

**INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER**

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**COSMOPOLITAN A.M.E. CHURCH  
AND THE PROBLEM OF THE VINE CITY COMMUNITY  
OF ATLANTA, GEORGIA**

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## INTRODUCTION

Cosmopolitan A.M.E. Church is a church of about nine hundred members located in a poverty-stricken section of Atlanta, Georgia, known as Vine City. Most of the members of this church happen to be residents of Vine City, yet the church has no program geared toward ministering to the needs of the community. The congregation consists largely of working class people. Some are reported to be on the poverty level. There is, however, a sizable number of members who fit into the middle-class category. There are three principals and from fifteen to twenty public school teachers in the membership. Yet, despite the vast human and financial resources it has the church has had little to do with the surrounding community.

For instance, Cosmopolitan raises an annual amount of about \$30,000. Out of this amount come the upkeep of the church, the maintenance of the parsonage, the general budget, the pastor's salary, etc. None of this amount is used for community purposes. Most of it is spent on church matters only.

Therefore, aside from serving as host to a few community meetings on urban renewal, the church has had little else to do in the life of the community in which it is located. At this point one may ask what are the problems of the Vine City community? What efforts, if any, are being made by other institutions in the community in response to the needs

that are there? What should be the church's mission as it confronts the situation in which it exists? These questions the student hopes to answer in the following pages of this work.

To my advisor or any others who may read this essay, I would say that what is written and implied in this essay is with the best intentions. The point here is not to condemn either the church under consideration or its leadership. If at points the tone of the essay seems critical, it is hoped that it is at every point constructively critical.

## I. SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Vine City is a six by four block area bounded by Simpson Street on the north, Northside Drive on the east, Hunter Street on the south and Sunset Avenue on the west, located in the western section of the city. According to a survey conducted last fall by Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc. Vine City has a population of about 3,700 people. Seven hundred and twenty-five are men, 1,175 are women and 1,800 are children.

Residents of the area live in 368 family units. In better than 50% of all the family units the father is absent. Twenty-four percent of the property is owner occupied. Nearly half of the adult male population is unemployed. Over 75% of the females are employed and 90% of the children attend school. Three hundred and seventy-five mothers receive Aid for Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.) and six hundred and thirty-five families receive surplus food. In certain portions of Vine City some families suffer malnutrition. Several health problems exist in the area.<sup>1</sup>

In her survey of the community made in 1965 Dr. Halvorson of the Sociology Department of Spelman College discovered that Vine City has an infant mortality rate of 26%. The average educational level for adults is the sixth grade. Fifteen percent of the population are high school graduates

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<sup>1</sup>Pauline Kendell, private interview held at the Nash Washington Neighborhood Service Center, Atlanta, Ga., March 25, 1969

while only 1% have finished college.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the housing facilities in the area are dilapidated and are under urban renewal study. A survey made by the Southern Regional Council reveals that a large number of homes stand in need of painting, wall and ceiling repairs. Screen doors, adequate floors, proper electric wiring and sanitary plumbing are all rare features in Vine City. Approximately 76% of the residents rent the houses in which they live. Occupants pay rents which in one year equal the tax assessed value of the house. Studies show that "a house assessed at \$750.00 of ten rents for \$60.00 a month."<sup>3</sup>

## II. INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE NEED OF THE POOR

### A. Government Programs

There are several organizations working in Vine City which are attempting to ameliorate the conditions of that community. Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc. (E.O.A.), an agency of the Federal Government, is the strongest organization operating in the area with offices in downtown Atlanta. The Nash Washington Neighborhood Service Center, an extension of E.O.A., serves the Vine City community from its location at 247 Ashby Street, N.W. An extension of the Nash Washington

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<sup>2</sup>Wayne Johnson, private interview held at the Vine City Foundation, Atlanta, Ga., March 28, 1969.

<sup>3</sup>Helen Howard, et al., The Vine City Foundation, Inc. (Atlanta: The Vine City Foundation, Inc. 1967), p. 1.

