

THE GOSPEL

a network for encouraging the encounter in North America & OUR CULTURE

Grant Enables New GOCN Initiatives

A grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts has provided for several important new initiatives in the Gospel and Our Culture Network. The grant was made to Western Theological Seminary on behalf of the GOCN. It enables the seminary to expand the ways in which it serves as host institution for the network and allows the network to further develop its key role in the life of the North American churches.

The grant of \$200,000 over the next three years is especially designed to support several strategic interventions that would otherwise not be possible. One of those is a public symposium for 300-400 Christian leaders and scholars, in February 1996, selected papers from which will be published as an edited book. Another is a major collaborative research project and book on ecclesiology, focusing on the churches' responses to the challenge of living in contemporary American culture. Out of both ventures it is anticipated that there will be a number of published articles in scholarly journals and popular periodicals which will communicate the projects' findings to a larger religious audience.

Also part of the grant design is support for the continuing development of other aspects of the GOCN movement. It will help enhance the quality and expand the circulation of the quarterly GOCN newsletter, enable a postgraduate intern to produce an annotated bibliography on witness to the Gospel in North American contexts, and develop a curricular module for addressing

"Gospel and Our Culture" issues in continuing education programs and pastoral training events. In the process, the overall project will further stimulate the development of the GOCN's three working groups (on culture, theology and church) and enable them to enhance the resources they produce for Christian leaders. It will also foster the development of regional and local groups of pastors and others who deal with the issues daily in contexts of mission.

To provide the necessary support structures for guiding these projects and nurturing the development of the network, the grant provides for substantial release time from other seminary duties for Western's Professor of Missiology, George Hunsberger. Hunsberger has been the Coordinator of the network and Editor of its newsletter from 1987. That was when the GOCN began as the North American expression of "the Gospel and Our Culture movement" which is present in various forms in several Western societies. With support from the grant, the Coordinator will have the assistance of a 3/4 time Administrative Secretary, Ms. Judy Bos.

The Pew Charitable Trusts, a national and international philanthropy with a special commitment to Philadelphia, support nonprofit activities in the areas of culture, education, environment, health and human services, public policy and religion. Through their grantmaking, the Trusts seek to encourage individual development and personal achievement, cross-disciplinary problem solving and innovative, practical approaches to meet the changing needs of society. □

Transformation: Changing the Essence of the Church

Inagrace T. Dietterich
Center for Parish Development
Chicago, Illinois

In the midst of a rapidly and radically changing cultural context, churches are being challenged to transform their identity and their mission-to change their very essence. The familiar understandings and the comfortable postures of the past are experiencing profound challenge. mental

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The old paradigms and models are insufficient. New ways to put the questions, new frameworks for dealing with them, and new proposals for shaping the church's ministry and mission are urgently needed.

Unprecedented Demands

The pace and complexity of new technology, new cultural forms, new ways of living, are of an order of magnitude never before experienced. The political, economic, social, religious landscape is being redefined. Worldwide changes in social values, the loss of traditional family structures, increased religious pluralism, and outbreaks of ethnic hatred, all define the environment in which the churches function. Add to this the unrelenting pattern of diminishing numbers of members and dollars, plus the churches' loss of status and influence, and the challenge becomes even more urgent.

How Will Church Leaders Respond?

Church leaders, clergy and lay alike, must respond. They have the task and responsibility of shaping both the functioning and the future of their church bodies: local, regional, national. How will they give leadership in this extraordinary moment in history?

The most insightful church leaders will recognize the need to examine the very essence of the church: its calling, mission, goals, roles and relationships of members, engagement with the increasingly secularized world. They will lead the church through this fundamental theological and ecclesiological task.

They will heed theologians like Douglas John Hall in Canada, Gerhard Lohfink and Jurgen Moltmann in Germany, Lesslie Newbigin in England, Gustavo Gutierrez in Latin America, Rebecca Chopp, Stanley Hauerwas, John Howard Yoder in the United States. Utilizing biblical scholarship, cultural analysis, sociological history, political philosophy, scientific inquiry, and ethical reflection, these theologians are challenging the entire orientation of contemporary churches. They are calling churches to move from the prevailing "establishment church" paradigm to a new but very old "ecclesial" paradigm.

