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EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



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Guest Editorial

In the Midst of Suffering is Prosperity Theology Scriptural?

Thousands of Christians around the world are facing persecution, suffering and death for their faith in Jesus Christ. What is the biblical perspective on Christian suffering? On the other hand, many pastors are preaching prosperity theology, i.e. that the more you give to God, the more spiritual and material blessings you receive from God. Does God always bring physical and material blessings to those who earnestly seek him? What is the relationship between prosperity theology and the theology of suffering? Is prosperity theology truly scriptural?

Approximately 50 theologians, including ten renowned theologians from six continents, met at the Korean Center for World Missions (Torch Center) in Seoul, Korea, September 28—October 1, 1994 to discuss the theological issues on the subject. Seven major papers were presented by both Korean and international evangelical theologians. This consultation was co-sponsored by the WEF Theological Commission and the Korean Evangelical Theological Society. The drafting committee of the consultation provided a *Statement on Prosperity and Theology of Suffering* which was discussed and finally adopted.

Dr. David Sang Bok Kim, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Asian Center for Theological Studies and Missions (ACTS) and executive director of the Torch Center, challenged the theologians not only to criticize bad theology, but also to strive to construct an evangelical theology of prosperity and suffering which would be able to guide Christians in their daily lives.

Dr. Young Hoon Lee, Director of International Theological Institute which belongs to Rev. David Cho's Youido Full Gospel Church, known as one of the churches in Korea which promotes prosperity theology, in his paper *Biblical Teaching in Prosperity Theology* stressed that the Old Testament puts much emphasis on material prosperity while the New Testament emphasizes spiritual prosperity. Dr. Lee said that since prosperity and success accompany those who serve God, a minister must teach his congregation correctly on how to serve God in order to receive his prosperity and success; nevertheless, prosperity and success should never be put ahead of God. [p. 4](#)

Dr. Ward Gasque, Dean of Ontario Theological Seminary, in his paper, *A Critique of Prosperity Theology in the New Testament* challenged the prosperity theologians on the grounds that this contemporary prosperity theology is 'based on the misinterpretation of specific texts of Scripture'. Quite contrary to prosperity theologians, he pointed out that the majority of faithful Christians in the world have been and are poor. He labelled prosperity theology as being fundamentally anthropocentric.

On the theology of suffering, a paper was presented by Dr. Se Yoon Kim, Professor of New Testament at the Presbyterian Seminary (Chongshin) in Seoul. Three case study papers on Christian suffering were also presented by the following theologians: *Suffering*

in Latin America by Dr. Pedro Arana of Peru; *Suffering in Eastern Europe* by Dr. Peter Kuzmic of Croatia; and *Christians Suffering in North Korea* by Dr. Sung Tae Kim of Korea.

Rev. Rene Daidanso of Chad, Africa, Associate General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA), made an oral presentation on the sufferings and poverty of many Africans due to natural calamities.

I welcome this issue of ERT which is devoted to this important issue.

Bong Rin Ro p. 5

Statement on Prosperity Theology and Theology of Suffering

INTRODUCTION

This statement seeks to summarize the substance of a discussion held at the Korean Center for World Missions (Torch Center) in Seoul, Korea, 28 September–1 October 1994, under the joint sponsorship of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Korea Evangelical Theological Society. Our consultation involved approximately 50 representatives of the two groups, in addition to a lively group of postgraduate students, many of whom are already theological educators in Asia and Africa. Participants hailed from Australia, Canada, Germany, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Korea, Nigeria, Peru, the Philippines, Uganda, and the USA.

Seoul seemed to be a very appropriate setting for such a consultation. The Korean Church, having passed through the fires of intense persecution and suffering during the first part of this century, has become quite prosperous and is rapidly becoming one of the dominant sending churches in the world Christian mission. The beautiful and bountifully equipped facilities of the Torch Center where we stayed are a visible witness to the dedication of many newly affluent Korean Christians to the cause of the gospel. The warmth of the hospitality, the commitment of brothers and sisters in Christ, and the breadth of the vision of the Korean church was a source of encouragement to all who participated.

I. PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

A. Definition

A distinction should be made between ‘prosperity theology’ and the biblical teaching on prosperity. The former expression refers to a contemporary theological teaching which stresses that God always blesses his people materially, with wealth and health, as well as spiritually when they have a positive faith and are obedient to him. It is a teaching that is found frequently, though not exclusively, in some charismatic and pentecostal circles, where it is also frequently criticized. The accent is not placed on the stewardship of the wealth that God has given to a person, but rather on understanding the biblical concepts of faith, prayer, and blessing, and the consequences of this teaching for one’s daily life. A p. 6 biblical theology of prosperity, on the other hand, would emphasize the

responsibilities of the successful or prosperous to use their wealth for the glory of God and for the alleviation of the suffering of the poor and the weak.

B. Context

Korea has experienced a great economic boom, and the Korean church has experienced both spiritual and economic growth. It now sits as an equal partner at the table of nations and is a model of success. Several of the other participants in the consultation were citizens of wealthy nations. On the other hand, there were brothers and sisters from other nations that are presently very poor by comparison. The church of Jesus Christ is alive and growing in most of these poor nations, several of them in a manner that equals or surpasses the recent growth of the Korean church and, indeed, far outstripping the spirituality and growth of the church in Europe and North America. Contrary to the Korean experience, the churches in some of these poor countries are not getting materially richer, in spite of their obvious faithfulness to the Lord Jesus and God's word. Consciousness of these present incongruities added a degree of realism to our theological discussion. Several participants felt called upon to warn the Korean church concerning the spiritual dangers of their newly acquired wealth, pointing to the coincidence of the decline of the church in Europe and North America with the growth in economic affluence.

C. The Christian Doctrine of Creation

The Bible teaches that God made the world and all that is in it and declared it to be 'good' ([Gen. 1:31](#)) And God made man and woman, 'in his image' ([Gen. 1:27](#)); he 'blessed them' and commanded them to bear children, to inhabit the earth, eating of its fruit and perpetually caring for the world that he had created ([Gen. 1:28-30](#)). In the original state, man and woman had in abundance all that they needed in life; they had immediate access to fellowship with God their creator, and they had all the food that they needed for their sustenance. They had life in all its fulness (cf. [In. 10:10](#)).

D. The Results of the Fall

As a result of the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God, sin, suffering, and death came into the world. The paradisaical abundance of the original creation was disturbed. Henceforth, pain ([Gen. 3:16a](#)), envy ([Gen. 3:16b](#)), strife ([Gen. 4:5-7](#)), greed ([Rom. 1:29](#)), and death ([Gen. 2:16](#); [4:8](#); [5:5](#)) were to become a part of the human experience; and it became necessary for men and women to struggle against nature in order to work out a bare living ([Gen. 3:17](#)). Thus, life in the world became a mixture of good and evil, abundance and scarcity, wealth and poverty, health and disease.

E. The Biblical Teaching on Wealth and Prosperity

The Old Testament is full of promises of blessing to the person who walks obediently before the Lord and keeps his commands. The book of Deuteronomy, for example, promises the [p. 7](#) people abundant material blessing in their lives in the land of Canaan if they remain true to the Lord. At the same time, there are checks and balances written into the biblical laws to prevent those who become wealthy from failing to share from their abundance with the poor—for example, the laws of the gleanings, the sabbatical year, and the Year of Jubilee. The ideal in ancient Israel was that there should not be a very big gap between the rich and the poor, though in time this ideal seems to have been lost sight of by many of the rich families in Israel and Judah. This neglect of the poor and needy called forth the scathing denunciations of the prophets of the LORD.

While the Old Testament promises abundance, including both spiritual and material blessings, to the faithful, this emphasis must be balanced by other Old Testament texts that warn the people concerning the accumulation of great wealth and the neglect of the needs of the poor, namely, the widow, the orphan the alien, and the physically disabled. God is the champion of the poor, and God's people are called upon to manifest his love and graciousness in reaching out to the needy ([Exod. 22:22](#); [Deut. 10:18](#); [14:29](#); [Isa. 1:17](#); [10:2](#); [Jer. 22:3](#)). Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that a faith that does not care for the weakest members of the human community is no faith at all ([Isa. 1:11–17](#); [Jas. 1:27](#); [Jn. 3:17](#)).

While the Bible teaches that all wealth comes from the Lord and is his possession, it does not teach that those who have wealth are more godly than others who do not. God in his providence causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends his rain on the just and the unjust ([Matt. 5:45](#)). The wicked frequently prosper ([Ps. 72:3–12](#)), and the righteous are frequently poor even though they are rich in faith ([Rom. 15:26](#); [1 Cor. 1:26](#); [2 Cor. 6:10](#); [Gal. 2:10](#); [Jas. 2:2–6](#)). The consequences of the fall have permeated the created order so that all are affected, yet God is still the benevolent creator who showers his blessings upon all ([Ps. 127:2](#)).

