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Editorial

The most distressing fact of our time is that human suffering, poverty, violence and death, the oppression of the weak, racial discrimination and the marginalising of the dispossessed are escalating. Even in the beautiful city of Delhi where I live one quarter of the population now lives in depressing slum conditions and the proportion is expected to rise to 50% in the next decade. The enormous suffering of women, rich and poor, caught in the transition from traditional cultural values to those of modern secularised societies is painfully illustrated in the lead article of this issue by Daisy Nwachuku. Dr. Raj Bothra, advisor on AIDS to President Bush, recently stated 'If we don't wake up now, India will have ten million full-blown AIDS cases by the year 2000'.

Another disturbing fact of our time, at least for evangelical Christians, is that the majority of people now living are without Christ and without hope. The expectation of completing the task of world evangelisation by AD 2000 is naive and smacks of human triumphalism. It is an impossible ideal apart from the massive intervention of our Lord through the power of the Holy Spirit. The majority of the unevangelised—that is, those who have never heard the Gospel to the point of understanding that the crucified and risen Christ calls them to a decision for or against him—is increasing, not declining. The challenge to those with evangelical concerns is to realise the link between those two facts. The majority of the world's unevangelised are poor, oppressed and discriminated against and are adherents of other faiths or ideologies. In a graphic map of the 10/40 degree latitude window the AD 2000 Partners International show that three-quarters of the world's population is both poor and unevangelised. They live in what we continue to call the 'third world'. According to the US Census Bureau, the world's population will rise by more than 50% before the year 2020 and 83% of it will live in these so-called developing regions. Bangladesh well illustrates this point. It is the most densely populated country in the world and this density will double by the year 2020. It is one of the poorest countries in the world and has the highest infant mortality. It is predominantly Muslim and is one of the least evangelised nations of the world. Churches are fragmented into numerous denominations. The number of missionaries in terms of the population is minuscule.

We must conclude from this that the task of world evangelisation is only beginning, not nearing completion. But we are not discouraged. We have not lost heart. The Church in many of the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America is growing at a phenomenal rate. If this growth rate continues, then in the next 200–300 years, if [p. 228](#) the Lord's return is delayed, and we pray it will be, whole nations in the developing world will be more Christian than those in Europe have been throughout the last 2000 years of their evangelisation.

This issue of ERT explores the belief that this expansion will happen only when mission is seen and undertaken in a holistic understanding of the inter-relatedness of worship, witness, compassionate caring and social justice and when the Church of Jesus Christ, warts and all, is seen to be central to God's agenda for mission. In biblical terms, the Church is both the body of Christ made visible in the world and the gathered community of believers who manifest the transformed lifestyle of a new society. The Church is built on the teachings and lifestyles of the prophets and the apostles as spokespersons for God, and on Jesus Christ as the chief corner-stone. The Gospel of the Kingdom of God was central to Christ's mission and to that of the early Church. The New Testament amply evidences that where the Church is faithful to the Gospel it visibly demonstrates the coming of the Kingdom of God and is a signpost pointing people to the Kingdom and warning them against false doctrine and prophets.

The institutional structures of the Church, insofar as they are faithful to the Gospel, are part of the very nature of the Church itself, for the spirit does not exist independent of the body. We are converted to Christ and to his Church. Marshall McLuhan has

emphasised that the medium is the message; the vehicle by which the message is transmitted is part of the message itself. Thus the Gospel cannot be isolated from the lives of those who believe and proclaim it. The poor and the oppressed, when they have an opportunity to hear the Gospel, judge it by the lifestyle of those who proclaim it—their holiness, their love and compassion, their communal harmony and their ability to triumph over suffering and oppression. The Church's agenda is dependent upon God's agenda; ultimately it is the only meaningful agenda for people in despair. The Church as a transformed community is at its best the envy of the world. All the modern Hindu reform movements of India have attempted to create their own version of the Church and model their activities in terms of evangelism and social concern on the lifestyle of the Church. At its worst, the institutional Church is a stumbling-block to evangelism and a denial of the gospel. Central to God's mission in the world is the ongoing renewal and transformation of the Church by the Holy Spirit. Jesus' message to his Jewish listeners 'repent and believe the Gospel' is equally valid for the Christian community today.

People of other faiths and ideologies are very conscious of power encounter. A high percentage of converts to Christianity from other [p. 229](#) faiths occur as the direct result of people seeing that the power of God in Christ is greater than the power of their gods and spirits. Miracles of healing, prophecies and exorcism of evil spirits continue to be major proofs of the truth of the Gospels as they were in Christ's own ministry. Christ has given the Holy Spirit to empower his Church for such a mission in the world. Apart from this power, the Church is powerless and its vision and idealism fade. Parachurch agencies have been raised up by God to fulfil God's agenda where the Church has failed. Yet they are ever in danger of becoming *culs de sac* when they fail to integrate the fruit of their ministries into the Church and ignore their accountability to the Church.

It is a myth to think that people can exist as individuals in isolation from society. To live alone on a desert island is to be less than human. We all live in two concentric or overlapping circles of identity. We have a self-identity as individuals which is only authentic when we have an identity in God, for self-knowledge begins with a knowledge of God. We also have a social identity—family, clan, community, race and nationhood. These two identities are inseparable because we are psychosomatic beings created in the image of God, who is trinitarian in personhood; God created us to live in families and in community. Throughout the developing world the family as the decision-making body continues to take precedence over the individual. This has important significance for our message and our evangelistic methodology. In Asia, relationships always take priority over rational concepts. This interdependence of the individual and society is aptly illustrated in Jesus' summary of the law: to love God with all our being *and* to love our neighbour as ourselves. To debate at length the priorities of mission as being evangelism *or* social responsibility is to debate a false issue. It denies the nature of the Gospel itself. Jesus was never in tension over this debate. He responded to need whether spiritual or material. He disconcerted the religious leaders when he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven ... I tell you get up, take up your mat and go home'. The implications of this holistic understanding of God's agenda as worship, evangelism, compassionate service and social justice are important for understanding ourselves and our task.

Worship is at the heart of our relationship to God and to other believers. Authentic worship is a powerful evangelistic witness. Many non-Christian seekers watch Christian worship at a distance to discover whether Christians really know God and enter into communion with him. A *darshan* or vision of God is the chief motivation of every Hindu and of many other seekers. The Christian service of baptism, [p. 230](#) celebrating the Lord's Supper, performing a marriage, and conducting a funeral service are powerful signs and

symbols of the Gospel message. They are relational and concrete. They are the Gospel incarnate in life. For many they are more convincing than verbal proclamation.

Evangelism as the verbal witness to the Gospel is itself holistic for evangelism is seeking individual responses; but it is more than this. It is social in its method and goals. In third world situations it is nearly always communal. The family is the unit of society and in all decisionmaking processes. In the conversions recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, so often it is the whole family and a man's household who are converted and baptised.

In the context of the enormous amount of human suffering and oppression in the world, there is no substitute for compassionate caring for both the people of God and all who are suffering irrespective of race, social status or religious belief. Compassionate concern is the mark of true servanthood; it is our response of love to Him who first loved us. Service is not conditional upon results or on opportunities for evangelistic witness. It is our compulsive response to people in need. In many closed societies particularly in Islamic context, compassionate service may be the only form of witness possible. It is the parable of the Good Samaritan in modern dress.

Social justice begins with the prophetic rebuke of all forms of personal sin and institutionalised evil, and cannot be isolated from either compassionate caring or evangelism. The revival of the Social Gospel Movement launched a century ago is doomed to repeat its earlier failure if it is isolated from spiritual transformation. Economic reconstruction alone is no cure for the social ills of our age. Bribery, corruption and selfish greed are the fundamental causes of poverty. Marxism failed because it failed to transform human nature. Chou en Lai saw this in China four decades ago, but he had no gospel to offer to bring about this change. Similarly to resort to violence to achieve social justice is no solution, for violence begets violence. If we change the structures without changing relationships we only change one form of oppression for another, a mistake all too often being repeated in our time.

The creation of a compassionate and just community as a model for society is necessary, but is only a beginning. Commitment to God's agenda in the world calls for commitment to praxis. Liberation theologians are right in their emphasis on praxis, though we may not agree with their presuppositions and methods for achieving justice. Christ commissions us to be in the world but not of the world. [p. 231](#)

In the words of the recent *Lambeth Documents*, Mission is:

proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ;
teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers;
responding to need with loving service;
working to transform unjust structures. [p. 232](#)

Women in Africa in the Process of Adjustment and Change

Daisy N. Nwachuku

I met Dr. Daisy Nwachuku at a conference in Oxford last year and commissioned her to write an article on the situation of women in Africa and their role in Church and mission. Her penetrating insights into the suffering and oppression of women caught in the process of rapid social change are very disturbing, and call for a much deeper biblical and theological reflection and praxis than evangelicals are accustomed to. This article is only a sign post. Let the theologians respond in word and deed!

Editor

INTRODUCTION

Many factors have shaped the situation in Africa today. It must be emphasised right from the start that Africa is so diverse in its people, language, cultural heritage, traditional laws and customs, and differing stages of national development, that no African can claim to make authoritative statements for the whole of Africa. Even within the same geographical region of north-south, east-west dichotomies, being Christian, Muslim, of Africa religion and also considering colonial history of who colonized who, for how long, when independence was granted, and how—all these factors penetrate into the whole fabric of life and the situation of the people today. Therefore, the term ‘The African’ is always ambiguous except when used within a specific context and relativity. Within this frame of reference, we shall then examine people in Africa in their contexts; remembering that when one talks of women’s issues, this complex situation becomes even more so!

I will address myself to situations which I believe are fairly common and exist only in patriarchal communities, because life is very different in matriachal societies. Even within this limitation there are bound to be variations. We shall adopt the life story method, drawing issues for analysis from the real life contexts of the case studies presented. This will guard against the obvious error of overgeneralization. The analysis and interpretations will be given as a point [p. 233](#) of view, leaving enough room for people to make their own interpretations in dialogue. Not long ago, a woman in her late 40s talked with me in Lagos, Nigeria’s largest city. Our conversation lasted more than an hour, and her main concern was why she should not be allowed by her husband and her in-laws to own her own property. Since she is a lawyer, I concluded that her preoccupation over property rights was an indirect effect of her profession on her private life. However, despite strong opinions expressed against customary practices and traditional structures, the fundamental issues underlying her concern were female oppression, denial of inheritance rights, general denial of fundamental human rights on gender basis and general downgrading of women. But what were her alternatives, I asked her? ‘I must fight, and continue to fight on these issues’, she said. Using her professional expertise, she was determined to press for change in legislation on gender equality. But how much could she achieve from her office?

I. CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS IN STRUCTURAL CHANGES

Women, children and the old are always the first group to be protected during a crisis. The concept of weakness upon which this security is provided, good as it seems, is unfortunately the same concept that has led to structurally in-built barriers and prejudices against the very group meant to be protected. Although women, children, the aged and minority ethnic groups share the same social concerns worldwide, attention will be focused on women in this paper.

Change presupposes a recognizable difference from a previous state, variation from an established standard or a substitute of one for another. Rather than seek to maintain

the status quo, change digresses, diversifies, dilutes or even diffuses in order to incorporate new features and drop or replace old ones. In other words, the phenomenon of change actually undermines the status quo in order to establish a new order, a new state of affairs and a new status quo. This chain of events calls for a complementary process of adjustment relative to the needs of the organism affected in the re-ordering process. Where the adjustment is positive, growth and progress results; where negative, the result is either regression or disintegration leading to chaos.

The paradox and perhaps the dilemma of the present situation for the woman in Africa is that while society is fast changing its structures in principle, yet in practice, the same society expects the powerless minorities (women, children, the aged and minority ethnic groups) to remain unchanged in their traditionally prescribed roles and functions. [p. 234](#) Consequently, what results is dynamic structural change on the one hand, in tension with systemic rôles prescription ingrained in the old structure on the other hand. At best, most of the old rôles are recycled in new patterns of communication, interpreted and conveyed as usual, from the dominant 'powerful' pace setters to the subordinate 'powerless' recipients of social, political, economic and religious interpretations. Therefore, since men are the dominant group in patriarchal communities, more often than not they interpret situations to their advantage, perhaps inadvertently rather than deliberately, even in a changed order.

In this state of conflict and tension, adjustment to the new emerging structures causes great pain. Both the powerful and the powerless come under great rôle strain. In effect, greater pain is faced by the powerless who are threatened by rôle sanctions. In order to rebalance the status quo without resolving the conflict, what happens in reality is that the pain of the powerful gets diffused, hidden or disguised into several behavioural response strategies, some of which carry within them death-delivering symbols. We shall give two examples to illustrate the seriousness of this mechanism.

Firstly, universal franchise is a political, structural change in Africa that has granted women voting rights in principle. But in reality women are prevented from exercising this human right by religious rôle interpretations given by men in Muslim ethnic groups. To act otherwise is out of norm with the behavioural expectations in the Muslim community of faith to which the woman belongs. A persistent defiance of the old norm in order to use her new rights leads to alienation and possibly ostracism.

Secondly, the introduction of universal primary education is a social, structural change which grants the right of education and full development to every child. This principle is upheld presently in every African nation. But in reality, social preference favours the male child in a patriarchal community whenever the need arises for a decision on which of the children gets education in the face of low family income. In the majority of cases female educational opportunity is sacrificed to the male, especially in poor families. This decision is forced to be made in a fairly predictable male preference due to the system of inheritance (primarily land and cash crop property) and also due to the compulsive need to maintain the continuity of the family genealogy among the ethnic group, thus perpetuating the life of the community.

The male-female preference has been a sociological factor grossly misinterpreted and misunderstood by foreign anthropologists. The crucial issue which Western anthropologists fail to understand is that [p. 235](#) Africa is community-oriented as opposed to city orientation. Even with modern urbanization, communities have survived and thrive along ethnic lines which foreign anthropologists describe as 'tribal'. This is a misnomer that distorts the concept of life and community which African ethnicity holds onto. A destabilisation of continuity of life by any factor of change becomes a potential

threat of annihilation of a community; hence, single life, single parenthood, and widowhood are perceived as social threats and resisted as vehemently as are epidemics.

In a few extreme cases, a young female African, especially from a poor family, may defy the rôle boundaries, break loose from tradition, escape into the city, and resort to disguised prostitution to pay her way through education in the belief that paper qualifications will enhance her employment opportunities. This adjustment process in turn earns her the social stigma of being of low morality. The female in response turns her back on the community and seeks marriage far from home. Adjustment in this case leads to broken lives and fragmented communities.

In general, the fate of a young woman in Africa today, whether from a poor or rich family, is embedded in structural tensions that exact costs. Choosing to be purely traditional implies a detachment from the irrevocable change processes around her. Choosing to be modern calls for contending with emerging foreign lifestyles which are alien to her roots and frowned on in her community among the very people she seeks to be fully accepted by as a person of worth and integrity. In this dilemma, most women in Africa adopt what we may call in this discussion 'a synthesis approach' to adjustment.

Adjustment by synthesis is laden with risks of survival, approval or condemnation. It would be highly presumptive if not totally erroneous to believe that the burden of adjustments to change falls only on women. Both men and women face this responsibility. However, coming from a perception and feeling of powerlessness in terms of who prescribes rôles in the society and for whom, the burden of adjustment to social change falls more heavily on women. Very often the impact of contradictions faced by women in developing countries as they strive to adjust is ignored or marginalized.

II. IDENTIFIABLE CASE STUDIES

We shall now turn to real life stories of women under adjustment. There are four distinct categories into which many women in many African countries fit. We shall highlight each category with an **P. 236** identified life story. Although sharp lines cannot be drawn in certain areas of commonality yet, certain characteristics are unique with each of the four life situations. We shall examine the life story of Nkema who is an archetype; Ema, Ugo and Mazuka who are prototypes of Nkema.

The Vulnerability of Poor Women Under Adjustment in Female-Headed Households

Nkema's Story:

We visited Nkema. The story of her life—what we saw and heard from her account—struck us with amazement, horror, challenge and admiration for her courage, faith and hope of survival. Nkema is a 42 year old widow. She has six children, two boys and four girls, and they live in a mud house belonging to her late husband in a semi-rural village in the eastern part of Nigeria. She is a member of one of the pentecostal churches in her village.

During the rainy season which lasts for six months, her three rooms are flooded due to a completely worn out thatched roof. She and her children sit or sleep on raised platforms made out of wooden logs until the floors dry. Since most young men who engage in thatch-making have left the village for the cities, rural housing now makes use of zinc roofing in the place of thatch. Nkema can afford neither the cost of thatch nor the exorbitant price of zinc.

In a patriachal community, it is essential to provide her son with good economic standing, since he is the hope of the family survival both in economy and progeny. She

was thus compelled to pledge all available property as collateral to Credit Union to pay his way through primary school. In order to provide him with a trade, Nkema gave away her third daughter aged eight, as a pawn to a rich mistress in the city, from whom she raised the necessary loan to pay for her son's apprenticeship in cabinet making. Her first daughter had to drop out of school to assist her brother's schooling. The second daughter, frightened of her mother's and sister's plight, dropped out of school (since that would eventually be her fate anyway), and, desirous to escape from the vicious circle of poverty in the family, she eloped with a young man to the city where both now engage in street hawking. She already had three children at the time of the interview, at age twentytwo. As she is not formally married, the future of the three children born while co-habiting is questionable since the young man can decide to reject her and her children and choose his actual bride with whom to raise a 'proper family'. In effect, the stress faced by this young p. 237 mother because of her adjustment strategy is worse than her mother's. She has no claim to a married home, no security of kindred or lineage for her children and no dignity among her own people because she brought her kinsfolk to shame by consenting to elope with a man without formal marriage. She seems to be a failure already and her future is a great source of added worry to her mother.

As a woman, Nkema has no rights to property ownership, especially family lands. Her status of widowhood (symbolically referred to among this ethnic group as 'the woman with shaven head' or 'woman in black') limits human rights to the barest minimum because traditionally she is now 'mute'. The loss of a husband was equivalent to loss of voice amongst her kinsfolk. Her right of speech could be restored if she has an adult male child. But at the time of her husband's death, her two sons were minors and administration of her family land reverted to the overall head of the extended family. Reclaiming the portion that belongs to her husband could be done by her first-born son at adulthood. However, such cases can result in grim rivalries between grandsons, cousins and uncles, often ending with protracted law suits. Meanwhile Nkema's alternative is to depend on the mercy of the family head for a piece of land for farming. She subsidises whatever she gets by purchasing other plots as a 'share-cropper'. In addition, she and her children work as daily farm labourers to rich landlords or as casual labourers, carrying mortar and bricks at building sites.

Nkema's situation of poverty and vulnerability became more stressful due to her refusal to enter into 'Levirate Marriage' with her late husband's next of kin as a sign of acceptance of continued male security within the family circle. This assertion of her right to self-determination earned her unsympathetic disregard and neglect. Her little boy, last of the six, at seven years of age faces spasmodic primary schooling which gets interrupted whenever he goes to help out in the farm or stays home to help in food processing. Gradually, he lost interest completely after only two years of schooling. Besides, the little boy feels frustrated at his teachers' harassment over coming to school with no textbooks, no writing materials, poorly fed and with no school uniform.

For Kkema and her children, life is one long gruelling struggle. Their day starts as early as five o'clock either on the farms or construction sites and ends as late as ten at night with late meals. Working between 15 and 17 hours daily, six days a week, their food is routinely starch with poor soup. Economic survival looks hopeless as she experiences her son's lack of access to a start-off credit with which to set up the much expected cottage cabinet business. From time to time, she p. 238 looks up to the sky searching for God. In her own words she said, 'I wonder if God really hears the cry of people like me? But then who else have I, if not God?' With these words of assurance, she lives on from day-to-day with hope of eventual deliverance.

Nkema is representative of millions of female-headed households of the rural African poor who are mostly women, children and young jobless adults. The most vulnerable, poorest of the poor among this group can be found among widows.

In reference to women in Africa in general who belong to this category, it is estimated that more than 100 million of the population of Nigeria are women. Some countries in Southern Africa would have a higher percentage due to men's deaths in the civil wars, for example in Angola. Within the population of women, about 80% still live in rural areas and 60–70% are engaged in agriculture. These women, even the non-widows, work very hard to maintain their families either through farming, petty trading or through street vending, carrying heavy loads on their heads and walking miles daily to earn a living. Added to the onus of finding bread, the women and their children have to walk miles in search of drinking water and cooking fuel. Back home at night, the gruelling tasks of labour-intensive food processing for the next day, cooking for the night meal, serving, bathing the little ones and washing the dishes still rest traditionally with the woman and her children. Thus, the average working hours for this category of woman range from 15–17 hours daily except for Sundays. Several recent studies have indicated that this common fate befalls many women in Asia also. (Ogbuagu, 1990; Commonwealth Studies, 1989; Mohammed, 1987; Ode, 1990; Nigeria Population Bureau, 1986; Women Under Racism, 1990; and Women of Africa Speak Out, 1989.)

Women in Conflict under Adjustment

Ema's Story:

Ema, 35 years old, lives in a city of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. She is a medical doctor, married with four children. Her husband is an accountant in the city bank. As they were married late due to prolonged schooling, their oldest child is eight and in primary school with their second child. The other two are in a nursery school. All the four children attend high fee-paying private schools which takes a heavy toll of family earnings.

Ema spends long and hectic hours at the hospital. After office hours, she engages in private practice and has registered for professional p. 239 examinations in paediatrics. Torn between the hospital, her private clinic, her study and her anxiety to qualify as a consultant paediatrician, her marriage relationship comes under great tensions very often, which drives her to seek therapy in a family counselling clinic. Healthwise, stress of over-work is beginning to show in her blood pressure even at the age of 35.

Ema's internal conflict gradually heightened due to the increase of the hospital management board's harassment of her either to succeed in the professional examination or be thrown out from the teaching hospital. At home, the insufficiency of income to match the family lifestyle has caused a drop in their eating and other standards.

As an immediate coping strategem, her car was 'grounded' on agreement between the couple that the two would use her husband's car in order to cut down on costs. However, this adjustment measure has led to predictable quarrels over whose time schedule controls the car. Her husband, as a banker, habitually comes home late at night after the books are balanced. Ema's frequent emergency calls back to the hospital create long absences. Their children are neglected by the couple due to work. Her husband and the children feel abandoned while they are home and she is out, and they complain bitterly. Ema feels torn apart by working hard for the comfort of everybody and yet faces severe and unsympathetic criticism of her self-sacrificing efforts to be a hard working, good wife and mother. Finally she decided to abandon her career interest and ambition to become a pediatric consultant and drops the idea of examination in order to salvage her marriage. In principle this meant loss of her job at the teaching hospital. Taking up a fresh job as a general practitioner at a state general hospital left her feeling unfulfilled in her career.

Meanwhile, Ema's husband faces a 'promotion freeze' at the bank due to the national economic Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The economic programme was adopted to meet the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions imposed to combat Nigeria's debt crisis. The burden of the family's economic crisis falls on Ema as the home manager. In order to keep the children in private schools, Ema takes up family cottage poultry.

As a medical doctor, she was able to get her employer to sign as collateral for an agricultural loan to start the poultry. This additional, income-generating project puts further stress on her own personal welfare and has increased the family work load. Her husband does not feel obliged to help out, either with the poultry or with domestic chores since he believes that all these are traditionally women's work.

There is also a lingering unresolved issue of what percentage of [p. 240](#) Ema's salary and the proceeds from her poultry should be turned over to her husband as the head of the family. Ema does not mind turning over the money but demands proper accounting of the family finances. Her husband feels it is not traditionally acceptable for a wife to demand such rights from her husband in the home. The in-laws encourage him to 'be a man' in his own home irrespective of his wife's status. This interference adds to the subtle tension. Ema still has to worry about paying back the agricultural loan.

