

Vocation and Church

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It is almost paradoxical to try to write an article on vocation and Church, for in the New Testament these two terms are one and the same. For the New Testament writers it would have been meaningless to discuss the relationship between Christian vocation and the Church, similar to defining today the relationship between conscription and the army. The Church (*ecclesia*) is the community of those who have been called (*kletoi*), those who have received a vocation (*klesis*) from God. In biblical terminology the Church has no significance other than as the fruit of vocation.

But this article does not aim at a biblical study of these terms but rather to look at the way in which Christians, and particularly Christian students, should see their lives as ordered by God's vocation addressed to them. This question is of special importance today when in the Federation we have rediscovered with new vividness the significance and primary importance of our churchmanship, and when we are devoting much time to the study of our responsibility to the ecumenical movement and to the one universal Church.

Three elements are involved in the concept of vocation, the person who calls, the person who is called, and the task to which he is called. In general we are agreed that God and God alone may call us. We are equally certain that we are the objects of the call, which concerns not only our souls but also our minds and our physical existence. The difficult question is, What are we called to? It may be well on this point to look at the New Testament. It seems obvious that in all cases, with one possible exception, the call or vocation is directed

towards a particular relationship with God. We are "called to be saints" (Rom. 1 : 7) ; we are called "to eternal life" (I Tim. 6 : 12) ; we are called "to be God's children" (I John 3 : 1). Perhaps the most significant of these is the first, "called to be saints". The word "saint" in the biblical sense implies not any moral perfection or mystical status but our situation as people who have been set apart from the rest of men, who belong somewhere else, who have, to use again the New Testament vocabulary, a different citizenship, a new loyalty, an eternal home. This is the fundamental contention of John's Gospel, that though we are by birth, by nature, children of the world, God has come into the world and called us out of it. Our vocation is to come out of the world not by deserting it, not by any spiritual evasion, but by recognising in thought, word and deed that we belong to a new Lord, who is our Caller.

"To everything there is a season"

The term vocation is commonly used in a very different sense. We speak of the vocations of doctor, politician or engineer, and in particular we consider that pastors and priests have been "called" to the ministry. This use of the word vocation, even if it can be justified on certain grounds, tends to hide its fundamental significance. In contrast to the people of Israel, the Church is characterised by the priesthood of all believers ; there is no special call addressed to one group of men which brings them into a closer relationship with God than others ; there is no particular profession which is the most adequate answer to God's call. To speak biblically, we are not called to a profession — we are called to be saints, or more simply, to be Christians. The sixteenth century reformers emphasised strongly that neither clerical life or more particularly monastic life was in any way preferable or religiously better than any other way of life, providing it was commanded by God's vocation.

It is one of the teachings of that rich and mysterious book of Ecclesiastes that "to everything there is a season". God does not want all men to be the same. We are not all called to be ministers, but there is a "season" for all kinds of jobs. In our daily lives we may manifest in an infinite variety of ways that we have received and tried to accept this vocation. When the Apostle Paul speaks of the Church as composed of different members, he does not refer only to the Church's varied ministry, but also in a much wider sense to the fact that there are many different ways of serving God.

Ministry of the Church

It might be said that we have a far too narrow conception of the ministry. The Church, which is not only a spiritual reality but also a visible institution, needs the services of certain "ministers" whose specific responsibility is to nourish the community life of this institution and of the fellowship it embodies: there are ministries of teaching, of pastoral care, of chairmanship, of social service, and many others. But it would be erroneous to assume, as we too often do, either from laziness or complacency with established forms, that those who have assumed these specific responsibilities on behalf of the Church should carry them alone. If we seriously believe that we are all called to be saints, to be God's children, we must also share in the Church's responsibility to teach, to comfort, and to watch over the welfare of all members of the flock.

