

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

MARCH 2002

OF, IN, AGAINST, OR FOR?

BY TIM KELLER

The Cross calls us to give up or use our power only for others, as Christ did.

Sect vs. 'Church'

About 100 years ago the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch wrote *The Social Teachings of the Christian Church* in which he made a distinction between 'sect' and 'church' that has been enormously influential. These were two models of how religious bodies related to the larger world.

A 'sect' saw the world quite negatively and formed a 'contra-culture' which largely separated its members from mainstream society. At the other end of the spectrum a 'church' (in Troeltsch's view) saw itself as

the central religious institution of the mainstream society. As Max Weber (I think) put it: "You get born into a 'church,' but you must join a sect." Like many mothers, the 'church' will embrace you irrespective of your behavior; like a stern father, the sect will make you follow a strict ethical code. The 'church' wants to make virtually everyone in the society feel 'part of it.' It will therefore stress love and acceptance and membership 'standards' will be virtually non-existent. The sect, on the other hand, believes it is only for the truly committed and it will therefore stress law and standards and be

quick to discipline and chastise people. The 'church' looks at its surrounding society as 'us,' the sect looks at the surrounding society as 'them.'

This distinction is still widely used by scholars for the simple fact that it describes most churches, especially in the U.S. In general, what have been called "mainline churches" stress complete acceptance and inclusion regardless of behavior or belief in an effort to stay as close to the heart of the culture as possible. Many conservative churches on the other hand lean towards being 'sectarian.' A

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MAIL EARLY

BY PETER HERMANN

...sooner is definitely better.

The signs go up at the post office during tax time and the holidays. The diaconate would like to follow suit and post a sign of its own: PLEASE NOTIFY EARLY!

If you are considering coming to us for assistance with matters involving your finances, please know that while there is no such thing as calling us too late, sooner is definitely better.

Consider these simple examples:

A person who is two months behind in her rent finds herself in less of a crisis than one who is six months behind.

A person who calls us when he finds that he won't be able to feed his family after the arrival

of a new baby is in much better shape than the person who calls after his family has not eaten in three days.

A person who calls us for help with budgeting because she cannot keep up with her credit card payments is much easier to help than the person who calls because VISA is threatening legal action.

Think of a doctor/patient relationship. Have you ever heard a doctor say, "You're here too soon. Give the sickness a

chance to spread"? So why do people wait so long to reach out for help? Perhaps because of the many compelling reasons to delay.

"I don't know if my situation qualifies for something like the diaconate."

"Maybe the problem will go away on its own."

"If I tell the diaconate about it, they'll get involved in my life."

"I'm embarrassed."

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classic example is how artists are pressured by conservative churches to work with only the church or to do overtly theological or evangelistic themes.

The Biblical Christian Community

The problem with this analysis is that (of course) the Bible doesn't call the believers to be either a 'church' or 'sect' (under these definitions.) For example, the key metaphor which 1 Peter employs to express the Christian relationship to culture is that of "resident aliens" (*paroikos; parepidemos*). This describes a people who on the one hand are permanent residents of a new country they love. They are not tourists, nor terrorist cells, nor even disdainful temporary residents who are only living in a place for material gain. But on the other hand they are significantly different in their way of life. They have not been 'assimilated' into their new country.

There are many places in the Old Testament that lay out this understanding of the believers' relationship to the surrounding world, though my favorite is God's letter to the Babylonian exiles in Jeremiah 29. But the ultimate root of Christian corporate identity lies in Jesus Christ himself. On the one hand he truly became one of us, a member of a specific human cultural community 'He came to his own...' (John 1:11). And he loved the world (John 3:16). And yet, though 'he came to his own, his own people did not accept him' (John 1:11)

It is traditional to say, 'we must be in the world, but not of

“Out of the new motivations and insights of the gospel, we seek to be a ‘counter-culture’ but one engaged positively with the city. We want to be unalienated aliens.”

the world.’ But I hope this analysis shows that we have to be more specific than that. While sectarian believers are 'in' but not 'of' they are also *against* the world. They are alienated from it. Jesus, however, was not alienated from the world (for he loved it), but was an alien in it (because he was continually misunderstood for being so radically 'different'.) So when we follow him we should find ourselves neither alienated from the world (as the sect) nor just part of the world (as a 'church'), but rather aliens in the world *for* the world.

The problem with Troeltsch's thesis is that he does not define the 'gospel.' Troeltsch recognizes only Christianity's commonalities with other religions—and not its distinctives. For all their apparent dissimilarity, both 'sect' and 'church' relate to the world in a way that helps them accrue and maintain their own institutional power. The 'church' by being completely and accepting and inclusive keeps its power in society by not challenging the current social norms.

The 'sect' attacks and vilifies the world in order to maintain its power over its members. The gospel, however, is too radically

humbling for its recipients to want to seek power over others, and it is too radically affirming for its recipients to need to seek power over others. The ability to hate/feel superior to others and/or the need for social approval and power—are both deeply eroded and undermined by the gospel. The Cross calls us to give up or use our power only for others, as Christ did. So both 'church' and sect are really about power, not about service to the world.

The Challenge

Redeemer has rejected both of these older models in favor of being a church in the city. Out of the new motivations and insights of the gospel, we seek to be a 'counter-culture' but one engaged positively with the city. We want to be unalienated aliens. On the one hand, we insist on the necessity of personal conversion, the reality of sin and the necessity of grace. We try to challenge the reigning sexual, material, and power-idolatries.