The good news of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and ultimately made real by his death, burial and resurrection is good news for the whole created order ([1 Cor. 15:1–5](#)). He did not preach a message of the salvation of the soul after death but of the fulness of life; he announced good news to the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the hungry, the weeping and the persecuted ([Lk. 4:18](#); [6:20–22](#) // [Matt. 5:3–11](#)). And he demonstrated the power of the kingdom by restoring people to wholeness (Heb *shalom*) in their relationships with God and with their neighbours ([Mk. 2:1–12](#); [Lk. 19:9](#); [7:36–50](#)), by driving out demons ([Mk. 1:23–28](#); [Mk. 5:1–20](#)), and by healing the sick ([Mk. 1:40–45](#); [10:46–52](#); [Lk. 7:18–23](#)). what Jesus promised by his kingdom proclamation, he wrought through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

The values of the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus were set by a radical commitment to the double command to love God with all one's being and to love one's neighbour as oneself ([Mk. 12:29–31](#)). To trust God completely frees the disciple of p. 8 Jesus from being overly concerned about material things. The desire to accumulate wealth, to have security and personal happiness represents the values of the old order, which is passing away ([1 Jn. 2:15–17](#)). To share what one has with others is a core value of the new community of the kingdom of God ([Lk. 3:11](#); [12:33](#); [18:22](#); [Ac. 2](#); [35](#); [2 Cor. 9:2, 7, 11](#); [Eph. 4:28](#)). The disciple of Jesus is called to a life of self-denial and servanthood, following the example set by the Lord himself ([Mk. 8:34–35](#); [10:45](#); [1 Pet. 2:21](#)).

Both Testaments teach that everything that exists belongs to the Lord and that anything anyone of us possesses is held in trust from the Lord. Thus, no followers of the Lord should regard anything they possess as their own. What we have is a blessing from God, but it is not ours to use in any way we desire. We are responsible for using whatever wealth we have for the Lord, particularly in the service of those who are in need. Our motivation for giving is gratitude, rather than to gain more. God has lavished his love upon us by his many gifts to us, the greatest of which is the gift of his Son ([Rom. 5:8](#); [Eph. 1:7–8](#); [1 Jn. 3:1](#)). Therefore, we find it natural to respond by sharing what he has given to us with others who have less of this world's goods than we have.

If our wealth comes from God, why is it that so many people, including many Christians, are poor? The Bible suggests a variety of reasons. Some are poor because they are lazy ([Prov. 10:4](#) *et passim*). But many others are poor because of circumstances totally outside of their control—because of injustice being done against them by people more powerful than themselves, because of war or famine, because of the death of the husband

and father who is able to provide for his family. As it was in the Old Testament period and in the first century church, so it is today. The Scriptures teach that it is the responsibility of those who have to share with those who have not, and thus to fulfil God's command to love our neighbour as ourselves.

The kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus and inaugurated by his healing mission, death, burial and resurrection has brought salvation to all who come to God through him; however, our experience of salvation is only begun in this life. Christians live between the ages—the age dominated by sin and rebellion and the age of the coming new world order that will be established at Christ's return. At the present time, we experience a foretaste of the age to come through the liberating power of the Holy Spirit, by signs and wonders, by the fruit of the Spirit, the experience of joy and the assurance of the hope that we have in Christ. Jesus' saving work has touched our lives and transformed them, and he, through us, reaches out to bring health, wholeness, and well-being to others; yet we must still resist the temptation to live selfishly and to invest our energies in matters of less importance, giving greater priority to spiritual matters. Hence the New Testament writers constantly urge believers to live in the light of the *eschaton*, the day when each and every one will experience full health, wealth, and eternal prosperity ([Mk. 10:25–31](#); [Col. 3:1–4](#); p. 9 [Heb. 12:1–2](#); [2 Pet. 3:11–13](#); [Rev. 21:1–4](#)).

F. A Search for Balance

The Bible does not, unlike some other religious and philosophical traditions, denigrate the physical and material. Wealth is not *per se* a negative. Viewed and handled properly, it can be an instrument for great blessing. On the other hand, it should not be given too high a value. Wealth can become a substitute for God; it can become an idol. Therefore, the Lord Jesus frequently warned his disciples concerning the dangers of riches ([Mk. 10:25](#); [Lk. 6:24](#); [Matt 6:4](#); [16:19–23](#), etc).

It is imperative that the church be taught a balanced perspective on wealth and prosperity. While there may have been times in the past history of the church where there was a danger of denigrating material things, that does not seem to be the present problem of the world Christian community. Rather, with the development of modern industrial and consumer capitalism, all too many Christians are obsessed with material things. Moderation is the true biblical perspective: 'Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it' ([Prov. 15:16](#)). 'Give me neither poverty nor riches, ... or I shall be full, and deny you, ... or I shall be poor, and steal, and profane the name of my God' ([Prov. 30:7–9](#)). 'Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that' ([1 Tim. 6:6–8](#)). Scripture teaches 'those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God' and 'to do good, be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share' ([1 Tim. 6:17–18](#)). Through the writings of Proverbs, scripture teaches the poor to learn the disciplines of careful planning, hard work, frugality, and honesty, so that they will 'have something to share with the needy' ([Eph. 4:28](#)).

G. Conclusion

Wealth and prosperity can be a blessing from God, but they can also be Satan's temptation ([Lk. 4:5–7](#)). Wealth can be used in a manner that brings great glory to the Lord and great blessing to his people, or it can subtly supplant the place of the Lord in one's life. Jesus warns us that we cannot serve both God and Mammon (Wealth) ([Matt. 6:24](#)). This message is as urgent in our day as it was in the first century and must be heeded. In the model prayer ([Matt. 7:11](#); [Lk. 11:3](#)), Jesus taught us to trust God for our daily bread, i.e.,

the necessities of life rather than the luxuries. Moderation and sufficiency mark the life-style of the biblically sensitive Christian. Paul had learned the secret of being content with whatever he had, whatever circumstances came his way, even in prison ([Phil. 4:11-14](#)). In another passage, Paul reminds us of 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)). Jesus thus provides the Christian with a model of sacrificial and truly altruistic love (*agape*). Whatever wealth an individual Christian or **p. 10** a Christian community has provides an opportunity for *koinonia*, for sharing. All the world's wealth belongs to the Lord. And if God's people could learn to be content with what is sufficient for a full and healthy life rather than the excesses that mark the overly developed world, there would be more than enough to go around. The earth is rich enough to support all those who are alive today and who will be born in the near future at a level of sufficiency but not at the level of prosperity and affluence presently attained by only a few. Both the creation ethic of the Old Testament and the kingdom ethic announced by Jesus call those who would be true worshippers of the living God to take steps to see that the basic needs of all are met. As God blessed Abraham so that he could make him a blessing to the nations ([Gen. 12:2](#)), so God has blessed rich Christians to make them a blessing to others.

II. THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING

A. Definition

Suffering is contrary to the original will of God. Suffering is a human experience which a person undergoes against his/her wish, an experience which causes pain, discomfort, disharmony, sorrow, despair, anxiety etc. in material, physical, psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions of life.

B. Context

During our time together, we heard reports of the intense sufferings of Christians in Latin America, Africa, and in Eastern Europe. And we learned of the suffering of many due to the spread of the plague in western India. Although poverty, injustice, deprivation, hunger and disease are more widespread in some parts of the world than others, the whole world suffers. In spite of the technological and educational advances at the present time, many Christians are suffering because of their faith in Jesus Christ as well as as a result of the political or economic situation under which they live with the general populace. It is very important for theologians and Christian leaders to be aware of the suffering that is taking place in the world because the God to whom they have dedicated their lives is a God of mercy to those who suffer.

C. Place of Suffering in Redemptive History

In the order of the original creation and in the final consummation, there is no suffering at all. Suffering is, however, characteristic of the period of human history between the fall of Adam and the *parousia* or coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Suffering came into the world as a result of human rebellion and God will bring it to an end when he completes his work of salvation for humankind at the second coming of Jesus Christ. During this interim period God permits human suffering, but he is also actively at work in the world, saving men and women from sin and its consequences. God solves the problem of suffering by way of suffering, namely, through the cross of Christ. Jesus' suffering was incarnational, substitutional, and redemptive for the sake of suffering humanity. Christians suffer not merely because of their participation in a common **p. 11** humanity that has been infected

by sin, or the influence of the demonic, but also because of their identification with Jesus Christ and participation in his suffering for the sake of his kingdom and in the service of his cause. Jesus was the Suffering Servant of the Lord ([Isa. 53](#)), and we Christians are also suffering servants in the inter-advent period. In our suffering we have a sure and certain hope of a day when God ‘will wipe away every tear’ and ‘there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain’ for the old order will have passed away ([Rev. 21:4](#)). As Paul comments: ‘The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us’ ([Rom. 8:18](#)).

