THE CHURCH AND ITS CHANGING MINISTRIES

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We are living in an era of radical change. If we were not already convinced of that from our daily papers, the publication last year by Random House of Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, and Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*, certainly called it forcefully to our attention. Radical changes in our way of life seem now to be imperative if we are to avoid rendering our planet uninhabitable by continued unwise use of its limited resources to support life. Unsettling news from denominational headquarters reminds us that for several years now church membership has been shrinking, or at least failing to keep pace with the rate of population growth. Funds for world mission causes and other special ministries are drying up . There is evidence that men are leaving the ministry for other professions in ever-increasing numbers. Many church members are concerned about the apparent radicalism of today's seminarians, and while they may be overly concerned, certainly the young people entering professional careers in the church today are significantly different from those of a generation ago.

Thus, the topic to which this paper is addressed: The Church and its Changing Ministries. Each of the words in that phrase is loaded with all kinds of emotional freight. Merely to reproduce it in print is to unsettle many faithful churchgoers. We can no longer deny that we live in a society and an era of rapid and radical change. That change has its effect upon the Church, as indeed it affects all social institutions. But we are far from sure that we want the Church to change, and still less sure that we can agree about how it ought to change. And because we cannot agree readily about what the Church in the Seventies is or ought to be, we are still less certain about what Ministry is or ought to be, since Ministry is what the Church does.

In other words, far more than the *fact* of change, we need to assess the *impact* of change. One of the characteristics of social change is that the rate at which it is occuring affects our choice of models for our own experiences of change. Sociologist Wilbert E. Moore suggests that we need to view this proposition in terms of four kinds of social change.[1] In a traditional society, where change is minor or non-existent, the individual turns primarily to the older generation for models of life-style. When changes begin to occur with more mod-

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[1]Wilbert E. Moore, "Aging and the Social System," in McKinney, John C., and de Vyver, Frank T., *Aging and Social Policy* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), pp. 39-40.

erate speed, the individual remains current in his society by employing his contemporaries as role models. In societies where change is fairly rapid, especially in those that are rapidly modernizing, role models tend to be doctrinal or borrowed from other social systems. Many persons will find such models inconsistent with their previous experience, and will be unable to remain in touch and functional. Finally, when social change is extremely rapid, as is the case in the United States just now, the individual is unable to keep up and rapidly falls behind and becomes obsolete. Youth become the models for life styles, but even their innovations quickly become obsolete. So it is that those over thirty are considered "over the hill" and "out of the picture."

Western society was in the first of these stages until the Industrial Revolution. At that point, social change began to speed up, so that traditional forms and styles began to be inappropriate. Somewhere around World War I, we began to move into the third stage as we fought the "Great War" to "make the world safe for Democracy." Since 1914, mechanical and technological innovations have been many and their impact has been to increase radically the rate of change in our lives. Radio, telephone, the motion picture, powered flight, the widespread use of electric power, and so forth, have significantly changed life in the Western World.

We are now entering rapidly into the fourth stage, through the effects of such technologies as television, data-processing, computer electronics, nuclear power, space exploration, and other systems that rely upon concepts, thought processes and structures remarkably different from anything we have ever known before. At this point we must recall that the characteristic of this stage is the introduction and rapid obsolescence of youth models for social behavior and life style. We may not be fully entered into this era as yet, but who can deny the powerful influence of the young upon the shaping of our society?

The influence of youth upon our values and life styles would not be so troubling were it not so obvious that they are radically different from preceeding generations. Reich's concept of Consciousness III, described in *The Greening of America,* is the portrait of a generation that thinks and feels in ways radically different from their parents.

There are no doubt many factors underlying such a radical change. One seems particularly obvious. All those who are under thirty were born since the last great economic disaster ,the Depression of the Thirties. Since the entry of the United States into World War II, the economy of the Western World, and particularly of the United States, has shifted from scarcity toward affluence. While poverty is

still very much with us, and still exercising its powerful influence over large sectors of the population, the basic level of the society viewed as a whole must be termed affluence. For example, recent news stories carried the information that the protein consumption of pet cats in the United States, in the form of fish type commercial cat foods, is equivalent to the protein deficiency in the diets of the population of South America. Most of the fish used in such products is harvested from the waters off the coasts of South America.

For the most part, not only is hunger fairly rare among most of our citizens, the level of our existence is well above the level of poverty. Indeed, more Americans seem to suffer from the effects of over consumption of food than from malnutrition. More specifically, the generation who are now parents was the last to be born under conditions of hardship and scarcity of needed goods and services; their children are the first generation (perhaps in the history of the world) that has not known any significant wants to be unmet.