The "Establishment Church" Paradigm

The "establishment church" paradigm came into being with the settlement of North America and dominated church thought and practice into the 1960's. During this period, mainstream churches were a dominant force in society, both formally and informally. They functioned as an integral part of the dominant political-military-economic-industrial-social establishment. They defined their own "success" using society's values of "bigger," "better," "more". The "establishment church" paradigm is still held by most church leaders and members (and most church consultants). It makes at least these basic assumptions which, while familiar and comfortable, need to be challenged and transformed:

1. The church is *personal sanctuary*, a haven from the world, dedicated to the pursuit of a deeply inward and private religious experience for its members. The church functions as a place for individual religious experience and growth.
2. The church functions as society's "chaplain," fulfilling the religious needs of society. It therefore *legitimizes*: blessing the existing cultural virtues, values, and structures; serves as *conscience*: articulating and teaching moral standards; and provides *social services*. As the church engages the larger culture, it preaches and teaches a kind of "ethics" which will work for non-Christians as well as Christians.
3. The resources and practices of the church—Scripture, tradition, doctrine, worship, sacraments, preaching, program ministries, ecclesiastical structure, and communal life—are useful to the extent that they serve as *functional guides* for individual expression and development.
4. Clergy are *professionals* trained to facilitate the development and affirmation of individual well-being, belief, piety, morality. Lay people are consumers of clerical services and functions, who sometimes help the clergy as volunteers (usually untrained) in ministry.
5. The church is the *agent of mission* which provides the resources and training to enable people to reach out to the unchurched. Informed by the church, lay people are to manifest the appropriate values and norms through their various interactions in the "real" world and thus encourage others to join the church.

6. The church can control its own destiny. It operates in a relatively stable and predictable environment. It can therefore take its time making minor changes in the way it operates and these changes can be introduced *incrementally*.

All six of these basic assumptions need to be challenged. They reflect the North American privatization of Christianity. They trivialize the Gospel, reflect an inadequate ecclesiology, make the church a tool of the establishment, distort biblical understandings of the church's mission, and fail to recognize the unprecedented challenge confronting the church today.

The "Ecclesial" Paradigm

In sharp contrast to this perspective is a new and very old *ecclesial paradigm*. This set of presuppositions grounded in scripture and utilizing overloaded aspects of the tradition, presents a totally different understanding of the church and its calling. It requires re-thinking and re-conceiving every aspect of church life and work. It takes into account the reality that God is calling the church to ministry in a world that is very different from the world of even ten years ago and vastly different from the world of the 1960s.

1. The church is *ecclesia*—a public assembly—to which God is calling all peoples to be transformed into the people of God. As *sign*, *foretaste*, and *instrument* of the inaugurated reign of God, the church is to proclaim and embody the ultimate destiny of all humanity in God's perfect society of love, peace, and justice.
2. The church is not simply to fulfill the self-defined needs of individuals or of society, but as God's demonstration people to offer a new paradigm: *a contrast society*. Transformed by God's love and forgiveness, Christians are to manifest a different way to be a community—to be a particular and peculiar people who uphold one another in love as together they struggle to be faithful to His promises, to love their enemies, to tell the truth, to honor the poor, to suffer for righteousness.
3. The resources and practices of the church *cultivate a new people*, the communion of the Holy Spirit. Grounded in baptism and faith in Jesus Christ, this new

community is formed by God's active presence. Those who "live in the Spirit" are to "walk by the Spirit" and thus exhibit the relational truths of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22).

4. *Laos*, (laity and clergy together) are called to be a community of stewards who through faith in Jesus Christ participate in the new life of the Spirit. Corporately they discern, nurture, and manifest their diverse gifts in a common life and shared ministry.

5. The *locus of mission* is the faith community itself. As a contrast society, the church offers to the world an alternative way of being human in a reconciling community of commitment, service, meaning, and purpose. The mission of the church is graciously and hospitably to invite the world to faith in Jesus Christ as *proclaimed and embodied in Christian community*.

6. The church cannot control its own destiny in today's world. Called and empowered by the living God for mission in a *turbulent and unpredictable environment*, it does not have the luxury of time to make the required changes incrementally. *Systemic changes* are essential if the church is to be faithful and effective now and in the future. These changes must be designed and introduced strategically.