Neighborhood Service Center is located in Vine City off the corner of Walnut and Magnolia Streets. It serves as a referral center to other agencies and listens to the problems of the community. A staff member indicates that many times persons only want a listening ear.<sup>4</sup>

Though it is not an eleemosynary organization food and clothing are often donated to needy families through its Social Service Department. Man Power (Job Training) is also a part of the operation. The A.S.E.P. and the Neighborhood Youth Corp (N.Y.C.) are phases of the Man Power program. The A.S.E.P. sponsors local on-the-job training and attempts to secure employment for trainees in some given establishment in the city while the N.Y.C. sends people to different parts of the country for training in various kinds of work. Head Start, at present, is also part of the E.O.A. program. This is a six-week program for pre-schoolers (ages 3-5) teaching them how to become adjusted to the classroom setting. Welfare and recreation programs are also sponsored by Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc.

#### B. Community Organizations

A wide variety of non-partisan organizations are at work in the Vine City area. The Vine City Foundation, perhaps the largest and most complex of these organizations, is composed of residents of the ghetto who, through the development of community action, attempt to deal with their own problems. The

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<sup>4</sup>Pauline Kendell, private interview held at the Nash Washington Neighborhood Service Center, Atlanta, Ga., March 25, 1969.

Foundation sponsors a large number of projects designed to serve the residents of the community. The Neighborhood Counsel and Consultation Service assists residents of the community with problems in welfare, housing, rent and legal services. Consultations and referrals to other agencies are made daily. Professional men in the legal field throughout Metropolitan Atlanta assist the service in handling numerous problems.

The Vine City Medical Clinic, a small medical clinic staffed by volunteer medical personnel, provides local treatment for minor injuries and illnesses. The Foundation also sponsors an Emergency Assistance Program which offers immediate assistance in providing food, clothing, rent and medical care for the residents of the Vine City community.

Other projects include the Craft and Candle Shop, the Thrift Shop, the neighborhood library and a nursery. The Foundation also publishes a community newspaper called The Vine City Voice. This organ provides the people in the community the opportunity to express their ideas on local issues of concern to them. Rev. Wayne Johnson, a student at the Inter-denominational Theological Center, is the editor.

A small scale tutorial program is also sponsored under the direction of Rev. Johnson. Students from the Atlanta University Center serve as tutors of grade school and high school students in this program.

A second non-partisan organization operating in response to the needs of the community is the Army Church. A non-profit organization composed of residents of Vine City who are interested



in the betterment of their community the Army Church works to stimulate the morale of the community. Emphasis is placed on the individual's responsibility, involvement and commitment to himself and his fellow man. Such matters as participation in community affairs, self-help, self-respect and respect for the rights of others are encouraged by the Army Church.

A third organization serving in the community is the Royal Knights. Initially a recreation club, the Royal Knights is one of the most popular organizations in the Vine City area. During the summer of 1967 the Royal Knights started out to sponsor one basketball team. By June 30th they were sponsoring eighteen clubs. Other projects sponsored by the Royal Knights include the following: fashion shows, lectures on grooming, and talks on how to use the telephone.

Finally, there is the Vine City Nursery. This program, sponsored by the Quaker House of Atlanta, is designed to care for the children of mothers who have to leave home to go to work. Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc. shares in the financing of this operation.

### C. The Role of the Church

Heretofore, Cosmopolitan has performed an active but a very limited role in the life of the community. During the pastorate of Rev. L. J. Jones (1965-67) Cosmopolitan A.M.E. Church engaged itself in community activities as a means of (1) preventing riots in the area and (2) ridding the community of those who were attempting to exploit the situation for political

purposes.<sup>5</sup>

Rev. Jones gave talks to young people at the Nash Washington Neighborhood Service Center's extension in Vine City on sex education. Jones also served on the Advisory Committee of the Nash Washington Neighborhood Service Center.