If this is so, should we not speak of God's vocation as a call addressed to the whole Church rather than in individual terms? It is certain that some people receive from God a special appeal to obey Him and to show forth His glory as ministers, as missionaries, as doctors, and in many other fields. But there has been an unfortunate tendency common in the Church during the last two centuries to express everything in terms of the

individual or of the person. A great deal of romanticism still characterises our Christian thinking about vocation, sometimes going to the extreme of conceiving it as some kind of mysterious and supernatural phenomenon happening in the darkness of the night, as it did in the case of Samuel. Such things do happen, and it would be a denial of God's freedom and disrespect for people who receive such calls to question them. But there is a danger that we tend to limit our conception of vocation to such exceptional cases, and to feel that, if we have not been granted the special privilege of such a call, we are left with an undetermined future which we can shape according to our personal wishes or to social circumstances. In other cases we tend to describe professional life as vocation, thus substituting a semi-secularised notion for a purely religious one in an effort not to be completely deprived of this fundamental relationship with God. In brief, we look at vocation either as a mystical event or a purely ethical concept, whereas it is obvious that while it may take the form of a mystical call and does have an immediate bearing on the ethics of human life, the very substance of it lies at a different level, at the level of the Church.

Within the communion of saints

If the Church is the body of those who have been called, and if to be called by God means to become a member of the Church, there is no vocation except within and towards the Church. This is not a mere pious platitude, but should have serious consequences for our personal life. It means that in recognising and answering God's call we are together, members of one fellowship. If God's call makes us His children, the members of Christ, we are by that same call made members of one another. Christian vocation always creates community, and we cannot look at our vocation independently of other members of the Church. Spiritual individualism is by definition un-Christian. When for

instance we try to answer God's call through our choice of a profession, we must do it within the fellowship of this Church. Moreover, it is not ourselves as individuals, but the Church as a community which must answer the call. A student, when making important professional, personal or political decisions, should share them with the members of his Church or his Student Christian Association in conversation, study and prayer. It may be that in certain cases he will have to sacrifice his personal inclinations, even his personal spiritual convictions, in order to remain truly within the fellowship of the Body of Christ. However, there is no simple rule which can be applied in every case. It would be as dangerous to assume that the Church's insight is always expressed by the congregation or denomination of which we are members as to claim that ultimate judgment of what is right and wrong is our own personal responsibility. The Church and ourselves as individuals are both called to come under the judgment of the Word of God and to receive from it strength and life. This does not apply exclusively to the important decision of the choice of our life work. It is a general precept of Christian life which should be followed whenever we have a choice between various possibilities. The responsibility for our life, the burden of it as well as the joy of it, is not our personal burden or our personal joy, but the burden and the joy of the Church. All this is hard to accept. We have been so deeply rooted in the individualistic tradition of our civilisation that we cannot accept the fact that we do not bear the primary responsibility for our lives. We rebel against such a view exactly as we rebel against God's free redemptive act and try to share in our salvation, either by good deeds or right faith, as we revolt against the good news of Jesus Christ, that He has taken our lives in His hands. We refuse to surrender these same lives to other men, even to the members of the same Church. At this point there is a question of faith, of self-sacrifice to God, as well as of daily discipline.

At this point we should guard against the opposite temptation, to abandon too easily to others what after all remains our task. While it is true that we cannot make the decision by ourselves, it is equally true that we cannot let others make it for us. What we should actually do is to *make* the decision in communion with others. This raises a whole series of questions on what should be the nature of the Church community and the S.C.M. While we often speak of pastoral care, in this connection we are frequently inclined to consider that it is the privilege and exclusive task of the specialists — the ministers. However if we believe that the call of God is addressed to the Church as a whole, if we see ourselves as a “holy priesthood”, we must recognise that pastoral responsibility falls on each one of us, that we are indeed called to be pastors to one another. In relation to vocational choice this implies that each one of us should try to make this decision, not instead of his neighbour, but together with him, as if it were his own, that through the mystery of prayer, the communion of saints in which we believe becomes the essential relationship between us all.