Caught up in the dilemma of worker, wife, mother, conflict and stress in running a home which is in neither African nor Western life style, and a frustrated career future, Ema lives with modern tensions and the stresses of her times. To women like Nkema, Ema, a 'woman-doctor' appears to be privileged with education, status, power, wealth and a good life. But to Ema, life seems as questionable as it is to Nkema with the same old 'woman stories' recycled in new patterns. As a woman in Africa who has embraced change fully, Ema is caught in a double bind. She seems not to have properly accepted as well as organized for the traditional expectations made on her as a woman whose place is in the home; a producer, mother and community organizer on the one hand, she seems almost strangled by the demands of modernization, profession and attainment on the other. She lives in the continuous conflict of being appreciated as a wife of status, a mother of children and a community organizer ready to cure all diseases; and yet, severely criticised for having so much power and autonomy as a wife! Ema's personal life, welfare, marriage, time and income all come under daily pressure of adjustment.

Much of the same story can be told of thousands of Africa's growing middle class of literate, professional women now in all walks of life in the cities and villages. While they seem to have embraced change, they also share the same traditional fate with the rest of women. Such dilemmas cast a spell of looming frustrations on this class of women which condemns them to continuous readjustment.

Crisis of Upper Class Women Under Political Change

Stories of Ugo and Mazuku:

Between the extremities of life experienced by Nkema in the rural, informal sector and Ema in the urban, formal labour sector we see several variations.

Ugo

Ugo, a 35 year old wife of a company director in Nigeria has two little [p. 241](#) children and is a full-time housewife. Born in a rich family and married by a rich man, she is refused the right to work in the belief that she does not need to slave for a meagre salary, although she holds a Bachelor of Arts degree. She and her children are well provided for and the domestic chores are done by paid company staff.

However, Ugo has an identity crisis in being reduced to consumer status all her life in an age when her peers are making their mark on national history in all areas of life. She therefore secretly seeks therapy on how to deal with self-awareness, self assertiveness, value clarification, sense of worth and how to recapture and protect her integrity. She feels extremely westernized to a point of nostalgia for the life of simple folk in her village, with less protocol. The political instability in her country adds to her stress because she fears that if there were another *coup d'état*, surely her husband would be among those executed or arrested.

Her husband cannot understand Ugo's state of boredom. He considers her ungrateful and her fears irrational. He cannot tolerate the implications of a working wife who neglects home, rushes out of the house in the mornings and returns late in the evenings. He also has great conflicts over a woman who could feel that she is a breadwinner which empowers her to contend for rights, power and authority in rivalry with her husband in the home. His slogan is 'behind a successful man there is a woman, never in front of him'. Although he is an engineer, his concept of male-female headship remains traditionally African and non-negotiable.

Ugo has no sympathy from either her parents or peers who fail to understand her. At the time of the interview she had withdrawn into self-alienation and was under great fear, anxiety and stress. Her marital relationship was under unspoken tension and her life seemed crushed by a great sense of power and money overshadowing her, and she was burdened as to how to cope with her own sense of powerlessness which no-one else could understand.

Ugo represents women in the few millionaire and upper-class families who are faced with the struggle of being both traditional Africans and westernized elite with great financial power among the masses of their poor, illiterate and hungry village kinsfolk. The contradictions of blessings and crisis keep them in constant search for a more acceptable lifestyle. The rising number of divorce cases in Africa come from Ema and Ugo's class.

Mazuku

Mazuku differs from the other three women. She is 40 years old, from [p. 242](#) one of the southern African countries, single, mother of a teenage daughter and chief executive of one of the international companies in her country. Her life story flows from her experiences in the political struggles of her country, especially between the black majority and white minority. She grew up in black reservations, bitter towards racism and rebellious against association with white governments. Yet, one of her puzzles is that her two best friends in life are her two white teachers, one in the high school and the other in the university. She said in deep reflection, 'I know it is the racist system I hate, not people.' (The book *Women Under Racism* narrates several life stories of women from all over the world similar to Mazuku).

Mazuku is also bitter towards her own people because of the way the guerrilla soldiers brutalized the local, defenceless women and forced them to provide the food and clothing needed to sustain the guerrilla operations. She hates the slogan, 'Forward with the cooking stick' as being the only way women's war efforts were remembered after independence. 'They did more than cooking', she said, 'but men find it hard to let women share any credit.'

She remained single because most men, her peers, died during the war of liberation. She talks lovingly of the young widows whose husbands were war victims. She felt she needed a child of her own and so had just one daughter; she did not consider the relationship would make a good marriage and so ended it. She has sworn to fight some aspects of her culture and of the new social changes which she believes are oppressive to women, such as the concept that a woman is incomplete and cannot be remembered as

an ancestor if she has not married or has no children; the statutory law that forbids child adoption by a single woman and the African attitude that despises adoption as an alternative for a childless couple.

She finds a puzzling challenge in the return of the younger generation to spiritism and ritualistic sacrifices of cleansing from blood, a strong old African purificatory rite performed for a young man who took part in bloodshed in any war. She admits that Christianity has not quite succeeded in breaking through to change African spirituality totally.

Politically, professionally and socially well placed, in a position of leadership, Mazuku sees her situation as that of providing models for the young generation of women in transition in her country. Her joys derive from the strength in the African women to cope with life in the presence of severe adversities. But her tensions and tasks are found in her fight against lingering cultural attitudes and practices of oppression and exploitation of women, political wars, racist attitudes, and even p. 243 oppression of women by other women. Mazuku represents thousands of Africa's women today who are both victims and beneficiaries of political, economic and social changes of a continent in transition.

III. WOMEN IN TRANSITION

Our Stories

We can each find ourselves and our stories in these four women. Each of the four categories is also symbolic of the many facets of life and change a female child born in Africa today is most likely to face. Nkema symbolises the courage and fortitude among the masses of illiterate rural and urban slum women who seem to survive from day to day in situations that might prove unbearable to others. Ema typifies the majority of the literate, professional, self-aware and powerful class who have both financial and communication powers; and have competitively gone into the labour force, vigorously combining all the basic roles of producer, mother, home manager and community organizer. Ugo's struggles highlight the ambivalence of African affluence of the old style among chiefs and rich landlords and the new elitist financier in the Western style. Mazuku incorporates innovations that modern female adjustment and change introduce which would have been social taboos in the Africa of old, struggling in public power sharing, questioning the old order and yet clinging to it in fear of loosening roots.

Collectively, women in Africa today are in transition. This means women in poverty as well as wealth, in illiteracy and education, women oppressed and women oppressors, admired as well as hated, women in war and peace, in power and powerless, and women in freedom as well as in bondage. We might perhaps be better called women in paradox situations. Our collective stories therefore present complexities that call for closer analysis.

Our Collective Adjustment Strategies

Historically, women taking action collectively against social injustice is not new to Africa, at least not new as the past few decades have projected it within the context of Western feminism. Without acting under the nomenclature of 'feminism', African women as a group possess enormous social and political power to exert great political and social changes. In this collective capacity they function as effective community organizers and builders. The Aba Women's Riot which led to the Women's War of 1929 succeeded in nullifying the British p. 244 imposition of poll tax on unemployed women (Nwagwru 1973, Akpan, E. O. and Ekpa, V. L. 1988), and the Zimbabwe rural women guerrillas who

helped to bring black majority rule are good examples. The traditional strategy of collective response also includes support teams for collective labour, financial help, teams such as childbirth assistance teams, bereavement teams etc. Joys and crises are collectively shared and people like Nkema draw great survival strength from this system.

This indigenous adjustment strategy has evolved in recent times into several women's action networks, non-governmental groups (NGOs), economic co-operatives, credit union groups, professional groups and even women's evangelistic groups. Some of these are formed on ethnic, social, religious, economic or professional commonalities. Irrespective of their basis of formation, they all have one common goal of action, to support the need for women to speak with one voice, to resist negative changes and to make demands for improvements through political religious and social pressure, lobbying, media propaganda, protest marches and dialogue. Some of these actions are well documented (Women in Nigeria, (WIN) document 1989; All Africa Conference of Churches Continental Conference (AACC), 1989); World Council of Churches (WCC); Women's Decade Links; and Oxfam's GADU). In many African countries these network groups have become a strong negotiating force in both government and church.

Our Individual Adjustment Strategies

In addition to collective response to social changes, there has also been widespread sharing of self-help strategies among rural and urban women in solidarity. The following are some highlights.

Team bulk purchases of groceries which maximise savings.

Neighbourhood cold storage systems where wealthier women in a neighbourhood make their refrigerators available to poorer or younger women to store their food. This kind of help strengthens the support system and builds a community.

Free public seminars organised by support groups on women's health issues such as causes of cancer, maternal mortality, home management, budgeting, new adaptable recipes, creativity and inventiveness to combat the negative effects of income cuts on family health, nutrition and social amenities.

Personal readjustment of welfare, preference, refurbishing of cars [p. 245](#) and wardrobes instead of buying new ones, in order to ensure family survival.

Women in Search of Clarity

There is need for society as a whole and women themselves in particular, to re-examine the nature of the struggle in Africa and the alternatives being suggested.

Whereas some women feel they have never been in bondage and so do not understand women's fight for freedom, others feel that what they need is help to enable them to cope with the social and technological changes which confront them. Yet other women see adjustment as part of a life process, which needs no special ability other than to grow with the times.

The growing complexity of perception and opinion among women themselves on the nature of the issues calls for clarity. Part of the lack of unison in women's voices across the board springs from the unclear distinction between what is expected of a truly modern African as opposed to a traditional African. Working out the dynamics of this distinction (or possibly a synthesis) and resolving the split personality into wholeness is perhaps the most crucial issue facing women in Africa today. This process carries with it political, economic, social, religious and psychological costs which have been vividly exemplified in our case studies.

A second issue for re-consideration is that of 'power sharing', which lies at the root of all struggle against injustice. African men and women need to re-examine these questions: Who holds the power?

Do those who hold the power use it to assist the powerless to rise to their full human potential?

Are the powerful willing to share their power?

In what proportion and in what areas?

Are the currently powerless willing to let go the pains of the past and rise to build together a future healthier society?

As community builders, the goal for women in Africa should be to press for changes which have both male and female aspects. If the case has been made against a male dominated society, tilting the pendulum towards female domination would be a counter-productive adjustment strategy. Therefore, in pursuing women's issues, a balance is needed and should be sought.

A Nigerian woman University Vice-Chancellor, Grace Alele Williams (1990:13) summarises the issue of balance thus: [p. 246](#)

Our society, like most progressive societies, must seek harmony in the home and in the community, on the basis of complementary rôles between men and women ... The problem of freedom which is the main task of history whether of an ethnic minority or of a religious group or even women, is a question of unequal relationship to social life. A progressive society is one which is neutral to all its constituent elements and that accords them the same rights and opportunities. The Nigerian woman must continue her uphill task to contribute fully to the development of Nigerian society.

IV. PASTORAL CARE FOR WOMEN IN AFRICA

The pastoral response of the African Church to women in Africa has a history of treading a deliberately cautious path, not wanting to rock the male-female boat (which is usually captained by men). In this situation, pastoral response has at times been in solidarity with women against social injustice. But at other times, pastoral response has evaded issues when, as a caring ministry, it should have spoken out or acted. Sadly, there is a yet worse situation, when pastoral care has colluded with sexist, traditional sanctions and customs. (For example, its present position on the ordination of women.) Therefore it has to be said that pastoral response to women's issues in Africa has been greatly conditioned by the social climate.

There is need for a much more clearly defined and committed line of action. The launching of the WCC decade of churches in solidarity with women in several dioceses has helped to bring about a more focused and committed effort by the Church to deal with women's issues. So long as human rights deprivation and social injustice against women on any scale continues, pastoral care in Africa owes the Christian community active assistance in dealing with what still remains in society of oppressive attitudes to women.

Pastoral care can play two effective roles at this stage.

Firstly, the Church needs to step up its former supportive role by continuing its crusade against remaining change-resistant, death-delivering structures by speaking out loud and clear from the pulpit. Sermons that seek to refine the identified customs and improve them for a healthier community would then enable pastoral care to address such issues practically. Practical actions from church care teams would in turn empower and encourage women in their efforts to make changes.

Secondly, in the present situation of heightened social tension between male dominated systems, and female demands for either reordering, [p. 247](#) reversals, or

inclusion, pastoral care should act as the 'enabler' of both men and women towards healing and wholeness in one community. By adopting this rôle, pastoral care would foster complementarity and peaceful co-existence. This process of adjustment involves both sexes, and leads to the building of a new community of faith where both men and women are truly themselves in the image of God, joint-heirs of God through Christ and partners in grace through faith ([Romans 8:17](#), [1 Peter 3:7](#)).

A holistic stewardship of care, fostered by pastoral care ministry would recreate new and positive male-female images and symbolism in the language and thought pattern of the new community which is today emerging from Africa's current transitional period. It will, in effect, forestall in the new African society, the unnecessary extremes to which sexist rivalries, arguments and debates in contemporary male-female relationships have been driven in the modern world.

Pastoral response in Africa will fall short of its responsibility if it does not empower the poor (in this case, women), to become the subjects of their own action rather than to remain objects of action and concern by the powerful (in this case, men).

Partners in a Community of Faith

The task of building a complementary, holistic community of men and women in African relative to the modern age is not entirely an African affair. We live in one world which continues to undergo change with international connections. Adjustments can be made more easily if we live mindful of the global situation.

So long as the international debt crisis remains a burden on the developing countries, especially the poor nations of Africa, so long as pollution, global warming and earth impoverishment are on the increase, so long as despotic African military leaders and rival regimes continue to be armed by the Western powers and the political and new trade alliances of the post cold war era and new economic order continue as if there were no victims involved, women of the world, especially women in Africa, will continue to face threatened and shortened life spans in their survival adjustments. It has become critical, in fact, essential for us, in our North—South mission partnership, to remind ourselves that we all have one common, holistic stewardship as God's people. We women from the poor nations of Africa need constantly to remind you, our brothers and sisters in the industrialized nations of the North, to draw fresh and deeper insights as how your political, economic, social and religious p. 248 decisions, as well as actions, intentionally or unintentionally affect us in the South, especially the poor, 'nameless' and 'faceless' rural masses of women and their growing children. Very often, a well-intended decision in the industrialized North can result in greater poverty and social injustice for the women in the South. Here are three examples to make this point clearer:

1. Contraceptives are shipped to Asia and Africa and are then distributed to rural women who do not trouble to get regular check-ups, and do not understand the full implications of health hazards. This has resulted in increased incidence of cancer and maternal mortality.
2. The use of farming technology appropriate to Western agriculture instead of technology appropriate to both large and small scale farming in Africa has resulted in the marginalization of small scale women subsistence farmers. It has also led to retrenchment in large factories where women are first to be made redundant because they are less skilled in the use of machinery.
3. The IMF debt and loan conditions placed upon debtor nations through Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) lead to retrenchment or wage freezes for husbands. This has invariably put heavier burdens on women, whose lot it is to put

bread on the table to feed many mouths. Being closest to their hungry children, women come under severe emotional traumas in these poor homes.

As partners in a global community of faith, we need to re-examine the changes and decisions made in our countries, to see how these affect our brethren and sisters in other countries. We must make real life physical and spiritual inter-connections with one another.

While we remind you of these issues as part of our joint stewardship, we do expect that you will also remind us in Africa continuously to rise to our own destiny, not in the western, fixated lifestyle and mind-set, but to continue in our adjustment efforts as Africans responding to changes in our own social context. Our culture abhors male-female confrontations, and we have kept this in constant view. Our adjustment challenges therefore are such that as women in transitional period, we must tread our path cautiously, seeking, through meaningful and friendly dialogue, co-existence and complementary rôles, a re-ordering of our present societies into fairer and more just structures. As a community-oriented people, we seek to continue our adjustment processes without being reactionarily confrontative or disruptive of the home stability which is already in a volatile situation. Through firm and [p. 249](#) yet peaceful means we must continue to address the issues that still adversely affect us in such a way that the emotional health of life in our communities will continue to develop positively and progressively in a wholesome direction.

CONCLUSION

Women in Africa believe that a continued process of male-female dialogue on change and adjustment issues of our times, no matter how long it might take, is the only sure process that will directly and effectively combat the issues of female poverty, marginalization, stereotyping, deprivation of social rights and general downgrading which are still endemic in our societies today.

Since change and adjustment are universal phenomena, and women's issues are also of universal concern, you need us in Africa to share our life stories, and we need you in Europe to share your own stories too. That is to say, we need each other in a newly emerging mission partnership in the community of faith through Christ, as we learn together from sharing as partners one faith, one mission of adjustment in our changing world.

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Seeing, Judging and Acting: Evangelism in Jesus' Way according to John 9

Guillermo Cook

In June 1979 I returned to Costa Rica to work with CELEP, the Latin American Evangelical Centre for Pastoral Studies, after several years of ministry in Brazil. The CELEP Board and Staff met at the Methodist Centre in Alajuela to evaluate their work and to plan for the future. I had just been named Assistant to the General Director, Orlando Costas, and he had asked me to lead one of the devotional sessions. I remember quite well the text I chose ([John 9:16](#)) 'Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided' (NIV). Just a day or two earlier, in my private devotions, I had noticed an interesting fact in a text I had read perhaps a hundred times before.

The Pharisees were divided into two groups. The group which obviously made up the majority judged the healing of the blind man from birth on the basis of their legalistic doctrine and condemned Jesus. What was probably a minority group, judging from the final outcome, judged the event on the basis of the deed itself, from its *praxis*, and refused to be rushed into making a negative verdict. Throughout history there have been two ways of evaluating the Church's actions, and of those who profess the Name of Jesus Christ. The 'top down' (or deductive) approach is to take refuge in the safety of doctrinal propositions. But working 'from the bottom up', one starts from a concrete situation and works inductively toward what may turn out to be a risky and potentially controversial conclusion. This qualitative difference in interpretation has always divided the Church, and accounts for most heresies. As a matter of fact, the division is false, because theory and practice are inseparable and should always be maintained in dynamic tension.

Because of the positive response from my CELEP teammates on that occasion long ago, I felt motivated to study the entire chapter within its own context. Over the years I have had the opportunity to exegete the chapter and to preach and teach from it in an expository way. What [p. 252](#) follows is an attempt to set down more formally my reflections on [John 9](#). I do so in memory of my dear brother, mentor and former colleague in ministry, Orlando Enrique Costas. For it was he who encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies and who inspired me to interpret the Word of God from a missiological and pastoral¹ point of view, with Latin America as my starting point.

THE GENERAL CONTEXT OF THE PASSAGE

Compared to the other Evangelists, John is rather sparing with his narratives about Jesus's ministry. We can be fairly certain that he has not recorded this unique story simply to add an account of Jesus' healing power which did not appear in the Synoptics. Above all, the Apostle seems to have had a pedagogical reason for giving us his Gospel, and this dramatic story: he wanted to confront doctrinal and practical problems that were beginning to vex the Asian churches toward the end of the first century. As is well known, dualistic heresies were placing either the humanity or the divinity of Jesus in doubt. Above all, gnosticism in its various forms was propounding esoteric theories whose symbols were truth and falsehood, light and darkness. John confronts these heresies throughout the entire Gospel by giving new and liberating meaning to the symbolic language of the gnostics.

[John 9](#) presents a multifaceted incident the purpose of which is to emphasise both Jesus' divinity and humanity. He presents seven interconnected dialogues—confrontations or crises—that are different responses to the evangelistic action of Jesus. Underlying each encounter is a fundamental question: What is *truth* and what is *falsehood*? And how can one really *know*, that is, discern between the two? Basically, this story is a kind of parable about 'walking in the light' as opposed to being 'in darkness'—two sides of an important theme in John's writings.

John's narrative method could not be more radical. He introduces us to a Jesus who raises difficult issues concerning the basic attitudes of satisfied professional religionists. Yet Jesus is not the principal character in this story. He appears only in the Prologue and the Epilogue, setting [p. 253](#) the stage and then presenting the moral conclusions of the drama, as in a Greek play. John shows us how an 'ordinary' or 'common' believer—poor, physically disabled, illiterate and barred from the fellowship of his religion—is capable of judging and confounding the knowledge of sophisticated theologians. This has a lot of significance for us today, when many of our own presuppositions are being challenged by the poor and dispossessed. We are also living in an era when 'First World' missions are being called into question by the Two-Thirds World.

'Seeing, judging and acting' became known a decade or two ago as a Catholic Action method of analysis to be applied to social and historical phenomena, and the Church's response to them. Without losing sight of its original purpose, I propose to use this method as a paradigm for effective evangelization. Simply put, we will attempt to discover how each one of the actors in this unique story *see*, *judge*, and *act* when faced with the need of a wretched human being and with the indisputable act of his healing by Jesus. In this study, *seeing*, *judging*, and *acting* will be related, respectively, to the kerygmatic dimensions of proclamation, judgment, and commitment to a specific mode of action.

¹ The term *pastoral* in Latin America is used not as a static adjective denoting a professional action, but as a dynamic noun/adjective. E. Costas defined 'pastoral' as 'everything that the church does on behalf of the world in the name of Jesus Christ.'

Seeing has to do with our perception of the divine revelation, in the person of Jesus Christ and in those in whom He chooses to be manifest. *Judging* in this passage has the sense of *krisis*, or *krima*, Greek cognates whose roots communicate the idea of sifting, of provoking a profound re-evaluation of our fond presuppositions, of confronting us with radical new options. Evangelism in Jesus' way brings about crisis, shakes things up, corrects our errors, refutes our false assumptions, illuminates contradictions. Jesus Christ forces us to take positions. *Judging* is the axis around which both seeing and acting turn. To judge without then acting is like being suspended in a hot air balloon, above the fray. *Acting* requires making choices. It is to commit oneself to Jesus Christ and to His mission, or to turn one's back on Him.

With these criteria in mind, let us analyze the passage. The text we shall use is the New International Version.

THE FIRST CRISIS: A THEORETICAL PROBLEM VS A CHALLENGE TO ACTION (Vv. 1-7)

'As he went along, he [Jesus] saw a man blind from his birth.' Jesus *saw* (that is looked with attention at) a man who was considered to be less than a full person by the religious people of his day. In some cases, he P. 254 was excluded from the blessings of the Covenant. The disciples however, instead of seeing a needy person, look upon him as a mere object of curiosity and of theological speculation. They pose a problem to Jesus: 'Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Their question neatly avoids the main issue before them. It is another way of posing the question of the lawyer in [Lk. 10:29](#): 'Who is my neighbour?'. Today Christians avoid commitment when they ask such questions as, 'Who are the poor?', or 'What comes first, evangelism or social action?' Theological discussions abstract the problems that surround us at every turn and they allow us to evade the responsibility of an authentic commitment to people in need. Because the disciples could not see, they judged the situation poorly, and in consequence, lost the opportunity of acting.

Jesus, however, focuses his disciples' attention on the real issue. The blind man is before them to be served, and so that God's will might be manifest in him. Now, while it is yet day, it is necessary to do the work of God, because at night one cannot work. It is significant that the account begins with a juxtaposition of light and darkness: 'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world,' says Jesus. It is here that we find the purpose of this story: to clear away the darkness of falsehood and to illuminate our hearts with the truth of God. Here and in the rest of this passage we shall see that the persons who are the most in need of God's light are those who profess to be His followers! It is a humbling thought.

Our Lord immediately acts in response to the blind man's needs. But he resorts to a practice which, from our perspective, might seem rather unsanitary, not to say repugnant. This is not the first time that Jesus mixes dirt and his saliva to make mud to anoint the eyes of a blind person ([Mk. 8:22, 23](#)). He did the same thing with the tongue of a deaf-mute ([Mk. 7:33](#)). Why did Jesus do this? We can only speculate. But it was a method which was used by popular healers in His day. In antiquity it was believed, not without reason, that saliva had curative powers (although rabbinic writers also pronounced saliva impure). In this way Jesus identifies with the popular culture and confronts the religious culture of His day. Without having to do so, He communicates His love through the vehicle of popular medicine. At the same time, he identifies Himself gratuitously with Jewish ceremonial practices when He sends the blind man to the pool of Siloam, whose waters were used for purification rites. He does not reject the customs of the common people. Instead, He

transforms them into instruments of His love. What does this have to say to our own attitudes toward the ‘superstitious’ beliefs of the people to whom we witness? [p. 255](#)

THE SECOND CRISIS: INDECISION VS INTEGRITY (VV. 8–13)

A life transformed by God is worth more than a thousand evangelistic sermons. The former blind man is now at centre stage and the object of many questions. Are you or are you not the same man whom we knew before, the one who begged by the side of the road? Who healed you? Interestingly enough, the man’s reply hinges entirely on actions and not at all on speculations. ‘The man they *call* Jesus *made* some mud and *put* it on my eyes. He *told* me to *go* to Siloam and *wash*. So I *went* and *washed*, and then I *could see*’. This verb-filled explanation is graphic and descriptive. These are the words of a simple man, unaccustomed to speculation, whose life is measured in terms of actions and their consequences. Yet, though his neighbours saw the evidence of a changed life before them, not all of them believed, perhaps because they were blinded by their religious presuppositions. The presence of a once blind man in their midst has become a matter of judgement, that is of crisis. But their action is inconclusive because of their fear of the religious authorities, to whom they will now turn over their neighbour.

