THE MINISTRY TO PEOPLE IN THE MID 60'S

BY: M.J.V. SHAYER

I didn't resurrect Roy's letter until after I had thought so much about the assignment that I was reluctant to correct the title to the one suggested, but I don't think I am departing from his intention in persisting along the line I had started.

Therefore my title is The Ministry to People in the Mid 60's indicating two concerns.
1. The concern to see more clearly what the ministry to Persons is, which arises out of the conviction that here is a profound need, and
2. The concern to appreciate more fully the situation of the mid-20th century person, arising out of the conviction that this is radically unique.

The paper won't organize, logically. I find myself a product of McLuhan's age. What I want to say won't separate out 1 2 3 4 all in a row. What I find myself having to think won't break down into pieces. I find myself needing a mode of comprehension and expression in which many things are said at once. McLuhan's distinction between Iconic and Perspective art has been helpful here. When a child draws a horse, he knows it has four legs, so he draws four legs. He is right about the horse, but his picture is distorted. From a single point of view at a stopped point in time no horse has four legs. But this perspective point of view is an abstraction, it is detached. The Iconic form of art, analogous to the infant, invites your participation. It's not that you view a horse but that you have one. It's not a matter of observation but of participation. However it remains true that from the "stopped time" single point of view, the icon appears distorted.

What style the paper has then will be more similar to the Iconic than the Perspective varieties. It will depend heavily on images, epigrams, metaphors, which attempt to say several things at once. There will therefore be considerable distortion. The attempt to correct this distortion gives the paper its organization. It is divided into four sections. Each is a separate run at trying to say all at once what the ministry to people in 1965 is.

1. A description of what I think is being asked for, directly or indirectly by members of the academic community today.

2. An analysis of what I think is the moral situation in the academic community today.

3. The story of my personal theological pilgrimage over the past 15 years.

4. An attempt to articulate what is left of the Word that is addressable to people in the mid 60's. (There goes number one distortion).

These are four separate go's at trying to express and express the same matter. They are not meant to be a breakdown of the problem into four parts.

One more assumption should be confessed in this introduction. I assume that what is taking place in the academic community is about to happen in the whole community. I speak of the academic community, because it is the one I am in. But I think I am talking about a matter in which town and gown are not so different.
1. What Ministry are members of the academic community asking for?

I have felt increasingly, that members of the academic community, while becoming more and more unchurched, are crying out for a ministry of some kind. My first breakthrough on this came at a symposium on Marriage and Morality, held over a year ago on our campus. It became clear to me, through the talk about experimental marriages, and the irrelevance of puritan morality, that what generated the interest of most of the members was a genuine longing that sex and marriage mean something and a fear that they didn't and couldn't. On the one hand there was a rejection of the conventional ministry but on the other hand there was a cry that an aspect of existence, now lost, be somehow redeemed.

At an academic symposium last fall, three of us campus religious workers were thoroughly doused with the extreme secularism that is characteristic of this decade. First principles, an ordered universe, an ultimate anything - none of these were taken seriously. It was not only God that was a NOT O.K word, but also that transcendence was a not O.K. word. It made yesterday's task of stripping the Gospel of the excess baggage so it can reach contemporary man, look like a well-heeled safari. Towards the end of the Symposium, as its members risked more and more self-exposure, one of the prime exponents of this radical secularization, a sociology professor, exploded. "Look it matters to me that God is dead" - "See"! We heard this as both witness and a cry for a ministry. Can such a one not hear the "essential" Gospel?

Early last spring, the Dean of Arts at our University took his own life by leaping through the closed window of a room on the eleventh floor of a hospital. He was an extremely creative and highly qualified sociology professor. Everyone from the academic giants to the humble undergraduate loved him. While his academic and administrative qualifications were the highest, the quality chiefly acknowledged of him everywhere, was his compassion. At his memorial service, one of the speakers contributed an astonishing ten sentences. He was selected because he is one of the senior men in the Arts Faculty. He is head of the Philosophy Department at U.B.C. - which enjoys the reputation of being the most completely secular such department in all of Canada. His tribute went something like this.

"It's ironical that this should happen just at the time I am lecturing in one of my courses on the thought of Hobbes, - the 'Life is Nasty, brutish and short' school. I have always found Kaspar N. to be a man who incarnated an opposite view to this. I met him when he first came to our campus. I was troubled and we talked and talked. When I left him everything was fine, everything was wonderful. When he first became Dean of Arts, I was having trouble with my department. I went to see him and we talked and talked. When I left, everything was fine, everything was wonderful. Just two days ago, the day he went to hospital, I was having trouble with my department and I went to see him. We talked and talked, when I left everything was fine, everything was wonderful. Now Kaspar is gone. Where can I go? There has to be another Kaspar.