One may easily jump to the conclusion that the result is a generation of spoiled brats who need to experience a little hardship in order to get their values straight. Perhaps, but a better understanding of this phenomenon may be found in the concepts of the hierarchy of human needs as spelled out by psychologist Abraham Maslow.[2] There are, according to Maslow, five levels of human need. The lowest, and most basic, he terms "physiological," and includes food, shelter, warmth, sexual activity, and so forth. The second level, higher than the first, contains such "safety" needs as physical safety from danger, order and structure and reliability in one's existence, and other needs related to the protection and security of life. Third, come the "love" needs for affection, love, social relationships, sense of belonging and so forth. Still higher are the "esteem" needs for self-esteem and the esteem of others, based upon achievement, self-confidence, independence and freedom. Finally, and highest of all, is the need for self-actualization, that is, the realization of all of one's potentials, for self-fulfillment.

More important than the concept of the arrangement of these human needs in a hierarchy is the understanding that the higher needs are not felt and cannot be satisfied until the lower ones have been adequately met. On the other hand, Maslow also holds that when the lower needs are in fact effectively cared for, the higher needs become more demanding and the individual feels a more insistent pressure within him to deal with them.

While Maslow was largely concerned with the effect of this needs-

[2]Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review*, 50 (1943), pp. 370-396.

hierarchy upon the individual, it would seem to have a societal dimension as well. We could spend our time well considering what this concept tells us about the life experiences of those who are parents today, and indeed about their parents, too, especially in terms of such an economic disaster as the "Great Depression." More intriguing, perhaps, is what it implies about the current generation of youth. If they are, in fact, the first generation to know only affluence, then we can say that they are also the first generation whose physiological and safety needs, at least, have been well satisfied. They have, with few exceptions, as a group, never known any deprivation for any extended period of time. If Maslow's theory is correct, the implication is that for this current generation under thirty, the higher needs for love, esteem, and particularly self-actualization are the more keenly felt, and have greater possibility of being satisfied, than for any previous generation in recent history.

If this can be said of today's youth, and if, at the same time, they are the models for contemporary life style, then we are currently experiencing a quality of change more profound than anything western society has experienced for a long, long time.

All of this has been preparatory, of course, to our main concern, the understanding of the Church and its changing ministries. One way, more directly, to approach an understanding of the Church is to begin with the New Testament and seek to derive from the Gospels and the Letters of Paul and others some doctrine of the nature of the Church and the divine intention for it. Without denying the validity of such an approach, and without engaging in a lengthy debate over whether Jesus, in fact, intended to create a church, and if he did, what he wanted it to be, let us consider another approach.

We can agree that whatever else the Church is, or was intended to be, it is an organization. Professor David Fletcher, of the University of Denver College of Business Administration, defines an organization as "a structured process in which humans interact to achieve objectives." There are three key elements in the definition: process, human beings, and objectives. The objectives which an organization seeks to achieve are derived to some extent from the goals and objectives of the individuals who are members of the organization. A major part of their individual objectives has to do with the satisfaction of their human needs. In other words: (1) individuals tend to form organizations in order better to achieve their individual needs; and (2) individuals tend to join existing organizations which they perceive to be concerned with or compatible with objectives similar to their own.

The point is that whatever else may be going on, a major reason why individuals organized the Church to begin with was to better

meet their individual needs, all of them. It also suggests that individuals continue to join the Church or remain members of it because it continues to meet their needs. The reverse can, of course, also be stated: when the Church ceases to meet an individual's needs, he will either withdraw from it in time or seek to change it so that it remains functional *vis-à-vis* his own needs. This last possibility is reinforced by the fact that when an organization exists to meet needs no longer felt by men, it must either adopt new objectives in terms of needs that are felt, or else become obsolete and die.

Two quick examples will serve to illustrate the point. As you walk down the street, you bump into someone. You mutter an apology, each moves slightly to one side, perhaps after some jockeying back and forth, and each continues on his way. This is a structured process in which humans interact to achieve an objective. That is, for a moment, it is an organization. When its objectives are achieved it becomes obsolete and dies. Of course, if the other person is a pretty girl, and you invite her to dine with you, and she accepts, you have now negotiated some new objectives, and the organization continues.

The family is an organization. In its early years, one of its major objectives is the rearing of children. In time, as the children reach maturity, marry, and establish their own families, this objective is largely met. The husband and wife now enter the so-called "empty nest stage," and must adopt new objectives for their life together, or else increase the importance of other objectives which have already been present. Otherwise the family unit becomes an obsolete organization and will die. The familiar example is the experience of many couples for whom the raising of their children has been the only powerful reason for staying together. So, after twenty to twenty-five years of marriage they divorce, or else simply cease to interact and, except for formal outward appearances, cease to be a family.

