

I Cor. 14:8 - "For if the bugle give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle?"

In these words St. Paul is giving some helpful advice to the church at Corinth. What concerns him at the moment seems to be that phenomenon known as "speaking in tongues", something that was not at all uncommon in the early Church, and which was thought by many to be a sign of the possession of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul's advice on the subject adds up to this: Speaking in tongues may be all right indeed, it may be a sign of the Spirit - but let's not have so much of it in the Church. After all, what real benefit is there in it? No one understands what you are saying, and so you are not contributing anything of value to the Church and her worship. St. Paul says that as far as he is concerned, he would rather speak 5 words with his mind in order to instruct others than to utter 10,000 words in an unknown tongue. After all, "if the bugle gives an uncertain sound", how would we expect soldiers to prepare for the battle?

This problem which confronted Paul and the Church at Corinth in New Testament times seems far away from us today. This is at least one problem which we don't have to face. There seems to be no danger of Episcopalians rising up to speak in tongues here in the 20th century. And yet the basic reasoning behind Paul's advice is something which we could very well hear and understand.; something which the Church today needs to take to heart.

What St. Paul is arguing for is relevance and meaning in the worship of the Church and in its life as a whole. Christianity, to be true to itself, must be meaningful and helpful to its adherents and to the world at large. It is not just the occasion for an emotional binge or a flurry of meaningless words. We should pause to consider this as we examine the state of the Church today. Cast about as we are on the seas of international tensions and hard-put to survive the flood of domestic frustrations and anxieties which beset us, what is the Church doing to give a clear and unmistakable leadership in the battle against evil and injustice? How distinct and how certain is the call which we give to call the world to spiritual warfare?

These are questions which we should take very seriously, for it is of the very nature of the Church for that body to give leadership - leadership not just in times of personal crisis in private lives, but in every phase of the world-wide and age-long struggle against every form of evil in this world. In so many ways we have departed from this essential nature of the Church. We have tended to make of our religion simply a private affair for the individual. We ask nothing more from the Church and expect nothing more than that it should supply us with a building in which to worship and a minister to lead us in that worship. We want the Church close by in times of personal tragedy or misfortune, but we do not expect it to be immediately relevant to the practical problems of every-day existence.

In short, we have lost the concept of the Church as a corporate body leading the fight against evil in the world. We do not ask that our religion give meaningful and relevant answers or insights into the social, economic, and political problems which confront us. We would prefer to handle these on our own and let the Church deal only with personal piety and the denunciation of evil in terms of vague generalities; to be against sin and let it go at that.

But to accept the Church as this and nothing more is to reduce Christianity to a triviality. No one can remain very enthusiastic about a religion which is relevant to only one day in the week. If the Church is to be strong; if the Church is to be what she is intended to be; then she must have a meaningful message for every phase of human activity. This is God's world. He created it, He sustains it, and He works within it. There is no phase or aspect of His Creation which is not the concern of God. True Christianity must be relevant to life in all its manifestations, and the Church must serve as the corporate voice of this relevant Christianity.

In other words, the Church is called upon to lead; to lead with purpose and conviction; with faith and hope; with courage and with strength. If the trumpet of the Church gives only an uncertain sound, then who will prepare for the battle against evil and injustice? This was the question put to the Corinthians by St. Paul; this is the question we must ask ourselves today. In our own Church life and worship have we not become guilty, figuratively speaking, of "speaking in tongues", so that no one is edified, no one is instructed, no one is led into the paths of righteousness?

It should be obvious to all of us that the Church has largely relinquished this leadership which she is called upon to give. The Church has followed often, but she has seldom led. There was a time when the Church built and operated most of the hospitals, and when she handled practically all charitable works and social services. There was a time when what educational facilities did exist were all provided by the Church. Today these things are changed. The Church fell more and more behind in shouldering her responsibility of leadership in these fields of service, so God raised up other institutions to meet the pressing needs. Now most of these phases of human life are the concern of secular institutions, which, for the most part, are doing a good job. The rise of such institutions is certainly not to be regretted. The more groups dedicated to this type of Christian service, the better. But it is to be regretted that their rise has caused the Church to leave it all to George; to forget or ignore in large measure her own obligation to remain a leader in these fields.

There are many other evidences that only uncertain and indistinct sounds are coming from the natural leader in the warfare against pain and suffering, evil and injustice. Apparently, the Church and we mean by this term everyone of us who calls himself a member - has been guilty of shameful neglect in truly witnessing to Christ. We have truly left undone those things which we ought to have done. The Church as a corporate body has been far too timid in exercising that leadership which she is called upon to bear.

There are times, however, when even this timidity cannot restrain the Church from speaking out; times when the Church must speak out and does speak out. We are living in such a time now. Of the hundred and one serious problems now facing us, both international and domestic, there is perhaps none so close to us and also none so fraught with moral and religious implications as the one posed by the recent Supreme Court decision on segregation in the public schools. On this issue the Church must speak out. On this issue the Church has spoken out.

In the August issue of The Church News, now available in the vestibule of the Church, there is a statement by our diocesan Department

of Christian Social Relations entitled, "The Church Considers the Supreme Court Decision". I would urge you all to get your copy of The Church News and read this article closely and prayerfully. Reprints of the article in pamphlet form are also available in the tract rack.

This statement was drafted by the department authorized to speak for the Diocese of Mississippi on questions pertaining to social relations. The department consists of clergy and laity, men and women, all Mississippi Episcopalians, and the statement is addressed to Episcopalians in Mississippi. The statement says nothing that has not always been the position of the Xtn. Church as a whole. Perhaps its only significance lies in the fact that this position has now been set forth on the diocesan level in an area which forms the very focal point of the problem.

The Court's decision poses tremendous problems for us here in the South. We all recognize this, and certainly we should make no attempt to minimize these problems. Yet the Church reminds us that we cannot compromise the basic Christian principles at stake and still be worthy of the name Christian. Whatever the final solution to the many problems involved may be, the Christian cannot evade or avoid the conclusion that the Supreme Court's decision is just and right, and the Christian conscience can never rest easy until we make this the starting point for all our deliberations and legislation on the subject.

The problem needs and deserves far more prayerful consideration on the part of all of us than it has been getting thus far. Let us hope that this article, or pamphlet, may mark the beginning of such consideration for all of us here in Calvary Church.

Here is one instance, at least, where the Episcopal Church in Mississippi cannot be accused of "speaking in tongues". The call that comes from the Church on this issue is clear and distinct, as it always has been from the Christian Church as a whole. God grant that this leadership may not go unheeded. May He grant that you and I as individuals and as the corporate Body of Christ may serve as effective instruments of this leadership in the days and years to come.