

EDITORIAL

On Being the Church

The Church. We all know what it means to be the Church don't we? We're the body of Christ, the Bride, the Temple of the Spirit. But wait just a minute. What do those definitions look like in practice? What do those titles mean in the rough and tumble of life? The Church. Maybe we don't know as much as we thought about what it means to be the Church.

Consider the fine people of First Church. They celebrated their 75th anniversary as a church in the late sixties. In that year it was a bustling congregation of nearly 700 dedicated folk. Trouble was that these dedicated folk didn't care all that much about things like the gospel, or evangelism, or missions, or edification. The church for them was a benign and amiable social club. That anniversary year capped the traditionalist phase of First Church's spiritual pilgrimage. They kept going by tradition even though those traditions had little to do with Scripture or God's purposes for His church.

But radical change came. First Church got a new pastor. He roused the church from its traditionalism and challenged the people to become relevant to the needs of nation-building. The new pastor preached politics and social action. He prodded and scolded and bullied the congregation into community involvement and the struggle for justice. But strange things began to happen to the church. Numbers began to decline and simple questions about faith and assurance and growing in Christ were neglected and even regarded as irrelevant. First Church began to shrivel and die under the new legalism of the pastor's social gospel.

The Pastor left and a new man took his place. He found the church wounded and hurt from its years of activism. He preached simple but well prepared and searching messages directly from the Bible. He encouraged people. He visited them in their homes and on their jobs. He made people feel the presence of God when they gathered for worship. And the people came back to the church in greater numbers than before. Community involvement was coupled with evangelism. Social action continued but new programs were started as well to edify people, programs like small group bible studies that met during the week in homes. The church was entering its evangelical phase and was on the road that led away from traditionalism and trendiness to spiritual greatness. Sure there were problems but the Word kept giving them answers. The Church. Made great by the Gospel. Made rich by mutual submission to the Word of God. Weakened by mindless traditionalism or misguided attempts at relevance.

In this issue of EAJET we explore the nature and work of the Church in three thought provoking articles that come from scholars and churchmen on different sides of the continent. Julius Muthengi of Kenya explores the work and worship of the church by working through ten key questions. A. O. Nkwoka of

Nigeria ponders the issue of the Church's call to holiness. Richard Gehman, a Kenyan missionary-educator, sifts once again the amazing story of the East Africa Revival and what it can teach about the renewal of the church in our own time. The Church. We need to keep searching the Scriptures to unlock the fullness of what it means to be the Church. May this issue of EAJET guide you in that great quest.

Rob Cook, our book review editor, wanted to send a note along to those readers who enjoy reviewing books. If you are interested in helping in this way, please complete the form below, put it in an envelope and send it to us by airmail.

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Contributers to this Issue of EAJET

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