If we return briefly to Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, we can suggest that the Church as an organization has been much concerned throughout its history with all of the needs that Maslow identifies: physiological, safety, love, esteem, self-actualization. We could, by searching the scriptures, produce abundant examples of the recognition of all human needs. Two brief quotations will suffice.

> Suppose a brother or sister is in rags with not enough food for the day, and one of you says, 'Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm, and have plenty to eat', but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? (James 2:15-17, New English Bible).

> You have learned that our forefathers were told, "Do not commit murder; anyone who commits murder must be brought to judgment." But what I tell you is this: Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to judgment. If he abuses his brother he must answer for it to the court; if he sneers at him he will have to answer for it in the fires of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22, New English Bible).

The first expresses a concern for physiological needs, the second for esteem. But we have said, following Maslow, that until the lower, more basic needs have been met, the higher ones cannot be dealt with, indeed cannot be felt. A man who is starving cares little for esteem and can hardly attempt self-actualization. Indeed he will risk safety to steal a cup of cold water, or a crust of bread.

Does not this suggest, first of all, that because until very recently life has been lived primarily in a context of scarcity, much of the life of the Church understandably has been focused upon the lower and more basic needs of man, upon his physiological and safety needs. So much of the work of the Church and its ministry, both towards its membership and toward society in general, has been concerned with food, shelter, health, and with the ordering of society to provide for law and order and the security of persons against harm. In the latter realm, for example, we have been much concerned with the family in its roles of protecting and rearing children and caring for the security of women; and with the well-being of widows, orphans, the sick, the insane, and the elderly. We have not neglected man's needs for love, esteem, and self-actualization, but have met with less success in these areas. But now, as we become more and more an affluent society, these higher needs are the more keenly felt, and at the same time we are freer to spend our energies in meeting them.

It is this new emerging style, we may suggest, that constitutes much of the idealism and activism of the young, and at the same time prompts much of their criticism and rejection of the Church and other institutions of our society. They hear us speaking a great deal about love, about respect for fellow men, about becoming what one is able to become, that is about creativity, but they see us at the same time still very much concerned about our physiological needs, and about safety and security.

For example, the young hear us still very much concerned about the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in, they hear us speak much about the need for law and order, and they ask why we cannot love our Black and Mexican-American neighbors, why we cannot accord them the esteem of full citizenship and participation in our

society; why we cannot spend a part of our energies helping disadvantaged persons realize their full potential as persons?

They hear us very much concerned that the war in Vietnam has to do with the security of the Western World, and they ask whether love does not demand an end to killing; whether esteem does not require us to stop using works like "gook" and "commie"; whether we ought not be helping Southeast Asia to achieve new levels of satisfying life instead of scorching the earth until nothing can grow.

In other words, the Church is now being challenged to be concerned with the higher needs of men, all men. We are being asked to develop new ministries that have to do with new objectives, new needs that now can be felt in ways that were not possible when we ourselves had pressing concerns about our own needs for the basics of life and for safety and security. And this challenge is shaping and will continue to shape the Church in new directions and new ministries. Let us examine some of the possibilities.

The most obvious characteristic today is the extent to which young people entering seminary have been inclined to write off the parish church and to express a sincere disdain for parish ministry. The young people who enter seminary these days are much concerned about being helping persons in our society. Their idealism is at once exciting and a bit threatening. It is exciting because, though sometimes naive, it represents an alertness to and a concern about the shape of our world that simply did not exist when, for example, the author entered seminary in 1953. It is threatening because in their sincere belief that love and esteem and self-actualization are really possible, they express an impatience about the older order, the order their parents and professors created and find comfortable, that threatens at times to bring that order tumbling around our ears, and we are not able to perceive what will take its place or whether we shall be able to live in it.

In the course of three years in seminary, or in the years following, many young men and women revise this tendency to disparge the local church and congregation. Some of them achieve a kind of realism that tells them that the majority of jobs in the ministry are still to be found in the local church, and if they want to work at the ministry it must be there. Some, and their number appears to be growing, arrive at a new understanding of the possibilities of the local church, and of the real ability of the parish ministry to change with the times, though often the change is laborious. Some come to the realization that the members of the local church have the same needs as humans as do those who live in ghettoes and that they too need ministry.

