. There are times when we pray as a substitute for persons who for one reason or another cannot do it themselves. For example, I sometimes pray the prayer another person would pray if they were strong enough or emotionally able to do so. Typically it is in their hearing, though I am not limited to that context. I make every attempt to be sure the concepts I pray—even the words I speak—are actually what the other person would say if they could.

2. *Confession.* We correctly reject the Roman confessional. That sins must be confessed to a priest with powers of absolution conferred only by

²⁶ T C Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford Blackwell, 1958) 265

²⁷ The Second Helvetic Confession correctly affirms the difference "To be sure, Christ's apostles call all who believe in Christ 'priests' but not on account of an office, but because, all the faithful having been made kings and priests, we are able to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ. Therefore, the priesthood and the ministry are very different from one another. For the priesthood, as we have just said, is common to all Christians" (5 153)

ordination is quite abhorrent We affirm that sins may be confessed directly to God and that the atonement gives full assurance that all sins are forgiven (Col 2 13–15, 1 John 1 9)

Unfortunately we make a great mistake as we reject the sacerdotal priesthood of Catholicism Instead of affirming universal priesthood we deny any priesthood at all James 5 16 tells us to confess our sins to one another This pattern is not limited to the sickroom

The NT pattern of priesthood tells us that any believer may hear confession of sin and affirm God's forgiveness Our Lord set the pattern in Matthew 18 when he told us to go and reprove one taken in sin, followed by two or three and finally the whole church The goal of the encounter is that the sinning person listen and repent The pronouncement of the believer priest gives assurance that Christ's work is really sufficient for the sinner's plight

Colossians 2 13–15 tells us that all our sins have been forgiven because they have been taken to the cross The assuring announcement of forgiveness rests on the full sufficiency of Christ's work Confession is not for forgiveness of divine penalty but for restoration of trust in relationship The moral debt of our sin to God has been released at the cross As with sin in any context, however, restoration of relationship depends on confession of sin and the fruit of repentance Kantzer summarizes well

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation To forgive is to stop holding against another the wrong he has done to us It is to assure him that from our side we have removed all obstacles to full reconciliation It takes two to be reconciled When wrong has been done, however, reconciliation follows forgiveness and requires that the guilty repent of their way and accept the forgiveness that is offered²⁸

This is quite different from the expectation that sin is not forgiven until the sinner confesses to another human Still less does it mean that the sin is not forgiven until I am satisfied that appropriate penance has been accomplished Divine forgiveness is completed Reconciliation comes with the process of confession and repentance to a loving Father This often comes with the assuring assistance of a believer priest who can give perspective and confirmation

3 *Sacrifice* Sacrifice is a part of the OT—in terms not only of animal, grain, and so forth, but also of contrition, prayer, praise and thanksgiving (Pss 50 14, 51 17, 107 22, 141 2) Sacrifices are a part of the NT experience of priesthood Sacrifice after the cross is not the temple sacrifice rituals, of course It is in the life of ministry that the believer worships God The most pointed passage is Rom 15 16, where Paul describes himself “ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the

²⁸ K Kantzer, “Bitburg Must We Forgive?”, *Christianity Today* (July 12, 1985) 14 See D Alendar *Bold Love* (Colorado Springs NavPress, 1992), for an insightful discussion of the concept of forgiveness

Gentiles might become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Paul is the priest, and the converted Gentiles are an offering to God.

Another example is Phil 2:17, where Paul describes himself as "poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith." His impending death is an offering poured over²⁹ their faith, a sacrificial offering to God. The same thought is found in 2 Tim 4:6, where Paul says that he is at "the point of being poured out as a drink offering." A related thought is in 2 Cor 12:15, where Paul sees himself as "expended for your souls." In all three cases his death is seen as a sacrifice. Of course it is not an atoning sacrifice but one that is given for the sake of the believers' growth in faith. His death is a freewill offering for the sake of the Church. The sacrificial death of a believer may serve to encourage other believers. The sacrificial murders of Jim Elliot and his four fellow missionaries by the Auca Indians still stirs believers half a century later.

Hebrews 13 also describes the life of the believer in sacrificial terms. We no longer offer bulls and goats but praise, doing good and sharing.

We see another aspect of the sacrifice of the NT priesthood in Rom 12:1; Phil 4:18; 1 Pet 2:9-10. In Romans 12 it is not a life ended for God but a life lived for God. This is expanded in the gifts and "one anothers" in the verses following. We do sacrifice as we build up one another in love—a most enjoyable experience.

