

The Bennett festschrift, THEOLOGY AND CHURCH IN TIMES OF CHANGE: ESSAYS IN HONOR OF JOHN COLEMAN BENNETT, edd. Edward LeR. Long Jr. and Robt. T. Handy (Westminster/70) includes a Bill Webber essay, "Theology, the Churches, and the Ministry" (pp.94-114), that ought to be studied in its entirety by all involved in New York Theological Seminary. The creedal heart of the article, and of the seminary, is on pp.94:

This chapter is concerned with the authentic witness of the church and the changes in theology and ecclesiology that seem necessary to bring about new health in the churches and their relationship to the common life of all mankind. The urgency of our times and faithfulness to Jesus Christ demand tremendous iconoclasm about contemporary ecclesiastical structures and practices. Those who recognize that "judgment begins with the household of faith" must not be written off as defectors, apostates, or heretics. Indeed, many such critics are, like the author of this chapter, profoundly committed to the Christian gospel and hold to certain basic convictions. For myself, these convictions include the following affirmations:

1. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ continues to call men to a missionary vocation, either as clergymen within existing churches or as missionaries in new situations. He locates them in Christian community for nurture and equipment and sends them into all aspects of service and witness. In short, God in his wisdom continues to evoke and sustain the church. The forms of community and mission may find drastically altered shapes in the years ahead, but they will reflect a continuity with the patterns of the New Testament.
2. Biblical language and Biblical perspectives upon the human situation provide the frame of reference from which, with integrity,

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the contemporary Christian must continue to operate. The problem of relating Biblical concepts and imagery to a secular society is not essentially different in character from the missionary problem of past centuries when the gospel crossed barriers of geography, race, and culture. The gospel has always been a scandal and a stumbling block, and is so no more and no less in our day than in past epochs, but we must be sure that men stumble over the genuine gospel and not over our ineptitude with it.

3. The concrete events of contemporary history always provide the locus for the self-understanding of the church. This is to affirm that our problem is not merely to figure some new way to make the Christian message relevant in a rapidly changing urban world, as though to cure the present problem with a gimmick, but to ask what, in the light of Christ, are the meanings of contemporary events and what they require in terms of Christian witness and obedience. We must be theologically and ecclesiastically free enough to be truly obedient to our Lord; sufficiently obedient to be theologically and ecclesiastically creative.