Well and good, the parish church and ministry seem assured of

survival for quite a while yet. But that survival will not be without struggle. We can expect that the "clergy gap" will continue and even widen in the near future. The idealism of younger clergy will not let the Church rest. For they see the Church to be both a place where men are helped through the healing of the hurts they experience in life, and a place from which we set about the business of changing society so people do not get hurt so much. So their ministry will still be concerned with comforting the afflicted, but it will increasingly be concerned as well with afflicting the comfortable. The result: some churches will change under this kind of leadership and adopt new shapes of ministry. Some churches will be alienated and some will cling to past and present models of life and ministry. And increasing numbers of younger ministers will grow frustrated with the slowness of change in the local church and will leave it for other ministries.

We will continue to see, in the forseeable future, an increase in specialized ministries. We will see more and more specialized programs and agencies attempting to deal with specific problems of persons in our society. We can expect to see, in particular, an expansion of ministries to the hurt and suffering among us. And these ministries will increasingly be concerned not only to bind up wounds but to foster changes of a preventive kind. So more will be done with children in trouble, children with learning and socialization problems, youth on drugs, people with sexual hangups and deviations, as well as a continuation of the more traditional special ministries on college campuses, in hospitals, prisons, custodial institutions and so forth.

We will also see an increase in what may be called ministry outside the Church. Here is meant not only outside the local church, but outside the structures of the Church as an institution, and outside its financial support. We will see, in particular, increasing attempts to minister to persons in the context of their work rather than in the neighborhoods where they live. Thus there will be an increase in industrial missions, and in the number of ministers working in industry directly, either as regular employees carrying out an informal ministry to fellow employees, or as chaplains. There will be more ministers entering politics and government, not as chaplains, but as lobbyists, as agency staff members, and as candidates for office.

There will be an increase in pastoral counseling and marriage counseling centers, staffed by ministers and supported by fees paid by clients. More ministers will work in and through community service agencies, and community centers, trying to reach the helpless, the disadvantaged, the rejects of our society at the points where these people are hurting. In many cases these ministries will not be funded by the institutional church. In part this will happen because the turmoil of

our present time will continue for some time to produce shrinking memberships and shrinking budgets for special causes beyond the local church. But the financial separation will occur because many of the younger clergy who engage in ministry outside the Church will reject church funding because they will see it as creating the possibility for control by churches whose values and objectives they see to be different from the goals of their ministries.

Within the local church itself, we will see structural changes. Many smaller churches will be organized into yoked fields and larger parishes, primarily for financial reasons. In some cases, this will be done on a basis that provides several smaller churches with a multiple staff of specialists, like that often found in large urban churches. There will be increase in what some call the "tent-making ministry" in which the minister earns his living at some skill or profession other than ministry and serves a congregation on a part-time basis. Again, this will provide situations in which a multiple staff of specialists serves part-time a church that normally could employ only one minister full-time.

Six years ago, the National Council of Churches Department of Ministry described the ministry as a "distressed profession." Changes in that pattern now begin to emerge. These changes result from: (1) the rise of several professional associations in the ministry, seeking to upgrade the profession; (2) the rapid development of many varieties of continuing education for ministers, and radical increases in the numbers of men availing themselves of such opportunities; and (3) some major changes in seminary education.

Not too many years ago we sincerely believed, and we were largely correct, that we could, in three years, train a man for an effective ministry of forty to fifty years' duration. Now we increasingly recognize that because of the rapidity of change in our world, it is more accurate to state that a seminary education has a half-life of five years. That is, by five years after graduation, half the education he received may well be obsolete and useless. By ten years, three-fourths will have failed him, and so forth. In response to this, the Churches, through almost every available agency, have spawned a massive program of continuing education. Increasingly, ministers are taking from a few days to a whole year to engage in further education, not only in schools, but in many workshops and special institutes. At the same time, many seminaries have realized that it is not enough to fill a man's head, however effectively, with the contents of Bible, history, theology, sociology, psychology, and how to preach a sermon. The task of the seminary is seen as the education of professionals. This means enabling men to develop for themselves a coherent theory of

what ministry is, to master the functional use of a growing body of specialized knowledge, to master a variety of skills (preaching, teaching, counseling, administration, and many more), and to develop, above all, an awareness of themselves as professionals and an acceptance of all that implies, in the best sense, about their lives.

In summary then, it appears that the years ahead will be exciting ones for the Church. We shall face many demands and challenges, and if our faith is sufficient, we shall meet them all, and surmount most of them. The ministry is an exciting work these days. The enthusiasm of its youngest members is catching, their commitment is exhilerating, their awareness of the world illuminating and sometimes frightening. They are a new breed of cat, and the foretaste of tomorrow's Church.