

# WHERE IN THE WORLD IS THE CHURCH?

by Tony Dale

“We evangelicals pride ourselves on our scriptural foundations and sound theology, but time and again we have missed the essence of what the Bible teaches about the most fundamental things. Nowhere in “The Book” do we find parachurch, which means “beside church” or, in the minds of some, “not really church.” If para-church describes anything, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who comes alongside the church! The phrase has been conjured up to keep at bay those who seem to threaten what possessive and sometimes hierarchical church leaders have come to regard as their domain. In God’s eyes there’s one church; para-church really is church too!”

- John Noble, British Pioneer Leader, writing in his new book, *The Shaking*, to be published in the UK in February of 2002.

Cathy, who is sitting over on the other side of the room, is a teacher of 4th graders. I wonder if that training is transferable to the church context? Mike is an attorney, dealing with major corporations who are bankrupt. Could any of his legal experience be used in church life? Jim is a businessman who owned a chain of retail optical stores. I’m sure there is nothing in his background that would be of much use in the Kingdom of God.

NOT!

I'm a doctor. Does this mean that the only thing that God can use me for is the practice of medicine? Tell that to Luke!

By concentrating power and authority into the hands of a special or professional class, usually called "clergy," the church has marginalized and thereby rendered ineffective most of its members. How well I remember the frustration of being an experienced professional, leading teams of people in my medical practice, and competent to set up conferences for physicians from all over the country, but apparently not competent enough to teach a Sunday school class at the church. Something is wrong with this picture.

It is interesting, quoting again from John Noble's book, *The Shaking*, that "by rising up and endorsing His apostolic team as church, Jesus set a precedent for all time, which we have ignored throughout history to our cost. We have marginalized the God-given missionary or growth forces within the church and labeled them para-church." Much of the real impetus for church growth and maturation has come through the so-called "para-church" organizations, because we tend to force the apostolic and prophetic types out of our churches that prefer a "pastor dominated" form of leadership. The result is vision-depleted churches, tending to the needs of their members, rather than Spirit Inspired assemblies, reaching out to deal with the needs of the world.

The reality is that much of the need of the world can be more effectively dealt with outside of the confines of “church,” rather than within the walls (or homes) of much of what currently passes as “church.”

John and Marion are family doctors in Plymouth. As they listened to the Holy Spirit’s prompting, they realized that many elderly patients, among others, were coming out of the hospital to a lonely and often unwelcoming environment. A person might be well enough to leave the hospital, but on his or her own, still be unable to go shopping or do the laundry.

So, they began arranging for volunteers from their church to take patients home from hospital admissions, and to assess what further help the person might need now that they were out of the hospital. From doing some shopping to picking up the convalescing for church meetings, these volunteers became the church beyond the walls. Over a period of time, the local social services began using John and Marion’s volunteers from a wide array of hospitals to help with most of the discharged patients in that district. This is church in the marketplace.

Another medical friend of ours decided to keep track of all of the patients that he spoke to about the Lord for the first time over the course of a year. At the end of the year, this is what he found: just over 50 patients had actually given their lives to the Lord the first time that he spoke to them about Jesus in his medical office. Another 50 had given their lives to the Lord on a second or subsequent visit during the year of this study. An additional 50 had

been spoken to about the Lord, but had not yet responded to the message. Over a hundred lives had been meaningfully and radically touched by God in his office that year. This is church at work.

I had a friend named Pam, a skilled nurse, who was also a natural evangelist. She came to my medical practice to stand in for another member of staff who needed to be on an extended maternity leave. There was a six-week period while Pam was working with me that we saw at least a patient a day give their lives to the Lord. Every day! This is church in the medical practice.

It is not that God just wants to raise up “church” in any and every place where He sends His people. He also wants to raise up apostolic and prophetic leadership to demonstrate His divine love and power to a world that is waiting to see God’s Word become flesh.