THE THIRD CRISIS: SABBATH AND SHALOM (VV. 14–17)

In God’s plan the Sabbath and the Shalom are inseparable. The Sabbath was more than a weekly day off from work. It was meant to be rest for God’s entire creation—His people, the animals and the land. The Jubilee Year—liberty to the captives and lands returned to their original owners—was intended to communicate Shalom in the realms of work, natural resource conservation and of social relations, as well as at the level of our relationship to God. These are all anticipations of the Shalom of the Kingdom, which is peace, well-being, health and salvation. The sabbatical law, however, was never truly observed according to the divine intention. Because of her rebellion, Israel never entered into the rest of Shalom ([Heb. 3:11](#), [18](#) & [4:1–11](#)). Instead of being a double symbol of integral liberation, the Sabbath and the Shalom were in crisis—that is in contradiction—in Jesus’ time.

Let us return to the hero of our story. He is totally alone. Jesus and His disciples have left him. His neighbours have thrown him to the religious wolves. Yet, alone though he is, our man has become a stumbling block, a sign of *krisis* to everyone around him. In this brief section we find the key focuses of attention which give meaning to the [p. 256](#) entire story. As we saw at the beginning, the Pharisees are divided between theory and practice. Both they and the disciples are faced with only two options: their own doctrinal-cultural tradition or the well-being (Shalom) of a needy person.

Today throughout the world evangelism is poised between these two poles. For the Pharisees the problem is the Sabbath. It is more than a day of rest. It is their entire value system, on which hinges their religious beliefs, status, and division of labour, which they themselves control. The Pharisees cannot permit their tradition to be broken for the simple reason that they cannot afford to lose their control over the minds and hearts of the people.

The majority faction of the Pharisees, therefore, are not looking at a person who has just been healed. Rather, they perceive a threat to the integrity of the law (their traditions) and to their own authority. So they question the blind man repeatedly about what has

happened to him. They are seeking to confuse him, but he doesn't fall into their trap, which frustrates them all the more. Significantly, the once blind man's first answer to his inquisitors is much more brief than that which he shared with his neighbours. It is an attitude of awe which is proper for an unlettered person who feels uncomfortable in the presence of the heavy hand of the law. It is at this point that division arises in the heart of the Council. We find here the same contradictions between theory and practice with which we began this study. A majority of the religious leaders base their conclusions upon tried and true doctrinal presuppositions ('This man is not from God for he does not keep the Sabbath', v. [16a](#)). Meanwhile, a minority starts from the fact of the healing and works back inductively to the proposition, 'How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?' (v. [16b](#)).

When the ex-blind man responds to a second interrogation, he makes a daring judgement about the identity of his benefactor. 'He is a prophet', he states. This does not satisfy the Pharisees. Their theory forces them to declare that the Healer is an imposter and the healing a hoax. So they now turn to the man's parents in the hope of finding a way out. But this is not to be.

THE FOURTH CRISIS: STATUS VS SOLIDARITY (VV. 18-23)

The parents' testimony on behalf of their son was indispensable if the Pharisees were to accept or reject out of hand the transformation in the life of the blind man. Nevertheless, even though the parents have [P. 257](#) before them irrefutable proof of the work of God in their son's body, he is also for them a sign of contradiction—of crisis—so they neatly pass the buck. Such is the absolute power of their religious tradition that they judge it more important to maintain their status within the synagogue than to demonstrate practical solidarity with their own son. How did he receive his sight? Ask him! He is of age.

THE FIFTH CRISIS: TRADITION VS WITNESS (V. 34)

The inquest begins again. The time for a pious verdict has arrived. 'Give glory to God; we know this man is a sinner.' Period. Tradition, with all of the weight of the law behind it has given its verdict. There is nothing more to say, or so the Pharisees believe. But our man certainly has much to say. He refuses to be cowed. Surprisingly, he has lost his timidity, because he has a vital testimony to share. 'Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know (I am not a theologian like you folk). One thing I do know. I was blind, but now I see!' Period. The crisis has come to a head. An irresistible force faces an immovable object. Who will yield? It seems that neither of the two will.

Momentarily taken aback, the Pharisees counter attack. Holy tradition cannot allow itself to be defeated. So they repeat their interrogation, doubtless hoping to catch him in an incriminating contradiction. But the once blind man does not let himself be frightened. Much to the contrary. This simple and illiterate man loses patience with the learned doctors of the law. He answers them with more than a tinge of irony: 'I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?'

What an interesting spectacle! These proud religious leaders lose their tempers. They are reduced to insults, a weapon of desperation (they would act worse later, spitting on and slapping the Master). They brag like little boys in a schoolyard. 'You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses!' (or perhaps today of the four Johns—the Baptist, Calvin, Wesley, Wimber?). 'We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we

don't even know where he comes from.' Pedigree, it seems, and theological credentials were the name of the game even in Jesus' day!

At that crucial moment the man who had been blind demonstrates unexpected qualities. He is both stubborn and a competent theologian—as every Christian can be who has to defend his faith in the face of the sceptics. While the editorial hand of the Evangelist is probably in [p. 258](#) evidence in this passage, here we have an example of what has been rightly called 'the wisdom of the people'. Listen to him! 'Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that He doesn't listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does His will. nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. If this were not from God, he could do nothing' (vv. 30–33). The man who at first must have felt incapable of getting involved in theological speculations (v. 25) ends up by making a masterful defence of the person and mission of Jesus. On the other hand, the Pharisees, their religious pride wounded, and concerned about maintaining their authority, can find no alternative left to them but to get rid of the once blind man. 'Correct doctrine' is incapable of accepting an evident fact that contradicts its 'assured propositions.'

Let us pause briefly to review the plot of this drama from two diametrically opposed points of view. From their positions of high authority, the Pharisees haughtily saw, judged, and acted, driven by the logic of death. First they attempted to undermine *the fact* of the blind man's healing. When their scheme failed, they tried to discredit the author of the miracle. When all of this proved to be to no avail, they were forced to get rid of the person who was healed. Progressively and inevitably, the religious leaders of Judah rejected the healing, the healer and the healed. This is the road that is always followed by religious people who refuse to recognise the work of God when it threatens their interests and contradicts their iron-bound presuppositions. When the logic of life confronts victoriously the logic of death, the lords of death have no other recourse than to get rid of those who personify life. The rejection was total and eloquent. 'You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!' And they threw him out of the synagogue (he had barely attained the right to be readmitted after his healing, and now he is cast out!) In the religious culture of his day, this was a form of assassination. For them the blind man had ceased to exist. He was worthless. The scum of the earth. Organized religion has robbed this poor man of his personhood, making him officially less than human.

On the other hand, from what has been called 'the underside of history,' a powerless person was growing in courage and in his capacity to reflect and to respond courageously. His straightforward theology flowed naturally from his own life experience with Jesus Christ, and not the other way around, as is the case with much of our doctrine today. He having confused his accusers and wounded their pride, they had no other alternative but to get rid of him. [p. 259](#)

THE SIXTH CRISIS: DEHUMANIZATION VS HUMANIZATION (VV. 35–38)

Just at the moment when our man is totally rejected—by his neighbours, his parents, the religious establishment—Jesus reappears on the scene, ready to act in his favour. Although for the Pharisees this man is unimportant (he is sub-human), Jesus gives him back his humanity when He makes him the centre of all His attention. He searches him out and He challenges him. 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' Moving beyond the theological content of the question we have to discern a profound communications event. In Jesus's question there is acceptance of this man's humanity, of his inherent capacity to launch upon the adventure of faith. In fact, the very 'abandonment' of the blind man by Jesus is,

at the heart, a recognition of his value as a human being—of the possibilities for spiritual maturation and theological reflection that are in him as a creature of God.

How different is the once blind man's attitude towards Jesus from that of the other actors in this story! His reply to the challenge of Jesus Christ is characterized by simplicity, worship and faith. 'Tell me so that I might believe in Him.' It is as if he were saying: 'You do not have to make a theological exposition, Master I don't need an explanation about the identity of the Son of Man, based upon Ezekiel and Daniel. I will believe in Him if you tell me who He is.' Even though it is unspectacular, the self-revelation of Jesus to the man born blind is worthy of comparison with the epiphany of the Burning Bush and with the manifestations of the risen Christ. 'You have seen him'. (How and when, Lord? Didn't you leave before I recovered my sight?) In fact, he is the one speaking with you.' Jesus revealed Himself as the Christ, the anointed of God, to a person who not long before had been thrown into the trash bin of history, as far as the Jewish leaders were concerned. Kneeling before Christ, the man exclaims, 'Lord, I believe.'

The story could have ended here. Jesus has *seen* the blind man. He has *judged* his situation, and has *acted* in his favour. One more person has been incorporated into the kingdom of God. Jesus' evangelistic method has proved to be a success. Nevertheless, this is not the end of the story. Our Lord has yet a lesson to teach to the religious leaders. Because, as Plutarco Bonilla has said, 'The miracles [of Jesus] are also parables.'

THE SEVENTH CRISIS: THE TABLES ARE TURNED (VV. 38–41)

Jesus throws down the gauntlet. 'For judgment (*krima*) I have come **P. 260** into this world.' At the beginning of the account Jesus had declared to His disciples, 'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world' (v. **5**). Now He is saying that this light is more than mere illumination. It is crisis; it is judgment, which at one and the same time dissipates the darkness of ignorance and blinds with its brilliance those who think they can see. 'I have come ... so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind' (v. **39**).

The Pharisees, who follow Jesus' every move, rightly guess that He is alluding to them. 'What? Are we blind too?' Jesus's answer is sharp and to the point. In effect, He is saying to them, if the shoe fits, gentlemen, put it on! 'If you were blind [i.e., if you could not recognise this fact], you would not be guilty of sin'. But because the Pharisees say that they see, they are therefore guilty. Jesus has dramatically turned the tables on them. The blind man sees clearly the will of God, while those who believe themselves to be fully gifted with sight (because of their religious knowledge or ecclesiastical position) are the ones who are truly blind. As the saying goes, 'There is none so blind as he who will not see.' The sins of the man who had been born blind have been forgiven. The real sinners are the Pharisees because they are blinded to the work of God. The one who was blind has been received into God's Kingdom, while the religious leaders, quite clearly, are excluded, if not from the synagogue, from the Shalom of God.

It is not by chance nor by coincidence that, immediately after this account, John transcribes the words of Jesus: 'I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep ... The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (**In. 10:1, 2, 10, 11**). Chapter **10** is, in a sense, a commentary upon chapter **9**.

There is no doubt as to who are the false shepherds and who is the Good Shepherd in this narrative. In **Ezekiel 34** the prophet describes with a wealth of detail the practices of death of the false shepherds and issues judgment against them. The promise of Yahveh

speaks to Jesus' dealings with the blind man. 'I myself will search for my sheep and look after them ... I will rescue them from all the places where they are scattered on a day of clouds and darkness' ([34:1-12ff](#)).

IMPLICATIONS FOR EVANGELIZATION WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE HAVE TO SAY TO US TODAY?

1. *Evangelism in Jesus' way begins with a recognition of our weakness* **P. 261** *and vulnerability*. Power or authority proceeds not from position and intellectual knowledge, but from self-sacrificing service (cp. [Mk. 10:42-45](#)). The privileged subjects and objects of evangelization are the weak, the poor, the little people. Privileged are also those who leave behind the prerogatives of status and draw nigh unto their underprivileged neighbours. They choose, like their Lord, to serve from a position of weakness and of marginality. In the profound words of D. T. Niles, they recognise themselves as 'beggars who show other beggars where together they can find bread.' St. Paul remarked that 'God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong, He chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him' ([1 Cor. 1:27-29](#)).

2. *Spiritual blindness often has ideological roots*. Intellectual pride, the defence of religious and social status, privileges, nationalism, racism and sexism blind our eyes so that we are unable to discern the situation and need of the people who surround us. This attitude distorts the true meaning of evangelization. The Church *must* recover the true sense of evangelism in the way of Jesus Christ if it is to save its own soul.

3. *Evangelization and the pastoral ministry are inseparable*. Seeing, judging and acting require discernment, critical criteria, and consistent action when we have to choose between several alternatives of pastoral action. If we follow along Jesus' way, our ministry will develop a critical dimension and take on a prophetic quality, as we confront false social, political, and religious options, particularly those that we find in our own Evangelical tradition.

In the words of Orlando Costas (to whom this article is dedicated), 'The final proof of any theological proposition is not its academic precision but its transforming power ... Even as the Apostle reminded the church at Corinth so many years ago, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power" ([1 Cor. 4:20](#)).² These words are a masterly summary of the content of [John 9](#). Are we not yet very far from living up to its implications?

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² Orlando E. Costas, *Boletín Teológico*, No. 28. Latin American Theological Fraternity.

The Hong Kong Call to Conversion

From January 4–8, 1988 the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelisation jointly sponsored a consultation to examine the place of conversion in world evangelisation, and to arrive at a common understanding of its theological basis, its psychological and cultural aspects as well as its spiritual importance.

The Statement summarises some but not all of the issues crucial to this central doctrine and experience of the Christian Faith. Emphasis on the need for conversion to Christ is fundamental not only to evangelism but also to compassionate service and social justice. It is one of the hallmarks of evangelical Christianity.

Editor

I. THE CALL FOR CONVERSION IN HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

a) The task of calling people to turn from their old way of life in estrangement from God towards reconciliation with Him through Jesus Christ has been in the minds of Christian ministers and lay witnesses throughout the history of the Church. But there have been periods when for various reasons this task was not faced with the same urgency, and also periods when the concept of conversion was changed, narrowed down or—on the assumption of a Christian culture—replaced by other approaches to man and society.

It was mainly Pletism (and Puritanism), reviving and personalising the theological heritage of the Reformation, and the Evangelical Awakenings in the 18th and 19th centuries that rediscovered and emphasised the centrality of conversion in the Church's saving ministry to the world and to her own nominal members, and whose representatives zealously worked for it in their evangelistic and educational ministries both at home and in the newly opened mission fields abroad. Through many revival movements God stirred up the churches from their dormant state and spiritually regenerated their members. In many cases this also led to a moral transformation of society. The conversion experience also motivated believers to witness about their faith and to establish new, self-propagating churches in all continents and cultures.

b) Today, however, we realise with concern that the biblical [p. 263](#) mandate of calling on people everywhere to be converted is eschewed by large sections of Christianity both in theory and in practice. It is disputed even by theologians and church leaders in its nature or openly abandoned in preference to other forms of the Christians' involvement in the world, such as working for a humanisation of the socio-political structures that impoverish the masses, or engaging oneself in a give-and-take-dialogue with the members of other religions and ideologies, in view of a mutual enrichment and the forging of a wider, multi-cultural and multi-religious human fellowship.

Conversion is contested as a genuine Christian goal; it is decried as being associated with proselytism and stemming from an attitude of spiritual arrogance and religious intolerance. In this movement we sense the danger of the Christian Church being swallowed up by a spirit of relativism and by a new syncretism that recognises saving revelation in all religions and ceases to care about man's eternal salvation through Christ alone. The cutting edge of the Gospel is blunted, and it is deprived of its salvific power (cf. [Romans 1:16](#)).

At the same time we became aware at our consultation that part of the theological criticism of conversion as the focus of Christian mission is due to distorted forms of evangelism. Misguided attempts are made to reach spiritual goals and impressive

numerical results by methodical designs that resemble psycho-technical manipulation rather than by the plain delivery of the biblical message, accompanied by a serious, but unobtrusive invitation to give their own answer to Christ's inherent spiritual power to convict and persuade the consciences of the listeners.

In view of this threefold danger to the biblical *importance* and *integrity* of the conversion call in the contemporary world mission of the church, we hereby attempt to point out the essential elements of the biblical concept of conversion, and to clarify its modalities as conditioned by psychological and cultural factors as well as by missionary and pastoral experiences.

II. BIBLICAL AND DOCTRINAL ASPECTS OF CONVERSION

The consultation found itself constrained to step back from some traditional stereotypes of conversion, evangelism, pastoral care, and denominational identity in order to move forward towards views that are biblically more accurate and pastorally more realistic in contemporary global terms. The workingout of these adjusted positions was incomplete, due to pressures of time, but the following affirmation reflect the considerable consensus that was attained. **P. 264**

There is only one Christ in whom sinful human beings may find salvation, namely Jesus Christ of the New Testament, the divine-human Mediator, crucified, risen, reigning and returning, our Saviour, Lord and Shepherd for time and eternity. Without Christ the human race is lost.

Fallen men and women have no natural ability to turn to God, and it is only through the mystery of the Holy Spirit's gracious sovereign action that they become free to respond to the Gospel message by faith and to be converted.

Conversion means turning from sin in repentance to Christ in faith. Through this faith believers are forgiven and justified and adopted into the family of God's children and heirs. In the turning process, they are invited to the crucified and risen Christ by the Holy Spirit who prompts them to die to the sinful desires of their old nature and to be liberated from Satanic bondage and to become new creatures in Him. This is their passage from spiritual death to spiritual life, which Scripture calls regeneration or new birth ([John 3:5](#)). We have no warrant to expect the salvation of any unbeliever without conversion.

Believers show themselves converted by living in active loyalty and obedience to Christ according to the Scriptures. Conversion experiences vary, and no such experience can be known to be genuine save by its fruits. Many can point to no conscious conversion experience at all. But one whose present life is shaped by constant personal responses to Christ in repentance, faith, hope and love, and by constant endeavours to fulfil His commands, is certainly a converted person. Such a person lives a life of continual conversion, daily renewal.

There are doctrinal differences amongst evangelicals with regard to *baptism*. But we all agree that baptism has an important relationship to the process of conversion. Paul teaches in [Romans 6:1-11](#) that baptism signifies our mystical death and resurrection with Jesus Christ, and our initial ingrafting into His body. Such life as a member of Christ's body implies conversion. When adults become converted, baptism on confession of faith becomes the visible expression of God's new relationship with them and thus both confirms and advances the reality of their new life.

Those evangelicals (as we were told by them in Hong Kong) who let their children be baptised, believe that God's prevenient gift of grace as acceptance into His Kingdom is similarly extended to them (cf. [Mark 10:14-16](#)). Some explain this in terms of God's covenantal relationship with us in Christ. At the same time they stress the personal

responsibility of these young Christians to make their own faith p. 265 commitment to Christ as soon as they are able to do so in order to confirm their baptismal covenant. Those who, although baptised, have never made such a commitment, or have turned away from God's covenant with them, must be summoned to conversion, whether initial or renewed, and told plainly that their baptism cannot save them without it.

Evangelism, which is the Church's priority task in the world, is essentially the work of calling others to conversion. Missionary proclamation of Christ must lead on to persuasion to turn to him and start a new life in his fellowship. The basic form of evangelistic communication is direct speech, though written communication may also have evangelistic force. Oral evangelism should, wherever appropriate, be accompanied by social service in love. True evangelistic communication is 'incarnational', in the sense that the messenger of Christ manifests in himself the new life of which he speaks, and that he sets it forth within the socio-cultural frame of his hearers' lives, with which he himself empathises. Right evangelistic communication is 'holistic', in the sense that it calls for a totally renewed and reintegrated life.

Our evangelistic message includes law with gospel and gospel with law, calling for self-despair in light of coming judgment ([Acts 17:30f.](#)) and announcing the promise of forgiveness through Christ to give hope to the despairing. Evangelistic communication in the biblical sense, therefore, is always urgent, in light of the certainty that unconverted persons face every moment the prospect of a lost eternity under divine wrath.

Our evangelistic task calls for fidelity in proclamation and prayer. Talking to God about men is as integral a part of evangelism as is talking to men about God.

Under the sovereignty of God there will be false and incomplete conversions in addition to sound ones, as Christ's parable of the Sower shows ([Matthew 13:24-30](#)), but evangelism must continue nevertheless.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CONVERSION

The past century has witnessed an increasing interest in the psychology of conversion. The particular psychological accounts given of conversion have, as might be expected, tended to reflect changing psychological theories. Thus in the 1930s Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic accounts received wide publicity; in the 1950s and 1960s the P. 266 focus of discussion had moved to accounts of sudden conversions as examples of 'brain washing'. Understandably, there was deep concern in evangelical circles when these psychological accounts were put forward ostensibly as explaining away the spiritual reality of conversion. In due course, however, it was realised that such psychological accounts by their nature provided no grounds for judging the truth or untruth of the religious beliefs adopted at the time of conversion. Indeed, they could equally be seen as providing further insights into the awesome ways in which the Sovereign God brought about His divine purposes in the lives of sinful men and women.

In the past, it has been customary to categorise conversions as either sudden or gradual. However, with the benefit of lessons learned in other cultures, it was realised that such a simple dichotomy did less than justice to the richness of what was really happening at the time of conversion. Thus, with more fine-tuned analyses, it was recognised that different factors might be major ingredients in different types of conversion. One has in mind here the intellectual, social and affective factors which may be operating in more or less coercive ways. The mention of coercion brings to mind the positive contribution which behavioural scientists may make to the evangelical understanding of conversion. The Christian psychologist will constantly remind us to

ascribe to people their full dignity as men and women for whom Christ died and to eschew any tendency to manipulate them as mere statistics.

With the ever accelerating rate of research in psychology and neuroscience it is likely that we shall be invited to consider new accounts of conversion in psychological language, and in terms of physiology or possibly even of biochemistry! The latter two sorts of accounts are likely to be of less interest to the Christian pastor and evangelist for whom the accounts of the social and psychodynamic factors in conversion are of more immediate relevance in addressing real needs and counselling the new convert.

As we consider the variety of psychological models of man used today by psychologists we caution against the dangers of identifying the models with the reality they purport to describe. There is a danger in too readily concluding that only one model is acceptable or appropriate. The multiplicity of models can help us to recognise and acknowledge the richness of the process of conversion, reminding us of the mystery of the Sovereign activity of God as He calls people into a personal relationship with himself. It is this and not any psychological account which is at the heart of the significance of the process of conversion. [p. 267](#)

IV. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF CONVERSION

Much grace and humility, much courage and wisdom, and much guidance from the Holy Spirit are needed if we are to enter other cultural worlds for the sake of the Gospel. Cultures must be studied not only theologically, but also analytically, for these factors shape the way people hear our message. They also shape the lives of the newly convened. Social structures and ways of thinking are particularly significant.

Although there are many different cultures and different social conditions in which men live everywhere, missionary experience has shown that conversion is possible and does happen in all of them. Of all the possible ways by which we might facilitate conversion among Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, nominal Christians, youth cults, and Marxists, case studies have shown that it is the presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ that particularly attracts people.

Regardless of culture, conversion always implies a radical breach with idolatry and self seeking attitudes, an ultimate allegiance to Jesus Christ and submission to the word of God as found in the Bible. This new allegiance will significantly change the converts' worldview.

In areas where there is a conflict with the biblical revelation, the 'old ways of life' must be abandoned and replaced with Christian values and a Christian lifestyle. Although there is a radical discontinuity in all conversions, in the sense that the convert 'turns from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God' ([Acts 26:18](#)), and in a real sense moves from death to life, conversion should not 'deculturise' the converts. They should remain members of their cultural community, and wherever possible retain the values that are not contrary to biblical revelation. In no instance should the converts be forced to be 'convened' to the culture of the foreign missionary.