D. Causes of Suffering

In general, suffering is the result of the sin of Adam. But this is not to say that all who are suffering are suffering as a result of their personal sins. Some suffer because of natural disasters, such as famine, sickness, physical deformities and limitations, drought, floods, earthquakes, and storms, some of which might have been prevented by more faithful application of the creation mandate to care for the earth. Some suffer because of self-inflicted pain, such as poor health that is a result of bad habits or neglect, business disasters because of poor planning or illegal practice, injury caused by carelessness, and the like. Some suffer because of the social sins of mankind, such as economic and political injustice, wars and violent revolutions, terrorism, abuse and discrimination. Christians sometimes suffer because God puts his disciplinary hand upon his sinning people. Christians suffer also when they have done nothing wrong but simply because of their faithful obedience to Jesus Christ in this sinful world. On other occasions Christians suffer as a result of their foolish acceptance of Satan’s temptation to turn away from the Lord’s path. On the other hand, Christians frequently suffer because of their resistance to Satan’s temptation and their steadfast discipleship in the world. Often suffering is a mystery, as in the celebrated case of Job. God knows everything; our knowledge is limited. In such cases we must be patient, content to leave the question, ‘Why?’ unanswered and continue to trust the Lord.

E. Significance of Suffering

The mature Christian knows that there is no meaningless suffering; all suffering can become meaningful. No one wishes to suffer, but no Christian who has gone through suffering regrets this. Christian suffering is instructive and has retrospective, present and prospective purposes: it teaches us lessons from our past experience; it is a sign that we are God’s faithful children ([Heb. 12:5–6](#)), and it purifies us in holiness for our future life of service. Christians suffer in sympathy with others who suffer and in the cause of attempting to remove causes of suffering in response to the love command of the Lord Jesus Christ. We suffer also because of our identity as disciples of Jesus Christ, who calls us to take up our cross and follow him and warned us of the persecutions that would follow. If we participate in the sufferings of Jesus Christ, we will share in his glory in the future. Thus [p. 12](#) suffering is not always detrimental but may be beneficial—to oneself, to one’s neighbour, and to the cause of the kingdom of God. Suffering is a path to glory. If we do not drink the cup that Jesus drinks and share in his baptism of suffering, then we cannot share in his exaltation ([Mk. 10:38–39](#)).

F. Christian Response to Suffering

We rejoice in the privilege we have in our suffering because it prepares us for the glory that is to follow. The church is expected to complete her diaconal work with the same perspective as her Lord, who, having loved his own loved them to the full extent of giving

his life for them ([Jn. 13:1-3](#)). The reality of suffering in the world calls every Christian to the task of seeking to alleviate suffering and to remove the causes of suffering, both individually and socially. If our personal suffering is because of something that we have or have not done, or is it self-inflicted, we have to repent. If our societal suffering is a result of our negative action or neglect of God's principles of stewardship and justice, we must repent. As Christians we are called to work for justice, both individual and societal, for the preservation of the planet ecologically, for a better life for all of God's creatures—in short, for kingdom values ([Heb. 13:16](#)). We need to repent of our neglect of such matters as social justice, basic human needs, ecology, and the alleviation of social ills. We need to harness the resources of modern medicine, agricultural science, technology, economic development, business management, political science, and other scientific and social scientific disciplines in the service of our fight against human suffering till God himself removes all suffering. The church will be able to serve faithfully unto death only if she knows she is going to pass from this world to the Father and that her 'present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed ...' ([Rom. 8:18](#)).

G. Conclusion

Human suffering belongs to the present reality of life between the fall and the consummation of all things at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the kingdom of evil has been fundamentally undermined by the first coming of Christ, we live 'between the ages', in a period in which both sin and salvation with their attendant consequences are present. Jesus announced good news to the suffering: the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the hungry, the weeping, and the persecuted ([Lk. 4:18](#); [6:20-22](#); [Matt 5:3-11](#)); and by his own suffering inaugurated the kingdom of God, a new world order. And in his short ministry on earth, he demonstrated the power of the kingdom by alleviating the suffering of many people. For nearly two thousand years his followers have sought to follow in his footsteps, preaching the good news to the poor and suffering and binding up the wounds of suffering humanity ([Lk. 10:30-35](#); [Matt. 25:31-45](#)). The church's ministry of mercy is an essential ingredient in her calling. To share the good news in word and deed is the reason that she has been left in the world. Suffering is a great mystery; however, part of the mystery has been revealed in the **p. 13** suffering of Jesus on the cross as a demonstration of God's great love for humankind. Christians have been called to suffer with Christ for the sake of the world; they are also called to demonstrate the love of God by reaching out to those who suffer. For in their suffering and in their service they validate the genuineness of their faith. **p. 14**

A Bed of Roses or a Bed of Thorns

Sang-Bok David Kim

For the last few decades the Christian community has been embroiled in controversies over the issue of the so-called prosperity theology, which is considered a new teaching by many. The church has been sharply divided between the ardent followers of prosperity theology and those who severely frown upon it and call it 'heretical'. We are gathered here to have another round of a formal discussion on it. As we begin this consultation, my

prayer is that we shall carefully search the Scriptures and come to a better understanding on the subject so that the church of Jesus Christ may follow the truth and receive benefits intended for our edification.

WHAT IS PROSPERITY THEOLOGY?

Prosperity theology is a teaching primarily embraced by Charismatic circles, which have been growing in the United States under the influence of Kenneth E. Hagin since the 1950s. Its tenet is that 'God desires that all faithful Christians should automatically prosper as of divine right.'¹ It is often called the gospel of wealth and health and happiness. It teaches that the atonement of Christ guarantees for all Christians divine healing for good health, the riches of this world if we follow certain principles, and a life of happiness without unnecessary sufferings.

On the other hand, prosperity theology is regarded by others as unbiblical and even 'heretical because its claim to be Christian cannot be substantiated, and the movement is to be rebuked wherever it is encountered'.² The movement became prominent in the latter half of the twentieth century. As the titles of the articles written on it suggest, it is seen as something new to the church: 'Prosperity: a New and Foreign element in African Christianity',³ p. 15 'Prosperity Gospel: A New Folk Theology',⁴ 'The Prosperity Message in the Eschatology of Some New Charismatic Churches',⁵ New Thought or a Modern Religious Approach: The Philosophy of Health, Happiness, and Prosperity'.⁶

Ray McCauley, a prosperity preacher from South Africa, says, 'It is God's will to prosper every one of his children.' He criticizes his opponents, 'A lot of people seem to think that poverty is a blessing and that somehow it's more spiritual and more humble to be comfortable with next to nothing.'⁷ McCauley had been trained at Hagin Bible Training Center. When he returned to South Africa upon graduation from the school, he started holding services in his parents' home with fifteen people in June, 1980, and six years later his 'Rhema' church had 9000 members and a six million dollar building which seats 5000 people. It is already too small, and has pioneered 120 other churches. His Bible school turns out 300 graduates each year. Each month 500 decisions for Christ are being recorded. When he came back to South Africa, he was told by some traditional Pentecostal ministers that 'it was impossible to pioneer a church without taking a part-time secular job and that a congregation of a few hundred was all that could be expected in our country'. McCauley further stated, 'I didn't believe them. I believe that God was on my side and could do better.'⁸ And Rhema Ministries South Africa started by him became something to behold. Prosperity theology worked for him. McCauley teamed up with

¹ Robert Jackson, 'Prosperity Theology and Faith Movement', *Themelios*, Vol.15, No.1, October 1989, p. 16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³ Paul Gifford, *Religion*, No. 20, 1990, pp. 373-388.

⁴ Joe E. Barnhart, *Religious Television*, ed by R. Abelman and S. Hoover, pp. 159-164.

⁵ Allan Anderson, *Missionalia*, Vol. 15, Aug. 1987, pp. 72-83.

⁶ M. A. Larson, *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring, 1986, p. 80.

⁷ Ray McCauley, 'Believe for a Blessing,' *Redemption*, May, 1986, p. 30.

⁸ *ibid.*

Reinhard Bonnke, who had recently visited Korea twice. They are experiencing tremendous success at spreading the prosperity teaching in the African continent.

David Yonggi Cho, who is looked upon as a symbol of prosperity theology, summarizes his beliefs in one of his books.⁹ His basic teachings are well represented in his 'King's Kid' idea, which is being worn on the shirts on the streets of Seoul. Cho appears to be convincing by the simple fact that he is the pastor of the most prosperous church in the world. He and his church appear to be enjoying what he preaches, 'wealth, health and happiness'.

Prosperity theology, which was started in the United States, is now everywhere in the world. The new movement is mainly associated with the Hagins, the Copelands, Frederick Price, and Charlie Capps in the United States, Ray and Lynda McCauley and Reinhard Bonnke in Africa, Bryn Jones in Britain, Stanley Sjoberg and Hans Braterud in Scandinavia, the Britons in Kenya and India, Orvil Swindol in Argentina, David Yonggi Cho in Korea and many others. p. 16

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CONNECTION

The leaders of prosperity teaching openly acknowledge Kenneth E. Hagin of the United States as the father of the movement, the human source of their inspiration and their spiritual mentor. Hagin himself claimed that during the 1950s the new teaching was given to him by Jesus through a series of divine visitations.

