***Missional* Matters**

Volume 1, No. 4

February 26, 2010

**Church as *Instrument* of the Reign of God**

by Roland G. Kuhl

Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthian church that “we are God’s co-workers” (1 Cor. 3:9) and he refers to other Christians as “co-workers for the kingdom of God” (Colossians 4:11). This is a key understanding of who we are as church. The church does not exist for itself – to grow itself, to develop itself as an institution, but, rather, the church is called to engage in participating and advancing the purposes of God in the world in partnership with God. The church exists for the purposes of God.

As was mentioned in the first column of ***Missional* Matters** (cf. Vol 1, No 1), God is the initiator and accomplisher of God’s mission – God is at work accomplishing the redemptive mission of God, and God accomplishes this mission by calling the church to be involved in the same mission. That is why Paul declares that the church does not work alone but works with God, as co-laborers with God, to accomplish God’s purposes in the world.

Inagrace Dietterich relates that the church is a called out (*ekklesia*)community, called out from the world to become a distinct social reality, an alternate culture in the world. This does not mean that the church is against culture, but rather the church is a community presenting a different way of being in culture. She states, as the people of God we are “the community of God’s new people, living a new way of life, through whom God has promised to bless the entire world.” (Dietterich, *Cultivating Missional Communities*, 1). The church is the re-created human community that lives being open to God’s mission and so prays “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” yet not only prays this prayer, but also lives this prayer – being a community which serves God by manifesting the will of God in a broken world.

John Howard Yoder, in *The Original Revolution,* also relates “the church is God’s people gathered as a unit, as a people, gathered to do business in His name, to find what it means here and now to put into practice this different quality of life which is God’s promise to them and to the world and their promise to God and service to the world” (Yoder, 31).

In this way the church offers itself to God to be used by God, through the Spirit of God, to be instrumental in effecting the presence of God’s reign in the world. The church does this through its life. The church engages in “practices that demonstrate God’s intent for the world” (Barrett, *Treasure in Clay Jars,* xiii). The church reveals and manifests the will of God by showing through its own life how we forgive one another, how we love one another, how we welcome the stranger, how we heal the broken-hearted, how we care for the sick, how we befriend our enemies, how we identify with the poorest of the poor and the outcast. The church in its living behaves in the way of Christ toward others, practices reconciliation, holds themselves accountable to one another in love, practices hospitality to all whom God brings into their midst. The church in its living shows how human life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ is to be lived – living which builds up one another, rather than destroying one another. In essence, the church, in its life together, is the community that demonstrates how the will of God is to be lived out in human life in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, the church in its instrumentality in the hands of God, lives cultivating a new reality in the world, a reality which is under the rule of God’s reign, God’s will. In Christ, through Christ, the community presents a different way, a new way. Dietterich expresses, “the old implements which had cultivated a people of war have through the cross of Jesus Christ, been replaced by the implements that now cultivate a people of peaceableness. Within Christian community people unlearn old patterns and learn new ways of living which reveal the love and power of God in Jesus Christ” (Dietterich, *Cultivating Missional Communities*, 4). She adds, “the mission of the church, is to be a source of radical hope, to witness to the new identity and vision, the new way of life, which has become a social reality in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. The persistent problem is not how to keep the church from withdrawing from the world, but how to keep the world from distracting the church from its purpose of cultivating a people of God. As a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God’s reconciling love and forgiveness, the church makes Jesus Christ visible in the world. (Dietterich, *Cultivating Missional Communities,* 5)

May we have courage to work together with God; may we have courage to embody the will of God in our thoughts, our actions, our lives; may we have courage to demonstrate the new kind of life that is to be found through living in the ways of Christ Jesus; may we have the courage to be instruments in God’s hands in creating a new kind of humanity through Jesus Christ.

Next week: Church as *Foretaste* of the Reign of God

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