In a special study of *evangelism among the poor* in our host city Hong Kong, it was shown to us that the poor also need a call to conversion to Jesus Christ in order to be saved from their sins (not only from their being 'sinned-against'). An approach that primarily or exclusively emphasises social justice has not proved successful and does not lead to faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

When evangelising the poor, we should meet them at the point of their felt needs, indeed. This approach may involve spiritual experiences of various kinds. They may sense a divine intervention e.g. in the form of healing; or they might be impressed by truly

Christian attitudes when they are met by love and personal care in situation of need. But the climax of a truly spiritual experience is when they are struck by the straightforward proclamation of the Christian Gospel. It is only when they have responded positively to this that they are fully converted. p. 268

It is important that the cognitive, evaluative and affective aspects of the Christian message are visualised in this approach.

Having used the entry point of the felt need, the church now has the responsibility, through instruction and pastoral care, to lead the converts to an ever deeper understanding and appropriation of the Gospel and its relevance for all spheres of life.

V. MISSIOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL ASPECTS OF CONVERSION

a) The missionary mandate of Christ to His Church as a call to conversion is clearly stated and unfolded in the apostolic vocation of St. Paul: Christ sent him to the Gentiles 'to open their eyes, that they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me' ([Acts 26:18](#)). This shows that within the total evangelistic task the calling on non-Christians to repent, believe and be integrated into the fellowship of the Church is central. The late German missiologist Walter Fretag rightly said: 'Nothing that does not aim at conversion and baptism deserves the name "mission".' Evangelists are to preach the Gospel with the aim of stirring up the conscience of their listeners in order to make them realise their lost condition, and to apply the message of their reconciliation with God at the cross of Calvary.

Doing so, however, we need to consider that we will meet our listeners in a *variety of peculiar conditions*. The points of contact should be their specific problems, desires and felt needs, with the aim of finally leading them to Jesus Christ as the only reliable answer both to these needs and moreover to their deepest predicament, i.e., their separation from God, the source of life. This is often not achieved in one single act, but by a process of turning from the old, lost condition to the new condition of being saved. The process of conversion may have to deal with several aspects both of their former miserable condition and of the manifold grace that is found in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Such aspects may be, e.g., the certainty about eternal truth, the overcoming of fear, the new liberty from occult bondage, or the compassion of Christ with our weaknesses. The conversion process can be regarded as integral when a person realises this sin against God as the deepest cause of his misery ([Mark 2:5](#)) as well as his inability to help himself, and then by faith hears and accepts the message of the atoning death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the only appropriate solution to his predicament. p. 269

Missionary experience has shown that there are several basic *hindrances to conversion*. Some are rooted in our natural pride which does not admit our sinfulness; others consist in our being tied to the decision processes of the social structures in which we live; others again in a demonic captivity due to the occult penetration of pagan religions. In response to these threefold hindrances, the evangelistic approach will be threefold as well:

1) The evangelist must be a person who himself has undergone the process of being spiritually broken down by a sense of guilt before God, and being rescued by grace alone; a person who is humbly aware that his new life in Christ can survive only by daily repentance and re-assured forgiveness.

2) The cross-cultural missionary should be mindful of the corporate structures which condition the cultural and social life of his audience. He therefore should not follow a policy of religious individualism and thus unnecessarily divert the new convert from

being loyal to his natural community. Rather he should strive toward convincing the entire socially homogenous unit to which he addresses himself—family, clan, neighbourhood etc.—and inducing its members to make a corporate decision for Christ (in which each member participates!)

3) Since there are often demonic forces hiding behind the human resistance to the Gospel ([Eph. 6:10ff](#)) that do not give way unless they are exorcised, conversion might require a spiritual power encounter which shows the superiority of Christ over against Satan. In this case we must make sure that all glory be given to God, and that miracles and signs are not sought for the sake of sensation or in order to enhance the status of the evangelist.

b) Our evangelistic approach must be accompanied and followed by pastoral care. Conversion never takes place in a vacuum, and God has called his people to be responsible instruments of the whole process of conversion. Therefore pastoral care for persons being instructed about Christ must extend as far as the need created by their new Christian commitment extends. This means first of all that the witnessing community, the church, must live a consistent life of love, moral integrity and ethical justice. Genuine compassion for the lost, characterised by prayer and concern, must mark the life of the witnessing community.

In Jewish, Muslim and Hindu circles converts are likely from their baptism on to face ostracism by their society and their family, which may in turn create socio-economic needs of many sorts. In animistic cultures a continuing ministry of deliverance from demonism through prayer may be necessary. Evangelism, when calling for conversion, [p. 270](#) may precipitate these needs, and those who evangelise must be prepared to meet them realistically. When the convert is incorporated into the fellowship of God's people by being baptised, the church cannot only admit the new convert to the Christian rites, but should also, in love, provide an environment of feeling at home in a place of nurture and care. Knowing the background of the convert and assisting him to overcome any inherent barriers is not only desirable but indispensable. The goal of all pastoral care is clearly expressed in the words of [Eph. 4:12–13](#): 'Equipping the saints for the work of ministry, building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'

CONCLUSION

The Church's call to all people to turn to Jesus Christ in faith in order to be saved, is not an expression of intolerance, a feeling of superiority over other faiths, or of spiritual arrogance, but a divine obligation to humbly share the message of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world with all people, as we ourselves by his grace alone have received him as our Saviour and Lord.

Having become mindful of the unchangeable mandate of the risen Lord to go and make disciples of all nations by calling them out of darkness and death into the divine light and true life in fellowship with Him in his redeemed community, we hereby appeal to all Christian churches to rededicate themselves with renewed vigour towards the evangelisation of the world in our generation, realising that this is a time of unexpected opportunities in nearly every country—opportunities, however, which will not last indefinitely.

Let us, therefore, follow the biblical injunction ([Acts 17:30f](#)) to call upon all people everywhere to repent and believe in order to be prepared to meet the Lord when he comes again in power and glory!

The editorial committee of the consultation were Dr. Miriam Adeney (Seattle), Dr. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Nairobi), Dr. Peter Beyerhaus (convenor, Tübingen), Dr. M. A. Jeeves (St. Andrews); Dr. James I. Packer (Vancouver). p. 271

The Promise of the Spirit for the Great Commission

Robert S. Coleman

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THE INDISPENSABLE GIFT

The affirmation of Christ's all-encompassing authority erases any doubt about the triumph of His kingdom ([Matt. 28:18](#)): and the consequent command to disciple all nations settles the plan of action ([Matt. 28:19-20a](#)) but how can His faltering disciples succeed in their mission once the Lord has returned to heaven? The answer comes in the concluding promise: 'Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age' ([Matt. 28:20](#)).

Jesus knows that left to our own resources and ingenuity we are helpless. Only he who has all power is sufficient for the task. That is why he assures the disciples of His continuing presence, a truth earlier enunciated in His teaching on the Spirit ([John 14:14-20](#), [26](#); [15:26](#); [16:7](#), [12-16](#)).

Luke's rendering of the Great Commission brings out this promise even more explicitly. 'I am going to send you what my Father has promised,' Jesus says ([Luke 24:49](#)). 'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit' ([Acts 1:4, 5](#)): 'Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high' ([Luke 24:49](#)): 'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses' ([Acts 1:8](#)).¹

John underscores the same promise in his account of Christ sending his disciples into the world on a mission like his own ([John 20:21](#)). Then, in anticipation of the Pentecostal outpouring, 'he breathed on them, and said "Receive the Holy Spirit"' ([John 20:21, 22](#)).² p. 272

¹ Perhaps it is well to note that the Acts of the Apostles constitutes the second volume of the Gospel of Luke. The first volume described 'all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven,' whereas Acts chronicles what he continues to do in his Church ([Acts 1:1](#); cf. [Luke 1:1-4](#)). Luke's record here of the witnessing commission with its emphasis on the Spirit's power constituted the last utterance of Jesus before returning to the Father.

² In this passage, Jesus also speaks of the disciples forgiving sin in others, an authority which he exercised, but which in the hands of the disciples can only be understood in conjunction with the Spirit's direction.

Strangely, though, this indispensable provision may be overlooked. I am reminded of a British pastor who was quizzing his class on the Apostles Creed. Each student was to repeat one phrase of the creed. The first began, 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.'

The second student said, 'I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.'

The recitation proceeded smoothly until it fell silent in one spot. The minister looked up from his notes to see what caused the silence. One of the students said, 'I'm sorry, sir, but the student who believed in the Holy Spirit is absent today.'

Many people, alas, are 'absent' when it comes to appropriating the promised gift of the Spirit. Whether through ignorance, misunderstanding, lack of faith, or something else, they never seem to 'wait' until 'endued with power from on high.'

CREATIVE POWER

God acts as the Father in administration; he is seen as the Son in revelation, but he moves as the Spirit in operation.³ Though the three Persons of the Godhead are equal in glory and superiority, when the function of power becomes prominent, the activity of the third member of the Holy Trinity comes to the fore.⁴

We are introduced to him in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis when it says that 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters' ([Gen. 1:2](#)). He was the divine energy bringing into existence and ordering the cosmos as God commanded (cf. [Job 26:13](#)). By the same mighty power, God still upholds that which he has made ([Psa. 104:30](#); [Isa. 40:12](#)), and apart from the Spirit's constant renewing, the universe and all its life systems would revert to nothingness.

The creative function of the Holy Spirit received particular attention [p. 273](#) when God made man in his own 'likeness' ([Gen. 1:26](#)).⁵ We are told that he 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life' ([Gen. 2:7](#)). The word here for 'breath' is the root for the word 'spirit'. Literally it means that God spiritualised the creature he formed from 'the dust of the ground', and thereby 'man became a living being' ([Gen. 2:7](#)). Thus Job testified, 'the Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life' ([Job 33:4](#)). Only through the interposition of the Spirit do we live and move and have our being in God.

RECREATED IN CHRIST

³ This analogy over-simplifies the provinces of action within the Trinity, of course. Any formulation of the triune nature of God proves inadequate, for the very reason that human intelligence cannot fathom the divine mind. How three uncreated Persons can function in one essence is a mystery. Yet only by the Trinity can the Personality of God be understood. For a discussion of this mystery, see R. C. Sproul, *The Mystery of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1990), pp. 33–74.

⁴ There is no want of good material on this subject. Among the more popular introductions are the books of Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit* (Waco: Word, 1978); and James Elder Cumming, *A Handbook on the Holy Spirit* (Minneapolis: Dimension Books, 1977, 1965). A general summary of the Spirit's ministry, along with some bibliographic references, will be found in my book, *The Mind of the Master* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1983), pp. 21–30, 199–120.

⁵ A veiled reference to the Trinity may be seen in the deliberative council within the Godhead respecting the decision: 'Let us make man in our image' ([Gen. 1:26](#)). 'Us' indicates more than one (also in [Gen. 3:22](#); [11:6, 7](#)). Further strengthening this reference to the Trinity is the plural word for God, 'Elohim,' in [Genesis 1:1](#). There is the passage, too, in [Isaiah 58:16](#) which speaks of a grouping of the persons of the Trinity. Though the concept of a plurality of persons within the being of one God emerges early in the Old Testament, the emphasis is more upon the unity of his nature, perhaps in consideration of the limited understanding of the people and the temptation to idolatry.

Tragically, however, God's purpose in making a people for his glory—to live in communion with him—was lost because of sin. Though his Spirit still sought to bring a fallen race to God ([Gen. 6:3](#); cf. [Psa. 139:7](#)), the inner presence of the Spirit was withdrawn, leaving our forbears not only depraved, but deprived of the means of divine fellowship. We all turned to our own way, vainly existing 'without hope and without God in the world' ([Eph. 2:12](#); cf. [Gen. 3:8–24](#); [Psa. 58:3](#); [Rom. 3:23](#)).

That is why, even to begin to live as God designed, we must be 'born again'—'born of the Spirit' ([John 3:3](#), [7](#), [8](#)). 'I tell you the truth', Jesus said, 'unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit' ([John 3:5](#), [6](#); cf. [6:63](#); [Rom. 8:11](#); [II Cor. 3:6](#); [I Peter 3:18](#)). This does not mean that God destroys our humanity. Rather he takes our corrupted nature, and through the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit, redirects our life according to his created purpose ([John 1:12](#); [II Cor. 5:17](#); [Titus 3:5](#); cf. [Ezekiel 36:26](#)).

Having transformed by his power, the Spirit continues to nourish and strengthen the growing child of God. His renewing work in us is likened to a spring of 'living water ... welling up to eternal life' ([John 7:38](#); [4:14](#)). He witnesses with our spirit that we belong to God ([Rom. 8:14](#); [Gal. 4:6](#); [I John 3:24](#); [4:13](#)). He helps us pray, interpreting the groaning of our heart to the Father ([Rom. 8:26](#), [27](#); cf. [Eph. p. 274 6:18](#)). He enables us to worship ([John 4:24](#)). He guides into truth, ever teaching us more of our Lord ([John 14:26](#); [16:13](#); [I John 2:7](#); cf. [Neh. 9:20](#); [Psa. 143:10](#)).

As we obey his leading, confessing our sin when convicted, we are made clean 'by the truth: and walk in fellowship with God' ([John 17:17](#); cf. [15:3](#); [Eph. 5:26](#); [I John 1:7](#), [9](#)). The fruits of the Spirit, character traits so beautifully portrayed in Christ—'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control'—begin to flow from our lives ([Gal. 5:22](#), [23](#); cf. [Phil. 1:11](#); [Col. 1:10](#); [Eph. 5:9](#); [John 15:5](#)). With our 'minds set on what the Spirit desires', we are progressively changed into the character of Jesus 'with ever-increasing glory' ([Rom. 8:5](#); [II Cor. 3:18](#)). Finally, on the resurrection morning, our very mortal bodies will be changed into the likeness of our Lord's glorified form ([Rom. 8:11](#); [I Cor. 15:44](#), [49](#); [Phil. 3:21](#)). From beginning to end, partaking of the saving life of Christ is the Spirit's work.

PREPARING REDEMPTION

As we would expect, too, it was the same Person of the Trinity who prepared the way for the Saviour's coming into the world. In the Old Testament few people knew his power, but from time to time he would come upon selected persons and equip them to perform a service in God's unfolding plan of salvation.

We are told, for example, that the Spirit of God was with Joseph in Egypt ([Gen. 41:38](#)). He qualified Moses to lead the children of Israel, just as he prepared the seventy elders who assisted him ([Num. 11:17](#), [25](#), [26](#), [29](#)). When it came time to build the tabernacle, a pattern of redemption to be consummated in Christ, the Spirit filled Bezalel and Oholiab with skill and knowledge for the task ([Ex. 31:3](#); [35:31](#)). In the same way, the Spirit qualified those appointed to make the robes for Aaron and his priestly sons ([Ex. 28:3](#), [4](#)).⁶

⁶ No priest in the Old Testament could come before the altar without this proper clothing. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for coat has the root meaning 'to cover' or 'to hide.' It is the same word used in [Genesis 3:21](#) when it says that God made coats of skin to cover Adam and Eve. The robe worn by the priests was in this sense a way of showing that they ministered, not in their own righteousness, but in the covering of the blameless Lamb of God and High Priest of Heaven. For amplification of this meaning, see my book, *Written In Blood* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1972), p. 40–42. A beautiful study of the garments worn by the priests as related to Christ is by C. W. Slemming, *These Are the Garments* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott).

All through the history of Israel the divine Spirit can be seen at work [p. 275](#) making a nation to accomplish his purpose ([Haggai 2:5](#); cf. [Isa. 30:10](#)). He raised up judges for his people ([Num. 27:18](#), [Deut. 34:19](#); [Judges 3:10](#), [34](#); [11:29](#); [13:25](#); [14:6](#), [19](#); [15:14](#)) and later the kings ([I Sam. 10:6](#); [11:6](#); [16:13](#); [II Sam. 23:1](#), [2](#)). Tragically, however, these leaders too often betrayed their trust and the Spirit departed from them.⁷ But insofar as they fulfilled God's mission in the world, it was the third Person of the Holy Trinity that qualified them for the task.

At times the Spirit came upon prophets and inspired them to communicate a message of the Lord ([I Sam. 19:20](#), [23](#); [II Sam. 23:1](#), [2](#); [Eze. 11:5](#); [Neh. 9:20](#), [30](#); [Micah 3:8](#); [Zech. 7:12](#)). Our whole confidence in what they said, and later wrote in the Scriptures rests upon the fact that they were borne along by the Spirit of God ([II Peter 1:21](#); cf. [Matt. 22:43](#); [Mark 12:36](#); [Acts 1:16](#); [28:25](#); [II Tim. 3:16](#)).

Under his inspiration a day was envisioned when God's plan of redemption would consummate in the coming of Messiah. A virgin would conceive, and she would bear a son, who would be called Immanuel—'God with us' ([Isa. 7:14](#); [Matt. 1:23](#)). Upon this Branch growing out of the root of David, the Spirit of the Lord would rest without measure ([Isa. 11:1](#), [2](#)), and through him a new age would dawn when the Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh ([Isa. 32:15](#); cf. [Joel 2:28–32](#); [Haggai 2:4–7](#); [Zech. 12:10](#); [14:8](#)).

MINISTRY OF THE SON

Just as foretold, in the fullness of time he who had been working from the beginning to effect God's purpose now planted the seed of the Father in the womb of the virgin so that she conceived and brought forth into human experience the only begotten Son of God ([Matt. 1:18](#), [20](#); [Luke 1:35](#)).⁸ Thereafter the Spirit directs his incarnate life, not [p. 276](#) in a limited degree or for a special time, as his predecessors in Israel, but in full measure and permanent possession.⁹

The fullness of the Spirit receives particular attention as Jesus begins his public ministry ([Luke 4:1](#), [14](#), [15](#); [Mark 1:12](#)). John the Baptist's announcement that he will baptise with 'the Holy Spirit and with fire' further discloses the spiritual nature of his mission ([Matt. 3:11](#); [Mark 1:8](#); [Luke 3:16](#)). Later, explaining why Christ is pre-eminent in all that he does, John added: 'For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God; to him God gives the Spirit without limit' ([John 3:34](#); cf. [Luke 10:21](#)). To dramatise his unique relationship with the Godhead, at the river Jordan the Spirit was seen descending upon the Master like a dove, and a voice spoke from heaven confirming the Father's pleasure in the Son ([Matt. 3:13–17](#); [Mark 1:9–11](#); [Luke 3:21–23](#); cf. [John 1:32–34](#)).

Lest this divine endorsement for his mission be missed, upon his first invitation to speak at his home synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus stood up and read from the scroll of

⁷ Saul is a notable example ([I Sam. 16:14](#)). Samson is another ([Judges 15:14](#); cf. [16:20](#)). Because of their sin, God no longer could use them. They tried to do the same old thing, but the Spirit was not in it. The danger of this happening can be seen in the prayer of David after he had committed sin with Bathsheba. Knowing the consequences of his act, he earnestly besought the Lord that the Spirit would not be taken from him ([Psa. 51:11](#)). Nothing is more futile than trying to carry on God's work in the energy of the flesh.

⁸ In other respects the physical birth of Christ was not unlike our own. What the Scripture makes clear is that his conception was different. That is where life begins. Advocates of abortion should take note.

⁹ As a perfect man, of course, Jesus had a spirit of his own, like anyone else ([Mark 2:8](#); [John 11:33](#); [13:21](#); [23:46](#); [Matt. 27:50](#); cf. [Eccl. 12:7](#)). How his spiritual nature was fused with the Holy Spirit lies within the mystery of his human and divine personality. We know that he felt the same natural sensibilities as we do, but his human spirit yielded fully to the Spirit of God.

Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me; Therefore he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour' ([Luke 4:18, 19](#); cf. [Isa. 61:1-2](#)). Having read the lesson, he rolled up the parchment, gave it back to the attendant, then sat down and announced to the startled congregation, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' ([Luke 4:21](#)).

The Spirit's power through the works of Christ displayed his authority over the demonic structure of this world, and thereby evidenced the coming of the kingdom of God ([Matt. 12:27, 28](#)). Those who rejected the claims of Christ, of course, were unwilling to accept this conclusion. To do so would require a recognition of his Messianic mission. So they took the other option, and accused him of being in league with the devil. Whereupon Jesus warned the unbelieving Jews that they were in danger of committing an unpardonable sin—they [p. 277](#) were blaspheming the Holy Spirit ([Matt. 12:31, 32](#); [Mark 3:28, 29](#); cf. [Luke 11:14-26](#)).¹⁰

Clearly the Spirit was ever present in Christ to make his life a revelation of God. Whatever he said and did was a demonstration of this mission. Finally, by 'the eternal Spirit,' he 'offered himself unblemished to God' as our atoning sacrifice ([Heb. 9:14](#)); then through the same instrumentality, he was raised from the dead ([Rom. 8:11](#); cf. [1:4](#)).

CONTINUING CHRIST'S WORK

As the Spirit fulfilled God's saving Word in Christ, so also he would enable his disciples to make known the good news of his completed work, to the ends of the earth ([Acts 1:8](#)). Through his power, they would be equipped to do the very works of their Lord, and even 'greater things than these' ([John 14:12](#)). Jesus does not elaborate on these 'greater' deeds, but his promise would seem to relate to the multiplication of disciples according to the Great Commission mandate.¹¹

They are under no illusion that the work will be easy. Indeed, the disciples can expect the same hatred from the world as was directed against their Lord ([John 14:18-27](#)). But when under duress, Jesus told them not to worry, for the Spirit would give them utterance to speak ([Matt. 10:16-23](#); [Mark 13:11](#); [Luke 12:12](#)). He would lift up the Son, and as men and women see his glory, they will be convicted of their [p. 278](#) 'guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment' ([John 16:8-11](#)).¹²

¹⁰ Jesus does not say here that the Pharisees were beyond redemption, but that by their hostile attitude they reflected a condition which, unless reversed, would bring final separation from God's mercy. To scorn Christ is to reject the only way of salvation, and hence to be in a state of unforgiveness. If one persists in this rejection, the state of judgment becomes permanent—one is guilty of an eternal sin.

¹¹ A greater work can be seen in the ensuing ministry of those first believers in the Acts of the Apostles. Not only is there greater geographic expansion of the Church, but also the numerical increase of believers is no less remarkable. When Christ returned to heaven, we are told there were scarcely more than 500 believers and these were primarily located within the confines of Israel ([1 Cor. 15:6](#)). But when the Spirit came upon the disciples at Pentecost, that one day about 3,000 were converted, and among them were pilgrims from at least 15 other language groups ([Acts 2:9-11](#)). Everyday thereafter others were added to the Church as they were saved ([Acts 2:41, 47](#)), and Christians began to witness across the earth. Indeed, the Book of Acts really has no conclusion, for we are still living in this promise of 'greater things', and it will not end until the Great Commission is fulfilled.

¹² Under conviction of the Spirit, persons are brought to see their unbelief in Christ, which is the epitome of sin. In so doing, they are made to recognise in Christ's completed work at Calvary the only way one can appear righteous before a holy God. Moreover, the world's standard of truth is seen to be utterly in error.

What a load this takes off our shoulders. It is not our responsibility to convince anyone of the truth. That is the Spirit's work. All we can do is witness to the Gospel and leave the matter of persuasion to God. The Spirit will apply the message, and draw broken and contrite hearts to the Savior.¹³

ANOTHER COUNSELLOR

As his days on earth drew to a close, Jesus was particularly concerned that his disciples understand how he would carry on his ministry through them by the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ The teaching comes out most beautifully on the eve of his crucifixion while they were together in the upper room after the Pascal supper ([John 14:1–16:33](#)). Knowing that soon he must go, Jesus told the disciples not to fear, for he would not leave them orphans. When he returned to heaven, he would ask the Father to give them 'Another Counsellor' to take his place, even 'the Spirit of truth' ([John 14:16, 17](#)).