At present the church continues to minister to the people of the community but in a limited and impersonal way. The pastor represents the church on the Board of the Nash Washington Neighborhood Service Center. He is a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and of "Operation Breadbasket." The church also participates in the annual passion week service which is sponsored by the A.M.E. Ministers Union.

Cosmopolitan has served as the host to some meetings held on community matters. In 1967 the mayor of Atlanta held a meeting at the church explaining urban renewal. In July, 1968 Cosmopolitan opened its doors to a community meeting sponsored by Morris Brown College on remodeling the community. Various protests meetings in which residents of the community voiced their feelings on issues pertaining to the community with city officials present have been held at Cosmopolitan A.M.E. Church.

However, the church itself has no program by which it can relate itself to the needs of the people living in Vine City

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<sup>5</sup>L. J. Jones, private interview held at the Inter-denominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Ga., January 14, 1969.

some of whom, as we noted earlier, comprise a major portion of its membership. In the following sections of this paper the student will propose some measures which the church may take as it ministers to the needs of the people living in that community.

### III. COSMOPOLITAN A.M.E. CHURCH -- WHAT IT CAN DO

#### A. Education

Much of the poverty in Vine City can be attributed to the poor educational backgrounds from which many of the people come. According to the study made by Dr. Halvorsen 84% of the adult population of Vine City have not finished high school. Many residents of the area have been found to be illiterate. A large segment of anti-poverty workers throughout the nation consider education to be, as one author put it, "the bedrock stepping stone out of poverty."<sup>6</sup> The need for education, particularly basic education beginning with reading, writing and arithmetic, has occurred repeatedly in every attempt to lift the burdens of low income people in city, suburb or rural community.<sup>7</sup>

In her book entitled How Churches Fight Poverty Elma L. Greenwood, Associate Director of the Department of Economic Life of the National Council of Churches, cites several tutorial

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<sup>6</sup>Elma L. Greenwood, How Churches Fight Poverty, (New York: Friendship Press, 1967), p. 41.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

programs successfully sponsored by churches and church groups throughout the country. Many of which are suitable for use at Cosmopolitan. In Syracuse, New York, a literacy program was started with the distribution of posters throughout the community reading "Free! to adults -- Learn to Read." Though illiterates cannot read many of them do recognize the word "free". Speaking of this technique of attracting illiterates to a literacy program Greenwood provides the following note:

What else the flier says has been the best news of their lives for the thousands of men and women in the Syracuse area and, through the idea's spread, in many other communities of New York and other states, who have been taught to read and write by more than 1,000 deeply committed Literacy Volunteers since the project started in February, 1963.<sup>8</sup>

In the Syracuse program classes were conducted on a one pupil-one teacher basis so that no one else will be involved in the pupil's training. Teachers meet with their tutees for one hour twice a week at a mutually convenient time and place. Places with quiet workrooms are located in churches, social agencies and libraries. Cosmopolitan has rooms within its facility that can be used in offering private tutorial lessons to illiterates. The basement of the church contains rooms in which private lessons may be conducted without interference.

School teachers (both active and retired), secretaries, college students, housewives or, in fact, every kind of person

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

who cares, can be recruited for the program. The literacy program may go through the fourth grade only. Upon completion of the course the tutees may be granted a diploma. However, they should be encouraged to attend the adult public school education program. One such program is conducted at the Booker T. Washington High School here in Atlanta.

Adults are not the only group who may benefit from a remedial or tutorial program. Children who show poor reading or learning habits in school can benefit from such a program. Greenwood relates as follows:

As the tutorial experimentors gained experience with the slow learners and with the personal, family and environmental causes of their difficulties, attention turned also to preventive programs with potential drop-outs. These programs frequently begin with children who show poor reading or learning tendencies in the earliest grades. Another soon-revealed need was for quiet, supervised study rooms where youngsters from distracting home situations could have periods of uninterrupted 'homework'.

