Outler Blasts Appointive System

Dallas — The Rev. Dr. Albert C. Outler declared in an address here that dissatisfaction and mutiny are swelling to epidemic proportions in the ranks of the Methodist clergy, and he put the major blame on the "fourfold failure of the appointive system."

"There is a crisis in vocational identity and professional commitment that has already shattered the esprit de corps of our once proud 'itinerant system,'" he said.

Dr. Outler, a professor at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, spoke at the biennial national Methodist Conference on Christian Education, held Nov. 6-10 at the Statler Hilton Hotel.

The internationally known theologian and ecumenist told the 1,300 Christian educators that the appointive system in our time is a system:

1. Which degrades professional men to the actual status of employees.
2. Which operates a double standard in its administration of absolute power.
3. In which appointments are made on grounds other than those of Wesley's conception of spiritual gifts, pastoral graces and evangelistic fruits.
4. In which there is an increasing atrophy of initiative and responsibility at the local, district and regional level.

Methodist Bishop James K. Mathews, Boston, was on the program as the "reactor" to Dr. Outler's speech. He said it may be that the appointive power of Methodist bishops, who assign pastors to their churches, needs to be revised, but he added that its values ought first be examined carefully.

Bishop Mathews said the values of the appointive system are at least three in number: (1) It is a principal guarantee of the freedom of the pulpit. (2) It is the fairest way to deal both with the pastor and the congregation when real problems of compatibility arise. (3) It is best suited for the church adequately to fulfill its understanding of the ability of a man may readily be matched with the needs of a congregation.

Bishop Mathews added that he does not believe low morale of ministers today is "due in any pronounced way to the oppressiveness of bishops." "Rather," he said, "morale is low among ministers, including bishops, because our image has become blurred. Now a new image is emerging of pastor-teacher, pastor-counselor, pastor-leader—who leads as a servant of man and God."

Dr. Outler said he thinks that "nothing short of basic constitutional change will suffice for the reform and renewal of The United Methodist Church that most of us profess to desire."

He said it seems to him that the price of reform in contemporary Methodist "will include at least four major items":

1. Decisive abrogation of the "absolute appointive power of the Methodist episcopacy," by a formal and substantial recognition of the rights of the preachers, on the one hand, and of the congregations, on the other.
2. Radical decentralization of all the (general) boards and agencies, the vigorous reversal of the current trends toward programs from above, and encouragement of "impulses and programs that arise at the local levels."
3. Renewal of the principle of "governance by conference"—local, district, annual, and regional.
4. A resolute decision to risk the changes in polity, and outward appearance, that are "certain to come with any really serious achievement in Christian unity over and beyond simple mergers between Christians within the same denomination family."

He added that The United Methodist Church "represents a low watermark in union without restoring the last time we will have that sort of 'cheap ecumenism' again. By contrast, the Consultation on Church Union means real change and we ought to face it in real change."

Vietnam Veteran Honored At Meridian Church

On November 5th, at the close of the evening worship service at Druid Hills Methodist, Meridian, Mr. and Mrs. Brooks Legate honored their son, Bruce, with a coffee. Specialist Five Legate has just returned from a years duty in Vietnam. Following a 30-day leave, he will report to Fort Rucker, Alabama for duty.

Members of the congregation and other friends, who called after the worship service, visited with Bruce and served a dessert plate with coffee by Misses Gail Ervin, Donna Clark, Marsha Herrington and Shelita Miller.

From Tidings—

New Paperback on Evangelism

Finding The Truth About Man—G. Byron Deshler, Tidings, 1908 Grand Avenue, Nashville, Tennessee 37203 pages 128 $1.25 each or for orders of 4 or more $1.00.

By Carl Keightley

Dr. Deshler, a former staff member of the General Board of Evangelism, has produced a sequel to his "Finding The Truth About God". It is aimed, as was the first volume, toward the small groups and individual Bible study.

The real value of the book is in the questions presented for self examination, rather than the comments of the various passages by the author. Dr. Deshler, however, makes no claim for definitive treatment of the scripture in his brief comments, but rather describes them as aiming at stimulating thought.

The volume offered meditations for thirteen weeks. The daily format nation, and suggestions for personal search for the Truth.

John McDowell said, "The Missionary enterprise is not the church's afterthought. It is the church's forethought. It is not secondary and optional, it is primary and vital." This seems to be as it should be since God's only Son was a missionary.

There's an old story about the near-sighted woman who talked religion to a wooden Indian in front of a cigar store. She later declared she would rather be a live Christian and talk religion to a wooden Indian, than a wooden Christian who never talked religion to anybody.

Robert E. Speer put it well when he said, "If you want to follow Jesus Christ, you must follow him to the ends of the earth; for that's where he is going."