The current crisis facing North American churches is also an *opportunity* rich with potential. Embracing change as an opportunity for greater faithfulness, church leaders can view the current crisis as an opportunity to re-vision, to transform the church, to participate in God's ongoing creative and redemptive mission for all humanity.

How to Treat the Change

In considering the forces for change, the decisions to be made, and their consequences, church leaders need to choose between treating the change in an incremental-operational way or in a fundamental, systems-based and strategic way.

If an incremental change strategy is chosen, church leaders will be assuming that the fundamental presuppositions on which the church currently operates are true, faithful, and desirable-and will merely try to find better ways to do what the church has

been doing for past generations. If a fundamental change strategy is chosen, the key leaders will be assuming that the old presuppositions on which the church body has operated are no longer appropriate and that a new paradigm is needed. To make only incremental improvements in church bodies that are founded on an out-moded and unfaithful understanding of the church's calling and mission is to waste money, time, energy-and ultimately to fail. Change on a much more profound scale is required.

A Theological Challenge

Church transformation is fundamentally a theological challenge-to discern afresh what God is calling the church to be and do and then to bring about major and profound changes in ways of perceiving, thinking, and behaving as the people of God. This requires changing the very character and agenda of the church, converting it from one mode of being to a new mode of being, from one self-understanding to another self-understanding. It means making a paradigm shift, one that transforms the very essence of the church.

For such profound change to occur, an intentional theological process is crucial, "a process of both annulling and pre-serving, of both passing-over and taking-up. In this process what was evil, false, destructive and oppressive in the past needs to be 'refined away,' to be allowed to die or to be put to death, while what was good, true, salvific, and liberating needs to be preserved and raised to new life in new forms." (Peter C. Hodgson, *Re-visioning the Church: Ecclesial Freedom in the New Paradigm*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, p. 17.)

In order to build upon and manifest these theological foundations within the life and practice of the church, other resources are necessary: a solid theory of planned transformation, tested conceptual tools, effective consulting practices, carefully planned strategic management, in-depth education of key leaders and members.

Strategic Leadership is Essential

Such major and profound change in the church requires visionary leaders who are both theological and strategic. In accepting

the theological challenge, they must be willing to innovate, learn, respond quickly, and design the appropriate infrastructure to meet the demands of ministry in the post-modern world. □

Cultural Diversity: Barrier or Resource

*Dan Devadatta
Daybreak Church
Grapevine, Texas*

We, the people of God, have been called by Jesus Christ to be faithful witnesses in the midst of our rapidly changing American culture and world. Yet the Church has, in most cases, been marginalized by the environment in which we have been called to witness. This tension cuts right through the heart of most of us, who struggle to provide leadership that will influence the hearts and minds of people inside and outside the church. I speak as a pastor who is passionately committed to shaping a new church to live as a missionary congregation that addresses the issues that face us, especially as we come to the close of this century.

A Vision of Diversity: The Blueprint for Leadership

We are entering an age in which the norm in our culture will be the emergence of a new global reality: culturally diverse people of both genders working and living together closer than ever before. The challenge for us is to provide insight and resources for people to build towards a common tomorrow based on the richness of our diversities today. A vision of diversity, then, is the blueprint for our leadership.

To say that most of us are undergoing culture shock might be the understatement of the decade. The workplace, the communities we live in and the churches we attend seem to be undergoing pressures we are unable to understand, let alone cope with. The old rules do not work like they used to and so fragmentation becomes the way we cope with this shock. As a pastor, I face this cultural fatigue amongst the people I live and work with.

Is there a vision of tomorrow that will help people begin to prepare themselves today? I believe the is: *we are entering a new world in the 21st century in which we are all immigrants*. In other words, all of us, regardless of our age, race, sex and country of origin, are entering an era in which we are outsiders living in a foreign land. Being immigrants, our old identity, roles and solutions are under assault and incapable of preparing us for this new culture. We might sense it but we have not been properly acculturated to this new environment of diversity. We are ill-equipped to travel in this land and we find the journey burdensome.

