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Melanchthon as Educator and Humanist  
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The International Student—  
Test of a Living Church  
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Brief Studies

Homiletics

Theological Observer

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# The International Student— Test of a Living Church

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IN a world in which the process of homogenization is being stepped up constantly, it is not surprising that we have reached the era of the International Man. Amid the strident cries of nationalism from newly independent nations of Asia and Africa and in the complacently preoccupied provincialism of America's Midwest it is easy to overlook him, but he is there. And he is a constantly growing figure on the horizon of our time. He is of that small but often influential segment of the human race that flies the fire-tailed jets across the seas, or those lumbering air-borne oxcarts held over from another era, the piston and propeller planes. He goes from hemisphere to hemisphere, from continent to continent, to analyze markets, to sell and to buy, to gather ideas for governing his nation and directing the manifold social services in the well-nigh universal pattern of the welfare state. He travels to sit down with the chiefs of another culture, be they chiefs of state or even chiefs of police and fire chiefs. He entertains with the songs and the dances of his native culture, be it that of the Philippines or Philadelphia. Recently a nationwide telecast devoted an entire hour to the Takarazuka troupe from Japan. He competes in international sporting events. He goes to contribute his professional know-why and his technological know-how. He goes to international meetings

of learned societies as likely to be held in Tokyo as in Rome or New York. He goes to teach in the colleges of other lands and he goes to study there. The Western coat and trousers has become the international uniform of the International Man. Bach and Bartok are almost as well known in Japan as they are in America.

The international student is only one facet of this many-sided composite being, the International Man, who is the moving shuttle that weaves the fabric of "the coming world civilization."<sup>1</sup> Even the Sino-Soviet bloc is not impervious to it.

English is rapidly becoming the world language as a counterpart of the Greek koine in the Hellenistic culture of the Mediterranean world. Just as the conquest of Greece by Rome only served to accelerate this process of Hellenization, so even a Russian victory over America, whatever its tragic consequences otherwise, might not be sufficient to supplant this *lingua franca*. On his 86th birthday Arthur W. Somerset Maugham in Bangkok wrote at a U. S. newsman's request, "I have an idea that in two or three hundred years English will be the universal language, spoken all over the world. Of course, it won't be the English we speak now; it will probably be even more strange than the language of Chaucer is to us now. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

It is significant that the great apostle to the Gentiles, the human founder of non-

<sup>1</sup> William Ernest Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (New York: Harper, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> "People," *Time*, Feb. 8, 1960, p. 42.

Jewish Christianity, was an International Man of his time. He was a Roman citizen, facile in using the koine as our New Testament bears witness, always on the highways and byways that tied his world together, ready and able to speak to slaves, artisans, merchants, and kings, of what God had done in and through Jesus Christ for all the world.

It is not necessary to labor the strategic importance of the international student as a mission prospect for the campus pastor. The latter has generally been more alert than his other brethren of the cloth to the needs of and possibilities for Christian witness to the international student. Pastors and lay people in Europe and America often have world mission opportunities for which the church's ambassadors overseas would give their eyeteeth. For example, they sometimes can reach high-caste Indians far beyond the reach of missionaries assigned to outcaste villagers. Moreover, removed from the web society of the Asian clan and family, these young people are uniquely approachable. Not all international students will occupy important posts in their own society upon their return, but a very heavy percentage of them probably will. One can point out that Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana is an alumnus not only of British jails but of American colleges. If one has lived all his life in America, especially among young people who think they are hep to everything and who sometimes actually do cover the entire gamut from A to B, the Oriental or African student who speaks with an awkward accent or fails to zero in on the latest campus variations of the American vernacular may seem an odd, slightly pathetic figure, inferior and second-rate. It may be hard for

the campus pastor to realize the assurance and security with which this ugly duckling swims in his own pond or the honor and respect that may be accorded to him there. Never having attempted to do more in learning a foreign language than to acquire enough reading knowledge of French to squeeze past the requirements for a doctorate, we may fail to appreciate the intelligence and perseverance that is required to learn to speak English at what seems to us the inadequate level of many a foreign student. To put us in our place he has only to ask, How's your Chinese or your Hindi? It is not he who is the incomplete, the fractional man. Rather we who have stripped off our hyphenated Americanism, discarded our German, Norwegian, and Slovak to become the complete Americans, rounded, whole, and yet one-legged cultural cripples. One footnote here is the fact that no culture ever started with more languages or wound up with fewer. But rather than emphasize the obvious importance of the international student, one ought to ask, How can we as Christian witnesses deal effectively with him? The complete answer is not to be found in any kind of narrow, specialized program of action designed especially for this one task. Any answers which the practical department of theology produces must be somehow related to the other three: exegesis, systematics, and history, with possible assists from a few other more modern disciplines.