Victor Choudhrie is such an apostolic figure. This highly successful and acclaimed cancer surgeon was also the Dean of one of the best-known medical schools in India when God told him to leave medicine and start planting churches. With no theological background and no church planting experience, he was forced into the only textbook he knew on the subject, namely, the book of Acts. Now, 8 years later, there are 3,000 churches and 100,000 people who are a part of those churches that were started through Victor’s obedience to the Holy Spirit. This is apostolic work, the ascended Christ building his church.

Patrick Dixon was a chest physician who found himself caught up in the growing AIDS crisis that hit Britain in the mid 80s. Caring passionately about the patients and about the public health aspects of this emerging crisis, Patrick applied himself to his patients' humanitarian needs and to Britain's apparent blindness to the seriousness of the AIDS problem. Out of this concern grew the largest of the British AIDS charities. But this was not to be the end of Patrick's story. Having seen what happens when one is open to pointing the way to the future, Patrick has developed into one of the best-known lecturers and forecasters of business and economic trends in Britain. He finds himself widely in demand to speak to major corporations across the world to help them understand the times in which we live. This is prophetic work, Christ speaking into the marketplace.

In our own limited way, Felicity and I have seen the power of Christ in the marketplace of business. Unable to practice medicine in America because our British licensing is not accepted over here, we moved into business. A few years ago we started an evangelistic Bible study with some of our business colleagues. We invited 12 friends to join us for a weekly study in the book of Proverbs so we could explore together "what the wisest man who ever lived had to say about wealth and finance." Over the course of the next year all 12 came to Christ. This is church. This is the risen Christ reaching into people's lives, where they are, and meeting them at their place of need.

If you are looking for the apostolic and prophetic people in church, you may be looking in the wrong place. Many, marginalized by their

churches, are nevertheless reaching out in ways that only the Holy Spirit could have initiated and are demonstrating how to bring church to the people, rather than people to church.

Jesus never told us to go and get the people to come. He told us to come to Him so that He could send us out. As Keith Green so eloquently put it in one of his songs, "Jesus commands us to go; it takes a call to stay." The businessman is as called as the evangelist, the university professor as called as the pastor. And what's more, the businessman and the professor can probably support themselves in the process.

It is an entirely Greek philosophy, which gives rise to the impression that somehow it is more spiritual to be pastoring than to be creating profits. For example, in our own situation over the past year, we could provide not only work for a number of people, but also the finances for mission trips for ourselves over a 3-month period, and for the training programs of over 100 church planters in other countries. The nature of the apostolic is to be entrepreneurial. Paul wanted to labor where no one else had gone before. He was not looking to build on another man's foundation or to be supported by another person's labor. For him it was a matter of pride that he could find a way to bring the gospel to people without charge.

Many in the business community are an incredible example of what the Romans 12 ministry of "giving" is all about. Rich DeVos, the owner of the Orlando Magic basketball team, not only models how to maturely manage and give away millions of dollars to inner city

missions, but also has devoted his time and talents as Chairman of the Board of Gospel Films, helping it reach millions for Christ through film. Bill Britt is a well known distributor/leader within the network marketing world. He wisely teaches why it is probably best never to give more than 10% of any single ministry's budget through your own personal giving, so as not to cause that ministry to place its dependence on you. He also follows it up with a powerful teaching ministry to his huge network of distributors to make sure that they know the only way they can be truly successful is to have Jesus as the center of their lives and businesses. Through his marketing network, hundreds of thousands have come to Christ. This too is church.

Time and space does not permit us to look at the huge number of other examples of the entrepreneurs who are extending the Kingdom of God. Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International (FGBMFI) never viewed itself as anything more than a "para-church" organization. But its chapters in cities across the world are actually more "church" for many people who attend them, than the actual churches that they go to on Sundays. A campus group may not be comfortable calling itself church, because it may be viewed as competing with the "real" churches off campus. But does that make it any less church in the Biblical sense?

Christ is calling the church to get out of the walls and into the world. It is when He is lifted up in the marketplace that the people will see Him and be drawn unto Him.