

united; they are related to the Missouri Synod, and cooperate with no one except — occasionally — fellow-Lutherans; two major religious movements of unique type, properly termed “sects”: Jehovah’s Witnesses and the New Apostolic Church.

The special dispensation of the Jehovah’s Witnesses is rather well-known. Professor Stroup of Brooklyn College has written an authoritative study of the movement¹; the German section adds nothing original except for a split — a Swiss personality led away a group and founded the Church of the Kingdom of God in the early 1920’s. Of special interest, perhaps, is the fact that — in part due to the peculiar situation Germany has been in since the war — the Jehovah’s Witnesses (who suffered terribly under Hitler, and are again undergoing imprisonment in the East Zone under the Communists) have a tremendous following. They have repeatedly called mass meetings with 12,000, 18,000, 22,000 in attendance. They claim half a million members in Germany; British “Religious Affairs” credited them with 300,000, while American “Religious Affairs” figured a minimum of 125,000 activists. Less familiar to us are the followers of the New Apostolic persuasion, who place alongside the Bible and preaching of the Word a special Apostolate form of governance. According to them the Church “fell” and lost the gifts of prophecy and tongues in part because it abandoned the New Testament governance by twelve Apostles, which they have restored. With a tight organization and strong expectation of the return of Christ, they have gathered 229,000 strongly disciplined members. Both of these movements rate as “sects,” precisely speaking, since they make secondary teachings central. For we may, with Professor Fritz Blanke, go so far as to accept the rule that whatever group makes anything other than Jesus Christ central to discipline and order is a “sect.” “Christ *and* — ”: that is the sectarian note.²

Propositions

We come again, then, to an attempt to formulate adequate definitions of “Church” and “Sect.” Quite evidently such formulation at this point must be tentative. One of the things learned in recent years has been

¹ STROUP, HERBERT H., *The Jehovah’s Witnesses* (Columbia University Press, 1945), N.Y.

² “Was sind Sekten?” — reprint from “Der Führerdienst,” Zwingli Verlag, Zürich, n. d., p. 4.

precisely that fact : to be tentative, indeed *hesitant*, about using words as heavily charged with emotion and explosive content as "THE Church" and "THAT Sect." But following this brief review of recent experience in another land, one where the shift from monochromatic pattern to pluralism highlights the issues more clearly than elsewhere, it might be possible to venture certain propositions :

1. A *Church* exists where Jesus Christ is recognized as Lord and Saviour, where a common life is fashioned under the governance of the Holy Spirit, where the major disciplines of the Apostolic Church obtain. On the other hand *sectarianism* commands where some other teaching, some novel or temporal restriction, some marginal rule, some other human personality, is made central and thereby usurps the place of the Divinity.

2. The *Church* is re-discovered in the midst of variety through prayerful discussion looking toward a consensus. For our dividedness is a common sin. A *sect* is a body which through pride or pretence will not participate in prayerful quest for guidance out of our sinful and offensive condition. Practically speaking, the authenticity of a religious body's universalism is evidenced by its relation to the Ecumenical Movement.

3. The *Church* in essence is unchanging and holds steadfast to the promise of His coming. It is a covenant which crosses cultural, racial, linguistic and national barriers, and also the line of life and death between generations (thus we confess "the communion of saints"). *Sectarianism* submits to the particularism, the provinciality, of nation or generation or cultural tradition, to the extent of making a diaphora definitive. This raises a serious doubt concerning establishments, whether national in limitation or socio-economic. The Free Church is *Church*, then, not because a spurious notion of natural freedom is injected into the congregation, but because she has the mobility to effect a more perfect obedience to her Lord.