We must go back, first, to a Biblical understanding of the nature of the church. Here we must distinguish clearly between function and form. It is easy to be preoccupied with the latter at the expense of the former. When others speak of the contemporary functional churches in Amer-

ican Lutheranism they are probably talking only of buildings. Perhaps someday we shall learn better to apply to the church as organization the dictum of Horatio Greenough, later picked up by Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, that "form follows function." The form that dictates our institutional shaping of the church still comes from the static agrarian setting of the *Dorfkirche* in Germany transferred, with minor adjustments, to the plains of Iowa and fitted with chrome trimmings.

Our thinking can be challenged by the more fluid concept of the church as *παρουσία*.<sup>3</sup> Here we find in Abraham, one of the first international men, the image of the sojourner. This is a note intoned by the Dutch missiologist Toekendijk, who has emphasized the church as *παρουσία* and *apostolate*.

The static *Dorfkirche* made much of the *Herr Pastor*. He was the most important person in the community. We don't need Vance Packard to tell us what has happened to the status of the parson. The horizontal and vertical mobility of Western society have made him just another molecule in the spinning convolutions of a revolutionary world.

If he is wise he will not set himself like King Canute against the flood, but he will recognize that this is a time to recover the apostolic function of the church. When this is listed as one of the four marks of the church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) this is usually done with a backward look only. The total church is to continue

<sup>3</sup> Martin Marty, "The Pastor as Administrator," *Report: Third Annual Parish Administration Institute* (St. Louis: The Board for Missions in North and South America of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1959), pp. 7—9.

the apostolic task in the world of our time. This is of its essence.

Instead of bemoaning the fact that the church has fallen on evil days, we ought to thank God for the volatile, mobile characteristics of our society, because they promote the re-emergence of the New Testament accent on the function of the total church as the royal priesthood of God. The clericalism of the past is not the ideal to which we should seek to return but a distortion from which we should be glad to free ourselves. It was Evanston who said:

Clergy and laity belong together in the church; if the church is to perform her mission to the world, they need each other. The growing emphasis in many parts of the world on the function of the laity since the Amsterdam Assembly is not to be understood as an attempt to secure for the laity some larger place or recognition in the church, nor yet as merely a means to supplement an overburdened and understaffed ordained ministry. It springs from the rediscovery of the true nature of the Church as the People of God.<sup>4</sup>

The laity are not supposed to help the pastor with *his* work; he is supposed to help them with *their* work. He is the playing coach, to use a favorite simile of Richard R. Caemmerer.

One of the most important functions we need to recover and use to the hilt in the church of our time is the *apostolate* of the laity. There are fronts of Christian witness where only the layman can make his testimony. Occupational evangelism is being stressed on both sides of the Pacific.

If any lesson has been impressed upon

<sup>4</sup> Wilfred Scopes, *Training Voluntary Workers in the Service of the Church* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1958), p. 9.

me by the mission field, it is this; the best man to win another is the one who "sits where he sits — the converted convict best wins other convicts; the farmer, farmers; the factory worker, factory workers. . . ." "Acceptance of Christian witness is the task of the entire membership of the church. The special responsibility of the laymen is to bear such witness in the public life of the community, to set up signs of the Kingdom in social righteousness and economic justice, as well as to take their full share in the pastoral and evangelistic work of the Church" (Willingen Conference of the IMC, 1952).<sup>5</sup>

The campus pastor cannot possibly discharge his duty to the international student — or the international professor — without the help of those who "sit where they sit."

If Lutheran students and professors think that church is chiefly a meeting that happens on Sunday morning, the campus pastor will be seriously hampered because of their inadequate understanding of the nature of the church.

One of the most significant strands in the work of the W. C. C. has been the work of the Department on the Laity, which has been tirelessly exploring and explaining the implications of the fact that to be a layman means to be part of God's mission to the world. (It is one of the fruits of our present *dis*-integration that the immense importance of this "laymen's work" for what are called "foreign missions" is still largely unnoticed.) It is true that many good Christians still think of laymen's work as being a matter of enlisting more and more laymen and women as "auxiliary church workers" — an excellent and

necessary thing to do, but not the centre of the matter.<sup>6</sup>

The eternal God communicates Himself. He is the yearning, seeking, searching, self-giving One. Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me." That will is love and salvation for man. If this desire animates the Head of the church, how can the body fail to be moved by it? "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." (John 20:21)

It is not wholly accurate to say that the church *has* a mission. Rather the church *is* mission, the contemporary incarnation of God's love for man.

In the global mobility of our time each local Christian congregation has a world mission. We do not mean the important part it has in contributing money to the church's worldwide mission program. Although the church has growing needs for financial offerings for missions, world missions is far too big and too important to be left to any denominational or interdenominational board for world missions. In the persons of the international men and women who come to your campuses, in the persons of your own members who travel abroad, especially your campus church has a world mission. In 1958 I spoke at a little church near a large college campus in Alabama which at that time had 50-odd communicants when the students go home. I found that this tiny congregation had one faculty family in Taiwan and another in Borneo.

