

IT SEEMS TO ME: PENETRATION—WITH WHAT?

by Charles C. Ryrie

■ ONE OF THE CONTEMPORARY calls to evangelicals is to penetrate the society in which we live. It is time, we are told, that the church abandon her isolation and diffuse herself throughout the societal structure of the day. We are told that what is needed is "a theology of culture and social concern." Supposedly this, coupled with up-to-date procedures, will bring a new reformation to our generation.

Penetration is right. No Christian should live within the confines of his spiritual clique — whether that clique be narrowly or broadly based. Our obligations to other people and the impossibility of living in isolation become increasingly apparent with each passing day and every achievement of man.

Social concern and up-to-date procedures are also right. The Bible plainly says: "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10), and it goes without saying that it is irrelevant to use out-of-date methods in carrying out the Great Commission.

But in this call to penetration, have we not ignored the most basic matter involved in it? *With what are we to penetrate our society?*

The answer of the Bible to this question is uncomplicated and to the point. We are to penetrate our culture with saints. And by saints I mean not simply believers in Christ but godly, sanctified, separated, fruitful Christians. When our Lord interpreted for His disciples the parable of the wheat and the tares, He plainly stated that the good seed which is sown into the world are "the children of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:38). Specifically, this means, therefore, that people, not programs or procedures, are what the Son of Man is sowing into the

world for a witness. Here is the scriptural pattern for penetration.

In the parable of the sower the Lord made the same point. Notice the Revised Version's translation of Matthew 13:19-23. The four kinds of seed are people who are sown into the world. He that is sown by the wayside is the shallow professing person whose interest in Christianity lasts but briefly.

He that is sown on rocky places is the unstable, emotional person who is stimulated only by external experiences and who has no inner roots. He that is sown among thorns is also unfruitful because his basic interests are in the things of the world and not in rescuing people from this world. His perspective being warped, his activity is misdirected, though likely he makes a show of serving the Lord among the rich of this world. But in the end, instead of penetrating that segment of society, he himself is overcome by it and because of this he loses his testimony.

But the fourth person is the one who not only hears and believes the Word of God but who bears fruit. This man *and only this one* has successfully penetrated his society. And what our generation needs is this same kind of penetration by *fruitful* Christians.

How is fruitfulness produced? Again the biblical answer is very simple. Fruitfulness is basically Christlikeness, and Christlikeness is produced by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Thus a fruitful Christian is one whose life is completely under the control of the Spirit. Spirit control is Spirit filling, and this concerns first and foremost the person, not a program or a plan. God is still seeking people who are

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yielded to Him in order to promote His work, though we seem these days to be seeking more clever promotional schemes in order to give God a helping hand.

When we face a need we call a committee meeting or a conference. We seek to probe the minds of men and fail to understand the mind of God. Perhaps the hue and cry for penetration is a defense mechanism against admitting our failure to do the basic job of being fruitful. And perhaps our failure is due to the church's promoting herself in the world instead of producing mature believers within her own ranks.

Penetration with what? God's answer is penetration with fruitful Christians.

But why are we not seeing this today? The answer is not difficult to find. It costs something to be a fruitful, Spirit-controlled Christian. It is comparatively simple to give yourself to a program. It is relatively easy to put your faith in a clever method someone else has invented and used successfully. It requires little personal commitment to become enmeshed in a mass movement.

But to stand alone as an oasis of light effectively penetrating the darkness of a neighborhood or an office costs wholehearted dedication to God, uncompromising standards of conduct, and rearrangement of the priorities of life.

This is costly, but it is the only route to effective penetration. END

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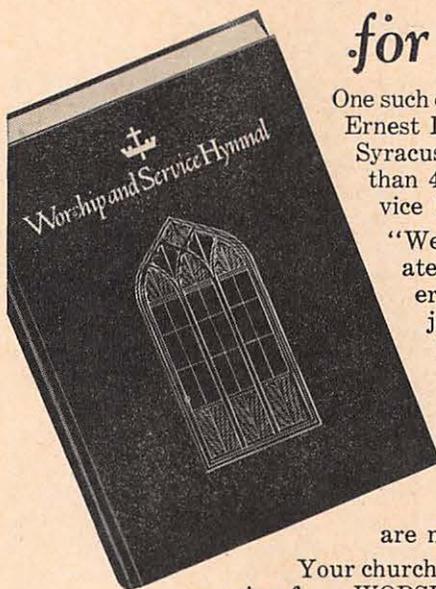
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