

BULLETIN

SEMINARY EXTENSION

DEPARTMENT

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JUGGLING TERMS

Present day writers, with few exceptions, are playing with terms. Whether the word "church" refers at all times to (1) a local congregation or whether it may, at times, refer to (2) all saved persons, (3) the gathered congregations at the end of time, (4) the invisible but present body, is really of little consequence. For in New Testament times the term had not come to have formal meaning. The churches of Galatia and the church at Ephesus may mean the same thing. For there is neither evidence to prove or disprove that at Ephesus there were not several congregations. At Antioch there were several ordained ministers. Were these ministers in a single body, or were there several congregations that were so united in spirit that they were viewed as one? The truth is, I think, that the early (what shall we call it) body of Christians did not organize formally. They were now in the synagogue, now in the Temple, now in a home, and now along the way. Wherever they went they spoke about the Kingdom for they were trying to evangelize Israel. They argued and debated in the same fashion as did the scribes of various schools. But later congregations were separated from the synagogues and set up very much like the synagogues.

There was a concept of "the people of God," or "the disciples" or "Christians" that transcended the local body. Such a concept exists today even among those who speak of the church in the narrowest of terms. The local body was also charged with responsibility to represent the body of Christ to the fullest. This concept exists even among the most catholic groups.

When we insist on a limited definition for the word "church," we are juggling terms--not ideas.

It is argued that the use of terms constitutes the use of ideas. But the issues would not be solved by agreement on word meanings. The New Testament does not give us a picture of a local autonomy in the sense that many Baptists argue, neither does it give us a pattern of episcopacy, nor of a ruling body of any kind. The authority rested solely in Christ. Theories of autonomy and government in the church and churches are developments later than New Testament times.

Whether we sanctify the term "church" or the expression "body of Christ," or "people of God" as the designation to represent that larger inclusion of Christians, is of little consequence, for we cannot dispute the existence of such a group. Paul's letter to the Corinthians is addressed also to "all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

Whether we use the expression "local church" or mean by the term "church" a local body only, is also of little consequence. For in the locale of some place each local group exists. To the membership of this local congregation is committed the task of evangelizing, teaching, and providing worship. Whether this group is absolutely autonomous is a matter for tradition. In Baptist life the tradition makes the body autonomous.

We draw our pattern from the New Testament with some reservations. Paul advises Timothy to appoint elders in every church, and a church was advised by John that he would set things in order and deal with the one "who loveth

to have preeminence" upon arrival. Christ can carry on his work under the leadership of elders, presbyters, episcopates, or messengers from autonomous bodies. We believe that the New Testament is the best pattern. And insofar as we can know, the autonomous local body is the best expression of that pattern. But whether this body is called a church or the church is not a real problem.

BOOK REVIEW

REDISCOVERING THE WORDS OF FAITH
by Charles T. Sardeson; Abingdon
Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1956.
124 pages, \$2.00.

The author joins many in the past who have attempted to restate the essential content of the Christian vocabulary in modern language even though the attempt to some has been quite frustrating and futile. Realizing his inexhaustible task he narrows his purpose to a treatment of fourteen words or truths in the Christian faith and considers these to be a bare minimum to anyone who seeks a firm grasp in understanding the Christian religion.

After an introductory chapter he sets himself to the task of couching each of these words that has grown up in Christian history in a setting that is simple but graphic. His use of striking metaphors proves most illuminating. Between each chapter there is included some pungent quotations from Christian writers that bear specifically on the material that follows.

The book can by no means be considered a textbook of theology nor a book of doctrinal sermons, however, it is certainly, in content, very theological and sermonic. I recommend it heartily to the consideration of every minister.

W. A. Whitten
Associate Director

STATISTICAL REPORT

Correspondence students	1,843
Extension center students	3,559
Total	<u>5,402</u>

A PATTERN EMERGES

During the week of July 9-14,
the Director and Associate, W. A.

Whitten, were in Kentucky conferring with the Baptist college presidents and other leaders in the interest of developing a joint extension program with these colleges and schools. The plan will operate under the leadership of Rev. Erwin McDonald, Executive Secretary of the Education Commission of Kentucky. Under the plan developed, the state has been divided into four districts with about eighteen to twenty associations for each college and school. The Clear Creek Mountain Preachers Bible School and the Magoffin and Oneida Institutes are cooperating in the project. The extension centers will operate in Kentucky like they do elsewhere, except that the colleges will supervise teaching, make personal contacts, and all publicity will be done through the colleges. Any association meeting the requirements may have an extension center. The program of the Seminary Extension Department will be used and the Department will promote jointly with the Education Commission.

The same approach is under way in Western Tennessee with Union University. Other colleges are considering the cooperative effort.

WHERE CHRISTIAN LEADERS ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE

"Me go off to school? I don't need to go to school; I've been ordained." It didn't take long for him to reveal to all hearing him how badly he needed some worthwhile training.

It is my strong conviction that a call to preach is a call to prepare. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that one unwilling to prepare either has not received a genuine call or has not fully surrendered to his call. Our Lord spent thirty years in preparing for his ministry and the Apostle Paul retired to Arabia and Damascus after his conversion in order to prepare. It seems that everyone should take the time to prepare. We must remember that the same book which says, "Preach the word," also says "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Ray K. Hodge

Associate Director