What unprecedented opportunities this offers for world mission outreach! But is it happening? In the early church there

<sup>6</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (London: Wm. Carling and Company, Ltd., 1958), pp. 16, 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

were no mission boards, no professional salaried agents abroad, but wherever lay people like Aquila and Priscilla went they helped establish churches.

Nor did they apply to the seminary at Jerusalem for a candidate to carry on. They relied on the Holy Spirit to endow the new groups that gathered with such gifts of ministry as they would need. Why isn't something analogous happening today? American Christians are going overseas in unprecedented numbers but the term "the ugly American" has enough truth in it to hurt. Too many Americans on overseas duty tend to spend their time drinking American whiskey in American clubs, living in little American ghettos, practicing what has somewhat mordantly been called social incest. Lay people of the settled denominations are too often leaving the missionary work overseas to the Holiness sects and Communists. Could it be because they have too often been propagandized, homogenized, and clericalized within an inch of their spiritual lives? Exercises in visitation evangelism have been a wholesome corrective. Many seminaries are adding professors of missions to their faculties. Yet many a campus pastor will have the opportunity to train far more overseas missionaries than the average professor of missions. It has been predicted that by 1967 25 per cent of all college graduates would spend at least a portion of their careers overseas.<sup>7</sup> The ordinary pastor sees many of his members go abroad in the military, but these include a great many average GIs, with perhaps a high school education or even less. But the campus pastor and the suburban parson

deal with the educated and the articulate, those best able to understand other peoples and to communicate with them, even though only through interpreters. Exchange professors and Point IV experts deal with the leaders of thought and men of affairs in nations overseas. Are Christian shepherds now training their lay undershepherds with plenty of field work experience for the wider opportunities of tomorrow? How many of them could lead a simple worship at a cottage meeting and deliver a homily or a devotional address? If we are not trusting them with the good china now, how do we know they will not drop it overseas or simply leave the dishes in the sink? Are they being trained for the fluid guerilla warfare of a mobile global battlefield in the Christian world mission?

Perhaps only by personal involvement in world missions can we cure American Christians of their "America First" complex which causes many leading American denominations to devote a smaller proportion of benevolence funds to world missions now than in the depth of the depression.

Now the best way Christian college students can train for the overseas mission opportunity of which they may not even dream today is to witness Christ in word and life to the international students who share their classrooms today. In a pioneering study we find the startling observation that every Christian needs two "conversions": first he needs to be converted to Christ in repentance and faith, and then he needs to be "converted" to the world in *diakonia* and *missio*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Harlan Cleveland and Gerard Mongone, ed. *The Art of Overseasmanship* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1957).

<sup>8</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, *A Theology of the Laity* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958), p. 175.

Mission work is never something the Christian can put off until the future. For if it is of the essence of the church's work and if it is of the essence of the Christian life, it is something he must be doing *now*.

The best approach is, of course, that of *friendship evangelism*. A book written to counsel American students going to study abroad, whether at Oxford or the Sorbonne or elsewhere, says that the student has two basic needs: (1) He needs to know the language well enough to know what's going on, and (2) He needs a friend.

The author writes of a French student who spent 40 consecutive Sundays in his own dormitory room right here in Chicago. Admittedly he may have had an abysmal lack of initiative or an awesome oversupply of shyness. But anyone who has ever spent a Sunday or an evening in a hotel room all by himself knows that there is nothing drearier. In his own country that Asian youth might feel no need of your missionary. But here he needs a friend. It could be a Christian pastor. It could be a Christian student or faculty member in his church.

Nor should we condition our help on the visitor from Asia or Africa being converted by the end of the next adult class. If he sees that our chief interest in him is to hang his spiritual scalp on our belts, he may go away, or worse, he might even permit himself to be baptized out of sheer politeness to us. We should give caring, sharing help to the stranger within our gates, not primarily because he needs our love but because we need to love; not primarily so that he may *become* a Christian—although we pray for that, too—but because we *are* Christians; not to exploit him as a curiosity at the next meeting of

the missionary society but to give him our Christian love, consideration, and respect for his human dignity.

If these are our motivations as we help him with his English essays, find him a place to stay, invite him to dinner, urge fellow students to take him home on vacation, and otherwise act, according to Martin Luther's counsel, as little Christs to him, then we shall not feel that we have wasted our time if he does not become a member of the Christian church while he is in our country. We cannot but witness. We cannot but love. We cannot but speak Christ to him. The results are not ours to worry about. We can forward those concerns to the Holy Spirit Himself.