Witnessing in all walks of life

If our vocation is to be shaped within the fellowship of the Church, it must be concerned for the task of the Church. “To everything there is a season,” or in the words of Paul, “Everything is permissible but everything does not build up others” (I Cor. 10 : 23). Our primary consideration must always be the building up of the Church. We must see our vocation in the perspective of God’s plan for His Church, which is that “all mankind may be saved and come to a full knowledge of the truth” (I Tim. 2 : 4). If our vocation is identical with our churchmanship, it is also identical with the preaching of the Gospel, with the evangelisation of the world. The vocation addressed to Jesus’ disciples and His last instructions to them are a criterion of any Christian

vocation. This does not imply a narrow conception of vocation according to which every Christian should be a professional preacher, but rather that there is no Christian vocation which does not include witnessing to Jesus Christ. There are many different ways to render this witness to our Lord. While the Church needs some people professionally trained for Christian teaching who will spend most of their time announcing the Gospel, it is equally true that both from a sociological and a theological point of view this clerical perspective is unsatisfactory. It is possible to manifest the glory of God and the love of Christ through acts as well as by words, and Jesus Christ, who is Lord not only of the Church but of all creation, can be witnessed to in all walks of life.

One of the most significant rediscoveries of the last decades has been that political activities offer a special opportunity to render witness. The function of the state in relation to the manifestation of Christ's kingship over all mankind is to maintain conditions in which Christian life is possible, and therefore the Christian in politics has a particular responsibility to live according to God's vocation. This new realisation of the relationship between politics and Christian vocation indicates that there must be similar ties to be rediscovered between the various other realms of life and God's plan for the world and for us. Instead of trying to define some moral criteria by which our job can be brought into harmony with the will of God, we should rather try to think through from the point of view of our vocation the relationship between our various activities and the Lordship of Christ over the world.

On the other hand, it has become increasingly obvious, particularly in those European countries which are most directly effected by the contemporary crisis and more completely secularised than others, that the traditional form of the Church's witness through professional clergy is losing its relevance to modern society. A great number of young ministers would assert today that laymen's

witness is infinitely more effective than the preaching and teaching of the clergy. The very fact that they are professionally responsible for such witnessing and are being paid for it seems in some way to sterilise the work of the clergy, whereas the witness of those who share more directly in the life experiences of men commands greater attention and respect. As a result there is a tendency towards a professionalisation of Church work and a greater integration of laity into the essential task of the Church. In other words, when considering our vocation we should think primarily of the ways in which we can share in the Church's witness, in this marvellous task which we have been given to "go and make disciples of all the nations".

Unto the uttermost part of the earth

The ecumenical character of the Church, its oneness and universality, is also important in this connection. Looking first at the Church as the same community over all the earth, without national, racial or social distinctions, we are confronted with the relationship of our vocation to the missionary task of the Church. Perhaps the most distressing phenomenon in the life of the Church today, and especially in the life of the Federation, is that in contrast to the great enthusiasm of the last centuries for the missionary task over all the earth, a more static attitude now prevails, visible tokens of which are the financial difficulties of missionary societies and the lack of adequate missionary personnel. It is particularly sad for us to recognise that S.C.M.s who once were the spearhead of the missionary enterprise now produce so few workers willing to go to overseas mission fields. It is surprising that at a time when the ecumenical nature of the Church is so strongly emphasised, Christians tend to be unconsciously blinded by social and national barriers. While political, economic and cultural conditions contribute to this situation, it is obvious that, for example in Europe, where de-Christianisation

has gone so far and there is such a pressing need for evangelists at home, the task to be carried on abroad loses some of its immediate appeal. When fifty years ago a young Christian became convinced that he must answer God's call by witness to Christ, he went to new fields where the Gospel had never been heard. In 1950 he has to look no further than the next street corner to find people who are ignorant of this Gospel. To be a missionary today may well consist in remaining where we are. But if the Church is one over all the earth, and if our vocation is the responsibility of the Church before it is our own, and if on the other hand our miserable Church is so short of workers to carry on this witnessing task, we must be guided in the choice of our field of action not by our own experience but by the over-all strategy of the Church. This use of the word strategy with regard to our vocation simply implies that we should use the gifts of common sense and intelligence which God has given us to carry on the work of the Church. The missionary responsibility should be considered not as an exceptional form of obedience to a very particular individual call from God Himself, but as the most normal aspect of Christian vocation. At a time when the world is becoming increasingly interdependent, this attitude is even more compelling. It may be that the wise strategy for the Church today would be to transfer most of its forces to new areas in the world, for example to the countries of the younger churches. Anyone who takes seriously the fact that he is called by God to be a member of His Church should be ready to undertake direct missionary work. This does not necessarily mean becoming a professional missionary; in most cases it may mean going abroad in a secular capacity and giving to this work all the attention it deserves, but remembering always that to witness to Christ in this new situation remains the primary concern. Whether one meets isolation, frustration and hardship, or discovers a real home in the community of the younger church, one remains within the wider fellowship of the universal Church.