However, a recent piece of research by Daniel McConnell demonstrated that Hagin had derived most of his teachings from the writings of Essek W. Kenyon. Many passages from the works of Hagin and Kenyon, who died in 1948, have been compared side by side. Hagin was accused of having allegedly plagiarized word for word from Kenyon's works and all of Hagin's work postdates Kenyon's. McConnell says, '... he (Hagin) plagiarized Kenyon both repeatedly and extensively ... the very doctrines that have made Kenneth Hagin are all plagiarized from E. W. Kenyon.'¹⁰ Kenyon was, however, not a Pentecostal, even though he may have influenced many of the post-war Pentecostals. The dominating influence in his theology was the metaphysical cults of Christian Science, which abounded at the turn of the century. He went to a college in Boston, Massachusetts, during the last decade of the nineteenth century, where Mary Baker Eddy, the mother of Christian Science, established her church. He explicitly refuted their doctrines but at the same time spoke very positively of her and said that there was a lot that could be learned from her and asserted the foundational doctrines of these cults.¹¹ He was living at a time when, while Christian Science was rapidly growing, the mainline churches were failing, because, he thought, they produced no signs and wonders. So Kenyon made an attempt to redress an anti-supernatural tendency which was driving bored Christians into joining such people as Mrs. Eddy. He sought to provide Christians with all the same benefits of Christian Science, while remaining within the Christian fold. The result was prosperity theology, which is, with very few embellishments, the theology of the present-day faith movement.¹²

⁹ Yonggi Cho, *Five-Fold Gospel and Three-Fold Blessings*, Seoul Books, 1983, pp. 237–252.

¹⁰ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel: The Cultic Nature of the Modern Faith*, A mss presented to Hendrickson for publication in 1988.

¹¹ McConnell, p. 56.

¹² Jackson, p. 16.

AMERICAN PRAGMATISM CONNECTION

It is not surprising that the new teaching began in the United States, where Charles S. Pierce, William James and John Dewey formulated the distinctly American philosophy of pragmatism or utilitarianism and where success business is a big business.¹³ James believed that truth must be practical and efficient and that philosophers should get down to the task of solving the problems of life. Too long have they been playing around with metaphysical speculations, An idea is to be judged by its 'cash value', wrote James, and philosophical concepts should be **P. 17** evaluated in terms of their practice consequences. It has often been noted that pragmatism could have been born on American soil, since it reflects the spirit of the nineteenth century, the frontier spirit of individualism, self-reliance, and practicality. James' down-to-earth attitude sometimes shocked staid academicians. 'This universe will never be completely good as long as one being is unhappy,' he said, and added, 'or as long as one poor cockroach suffers the pangs of requited love.'¹⁴ His concerns were happiness and love, and the abolition of poverty and suffering. Pragmatism asserts that truth must be productive, helpful, and utilitarian. Truth must always produce beneficial results. If it does not, it is no truth. One of the most important discoveries by James is the power of belief in achieving pragmatic results.

The tenets of James' philosophy were adopted, Christianized and popularized by Norman Vincent Peale who often quoted James and applied his philosophy in his Christian circles, American businesses as well as sports. Peale, the author of *The Power of Positive Thinking*, has been popular for decades among the salesmen and business executives for his inspirational talks about success. The possibility thinking of Robert Schuller, who is a disciple of Peale, further extended its influence. Carnegie, Hill and Stone adopted prosperity philosophy and widely disseminated it.¹⁵

FAITH AND PMA

They taught that 'PMA' (Positive Mental Attitude) attracts wealth, success, happiness and health, whereas 'NMA' (Negative Mental Attitude) removes them. As someone suggested, prosperity teaching 'fits the spirit of the age' rather than the spirit of the bible.¹⁶ Peale quoting William James said, 'Your belief will help create the fact.'¹⁷ The power of faith was scientifically observed and demonstrated by James, and in turn popularized by Peale and Schuller. Hagin and his followers are not directly connected to Peale and Schuller. However, the two strands of the prosperity movement complement one other in order to advance it. On the one hand Kenyon, Hagin, Copeland, Cho and McCauley form the faith movement: on the other hand Pierce, James, Carnegie, Hill, Stone, and Peale and Schuller travel the similar path of prosperity teaching. The first group represents more of conservative charismatic churches, while the second represents more or less secular and liberal circles.

POSITIVE CONFESSION

¹³ Og Mandino, *University of Success*, Bantam Books, 1982.

¹⁴ James L. Christian, *The Ways of Philosophy*, Rhiehart Press, P. 36.

¹⁵ Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, Prentice Hall, p. 112.

¹⁶ Voskuil, 1983, p. 10.

¹⁷ Peale, p. 14.

Prosperity theology has a few important tenets. Adherents are believers in the power of faith, whether it is called faith in a religious term or PMA in a psychological term. They have faith in faith. The anatomy of both is similar. The results could be the same. If you believe in something strongly enough, you will get it. As you believe for a healing or a business deal, what you believe can **P. 18** be secured. Peale says: 'I discovered that if you expect the best you will get the best'¹⁸ or 'Big thoughts get big results'.¹⁹ So he advises, 'Repeat the affirmation daily,' 'Speak to your muscles every day and to your nerves.'²⁰ Is this a biblical faith or self-hypnosis or mind-conditioning? Success is claimed on the basis of texts such as [Mark 11:24](#) and [Philippians 4:19](#).²¹ What PMA was to Carnegie and Peale, faith was to Hagin and Cho. When one reads the literature produced by the faith movement, one is constantly reminded of the secular motivational paperbacks readily available for the businessmen on the popular book racks in the stores at any major airport of the Western hemisphere. The prosperity movement is essentially a faith movement. Faith works whether one uses a religious term or a psychological term. It works in religion; it works in business and sports. They teach that the key to success lies within you. As Oral Roberts says, 'Your faith is the key to your own healing.' Your faith activates prosperity.

'NAME IT AND CLAIM IT'

This is sometimes called 'the slot machine religion' or 'cafeteria Christianity'. You can have anything you want. You just name it and claim it; then it's yours. 'Believe it and receive it.' If you want a piece of real estate, just name it, walk around it and claim it by faith; it will be yours to build your church on. If something is claimed, you must act on it as if you have already received it. If your faith is not real, or you have any doubt, consequently you will not receive it.²² If there is any failure, it is your fault. It's your problem.

Jenny went to a healing service. She was told to claim healing of her eye-sight. She was wearing her thick eye-glasses. The healer laid his hand on her. As she believed for healing, she felt her eye-sight restored. She got up and claimed healing and believed that she was healed. Momentarily she could see clearly. So she acted on faith; she shouted 'Hallelujah' and broke her glasses while the crowd was watching her. All shouted 'Hallelujah' together and rejoiced with her. The evangelist told her that she must believe and not doubt that she was healed, and she did. During the following year she has been called upon fifty times, almost once a week, to give the testimony of her healing. She believed and acted upon her faith. At the end of the year she came to me and confessed that she in fact couldn't see well, but still she believed she was healed but was now troubled. I told her that it's alright to use her eye-glasses and she began to use them again. She felt relieved. She was one of my students. If one does not receive it by faith, one is blamed for one's little faith or doubt.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹ [Mark 11:24](#) 'Therefore, I say unto you, Whatever things you desire, when you pray believe that you receive them, and you shall have them.' [Phil. 4:19](#), 'God shall supply all your needs according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus.'

²² G. Copeland, *God's Will Is Prosperity*, Harrison House, 1978, p. 80.