We must remember that the ancestors of that Japanese student have been Shinto since Old Testament days, and Buddhist since before Charlemagne and Boniface. This is the age-old dyer's vat in which his thoughts, customs, attitudes have been soaked. Let us witness to him, give him every opportunity to know and accept Christ, but also give him time. We must not pressure him. It is better to take out our American aggressiveness on the youngsters from suburbia; they're used to it. It is preferable simply to let down the bars and be kind to our friend from the East and show him that we are trying to learn as well as to teach, that we are making the time to understand him.

Hendrik Kraemer distinguishes between "communication-of" and "communication-between."<sup>9</sup> We are not engaged simply in communicating the Gospel, as a TV commercial is involved in communicating

<sup>9</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, *The Communication of the Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 10—13.

stimuli to buy a thinking man's cigarette or a beautiful woman's soap. We are in the business of "communication-between," the living back-and-forth traffic between two persons in Martin Buber's classic I-Thou concept. For meaningful encounter it would be desirable for the campus pastor to know something of the international student's cultural and religious background.

Here one would like to encourage the campus pastor to take at least an introductory course in the history of religions. Our courses presumptuously titled "World History" or "World Civilization" usually give short shrift to Asia and have left us provincial and half-educated. A college text on "World Civilization" which this writer saw in use at an Eastern college devoted one page to all of Asia, most of it being given over to one of Asia's least civilized individuals, Genghis Khan! Again, courses or reading in Asian culture and history are needed to make us at least passably literate in the area. These are all ways of communicating the Gospel between us and an Asian student, instead of communication of a gospel that never gets to its destination because it meets a blank and baffled stare. The pastor on the campus or in the city who is equipped to give a course or even individual lectures on non-Christian religions will find this a surprisingly apt way of reaching the Jew and often the kind of unchurched individual who would not readily be drawn into more direct approaches.

A seminary student one day gave this unsolicited testimonial reproduced here in verbatim excerpt:

I am very thankful that I took this course. I decided that I had to take one in the mission area and so I took this one because it was going to be the most

factual. Friday afternoon when I was just about set to start working again after a little snooze, the information office called and asked if I would come over and give someone else a tour. I went, none too happy about it. It turned out that there were two Americans and two Hindus. . . . the two men from India were a Brahmin and a Kshatriya, and I had never pictured when I took this course, had never thought that I would ever communicate with a Hindu. It was just completely out of my mind. And they wanted a tour of the campus. So as I took them around and showed them the tremendous symbolism that is on our campus, I was able to explain the Gospel to them and not only to explain it in our terms but to communicate to them the very fact that I knew what they were and I knew about their religion and that I could make comparisons to show where there were some analogies. They were tremendously impressed. . . . it's amazing how right here you can be a missionary and how you can use these things without ever leaving campus or without ever leaving America. How very practical! When I started out I didn't think there was any practicalness to this course at all and it turned out just Friday to be the most practical course that I had had so far.

But greater than all knowledge and tongues is Christian love. If pastor and people have shown the International Man Christian love, this will matter very much. The young Indian engineering student will return at last to his own country, and when he does he will surely compare notes with his compatriot who studied at Moscow's skyscraper university or in Peiping. There will be talkfests far into the night about Marxism and Christianity. The students will speak of the failings of America: the

competitive spirit that exalts individual gains at the expense of the public welfare, the sex idolatry in advertising, entertainment, and in the flood of cheap and vicious paperbooks that could never be sold in Russia, our juvenile delinquency, our desire for comfortable short cuts in everything from the kitchen to education, and our racial segregation from Little Rock to Deerfield. And we must be prepared to give away all these points. But then they will tell of the friends they made, the kindness and the hospitality which they received, the one in Russia or China, the other in the USA. And what if we, so much more bountifully blessed in material goods than either the Russians or the Chinese, should be bested here and shown to be poverty-stricken in humanity and in agape? Then truly the handwriting "weighed and found wanting" is on the wall.

"What have they seen in thy house?" the Lord asked a king of Judah after a party of international men had gone. One Japanese student whom the writer met on the train summed up his considered opinion of the Christian church in America thus: "Just a social club." Another said,

"I see that the church is a living community and a real force in people's lives." Why had they come to such different conclusions?

The International Man is a test for a so-called Christian America, a test for the Christian church, and a test for each individual Christian. A stream of letters goes overseas from the 57,000 international students in the USA with their impressions of us and everything about us; sure we wonder what they are saying in all the languages under heaven! The international student is a test for the Christian pastor and his church in the quality of its *κοινωνία*, *μαρτυρία*, *διακονία*, and *διδασχία*.

We should be hospitable, says the New Testament, for so some have entertained angels unawares. What is an angel? A messenger. The 57,000 international students are all so many potential angels—in spite of their sometimes crassly selfish opportunism—angels and messengers to their people around the world, and some of them by God's grace through our word and life—angels of the everlasting Gospel. The International Man is an angel. The question is, Are *we*?

St. Louis, Mo.