Here, before a most distinguished congregation and before undergraduates, this senior professor and head of a notorious department, declared "You can't run an academic community without a ministry!" The question is "what is the nature of the ministry he cried out for?"

This same cry was echoed at an S.C.M. advisory board meeting by a professor with a long S.C.M. history. He has given the appearance for years of being
a self-sufficient, well informed leading layman, prodding students and faculty on
to a well led attack on the anti-religious forces on the campus. We were talking
about the ministry to persons, and the presence or lack of it, and he let out his
cry.

"Where can you go for it? Who knows how to provide it?
One turns to one's colleagues, one turns to senior people in
one's department, one tries even the head of one's department
and no one can provide it."

What is being asked for here, by the very community that is so radically
and contentedly bereft of things religious? Can the Gospel still be heard as the
living word by such people - where they are? Is there an essence of Christianity
which is still relevant or will the essence be lost by the time you find a
ministry relevant to such people?

2. The Moral Situation on the Campus.

I include these observations on the moral climate at the university because
they may have the worth of pointing to the complex of dilemmas before us in the
topic "The Ministry to People in 1965."

A surprising number of our students are lost in an extreme kind of lostness.
I would be inclined to hold back on this observation had I not found it being
made in some form by a great many observers. People are writing about Identity
Diffusion and Delayed Adolescence. A U.B.C. sociologist detects a change in the
form of youth rebellion from political radicalism to an emphasis on personal
experience and an exploration of personal relationships. Youth seems to see
nothing in the public domain it wants to rebel against, or identify with. A
U. of T. survey reports that 75% of the student body feels despondent and
depressed, 8,000 lack confidence in themselves, 7,000 are concerned about the kind
of values they have, 4,000 feel close to a nervous breakdown.

Today's university student tends to be in a kind of limbo. I believe it to
be well described as a state of identity diffusion. It is no new thing for youth
to be in such a state. But I find the depth and persistence of its present form
to be unique.

The moral situation on the campus is an indication of this intensified
identity crises.

(i) There is plenty of straightforward misbehaviour, which is seen as
such and undertaken as such. While this presents a problem for the
church's ministry, it is one we have faced before, and one some of
us warm to, even if we don't always meet it effectively.

(ii) There is plenty of culture shock at finding that morality as taught,
and morality as lived in the public domain, are two different things.
This has always been one of the blows received in adolescence. The
Church has met this before and has even known how to cope with it.

(iii) There is a generous display of the necessary adolescent revolt - the
resisting and testing of inherited morality whereby one comes to find
out what he genuinely approves of, and what morality he shall make
his own. The church has often been aware of the nature of this prob-
lem and has not always treated it as if it were the same as outright
misbehaviour.
But many factors are conspiring to make today's moral crises much more radical. We are in times of rapid technological change with immeasurable social repercussions. The distance between the generations grows with increasing velocity. An interconfusion of cultural worlds, which up to now were isolated from one another, closes in about us. The fragmentation of the intellectual world into isolated disciplines, each with its own perspective, has destroyed any expectation that a single inclusive thought system can be found. We suffer a constant bombardment of conflicting opinions, none of which appear to be free of vested interest.

One could list reasons for a long time. But the fact is that many responsible young adults are thrust into a moral dilemma of unique depth. They are in the radical position of questioning the basis of all moral decision. Where does one stand while deciding where to stand? One is over an abyss. The only person who can consider such a spot of little consequence, is the person who has never been there.

How do you minister to people who are in such an identity crisis? For as Paul Goodman says in his book "Growing up Absurd", "It is hard to grow up in a society in which one's important problems are treated as non-existent, - it's impossible to belong to it, and it's hard to fight against it".

To treat the victims of this dilemma as though they were simply misbehaving, or as though they were in a regular type identity crises, is to treat them as though their problem didn't exist.

To approach this dilemma with a moral preaching which presupposes a Victorian doctrine of Man is to address a word to the situation which cannot be heard. Darwin, Marx, Freud and Einstein have all happened since then. We simply do not see ourselves as Victorian man saw himself.

I find that today's youth is crying out for a ministry but the trick is to know what the nature of such a ministry is.