The Experience of Diversity: The Cause of Stress

Most of us have begun to experience this cultural shock. What has long been true for cross-cultural missionaries and workers has become our own reality. We are entering a period when we will all live in the presence of cross-cultural realities and the stresses that are caused by the vast range of cultural differences. We do not always understand how this works or how it affects us but we do know we are experiencing its stress, and throughout this experience will continue to grow.

There are three responses to diversity that I have found to be prevalent. One is *resistance*-the blatant internal and external rejection of this new culture and the tendency toward an irrational defense of one's own traditional cultural values. The emergence of the neo-Nazi movement around the world is an illustration of such a response.

Another response is *assimilation*-the wholesale rejection of one's values in order to embrace those of another culture. This is true especially of certain ethnic communities who come to believe that in order to survive one needs to deny one's cultural standards. Women, along with other minorities, experience the burden of assimilation.

There is a third response that is better suited to the emerging culture of diversity. It is *acculturation*-learning to talk the language of another culture, while remaining rooted in the values and language of one's own. This will become the most effective way of coping and dealing with

diversity.

It is a great tragedy that we feel we do not need to change if we choose the path of resistance or assimilation. We mistakenly think that only the third option requires us to change and thus will be harder to pursue, so we choose to resist or assimilate. However all three responses require some change in one's own culture.

Those who resist the new culture inevitably harden their values and beliefs. These people become brittle and lack the flexibility that is required to cope with the changing realities around them. Such people either drop out of the mainstream and become marginalized or in some cases, if they possess power, will use their power to subjugate others to their own norms. That does not last for long, however.

Those who assimilate abandon their own culture and with it they often abandon their own self-worth and esteem. One culture is swallowed up by another and the values, customs, and ideas of one group are exchanged for those in the mainstream. This view is known to us as the melting pot theory. Those from the established culture rarely seek to learn from others who are different and the richness they might bring. Those who are not from the established culture feel that they need to fit in in order to survive. However, assimilation does not work totally and so in time the dominating culture becomes influenced by the very ones it has swallowed up. We are what we eat. So change happens whether one chooses the path of resistance or assimilation.

To acculturate one must live in two worlds, often simultaneously, and attempt to divide life into separate compartments, sometimes living in dissonance. To acculturate means to learn enough not only to survive but to thrive in this new culture. It is a shared journey that people take together, each learning, contributing and influencing each other so that the richness of our diversity will contribute to a brand new common ground for living, working and worshipping together. It recognizes that all of us are newcomers to this emerging reality and that the dominant culture of tomorrow will be the culture of diversity. Those who learn to live by the emerging rules of acculturation will become the most influential teachers for survival and success in the 21st century. Acculturation will be

the way of life.

The Celebration of Otherness as a New Paradigm

Does the Bible have a perspective that will help us not only to understand but also embrace this new culture? I believe that it does. Simply stated, the Bible calls us to Celebrate the Otherness.

I use the concept of marriage found in the Bible to illustrate this theme. When God created Eve and gifted Adam with her, Adam's immediate and healthy response was to break into song. When God brought the woman to the man, the man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man" (Gen. 2:23).

Adam celebrated Eve's presence in his life and saw that life with her would be more complete than life without her. He celebrated the oneness as well as the otherness in her. She was God's gift to him. It is only after the Fall that Adam blames God for her and accuses her for his demise.

The principle of mutuality and the celebration of the otherness becomes a paradigm for dealing with differences. In marriage both individuals, the man and the woman, go through a process when they marry. Though they might be raised in unique and different cultures, come with their unique values, they come together and develop their own new environment. A typical marriage will involve discussions of the home, the kinds of food eaten, how money will be spent, and a host of other issues. In all of this there is a creation of a new environment that draws from each individual. And if the relationship is to be harmonious each individual will learn to draw from the other and celebrate what the other has to offer in the creation of this new environment.