This shows the error of thinking that Biblical sacrifice always involves pain and loss. Sacrifice in the Bible focuses more on giving to God what is valuable. For example, there is no loss involved in the wave offering or in the sacrifice of praise.

If we do not limit the priestly work of Christ to his atoning work we find significant patterns for the ministry of the Church as she continues his mission in the world.

V. PROPHET

A prophet is one who comes with a message from God. That messenger does two basic things. He speaks for righteousness by both word and deed, and he points out unrighteousness in light of that righteousness. The prophet's proclamation must be congruent with his or her character. Jesus did these works. Following his mission means following his pattern.

In the arena of the prophetic there is the issue of receiving new revelation. I do not have time to revisit the Grudem-Gaffin-Thomas debates over the legitimacy of third-category prophecy except to say that I remain unconvinced that the Bible talks of fallible and therefore nonauthoritative prophecy. I do think there may be current-day prophets, especially as the coming of our Lord draws near. But it seems to me that they should meet the same standards as those of OT prophets: prophecy that draws people

²⁹ The drink offering is usually poured over other offerings, especially the whole burnt offering (Exod 29 40, Lev 23 13, 18, Num 15 5, 7, 24, 28 7, 9-24, 31, 29 6-37) It is mentioned in Gen 35 14, Lev 23 37, Num 4 7, 29 39 among other places It is like an anointing of the offering

to YHWH, that is absolutely accurate in every prediction, and that comes from a person of genuinely Christlike character.

I believe that the Spirit is very active today, working to bring things to mind, reminding us of relevant information, showing us how Scripture is significant in particular circumstances, perhaps enhancing our intuition to be able to perceive things in another person and even giving us information necessary for doing our pastoral work. But I place this under the category of illumination or wisdom rather than under the category of prophecy.

The Biblical category of prophecy seems to me to involve inerrancy and trustworthy authority, which modern-day prophets do not have and rarely even claim. When they do claim prophetic status, it seems to me that they often want the authority of the prophetic category without the corresponding responsibility.

Perhaps the most sobering thing about prophecy is the command to speak only what God has commanded. The one who speaks beyond that command opens himself to dire consequences. J. Owen puts it this way: "In the whole world there is nothing so vile as that which pretendeth to be God, and is not; nor is any other thing so pernicious an abuse."³⁰ He represents the spirit of Ezek 13:1-7, 17, where God pronounces woe on the supposed prophet who speaks out of his own spirit.

I believe that the Church follows in the prophetic office of Christ by proclaiming the revelation of God powerfully to a world desperately in need of hearing his word.

One of the prophetic functions is calling people to see their lives and actions from an eschatological vantage point, a kingdom perspective. Rather than merely pronouncing judgment on people, prophetic work might help us to see how to make our efforts be strategic for God's larger program. It would help us pick larger and more long-term goals because we see the deeper significance of our work.

If the Church follows the prophetic work of Christ in bringing God's message powerfully to the world, it must develop godly character and wisdom both individually and corporately. It means hearing God's Word and by the power of the Spirit seeing its significance for the Church and the world. It means proclaiming it with the Spirit's power so that it breaks through the sin-hardened hearts and minds of people, softening them to receive the Word of the Lord.

1. *Proclaiming a moral vision.* It seems to me that people ought to strive to be prophetic in the sense of setting a moral agenda for the Church as well as for society. This requires large-scale intellect, careful reflection on God's Word, and the anointing of the Spirit to achieve this vantage point. We hear and honor people like C. Colson, O. Guinness or A. Solzhenitsyn who can do this effectively.³¹

³⁰ J Owen, *Works* 3 29

³¹ See O Guinness, *The American Hour* (New York Free Press, 1993) He points out a national schism fueled by a crisis of cultural authority in which beliefs, ideals and values that

It is very easy for the Church to get bogged down in issues of the moment and neglect the foundational issues. The result is that we are ineffective because we are responding to crisis or planning by short-term objectives rather than building a Church that initiates change in a sinful world.

Our society is dying for lack of moral vision. Evil and ignorant people have smuggled moral relativism under the cover of multiculturalism. The Church has failed to help the world differentiate the pluralism of the anthropological and moral realms. We allow racial and ethnic diversity to become moral diversity.³² Incredibly, Christians defended O. North's lies in the name of patriotism, J. Bakker's fraud in the name of evangelism, and Caribbean pleasure cruises with well-known Christians in the name of edification.