Finally, Christian vocation is closely related to the ecumenical character of the Church from the point of view of its oneness and of the scandal of the division within it. If the Church is really the creation of God's call and the fellowship of those who have heard this call, to remain apart from one another is to imply that there are different calls, and therefore different gods, or from another viewpoint, to deny that members of other Christian denominations are a part of the Church. One of the implications of the concept of vocation is that we are committed to the ecumenical movement. This effort towards unity does not mean a struggle for uniformity. While there is only one call, there are different ways in which to answer it, and within the same one Church there may be varying forms of churchmanship, in the same way as within one local congregation people may answer God's vocation in various manners, recognising that their different obediences depend on the same call. The Church in its national and international forms must establish such a fellowship, and recognise together that it is constituted in all its parts by the same Lord, Who is addressing to it an eternal vocation.

The Lay Specialist, or The Rediscovery of the Church

HANS HERMANN WALZ

Laymanship as destiny

When we were boys we all aspired to be specialists. Now that we are men, we find that as a result of this intense specialisation in one field we are laymen in all others. We have all contributed our share to the structure of modern life, but none of us is quite at home in this complicated sky-scraper. If the lift goes out of order, we starve on the sixty-third floor, while on the seventeenth the food is going bad because no one can buy it.

We must not condemn the sky-scraper. Before the first World War our fathers dreamed of destroying it and going back to nature. So they tried to pull down the sky-scraper — with partial success. But in the last two decades we have learned that modern man is more at home in a sky-scraper than in a hole in the ground. We have not been brought up in the romantic or anarchistic schools of Rousseau or Bakunin. We prefer a comfortable arm-chair to a tree trunk or the bricks of a ruined house. Of course, ruins have one advantage: they are indestructible — they can be multiplied indefinitely. Houses — even sky-scrapers built of steel and concrete — are vulnerable. Nevertheless, we don't want to live in caves! We can achieve absolute security against destruction only by descending to the level of the amoebae.

Christians are sometimes remarkable for their gift of blindness. They do not see what is going on. Or if they do see, they try to build imaginary wonderlands

of their own. They dream of turning back the wheel of history to the time when there were no machines, to the time of the Reformation, to the "age of mediaeval Christendom", or to the time of the early Church — depending on their personal preferences or theological outlooks. But the big wheel refuses to turn backwards. Those who fling themselves against its spokes only succeed in slowing it down for a moment, until it has gathered sufficient momentum to toss them aside, or crush them to pieces.

We cannot get rid of specialisation now. Moreover, we must specialise still further, unless we prefer to return to the ruins or the cave-dwellings. We shall have to become increasingly specialised, and as a result increasingly amateurish in spheres other than our own. Away from our special machine we shall be quite helpless — completely out of our depth when we get outside our own tiny field of knowledge. The only thing we shall understand will be our own machine, and no one else will understand that as well as we do.

That is the problem. When the world consists entirely of experts, people can no longer understand one another. If we cease to specialise — assuming that to be possible — we must sacrifice our humanity and return to a romantic or nihilistic form of barbarism. It is a vicious circle. We know that we cannot escape it. Here if anywhere lies *la grandeur et la misère* of contemporary man. If we refuse to accept the misery, we shall lose the greatness — even the meaning of life.

The discovery of man

There is much talk today about the rediscovery of the Church. One aspect of this is extremely significant for the most progressive thinkers of our time — even if they have no other interest in the Church: that is the discovery of man which is inherent in the rediscovery of the Church. When we speak of the layman we mean the ordinary man — not *homo sapiens*, not man *an sich*, nor

the marvellously sentimental idea of the "eternal human". We mean man as he really is today. So there may be no confusion with either the classical man of the Greek statues, or with the full-blooded types described in the books of D. H. Lawrence, we shall speak of "lay specialists" when referring to modern man. The lay specialist is the key to the nature of contemporary man, just as in previous ages the key figure was the hermit, the knight, the wealthy, cultured bourgeois, and twenty years ago perhaps, the proletarian.

