

## Preacher's Pen points

# A Surprising Statement



I was surprised when I read this statement from Mark Galli, the managing editor of the denominational publication “Christianity Today”:

*“Religion reporting during disasters seems, on the surface, to be a shot in the arm for the faith. There is lots of talk about churches offering food and shelter, of people praying, of the difference that faith makes in a crisis. But when you scratch below the surface, what’s being reported assumes an abysmal view of our faith.*

*We saw this again during Katrina and Rita. Many media made comments to the effect that on the first Sunday or two after the flooding in New Orleans, most churches didn’t meet for worship—and besides, they had urgent matters to attend to. As if worship of Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, is an elective in the life of faith. As if a disaster precludes people of God gathering to honor his sovereignty.*

*And when Christians did gather for worship and prayer, journalists inevitably cast the gathering as an exercise in social psychotherapy. People pray to receive “comfort and hope.” Worship helps victims deal with their feelings. And so on. Note to journalists: Prayer doesn’t comfort, God does. Worship is not about processing feelings but glorifying the Savior and Judge of all mankind.*

*The church may be flattered by such journalistic attention, but we should cringe instead. The media usually just cast the church in their own image, as a therapeutic organization that can really be useful in a disaster.*

*We need to work diligently to combat such a view, during and between disasters. The CT Library is one place to begin the reading to do just that. In these archives, we have a wealth of articles that show in a variety of ways how the church is more than a glorified social service agency, but the body of Christ in a world that needs not just relief but redemption.”*

### Distinctive Church Function in the NT

Galli’s thought-provoking comments may not be welcomed by the vast number of churches whose primary stress has been upon the social gospel concept of the church; but it is certainly in harmony with the NT presentation of the church of Christ. If we are to learn anything at all from the reports of the NT church’s example, it should be clear that NT congregations gave the highest priority to the proclamation of the message of redemption. They met in weekly assemblies to honor God in worship and to teach His word to both disciples and visitors who came among them (1 Cor. 14:24-25). They sent and supported those who could take the message of redemption to whole Roman world (Ac. 11:22ff; Phil. 4:15ff).

In the few recorded cases of benevolent relief, the funds collected and sent were clearly earmarked for the needy among saints (Ac. 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Even here we may safely presume that the objective was not solely to relieve the discomforts of the brethren, but to keep alive the mission of redemption by preserving its only messengers in this world (Phil. 1:21). These examples should guide us in formulating priorities for the church’s mission and work.

I have appreciated the loving response of Christians around the country to the needs of both brethren and unbelievers in the wake of these serious incidents; but Galli’s call to not lose our balance could also be especially important now. It is terrible to lose one’s possessions; but it is far worse to lose one’s soul. Only the church can keep that from happening; and only if it places the highest priority upon the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ! —Johnny Felker