Churches, church groups or agencies, with virtually untapped volunteer teacher resources and large amounts of unused space, were among the first to initiate and then to expand tutorial, remedial reading and quiet study programs.<sup>9</sup>

With the educational needs in the community as great as they are, a church-sponsored tutorial program conducted by Cosmopolitan A.M.E. Church should prove to be very helpful in ministering to the needs of the community. The church is located in the very center of the community and is within walking distance of all persons living within the community, both young and old. Principals, teachers, secretaries and

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

other professional members of the congregation may help to recruit their co-workers as volunteers in a tutorial program. Grants can be obtained from the E.O.A. as a means of covering whatever expenses that may arise.

Churches have always displayed a primary concern for education. In communities across the nation churches engaged in anti-poverty work have taken a big lead in helping victims of poverty to secure educational opportunities, ranging from children of pre-school age to adults.

Education is a major factor in almost every anti-poverty program there is.<sup>10</sup> Some projects specialize in education to the exclusion of all other features, concentrating on the needs of a specific age group. With the human resources that it has within its membership and due to its proximity to the Atlanta University Center, Cosmopolitan has the opportunity to sponsor a vital remedial program for the needy residents of the Vine City community. Cosmopolitan is equipped with the physical facilities, the leadership and the personnel necessary to make such a program successful. In addition, Cosmopolitan is within walking distance of all persons living in the community. Funds can be secured from the E.O.A. to cover whatever expenses that may arise.

#### B. Job Training and Placement

As was mentioned earlier, nearly half of the adult male population living in Vine City is unemployed. Only 75% of the

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

female population is employed. Many of the jobless lack the training necessary for employment in various kinds of work. Recognition of the fact that employment at adequate wages is the best antidote to poverty has led churches and other anti-poverty groups to conduct programs in training and retraining people for suitable work in the labor market.

A vast number of church-sponsored job training and placement projects have been successfully conducted by churches across the country, many with support from the Federal government. Some were even successful in enlisting the support of business, educational, and philanthropic leaders throughout the nation.

In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the Opportunities Industrialization Center (O.I.C.), initiated and sponsored by the Rev. Leon H. Sullivan, pastor of Zion Baptist Church, is one of the most successful job training and placement enterprises even devised by a church. The following account is given on the inception of the O.I.C. program:

A door-to-door canvass of the Negro area raised \$102,000 in cash and equipment, and the Ford Foundation added grants totaling \$200,000. In an abandoned jailhouse, refurbished with the help of enthusiastic volunteers, the OIC opened for business in February, 1964.<sup>11</sup>

Today, recruiters go into the streets, the homes, and the billiard parlors explaining what the OIC has to offer in a "feeder" program which covers introduction to job categories,

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

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job-finding techniques, minority history, grooming and hygiene, civil service exams preparation, English as a foreign language, consumer education, remedial reading and basic adult education. Other courses cover specialized training such as communication skills (concentrating on reading and writing difficulties), computational skills (mathematics from simple arithmetic to trigonometry) and attitude orientation.

After completing the feeder program the trainee is offered a choice between twenty-five job training areas. The job areas include: teletype, drafting, power sewing, laboratory technicians, machine shop (including repair and maintenance), restaurant practices (from waitress to chief cook and manager), sheet metal, electronics and electronic assembly, secretarial science including typing and office machine operation, merchandising-marketing, IBM key punch, real estate sales preparation, laundry and dry cleaning, small business management, plumbing, heating and air conditioning, brick masonry, commercial art and various printing operations.

O.I.C. has expanded tremendously with the help of funds from the Office of Economic Opportunity and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Through the O.I.C. Institute, an independent agency supported by public funds from O.E.O. and the Department of Labor's Manpower office, forty other cities are taking the first step toward launching an O.I.C. program. Rev. Sullivan contends that the success of the operation, for the most part, depended on its community roots. He says:



"It is important to raise some of the funds from the community. The people then have a stake in them and won't let them die."<sup>12</sup>

With agencies like the O.I.C. Institute, the O.E.O., and others offering assistance to those churches that are willing to join the fight against poverty there appears to be no reason why Cosmopolitan cannot take part in the effort. Cosmopolitan may not be able to launch a program as immense or as complex as that launched by Zion Baptist under Rev. Sullivan but it can do its part where it is.