The lay specialist of today is neither a hero nor a saint. But neither is he a devil, although the devil can and sometimes does succeed in leading him astray. He is a man who is good-hearted, though weak. If he is an extrovert, he is amiable and familiar with everyone. If he is an introvert, he is irresolute and self-indulgent, or worse. He never has a spare moment; he has never learned the art of having time: this is a matter of training and was not included in his curriculum. If after work he has any spare time apart from meals, sleep and the barber, he feels a sort of vacuum and has a bad conscience, which he tries to drug at the cinema. He is afraid of the future — that is why he cannot enjoy the present. He longs for rest — that is why he rushes frantically from one activity to another. Although he meets hundreds of people every day, he is terribly lonely. If he is unmarried, he longs for a mate. If he is married, he plays with the idea of divorce. If he is divorced, he regrets it. Like everyone else, he is an expert at his own job, and no one else can do it properly.

All things considered, there is nothing extraordinary about modern man. There have been people like him in all ages, and probably they have always been in the majority. The difference is that today this ordinary man-in-the-street has become the symbol and norm of the age — and fully realises it! Ortega y Gasset drew attention to this twenty years ago. But today we do not agree with him when he deplors this situation. The lay specialist as a symbol of the age provides at least some

frame of reference for a whole generation which has lost all other standards but not all hope for the future. We must not underestimate the significance of this one remaining orientation point. A centime backed by secure currency is worth more than a ten-pound note that is not guaranteed and may be worth only the paper on which it is printed.

At any rate, these are the people with whom the Church must deal, in so far as it gets in touch with them at all. Those who undertake pastoral care fully realise this, and the religious worker himself, whatever else he may be, does well to realise that he is also that kind of person. This has been asserted most emphatically of all within the Roman Catholic Church. I need only mention George Bernanos and Graham Greene. But I could easily name a dozen other novelists and philosophers and, one should add, teachers of theology. They have gone very deeply into the matter. This Catholic view holds that modern man, even when he is a baptised Christian, often drifts aimlessly along a dead level of mediocrity. Nevertheless he is accompanied by the grace bestowed on him at baptism. But the Church knows that even ordinary men are thus sustained and, moreover, that she has at her disposal this means of support. In this way the Church stands above all the struggles and frustrations of men.

The laymanship of the Church

Protestant ideology has lost sight of this separation because of its emphasis on the Church's solidarity with man. Here the discovery of laymanship is identical with the rediscovery of the Church itself.

I am not speaking here of a new awareness in the Church of its so-called lay element. That did not need rediscovering, for the traditional view was precisely that the Church consisted of two elements — the clergy and the laity. The question of how to adjust the balance between these two groups may have a variety of answers.

Many of the clergy, and some church boards (partly on their own initiative, partly through force of circumstance) have discovered that the laity can be entrusted with tasks which the pastor can no longer perform single-handed. The pastors who have realised this and who have found a few capable helpers are to be congratulated — and so are the men and women who are ready to undertake such service. In addition some “lay” people also think they have made a discovery. They maintain that their church is run by the pastor and that they are not allowed sufficient voice in what goes on, although they maintain the church financially. While these developments are valuable, they may also be dangerous. The Church is in danger not only of becoming clericalised, but also of becoming laicised. The one tendency is as bad as the other, because both are derived from a false distinction which they seek to perpetuate.

But these are not the most crucial developments. The crucial point is rather the rediscovery of the essential “laymanship” of the Church itself, inasmuch as it is regarded as the congregation of believers. Either there are no lay people at all in the Church, because God has written His law in the heart of every member (Jeremiah 31 : 34), or the Church consists entirely of lay people, because “there is none that understands, no, not one” (Romans 3 : 11).

The Church is a gathering of people who apparently have nothing in common ; they have little or no point of contact with one another. There is the business man from the old firm, whose family has been so correct for generations that everything he says or does bears the hall-mark of respectability. What has he in common with the youth in the smart crêpe-soled shoes and loud necktie, whose dandyish appearance marks him immediately as a parvenu ? In the Church we find the conservative farmer and the revolutionary workman, the illiterate man and the scholar. The pacifist and the army general sit side by side at the same service. One member of this strange gathering lives in Texas and another in

Travancore. One is a communist, another has been a nazi, and a third has never strayed from the straight and narrow path of democracy. What have all these people in common? Their human appearance? *That* has not proved a very effective tie between men during the last few decades.