Does that mean that faith does not [p. 19](#) work healing? Yes, it does, but not always. Faith in Christ saves all sinners. But faith healing does not always procure healing, Only 5%–10% of those who sought healing are helped from feeling better to complete healings.²³

SEEK FAITH: MATERIAL SUCCESS IS A RIGHT

F.K.C. Price says: 'We need to realize that prosperity is the will of God. It is God's perfect will that everyone prosper in every area of life. Primarily, we are dealing with material and financial prosperity, because it has to do with tithes and offerings.'²⁴ God wants all Christians to be rich, and the reason for this is not only so that it can be given away. Price believes that God also wants Christians to enjoy being wealthy: 'Yet by walking in God's financial plan, you can have the \$15,000 automobile, wear the \$300 suit, and buy the \$100 designer shoes. God does not care. He wants His kids to look good' ([2 Cor. 9:6–11](#)), Michael Bassett also says, 'If you want a nice watch, why don't you give one away and be expectant for your nice one to come in? If you want a nice car, why don't you sow for one, then you can be expectant for a new car? ... you cannot give away much when your own needs are not met. You cannot do it when you are struggling yourself to pay your electric bill.' Poverty is seen as a 'denial of all that Christ has won through his death', and 'the ignorance of this fact which prevents financial endowment is tragic'.²⁵ Gloria Copeland is more explicit: 'Give one house and receive one hundred homes or one house with one hundred times as much. Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the airplane. Give one car and the return will furnish you a lifetime of cars. In short [Mark 10:30](#) is a very good deal.'²⁶

The thrust of Peale's books also concerns success and how to achieve it. He believes that material success is a result of a positive attitude to life. Faith and prosperity are inseparable. He explicitly says, 'There was a time when I acquiesced to the silly idea that there is no relationship between faith and prosperity ...'²⁷ Hill and Stone report the effects of having a group of salesmen chant in unison 'I feel wealthy, I feel happy, I feel terrific', and advise writing down 'with emotion', twice daily, a statement of desire for money. Peale speaks of 'the amazing untapped power you have within you', One common thread that appears always is that the power for success is within you. If one does not restrict the power of thought with negative emotion and thought, anything can be achieved. All the prosperity teachers believe that *prosperity is always* the will of God and can be secured if you just believe it for yourself. [p. 20](#)

THE LAWS OF BLESSINGS

David Yonggi Cho's teachings are identical in substance to those of Hagin and Schuller, but more balanced than most. His basic teachings are summarized in one of his books. The five-fold Gospel is the Gospel of Regeneration, the Gospel of the Filling of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel of Divine Healing, the Gospel of Success, the Gospel of the Second Coming; and

²³ Sang-Bok Kim, 'The Place of Miracles Today', *ACTS Theological Journal*, Vol. 5, 1994, p. 83.

²⁴ F. K. C. Price, *High-Finance-God's Financial Plan*, Harrison House, 1984, p. 12.

²⁵ Jackson, p. 18.

²⁶ G. Copeland, p. 54.

²⁷ Peale, p. 229.

the three-fold blessings are the Spiritual Blessing, the Daily Blessing, the Blessing of Health ([3 Jn. 2](#)). He writes, 'When you practice the Gospel of blessings, you become successful in all things. The blessings here do not mean material blessings alone, but also include life's overall success and happiness. Being prosperous in all things means that we live a successful and happy life in the Lord. Already we are the people who are prepared for successes in all things.' Cho teaches that one must follow the laws of blessings if he wishes to be prosperous.

The first is the Law of Tithe Contract ([Mal. 3:10-12](#)). Tithe faithfully all the incomes big or small which come in your daily life. We are never to test God, but he himself told us to test him regarding tithes to see whether God does not pour upon us so many blessings that we are not able to hold them.

The second is the Law of Sowing and Reaping ([Gal. 6:7-8](#)). As you sow, you shall reap is a universal law of nature. If you don't sow, you don't reap. If you sow a little, you reap a little, and if you sow much, you reap much. This natural law applies to the spiritual realm as well. God manifests his work on the basis of your sowing by faith. Therefore, we should sow before God as much time, material, service, and dedication as we can.

The third is the Law of Echo. When we go up to the mountain, if we don't say anything, the other side of the mountain doesn't say anything either. But if you shout in a loud voice, the mountain yonder shouts back to you in a similar voice. Likewise, if we do the works by which we can glorify God as the Holy Spirit leads, what we did will come back to us with many blessings ([Lk. 6:38](#)). If you desire to live in the Lord's blessings, you should share first with God and with your neighbours ([Lk. 18:22](#)). Then what you have shared will come back to you as echoes in thirty-fold, sixty-fold, hundred-fold.

Lastly you should expect the blessings of God. Even though you have sown the faith seeds by way of much material and time, if you don't believe and expect that you will receive the blessings of God, they will not come upon you. The elder son in the story of the prodigal son in [Luke 15](#) was not expecting to receive even a little goat from his own father; he could not experience his father's rich blessings. Likewise, however great and almighty God is, if we do not expect anything from God, his blessings will not come upon us. The Bible says, 'Open your mouth wide, I will fill it' ([Ps. 81:10](#)). The Lord wants to fill our mouth of faith. The reason why faith does not work in our Christian life and we are p. 21 always lacking, is because we do not expect anything of abundance from God, and we have not sown anything in concrete faith. If you follow the laws of blessings, you are assured of prosperity. How do you expect it? according to Cho you are to condition your mind, making a mental picture of what you desire, and then you will get it.

Some of the techniques for prosperity appear to be more psychological than spiritual. It gives an impression that man can, by the use of formula, force the hand of God to grant what he desires. Numerous problems and excesses are observed in the underlying theology: positive confession, Bible usage, almost letteristic hermeneutics, the idea of seed faith, material success and physical health as a divine right, simplistic methods and other techniques of achieving prosperity. There are so many problems with prosperity theology as it is promoted in the current form, such as the belief that material prosperity is the divine right of a Christian. In spite of the manifold problems, people are attracted to the churches that espouse prosperity theology. Some of these churches are apparently prospering, while many churches not espousing prosperity theology are anaemic. Why? Somehow prosperity teachers raise hopes and expectations for the people and seem to meet their needs.

SPIRITUALITY INCOMPATIBLE WITH PROSPERITY?

Then we may ask this question: Is spirituality necessarily incompatible with prosperity? Are spirituality and prosperity possible simultaneously? Is God against health, wealth and the prosperity of his children? Is the will of God always to have his children undergo sufferings in life? On the other hand are the children of God never to experience the sufferings of this life because they are members of God's family? Will they get anything simply on demand because they name it and claim it or agree with one another? Did Peter, James and John, who gave up their fishing boats and nets receive one hundred boats and nets according to the law of sowing and reaping in [Mark 10:30](#)? Was Paul able to remove his thorn in the flesh? Was Timothy delivered from his stomach trouble without a little bit of wine? Why was Paul himself ill ([Gal. 4:13f.](#))? Consider this in light of what Hagin says: 'When the Bible talks about suffering, that doesn't mean 'sickness'. We have no business suffering sickness and disease, because Jesus redeemed us from that.' Why was Trophimus left sick in Miletus ([2 Tim. 4:20](#))? Can all the benefits of the atonement of Christ be secured at the present time by PMA? Although we know forgiveness is instantly granted, is healing always granted instantly? Prosperity preachers must answer many questions. How simplistic prosperity preachers have been one can easily see.

Then on the other hand, is Christian faith relevant only for spiritual and ethical life but not for physical, social, financial, emotional, intellectual or environmental life? Or should material blessings be excluded from [p.22](#) God's domain? If Christian faith affects all areas of life, does that include financial as well, or should we apply Christian principles to all other areas except prosperity? Does the Bible teach that God promises to prosper his children? Does the Bible have nothing to say about the prosperous life of God's children? Is there any systematic teaching in the Bible for Christians to follow that will help them to prosper? Should Christians experience no suffering but instead wealth, health, and happiness, simply because [Isaiah 53](#) says that he took our pains and griefs? Do prosperity teachers sometimes create possible heresy because of the overemphasis of one truth while ignoring the other truth which is equally clear?

The Book of Deuteronomy is full of divine promises of all kinds concerning blessings for God's people on earth, contingent upon faithful obedience to the Lord. To be God's people is the result of his unconditional choice and his sovereign grace; but whether to enjoy prosperity in this life or not is conditional upon their obedience. The Bible clearly teaches that there is always suffering in life which has beneficial significance for the believers. One of the major problems of prosperity teachers is their one-sidedness, losing sight of the other side of the coin, while those who see the Christian life only as a path of suffering, make the same mistake.

ROSES WITH THORNS

The author of Hebrews is explicit: Christian faith holds both blessings and sufferings. Even sufferings are blessings. 'And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight; women received back their dead in resurrection: and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And all these,

having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect' ([Heb. 11:32-40](#)).

Some prospered, while others suffered, both equally by faith. Those who achieved great feats did so by faith and those who suffered greatly in destitution did so likewise by faith. Both were approved by God for their faith, not just those who could have been called prosperous. Both groups had the expectation of 'a better resurrection' and 'something better' to come. This life is only a [p. 23](#) shadow of something better prepared for us hereafter. Whether in prosperity or poverty we are to trust the Lord. It is erroneous in light of the Scriptures to claim that the atonement of Christ guarantees all Christians health, wealth and prosperity here on earth. A closer walk with the Lord will guarantee the peace of God that passes all understanding in sickness or in health, in prosperity or in poverty. Our happiness is to do whatever the will of God may be for our lives just as it was in the life of Jesus. He was determined to do the will of the Father who sent him, He went through the suffering of the cross, and so there was the triumph of his resurrection waiting for him. His life was neither only suffering or only prosperity but both. If we emphasize only the first half of prosperity in the Hebrews passage and ignore the other half of suffering, we are doing a great injustice to the biblical teaching. But at the same time if we focus on the second half and ignore the first half, we also do violence to the biblical text. The Christian life contains both prosperity and suffering.

