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Draft Notice (Work Station Two)

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Gary B. Swanson

The 1941 Oscar-winning film, *Sergeant York*, released on the eve of World War II, recounts the story of Alvin C. York, the third of 11 children in an impoverished farming family in Tennessee. Drawing some details from his own personal diary and inventing others, it tells of York's checkered young life filled with paradoxical turns before notice of his draft into the military in World War I.

DRAFT NOTICE

Film and literature are replete with heroes who came from nowhere, who to all outward appearance had no significant strengths or skills, but who rose to singular and inspiring accomplishment. This is a theme that frequently brings box office success.

And it is an occasional phenomenon in the lives of everyday people throughout history as well. In fact, it occurs also in the New Testament.

Shortly after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, He was led into the wilderness to meet His direct confrontation with Satan's best efforts to lure Him from His mission. Satan's efforts failed.

When Jesus returned to Galilee, He began His ministry. It was time to draft a team.

On the shore of Galilee, He encountered two brothers, Simon and Andrew, actively engaged in their chosen profession: fishing. "Follow Me," Jesus called to them, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19).*

Simple. Direct. For Simon and Andrew, this was a draft notice. No

intentional use of persuasive techniques. No defense of such an abrupt assertion of authority. Just: “Follow me.”

And that is exactly what these two draftees did: “They immediately left their nets and followed Him” (vs. 20).

Much has been made in sermons and commentaries about the apparent lack of qualifications among these original 12 draftees. In fact, it has been said that there were negative qualities among these men that should have *disqualified* most of them from Jesus’ regime of discipleship.

As with so many of the other 4.7 million young men mobilized in the U.S. military in World War I, Alvin York could never have predicted the outcome to his involvement. Neither could the original disciples of Jesus have foreseen where their lives would lead them over the coming three years.

What this amounted to was three years of on-the-job training. There were lectures, assignments, evaluations. There was exhaustion, failure, misunderstanding, embarrassment, frustration, anger, disillusionment.

In short, the original Twelve didn’t have a clue about what they were signing on for. Right from the beginning, it seemed relatively plain what Jesus meant by “Follow me.” But it was going to be three years—and more—before they began to have an inkling what Jesus meant by the expression “fishers of men.”

For two millennia, Christians have had a very clear interpretation of what He meant. To fish for men is to proclaim the Good News to anyone willing to listen—and even, probably, to those *unwilling* to listen. The task and responsibility of fishers of men is best expressed by Jesus’ own elaboration—His own final command—near the end of His earthly ministry: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19, 20).

But even after He made this final command, He added a refinement to what He meant by fishers of men. In a sense, He was saying, “Once you’ve been fishing for a while, what do you do with your catch?” And His answer came in three variations: “Feed my lambs” (John 21:15); “Tend My sheep” (vs. 16); and “Feed My sheep” (vs. 17).

Earlier in their training, the disciples may well have expressed confusion over this last of His commands to them. Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry they’d been called to be fishermen. Now He was talking about them as shepherds. Was Jesus mixing metaphors here at the last minute?

Loving Jesus—and telling the world that they loved Jesus—was only a part of their role in discipleship. They were also to love one an-

other—and to care for one another’s welfare, both material and spiritual.

This was one of the more radical ideas that Jesus exemplified in His life. And one of the more difficult. It was easy to love Jesus: how could you *not*? But loving one another was something quite different.

And it may be that after Jesus’ ascension to heaven, this caring for the physical and spiritual lives of fellow disciples may have taken some getting used to. The Book of Acts suggests that there were some squabbling and hurt feelings as the new church began to get organized and set about its task. But there is also suggestion that the church was beginning to recognize its role as shepherd, too.

Generally, the New Testament was written for a Christian audience. It wasn’t primarily an evangelistic treatise. Only the Gospel of Matthew appears to have witness as one of its primary objectives: to claim among the Jewish people that Jesus was the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies in their own holy scriptures.

But the Gospel of Mark was intended for Gentile Christians; Luke was addressed to Theophilus, a new Gentile believer; John, it could be said, sought to defend the deity of

Jesus against heresies that were already arising within the Christian faith. Acts could be thought of as a historical narrative that sought to sustain belief among Christians themselves.

From there through the Epistles to John’s Revelation, the books of what we have today as the New Testament were addressed to Christians in various areas of the world. The intended readership for the great majority of the New Testament was primarily Christians—not pagans. “All Scripture is . . . profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). “Doctrine,” “reproof,” “correction,” “instruction”—these are words that pertain more to discipleship than to evangelism.

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, 20 is the marching orders for every draftee to the Christian cause. Some of these draftees will become notable heroes among the rank and file. But these marching orders are best expressed in two personifications: fishermen and shepherds. The life of each Christian must be an organic combination of both.

*All Scripture references in this column are cited from the New King James Version of the Bible.

