

The below is a book review I did for UCC clergy at the time of the book's publication. In connection with a radical collective look at the suburban church I'm a member of, I bumped into the book and this review, and think it worth a think-sheet for my "Sociology of Religion" course. The subsequent near five years have not changed my view of the book/situation, and my gut grasp of the untowardnesses and intractabilities [though "with God all things are possible"] has deepened and broadened: I'm kinder, sadder, gladder, and (I hope) of more earthly-suburbanly-urbanly good.

Willis E. Elliott review of

CHRIST'S SUBURBAN BODY, Wilfred M. Bailey & Wm. K. McElvaney, Abingdon/70, \$4.95, 208pp.

TO: Wilke

FOR: CHURCH AND MINISTRY Occasional Papers

This heartening, helpful books bids us shift our attention from weakness to strength, from "the suburban captivity of the church" to the potential of the suburban church--a shift in the same climate that has moved us from weakness therapy (the power of the unconscious) to strength therapies (reality therapy, responsibility therapy) and from weakness theology (man's limits, finitude, sin) to strength theology (the human potential, responsibility theology), from noticing that the glass is half empty to asking What is in the glass and how shall we use it?

Suburbia, everybody ought to know by now, is a vast reservoir of affluence and influence, and its churches can be powerful factors in the decision processes through which the reservoir gets put to dehumanizing or rehumanizing use. But if the suburban church is to throw its weight on the humanizing side, it will have to assume some of the experimental aspects of the underground church, adopt new priorities, and initiate new forms. That some suburban churches are well into this re-formation, say the two Dallas Methodist pastors who wrote this book, should give both new hope and some guidance to others--and thus the subtitle *Signals of Hope and Challenge From the Underground Aboveground*.

Suburban pastors and concerned laity will be encouraged to know that while the book is divided into a theory section ("Mission Interpreted") and a praxis section ("Mission Implemented"), the latter gets three times the space: the book is action-oriented, and thus a useful supplement to the UCC literature on "The Local Church in God's Mission" (available through Central Distribution Service) and in connection with Theodore Erickson's material on church clustering (available from BHM Division of Evangelism, 287 Park Ave. S., NYC 10017).

While the particular focus is on the suburban church's planning for and participation in community social-action, the planning process can serve as a model for all the uses a suburban church makes of its manpower, money, and property.