

#### 4. WHAT SHOULD WE AIM AT: "SAVING SOULS" OR "BUILDING THE CHURCH"?

The Scripture-passage discussed in the first section (Ephesians 4:11-16) leaves no doubt whatsoever that, by the ministry or service of the saints, "the body of Christ is to be built up." For that upbuilding of the body every single member is called into action: "when each part is working properly, (it) makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love" (verse 16). Much may be lacking yet in this respect. Are all talents and gifts of the Spirit, given to each member (see I Corinthians 12) used, engaged? Should we not rather agree with Dr. John R.W. Stott, that "the biggest unemployment problem is found in the church"?

The question now is, whether this need for building up the body of Christ can, may, must be used *against* "winning or saving souls"? We may criticize the terminology, although the Bible does not hesitate to speak about "winning your soul" and "losing your soul." Fine with us, if one prefers to speak about confronting people with the Gospel, or bringing men to repentance, and to Christ. Is not "adding new stones to the building" also an "upbuilding of the body"? It may strike us that Paul in the first part of his letter to the Ephesians speaks more about that building of which Christ is the cornerstone (chapter 2:19-22), and in the second part about the body; and then combines the two in the expression, "building up the body of Christ."

We should not forget dilemma number four!

Suppose that all gifts and talents given to the church would be fully employed, would that not also have far-reaching results for "winning souls," if we may use that expression once more? We as believers are supposed to have our share of the love of Christ. Should we, then, not be deeply moved by the thought that, possibly, our colleague, our neighbour next door, is on his way to eternal darkness? Would not the stones speak, if we would keep our mouth shut because we are too busy with "building the church"?

We should not cut asunder what Christ has joined together. He taught us to pray, every day, "Thy Kingdom come," and with the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 48, we then pray, "preserve and increase Thy church." The more we stress "preserve," the more we should long for "increase." When (Acts 5) radical discipline is exercised by the death of Ananias and Sapphira, the first result is, "great fear came upon the whole church" (verse 11) — but the second result follows closely, "And more than ever believers were added to the Lord (not 'by the Lord' — we plan to come back to that) multitudes both of men and women" (verse 14).

One may hear "our (only) task is to keep the church pure, then we may expect that people who really want to serve the Lord, will be

attracted." We would like to wholly agree with this statement, and hope to say more about this too. Yet, this element of truth should not cause us to close our eyes for a different picture, presented by the church at Thessalonica. The apostle's praise for this church is that "the Word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, and your faith has gone everywhere, in the whole region" (I Thessalonians 1:8). Preservation and increase went hand in hand. How could it be otherwise, considering what the Saviour has said in His Sermon on the Mountain, Matthew 5: you are the light of the world, the salt of the earth; it cannot remain hidden?

Let's build the church! Let's keep it pure in the three marks that constitute a faithful church (Belgic Confession, Article 29). But the first mark is the pure preaching and proclamation of the Word of God. This preaching, when it really "equips the saints," will be multiplied when they take God's precious Word along on their way back home, and back to the job, and to whatever other contact they have with their fellow-men. That is also a mark of the True Church: "their faith goes everywhere."

If we cut asunder "preserve" and "increase," we may as well end up in becoming a stuffy company of people, a sect which scares people away rather than attracting them by "adding them to the Lord." (More will be said about this when we discuss the dilemma "sowing or harvesting.")