2. *Speaking with godly character.* The prophetic voice must speak from godly character. Billy Graham has shown us that a man of God who desires to be heard must maintain the highest standards of integrity. That he has succeeded is shown by the fact that he has been allowed to speak in every part of the world to perhaps one hundred million people with nearly three million responses. It is even more telling that an outspoken, evangelical, Bible-thumping preacher is the only person to make the top-ten list of admired Americans every year since its inception more than forty years ago. Even non-Christians who despise the prophetic message respect prophetic integrity.

Graham is a man who is able to gain this kind of reputation in all spheres of life and bring so many to Christ. Yet *Time* magazine quotes Bob Jones III as saying that Graham "has done more harm to the cause of Christ than any other living man."³³

Of course, neither accolades nor attacks from the Church or the world necessarily signify prophetic integrity or its lack. The examples of Jesus and Paul indicate this clearly. Jesus was both appreciated and hated by religious and nonreligious people of his day. Some governmental officials appreciated Paul (e.g. Sergius Paulus, Acts 13:7; Agrippa and Festus, 26:28–32) while others hated him (the chief magistrates of Philippi, 16:22). Nonetheless I believe that those who speak from integrity speak much more effectively.

once defined America have lost their compelling and restraining power. Others who are doing this well include J. D. Hunter, S. McFarland and M. Cromartie. They suggest that Christians must first transform their own cultural minds and then penetrate culture with a clearly-stated, persuasive cultural strategy.

³² N. Gabler, "Morality Molds Us Into One," *The Oregonian* (June 16, 1992) C7.

³³ N. Gibbs and R. Ostling, "God's Billy Pulpit," *Time* (November 15, 1993) 72. The same article tells of Graham's rejection of liberalism, his affirmation of the total and complete inspiration of Scripture, which is the rule of spiritual life, and his decision that "the Bible was the one true Word in its entirety." He has never wavered from that position, affirming such beliefs as angels, demons, and the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ.

My wife Sherry drew my attention to the *Profiles* magazine in the seat pocket of our airplane on our journey to this conference. It profiled F. Mahfood as a man whose “full-blown religious conversion” to Spirit-filled Christianity occurred as he read C. Marshall’s *Something More*. “God broke into my world with a force that was unreal,” he remembers.³⁴ Collins, a senior editor of the magazine, describes a rich man sitting at cotside in Haiti’s Hospital for the Dying and Destitute. He uses his prodigious business skills to aid the poorest of the poor in leper colonies, tuberculosis wards, hospitals for the handicapped, and homes for street children throughout the Caribbean. The article chronicles how his new commitment to Christ led him to leave his position in the family business to run Food for the Poor, a ministry majoring in wheeling and dealing in the good-Samaritan business. He decided “to become a beggar for the poor, a beggar for those who cannot help themselves.” He is a popular man who combines his Christian principles with the entrepreneurial spirit of a commodities broker. His integrity and skill is sufficient to bring him positively to the attention of an audience as diverse as passengers on Continental Airlines. Such is the prophetic voice.

3. *Proclaiming God’s truth.* I think one of the reasons the Church is not being heard in the world is that we have not given our attention to the first side of the prophetic work—that is, we are not proclaiming God’s message of truth. We are not giving nearly so much attention to righteousness as we are to making noises about unrighteousness on certain agendas. Rather than taking the initiative to speak God’s gospel we allow ourselves to be pushed into a negative agenda. We allow the media and the government to set the moral agenda in our society. That leaves us the responders, and usually in the sense of being reactionary. We respond to brokenness rather than building righteousness. We deal with divorce and pregnancy out of wedlock because we have failed to counter the culture of narcissistic hedonism even in our own people. We even pander to it when we orient our ministry to the world in the name of being seeker-sensitive.³⁵

It seems that we feel most comfortable speaking against things. We need enemies to oppose. Too often Christians cast about for a foil against whom we can define ourselves.³⁶ Fear seems to be the motivator of our actions. We spoke fervently against communism until it collapsed under the weight of its errors. I am amazed at how many Christians claimed credit for the collapse of communism. “Our prayers toppled the godless regime,” they shouted fervently. Now it is the gays and lesbians who are identified as the reasons for the moral collapse of America.

But that allows others to set our agenda. It leaves us open to being taunted into action like a bull in the arena. When we respond to such taunts we often find a sword concealed under the red cape.