3. The Story of My Personal Theological Pilgrimage.

Part of the story of what happened to me through the 50's and 60's is told here in the hope that it will help point to what the ministry to people is, in 1965.

I had been out of seminary eight years when the theological revolution struck my part of the world. This was an exciting time for me and the church. I had grown up in a liberal - evangelical - social gospel environment. The Neo-Orthodox revolution restored me first to my Reformation past and then to my Catholic past. Rejected Biblical concepts like sin and salvation, good news instead of good advice, came alive. The Doctrine of the Church, the priesthood, the Sacraments and the Word came alive. I can remember being completely puzzled at the seminary when one of the students asked our New Testament professor what Paul's Christology was. I came in the 50's to see the Christian Proclamation as nothing more nor less than Christology. I became excited about the preached and heard word.

The same thing was happening to many others. Theological dialogue and discussion raged creatively on all sides. The groups I participated in experienced
a series of transforming events. At least our preaching changed. We could hardly believe what we beheld whenever we dug an old sermon out of the barrel.

In the midst of this I got involved in the fringes of the student community. I was fascinated. Theological concern had put together a most exciting community. Not the campus rejects, but the campus leaders were involved. Top people were being drawn out of other disciplines into theology. There appeared to be a rush towards the ministry. Here was a redemptive community.

In the Fall of 1959 I came to U.B.C. I had no illusions about repeating what had taken place in the late 30's but I was expecting to repeat the great events of the 50's. It began to look as though it would come off. After two years a theological dialogue was under way but it didn't quite go right. I didn't find people rushing to identify. I found the whole identity question diffuse to a radical depth among undergraduates, graduates, theologues - the works.

I found the climate to be toughest on what might be labeled the rational theologians. These nearly cracked up in an age which mistrusted all reasoning as rationalizing. Even classical existentialism was not fragmentary enough for the climate. The theological talk I had once found exciting began to develop the disappointing habit of sounding irrelevant.

By the time I had stayed through a whole student generation I found that we had some of the elements of a redemptive community. A group of students and faculty had experienced the wounds of exposure and found the grace to bear one another, at profounder depth than I had ever experienced. Wondrous as this was I found that I could hardly call this community 100% redemptive, the intimacy we experienced was life-giving but it remained profoundly ambiguous. It was not free of destructive elements. Its members ate one another as well as blessed one another. I looked back in nostalgia to the student community I had known in the 50's.

About this time a friend of mine did the rounds of several of the members of this earlier community. Most of them were now hung up in some ambiguous way. They were in very much the same state as my current community.

For one wild short period I found myself longing for less intimacy - for the innocent fun-times of not knowing what was really going on with people. At this time I got involved with two friends my own age - a brother and a sister, at their father's funeral. The elderly man had been a minister of our church who for health reasons had to leave the ministry early in his career. I had long known how ambiguous the relationship with this parent had been. A fantastic amount of repressed hostility and ugliness had characterized it.

After the funeral I met with these two for a fantastic couple of hours. They were in torment because they had endured a funeral at which the ministry had been all sweetness and light. By ignoring the reality of this situation the church had cut off any ministry to these people. By being out of it the church had nothing to say to people who desperately needed a redemptive word and who were hopefully looking to the church for it.

This experience was timely for me. Mess or not, I knew I belonged in it rather than out of it. The peace of not knowing - was not the peace of the Gospel.
As a result of all this I am toying with several descriptive epigrams that I find risky but irresistible. Risky because they are prone to distortion, especially without the qualifying historical setting. But irresistible because what seeks expression can be expressed only in a mode that risks distortion.

About the community I have known lately I want to say, "It's either redemptive or it's real" - or perhaps a truer statement is the less extreme - "At the same time when a community becomes real it is both redemptive and destructive at the same time."

About the human relationships I have known, I want to say "They are either dead or they are murder" - or perhaps the truer statement is the less extreme - "When human relationships come alive they include murder."

I experience the human situation as much more radically ambiguous than ever before. It's a wilderness when you get to the real thing. Self knowledge and other-people-knowledge, when you abandon the pretend world are a wilderness.

This is the sharp new ambiguity. I don't find myself wishing that I didn't know it was wilderness. If that's how it is, it's great to know it. It's home. I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. People who don't know it's a wilderness bore me. I would find it soul-destroying to flee the wilderness for an unperceptive existence.

At the same time I find myself totally reluctant to push the uninitiated into the wilderness. I don't feel right about forcing such an awareness on the unaware.