No theory; no makeshift substitute. The reference is to a real Person, like himself; 'Another' to stand by their sides—one who would be with them in spiritual reality just as their Master had been with them in his physical presence.¹⁵ Heretofore Jesus had been their counsellor and [p. 279](#) teacher, but now the Spirit would guide them into all truth ([John 14:26; 16:14](#)); he would answer their questions ([John 16:13, 23](#)); he would show them the future ([John 16:13](#)); he would help them pray ([John 14:12, 13; 16:23, 24](#)). In short, he would glorify Christ in the lives of his disciples ([John 15:26; 16: 14–16](#)).

Actually their relationship to Jesus through the Spirit was to be more fulfilling than anything experienced before. In the flesh Jesus was limited to one body and one place; he could not be with his disciples all the time. With those physical barriers removed, however, through the Spirit, the disciples could live continually in the presence of their Lord. That is why he could say, 'I will be with you always, to the very end of the age' ([Matt. 28:20](#); cf. [John 14:16](#)).

This is the promise in which the Great Commission lives and has its being—the means by which disciples go forth to disciple the nations. Jesus is with us, not as a distant observer, but as a present associate. Note, too, that it is not a promise obtained when we get to heaven, but a fellowship to be experienced now as we obey his command.

Until Jesus had finished his work on earth, and was exalted at the right hand of God, the promise could not be realised ([John 7:39, Acts 2:33](#)). Only after he returned to take his place of supremacy at the heavenly throne could the Spirit be released in power upon the

Jesus, rejected by the world, is exalted in heaven; whereas the prince of this world, Satan, now stands condemned.

¹³ Much superficiality in present day efforts of evangelism could be avoided if this truth were observed. All too easily we try to induce human response to the Gospel through behavioural and psychological manipulation. Not only do such practices produce stillborn converts, but they cheapen the witness of the Church in the world.

¹⁴ For a good treatment of Jesus' teaching on the Spirit, see Louis Burton Crane, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Holy Spirit* (New York: America Tract Society, 1905); J. Ritchie Smith, *The Holy Spirit in the Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1926); and Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976).

¹⁵ The word 'another' here is not the term used to compare two objects different in quality, but rather this is a term used to compare two different persons or objects that have the same essential quality. While the word recognizes the difference between the second and third Members of the Trinity, in quality of life—in holiness, in love, in truth, in power—the incarnate Word and the invisible Spirit are the same. G. Campbell Morgan discusses this distinction in *The Teaching of Christ* (New York: Revell, 1913), p. 65.

expectant Church; not for a few years, but for an age; not on a few choice individuals, but on all who would receive him.

THE PENTECOSTAL OUTPOURING

It is easy to see why Jesus told his disciples to wait until this power was experienced ([Luke 24:49](#); [Acts 1:5, 8](#)). How else could they ever do his work? Their enthroned Lord needed to become a living reality in their ministry. 'The very Spirit of God's own Son, as he had lived and loved, had obeyed and died', had 'to become their personal lie'.¹⁶ Unless they were enthralled by his Presence, his mission would never captivate their souls.

The awaited empowerment begins to unfold at Pentecost.¹⁷ As the disciples were assembled at Jerusalem in prayer, suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the house where they were sitting ([Acts 2:2](#)). The wind, symbolising the strength of the Spirit, came first to the believing fellowship, from whence it p. 280 would sweep across the earth with life-giving power. Then 'they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them' ([Acts 2:3](#)). The distribution of the sacred fire pointed to the truth that the Spirit had come to dwell with all the members of the Church. Descriptive, too, of their witness-bearing function, they 'began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them' ([Acts 2:4](#)).

The enduring miracle on this day, however, was not in the signs dramatising the event,¹⁸ but rather in the way the disciples were 'filled with the Holy spirit' ([Acts 2:4](#)), an experience repeatedly underscored in the ensuing account of the apostolic church.¹⁹ Jesus as an external Presence now reigned as Sovereign in their hearts. The Gospel became life and power within them.

The full significance of this heavenly endowment becomes increasingly apparent as we move through the Book of Acts. What joyous assurance emboldens the disciples in their witness! A purity of intention drives them. Their hearts overflow in praise to God. When beaten and stoned, they pray for their tormentors. Something about them was different. 'Look how they love each other,' one observer noted.²⁰ There was a sparkle in their eyes, a deep serenity in their souls. By watching them closely, even their antagonists could tell that they 'had been with Jesus' ([Acts 4:13](#)).

¹⁶ Andrew Murray, *The Spirit of Christ* (London: Nesbet and Co., 1880), p. 149.

¹⁷ Among the many studies on this subject, probably the most complete is Henry Boer's work, *Pentecost and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Win. B. Eerdmans, 1961).

¹⁸ The wind and the fire do not reappear in subsequent visitations of the Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles, and tongues are only noted twice ([Acts 10:46](#); [19:6](#)). Tongues are mentioned by Paul when speaking of spiritual gifts in his letter to the Corinthian church, but nowhere does he indicate that the gift is any evidence of divine favour. In fact, most of the teaching in regard to tongues cautions against any undue attention to them ([1 Cor. 12:1-31](#); [13:1](#); [14:1-40](#); cf. [Rom. 12:6-8](#); [Eph. 4:8](#)).

¹⁹ Noted in [Acts 4:8](#), [31](#); [6:3](#), [5](#); [7:55](#); [9:17](#); [11:24](#); [13:9](#), [52](#); cf. [Luke 1:15](#), [41](#), [67](#); [4:1](#). The figure conveys the idea of a personality being pervaded by the Spirit's power and influence. In some instances the text underscores an act of being filled; in other usages the emphasis is upon acting in the fullness of the Spirit. That the Spirit-filled life was understood as the norm of Christian experience is seen in [Ephesians 5:18](#), where Paul exhorts the saints to be constantly filled with the Spirit. The tenses here underscore a moment by moment abiding in Christ. Other descriptions of the Spirit's personal bestowal are mentioned in the Acts about 25 times, like receive, give, fall, pour out, baptise, anoint, come, and these terms sometimes relate to an infilling. Each instance needs to be interpreted in its own context.

²⁰ Atenagoras, 'A Plea Regarding Christians', in Eberhard Arnold, ed., *The Early Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), p. 118.

Needless to say, not every Christian lived in the fullness of the Spirit. Accounts of the early church reflect ample problems of strife and pettiness among believers. But where these conditions existed, the New Testament made abundantly clear that carnal saints were living below the expectations of their Lord. p. 281

RECEIVING THE PROMISE

Pentecost marked the beginning of an era that would continue until Spirit-endued witnesses bear the Gospel to the ends of the earth. To be sure, as an historical event the outpouring on that day can never be repeated—it is an accomplished fact; but the spiritual endowment it gave to the church continues for all generations. Nothing about the power from on high is restricted to the apostolic church. As Peter proclaimed, ‘The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God shall call’ ([Acts 2:35](#)).

And why should any believer not have the blessing? ‘Everyone who asks, receives,’ Jesus said ([Luke 11–10](#)). Then, to underscore this truth, he reminded his disciples that if an earthly father, being evil, knows how to give good gifts to his children, ‘how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask’ ([Luke 11:13](#)).

Obviously, though, receiving the Spirit in fullness requires that our hearts be empty of that which hinders his possession. Where there is known sin, it must be confessed, and our character conformed to all that we know of Christ. He must be Lord of our lives. Not that we can have all of him, of course. No human can ever contain the infinite personality of God. But he can surely contain all of us.

As we learn more of him through obedience, so also our capacity to experience his life will enlarge. There is never a foreclosure on growth in grace and knowledge. His presence is fresh every morning. Special anointings of the Spirit will be needed as new demands of ministry require greater sensitivity and strength. Yet however difficult the task, we can rest on the promise that Jesus is with us, never to leave, never to forsake his own.

How we describe this abiding may differ, depending upon theological presuppositions.²¹ What matters is not the definition, but the reality of the ever present Saviour and Lord in our lives. p. 282

AN EXAMPLE

Many people engaged in the work of Christ may not embrace easily this promise. Dwight L. Moody was such a person. Though very energetic, for years he laboured largely in the energy of the flesh.

Sensing the problem, two ladies, burdened for his ministry, mentioned that they were praying for him. Mr. Moody wanted to know why they were praying for him rather than the unsaved. ‘Oh,’ they said, ‘We are praying that you will get the power.’²² The evangelist did not understand what they meant, and at first was rather irritated by their concern.

²¹ Some persons, for example, may equate the Pentecostal infilling with true conversion. Others look upon it as a spiritual event after regeneration. That the experience is variously identified in Scripture adds to the difficulty. Perhaps it may be agreed that everyone receives the Spirit when saved, though the fullness of the Spirit may not be realised until later, nor the conditions maintained. However interpreted, what matters is that the Spirit have undisputed reign in the heart. To see how people may know the same reality in different ways, read V. Raymond Edman, *They Found the Secret* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

²² Taken from the account of R. A. Torrey, a close associate of Moody, and in many ways his successor, in *Why God Used D. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1923), p. 56.

But as time went on, he asked them to tell him more about the Spirit, and he joined them in prayer.

Not long after this, one day while he was walking down Wall Street in New York City, their prayers were answered. The Spirit came upon him with such force that he had to ask God to stay his hand because he could hold no more. From that time on his life and work reflected a new spiritual depth and power.

As with others who have known such a definite renewing of the heart, the power of the Spirit became a growing emphasis in Moody's ministry, particularly when addressing potential church leaders. Being a very practical minded man, he could not understand why some people would obscure this essential truth by academic disputation on peripheral matters. 'Oh, why will they split hairs?' he said one day to Dr. R. A. Torrey after a frustrating discussion with some teachers. 'Why don't they see that this is just the one thing that they themselves need?'²³

Dr. Torrey recalls an occasion in the summer of 1894 which illustrates Mr. Moody's feeling. It was the closing day of the Northfield Conference, where students had gathered from a number of eastern colleges. Torrey, at Moody's request, had preached that morning on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. When he finished at noon, he told the students that Moody had invited them 'to go up on the mountain at three o'clock to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit'. But, he said, 'Some of you cannot wait those hours. You do not need to wait. Go to your rooms; go out into the woods; go anywhere you can get alone with God and have the matter out.'²⁴

At three o'clock the more than 400 students assembled and went up p. 283 the mountain. After a while, Mr. Moody said: 'I don't think we need to go any further; let us sit down here.'²⁵ So they sat down on the ground and on logs under the trees.

'Have any of you anything to say?' he asked. Many of the students arose, one after another to say that they could not wait, and since the morning service they had been alone with God, and could affirm that they had received the promised endowment of the Spirit.

When their testimonies were finished, Mr. Moody said: 'Young men, I can't see any reason why we shouldn't kneel down here right now and ask God that the Holy Ghost may fall on us just as definitely as he fell upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost. Let us pray.'²⁶

As they had gone up the mountain that day heavy clouds had been gathering. Dr. Torrey says, 'Just as we began to pray those clouds broke and the raindrops began to fall through the overhanging pines. But there was another cloud that had been gathering over Northfield, a cloud big with the mercy and grace and power of God; and as we began to pray our prayers seemed to pierce that cloud and the Holy Ghost fell upon US.'²⁷

That is what all of us need—a heavenly anointing of the Spirit of Christ. Thanks be to God, if his presence is not already a reality in our lives, we do not have to wait. The Comforter has come; he is here now. And all who surrender to him as Lord will abide in the promise of the Great Commission.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 63.

God's Agenda for the City: Some Biblical Perspectives

John W. Olley

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From the Garden of Eden to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem: such is the direction of biblical account of the journey of God and humanity. Along the way there are many other cities: Enoch, the city built by Cain; Babel (or the more familiar English name, Babylon); Jericho; Jerusalem, the city of David; Samaria; Nineveh; Antioch; Rome. Each biblical city brings with it different features that help us to reflect on our life and mission in cities today.

A PLACE OF PROTECTION

From the city built by Cain to the city-states of the Canaanites there are many places in the Old Testament called a 'city'. The most general sense of the word is 'a fixed settlement which is rendered inaccessible to assailants by a wall and/or other defence works' (Frick 1977, 30). Further, 'to build a city' is to 'fortify' (e.g., [1 Kings 16:24](#)). Jerusalem is where it is because its topography and water supply meant easier defence.

And here is ambiguity. Nehemiah can seek God's aid to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and when they are completed 'all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realised that this work had been done with the help of our God' ([Neh. 6:16](#)). And yet the massive walls of Canaanite cities are no security against the Israelites, and the Jewish king Hezekiah is criticised because, in the face of Assyrian threat, 'you counted the buildings in Jerusalem and tore down houses to strengthen the wall ... but you did not look to the Maker of it all' ([Is. 22:11](#)). The new city of Jerusalem has its walls too, but its gates are never shut. Furthermore, unlike the ancient cities which hid their water supply from outsiders, the new city has a river that flows out to the nations. The biblical references to walls reflect the persistent warning not to rely on horses but to be faithful to God and to do what is right and just. [p. 285](#)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT

The story of the Tower of Babel is often spoken of as a human attempt to reach God. I find it significant that the biblical statement by the builders is, 'Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth' ([Gen. 11:4](#)). It was common in the ancient Near East to speak of the fame of a city due to its great buildings, and the later Wisdom of Ben Sirach recognises that 'children and the building of a city establish a man's

name' ([40:19](#)). Nevertheless, 'the danger of presumption and over-reaching oneself is close at hand' (Westermann 1984, 549). Westermann goes on to point to the impressive prophecy of [Isaiah 2:12-15](#):

The LORD Almighty has a day in store
for all the proud and lofty, ...
for every lofty tower
and every fortified wall,
for every trading ship
and every stately vessel.
The arrogance of man will be brought low
and the pride of men humbled;
the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

Is it that God is against magnificent buildings? One might think of the magnificent temples of Solomon, and then of Herod. And yet these are also seen eventually to be destroyed by God. There is a recognition of God-given crafts used to the glory of God (e.g., [Ex. 31:1-6](#)), and certainly the New Jerusalem is described as a place of beauty and grandeur. And yet human values always are paramount, as in Jeremiah's condemnation of King Jehohaz ([Jer. 22:13-17](#)):

Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness,
his upper rooms by injustice,
making his countrymen work for nothing,
not paying them for their labour.
He says, 'I will build myself a great palace
with spacious upper rooms.'
So he makes large windows in it,
panels it with cedar
and decorates it in red.

Does it make you a king
to have more and more cedar?
Did not your father have food and drink?
He did what was right and just, [p. 286](#)
so all went well with him.
He defended the cause of the poor and needy,
and so all went well.
Is not that what it means to know me?
declares the LORD.

A consistent biblical motif is that God's people are to be famous not for their buildings, but for doing what is right and just. But more of that later.

More could be said about other aspects of human culture that often reach their heights because of the resources of city life. One can think of music and entertainment, of crafts expressed in jewelry. Again there is ambiguity—the use of music in all areas of life is affirmed, the diversity of jewellery is praised as part of the wonders of God's creation, and human craftsmanship and technology is seen to be Godgiven. There is no praise of ugliness or of plainness. Yet when such pursuits take precedence over human needs, there is nothing but criticism. The city of Samaria at the time of Jeroboam II benefited from the control of trade routes. Those in the right occupations and with the right connections were able to enjoy the culture money can provide—they could afford to go to the concerts,

eat at the best restaurants, and buy imported furniture! To them came Amos's words ([6:4–6](#)):

You lie on beds inlaid in ivory
and lounge on your couches.
You dine on choice lambs
and fattened calves.
You strum away on your harps like David
and improvise on musical instruments ...
but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.

I do not believe there is criticism of the furniture, food, and fun of itself—although I believe the whole tenor of Scripture is a warning against their seductiveness in leading to pride of human achievement that draws one away from recognition of God and his requirements of doing what is just and right. I need only refer to Deuteronomy with its promise of material and social blessings, along with warnings against pride and selfishness; or in the New Testament, the affirmations of [1 Timothy 4:1–4](#) concerning enjoying all that God gives 'with thanksgiving'.

A CENTRE OF TRADE

Any city that controlled trade routes, or that had a number of client states, and that enjoyed peace (commonly through military supremacy), [P. 287](#) was in a position to become prosperous, then as today! Certainly this was true of Jerusalem in the time of Solomon, building on the work of David. As mentioned earlier, it was also the case for Samaria in the eighth century BC.

But in the Bible, the greatest descriptions are given of Babylon. In his 1930s oratorio, *Belshazzar's Feast*, William Walton made use of the lengthy description of Babylon in [Revelation 18](#). While it may well be that in Revelation Babylon is a symbol of Rome, yet throughout the Bible Babylon is the wealthy, powerful city *par excellence*. Rome carries on in that tradition, as do all subsequent similar cities. Look at the description in verses [11](#) following—a rich listing of trade, and of the people who profited from that trade, a listing which ends with 'and bodies and souls of men' (NIV), or to follow the Good News Bible, 'slaves, and even human lives'. It is a trade that exploits others and benefits from their weakness.

As we reflect on our own reactions to the modern Babylons, Caird's comments on this passage in Revelation are helpful:

There is a sense in which the spectators speak for the author as well as themselves. He has had to be told not to stare in wonder at the great whore (xvii. 607), for he too was able to appreciate the glamour and brilliance, however deeply aware he might be of their dangers. He was no Manichaean or eremite, contemptuous of the beauties and amenities of the civilized world. The cry, 'Was there ever a city like the great city?' is wrung from his own heart as he contemplates the obliteration of the grandeur that was Rome.... There was nothing sinful about the commodities which made up Rome's luxury trade, until the great whore used them to seduce mankind into utter materialism. Every object of worth ... belonged to the order of God's creation which must be redeemed by the overthrow of Babylon, and would find its place in the new Jerusalem. (Caird 1966, 227)

So again, there is ambiguity. Trade may exploit and seduce, but it is not condemned in itself. For in the New Jerusalem we see people bringing their splendour to the city ([Rev. 21:24, 26](#))—but from this city flows a river on whose banks are the tree of life, whose

'leaves are for the healing of the nations.' Or to go back to the passage that Revelation builds on, namely; [Isaiah 65–66](#), there the nations come and are able to be full participants in the blessings and worship of the New Jerusalem.

A CENTRE OF POWER

As one thinks of Nineveh and Babylon, there are images of world powers that control large territories. Especially for Nineveh, the capital [P. 288](#) of Assyria, as later for Rome, there is an image of rule by awesome, frightening, military might that would allow no opposition. Images of rule by might continue to dominate human society—whether it be military or economic might. It is believed that might gives the right to rule. Furthermore, such rule is usually exercised in a way that benefits the rulers. Yet again, rule over others is not in itself condemned. Indeed, a central biblical theme is that of the Davidic kingship and of its subsequent fulfilment in the reign of the Messiah. Yet how different is the pattern of the rule.

Important comparative data have come from studies of kingship and royal decrees in the ancient Near East, and understanding of words related to the Hebrew *sedeq/sedaqah* (traditionally translated as 'righteousness') (e.g., Schmid 1984/1973; Weinfeld 1985; Epsztein 1986; Lohfink 1987; Olley 1987). The following features are relevant to our topic:

1. There is a cosmic ordering whose continuity is maintained through ritual, in which the king has a central role. A close link is perceived between the actions of the king and the maintaining of order and harmony in society and in nature. While the actual 'theology' may vary from culture to culture, yet in some way the king is seen to be appointed by the gods to bring a good and happy life for all his subjects.

2. The representative role of the king in maintaining order is not only in ritual, but more importantly he is responsible for upholding justice, especially for the powerless (poor, widows, fatherless). For example, (Hammurabi of Babylon (ca. 1750 BC) describes himself as 'the shepherd bringing salvation' and legislating 'to bring the orphans and widows their rights' (Epsztein 1986, 10). 'Righteousness'—or better, 'what is right and harmonious' in all aspects of life—depends upon his actions (cf. [Psalm 72](#), where, incidentally, economic prosperity is a consequence of the practice of justice).

3. His decrees as a ruler who does 'what is right' may involve remission of debts, freeing of slaves, reduction of forced labour and release of land. There is hence a close association of 'doing right' with ideas of 'generosity', 'mercy', 'compassion', and 'setting free' (compare [Jer. 9:24](#), [Hos. 2:21](#), [Psa. 89:14–17](#)).

4. There are thus brought together concepts of provision for the continuity of life and of society ('sustaining'), justice, and setting free from those things which hinder enjoyment of life ('delivering'). All are brought together as responsibilities of the king for harmonious order, 'aspects of one comprehensive order of creation' (Schmid 1984, 105).

While it can be questioned how much this ideal was realised in the [p. 289](#) ancient Near East, it is important to see how these same concepts are intertwined within and are assumed by the Old Testament. This is part of the milieu in which Israel became a nation and in which her faith was shaped. She too shared understandings of cosmic order and the role of the king, although her faith was to be expressed in distinctive ways. Israel shared a model of rule that was exercised for the benefit of the ruled, especially for the weak and powerless.

The Scriptures are only too painfully aware of how far short the kings of Israel and Judah fell of this pattern, but it is the pattern of the coming King. He will truly be the one who will bring justice and harmony for all ([Is. 11:1–9](#)). Not only in name but in deed he

will be 'The LORD [who] brings about what is right (*sedeq*)' ([Jer. 23:5–6](#); contrast 'Zedekiah' whose deed did not follow his name). That king will rule from the Holy City and bring peace to all the nations of the earth; all are blessed by his rule. And that city will be one where all enjoy justice. To quote the vision of the New Jerusalem in [Isaiah 65:17–25](#):

... the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

Never again will there be in it
an infant who lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not live out his years....
They will build houses and dwell in them;
They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit;
No longer will they build houses and others dwell in them,
or plant and others eat....
They will not toil in vain
or bear children doomed to misfortune.
Before they call I will answer.

One sees obvious contrasts with the cities of today, where so many people work hard—but do not have adequate food and clothing, and may not enjoy a relationship with God.

TWO TYPES OF CITIES

As we have considered these various aspects of cities, there have been both negative and positive features; tragically, so often positive possibility but negative reality. We will summarise by giving the vision of the possibility: a city where there is security, but without the huge expenditure on defence that comes from relying on might; a city where there is joy in human achievement that benefits the whole community (or should I rather say the whole world), human achievement that is **P. 290** received as a gift of God to be used in a way commensurate with God's values; a city where there is justice and peace for all, where justice for the poor precedes a desire to be famous, where worship and life are integrated. It is a city which has the delights of a garden.

GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE CITY

The incident of the city of Babel, actions by people seeking to guarantee their future, is followed by God's actions that are to lead to a future of blessing. The scattering of the people who sought to be secure is followed by a call to Abraham to leave the city with the goal that through his descendants 'all the families of the earth might find blessing' ([Gen. 12:3](#)). That blessing would come as Abraham 'will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just' ([18:18–19](#)).

We could go on to consider the events of the Exodus and the covenant at Sinai, but we jump to the later theology of Zion, the city of David, the City of God. There appears to have been a tendency for people to view the Davidic covenant and the temple as some kind of guarantee for the future, to view the royal cult and structure as entities separate from the Mosaic covenant. Against that, the prophets brought the two together. Out of the prophetic messages, the actual life of Israel, and some New Testament input, the following points have relevance to our topic.

JERUSALEM, A CITY WITH A DIFFERENCE

The Mosaic covenant with its laws portrays a people whose life as a people was to be different from the surrounding society in its worship and its socioeconomic relationships. There were laws to maintain the (extended) family as a viable unit for religious and social life. Lohfink (1987) highlights the significance. While the responsibility of Israel's kings to do what was just and right, especially for those who lack social resources, was similar to that of all rulers in the ancient Near East, a distinctive feature in Israel was the responsibility of *all people* to do 'justice and righteousness'. Other kings merely ameliorated the status quo; God's purpose was to work through a differently-structured community. In this connection, it may also be noted that, whereas in the ancient world it was kings who were 'in the image of God', for Israel it is all humans, 'male and female'. Further, 'rich and poor have this in common: the LORD is the Maker of them all' ([Pro. 22:2](#)). Hence, 'he who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but **P. 291** whoever is kind to the needy honours God' ([Pro. 14:31](#)). Furthermore, this new community was to remember that they were slaves, foreigners, poor, and weak, and God was generous to them. So now they are to be generous to slaves, foreigners, the poor, and the weak.