³⁴ C. S. Collins, “Prince of the Pauper,” *Profiles* (November 1993) 30

³⁵ Guinness, *Dining*, offers an incisive critique of the seeker-oriented church

³⁶ R. Balder, “Religious Right Feints, Falls Back—Then Scores,” *The Oregonian* (July 17, 1993) C12

We damage our credibility when we use fear of enemies as a fund-raising opportunity. As I write this I have a mailing from a respected, nationally-known Christian leader soliciting large amounts of money to keep homosexuals out of the United States military. Consider the irony of a ministry well known for its evangelistic work saying that with your signed petition and emergency gift they will be able to stop the well-funded lobby of militant homosexuals, liberals and radicals. Do they really believe that they have this much power? I hardly think so. A twenty-nine-cent letter to a congressman or a free phone call would be at least as effective. Will such appeals enhance evangelistic work? Hardly.

4. *Crusading prophetically against abortion.* Come with me to the Sunday *Oregonian*, November 14, 1993. The color headline is "Praying with Fire." It is the story of S. Shannon, an Oregon homemaker who shot an abortion doctor in Wichita. In large print beside pictures of a woman with a haunted, haggard face, she reflects: "It was the most holy, most righteous thing I've ever done."

The lengthy story reveals a lot about the nature of the debate. "A raging fanatic," says the doctor's agent, obviously a responsible person. The one who calls her angelic is identified as a convicted firebomber. There is an interchange with A. Burnett, editor of *Life Advocate*, the Portland-based magazine that serves the national rescue movement. In 1991 it exposed the work of G. Tiller, a doctor. "Tiller, 'an advocate for women'? Explain that to the children whose bodies have gone up like raw kindling in his privately owned gas chamber." Shannon had the article with her when she shot the doctor. Her conversion to killing began with her conversion to born-again Christianity.

According to *The Oregonian* article, Burnett argues that "if you really believe abortion is murder, then you may have a right—even a duty—to consider killing an abortion doctor as a last ditch defense of those you see as defenseless: the 'unborn.'"

While *The Oregonian* notes that such a sense of militancy puts Burnett and *Life Advocate* into the extreme minority, it describes the rescue movement as "fervently Bible-centered" people "who give their lives to praying and blocking clinics . . . to serve God by rescuing the unborn."

Later in the article P. Wilson—a man who says he once held anti-abortion views—says, "I once thought Christians were peace-loving, people-loving folks." Now he says they are a "bunch of bigots. They think if you don't behave exactly as they do, you belong to Satan and oughta be shot or killed. That's putting it pretty rough, I guess. Most of them are good people. But there's a fringe whose hearts are filled with hate."

In fairness, *The Oregonian* describes an interchange outside the Wichita abortion clinic that shows the hatred of the pro-choice patient escorts. It also quotes briefly a woman from Right to Life who condemns the shooting. "It's like we've been shot ourselves. If they would advocate violence, then shoot me first." But the tone of the article portrays Christians as fanatics who only deal in simplistic, black-and-white categories and pro-choice folk as ones who deal carefully with the moral complexities of our world.

My point in this lengthy description is that those who speak in the name of Jesus must tell the world what he is really like. When they de-personify their enemies, calling doctors Nazis and their clinics abortuaries, they present themselves and Jesus as a bunch of bigots. They often portray Christianity as filled with hatred and militancy. No wonder women struggling with the guilt of a child conceived out of wedlock seldom think of a church as a haven where they can find help in their time of crisis.

5. *Crusading prophetically against homosexuality.* In the war against homosexuality Christians find another enemy to fight. While the issues involved are more complex than I can interact with in a paper of this length, some points are clear. The Bible proscribes homosexual behavior unconditionally. It limits sexual relations to male-female marriage. Homosexuality is unrighteous, shameful and sinful, according to Biblical standards. The Bible is also clear that we should show God's love and compassion to sinners in the hope that they will respond to his grace and find his forgiveness and healing from their sin.

We have the prophetic responsibility to expose the sinfulness of homosexuality, to oppose those who would draw others into their sinfulness, and to resist attempts to have it condoned as a legitimate alternative lifestyle. We also have the pastoral responsibility to extend forgiveness, cleansing and the hope of healing to people trapped in a sinful lifestyle. The issue revolves around how we express ourselves prophetically and wisely in a world that does not accept Biblical authority.

Billy Graham put it well during his Portland crusade. When asked about his attitude toward homosexuals, he responded that God loves heterosexual sinners, God loves homosexual sinners, and he offers everyone forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

I also think that crusading Christian groups have played into the hands of liberal forces by polarizing Christians but, even worse, polarizing pre-Christians who would otherwise have been sympathetic to our cause. For example, in 1992 the Oregon Citizens Alliance (OCA) cost the anti-gay-rights advocates in the northwest a lot by including unnecessarily inflammatory phrasing in Measure 9, their anti-gay-rights measure. Now more careful proposals are being tarred with the Measure-9 brush. Because of naive political strategy they have undercut the cause of righteousness.