And further, in an attempt to differentiate today's climate from that of a decade ago, I come up with the last of these epigrams. As compared with the former time, "For the wilderness, only silence is appropriate."


As I thought first of the organization of this paper I planned to divide this section into two parts. One to be concerned with the WORD to be ministered to the people who live in this 1965 climate I have attempted to understand. And the other to be concerned with the WORD to sustain him who would conduct such a ministry. But I soon found that I couldn't make this separation. Therefore what is to be discussed here is the WORD to us in 1965. I cannot differentiate between the WORD that is capable of reaching me and the WORD that is capable of reaching the world, for I am too much in the climate of this world to be separated out in any significant way.

It seems to me necessary to comment first on the matter of Ministerial style. Perhaps this is the observation I am most interested in making. The statement "For the wilderness, only silence is appropriate" is mostly a remark about style.

I was having coffee with a theologian's wife the other day in Union College dining room. She is a very perceptive person, doing her Masters in Sociology, who has even now a significant ministry with an odd assortment of 1965 people. The dining room was half filled with clergy attending the theological summer school. From all sides there came confident know-it-all-sounds. We both commented on it at the same time. These sounds had nothing to do with 1965.
This same girl had been hostess a few nights before, to several couples. One person present was a young minister's younger wife who was having mother-in-law trouble. It was specially acute for her because her religious history was that she had been saved under the lay ministry of a conservative evangelical and she-had expected to be free of these negative feelings. Another minister's wife present made some wise remarks out of her considerable knowledge. The hostess made a comment like "I haven't any idea what I'd do under your circumstances". Next morning it was the hostess the young wife phoned to make an appointment.

For the wilderness, if we are participants in it and not just observers of it, mostly silence is appropriate. If justification is by grace, then it's by grace and not good management. - If it's a gift - then it's a gift and we will receive it together.

The final comment on style is a quotation from the Italian writer I. Grazio Silone. In his book called "The Choice of Cowrods" he writes these words quoted in William Hamilton's The New Essence of Christianity.

"Anyhow I do not think I have the right to speak of faith, but only of a certain trust. This trust is founded and turns on something more than the compassion of Albert Camus. It is founded on the inner certainty that we are free and responsible, and it turns on the absolute need of finding a way towards the immost reality of other people. --- Humbly we must confess that we have no panacea, all we have - and it is a great deal - is this trust that makes it possible for us to go on living. The sky above is dark, and this small circle of light barely enables us to see where to place our feet for the next step.

This amounts to saying that the spiritual situations I have just described admits neither of defence nor of arrogance. Frankly it's merely an expedient. It resembles a refugee encampment in no-man's-land, an exposed makeshift encampment. What do you think refugees do from morning to night? They spend most of their time telling one another the story of their lives. The stories are anything but amusing, but they tell them to one another, really, in an effort to make themselves understood. As long as there remains a determination to understand and to share one's understanding with others, perhaps we need not altogether despair".

Did we not hear the anticipation of this in Richard Niebuhr's The Meaning of Revelation where he speaks of the necessity of the confessional stand in theology.

The closing remarks are concerned with the content of the WORD that may still be left to us. It sounds like we are off on a devastating reduction bust. But I am suggesting that it may rather be the shake-down of idolatrous trappings.

1. It seems to me that it can still be said that self-justification is a bust. This is a word that can still be heard. It's one version in which the Biblical doctrine of the Fall can still be heard. Wilderness dwellers can surely perceive the depth of the human predicament.
And this is a word we will never cease needing to hear. It is positively fantastic the places where self-justification does persistently appear.

This may be a modest version of Barth's wonderful understanding that the Living God is constantly saying NO GOD to all the God's of human invention. But it is a telling version none the less.

2. It seems to me that the Biblical concept of Call is still meaningful. I think it is the form the theological question is taking in our time. It may be all we have left to replace the no longer O.K. symbol GOD, but it is a telling replacement none the less.

Let me illustrate what I mean by reference to the identity diffusion we talked about in section 2. This moratorium on the identity pilgrimage may be an indication of weakness, or it may be prompted by a deep sense that to identify with any present offerings would betray something deeply meaningful to the person. Identity Diffusion may be no more than an escape from responsible adulthood. On the other hand it may be responsible search for authentic existence. The time in the wilderness may be flight, or it may be a genuine call. It may be the only thing he can really mean.

If a person is being bothered by the question of what he can really mean, he is being bothered by what sounds very much like the theological question. He is being bothered by a question which seeks the kind of answer which stands in relationship to him as that which grasps him. This sounds like a modest way of putting the doctrine of the Living Word, but it is a telling one none the less.