This principle is picked up within the redeemed community of God's people as well. The concept of the body, as described by Paul in the new Testament (I Cor. 12) shows how each part is necessary for the proper functioning of the body. If the body is to be healthy each part contributes to the whole. A new environment is created in the midst of the differences. Differences are celebrated and one part cannot exclude the other and neither does one part need to feel

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PASTOR'S SEMINAR SCHEDULED

A continuing education seminar for pastors will be held May 23 - 27, 1994, to offer an intensive way for pastors to work through the Gospel and Our Culture agenda as it touches the life of congregations. The seminar is designed to fulfill elective requirements in established D.Min. programs or provide personal pastoral growth for those desiring the companionship of colleagues as they seek to pursue faithful and relevant ministry approaches. The seminar will focus on the theme, "Pastoring Congregations Toward Their Missionary Vocation." The faculty consists of Jim Brownson, George Hunsberger, Al Roxburgh and Craig Van Gelder. Collectively, they bring a sense of the work going on in the GOCN work groups and their own biblical and practical reflection based on a wide range of experience in congregational setting.

The seminar will be held on the campus of Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, from Monday afternoon (May 23) through Friday afternoon (May 27). The registration for the event will be \$276.00 and includes lodging in a college dormitory on the adjacent Hope College campus. A \$40.00 per person reduction may be made for double occupancy. The registration for commuters is \$180.00. Continuing Education Unit (CEU) credit is available upon request through the seminary.

To register, use the form on page 8 and send it with registration payment to Judy Bos at the GOCN office. Checks should be made out to Western Theological Seminary/GOCN. Registration must be made by May 13 to ensure participation. □

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that it cannot contribute to the body. There are many parts but one body.

What does this mean within a culture of diversity? Simply put, God's new society will be a society that celebrates the otherness in people. While the broader culture will insist on rights, including victims' rights, we as the people of God will be a society that celebrates the otherness in people.

In other words, the church will be a place which sees diversity as a strength, not a barrier, and it will give itself to the difficult task of creating a new environment in which this is celebrated. □

[Resources: Simons, Vazquez, Harris, *Transcultural Leadership*, Gulf Publishing Company, 1993.

Harris & Moran, *Managing Cultural Differences*, Gulf Publishing Company, 1979.]

ANNOUNCING A MAJOR SYMPOSIUM

The "Gospel and Our Culture" Symposium, scheduled for February 21 - 24, 1996, is designed to be a major event drawing the attention of a wide spectrum of churches in North America to the issues of the Gospel and Our Culture. It intends to form a highlighting, defining moment in the consciousness of the churches regarding the importance and shape of a missiological response to our contemporary context. It will feature the voices which are most critical for the churches to hear in regard to the contemporary challenge to the churches.

The purposes of the Symposium are:

- 1) To call the churches to the major missiological challenges they now face and to a recovery of their missional character and life.
- 2) To issue this call out of a depth of scholarly analysis which is rooted in commitment to the life and witness of local congregations and able therefore to impact congregations toward transformation.
- 3) To accompany the call with the resources of a growing movement which invites collaborative partnerships for meeting the challenges.

The impact of the event will be enhanced through the production of a published compendium, either in preparation for the event or as a report of its emphases. It will be produced collaboratively out of a dialogue between academic research and contextual reflection. The event and publication aim to speak with a credible voice to several critical audiences. On the one hand, it will seek to address the ferment in theological seminary communities grappling with the missiological implications of globalization for North American churches and pastors. At the same time it will seek to bear such a contextual congregational rootedness that it will excite and empower pastors and lay leadership.

As a part of the ongoing GOCN, the Symposium will have important points of contact with other facets of the movement. It will provide the three GOCN Work Groups (focused on Culture, Theology, and Church) a critical forum in which to share the fruit of their work. This, in turn, will sharpen the focus, dialogue and scope necessary to their ongoing work and further stimulate the growth of the groups as centers of collaborative energy. The Symposium will also provide an occasion to build a network of relationships within a number of denominations and with a number of local or regional groups engaging these issues.

Beginning in early 1994, a design and management team will be formed to develop the program, organize the meeting logistics, recruit participation from a wide cross-section of the churches, and link the event with other facets of the GOCN. The GOCN Work Groups, in particular, will continue their work with an eye toward how it will help shape the content and style of the Symposium. □

Networking

Networking Teams Forming for GOCN Events and Projects

Several news items in this issue of the GOC newsletter indicate new initiatives getting underway in the Network (see the announcements of the Pew grant and the 1996 Symposium on pages 1 and 5). On a number of fronts, there are needs and opportunities for Network members to be involved in these joint efforts. In particular, we are developing teams to work on the following:

✓ *the 1996 Symposium*: teams are needed for a) program and publication; b) advertising and recruitment; and c) arrangements and logistics.

