

"A STATEMENT OF FAITH"

INTRODUCTION

It seems altogether appropriate to share some thoughts with you regarding the new organ that we are dedicating this morning, and the place it will have in the life and ministry of our church in days to come. I felt it best to do this now before we share in the Litany and Prayer of Dedication.

My remarks, of course, are taking the place of a sermon or a meditation. This may please some of you, but lest others of you feel that you haven't been to church unless you hear a sermon, let me try to set you at ease by undergirding my remarks with a Biblical text. I would refer you to the 150th Psalm and to those lines read a few moments ago:

"Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary. Praise Him with trumpet sound; praise Him with lute and harp! Praise Him with timbrel and dance; praise Him with strings and pipe. Praise Him with sounding cymbals; praise Him with loud clashing cymbals. Praise the Lord!"

BACKGROUND

Those wonderful people of faith and of vision who built this church back in the mid 1920's believed in the text, in "praising the Lord" with sound. For it was on a cold winter, Sunday evening, at eight o'clock, on January 9th, 1927 that the members and friends of this parish came together for the dedication of the new Skinner organ. That Sunday morning they had met to dedicate this beautiful sanctuary. That night the organ was dedicated in a special service. Built by one of the finest organ companies of that day, the E. M. Skinner organ served our church well for forty-four years and four months. It was an excellent instrument.

However, the air of New York City was not kind to it. Unfortunately, in the mid 1950's, it became apparent that certain parts of the Skinner organ were deteriorating, and the major cause of this deterioration was air pollution. The air that was being blown through the pipes was causing the delicate leather membranes in the pipes to rot and disintegrate. In 1960, the Trustees of the church spent close to \$12,000 to have the leather in the organ renewed. But five years later, the problem again presented itself. The deterioration in other parts of the organ that had not been touched, as well as in those parts that had been renewed, was a cause of major concern. The Trustees of your church invited Dr. Robert Baker, of the School of Sacred Music of Union Seminary and one of the leading organ consultants in the country, to come over and examine the organ and share his wisdom with us on what should be done.

The question we faced was whether we should attempt further refurbishing of the old organ or think in terms of a new instrument. If a new organ, should we consider another pipe organ or should we change to an electronic organ. Our consultant advised us to not put more into the old instrument - it had seen its best day - but to think in terms of a new organ. After much talk among ourselves and a thorough examination of the electronic organ, we made the decision to install a new pipe organ. We wanted the real sound, a pipe organ that we would be proud of, one that would assist us in bring to the worship of God our very best.

I loved the sounds of the old Skinner organ, as did many of you. For close to fifteen years, I listened to it - Sunday after Sunday, many hours during the week day, too, as organists came in and practiced on it. I confess to you I felt

an emotional tug last Easter as we used it for the last time in a service in our church. We are creatures of sense - affected by what we see and the sounds we hear. And the sounds of that beautiful Skinner organ nourished my own inner life many times across the years and helped to prepare me for leading in this hour of divine worship.

There were those Sundays, however, when it let me down, those Sundays when I became somewhat upset, provoked by its temperamental ways, those Sundays when the organist would come to me at ten of eleven and say, "It's konked out again. I can't get it going". And more than once Mr. Merget came to our rescue and changed fuses behind the scenes as I was giving the call to worship at the back of the church. More than once, we had a Quaker service, too - without the sounds of the organ to lift us in our worship of God.

I was telling someone recently about the two most electrifying Sunday services I have experienced in this sanctuary. One of them, of course, was that Sunday in January of 1970 when without warning the doors opened and thirty supporters of the Young Lords came down the aisle chanting, "Power to the People", fists clenched and raised over their heads. Some of you remember the currents of electricity that flowed through the sanctuary as we were suddenly confronted in the middle of a quiet organ offertory. Our bass soloist was scheduled to sing a solo that Sunday at that point in the service, but he had a sore throat and didn't make it. No one went to sleep that Sunday.

The other Sunday that shook me was on Easter in the year 1958 when with a full church, full choir, the organ gave one mighty groan and went dead on us in the middle of a majestic Easter anthem. There aren't too many of you now who remember that Sunday. But I can still see our organist standing on the pedals, white as a sheet, flashing some face signals across to me which I didn't want to see, shaking his head and lifting his hands, trying to tell me the organ was dead. I remember the members of the choir and how stunned they were, not to speak of the congregation. Well, what do you say to an Easter congregation in a New York City church when the organ suddenly quits on you in the middle of a great anthem. I don't remember just what I said, but I do recall that I led the congregation in the singing of the doxology, and the two closing hymns.

NEW ORGAN About four years ago then we made the decision to go with a new pipe organ and we invited representatives of major organ companies to submit estimates on a list of specifications. Austin of Hartford, Mollner of Hagerstown, Maryland, Aeolian-Skinner of Boston, and the Schantz Organ Company of Ohio. Our organist, Mr. Woodside, was familiar with the Schantz organ Company and his enthusiasm for the Schantz Organ was helpful to us as we received the various estimates and compared the bids. Schantz gave us the lowest estimate and this was in part due to the fact that they were most anxious to place an organ in a New York City Church for demonstration purposes. We moved in their direction and placed the order three years ago this month.

We have been most pleased that we moved in their direction, for their guidance and helpfulness along the way has been outstanding to my way of thinking. For along the way we did face certain difficulties and had to make certain decisions. One such concern was whether we should have exposed organ pipes in the chancel above where the choir sits in order to improve the sound. We voted against it, and we're pleased we did. Mr Schantz himself said to me one Saturday afternoon three weeks ago that it was the right decision not to expose the pipes and lose the beauty of the present chancel.