That purpose for God's people is now focused in Jerusalem, for a city is people who regard that city as their focus. Jerusalem is intended to be a city faithful to God and exemplifying justice and righteousness, along with the worship. Tragically the city was active in worship but deficient in justice. And so God orders them to stop their worship. Worship without justice is worse than no worship! Within the city he looked for justice (*mishpat*), but all he found was bloodshed (*mishpah*); he looked for righteousness (*sedāqa*) but instead there were cries of distress (*sēaqa*) ([Is. 5:7](#)). The city that was meant to be a focus of blessing to others was herself riddled with un-blessing to her own citizens. We need to remember that the prophets' words concerning the doing of what is just and right were initially addressed to God's people. This is the perspective portrayed in detail in [Isaiah 1](#).

God, however, does not give up on his people, his city. He is going to act. There will be purifying judgment, Jerusalem will become 'the City of Righteousness' ([Is. 1:26](#)), and there is the magnificent vision of the future:

In the last days

the mountains of the LORD'S temple will be established
as chief among the mountains ...
and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,
'Come let us go to the mountain of the LORD, ...
He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths ...'.
He will judge between the nations ...
They will beat their swords into ploughshares. ([Is. 2:2-4](#))

Much in the whole Book of Isaiah is a vision of the future Jerusalem to which the restored people of God come, where there is true worship of God that is linked with a life of justice for all. She was to be a 'light' to nations, drawing the nations. Even eunuchs and foreigners will be able to worship in the temple. All cultures and peoples are welcome. God's answer to the chaos and arrogance of the world's cities is to form his own city,

Jerusalem, to which all are welcome. There is also the destruction of other cities that are testimonies to human pride.

That vision is a challenge to the people of Israel to live that life now: 'Come, O house of Jacob let us walk in the light of the LORD' ([2:5](#)). Was [p. 292](#) it Jeremiah's experience of the failure of Josiah's reforms that helped him to see clearly that the only hope was for the people to be given a 'new covenant ... put in their minds and written on their hearts' ([Jer. 31:31-34](#))? Ezekiel saw the necessity of 'a new heart ... and a new spirit ... I will put my Spirit in you' (Ez. [36:26-27](#); [37:14](#)).

As we move to the New Testament there is a transformation of the imagery. Again the physical city of Jerusalem becomes a place for the rejection of God. The city with its temple faces destruction. Now there is a new City, a new Temple. I find it significant that when Jesus speaks to the group of disciples he says, 'You (plural) are the Light (singular) of the world'. Immediately follows the imagery of 'a city on a hill'. The light that is to shine shines through the quality of life of the new community, the citizens of the New Jerusalem ([Matt. 5:14-16](#); [Gal. 4:26](#)). This same community is also the new Temple ([John 2:19-21](#); [2 Cor. 6:16](#)). Now we are called to live, not as citizens of an earthly city, but corporately as citizens of the city that is to come ([Heb. 13:14](#)). We live in the cities of the world, but our scattered communities are to bear witness to a different set of values, a life of hope.

LIVING IN BABYLON

What does it mean now to live in the modern Babylons as citizens of the New Jerusalem? An off-quoted, relevant passage is Jeremiah's letter to the exiles in Babylon (chapter [29](#)):

Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce ... Also, seek the *shalom* ['peace, well-being and prosperity'] of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because in its *shalom* you will have *shalom*. (vss. 5-7)

This attitude is expressed in detail in the stories of Daniel and his friends as also in the story of Joseph. Here is a pattern for all. In the New Testament, mention could be made of the exhortation to 'pray for kings and all in authority, that we might live peaceful and quiet lives' ([1 Tim. 2:1-2](#)), to respect people in authority ([Rom. 13:1-7](#)). There are also the occasional references to people with some secular authority. In the main however, the call of the New Testament is for the Christian community to live lives of love and service, bearing witness to Christ by a different lifestyle.

THE SEDUCTION OF THE CITY

Within each of these situations—the exiles in Babylon, Daniel and his friends, Joseph, and the young Christian community—there are also [p. 293](#) warnings and illustrations relating to the seductiveness of the lifestyle of the city.

The story of Joseph has its account of the seduction by Potiphar's wife. Joseph's resistance did not help his immediate job prospects! The account of Daniel from beginning to end involves temptations to compromise—'when in Rome do as in Rome,' 'business is business, politics is politics'. Both accounts deserve close attention for grappling with issues of serving the city with integrity.

For the Jews in exile, the pressures were real. The familiar [Isaiah 55](#), with its call to 'Come, buy wine and milk' is a challenge to the exiles to leave the comforts of Babylon and participate in the return to Jerusalem. It is a challenge to reassess what one is spending energy and money on (verse 2: 'Why do you spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?'). It is evident that the exiles had taken Jeremiah's words

to heart and enjoyed the benefits! Now the danger is that those same benefits will prevent involvement in God's greater purposes for his world through his people, citizens of the new Jerusalem. The mocking of Babylon's gods and the magnificent spectacle of the annual New Year celebrations also suggest that those ceremonies had their attraction. The buildings and celebrations were far more spectacular than anything Jerusalem could produce.

The earlier quote from Caird referred to the dangers of the attraction of the great whore, and the New Testament has its sad record of those who are drawn aside by 'the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things' ([Mark 4:19](#)). The New Testament has much to say about the seduction of material possessions—and the modern city survives and thrives through people buying more!

THE CITIZENS OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

God chooses to redeem the world, the cities of the world, through a community, a city, he brings into being. Look at the people he chooses.

When he starts with Israel, he starts with slaves, an insignificant ethnic group, people who are poor and small. Indeed, he specifically tells that he did not 'choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples' ([Deut. 7:7](#)). The city of Jerusalem starts with the choice of the youngest brother who at first was not even considered a candidate. (And remember it was Saul who stood out head and shoulders above others! [1 Sam. [p. 294 10:2](#)]) And David's army had been a bunch of renegades and malcontents.

When God turns to the exiles in Babylon to return to rebuild Jerusalem, they are poor, 'blind and deaf servants' with no political status. When Jesus starts to build the New Jerusalem, look at the disciples he chose. Were any from the power structures of Jerusalem? God's model community begins with people the world regards as insignificant, of little value, and even a nuisance. And these are the people chosen to go into the cities with the good news that Christ has died and is risen. Here we might allude to Antioch, a city which became a centre for mission to the cities of the Roman Empire. There is both judgment with a call to repentance, and a promise of forgiveness and a future, for the arrogance injustice of city-dwellers. There is a message that our hope is not in the present, but in the new creation God is to bring about. In the meantime he calls people, yes, and as his co-workers we too call people, to be disciples, to live as citizens of the New Jerusalem. So there is a ministry of calling people to repentance, of offering forgiveness and citizenship in the New Jerusalem, and of living now in the power of the Spirit of life of love and service, seeking what is just and right, for these are the values of God's city.

HOPE FOR THE CITY

Here is our hope as we work in Babylon as citizens of the New Jerusalem. God does have a purpose for the world, for cities. That purpose is to be most clearly seen through the communities he brings into being, communities of the poor and weak, but people who have a vision of the values of the New Jerusalem, even when the values of Babylon are so powerful and seductive. We live as pointers and models of the new. For Babylon is to be destroyed. God is going to bring the New Jerusalem down to earth.

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The Church's Witness in Evangelism and Social Praxis

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This carefully worded and tightly packed argument is worthy of careful study. The author's call for a balanced and coherent commitment to the understanding and praxis of the Church in mission demands both our individual and church-in-community response.

Editor

WHAT IS THE CHURCH'S MISSION?

A major focus of conflict in the Church of England was recently highlighted in a report on industrial mission.¹ On the one hand, it observed, there are those engaged in industrial

¹ *Industrial Mission—An Appraisal*, The Report of a working party commissioned by the Industrial and Economic Affairs Committee of the Church of England's Board for Social Responsibility, BSR, London 1988.

mission who believe that the Church's primary calling is to support communities in their struggle for social justice, regardless of their religious convictions. On the other hand, there are those in the rest of the Church, especially the parishes, who see her mission primarily as that of enabling spiritual conversion.

The report specifies this conflict as one between the practioners of industrial mission and those responsible for parochial ministry.² But it is in fact much broader, running through most reaches of the Church; and it is of course, neither confined to the Church *of* England nor to the Church *in* England. Still, it is particularly poignant that on the very eve of the Decade of Evangelism there should be in the Church of England such debilitating disagreement over what the mission of the Christian p. 297 Church is, over what the Church is for, and over what it is that Christians are called to do.

It is the three-fold aim of this essay, first, to identify the concerns that characterise the opposing positions; second, to clarify the controversy by distinguishing the crucial issues from the tangential ones; and finally, by addressing those crucial issues, to offer an account of the Church's mission that pays due attention to both sets of concern.

I. IDENTIFYING OPPOSITE CONCERNS

First, then, what are the concerns? Why is it that some feel driven to identify the Church's mission with social action? And why is it that others find this so objectionable?

Mission as Social Praxis

There seem to be at least three reasons why some see the Church's basic duty as that of promoting just community in society as whole. One is that they have lost confidence in the characteristic truth claims of traditional Christianity. They no longer believe in a God who has acted uniquely and decisively in Jesus Christ to save the world. They see Christianity as one of several culturally-conditioned ways to God, and they regard its traditional claims to special status as insupportable, even immoral. Moreover, given the overriding moral imperative of preventing global nuclear holocaust and the strife between human communities that would kindle it, these religious pluralists argue that the 'truth' of a religion is to be measured by the extent to which it fosters social praxis; that is, active commitment to the task of building just community. Orthodoxy divides; orthopraxy unites.³

A second reason for identifying the Church's mission with social praxis is the belief that religion is virtually reducible to social morality. This was the conviction of the social gospel movement, which was originally a late nineteenth and early twentieth century American phenomenon. Unlike contemporary pluralists, the apostles of the social gospel did believe in the uniqueness of the Christ-event, albeit in Schleiermacher's terms and not

Sadly, the follow-up paper, *Church and Economy: Effective Industrial Mission for the 1990's*, BSR, London, 1989, which was intended to develop and stimulate discussion on the issues raised by *Industrial Mission*, is entirely devoted to organisational concerns. Theological issues were supposed to have been reserved for the complementary paper, *Ministry and Mission Examined: Stories and Reflections on Industrial Mission Today*, BSR, London, 1989. This, however, lacks all trace of awareness of the fundamental theological conflict identified by *Industrial Mission*. Only *Church and Economy* reached the General Synod for debate.

² *Industrial Mission*, pp. 43-4.

³ For arguments along these lines see the essays in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. John Hick and Paul Knitter, SCM, London, 1987.

those of classical orthodoxy.⁴ p. 298 However, they inherited from Kant a strong anti-pietistic inclination to regard the specifically 'religious' dimension of Christianity—the dimension of prayer and worship—as an immoral distraction from the performance of moral duty which is the substance of genuine religion. Then, under the influence of Albrecht Ritschl, they specified the building of God's Kingdom here and now in the form of a more just and democratic society as the most Christian and most urgent moral duty.⁵

The third reason for making social praxis the main business of the Church is apologetic. For when faced with human beings suffering injustice, how else can the Church maintain her integrity except by committing herself to overcome it? How else can she preserve the credibility of the gospel of God's costly love for the world? This apologetic concern was a major cause of the genesis of Liberation Theology.⁶ The context of its birth was the long history of economic exploitation and political oppression in Latin America, in which the leadership of the Church (i.e. predominantly the Roman Catholic Church) had tended to play a conservative role, virtually sanctioning the unjust status quo. When this conservative stance was contrasted with the readiness of others, especially Marxists, to risk their lives in trying to combat injustice, the Church's reputation and the gospel's suffered grievously. Liberation Theology, then, emerged as an attempt to rescue Christianity's credibility by showing that the Church of Christ cares enough to put itself at risk in the struggle to overcome oppression and exploitation.

We have now adduced three reasons why some regard social praxis as the heart of the Church's mission: first, because they believe that it is the main measure of the truth of its beliefs; second, because they believe that it is the real point of the Christian religion; and third, because they see it as necessary to the integrity of the Church and so to the credibility of its witness to the gospel of Christ. Now we shall turn p. 299 to the other side of the debate, to those who deny that social praxis should take first place on the Church's agenda. What are their driving concerns?

Mission as Spiritual Concern

There are at least three. First, they are concerned to uphold the truthclaims of traditional Christianity. They believe that traditional Christian assertions about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the divinity of Christ, his definitive revelation of God's character, and God's act of atonement through him, are true claims and that there are good reasons for believing them. Therefore they deny that the 'truth' of Christianity can be measured simply by the criterion of social praxis. It should also be measured by the logical coherence of its metaphysical claims and by their empirical and historical grounds. This brings them into conflict with religious pluralists.

⁴ The Christ-event is unique, according to Schleiermacher, in the sense that the absolute God-consciousness which is communicated through the corporate life of the Christian community was original to Jesus. See *The Christian Faith*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1928, Second Part, Second Aspect of the Antithesis: Explication of the Consciousness of Grace, First Section.

⁵ In one of the classics of social gospel literature, Walter Rauschenbusch's *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, Abingdon, Nashville, 1945), there is no discussion of the spiritual disciplines of prayer and worship, and in the chapter on the sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper are given an exclusively social significance. We are told, for example, that baptism was originally 'not a ritual act of individual salvation but an act of dedication to a religious and social movement' (p. 198); and that in inaugurating the Lord's Supper, Jesus intended to create 'an act of loyalty which would serve to keep memory and fidelity alive' (p. 202).

⁶ See, for example, Enrique Dussel, *Ethics & Community*, Liberation & Theology 3, Burns & Oates, London, 1988, pp. 220–21, where Liberation Theology is described as a form of 'fundamental' theology, that is, 'self-justifying' or apologetic theological discourse.

Their second concern is to preserve the distinctive importance of the religious or spiritual dimension. In opposition to the proponents of the Social Gospel, therefore, they deny that the Christian religion finds its real substance simply in morality, whether personal or social.

Their third concern has to do with the meaning of 'social praxis'. 'Social praxis' usually means something more specific than 'social responsibility'. It means an active commitment to the cause of social justice. Further, it is usually assumed that this commitment involves resistance to the economic, social, and political status quo; and the status quo is usually taken to consist primarily in certain social structures. Further still, resistance is often understood to include the use of violence. So those who object to the identification of the Church's mission with social praxis do so partly because they doubt that the Christian Church should avail itself of violent means to fulfil its social responsibility.

II. CLARIFYING THE CRUCIAL ISSUES

We turn now from the concerns that fuel the debate over the place of social praxis in the Church's mission to the task of distinguishing the crucial issues from the tangential ones. We shall do so in two steps. In the first we distinguish the issue of the missionary role of social praxis from that of the reduction of the Christian religion to social praxis. There are many who believe that social praxis is integral to the Church's mission, but who do not believe that is all that Christianity is about. Many Liberation theologians for example, are theologically **P. 300** orthodox. They take for granted the classical Christological claims about Christ's divinity and therefore classical trinitarian theology. They acknowledge that Christianity makes claims about God's redemptive activity as well as about right political behaviour. So the debate over the identity of Christianity between the theologically orthodox on the one hand and religious pluralists on the other, is in principle quite distinct from the debate about the place of social praxis on the Church's agenda. We shall concentrate exclusively on the latter.

In the second step we distinguish the question of the missionary role of social praxis from that of the propriety of the use of violent force. It is perfectly possible consistently to advocate the missionary priority of active commitment to social justice and against unjust structures without endorsing the use of violence. The question of the use of violent force by Christians is in principle a distinct one, which is strictly tangential to the issue which concerns us. Therefore we shall pass it by.

Now that we have sharpened our focus, let us proceed directly to address the issues upon which the matter of the missionary role of social praxis turns. There are (predictably) at least three of them: what is it that God works to save us from? how should the Church bear witness to the gospel of God's saving activity? and what should we understand social justice to mean? We shall take each in turn.

Salvation as spiritual and social

First, from what has God acted in Jesus Christ to save us? The traditional answer, of course, is 'sin'. When we talk of 'sin' as distinct from 'a sin' we refer, not to a particular wrong act, but to a more basic wrong disposition or orientation. Moreover, we refer to a quite distinct species of wrong disposition, one that is specifically religious. In the first place, 'sin' characterises the relationship, not between one human being and another, but between human beings and God. It refers to the human rejection of God either because of proud self-assertion or because of an anxious refusal to trust. On this account, therefore,

salvation is primarily about the overcoming of this estrangement of humanity from God. It is about God's reconciliation of humankind to himself. It is about the divine atonement.

Sometimes, however, those who put social praxis at the top of the Church's agenda seem to think of sin only in its secondary, social manifestations. Likewise, they think of salvation only in its secondary sense of the putting right of the distortions which sin introduces into human relationships and institutions. So, for example, some Liberation theologians virtually collapse 'sin' into 'offence against the neighbour', p. 301 and 'salvation' into 'liberation' from economic, social, and political oppression.⁷ One of the reasons for this 'secularisation' of the concept of salvation is undoubtedly opposition to the pietistic abstraction of the religious relationship from its social context. But it is surely unnecessary, as well as theologically disastrous, to affirm the moral and social significance of salvation by collapsing it into its secondary sense. One can affirm a very intimate connection between spiritual and social salvation without abolishing the distinction. This is what the Christian tradition has done from the beginning in arguing that love for God—or, if Luther is preferred to Augustine and Aquinas, faith in God—causes love for the neighbour. Even if one chooses to go further and specify love for the neighbour in terms of social praxis, there is no logical reason why one could not still retain the priority of faith or *caritas*.

So why do some Liberation theologians decline to settle for this traditional description of the connexion between the religious relationship and secular ones? In some cases, the reason is an oddly unqualified subscription to the Marxist doctrine of economic determinism, according to which economic relationship determine all others. The lack of qualification is odd because it is hard to see how anyone can believe in economic determinism and remain confessionally committed to Christian theology. For if economic structures lie at the root of what is wrong with the world, then 'salvation' must lie simply in the economic reorganisation of society. The question of the status of one's relationship with God loses all immediate relevance to the problems of temporal life. Therefore insofar as Liberation theologians endorse the doctrine of economic determinism, we can only conclude that their eagerness to stress the power of economic interests to deform human relationships and institutions (including religious ones) has made them theologically careless. We should certainly follow them in acknowledging that love for God or faith in him makes demands upon our economic relationships and structures, as upon our social and political ones. But the moment they imply that sin and salvation refer simply to secular relationships we should part company. Of course the gospel bears upon our secular relationships, personal and institutional; p. 302 but in the first place it refers irreducibly to the state of affairs existing between us and God.

III. DECLARING THE GOSPEL IN WORD

So much for what the gospel is about. Now for the question of how to declare it. The initial answer is no less correct for being obvious. We declare the gospel by testifying that God had acted decisively in the life and death of Jesus Christ to remedy our relationship with him; that we believe this to be the case for certain reasons; and that what happened in

⁷ E.g. Dussel, *Ethics & Community*, pp. 19 & 26, where we are told that 'offence of God is *always and antecedently* an act of domination committed against one's brother or sister' (my emphasis); and that 'there is no such thing as a religious sin that is not a political or economic sin....' Accordingly, when Dussel discusses the 'Reign of God' in Christian life (pp. 7–8), the emphasis lies almost entirely on the social dimension or 'being together with others'. It is true that this 'being together' is described as being 'with God', but since no explanation of the significance of this qualification is offered, it is hard to see it as much more than a formality.

Christ bears upon us in certain ways. In other words, our declaration of the gospel will take the primary form of an historical claim, a claim about an event and its significance for us here and now. This is what is usually understood by 'evangelism'.

The Text of Transformed Lives

But evangelism in this sense often faces a major problem that it cannot overcome by itself. And that problem is that there are many people who cannot immediately see why the gospel matters, what difference of importance and for the better it could possibly make to the lives that they lead. Quite apart from the question of the content of the gospel and its truth, there is the question of its meaningfulness. And no amount of persuasive argument about the historical reliability of the New Testament or intelligible explanation of the doctrine of the atonement will suffice to make God's action in Christ interesting to those who are not especially hounded by guilt or weighed down by existential *Angst* and whose lives, busy and rich with more or less decent occupations, seem satisfying enough.

For this reason, at least, declaring the gospel cannot simply take the form of 'evangelism' in the sense just given. It also has to take the form of lives governed and transformed by faith and love for God, lives that display the deep integrity of worshipping and obedient humanity, lives whose lively beauty draws the beholder first to itself and then to its divine cause. Karl Barth makes the point well, albeit in his own terms:

What is to be expected of [Christians] is that [this Word of God] will give their choosing and willing a specific character so that their lives will become a text accessible not only to their fellow Christians but also to their non-Christian fellows. So long as they do not have the vocabulary, grammar and syntax, the latter may not understand it, but it is legible to them as written p. 303 by a human hand. In the persons of Christians as hearers of God's Word, the Word itself is present to their non-Christian fellows also. In the way that Christians shape their lives as people of the world confronting the same problems as others, their life's task in the midst of others documents the Word, brings it to notice, and draws attention to it. They cannot do more than this and they should not try. It may be that in time they will have to answer questions concerning the reason for the special character of their works, that they will have to comment to others on the text of their lives, that they will have to offer an introduction to the understanding of the text and therefore speak about it. But the first and proper thing that as men of the world they owe other men of the world ... can only be the 'behaviour without words' which [1 Peter 3:1](#) commends....⁸

Sometimes we will be called upon to comment on the text of our lives, to explain how they came to be written and what they signify. But our main task is simply to let our lives be texts which refer to the God who has loved us in Jesus Christ, and which are sufficiently attractive to make their referent interesting.

Now it is certainly true that we may signify God in the text of our individual lives. It is these that the gospel of God's love addresses directly, and these that it would govern and transform. Nevertheless, our individual lives have a social dimension. They are social. From conception on they stand in the context of relationships with others. Who we are, what really makes us tick, is revealed most sharply in the quality of our relationships with other people, in how we treat them and let them treat us. So if God speaks his word through the text of an individual life, he necessarily speaks it also through the social context in which that life is embedded. He speaks it through the set of relationships, immediate and remote, personal and institutional, with which that life is inextricably bound up. He speaks it through the text of individuals-in-society.

⁸ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics, IV/4, Lecture Fragments*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1981, pp. 201–2.

Indeed, it is one of the major themes of the Bible that where God's authority is acknowledged there mere society becomes true community. There the members of a society treat each other justly and generously, living together in that convivial peace which is itself a mark of God's presence. In the New Testament the role of the Christian community [p. 304](#) *as a witness to God's Word in its own right* features prominently. Let us take, for example, the early chapters of the Book of Acts. In the first verse of chapter [6](#) we are presented with a social problem—or, to be more precise, with an instance of social injustice within the Christian community: 'Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution'. At the end of chapter [2](#) we were told that immediately after Pentecost the believers had pooled their capital and were using it to provide for those who had insufficient income (vv [44–45](#)). This is reiterated at the end of chapter [4](#) (vv [32, 34–35](#)). What the first verse of chapter [6](#) tells us is that the allocation of resources from the common fund, referred to in the text as 'the daily distribution of food', had become corrupted by ethnic prejudice. Widows who were culturally Greek (the 'Hellenists') were being neglected, presumably because the distribution was in the hands of Aramaic-speakers who were culturally Palestinian ('the Hebrews'). In other words, the unity of the Christian community was being jeopardised by an injustice perpetrated by a partisan abuse of power.

Now, it is possible to interpret the Apostles' response to this problem as implying that the only reason for addressing it was that it threatened to distract them from their real business of proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: 'And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables"'. Their response could be read as suggesting that social harmony in the Church is important only because it provides an undistracting environment for preaching the word of God. In other words, a peaceful community and the social justice that sustains it is significant only because it enables preaching. Community is simply instrumental to the preaching of the word.