6. *Prophets without righteousness.* Worse yet, the prophetic voice of the OCA is severely tainted by their own unrighteousness. In the week prior to our 1993 ETS meeting I received a fund-appeal letter signed by L. Mabon, chairman of the OCA, in which he cast the OCA as the only³⁷ effective voice of righteousness in the "battle to defend our families from the homosexual agenda." The letter begs Christians to entrust him and the OCA with large amounts of money so they can continue their righteous war

³⁷ Their previous unwillingness to cooperate with other Christian groups along with the total absence of mention of other groups in their literature is the basis of my "only"

against homosexuality. It concludes by announcing the momentous impact of a contribution: "There are few times in a person's life when a single decision can have the potential of changing an entire culture. Your decision to become a regular supporting member of OCA may be just such a time." The implication is that failure to support them will effectively be an endorsement of the homosexual agenda. Such grandiose claims about cultural effectiveness should immediately discredit the one making the statement. But here the case is even worse. The voice of righteousness is unrighteous.

The OCA and several of its agencies, along with Mabon, owe tens of thousands of dollars in back taxes. According to an interview given to the Associated Press, Mabon has chosen to spend his money in the war against homosexuality rather than pay his taxes. An accountant who audited the OCA books remarked: "Sometimes you just can't help but feel that Lon Mabon doesn't play by the same rules as the rest of us."³⁸

I must object to those who speak in the name of Christian righteousness but who do not exhibit that righteousness in their own lives. Have we not learned the lessons taught so painfully by J. Bakker and J. Swaggart, not to mention the Bible? Those who call for righteousness must be above reproach both within and without the Christian community (1 Tim 3:1-5). Those who ask us to trust them must be trustworthy.

7. Balancing prophetic responsibilities. The prophetic voice must speak with prophetic character. Compare the voice of a B. Graham or a C. Colson, a D. Coates or a W. Bennett, with the voice of self-styled prophets such as S. Shannon or L. Mabon, with televangelists proclaiming righteousness with outrageously expensive lifestyles and all the accoutrements of the sound stage. The Church will be effective in continuing the mission of Jesus only when we follow his pattern of truth in word and in deed.

We will be effective in calling people to moral renewal when we exhibit that renewal in our own lives. Like Jesus, we will speak truth powerfully but persuasively rather than pushing power politics. When we follow the example of Jesus, the woman considering an abortion will see a church as a safe place where she can find help and support rather than a place where she will find only guilt and condemnation. We will keep the balance between truth and purity on the one hand and compromise and persuasion on the other. We will stand with cultured civility between too much conviction and too much accommodation.³⁹ As noted in 1 Pet 3:13-15 our godly lives will provoke questions about the hope that is in us, and we will give an answer with gentleness and respect, keeping a good conscience because we sanctify Jesus in our hearts.

³⁸ The facts of the case and the quotations are summarized in an editorial by D. Sarason, *The Oregonian* (November 14, 1993) D2. The facts of the case are not disputed by the OCA or Mabon.

³⁹ R. Mouw, *Uncommon Decency* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991).

VI. CONCLUSION

We have seen that the key concept of the Church is that it is a Spirit-led people of God who carry out Christ's mission in the world. The people who make up the Church are the concretely living body of Christ, which is his person turned outward in action. The Holy Spirit mediates the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ to his corporate people who make up his body, the Church. His Spirit empowers his body to continue his mission to reveal his Father and redeem the world.

The offices Christ fulfilled give direction to the work of the Church continuing the mission of our Savior. Inaugurated eschatology gives the pattern for the kingdom work of the Church. All its members are believer-priests equally able and called to do the mediatory work of the Spirit. Individually and as a corporate body it witnesses wisely, applying the Word of God to the lives and agendas of people.

W. R. Cook, my colleague in teaching theology at Western Seminary, closed his final chapel address prior to his retirement with words that are very apropos to our task today:

Let us not forget that we, right now, provide the interface between God's "already" kingdom and its "not yet" phase. We should be thinking, speaking and living now characteristics of what the kingdom will one day be. If the line between time and eternity is for all practical purposes immeasurable (cf. 1 Cor 15:52; cf. Enoch in Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5), so should be the line between the inaugurated and fulfilled kingdom of God—as far as attitudes, values and spiritual quality of life are concerned. We seem to be on the doorstep of heaven, but our amazing God of the unlikely and the unexpected left us here to represent him to a world only interested in a predictable god made after its own likeness.