MATURITY AND PROSPERITY

What are the characteristics of the mature Christian? Firstly he is a child of God who has been redeemed. He is one who has developed a consistent prayer life. He is wiser than a serpent and yet is also innocent and without guile. He is prepared to go the extra mile and to serve others. In God's service he uses his given talents to the fullest and does all things heartily as to the Lord. He has a peaceful heart, a strong sense of security; he is full of confidence in God, without fear or anxiety, someone of strength and courage. He is filled with faith, hope and love; he is not extreme in his views but has a proper perspective on life. In his relationships with others he is submissive to authority, honours his parents and loves his enemies. He is daily in tune with Almighty God. He is humble, not angry. He demonstrates the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit and his life reveals the fruits of the Spirit. Under normal circumstances, why could such a person not live a successful life here on earth?

BIBLICAL PROSPERITY THEOLOGY?

Christian theology developed over the period of church history. In the fourth century Christology was formulated; in the sixteenth century soteriology was prominent; in the eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelism and missiology were emphasized; in the twentieth century eschatology, bibliology and pneumatology have been expounded. Now is there a need to develop a carefully articulated biblical theology of finance for the practical earthly benefits of Christians? I would say a resounding 'yes'. This aspect of Christian theology has not been sufficiently explored. Christians believe that this world is to be destroyed, so there is no need to take it seriously. At most it should be tolerated. We often quote [1 John 2:15-16](#), 'Love not the world and the things thereof ... the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.' Spiritual man is not to talk about money. If he [P. 24](#) does, he is supposed to talk in a hushed voice. Is God's view of financial prosperity taught in the Bible? If it is, whose job is it to formulate a sound doctrine of Christian

prosperity? This is definitely the responsibility of the trained theologians and should not be left in the undisciplined hands of prosperity preachers who are not scholars, and consequently create too many problems for the church because of their inaccurate, erroneous interpretation of the Scriptures.

However, have the theologians been so heavenly-minded (concerned only with the spiritual dimension of Christian truth) that they have not been any earthly good? Most of the prosperity preachers are not disciplined theologians. They are practitioners. So there have been excesses in the use of the Bible, often simplistic and one-sided, resulting in extremism. Isn't it about time that the trained theologians became involved in a systematic study of the earthly blessings promised in the Scriptures, in order to discover the biblical principles which can be put into practice by Christians so that they can be successful in this life as well as in the life to come? Is God against prosperity, health and happiness?

PROSPERITY AND SUFFERING

Whether Christians prosper or suffer, they are still to live by faith and to glorify the Lord in all things. Paul says: 'I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me' ([Phil. 4:13](#)), which is a favourite text with all prosperity teachers. According to the context he can do all things. However, we find that he can be 'abased' (suffering), as well as 'abound' (prosperity), 'full' (prosperity) as well as 'hungry' (suffering), both 'abound' (prosperity) and 'suffer need' (suffering). 'My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus' ([Phil. 4:19](#)). 'All your need' includes material things (vv. [17-18](#)) as well as spiritual strength to endure the lack of material things (v. [14](#)).

Paul also says in [Romans 8:18-23](#), 'For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us ... for the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope ... we know the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our bodies.' Paul understands that there are the sufferings of this present time and that the incomparable glory is yet to be revealed. The whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. There is no exception to suffering. All suffer together, even we who have the first fruits of the Spirit. All are waiting for the redemption of our bodies. Paul also said, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death' ([Phil. 1:20](#)). Our earnest expectation and hope is to magnify Christ in our body by life or by death, by prosperity or by suffering. The ultimate aim of a [p. 25](#) Christian life is not merely to enjoy our own wealth, health and happiness. Whether we are in wealth or poverty, in health or sickness, in happiness or sufferings, the purpose of Christian life is to exalt Christ in our bodies, waiting for the total deliverance from this life, until we shall be changed to be like Christ when we see him at his coming. Then and then only shall we enjoy perfect prosperity in heaven, a glorified body of perfect health and happiness with the Lord for eternity. Until then we press on for the mark set before us in health or in sickness, in prosperity or in poverty, in happiness or in suffering.

The Rev. Dr. Sang-Bok David Kim is Professor of Systematic Theology at the Asian Centre for Theological Studies and Mission and Executive Director of the Torch Center, Seoul, Korea. [p. 26](#)

The Case for Prosperity Theology

Young Hoon Lee

I

BIBLICAL TEACHING ON PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

The Conception of Prosperity Theology

Generally speaking, prosperity means a successful, flourishing, or thriving condition, especially in financial respects.¹ Sigmund Mowinckel says that the blessing is first of all, life, health, and the productive state of wealth for man, animal, or the field. He continues to say that it is the basic power to sustain lives.² However, the blessing in the Bible has both physical and spiritual aspects.

Prosperity Theology in America shows a tendency to put more stress on material success. Prosperity Theology is sometimes called the Theology of Prosperity or the Gospel of Prosperity. People have a tendency to understand it as putting emphasis on material success, positive thinking and faith. Its leading advocates are Robert Schuller, Norman Vincent Peale, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, and E. W. Kenyon.

There are some who positively acknowledge Prosperity Theology, while others view it as Satanic and detest it. There may be various reasons for and backgrounds to these extremely opposed view-points. I want to start by looking at the different definitions of Prosperity Theology. Those who believe that God blesses his people—when they are trusting and obedient to him—accept Prosperity Theology positively. On the other hand, those who think it will ruin pure piety of believers—by adopting worldly business techniques and the theory of enterprise—reject it.

Old Testament Concept of Prosperity

In the Korean Revised Bible, there is no place in the Old Testament where ‘prosperity’ appears. The Hebrew verb *gadal* means ‘to grow’ or ‘to become big’, which implicitly contains the meaning of ‘prosperity’. It also contains the meaning of ‘to p. 27 become strong’ in the Aramaic language.³ The verb *gadal* contains the meaning of ‘prosperity’ when the work of a man becomes successful. An individual or a state has achieved prosperity when possessions, power, authority or glory are acquired.⁴ Prosperity is closely related to blessing and in the Old Testament blessing means success, the presence of God, and peace. This is the state of an individual or a country when it has received blessings.⁵

The concept of blessing in the Old Testament is more frequently expressed and more broadly applied physically and mentally than in the New Testament. This blessing was

¹ Stuart B. Flexner, *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, N.Y.: Random House 1987, p. 1553.

² Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the life of the Church*, tr. Wilson Chang, Seoul: The Christian Literature Society, 1980. p. 43.

³ Byung Hoon Kang, *Shema Dictionary*, Vol. 5, Seoul: Biblical Research, 1990, p. 409.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 410.

⁵ C. Westermann, p. 53.

given by God to God's chosen people Israel. We find the following concepts of prosperity in relation to the Old Testament blessings.

1. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Pentateuch

a. IN GENESIS

Genesis chapter [1-11](#) describes God's blessing upon all living creatures, including man, including the preservation of the species so that they may be fruitful and increase in number. From chapter [12](#) to [50](#) we find God's blessing upon a religious man and his family and a group of people.

- (1) God blessed all the creatures he had made ([1:20-22](#)).
- (2) God blessed man and woman who were created in his image ([1:27-28](#)).
- (3) God blessed Noah and his family ([9:1-3](#)).
- (4) God blessed Abraham, the father of faith ([12:1-3](#)).

b. IN DEUTERONOMY

The blessing for God's chosen people is recorded in Deuteronomy.

- (1) God blessed certain individuals, certain families, or certain groups ([11:26-29](#)).
- (2) God promised to bless his people specifically and practically when they followed his commands ([28:1-4](#)).

2. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Historical Books

The blessing in the historical books was given to God's chosen people and their country, Israel, as in Deuteronomy. We cannot but notice God's enormous blessing upon Solomon. Solomon was so exceptionally blessed because God was pleased with the request that Solomon made. ([1 Ki. 3:7-14](#)) We can relate Solomon's request to Jesus' New Testament teaching of [Matt. 6:33](#).

3. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Books of Psalms and Wisdom

a. IN JOB

What we have to notice in the book of Job is the suffering of a righteous man. Its theme is that God will ultimately bless the righteous man with prosperity when he trusts the Lord to the end and when he understands that the blessing is not his own but God's.

b. IN THE PSALMS

We find various types of blessings in the Psalms. p. 28

- (1) Blessing of prosperity ([1:1-3](#), [128:1-4](#)).
- (2) Blessing of the forgiveness of sins ([32:1-2](#), [103:3](#)).
- (3) Blessing of healing ([103:1-5](#)).

Such blessings are given to us (1) when we shun evil and delight in and meditate on God's Word ([1:1-2](#)); (2) when we keep his law ([119:1-3](#)); and (3) when we fear him ([115:12-13](#)).

c. IN PROVERBS

- (1) Blessing of wealth and crops ([3:9-10](#)).
- (2) Blessing of wisdom ([3:13-18](#)).

d. IN ECCLESIASTES

(1) Blessing of wealth and possessions ([5:18-20](#)).

As shown in the books of psalms and wisdom, God blesses his people with wealth and possessions when they trust and follow him.

4. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Books of Prophecy

a. IN ISAIAH

(1) Blessing of the Holy Spirit ([44:1-4](#), [60:1-3](#)).

(2) Blessing upon a man who keeps the Sabbath ([56:2-89](#)).

(3) Blessing comes when we pray and fast ([58:6-11](#)).

b. IN MALACHAI

(1) Blessing comes when we give tithes and offerings ([3:8-12](#)).

The Old Testament blessings depend completely on God. God grants his blessing to his people according to his will when they trust and follow him. His blessings are often shown as material blessings and the blessing of circumstances. And at the same time, the Old Testament speaks of the blessing of healing and spiritual blessings, in relation to the deliverance from slavery and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

New Testament Conception of Prosperity

The word 'prosperity' appears in the Greek Bible in terms of εὐδόω. It is a combination of the root ὁδός, meaning 'a way', and the prefix εὐ, meaning 'good'. It, therefore, means 'to lead on a good path', 'to guide well', 'to bring on to the right path'. The LXX takes it on to the sense of 'to bring to a good conclusion', to succeed'.⁶ In [Cor. 16:2](#), we find the phrase, 'in keeping with his income', which is related to prosperity in a material sense. The progressive tense used in this passage indicates the various circumstances of prosperity in each week. Also in 3 John v.2, we have a customary wish for health but the stress is on εὐοδοῦσθαι (to prosper) rather than ὑγιαίνειν (to be healthy),⁷ probably because this carries the thought that all health and success, both material and spiritual, depend on God,⁸ and that we may have confidence in him. On the other hand, in [2 Cor. 9:10](#), the word πληθύνω meaning 'to fill' or 'to be full' is used in the sense that God supplies and it becomes full.⁹

In the New Testament, God's blessing is deeply related to redemption through Jesus Christ and is [p. 29](#) emphasized in the spiritual sense. However, the material side of the blessing is never denied in the New Testament. Since the Old and the New Testament have complete unity and harmony, we must accept the fact that their ideas of blessings do not differ in essence but are the same. The material blessings of the Old Testament contain spiritual blessings at the same time and symbolize clearer blessings to come in the New Testament era. In teaching his people, God used something natural as a symbol for the spiritual blessing ([1 Cor. 15:16](#)). One of the most important examples of such symbolism can be found in the description of Canaan as the land flowing with milk and honey. Here Canaan symbolizes heaven where we believers will go after death. The New Testament,

⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: 1992, p. 672.

⁷ Byung Hoon Kang, p. 410.

⁸ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, p. 673.

⁹ Byung Hoon Kang, p. 410.

on the other hand, does not ignore or deny material blessing ([Matt. 6:11, 24](#); [Tim. 4:4](#)) but emphasizes the spiritual blessing more ([2 Cor. 4:18](#); [Matt. 6:24, 33](#)).¹⁰

We notice that God's blessing in the Old Testament is changed into the blessing in Jesus Christ in the New Testament. We should relate the concept to the work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament emphasizes the spiritual side of prosperity and blessing in relation to blessing in the eternal world.

1. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Four Gospels

- a. Spiritual blessing ([Matt. 5:3-12](#)).
- b. Blessing in daily life ([6:25-33](#)).
- c. Blessing to be like children ([Mk. 10:15-16](#), cf. [Matt. 19:13-15](#); [Lk. 18:15-17](#)).
- d. Blessing of marriage ([In. 2:1-11](#)).
- e. Blessing of forgiveness ([Lk. 6:28, 23:34](#); [Matt. 6:12](#)).

2. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the Pauline Epistles

- a. Spiritual blessing ([Eph. 1:3-5](#), cf. [1 Pet. 11-5](#)).
- b. Blessing in the present and in the future given to believers ([1 Cor. 3:21-23](#)).
- c. Material blessing ([2 Cor. 8:9-11](#)).
- d. Blessing of Abraham ([Gal. 3:9-14](#)).

When Paul speaks of the blessing of Abraham, he means not only spiritual blessing in Christ but also material blessing in the world.

3. The Concept of Blessing Shown in the General Epistles

a. IN JAMES

James speaks of suffering and blessing ([1:2-4](#)) and the blessing of patience in faith ([5:1](#)). We may receive suffering as a necessary step in the growth process of our faith, and furthermore as a blessing we must go through for the work of God.

b. THE BLESSING IN [3 JOHN 2](#)

There is disagreement on the interpretation of this verse for the following reasons: (1) it is a part of the apostle John's personal letter to Gaius, a faithful worker of the Lord, and thus it cannot be generally applied to all Christians and (2) it focuses too much on material prosperity. However, when we work out our concept of blessing, based on [Matt. 6:33](#), we will have a correct and biblical interpretation of this verse. p. 30

Nonetheless, the material side is never ignored. Paul said, in [2 Cor. 8:9](#), 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.' The theme of prosperity and blessing is connected to salvation¹¹ and the ultimate goal of prosperity is eternal life.¹² Therefore the Bible treats prosperity and blessing as a very important issue, not as a marginal issue which accidentally exists among other more major topics.

Christian Concept of Prosperity

¹⁰ Eui Hwan Kim, *The Biblical Blessings*, Seoul: Sung Kwang Moonwha, 1981, pp. 54-55.

¹¹ C. Westermann, p. 71.

¹² Yun Keun Lee, *The Theory of Blessing*, Seoul: Sheep Gate Pub. Co., 1990, pp. 20-21.

Generally, success means attaining some measure of money, fame, power, and self-fulfilment,¹³ attaining goals or high social position or wealth. But social standing or wealth cannot be a true measure of success since they deal with externals. From the Christian view-point, moreover, the attaining of wealth or high position by any means cannot be judged true success and the Bible describes such pursuits as the shortcut to destruction.¹⁴

Thinking in a Christian way about success leads us to conclude that the world's definition of success is inadequate. Having a measure of wealth, fame, power, self-fulfilment and the appearance of succeeding is not enough to be called success. These things may be noteworthy from a worldly perspective, but hardly transform someone into a success before God.¹⁵ In Solomon we find a perfect example of the fact that such material abundance is not enough. After attaining so much prosperity and success from a worldly perspective, he said it was meaningless and he told his people to fear God ([Eccl. 12:13](#)).

However, prosperity itself should not be misunderstood. The things which constitute the natural world were all prepared by God for the happiness of man. Prosperity and blessing from God were meant to lead our hearts to God but man has distorted them and turned them into a curse by his own stupidity.¹⁶ We can enjoy God's prosperity and blessing when we use what God has given us, in accordance with God's will.

Therefore, success may be viewed as our being the way God wants us to be¹⁷ or to achieving God's goal for us. Hence the Christian definition of success should be rooted ultimately in what pleases God. We may be considered a success by man but we could be declared a total failure by God. Therefore Christian life should be centred in Jesus Christ and our perspective on success must be in tune with his pleasure.¹⁸ For this purpose, we may voluntarily give up abundance and may discard our home, wealth, and comfort for the gospel.

The true meaning of prosperity is likely to be distorted when the out-come [p. 31](#) of prosperity or its state alone is emphasized. For this reason, the paths to prosperity should be given major consideration. Only when these paths are acceptable to God, can prosperity have some meaning and value.

II

THE CASE FOR PROSPERITY THEOLOGY

The Positive Side of the Prosperity Theology

William H. Cook says that Prosperity Theology has enabled us to find in the Bible what was not yet known. First of all, since man was created in God's image, he says that man was not created to fail but to succeed.¹⁹

He views religions as the summation of teachings to show man how to live. He also argues that in general religions were developed by leaders who could not give their

¹³ Denis Haack, *The Success Factor*, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989, p. 40.

¹⁴ Byung Hoon Kang, Vol 8, p. 15.

¹⁵ Denis Haack, pp. 48–49.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 411.

¹⁷ William H. Cook, *The Success, the Motivation, and the Bible*, Seoul: Jordan Pub. Co., 1984, p. 64.

¹⁸ Denis Haack, p. 84.

¹⁹ William H. Cook, pp. 33–35.

followers the power to live in accordance with their teachings. He asserts that Christianity does not only show the way to live but provides the relationship with the power to live the suggested life.²⁰ From this positive viewpoint, Prosperity Theology encourages Christians, through their personal relationship with God, to respond positively and actively to sufferings and hardships and to overcome them by the power and wisdom from God, instead of giving up on them. In general, this encouragement has promoted more active Christian life.

The positive and active thinking of Prosperity Theology has a very close relation to faith. From the example of the fall of Adam and Eve we find that it is very important to have a positive faith in God. Tempted by the serpent, Eve began to have negative thoughts of God and lost confidence in God. Faith is the foundation of positive thinking and the men of faith in the Bible provide theoretical grounds for it. Ministers like Norman Vincent Peale²¹ and Robert Schuller²² theorize about it, using the examples in the Bible. Some critics say that advocates of positive thinking emphasize material success only, but it is not always so.²³

Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, who is famous for his publications and lectures about active attitude and positive thinking, says 'when a person suffers self-dislike, his personality deteriorates as a result'.²⁴ He agrees with Jimmy Carter that the American nation has spiralled downward into self-doubt and low self-esteem and that the Americans can recover by positive attitude and faith.²⁵ Since churches or other organizations may be damaged by negative words,²⁶ it is very important also for the church to have positive thinking based on biblical teachings. Positive thinking enables us to accept suffering positively and to view it as a process of blessing. As long as positive thinking p. 32 is based on the theme 'No cross, no crown', it will be very beneficial to the believers.