There are a number of vacant buildings in the Vine City area that can be renovated and converted into shops, garages, and small factories and used in job training programs. Courses in auto mechanics, radio and TV repairing, cooking, plumbing, painting, printing, secretarial science, small business management and many other subjects may be sponsored by the church. After having trained and qualified men in certain skills the church can work with the Urban League, "Operation Breadbasket" and other agencies in securing suitable employment for graduates of the program.

A job training and placement program <sup>Sponsored</sup> ~~sponsored~~ by Cosmopolitan A.M.E. Church would not replace the work of other programs in the community. It would supplement them. The programs already in existence are not meeting all of the people needing them. A church sponsored program would, in a sense, take up where E.O.A. leaves off.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

In the light of what has been said one might ask the question why are religious groups so successful in these various kinds of vocational efforts? The following note should suffice as an answer:

In job training and placement, as in many other economic activities, both employers and employees usually respect the economically 'neutral' position of the religious leader or group. Thus a church-based project has, by its nature, a substantial head start in reaching out to both groups needed to make any job-related program a working reality. Increasing emphasis on on-the-job training has also required more and more cooperation from the nation's industrial leaders, many of whom have become personally interested in training programs as a result of their contact with church-initiated projects.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, for programs like these to have permanent results, the approach to those who are in need of these benefits must be as close to the one-to-one relationship as possible. In conducting such a program the following steps in the use of the personal approach are recommended:

. . . first, in the recruiting, where prospective trainees are not just notified but sought out man-for-man, on street corners, in bars or in crap games; second, in the training, especially where progression is based on individual attainment rather than on a fixed instruction period; and finally, in the follow-up, where the continuing contact is again not only persistent but warmly personal. The person-to-person approach seems to be made most easily and naturally by religiously oriented people or groups.<sup>14</sup>

#### C. Family Renewal Through Housing and Services

Living conditions at home have much to do with family stability. For a family to remain intact today there is no

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

greater material need than an adequate place in which to live. If a home is well equipped, located on a clean street in a wholesome neighborhood, the possibility of that family staying together is greater. While many family problems are internal, such external difficulties as bad plumbing, dilapidated walls, inadequate floors, faulty electric wiring, rats and roaches are enough to disturb even the most stable relationships.

Some churches, councils of churches, and denominational bodies have attempted to meet the physical needs of families by building low-cost housing projects. Loans can be obtained from the Federal Government for the construction of low-cost accommodations. Nevertheless, it takes time to plan, finance and erect large-scale housing. The needs of the poor are desperate and demand immediate attention.

Low-income families are beset by psychological, emotional, household management and social problems also. A church located in an urban ghetto can establish a marriage counseling bureau. Some churches have sponsored birth control clinics for mothers. Others have family adoption programs in which a church assumes the responsibility of one or more families who are unable to pay their rent. Few educational, child-development or even job training projects progress very far before there is a recognition of the need to establish some kind of family service that can address itself to the problems of daily existence in the ghetto.<sup>15</sup>

As was stated earlier in this essay Vine City has its

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

housing and family problems. Surely an area which is characterized by dilapidated housing and in which the father is absent in over 50% of all family units needs the church's ministry. Perhaps some of the projects mentioned here warrant the attention of the official board of Cosmopolitan A.M.E. Church. Cosmopolitan may explore the idea of forming an association with other churches in Vine City in an effort to provide services for families living in the area as have been done by churches in the Hough area of Cleveland, Ohio and Junior Village in Washington, D. C. Nevertheless, the earnest and disciplined efforts of a church-based program is greatly needed in Vine City.