We have all learned in some catechism or other that it is God, the Holy Spirit, which gathers the Church. But have we realised what that means? The Holy Spirit is the sole *raison d'être* for this gathering. There exists no intellectual, moral or political criterion which would select these particular people to form a community. The society which meets under the name of "the Church" is composed of the most absurd and incompatible elements. This gathering of believers cannot possibly have been formed on its own initiative.

Neither can it direct its own course. For none of its members has learned what is necessary for leading a community of this kind. They can only wait and see whether they will be guided, in the same way as they were originally called together, and whether something will be said to them which they can all understand, even though they can hardly understand one another. That is the "laymanship" of the Church — completely dependent upon the Word of God, without any meaning unless that Word is given.

But is this not a gross exaggeration? Is not the Church something far more glorious than this poor collection of lay people, none of whom knows how to proceed? Is not the Church the Body of Christ? It certainly is. But it is the Body of Christ on earth — the Body of which it is said: "His form was marred more than that of other men" (Isaiah 52: 14). It is the Body which broke under the weight of the Cross. It is the Body which "can only bring forth fruit if it fall into the ground and die, like a grain of wheat" (John 12: 24). If this shapeless mass can give rise to a form that is eternal, if death can give birth to life, this is not due to vitality within the body itself. It cannot be attributed

to the efforts of the laity assembled there. It is the action of Him "Who can make the dead live, and speaks His Word to those who are yet unborn" (Romans 4 : 17) ¹.

God's promise to the laity

It is one of the most astonishing things in the Bible that it does not tell us first of all what we ought to *do*, but rather shows us where we are and who we are. It is through this laymanship that God's promise to the Church will be fulfilled.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5 : 3). This promise is made to the Church as an assembly of lay people. The real Church consists of people who have lost their way, people who — through force of circumstance — can hardly be counted among the "pious". The Church is made up of the "sick" people of whom Jesus speaks — the lost and scattered sheep without a shepherd — those people to whom I alluded in earlier sections of this article. It is to them, and to people like them, that God has given His promise.

But what are we to do, all we laymen in the Church? Are we to throw up our secular occupations and go out as missionaries and evangelists? For some, this will be the right course to take. Are we to return to school and study theology, if we have not already done so? Others will be led to do this. Or shall we try to blow up the walls of the prison in which we work, to discover the link between its many specialised departments and their real significance, and thus help to think out and teach a Christian view of life? A few people will feel this to be their task. But what about all the others?

The primary thing is not our own task. It is God's invitation to come — with all those who are weary and heavy laden — to taste and see that the yoke laid upon our shoulders is easy and the burden is light. Only if

¹ Translation by J. B. Phillips in *Letters to Young Churches*, Geoffrey Bles, London, 1947.

we discover the truth in this promise and see that it really applies to us in our personal situation, can we understand the other things which must be said.

The many lay specialists living as Christians in various parts of the world today will certainly not build the Kingdom of God on earth. That branch of architecture was not included in their curriculum. They will not be able to answer many of the questions outside their own field, whether those questions arise in their own minds or are put by other people. The pastor is bound to be scandalised sometimes by their ignorance of the most rudimentary theological matters. The evangelist who knocks at their door and asks whether they have been converted may receive no reply. But they will be certain of one thing — so irrevocably certain that some have already died for that belief, and others will follow them: that they have a Master to Whom they belong with all they are, all they have and all they can do. They have very little and they cannot do much. But there is one thing that they *can* do: they are experts at their own job. And since this job claims their whole day from eight in the morning till six in the evening, surely it is this most of all that they will want to place at their Master's service. How can they do this? This opens up a new question, in America and Germany, in South India and Greece, in Czechoslovakia and Holland.