✓ *a series of publications*: a policy and editorial team is needed to oversee a series designed to include compendia and monographs.

✓ *the 1995 Atlanta GOCN Consultation*: a team is needed to build network connections with multiple ethnic conversation partners on the engagement of the gospel with our cultures.

✓ *a bibliography project*: a team is needed to work on securing the funding for the project and designing the scope and form of a bibliographical resource on GOC issues.

✓ *regional conferences and groups*: people are needed to take the lead to set up conferences or groups are needed in a variety of regions or locales.

Network members and newsletter subscribers who are interested in being involved in any of these ways are invited to send a letter of intent regarding the projects or teams in which you are interested. The letter should include an indication of the kind of contribution you believe you can best make and the availability of your time and other resources. Send the letter to the coordinator, George Hunsberger, at the GOCN address. □

The 1994 Consultation

The third annual GOCN Consultation was held in Pittsburgh in February. Nearly seventy people from a diversity of denominations were in attendance for an engagement of issues surfacing from presentations made by George Crain, Jim Brownson, Alan Roxburgh and David Lowes Watson. The presence of four people from the leadership of the British Gospel and Our Culture movement helped enrich the extended discussions growing out of the presentations. One theme which emerged in all the discussion sections was the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutics of our grasp of the gospel in the scriptures and in the development of leadership for missionary congregations. Along with that, student participants called for a greater emphasis on spiritual formation as a part of their theological education. A British participant identified worship as an important enough issue to warrant special focus, either in an additional work group or as a more prominent focus of attention in one of the existing ones. Several suggested that the advances made in the character of our

consultation worship this time should be continued and developed, especially in regard to the shape of worldview and perspective in sung and spoken facets of the worship.

As at prior consultations, the participants at this one felt keenly the fact that we were mostly white and mostly male, partly a reflection of the makeup of the structures of church and academy of which we are a part, and partly a clue about which churches are feeling the particular pinch from the shifts in our culture which marginalize historically dominant religious forces. It was a common sense of the group that our own conversation, a legitimate but not complete one, has matured to the point that a deliberative next step to widen the conversation becomes important. This wider conversation among groups engaging these GOC issues from within different cultural strands in North America has been slated as the agenda for the next consultation, to be held at the Simpsonwood Conference Center in Atlanta on February 16-18, 1995.

The addresses given at the Pittsburgh Consultation are available from the GOCN office in several forms: print, audio and video. The collection of printed materials is available for \$4, the audio recordings of the four addresses for \$4 each, and two video recordings (Crain and Brownson on one, Roxburgh and Watson on the other) for \$12 each. Orders and payments should be directed to Judy Bos at the GOCN address. □

FYI

■ The North American Academy of Ecumenists has announced its 1994 Annual Conference which this year addresses the theme, "Gospel Shaping Culture: Dynamics of Unity and Division." The conference will be held September 23-25 on the campus of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. Those interested in obtaining a copy of the full program and registration information should contact Anastasios Zavales, P.O. Box 144, Sloatsburg, NY 10974, 914-736-6307.

■ The WCC Gospel and Culture Study Project continues to take shape in the USA. Study guides have now been prepared and are ready for use by local groups. The groups will focus on a series of questions: How has our understanding of, and witness to, the gospel been shaped by the culture in which we live? How can local congregations be enabled to live and witness in pluralistic societies and to affirm and celebrate cultures as expressing the plural wonder of God's creation? What is the role of the gospel in situations where the identity of people is denied by political, social or economic forces? Can we find a common language or framework within which mutual understanding, communication and accountability are possible among the churches? Persons interested in forming and guiding a group to address these questions should contact Jean Stromberg, U.S. Office of the WCC, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 915, New York, NY 10115.