#### D. Community Organization

Community organization is one of the most effective means of bringing about social change. Lyle Schaller, in his book Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation, describes community organization as the process by which "the residents of a community are organized so they are able to identify their problems, establish priorities among their needs, develop a program of action and move on to implement this program."<sup>16</sup>

One might ask the question why should churches participate in community organization? Schaller points to the Christian's love of his fellowman and the love expressed by Christians through their church. Community organization, enabling individuals to attain a new sense of dignity and self-fulfillment, helps the church to express this more effectively.

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<sup>16</sup>Lyle E. Schaller, Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation (Nashville: Abington Press, 1966), p. 18.

The church can also fulfill the unique role among many other organizing forces of keeping the organization process non-self or neighbor-centered.

Institutionally the church is itself one of the organizations in the community. Fortunately the assumption that the local church exists to serve the people in its community is more and more widely acknowledged. If this principle is accepted it is difficult to see how the church can expect to do this without becoming involved in a program of social change in its community.

Fortunately, Cosmopolitan is an active member of several civic organizations operating in the community. As was noted earlier the church is affiliated with the Nash Washington Neighborhood Service Center, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Operation Breadbasket, the latter an organization working to secure suitable employment for members of minority groups. The church supports these organizations financially.

#### E. Welfare Recipients

As was mentioned earlier in this paper in over 50% of all the dwelling units of Vine City the father is absent thus leaving the families to care for themselves as best they can. Three hundred and thirty-five mothers who receive Aid For Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.) and a total of six hundred and thirty-five families who receive surplus food.

What can the church do in response to the needs of persons who must depend on public welfare for support? In

1964 a group of lawyers in the Chicago area decided that there is need in Chicago for assistance to persons without knowledge or means to obtain a lawyer. In a letter to the Chicago Bar Association the lawyers stated: "We concluded further that the many churches located in neighborhoods (of the poor) throughout the city are in positions to help meet this need by offering legal assistance as part of their general ministry."<sup>17</sup>

In conjunction with the Neighborhood Counsel and Consultation Service of the Vine City Foundation which, as we have mentioned earlier, responded to a situation similar to that the lawyers have reference to in Chicago, Cosmopolitan may sponsor such a program for welfare recipients or should be welfare recipients. Such a venture would make the church more relevant to the concrete needs of the community and at the same time would win the confidence of the people in the community in their church.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This student is one of the opinion that the church is properly justified in its participation in the fight against poverty because such an engagement appears to be in accord with its nature and mission. Alvin Lindgren, in his book Foundations of Purposeful Church Administration contends that the nature and mission of the church must be seen in the light of the following factors: (1) the church as God's chosen community (the central concept of the Old Testament), (2) the church as the body of Christ (the most significant concept of the New

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<sup>17</sup>Greenwood, op. cit., p. 116.

Testament) and (3) the church as a fellowship of redemptive love (a common mission of both concepts).<sup>18</sup>

The first factor is that the church is God's chosen community. This notion is, as Lindgren puts it, "basic to the understanding of its nature."<sup>19</sup> It stresses the divine origin of the church. Hordern substantiates this position by declaring that "the church exists because God intended for it to exist."<sup>20</sup> The historical root of the church goes back to the time of Abraham when God called the patriarch of Israel out of Chaldea with the promise that he would make him the father of a great nation (Gen. 12:1-2). In responding, Israel became God's chosen community.

For what reason did God choose Israel out of all other nations? God did not choose Israel because she was a world power, or because she was affluent, or religious or in any way merited the choice. He chose her because he loved her. As the writer of Deuteronomy reminds Israel:

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because God loves you.<sup>21</sup>

The only reason why God chose Israel was because he loved them, and that love was unmerited. God's grace is

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<sup>18</sup>Alvin J. Lindgren, Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 38.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Deuteronomy 7:7-8a.

manifested in the Old Testament as well as in the New. It was the grace of God that called the church into being.