Can these one-sided specialists really serve God? They certainly can. They cannot build the Kingdom of Heaven, but they can help to make this world a little more livable. Their training has taught them how, and for that purpose God will use them. For He wants this world. He loves it. The engineers and workers can rest assured that their work has its place in God's plan, and that it is never done in vain if it is done for Him — and not for the little men who often make our lives miserable and prevent us from being a "success".

In serving God they can remain indifferent to the praise or blame of men; but they can never be indifferent

to the men themselves. God wills that men should serve Him by serving the humblest of their brethren. God Himself needs nothing. But He wants to pass on even to the lowliest of men what their brothers wish to give to Him. They have many needs : clothes and shoes and a roof over their heads ; food and drink ; happiness and recreation ; security and order ; peace and justice. There is plenty of work for the experts in every field ! But what people need most of all, and in all, is love. That is not manufactured by specialists. But each particular job may be a product of love, whether it be a well-swept street or a well-governed state.

There is therefore some purpose in having special groups within the congregation of believers, united only by the fact that they are listening together. Here the specialists meet to listen again and again to the Word that speaks to all men. Here they ask each other how in their particular work they can serve their brethren by helping to make the world more habitable and more human. It is a truly ecumenical task to bring together specialists and groups of specialists of this kind. They will see then that in their hard struggle to serve God in the world they have the support of the whole Church — that they are in fact the direct representatives of the Church when they are guided by Christian principles in making technical decisions. Because of the highly specialised nature of the contemporary world, Christian social ethics, which are so much discussed in the Church today, will not be worked out by great scholars. They will be discovered by those specialised laymen who are groping their way forward, scarcely able to see more than one step at a time, but who are prepared, whatever happens, to take their next step in obedience to the will of God.

Vocation and Profession

JOHN KAREFA-SMART

Vocation is fundamentally the vertical aspect of man's life. It is the response which he gives to the call of God. There can be only one Christian vocation, namely, holy obedience. In the words of Paul, the Christian is by vocation "a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ", and an apostle, the bearer of His Master's message. This obedience is the only response compatible with the unalterable fact that Jesus is Lord, and when the Christian makes this response, "My Lord and my God", he has found his true vocation. In this he is at one with all other Christians, for we are all of one calling.

Profession, on the other hand, is the horizontal aspect of man's life, and represents the individual's response to the need which society has for his talent and training. Christians, therefore, may differ in their choice of a profession. To the Christian his profession is fundamentally the channel through which he obeys the command to "Follow thou Me" and "Feed My sheep". Through his profession he serves his Master by serving his fellow men.

Because it usually involves the discipline of long training in some branch of the arts, humanities or sciences, the Christian student must attach great importance to his choice of a profession. Here in West Africa, for example, it is common for parents or guardians to choose their children's professions, and very often the choice depends on calculations of speedy financial return of the money spent on the period of training. The result is that there are far too many lawyers, and the number of doctors, although still not sufficient to meet the need, is much out of proportion to the number of agriculturalists and social workers.

The choice of a profession

The Christian student in West Africa is therefore challenged to bring the idea of stewardship of talent into the choice of a profession. His choice must be conducive to the fullest development of whatever natural abilities and aptitudes he may possess, while at the same time it must be made in obedience to the will of God for *his* life, with particular reference to the need around him and not to the possibility of financial success. The idea of stewardship implies that the God-given gifts of character, natural ability, and technical aptitude and skill are neither to be wasted in the profligate living of an irresponsible and prodigal son (Luke 15 : 13-32), nor wrapped in a napkin and buried in the unimaginative spirit of the unwise steward (Matthew 25 : 14-30).

Previous discussions in *The Student World* have already emphasised sufficiently that the years at the university must be spent not only in developing and training the student's natural gifts of mind and body and in acquiring the knowledge necessary for the best use of these gifts, but also in acquiring "a sense of context". The student must try to see not only how the choice he makes fits him for service to society, but also how this service builds upon the foundations of the past and prepares the way for those who will follow him in the future.

To illustrate again from West Africa, the Christian student who is training to be an engineer must see that the roads and towns which he will build will not only help to bring the advantages of modern communications and better housing to his people, but also will be the means whereby they, through partaking of a fuller life, will at the same time be more able to make their contribution as a self-governing people to the life of the rest of the world.