But there are at least two good reasons why this interpretation would be mistaken. The first and major one is that the formation of a community where social justice prevails is presented in the early chapters of Acts as one of the primary manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit. The creation of a common fund to supply the needs of the poor was, according to chapter [2](#), one of the very first things that the believers did after Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost ([2:42, 44](#)). A couple of chapters later this point is repeated and we are told ([4:33–34](#)) that 'much grace was with them all. There were no needy persons among them.' Social justice is an immediate manifestation of the gracious power of the Holy Spirit. It is not, of course, the only manifestation. Two others are mentioned in chapters [3–5](#): the power to do miraculous works of healing (chapter [3](#)) and the power to preach [p. 305](#) the resurrection of Jesus boldly (chapter [4](#)). But the point is that the formation of just community is not merely a necessary condition for an efficient preaching ministry, but rather a manifestation of the power of the Spirit in its own right.

Further (and this is the second, minor reason) this equality of status between the building of community and the preaching of the word, insofar as both are manifestations of the Spirit's power, is corroborated in the opening verses of chapter [6](#). For there the word 'distribution' in 'the daily distribution of food' and the word 'ministry' 'in the ministry of the word of God' are both in fact translations of one and the same Greek word: *diakonia* or 'service'. They share the same label. What this means is that the first few verses of [Acts 6](#) treat preaching and the business of maintaining just community as different species of the same thing.

So the early chapters of Acts do not allow us to regard the building of community and of the social justice it required simply as necessary means to the end of effective preaching. They make it quite clear that both are manifestations of the Spirit's power. They also make it clear that both are effective in bringing about repentance and conversion and so in enlarging the Church. At the end of Peter's address in chapter [2](#) we read (in v [41](#)): 'Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.' But likewise at the end of the passage which follows immediately and is largely devoted to describing the quality of the believers' community, we also read (in v [47](#)): 'And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.' *Both* preaching *and* community are effective means of saving grace, which, since both are manifestations of the Spirit's power, should not surprise us, for the power of the Spirit is nothing other than the grace of God at work redeeming the world.

The Quality of Communal Life

So far we have argued that we should declare the gospel, not only through verbal statements of what we believe to be true and why, but also through the text of our lives as individual members of the Body of Christ. In the first instance, what this text says will be a matter of how we treat each other: of our ability to behave respectfully, humbly, openly and generously and of our capacity both to grant forgiveness and to receive it. In the first place, the quality of our communal life will consist in the quality of our personal relationships with others. These relationships may be with family members or friends, but they may also be with political opponents, whether on the worship committee or on [p. 306](#) the PC or in Synod. In this respect there is no distinction between the private and the public realms.⁹

Integrity in Power Structures

There is, however, a distinction between the personal and the structural dimensions. So in addition to the question of the quality of our personal relationships in the Christian community, there is also the question of the quality of the public conventions and institutions which order those relationships. There is also the matter of political structures. Every community has political structures. It has sets of conventions which regulate the exercise of power, determining who gets to exercise a certain kind of power under certain conditions. These conventions may be formal and explicit or they may be informal and tacit. More to the point, they may be more or less just. They can give some people or classes of people too much power, and others too little. They can institutionalise the lie that only the skills of a few are important for communal well-being by the custom of refusing others the opportunity to discover and exercise their own. Political structures in the Christian community may or may not be faithful, for example, to Jesus' constant refrain that the power that really counts is the power of the servant ([Matt. 20:25-28](#); [Mark 10:42-45](#); [Luke 22:24-27](#)); and they may or may not be true to St Paul's organic vision of the Christian community as one where the obscure (domestic or parochial) service is recognised to be just as vital to the life of the community as the prestigious (synodical or episcopal) one ([Rom. 12:4-6a](#); cf. [Cot. 12:4-31](#)). The gospel bears upon us, not only in the ways we treat each other at home or on the public stage, but also in the ways in which we organise our communal life. It bears upon political structures too.

⁹ Although Emil Brunner distinguishes between the private and the public spheres as between the personal and the impersonal, he qualifies the distinction when he acknowledges that there are personal spaces present in all social institutions—'not in the actual activity of the institution itself, but "between the lines"' (*Justice & the Social Order*, Harper, New York & London, 1945, p. 129).

Hitherto I have spoken only of the Christian community, arguing that the quality of its personal relationships and political structures is a necessary and important dimension of witness to the gospel of Christ. This is the primary form of the Church's social responsibility: to demonstrate in the fabric of its own life the power of God's Spirit to restore human beings to the kind of life they were created for—of lives where love for God orders all other loves and makes community possible. p. 307 Through this demonstration the Christian church addresses secular society at once as gospel and judgement. It declares the gospel by displaying proper human life, the kind of social life which we were made to enjoy and for which we all deeply yearn. But by the very same token, it indirectly pronounces judgement, exposing how far sinful society falls short of genuine community by throwing into sharp relief the injustice of its personal dealings and its structures. So simply by being the Church, by reflecting God's Kingdom, by affording glimpses of convivial community under God's authority, the Christian Church fulfils its primary responsibility to secular society.¹⁰ This is the view of the Johannine literature in the New Testament, where the unity of the Church is plainly presented as the main medium of the light of Christ to the world: 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' ([John 13:35](#)).¹¹

Commitment to a Just Community

Nevertheless, if the Church's responsibility for society begins with the nurturing of its own communal life, it does not end there. It continues in commitment to the cause of just community beyond the circles of confessing Christians. There are (as always) at least three reasons for this. First, if we regard just community as a good at all, then we are bound to care for it wherever we see it, even when it appears beyond the sociological boundaries of the Church. Love for justice is indivisible. Second, to affirm that just community ultimately depends for its fulfilment and its final security upon the right ordering of humankind's relationship with God, is not to deny that just community exists in some form and to some degree outside the Christian Church. There is plenty of empirical evidence, at very least, that non-Christians retain some sense of the justice requisite for a measure of social peace; and that their self-interest can still be sufficiently rational for them to take steps to meet that requirement. Not even Luther and Calvin, with their heightened sense of the depth and extent of sinful corruption, could avoid acknowledging the persistence of an awareness and practice of justice among pagans.¹² The final reason why the Christian Church should be committed to the cause of social justice in society as p. 308 a whole is that the boundaries of the true Church are not crystal clear to us. This side of the *eschaton* we cannot be finally sure who belongs and who does not. So when just community appears among non-Christians we cannot dismiss it summarily as a mirage; for it could be the Holy Spirit's work.

In response to the question, 'how should the Church bear witness to God's saving activity in Christ?' we have argued that it should obviously declare its belief in the Christ-event and give reasons for it; but that it should also show the significance of that event by nurturing just community, primarily among its own ranks, but secondarily in society as a whole. We now move rapidly to a conclusion by pointing out two respects in which the

¹⁰ This is the kind of line taken by Karl Barth, J. H. Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas.

¹¹ See my discussion of the Johannine understanding of the relationship between the Christian community and social concern in *Theological Politics*, Latimer Study 29/30, Latimer House, Oxford, 1989, pp. 14–16.

¹² See J. T. McNeill, 'Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers', *Journal of Religion*, XXVI, (1946), pp. 168–87.

concept of social justice as we have used it differs from that assumed by many who urge the missionary primacy of social praxis. Here we respond to the last of our three crucial questions.

IV. THE PERSONAL AND RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

First, as we have conceived it, social justice is not simply a matter of political structures; it is also about personal relationships. We cannot make our *institutions* sufficiently just that we can afford not to be. So if we would promote social justice, then we must do it, not only by organisational reform, but also by the moral reformation of the individual-in-community. Therefore, secondly, social justice depends ultimately on spiritual conversion. For ultimately whether we treat each other justly depends upon how we regard ourselves, and how we regard ourselves depends on how we regard God. If we see ourselves as autonomous individuals, finally responsible to no one else, then we will try to play god with each other, abusing and manipulating and judging self-righteously. But if, worshipping God the Creator, we accept ourselves as the creatures we are, limited in power and responsibility and naturally lacking in self-sufficiency; and if, accepting the forgiveness of God in Christ, we recognise each other as equal in sin and in debt to grace, then the mutual respect, forbearance and sympathy that are requisite for just community will be forthcoming. Social justice depends ultimately on the kind of people we are; and ultimately the kind of people we are depends on whether we stand with God or against him.

CONCLUSION

Our conclusion, then, is that evangelism and social praxis are both equally necessary to the mission of the Christian Church. Apart from **P. 309** the witness of just community, evangelism will be unable to demonstrate why the gospel matters, why it should interest real human beings who are individuals-in-community. If it would address the world in such a way as to be heard, the Church must show how what it says promotes the human good, a good which is irreducibly (albeit not entirely) social. If the Church proclaims the gospel without simultaneously building just community, then it will speak empty words to ears that are hungry for words of substance.

On the other hand, to engage in social praxis apart from evangelism is to neglect the personal and religious dimensions of just community and to lay its cause wide open to all sorts of utopian illusions and totalitarian self-deceptions. For the promotion of social justice is not simply a matter of enacting new laws and reforming old institutions. At its most substantial it is also a matter of refashioning relationships between persons, together with the tacit codes and conventions and attitudes that govern them. And since our regard for others is decisively shaped by our regard for ourselves, and our self-regard by our regard for God, the cause of social justice itself raises the religious question—and scans the horizon for glad tidings.

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The Kingdom Manifesto

Compiled by: Wyn Fountain, Brian Hathaway, Gordon Miller, Bernie Ogilvy, Peter Philip and Ray Windsor, after deliberation with other Evangelical and Charismatic Church leaders in New Zealand and overseas.

This important study which has received worldwide acclaim outlines a biblical holistic foundation for the Church's mission as worship, witness service and justice. It also raises issues that need further clarification including the work of the Holy Spirit in the Kingdom outside the Church especially in other religious faiths; situations in which the institutionalised Church hinders or obstructs the work of the Kingdom; and the Church's moral and prophetic role in rebuking personal sin and institutional evil in society.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

This Kingdom Manifesto came out of a concern among several Evangelical and Charismatic church leaders in New Zealand about the trends we were seeing in the theology of the Kingdom of God coming from outside our country. It was felt that there was a need to clearly articulate, from a Kingdom of God framework, some of the major issues that we were facing in New Zealand both from within and without the church. It was also recognised that evangelical, charismatic and liberal wings of the Christian church had valuable insights and contributions to make to our understanding of the Kingdom of God and this document seeks to embrace sights from across this spectrum of the Church.

A core group of church leaders (all members of EFNZ) deliberating with many others from within New Zealand and several from overseas, developed this document through numerous editions and over a period of about 18 months. It was not envisaged that the document would cover all the issues pertaining to the Kingdom of God, neither is it seen as a final statement on this matter. We hope that future revisions will occur as our understanding develops. The Kingdom Manifesto is commended and distributed by Evangelical Fellowship of New Zealand and we encourage others to copy it and make use of it in whatever ways they may wish. [p. 311](#)

PREAMBLE

It is with growing conviction and excitement that we present to you this Kingdom Manifesto—a statement concerning the Kingdom of God which is the rule and government of God over all of life, individual and corporate, private and public.

In many places in Aotearoa, New Zealand, there is an increasing interest and awakening to the realisation that when Jesus Christ the Son of God commanded His disciples to pray 'Your Kingdom Come' and to 'Seek first the Kingdom of God' in everyday matters, He expected it to have a profound motivating effect on His followers of that day and down through the ages.

Many churches in the 20th century have not yet fully discovered the dynamic of these commands. But in this country and overseas, Christians are enthusiastically exploring, studying and allowing the Holy Spirit to lead them into fresh understanding about the Kingdom of God.

Clearly the Kingdom of God was the central theme in the teachings of Jesus. It is much more radical than most Christians have conceived. We believe that the Christian community needs to recapture and apply the importance of this message.

This statement does not include all the issues that encompass an understanding of the Kingdom of God but we believe that it covers some of those that are of greatest significance in our country at this time.

We believe that the content of this statement encompasses views held by Church orthodoxy through the 2000 years of its history and that throughout the entire Church age, eschatological liberty has generally been granted to others in the Body of Christ so that neither premillennialism, amillennialism or postmillennialism has been considered a heresy by the mainstream theologians of the Church.

We present this Manifesto to you as a vision of the possibilities of a wholehearted commitment to the Kingdom of God by the people of God in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

We confess that all too often ...

—we have ignored the centrality of the message of the Kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus.

—we have failed to recognise that love is the definitive mark of the Kingdom of God—loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and our neighbours as ourselves.

—we have limited the expression of Christ's Kingdom within society to the institutional Church. [p. 312](#)

—we have emphasised the individual and personal aspects of the Kingdom of God to the neglect of the corporate and communal.

—we have neglected the physical and material implications of the Kingdom of God and concentrated on the moral and the spiritual.

—we have divided our lives and activities into secular and sacred categories.

—we have failed to occupy our proper position as servants in the affairs of Government, education, business, economics, trade unions, media, arts, science, welfare and medicine as the Creator's salt and light to the world so that those areas of life might more clearly reflect Christ's justice, hope, peace and joy.

—we have prayed 'Your Kingdom Come' and ignored the command of Christ to 'Seek it first' in personal and societal lifestyles.

Therefore we repent of our failure to let Christ be King in these areas. We will redress these failures with teaching, small group discovery, seeking new insights, creative Spirit-led endeavour, robust theological debate and the development of working models embodying principles of the Kingdom of God.

I. BIBLICAL BASE

'The Lord is a great God and King above all gods'. As the Creator, Sustainer, Owner and Controller of the whole universe He has never given up, nor will He ever give up, His rule over this universe.

In the Biblical record from Old Testament times, we see God creating the world and placing it under the management and authority of women and men—both created in the image of God ([Gen. 1:27–28](#); [Gal. 3–28](#)). Subsequently men and women disobeyed their creator and this rebellion has influenced and spoiled the whole of God's creation ([Gen. 3](#)). Yet God still desired to establish His authority and rule in the lives of individual people and in the nation of Israel. Through many of the experiences of His chosen people and the statements made by the prophets, God taught them to once again expect His actual rule on earth. This new era would ultimately effect the whole world, bringing salvation, justice and peace—wholeness in all areas of life—to men and women ([Isa. 9:6–7](#); [Isa. 65:17–25](#)).

In the New Testament we see that Jesus Christ, the son of David and the Son of God, came to earth to commence this promised age by proclaiming and demonstrating the

Kingdom of God ([Matt. 9:35](#); [Matt. 4:17–24](#)). His life attracted women, men and children from all walks of life. Young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, religious and non-religious, Greeks, Romans and Jews were all [p. 313](#) astonished at His gracious words and His powerful works. These evidences, coupled with the climax to His life—His death, resurrection and return to the Father—unmistakeably proclaimed the present reality of the reign of God on earth.

However, Jesus' understanding of the Kingdom of God differed from that which had been expected. The Kingdom of God had not fully come with his presence on earth but was a hidden, apparently insignificant yet steadily growing influence ([Matt. 13:31–33](#)). Nor was it merely a political kingdom—Jesus firmly rejected the use of violence and the use of military power as a means for its establishment ([John 1836](#)). He redefined the enemy of God's Kingdom as Satan, with his evil forces, and all people who join him in opposing God. Through His works of power, culminating in His resurrection, Jesus demonstrated the victory of the Kingdom of God over the enemy and guaranteed the final triumph over death and all evil ([Heb. 2:14–15](#)). However, the battle still continues today and will do so until the return of Christ. Although Christians debate the details of that return, it will usher in the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.

Meanwhile, Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to equip, enable and empower men and women to see, proclaim and demonstrate the Good News of the Kingdom of God to this world ([John 14:16–18](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). Understanding the importance of the Kingdom of God and of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the writers of the New Testament explained that the Kingdom of God requires Jesus to be honoured as Lord and Master over every aspect of life ([Phil. 3:7–8](#)). Since that time the message of the Kingdom of God has proved to be relevant and effective worldwide. Christ the King transcends all racial, national, sexual, educational, cultural, socio-economic and religious barriers. The presence of the Kingdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit here and now, and the knowledge of its climax at Christ's return is Good News indeed for each generation ([Rev. 11:15](#)).

II. THE KING AND HIS KINGDOM

1. We believe that Jesus Christ is the King of His Kingdom ([Phil. 2:9–11](#)).

Therefore, He is our central focus and we seek to worship, love, obey and follow Him in our walk in the Kingdom of God.

2. We believe that the Kingdom of God is evident on earth when the will of God is being done ([Matt. 6:10](#)). It is the expression of the life of God in His people corporately. It is the rule of God in the lives of women and men. [p. 314](#)

Therefore, we encourage all women, men and children to commit themselves to that Kingdom by placing themselves under the rule of Jesus Christ and acknowledging Him as Lord of their lives.

3. We believe that it was God, through His Spirit, who enabled Jesus to proclaim and demonstrate the Kingdom of God while He was on earth ([Luke 4:18–19](#)).

Therefore, we encourage women and men to seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit and know the Holy Spirit's empowering as they 'seek first the Kingdom of God'.

4. We believe that the basis for our understanding of God's Kingdom is found in Jesus (the revelation of God to people) and the Bible, God's record of that revelation ([John 14:9–11](#)).

Therefore, we fully acknowledge the trustworthiness of Scripture and seek to interpret all matters of faith and conduct in the light of its teaching under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

III. SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

We believe that the following are significant signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God:

1. The presence of Jesus in the midst of His gathered people ([Col. 1:18](#)).

Therefore, we look to the Church to be both a sign of and a signpost to the Kingdom of God as we experience the joy, peace and sense of celebration which His presence brings.

2. The proclamation of the Gospel ([Mark 1:15](#)).

Therefore, as Jesus communicated the gospel we will also seek to do this by all means, in all places, at all times and encourage all followers of Jesus to do likewise.

3. Conversion and the new birth ([John 3:3, 5](#)).

Therefore, we will expect to see the Holy Spirit bringing people out of the Kingdom of darkness and into the Kingdom of God.

4. Deliverance from the forces of evil ([Eph. 6:10-18](#); [Col. 2:1-3](#); [Matt. 12:28](#)). We take seriously the power of evil in the affairs of men and women: through people's personal behaviour, in the Godlessness seen in every culture, and the occult practices within our society.

Therefore, we will minister in the name of Jesus to all who are under the influence of the devil and will challenge the faulty teachings and world views that dominate the minds of women and men today. p. 315

5. The Holy Spirit working in power ([1 Cor. 12:4-11](#)). We expect to see God transforming people and performing miracles and healings today.

Therefore, we will seek to be willing vessels through whom the Holy Spirit can bring such evidences that the Kingdom of God is amongst us.

6. The fruit of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people ([Gal. 5:19-26](#)).

Therefore, we wait patiently to see the qualities that mark the life of Jesus being expressed in the lives of His followers. We earnestly desire that our personal lives also demonstrate such qualities.

7. Suffering for righteousness' sake ([1 Peter 4:12-16](#)). We live in a period of incomplete realisation of the Kingdom of God, in a state of tension. A courageous, joyous bearing of suffering is a clear sign to onlookers that we are part of God's Kingdom.

Therefore, as Jesus suffered, we will not be surprised if suffering comes to us.

IV. ENTERING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1. We believe that a person enters the Kingdom of God by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ the Lord, being born again by the work of the Spirit of God on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus ([John 3:3, 5](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [Rom. 1:17](#)).

Therefore, we do all in our power to urge people to enter that Kingdom where women and men of all races are equal.

2. We believe that while the Kingdom of God is open to all people, Jesus declared a particular concern for the poor, weak and oppressed, and He said that it may be more

difficult for the powerful, the wealthy or the influential of this world to enter it ([1 Cor. 1:26-31](#); [Matt. 16:24](#)).

Therefore, we are committed to reflecting Jesus' concern as we proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

V. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE CHURCH

1. We believe that the Church is the community of the King, the Body of Christ, a visible evidence of His presence and God's chosen agent to demonstrate His Kingdom in this world ([Eph. 1:22-23](#); [3:10](#)).

Therefore, we will work for this continuing renewal and seek the total mobilisation of all its members to be salt and light in their local communities.

2. We believe that at the local level, the Church is the people of God [p.316](#) sharing together in loving worship, fellowship, nurture and training for ministry in the world ([Acts 2:42-47](#); [1 Cor 12](#); [Eph. 4:7-11](#); [Rom. 12:4-8](#)).

Therefore, in our congregations, we will strive for maximum effectiveness in these areas, and encourage Christians to identify, develop and use their gifts in order to demonstrate the Kingdom of God in all areas of society.

3. We believe the Church transcends all denominational differences and is made up of women and men from all nations, cultures and walks of life who are being transformed by the power of the Spirit of God ([Col. 2:11-19](#)).

Therefore, the worship and life of each local congregation should affirm the heritage of each culture represented in its midst, allowing this diversity to enrich and enhance our service of God.

4. We believe that Church growth is the normal outcome of seeking first the Kingdom of God ([Matt. 16:18-19](#)).

Therefore, where Christians do this, local congregations will grow and new congregations will be planted and established.

5. We believe that a loving, servant heart towards God and other people is the prime characteristic of being 'Kingdom people' ([Luke 10:25-37](#); [Matt. 20:25-28](#)).

Therefore, we seek to demonstrate this in our congregations, communities and all other areas of life.

6. We believe that the Church does not exist for itself but was established by Christ as a witness to the Kingdom of God ([Matt. 16:18-19](#)).

Therefore, in our local congregations, we will set goals and evaluate their effectiveness in terms of that Kingdom.

VI. OPPOSITION TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1. We believe that the schemes of Satan oppose the Kingdom of God and that there is continual and hostile conflict between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan ([Matt. 12:28](#); [Col. 1:12-13](#)).

Therefore, we expect opposition to the establishment of the Kingdom of God in our own lives, in our families, in our local communities and in our country.

2. We believe that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Kingdom of God demonstrates the power which will ultimately [p. 317](#) overcome all sin, poverty, disease, death and demonic interference ([Col. 2:15](#)).

Therefore, we declare, and seek to live in the triumph of the Kingdom of God over the powers of darkness.

VII. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

1. We believe that an understanding of the Kingdom of God will bring men and women to a deeper appreciation of the Peace and Justice of God ([Mic. 6:8](#); [Rom. 14:17](#)).

Therefore, we determine to act justly, oppose all forms of violence and be resolutely involved in seeking peace and justice in every situation as and when we are able.

2. We believe that reconciliation is at the heart of the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom and is firstly between God and people, then between people themselves ([Col. 1:20](#)).

Therefore, we place great importance on reconciliation among and between different nations, cultures, local communities, churches and families.

3. We believe the Kingdom of God encourages caring and sharing lifestyles as opposed to materialism and individualism ([John 13:34-35](#)).

Therefore, we urge co-operation rather than competition, and oppose the consumerism and materialism of much of Western society. We are personally committed to living a sacrificial and simpler lifestyle.

4. We believe that God instituted marriage and family life as the fundamental unit for expressing the life of the Kingdom in society. The rule of Christ brings dignity and sanctity to both the single and married states ([Matt. 19:4-6](#)).

Therefore, we will model and support fidelity within a permanent marriage covenant between one man and one woman, and chastity outside of marriage.

5. We believe that God delegates authority to men and women within His Kingdom, raises up leaders and expects those in such positions to act responsibly and with humility ([Heb. 13:17](#); [1Tim. 3](#)).

Therefore, we encourage those in authority within the Kingdom of God to model servant leadership, act with integrity, seek accountability and encourage teamwork. [p. 318](#)

VIII. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND SOCIETY

1. We believe that the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom requires identification with the needs of those to whom we speak ([Mark 16:15](#); [Matt. 25:31-46](#)).

Therefore, we are committed to ministering to the whole person and reject the distinction which would isolate evangelism from social involvement.

2. We believe that God's intention is the transformation of the whole of society and that this is inseparable from the transformation of the inner, spiritual life of people, families and communities ([Col. 1-10-22](#)).

Therefore, we encourage men and women to look to God Himself for the power for this transformation.

3. We believe that God is the rightful owner of this universe, but He has given the management of this planet to men and women ([Ps. 24:1](#); [Gen. 1:28](#)).

Therefore, we are committed to a wise and responsible stewardship of land and other natural resources and we are opposed to all forms of greed or exploitation.