Secondly, for Israel to have been chosen out of all other nations for a special privilege or favor would seem unfair. Israel was not designated for any special privileges or favors. Rather, she was called for a special responsibility. She was designated to be a kingdom of priests making known the love of God throughout the world. She was called upon to minister to the needs of the world.

The writer of Exodus 19:5-6a quotes God as saying the following to Israel:

Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.<sup>22</sup>

In keeping with the thought expressed in Exodus 19:5-6a Lindgren asserts as follows:

Israel's choice required first of all her obedience to God in keeping the covenant. The requirement of obedience is always upon those whom God calls. Furthermore, God's choice was for a purpose; Israel is to be a kingdom of priests through whom God's love for 'all the earth' is to be known. Just as the Levites were set apart as a priesthood within Israel, so the nation should be set apart as a priesthood to all the world. Israel was chosen as the instrument of God's love.<sup>23</sup>

A number of factors indicate the continuous link between the Old Israel of the Old Testament and the New Israel

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<sup>22</sup>Exodus 19:5-6a.

<sup>23</sup>Lindgren, op. cit., p. 40.



of the New Testament. Richardson, in his book An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament, cites the Christian interpretation of Ex. 19:4-6a as follows:

The most striking affirmation in the NT that the Christian community is now the true . . . Israel is to be found in 1 Peter 2:9f., where the author somewhat freely quotes Ex. 19:4-6 and applies what was there said of Israel to the Christian Church: 'Ye are an elect race . . . , a royal priesthood . . . , a holy nation . . . , a people of possession . . . , that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.'<sup>24</sup>

Richardson goes on to comment:

The passage affirms that the Christian community is commissioned and enabled to perform the task of being the light of nations, which the Old Israel failed to become. Likewise, the Church of Jesus Christ was in fact a royal priesthood (cf. Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), a consecrated nation, representing God to all the nations of the world and the needs of all the world to God. The missionary implications of God's call to Israel was now being realized through the witness of the Church.<sup>25</sup>

The second factor is that the Church is the body of Christ. Christ is the head of the church. As Newbigin argues the church "derives its character not from its members but from its head, not from those who join but from Him who calls it into being."<sup>26</sup> Thus the church cannot be true to her nature apart from a meaningful acceptance of Christ as the head of

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<sup>24</sup>Alan Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1959), p. 271.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Leslie Newbigin, The Household of God (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), p. 21.

the church. "As the New Testament clearly indicates," says Lindgren, "the headship of Christ is acknowledged by a personal commitment to Christ as Lord."<sup>27</sup>

To speak of the church as the body of Christ is to assert that it is the means through which the Spirit of the Risen and Exalted Lord continues his work on earth. Again Richardson states as follows:

The Church is thus the means of Christ's work in the world; it is his hands and feet, his mouth and voice. As in his incarnate life, Christ had to have a body to proclaim his gospel and do his work, so in his resurrection life in this age he still needs a body to be the instrument of his gospel and of his work in the world.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise Lindgren argues as follows:

To speak in contemporary terms, the church is to be the instrument through which Christ continues to work in the world today. In other words, the church is to become the living expression of Christ's spirit in our time and culture. This means that if the church is true to its nature, it must recognize that its central reason for being is to continue God's work of reconciling the world unto himself begun in Jesus Christ. If the church is to fulfill its nature, it must be the body in which the living word of God's love is found and Christ's work and ministry extended to today's world.<sup>29</sup>

The third factor asserted states that the church is a fellowship of redemptive love. Members of the Christian communion should find strength in fellowship with one another as individuals. Through this process the church is strengthened both individually and collectively for service to the world.

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<sup>28</sup>Richardson, op. cit., p. 256.

<sup>29</sup>Lindgren, op. cit., p. 51.

Thus one can see how appropriate it is for the church to engage itself in the fight against ignorance, unemployment and human misery whenever these problems plague the lives of men. The church is supposed to be an instrument of God's love. Where there is need the church should be ready to respond to that need. Only by ministering to the needs of men can the church fulfill its mission.

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