On the other hand, we include in our services and ministries people at every possible stage in their spiritual journeys. We sac-

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REDEEMER REPORT

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HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM
EAST 69TH BETWEEN PARK AND LEXINGTON
services at 9:30 • 11:15 • 6:00

CHURCH OF ST. PAUL AND ST. ANDREW
86TH AND WEST END AVENUE
services at 7:00

“I got myself into this mess, so I am going to get myself out.”

If you don't know whether your situation qualifies, contact us and let us make an assessment. Perhaps we will not be able to help but will know of an organization that can. But we can't do any of that if we don't know about you.

If you think your financial problems will go away, let us tell you—gently—that they won't.

Though you may be reluctant to confront your situation, please know that there are ways to approach all that debt, teach you (yes, even you!!) to budget, and to change—perhaps very gradually—your situation into something that you don't need to deny. That process cannot begin, however, if you are hoping those unopened bills will somehow disappear. C.S. Lewis' instruction is apt: you fix something, he says, “by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on.”

If you are embarrassed to approach the diaconate, let us tell you—joyfully—that we are happy to help you, and that you have nothing to be embarrassed about. Yes, you may wish you had handled your situation differently, but you can let us know about your frustrations when you come to us. We will address them, prayerfully and endeavoring to reflect Christ's healing love. And remember, the diaconate is made of people as desperately in need of God's grace as you are.

Along the same lines, if you are afraid that help from the diaconate means that we will become involved in your life, then know that we want to come alongside you in love, not recklessly invade your existence. Think of the doctor again: the

more of a certain condition she sees, the better she is able to treat it.

If you feel that since you are the one responsible for getting yourself into your “mess”, you should be responsible for getting yourself out, be reminded that if that were the way the world operated, the saving work of Jesus on the cross would be pointless. God's policy for the world He made is grace, not “You broke it, you fix it.” The demands of that law will either crush you or, if you meet them, harden you into self-righteousness.

“All good reasons to reach out for help,” you say, “but doesn't the Bible itself exhort me to endure? Hebrews tells me about a race I'm supposed to run. What about Romans 5:3: ‘We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope?’”

Yes, we are called to endure, to persevere, to run a good race. But we are not meant to do it alone. We are designed for relationship, and our finances are not an exception. Perhaps God is even using those finances to

“Yes, we are called to endure, to persevere, to run a good race. But we are not meant to do it alone. We are designed for relationship...”

pull you—at long last!—into community.

Finally, look at Jesus' appeal in Matthew 11:28: “Come unto me, all who are weary, and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” *Anapauo*, the Greek used here for “give you rest”, most closely resembles the English word “refresh.” As Leon Morris comments, “The verb seems... to imply the rest... that enables the worker to go back to the task with renewed vigor.”

In other words, don't stop running. Reach out for help so that you will run better. Don't stop persevering. Reach out for the help that will allow you to persevere.

In our endeavor to be the human face of Christ's breathtaking appeal, we at the diaconate hope that you will call us. Soon!

CHURCH FAMILY UPDATE

Vows & Baptisms

Vows:

Roma Birute Krapovicki
Colin Brennan Lardner
Don Robert Ratcliffe
Kathleen Sue Hogue Ratcliffe
Gene Brian Schmidt
Jocelyn Sue Gerhart Schmidt
David C. Wong
William Walter Gilmore

Baptisms –

David C. Wong
William Walter Gilmore

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rice our time, money, and emotions to meet the needs of people around us whether they believe as we do or not. We will love our own New York City.

All that sounds inspiring, doesn't it? But it is also much, much more complicated. Here is an example. An artist in a 'sect' simply withdraws from the surrounding culture and directly presents Christian subjects. An artist in a 'church' simply works in society reflecting pretty much whatever is happening in the broader culture. But an artist in a church like Redeemer has to ask: "How do I integrate my faith and knowledge of Christ so that it makes my art different as I work in society?"

There is another challenge. A non-sectarian, non-mainline church will often be misunderstood and criticized. Mainline bodies will see us as sectarian, while sectarian bodies will see us as dangerously compromising and compromised. But something like this happened to Jesus too.

FYI

Maundy Thursday Service

Thursday March 28th 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

All Souls Church (80th & Lexington)

Please come and join the rest of the Redeemer community in a celebration of Jesus's Last Supper with his disciples. There will be a worship service with the Lord's Supper, foot washing and a communal meal (\$ 5 at the door). Childcare, up to age four, will be provided.

The Maundy Thursday service commemorates Christ's last supper with his disciples on the night before he was betrayed. The English word maundy is derived from the Latin phrase *novo mandatum*, which means, new command. This remembers Christ's "Love command" to his disciples in John 13:34, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

To reinforce his command Christ washed his disciples' feet during the meal, a task that would have been considered beneath the dignity of even a slave in that culture. It is for this reason that Maundy Thursday services have always included foot washing, typically the feet of church members by the church's leadership.

Easter Service Times

The service times for Easter are just a little bit different than our usual times.

9:30 a.m. Hunter College 6:00 p.m. Hunter College

11:30 a.m. Hunter College 7:00 p.m. Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul

SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, April 28 — Open Forum — The Journey of Love

- Music from George Gershwin's classic opera *Porgy and Bess*
- Featuring soloists from the 1976 Broadway revival, the Redeemer band, and a 20-piece string section
- Lecture by Dr. Timothy Keller
- 6:00 p.m. Hunter College Auditorium (69th and Park) Free admission