WORK GROUP AGENDAS (3)

The Church Work Group

Defining Statement

The Church Work Group seeks to encourage and enable the church and its leaders to give faithful witness to Jesus Christ in the midst of rapid cultural change. The church now finds itself increasingly on the margins of society in a post-Christian situation. The Church Work Group will explore aspects of this missionary encounter of the Gospel in the cultures of North America. In this context God calls the church to: (a) recognize that we live in culture and must struggle to engage our culture from within; (b) contextualize itself with integrity in a culture; (c) affirm and strengthen those aspects of culture which seem helpful for the common good; and, (d) critique and challenge those aspects of culture which seem to stand against God's will and reign.

The Group is working to engage the challenges facing congregations, denominations and related Christian organizations seeking to respond to the emerging post-Christian and postmodern context. The Work Group is directed toward developing ecclesiological responses for the missionary situation of the churches through incorporation of cultural, theological and biblical analysis.

Examples of Issues and Research Topics

1. Church and Its Mission Nature

Churches need to recover and develop a mission-shaped ecclesiology that fully expresses the missionary nature of the church. This requires a reading of the Scripture with a missionary hermeneutic. In particular, churches need to reflect critically on the inherent encounter with culture which is within as well as around them. The relationship of new, post-Christendom perspective and fresh models of commitment.

2. Church and Its Mission Structure

The agenda of the 1960's to establish the "missionary structure of the congregation" was left unfinished as other issues displaced it. This agenda needs to be further developed in helping churches and congregations examine their present "operative" missiologies in the light of the missionary nature of the church.

3. The Church and Denominationalism

The continued expansion of the denominational form of the church in North America and its accompanying para-church structures needs to be examined in detail, especially in the light of the postmodern sensibilities characterizing many of those outside the church. Critical reflection needs to be given to the historical roots which shaped these forms, the cultural needs which they were meeting, and the tendency of these systems to be driven by competition and success orientations. In any research into forms of the church for a post-Christendom, postmodern context, the future of denominations is a critical question for examination.

4. Church and Kingdom

There is a need to sort out the distinctions between the church and the kingdom of God as these relate to the mission of the triune God in our particular cultural context. This perspective needs to be incorporated as a foundational hermeneutic into both the missiology which shapes the church's ministry and the structures which carry out this work.

5. Church and Evangelism

We need to develop theologies and practices of evangelism appropriate to the pluralistic, postmodern environment. There needs to be research on how the church will re-shape its identity and ministry to pursue such approaches. Related to this is the issue of how the preaching of the Gospel will need to be re-shaped in this new context.

6. Church and Case Studies

The Network recognizes that there is already a large number of congregational, denominational and para-church groups seeking to define and interact with the new situation of the church in North America. What is required is a carefully designed project to develop and analyze case studies of such settings.

7. Church, Pastoral Role Change and Conflict

The call for missionary congregations and the marginalizing process of the church in the culture bring increasing pressures on traditional pastoral roles. Identity, conflict and change agency form critical areas of research for emerging congregational leadership.

8. Church and Theological Education

Theological schools remain critical nodes in the preparation of leaders and shaping of the issues now being faced by the churches. What kinds of curricula prepare leaders for the missionary encounter? What should be the nature of the conversation between the Network and the institutions which train leaders for the church?

9. The Public Witness of the Church

In a post-Christendom situation, what will be the particular shapes of the church's public expression within a pluralistic culture? What are the contours of a political, social and economic expression of church life?

10. Christian Education and Worldview Studies Analysis

The church is a community that shapes Christian identity and character. We need to explore patterns of church life by which the gospel recasts worldview and way of life.

PASTOR'S SEMINAR

May 23 - 27, 1994

"Pastoring Congregations Toward Their Missionary Vision"

Leadership for churches engaged in the encounter of the gospel with our North American culture.

Sponsored by the GOCN

Held at Western Theological Seminary, Holland, Michigan

Faculty: Jim Brownson
 George Hunsberger
 Alan Roxburgh
 Craig Van Gelder

Cost:
 \$276.00 including lodging at adjacent Hope College.
 (\$40.00 reduction per person for double occupancy)
 \$180.00 for commuters.
 Registration includes a daily Continental breakfast.
 Other meals are self-entertaining.

____ CEV credit is requested.

To register, send completed form and check to Judy Bos/GOCN, 101 E. 13th St., Holland, MI 49423-3622.

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