4. We believe that the Kingdom of God affects the whole of a person's being ([1 Thess. 5:23](#)).

Therefore, we are concerned about physical, cultural, social, spiritual, intellectual and emotional wholeness in human lives.

5. We believe that the Kingdom of God addresses all the needs that women and men experience ([James 2:15-17](#); [1 John 3:16-17](#); [Gal. 6:10](#)).

Therefore, we are concerned to minister to the needs of:

the rich and the poor,
the imprisoned and the free,
the oppressor and the oppressed,
the over-fed and the hungry,
as well as all others in need.

6. We believe we must respond to all people in need, especially sisters and brothers in the Kingdom of God ([Luke 4:18-19](#); [James 2:5](#); [Gal. 6:10](#)).

Therefore, we will give from our material abundance to assist the economic and spiritual transformation of the lives of people in poverty in other parts of the world.

7. We believe that the Kingdom of God transcends and transforms all p.319 cultures. It is radically different from, and challenges the fallenness of the status quo in our communities ([Gal. 3:28](#)).

Therefore, while recognising the contribution, strengths and uniqueness of each culture within our multicultural society, we are committed to bringing the influence of the Kingdom of God to bear on the fallen structures in our society by modelling the alternative and distinctive lifestyle of the Kingdom of God.

8. We believe that whenever humans, individuals or societies, Christian or non-Christian, generally obey the moral, economic, and practical precepts of the Kingdom of God, those people tend to reap earthly blessings for doing that ([Prov. 11:24-27](#)).

Therefore, we recognise the common grace of God to all people.

IX. THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE FUTURE

1. We believe that Jesus Christ will return and that it is God the Father's intention to reconcile all things to Himself through Christ ([John 14:3](#); [Col. 1:19](#)).

Therefore we wait expectantly for the time when the full reign of the Kingdom of God will be seen and the whole of creation will be healed and restored.

2. We believe that the Kingdom of God is both a present reality and a future expectation. It is both 'already' and 'not yet fully'. We live in the period between the inauguration and consummation of the Kingdom. At that consummation all the kingdoms of this world will come under the reign of Christ ([Luke 17:21](#); [Luke 19:11](#)).

Therefore we seek its demonstration here on earth while awaiting its full revelation in the future.

3. We believe that there is an important role for this earth in the future under the rule and reign of Jesus Christ the King ([Zech. 14:9](#); [Ps. 2:8](#); [Col. 1:18-20](#)).

Therefore we will value not only the spiritual but also the material and physical elements of creation as we work with Christ for the redemption of all things.

X. COMMITMENT TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1. We believe that commitment to the cause of the Kingdom of God will mean costly discipleship for people in terms of time, possessions, money and abilities ([Matt. 6:25-34](#); [Luke 18:22-30](#); [14:25-33](#)). **p. 320**

Therefore we will stress to people the need for prayerful evaluation of their life's priorities, discipline and faithfulness.

2. We believe that people were created to live within the Kingdom of God and that they thrive under its rule ([Matt. 6:25-34](#)).

Therefore, it is in living by the principles of the Kingdom of God that people reach their maximum potential and experience life in all its fullness. Thus the Kingdom of God is not a threat to humanity.

3. We believe that the Kingdom of God calls us to develop our abilities to their fullest potential for God ([Col. 3:17](#)).

Therefore we will encourage people to pray for and pursue this by training, development and persistence in the vocational, sporting, creative, educational and relationship activities of their lives.

4. We believe the Kingdom of God is like a treasure hid in a field, a pearl of great price ([Matt. 13:45-46](#)).

Therefore we will value everything we possess in relation to the Kingdom of God.

FINAL SUMMATION

As Christians of Aotearoa, New Zealand, we believe the Kingdom call of God requires that we observe His Kingly rule ..

—in all things.

Therefore there is no human activity, no region of human endeavour which is beyond His reign.

—at all times.

Therefore we maintain that there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular areas of human life.

—in all places.

Therefore we urge all Christians to 'seek first the Kingdom of God' in the home, at work, in study, in their local community, during recreation and in all other activities of their lives.

—among all people.

Therefore we will work for racial and social harmony, international justice and peace, and the manifestation of His Kingdom among all people everywhere.

—as our highest priority in our lives.

Therefore we will not permit anything to deflect us from seeking its fulfilment in our lives. **p. 321**

It is, therefore, our determined and unanimous decision, with prayer and the Holy Spirit's enabling, to commit ourselves to the outworking of this Manifesto. It is also our prayer that all who read this statement will join us in this commitment.

Mate Atua Koe e arahi i nga wa katoa; (God lead you on). **p. 322**

A Review Article

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EVANGELIZATION

by Paul Hacker

(Steyley, Verlag, St. Augustin 1980 pp. 100)

(Reviewed by H. L. Richard of Lucknow, India)

Paul Hackher, in this posthumously published work, gives a penetrating analysis of some recent trends in Roman Catholic thought in India. In many ways, this is a prophetic rebuke of the syncretism and compromise that mark so much of present day Roman Catholic attitudes and actions toward Hindus and Hinduism.

The book might be more accurately entitled 'Toward an Orthodox Christian Theology of Comparative Religions', although it seems likely the author chose his title to emphasise his practical, as opposed to merely academic concerns. An evangelical reading this book cannot miss the fact that Hacker, largely holding the position of traditional Roman Catholicism, defends a viewpoint quite closely resembling his own. A great chasm exists between evangelicals/traditional Catholics (ideological 'enemies') for centuries, and still such despite the birth of an ominous common foe) and liberal Protestants/radical post-Vatican II Catholics.

Hacker's 'Preface' sets the tone. 'One of the Primary expressions of the Church's life is evangelization or missionary work' (p. 5), he states: But on account of mistakes that can be summarised as 'the postconciliar disaster' (p. 5) we have a situation where there is 'a grave peril to real evangelization today' (p. 6). We will note later Hacker's view on just how Vatican II led to this 'disaster'.

The first chapter covers 'The Religions of the Nations in the Light of Holy Scripture'. Old Testament covenants are helpfully analysed. The covenant with Noah is seen as an unconditional promise to sustain mankind in its state of rebellion. There is no salvific content or instruction on worship, but rather a mere(!) promise of protection from destruction. The later judgment at the Tower of Babel appeared to so disperse the nations that universal salvation would be impossible; but the preservation promise of the Noah covenant established conditions such that a later evangelization of all nations would be possible.

Hacker is emphatic, however, that only the covenants with Abraham and Israel are 'a direct preparation for the gospel' (his italics) (p. 12). [Gen. 35:2](#) is put forward as an example that from earliest times the God of Israel/Jacob was seen as other than the gods of the surrounding nations, and this is emphasised continually from the time of God's covenant with Israel mediated by Moses ([Ex. 20:3, 4](#) for the [p.323](#) most obvious example). The people of the covenant and the fact of peoples outside the covenant is a fundamental Biblical fact and perspective that is not overruled by the New Covenant in Christ and that must never be ignored if we are to be faithful to Biblical revelation.

A clear summary of OT views of other religions is found in [Acts 14:16](#), 'In past generations God allowed all the Nations to walk in their own ways'. This rules out the modern idea that all religions are legitimate, while recognising the fact that God never called Israel to either jihad against the nations nor to missionary endeavour to convert them.

Considering the New Testament, Hacker first focuses on the conversion of Cornelius. As a 'pious Gentile' Cornelius is viewed as something of a type, and Hacker asserts that the message intended in Acts is that such 'pious Gentiles' will find their way into the church, and 'it would amount to missing or evading the point of the passage if we would

inquire what might happen if a pious gentile does not come to know the gospel and the Church' (p. 27).

Paul's preaching in [Acts 17](#) is built on the Noah covenant. It strikingly uses materials from non-Biblical sources which in their original contexts are not purely true although reflecting some element(s) of truth. In no sense does Paul grant validity or salvific content to Greek religions, yet he does not hesitate to use (and transform) some of their ideas. Further, the 'now' of vs. 30 is seen as definitive for all consideration of other religions. If the 'now' offer of salvation on condition of repentance is accepted, 'then and then only is the past annulled in its aberrations and reinstated in its remnants of truth and righteousness. The past is not redeemed by concepts but only in concrete reference to the "day of salvation" which is offered for the acceptance of faith in the message of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. If the past is contemplated in itself, without reference to the "day of salvation", then the religions of the Nations remain as perverse in the view of the New Testament as they were in the view of the Old Testament' (p. 31).

Hacker's second chapter deals with 'The Religions of the Gentiles as Viewed by Fathers of the Church'. He sees the church fathers following faithfully the pattern of Scripture, and demonstrates this by analysis involving extensive quotation from 7 early theologians, most prominently Justin Martyr, Clement, and Augustine. The presuppositions and conclusions of the church fathers are seen to be quite other than those of modern proponents of 'salvation in all religions' viewpoints. The 'spoiling of the Egyptians' (the idea that as Israel took treasures out of Egypt, so also non-Christians bring 'treasures' from their past into the [p. 324](#) Christian faith) is noted in several, and under the technical term of *chresis* (Greek for 'utilization') is later adopted as the proper paradigm for comparative religious study and practice.

Under 'The Christian Attitude Toward Non-Christian Religions' Hacker deals with Karl Rahner's theory of 'anonymous Christians' and with Vatican II and its aftermath. He begins with a clear statement that as individual Christians we should meet non-Christians 'in a spirit of dialogue' (p. 61). But in analysing the theological concepts behind some theories of dialogue he finds betrayals of Biblical revelation. Rahner is weighed and found wanting on numerous points.

The documents of Vatican II are shown to be at variance with Rahner despite continued efforts to interpret them as supporting his view that people can be saved in and through their own non-Christian religions.

Hacker grants, along with Vatican II, that 'men who without their guilt are ignorant of the gospel and the Church can attain eternal life if they, guided by God's grace, seek God and follow the dictates of their conscience, Without faith, however, man cannot be pleasing to God. We must assume that God can lead those ignorant of the gospel to faith by ways which He alone knows. This implies that the salvation of nonChristians is ultimately a mystery which we cannot unveil by scrutinizing' (p. 71). Yet he sees the larger issue of comparative religion 'the Christian attitude to non-Christian religions' as perhaps more important than the question of salvation for individual non-Christians.

Fundamental to 'comparative religion' (a term Hacker does not use) is 'simply to face the reality of the non-Christian religions as they are' (p. 72). Vatican II recognized the positive values of non-Christian religions, saying 'not seldom do they reflect a ray of that Truth which illuminates all men' (p. 72). Yet despite the desire of the Council to present a positive pastoral stance there is no mention of legitimacy in other religions, nor that salvation can be found through them. Rather, in Hacker's interpretation, 'even the Second Vatican Council, with all its understanding openness and reserve, has not hesitated to state or indicate that there is inveiglement by the Devil and evil defilement in non-Christian religions' (p. 73).

Hacker sees the council squarely in line with the view of *chresis* or utilization developed by the Church Fathers. 'In the course of time the Church, certainly not without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has actually, though without really thinking it through, exercised such utilization on a large scale. It may suffice here to recall that Christian rites are in great measure reorientations of pre-Christian customs ...' (p. 75). Evangelicals cannot be quite so positive about all the extra-Biblical p. 325 rites adopted by the Roman church over the centuries, but must not be blind to this background for some of our own practices!

Hacker quotes Vatican II for the theological basis for *chresis*: 'Through a sort of secret presence of God, elements of truth and grace are found already among the gentiles (Missionary activity) liberates all these elements from evil defilements and restores them to Christ who is their Author. He overthrows the dominion of the Devil and wards off the manifold malice of evil deeds. Therefore, all those good elements which are found in a germinal form in the hearts and minds of men or in the rites and cultures peculiar to particular peoples, are not destroyed; on the contrary, they are healed, elevated and perfected for the glory of God, for the humiliation of Satan and for the beatitude of man' (p. 75).

Three elements of this utilization (*chresis*) are drawn out. Elements borrowed from a non-Christian system must be made to work toward a different end than they pointed to in their original setting. Secondly, items can only be so taken over that have some truth contained or hidden in them. Finally, such items must be reoriented so their truth shines out clearly.

In his final chapter Hacker surveys 'The Situation of the Church in India'. He begins by pointing out that in the third Synod of Bishops in Cotober, 1974, 'the opinion of most of the Indian bishops ... did not find the Pope's approval' (p. 79). Hacker laments the fact that in the ten years between the Vatican Council and this meeting the meaning of Vatican II had been interpreted by Karl Rahner and other radicals in such a way that its true meaning was lost. The effort to truly interpret the Council following this 1974 confrontation proved a case of too little too late. Sections of the Roman Catholic church in India had and have run far ahead of and beyond what is acceptable to either Biblical thought or the traditions of orthodox Christianity.

Hacker states the view that India, with its ancient spiritual and cultural traditions, needs a strategy of *chresis* or utilization of its cultural riches by Christians. Yet he suggests that no successful *chresis* has yet been effected here (p. 81). He see the great work of Robert de Nobill as illustrating adaptation and even assimilation of habits and customs, yet is not ready to grant that even de Nobill arrived at *chresis*. (And as de Nobili's method itself was not continued for long after his death, nothing near *chresis* ever appeared.)

Two problems are highlighted in considering the need and possibility of presently working toward *chresis*, now illustrated as a marriage between Indian thought/customs and Biblical discipleship. The first problem is that the Indian Church is already married! The p. 326 Indian Church is married with 'pre-Christian Western culture and this cannot be dissolved ... we could say that the spiritual temple of the one true God which is to be adorned by Indian 'treasures' has already been decked out by precious achievements of the Western mind. Christian and (incorporated through *chresis*) originally pre-Christian' (p. 84).

From this obvious fact, Hacker draws the conclusion that a second marriage or *chresis* is not possible ('inadmissible'). The western heritage must be allowed to stand rather than attempt to work directly from Scripture on the basis of *chresis*. Crucial western theological terms are not open to discussion, but can only be translated. Translation itself is seen as difficult, 'a special kind of adaptation' (p. 85). In this section Hacker seems on unstable

ground, and especially on evangelical principles the refusal to allow the Bible to interact directly with the cultural context cannot stand. Hacker admits that 'Christian Hindi sounds somewhat artificial', yet goes on to say that 'it would be an error to try to eliminate this artificiality by using expressions familiar to the Hindus. This would be no *chresis* but syncretism' (p. 85). He still wants *chresis* and sees rich potential in it, yet seems to desire even the dropping of *pavitra atma* for Holy Spirit from Hindi Bibles in favour of the old missionary use of the Latin *espiritu sanctu*!

A second great problem with any *chresis* today is that Hacker sees no one qualified to do it. '*Chresis* requires, first, that the Christian dogma be the thinker's mental treasure; secondly, that he have an exact and comprehensive knowledge of the pagan system in whose area he is working; thirdly, that he be able to think in the language which is the medium of expression of this pagan system; fourthly, that he have the spiritual power to reorientate pagan notions which will inevitably occur to his mind as he is pondering on the mysteries of Christianity in a non-Christianised language. And let me repeat: There is hardly an theologian today who could fulfil all these requirements' (p. 91). Hacker defends his bold assertion that such people are not to be found, claiming there are inadequacies in both the Indological and Biblical fields. The compartmentalisation of life leaves few Indian Christians with any deep knowledge of Hindu thought. More tragically, Indian religious texts are now read not with Christian discrimination but with the belief that they are virtually on the same level as the Bible, clearly indicative of the death of clear Biblical thought. 'Early Christians wrote apologies to defend Christianity against paganism; present-day Indian adapters and indigenizers produce apologies of paganism' (p. 86). p. 327

The evidence for this strong statement is seen in D. S. Amalorpavadass, a follower of Rahner's thought who also 'seems to subordinate religion to nation and in this he agrees with the pagan modernism of his native country' (p. 88). Hacker strongly disapproves of Amalorpavadass' desire to introduce readings from non-Biblical Scriptures into Christian worship; in Hacker's words a 'paganising deformation' by reading these 'pagan' texts (p. 89). Celebrating Indian festivals is similarly considered; *chresis* in this area would be fine, but pushing some Christian meaning into a Hindu feast so as to have a common celebration is seen as misguided.

Such efforts as these have made it virtually impossible for a true *chresis* to develop. Fr. Johanns' 'To Christ through the Vedanta' is written of as 'a hybrid product, courting misconception on both sides', although avoiding 'paganization' (p. 90). Raymond Panikkar 'was probably gifted enough to solve the task, but unfortunately his writings have reached the climax of hybridity or syncretism ... it is quite out of the question that a Catholic could accept Panikkar's thesis' (p. 90, 91). Numerous specific examples of the mistakes and problems involved are mentioned. A striking conclusion is reached in the light of the confusion of such syncretism: '*chresis* is not only excluded but, if it were attempted at all, would be misunderstood'.²⁵

The essential problem is that in the Roman Catholic church in India today we are not witnessing an example of Biblical *chresis* in the Hindu context, but rather an indigenization or nationalization of the presently existing Church. Hacker suggests that this nationalization has nothing to do with evangelization and in fact is the same error (ethnocentrism, although Hacker does not use the term), made by the colonial missionary who introduced western ways. Hacker rightly points out that confusion and opposition are being generated in the Church by some aspects of this indigenization, and at least by inference suggests that it is irrelevant to Hindus who might notice the process.

There is so much more of weight and importance in Hacker's brief study. His perspective needs to be wrestled with by anyone seriously engaged in Hindu-Christian

encounter. This reviewer will suggest only three brief observations in interaction with Hacker's thesis. First, his criticisms of Indian thinkers do not entirely ring true; greater sympathy even in criticising would be helpful. (Even as he acknowledges at one point that the texts often misused in syncretic fashion are the right texts to be engaged in *chresis*.) Yet in the broad perspective it seems Hacker's criticism is on target.

Second, *something* must be done! Call it *chresis* or indigenization or anything else, the tendency to despair in Hacker's thesis must be p. 328 overcome in favour of Biblical and contextual evangelization and church planting (this a far greater priority than seeking to change the existing Church). To point out errors is useful; to paralyse serious and necessary efforts is not. Evangelicals are hardly involved in this significant field, and reading this work by Hacker may only scare us away. This would be tragic.

Finally, Hacker makes clear that the way ahead in contextual work among Hindus is incredibly difficult and dangerous, and he may be right that even assuming a proper practise of *chresis*, misunderstanding is inevitable. But the prospect of crucifixion did not turn Jesus aside, nor can past and present failures and mistakes condone continued inaction in the vital field of Hindu evangelization. Hacker does a great service in pointing out how narrow the true path is, even if at points we must conclude that he is not completely accurate in his analysis and approach. p. 329

Book Reviews

THE IMPRISONED MIND: THE GURU SHISYA TRADITION IN INDIAN CULTURE

by Akileshwar Jha

Delhi: Chanakya Publications (F10/14 Model Town, Delhi - 110 009) Second Edition (1989). x, 239 pp. Rs. 200, (Indian Rupees)

Reviewed by: Roger E. Hedlund

'The continuance of the guru-shisya tradition has crippled the Indian mind from being intellectually creative in the modern times', writes Akhileshwar Jha. Not so evident on the surface, a tradition based on religious rituals and quasi-magical mantras stands in the way of modernization. Sanskritization therefore is a step forward. Deviations and reforms lead nowhere because the intellect remains bound to hereditary customs and assumptions in which the guru holds sway. The guru is the cardinal figure in Hindu society. Scientific thinking and progress are secondary to one's devotion to one's guru. Good and evil do not really matter in a mythical world where even the gods depend upon their guru!

The author traces his theme from the Vedic period, through the various cults and sects and legends, down to the modern age. The greatest guru of the modern period, he finds, was no one less than Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi, who tried to energize Hinduism by injecting it with Christian humanism, was never able finally to free himself from the garb of the guru. His followers saw him more as a religious guru than a political leader. It was his appearance as a Hindu guru which aroused the suspicions and finally the antagonism of India's Muslims. Even the great secular leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, was a product of a guru-shisya culture and a life-long Gandhi shisya.

The author charges that India's modern education system has been degraded by the guru-shisya spirit in which students derive formulas (mantras) from professors in order to pass examinations (without reading the textbooks). The professor thus becomes a modern guru who provides a way of employment for his shisyas. The old pattern has subverted the modern university system so that intellectuals are neither creative nor free. The lure for power and the dis-inclination to hard work are manifestations of the crippling impact of an ancient tradition which is not able to come to terms with the modern, scientific world.

Not everyone will be happy with Jha's consistently devastating treatment of a cherished tradition. A protest may well be launched that he has given but one side of the story. A noble tradition has its values. Why not eliminate corruption, restore lost values? Regardless of one's reactions, it may be helpful to hear Jha out to his conclusions.

What solution is offered? Jha calls for a radical overhauling of all p. 330 institutional structures. 'Only a socio-political programme divested of 'isms' and 'ideologies', and based on the real needs of the people, and with a wholly pragmatic approach to problems, can hope to achieve the objective of freeing the Indian mind from the tyranny of the gurushisya tradition.' He wants to create a fresh psychological climate. India today, Jha is saying, is captive to a thousand-year-old traditional rural mentality which is unable to cope with the demands of a modern, urban, industrial society. It is time therefore to separate the humbug from a true spirituality which can liberate captive minds.

Jha addresses Indian intelligentsia. What is the relevance to the Church and Christian leadership? Just this, that the Church is part of the larger social-cultural milieu. The Church in India therefore is shaped by Indian traditions. Where these are in conflict with Christian teachings as contained in the Christian Scriptures, the Christian owes allegiance to a higher guru. The Church is called to live in tension—in the world but not too much of it.

Applied to the Church, *The Imprisoned Mind* helps us understand abuses of power and the corruption sometimes found in Christian leadership.

We can learn from the example of Gandhi who tried to comprehend Christianity but finally returned to an earlier Hindu model.

If, as some have charged, our present patterns of Church leadership training consist of largely irrelevant, prepackaged programmes borrowed wholesale from the West, the solution is not necessarily in rejection or in going back to an earlier pre-scientific, anti-intellectual pattern. Jha's polemic cautions us against an unthinking acceptance of the guru-shisya model. While Jesus certainly fits into the role of guru rather than that of maharaja (both traditional Indian roles), we cannot overlook the exploitation of the guru model for wealth and power exhibited by certain well-known contemporary guru-figures.

The greatest value of this unusual book is in its penetrating analysis of one aspect of the contemporary Indian scene. Whether or not one agrees with the author's thesis or conclusions, his interpretations are certain to stir the mind and provoke better understanding of the Indian psyche. Highly recommended reading for theological educators, Christian leaders, students of Eastern religions, and anyone interested in South Asian studies. p. 331

REDATING MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE

by John Wenham

(Hodder and Stoughton, 1991 Hardback £14.95 Paperback £9.95)

Reviewed by Bob Willoughby, lecturer in New Testament, London Bible College, London, England.

Why bother about the 'Synoptic Problem'? Isn't it just another insoluble riddle we would do better to forget about? John Wenham (and this reviewer) would certainly disagree. Most of us would do well to preach and teach much more from the synoptic Gospels with their warm and graphic presentation of Jesus. And to soak oneself in them is to be confronted yet again not only with Jesus, but also with the age-old headache of how these Gospels relate to one another. Hence the importance of the 'Synoptic Problem'.

In this book John Wenham (famous for his *Elements of New Testament Greek*) challenges many of the most accepted positions of contemporary scholarship. His thesis is quite simple: firstly, literary dependence is present but minimal and fairly unimportant; secondly, all the Synoptic Gospels were written before the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD—Matthew came first (about 40 AD), followed by Mark (about 45) and Luke (early 50s). His argument is illustrated by countless tables and parallel passages in Greek. This makes the book fairly heavy going even though there is real clarity in the handling of complex arguments.

Wenham has much more respect for the Church Fathers than many modern scholars, though he fails to do justice to Irenaeus' claim that Matthew wrote while Paul was in Rome. He shows how modern scholarship often uses arguments which are reversible and how the Gospel writers could not have been editors in exactly the way that scholars have often imagined them to be.

This is an important book, characterised by great learning, common sense and love for Scripture. It will be indispensable to all who are interested in the scholarly study of the Synoptic Gospels. [p. 332](#)

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