The last six months have been difficult ones for us here in the church as we have made the necessary preparations for the new instrument. Walls in the organ chambers had to be washed, plastered in places, and painted three times. They had not been touched since 1926 and forty-four years of accumulated dust had to be cleaned out. New lighting had to be installed. A new AC line replacing the old DC line had to be run from the front of the basement to the rear of the Community Room. Four estimates from electrical contractors had to be received with a thousand dollars difference noted between the highest and lowest estimate. This sort of thing takes much of my time. A trap door had to be installed in the vestry room for better access to the organ chambers for tuning. The dummy pipes had to be removed. Pianos were moved. Scaffolding had to be erected in the chancel to help with the installation.

Last night, at six o'clock, the new Schantz organ was declared officially tuned and ready for use. Approved by our organ consultant, Dr. Baker, it is a magnificent instrument and will lead us in our "praise of the Lord" in this sanctuary. To give you some idea of the magnitude of the instrument, it has 39 ranks and each rank has 61 pipes - a total of 2,412 pipes. We have plans for its use - a dedicatory recital, hopefully some time between Thanksgiving and Christmas by our organist - an opportunity for you to hear this instrument in all of its brilliance and color and variety. It has a cathedral sound to me, and I hope, too, that we can share its majesty and splendor during the weekday, too, perhaps with Wednesday noon hour organ recitals for the community.

Certain people have worked long and hard for this day, for this new instrument, and should receive some word of commendation. I think of Mark Else, our former choir director and Lay Leader, who helped focus our attention on the gradual deterioration of the old organ and the need for a new instrument. Our former organist, Earl Weatherford, who passed away a year ago and who would have rejoiced over this occasion. He and our present organist have so skillfully covered over the inadequacies of the old instrument across these years. I think too of Mr. Paul Russell, Chairman of the Trustees, and Mr. Arthur Tower, Vice-chairman, for their contributions of time and effort in bringing us to this day. Also, for Mr. Woodside's unfailing helpfulness with the countless details of installation and his cheerfulness in keeping my spirits up through the six months of transition. To me, it has been well worth all we have been through.

WHY AN ORGAN

I think there is one question that some may have in their minds and I should like to touch upon it briefly this morning. Some may ask: why - in this day and age in which we live with so many pressing social problems and vast human needs - why should a Christian Church put so much into a new organ? Is it right? Can it be justified? Some in our society and in the church may say no, that it represents a luxury that the Christian Church has no right to consider in view of pressing social needs. Believe me, this is a question that I have had to wrestle with at many points across these past four years - a concern I have thought about, prayed about and had to find answers to myself. Let me share my thoughts with you in this regard.

A deeper question must be considered first: has man outgrown his need for worship? The answer to that question for myself is no - he has not outgrown his need for worship, he has not outgrown his need for God. Worship is one of the deep human responses we make to God for our creation, preservation, our redemption. The deep experience of worship is vital to man's wellbeing, vital in reminding him of certain things: his stature as a child of God, his responsibility for the needs of his fellow man.

We live in a time when the emphasis is on action, on social change. We are passing through a period when the pendulum has swung far out in the direction of social action, and it is so essential and so right that we continue to "fight the good fight" to rid society of the evils of injustice, war, and poverty which shackle the dignity and life of people. But let us also recognize that all of the good works, all of the humanitarian reform to which we give ourselves - that the entire scaffolding will collapse if it is not sustained by a strong center of faith and belief. The passion to do the works of God must be inspired and motivated and controlled by a strong and vibrant core of belief and this is what should happen in worship - worship, at its highest and best - to the mind and spirit of man.

Man has not outgrown his need for worship. The essential of a House of God, a sanctuary where we can come and "spirit with spirit can meet" is the presence of the Divine. Many sincere worshippers (and I am a part of this number) - many sincere worshippers require definite help from more than one of their five senses before they can come to realize that Presence, the Spirit of the Living God. We are creatures of sense - affected by what we hear, and by what we see. The ministry of music is a part of man's experience of worship. Our lives are enriched as we open them to the great sacred music of the past as well as of our own day. The organ is the foundation of that ministry of music. This is not to rule out other art forms and other mediums through which man's spiritual side can be reached.

The essential of the House of God is the presence of the Divine. Some find that presence under the arches of the forest, or by the majestic sea, or by the rays of the setting sun, in temples not made with human hands. But for the city dweller, for the masses of people who live in this urban center, the place of worship is vital, the sanctuary where people may come and have their spiritual energies renewed and refreshed, their horizons enlarged, their spirits significantly touched by great music, fellowship, preaching, art. I do not see the social agencies of our city duplicating or providing what the church through worship can and does provide. ~~And I think as time goes on, worship in sanctuaries made by the hands of man will become more significant than less.~~

Yes, this new organ is an expression of faith in the continuance of the worship of this church and its work and witness in this city for decades to come. We are privileged to be a part of this historic congregation that goes back some 137 years when a new, and exciting instrument of praise is being installed. Future generations will come here, listen and be lifted. As the editor of our parish newsheet "A Word in Edge Ways" put it several weeks ago:

"In a time when church attendance is declining and organized religion is coming under increasing criticism, it is indeed a statement of faith to install this new organ which will contribute so much to the worship in our church for at least the next fifty years".

We pray that it may be so. Shall we stand and share together in the litany of Dedication.