3. In the matter of the Ministry of this WORD, it seems to me that the proclamation that Christ is the hidden Lord of the Wilderness is still relevant, indeed especially so. It constitutes a call to BE there. To meet Him it is not a matter of conquering the World for Him as if being the means whereby the world can be itself.

The ministry remains, it seems to me, a matter of testing one another's call - of being the means to one another of discovering what we can really mean. What people can still use & still desperately need is other people who affirm their person while at the same time keeping the distance required to liberate their person.

4. And this is not a painless role. This abyss of identity diffusion requires a ministry of painful listening. To enter the abyss with a person who has no where to stand and who cannot decide where to stand, is to be confronted with a painful combination of welcome and rejection. "Stay with me while I rain blows on you". It sounds very much like the ministry of the Cross.

The intensified modern Identity crisis will require the ministry of small intimate groups, whose members know how to hear love - hate and can afford to enter the abyss with their fellow pilgrims - which sounds like a community of grace with its wilderness and exile motifs.

It seems to me that the story of Israel remains profoundly relevant and that it is exactly the Gospel ministry that is being called for. The dying and rising element in the Christian proclamation remains profoundly relevant, it seems to me, only somehow we are called at last to take it more seriously than ever before.
5. Finally, I find the eschatological dimension of the Gospel gains in relevance in our time.

The story of my life is that I have found that love alone makes the wilderness blossom. To betray love is to betray the only thing I can really mean, yet I find that I do betray it. I find that the only love I know is also a broken distorted thing. It devours and affirms those I love. I am monster and lover at the same time -- just and sinner at the same time. I find I can escape from neither absolute into the other and be alive in the real world. I find the Gospel Word of justification by Grace with its already-and-not-yet dimension profoundly relevant.

This makes me think that others of my contemporaries will find it relevant also. I now seem to have contradicted what I said about silence being appropriate to the Wilderness. But I can't quite go back on the former statement. Perhaps what I mean is that this is such a fantastic WORD that only God can say it, or perhaps what I suspect is that our times are such, that unlike other eras, we cannot get away with pretending that we possess it.

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Matabanick Inn,  
United Church University Chaplains Conference,  
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CAMPUS MORALS

Brother, are we moral?
But what does it mean?

By REV. JOHN SHAVER

That I have been a chaplain at UBC for six years is no justification for offering an article on the moral situation in the university. But that is no problem. The Ubyssy allocates a good percentage of space to moralizing articles, with just as little justification.

I do have a problem, however. How does one write an article on campus morals without sounding uprighteous? You see, I find uprighteousness not only unjustifiable, but also a crashing bore.

This sounds like a place to start.

UBC is frightfully uprighteous. This doesn't mean all the self-conscious misbehavior is wasted on me. It just doesn't fascinate me as much as unconscious uprighteousness.

The latter appears everywhere — in weirdle-beardles and anti-weirdle-beardles; in the forestry blank and in letters to the editor advocating both free sex and chastity; in rebels who are out to get stupid adults and adults who are to put kids in their place.

Brother, are we moral? But I don't find this kind of morality morally helpful.

Observation number two is related.

I find self-justification everywhere. Brother, are we interested in justifying ourselves? You name the place and it's going on.

Administrators, underlings, voters, non-voters, writers, coffee drinkers, drivers, hitch-hikers, top students, drop-outs, higher-ups, lower-downs, all jumpy about criticism, responding with the twin ploys of 'look-what-a-good-boy-am-I' and 'look-what-you-made-me-do.'

Nor do I find this morality very helpful. When you justify yourself, it's a bore, and when I do it, it's a bust.

There is one promising aspect of the moral situation.

I find a large percentage of university people are lost. They are experiencing a thing that can be called 'identity diffusion.'

Young adults are finding it harder to identify. Most present offerings look crummy. I find that a great many UBC people long to have their lives mean something.

They would like to have their student politics mean something, their sexual pleasures mean something, their going to jail mean something. But they can't mean any of the pompous phony pretentions some people seem to be hooked on. They have entered a perpetual 'identity pilgrimage.'

It's a wilderness, and it's not much fun. But it may be a very moral place to be.

Only, neither uprighteousness nor self-justification is much help in it. I don't see much of the kind of morality that would be much help. This is a kind of dialogue and mutual affirming of one another in which a person is permitted to discover what he can really mean.

In this respect I guess we are not very moral.