Another implication of this sense of context is that, in particular cultural environments, the Christian student will have to give up certain professions, no matter how

interesting they may be to him as an individual. The Christian student in West Africa, for instance, can hardly be said to have chosen wisely if he decides on astronomy as a profession and pursues this study to the point where he needs to reside in a western country where he can have access to special telescopes in the great observatories. With only a slight modification of his natural bent towards the study of celestial bodies he could become a meteorologist in his own country, one of the team of specialists necessary for the maximum development of agriculture and communications.

Another temptation must be overcome — that of choosing easy paths to academic distinction through what American students call “snap courses”, in which, with a minimum of mental exertion, success is guaranteed. Or there may be the temptation to choose courses which are popular for one reason or another, most often because of the personal charm of the instructor. These criteria do not meet the standards of a stewardship either of the opportunity to attend the university or of the developing of natural aptitudes, and must therefore be rejected.

In the choice of professional training a very important question arises. If we are right in our interpretation of Christian vocation, are there any professions which are, by their very nature, incompatible with Christian obedience? It might be relatively easy to rule out at once some professions, the pursuit of which inevitably ends in the destruction of other human lives or in the blighting of character, but it could also be argued that often it is not the profession itself that is incompatible with Christian obedience, but the motivation of those who practice it.

It might be helpful to illustrate from personal experience. The medical profession is one that is universally regarded as laudable, and it is easy to become eloquent about how closely the medical practitioner walks in the steps of the Master Who went about healing the sick. But I can remember conversations with fellow medical

students which revealed that one does not always choose to be a doctor for reasons other than making a fortune as quickly as possible in a most respectable manner. And when one is in actual practice, one discovers that there are things a doctor could do with the perfect approval of the profession as a whole that he could not do with a free Christian conscience. And there are other matters, fee schedules for example, in which action dictated by a sense of Christian obedience might run him afoul of the existing codes of practice in his particular locality.

Obedience and stewardship

At the completion of the years of university training, are there any principles which can serve as a guide to continued obedience and stewardship? I suggest the following:

1. Christian professional action springs from a daily renewing of the act of consecration. Personal prayer, Bible study and family devotions, as well as the corporate worship of the Christian community of which one is a part, are all means whereby this renewal takes place. Christian action is the spontaneous harvest of the discipline of the devotional period.

2. No Christian service has been performed if no human need has been met. The Christian in professional work must always remember that the final criterion of his obedience is not the attainment or lack of attainment of high professional standards, or the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, or the profundity of scientific research, but whether or not some one of the least of God's children was hungry and received food, or was sick and was visited, or was imprisoned by the cares and concerns of this material life and was released (Matthew 25 : 31-46).

3. The Christian community has an important claim on the services of the Christian in professional life. The call to the life of obedience does not come to the

Christian by himself, with no reference to the community of other Christians. The Church, which we regard as synonymous with the Christian community, exists as part of God's answer to our prayers that "Thy will be done in earth, as in heaven", and in its corporate life it must use all the talents and abilities of its various members, each ministering according to his own gifts (Romans 12 : 6-8). It is because the Christian community has largely been deprived of this differentiated ministry and has erected the artificial and non-Christian difference between the clerical and the lay professions, that its message has been sterile in some areas of western industrial and professional life. The Christian farmer, chief, physician, school teacher and housewife must once again feel equal responsibility with the Christian preacher in preparing for the Kingdom of God on earth.

I should like to pursue this point further with particular reference to Christian missions. There are increasing fears in some quarters that "professional" missionaries will no longer be welcome in many parts of the world which are now or soon will be throwing off the yoke of foreign imperialism. But wherever there is already the nucleus of an indigenous Christian community, the services of any Christian from another country will always be welcome, if they are related to the life and witness of the Christian community. In this connection Canon Warren in his *Church Missionary Society Newsletter* for January, 1950, describes as a possible "third order" :

... the idea of Christian men and women going out to secular employment in such countries, but going out determined to identify themselves with the Christian Church of these lands, banded together by some association which would help to strengthen them in their individual and corporate Christian witness, even accepting the obligation of receiving before sailing, or at least on their first leave, some serious Christian training for their witness while abroad. This, of course, is in one sense only a development of what countless

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