Prosperity Theology has made a contribution to finding the positive and active side of faith and to encouraging Christians to live positively and actively in faith. It has great merit in that a person who suffers some pain and difficulties, being assured that God leads him in great love and mercy, can overcome the sufferings by positive faith in God and live with hope for the future.

Some connect the theory of visualization of David (Paul) Yonggi Cho and Robert Schuller to that of the New Age Movement.²⁷ The visualization of the New Age Movement is to believe that there are gods and that things will become as their hearts want. The visualization of positive thinking, however, is that we, as God's creatures, anticipate God's answer to our prayers—according to the Scripture, 'Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see' ([Heb. 11:1](#)). In this sense we must clearly distinguish the one from the other. God's promise to Abraham that his offspring will be

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 105.

²¹ See Norman Vincent Peale, *The Positive Power of Jesus Christ*, Seoul: Voice Pub. Co., 1988.

²² Robert A. Schuller, *Just Because you are on a Roll doesn't Mean you are Going Downhill*, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1990, p. 45.

²³ Norman Vincent Peale, p. 49.

²⁴ Norman Vincent Peale, *This Incredible Century*, IL: Living Books, 1991, p. 312.

²⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 287–288.

²⁶ Roger F. Cambell, *You Can Win*, MI: Kregel Pub., 1993, p. 48.

²⁷ Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon, *The Seduction of Christianity*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1985, p. 8, 16.

like the stars ([Gen. 15:5](#)) is an example of anticipating what God will give before he actually gives it. God also planted great expectations in the heart of the Israelites by using the expression, 'a land flowing with milk and honey' when he led them to Canaan. Therefore we must distinguish the one type of visualization from the other and should accept what is biblical, while rejecting what is Satanic and non-biblical.

When we overly emphasize the negative side of prosperity theology, we may be in danger of neglecting some of the important teachings of the Bible. Although McConnell claims that the positive attitude and the positive confession of faith are used to obtain material wealth and magical power,²⁸ the Bible says that the attitude of positive faith and positive confession of faith in God are what God wants of us. Out of twelve spies sent to Canaan, ten were judged and killed by God because they made a negative report based on their own feeling and evaluation ([Deut. 13:27-29, 32-33](#)). Not only that; those who accepted their report also died in the wilderness.

The positive faith confession of Joshua and Caleb cannot be considered the means of obtaining material wealth and magical power. The Bible describes God as the one who creates praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel ([Isa. 57:29](#)). The Bible also says, 'From the fruit of his lips a man enjoys good things' ([Prov. 13:2](#)), and 'He who guards his lips guards his life' ([Prov. 13:3](#)). Therefore we should not limit the positive attitude and the positive confession of faith to the secular level, but should study it in relation to the spiritual growth of believers.

Of course, there is a danger that positive thinking and faith may slant toward spiritualism or psychology. Nonetheless, we should never denounce a person who is facing [p. 33](#) hardships for using psychological means when he clings to [Psalm 23](#), 'The Lord is my shepherd I shall not be in want' and tries to go through the dark valley of sufferings. We need to discern between good and evil by the life a person leads.

McConnell points out that Prosperity Theology, by overly stressing prosperity and healing, leads Christians to neglect the cross in their lives.²⁹ We should emphasize the cross in the life of each and every believer. However, we need to make a distinction between the cross and suffering and poverty itself, because the cross was not the end—it led to the resurrection. Hence the cross should be viewed leading to the blessing of resurrection. Without the hope of resurrection, the cross would be meaningless. ([1 Cor. 15:22-28](#)) McConnell speaks of Paul's suffering and poverty. Here Paul's suffering was for the sake of the Lord Jesus and Paul himself chose to be poor to help the needy and to devote himself to missionary work. By saying, 'Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain' ([1 Cor. 9:9](#)), Paul makes it clear that he gives up his lawful portion to save some ([1 Cor. 9:22](#)). This should be distinguished from the sufferings or poverty we face because we allow ourselves to be conformed to the world—failing to put on the full armour of God. We should humbly take the sufferings and poverty when its purpose is to save souls, to heal the brokenhearted, and to help people in need. On the other hand, however, we should strongly resist the suffering and poverty which comes from Satan and should rebuke and confront him—for Satan tries to weaken our faith and to destroy and kill us through such sufferings. This point is emphasized by Peter and James ([Jn. 10:10](#); [Jam. 4:7](#); [1Pet. 5:8](#)).

Negative side of Prosperity Theology

²⁸ D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel*, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1992, p. 174; Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon, p. 16.

²⁹ D. R. McConnell, p. 178.

The Bible speaks of God who fills those who seek him with good things, and at the same time, it speaks of the process of suffering and discipline to make us worthy of God's provision. Some, however, pursue the blessings alone, without thinking of suffering or discipline from God. This attitude may be denounced as shamanistic and it lacks a sense of ethics or morals and the fear of God. Prosperity theology, if it drifts away from the biblical teachings and if it pursues worldly prosperity, may also degenerate into a shamanistic cult.

David Yonggi Cho said that he got sick in his soul when he heard testimonies like: 'One day I gave so much money to this ministry and the next day I found a new job' or 'My boss gave me an increase in salary.' He went on to say that this cheapened the grace of God and that he thought it was a form of gambling.³⁰ Success is not self-centred. When a person sets up a goal for himself, he should make sure that the goal is not self-centred.³¹

Nonetheless, in America, they failed to teach Christians that prosperity should be used to build the p. 34 kingdom of God. Many Christians claim prosperity just to buy a luxury car, to have a big home and to live a sumptuous life.³² Not all Christians can be millionaires. God can make someone a millionaire if he wants to. But when God does so, he must have a plan and purpose for that person. If a Christian pursues nothing but money, he will become shamanistic; and if he uses the prosperity only for himself, it will become a dreadful curse to him.

The negative side of Prosperity Theology was openly and clearly exposed in the scandal of famous televangelists. The fall of Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swagart³³ may have shown a negative side of the Prosperity Theology. Jim Bakker had preached on prosperity in Christ for years but not on the godly life, and thus he lost the balance of faith, pursued the work of the flesh, and finally he committed sin.³⁴

If we fail to distinguish biblical prosperity from worldly prosperity, and if we take worldly standards for prosperity to church, then the congregations will be confused. God certainly wants to provide for the needs of his people. To say to the poor man that something is wrong with him or to rebuke the sick like the three friends of Job's is not the attitude we should take.

As for the ideas about prosperity, which are emphasized in relation to Prosperity Theology, we should be careful not to be connected to the spiritualism, Human Potential Movement, or the like as in the Napoleon Hill case.³⁵ If we use biblical words but fill the contents with philosophy or psychology, it will be like poison presented in a beautiful box.

Some secular scholars teach as if serving God were some kind of a business. They publish such books and mislead their readers. When the theories of spiritualism, politics, management, or marketing come into the church wrapped in biblical words, without going through biblical testing, the congregation will read God's commandments on one hand and focus on money and abundance on the other.

Prosperity Theology and Pentecostalism

³⁰ 'Cho's problem with Prosperity,' *Charisma & Christian Life*, March 1988, p. 70.

³¹ William H. Cook, p. 60.

³² 'Cho's problem with Prosperity,' p. 70.

³³ Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993, pp. 254–260.

³⁴ 'Cho's problem with Prosperity,' p. 70.

³⁵ Dave Hunt & T. A. McMahon, pp. 18–19.

There are some scholars who claim that the negative sides of the Prosperity Theology are deeply related to the negative sides of Pentecostalism. Harrell states that the doctrine of prosperity has come to be in the most important new idea of the charismatic revival.³⁶ Bruce Baron links the doctrines of healing, positive confession, and prosperity directly to the Pentecostal movement.³⁷ And McConnell says:

Whereas in its infancy, the Faith movement was known for its radical emphasis upon healing, today the Faith movement is one of the major sources of prosperity teaching among modern charismatics. Although they did not originate the teaching and are by no means the only ones to propagate it, the Faith teachers have with typical abandon made the most outrageous p. 35 claims for the doctrine. Their promises of material prosperity and financial success are undoubtedly a major source of motivation for many to join their movement.³⁸

I do not deny that some Pentecostal/ Charismatic ministers caused some problems by preaching on and pursuing material prosperity and secular success. However, some negative things of different types can happen in any denomination to some degree. We see that some prosperity advocates have changed their ways. Benny Hinn once overly emphasized prosperity, but now he seeks God's forgiveness for this.³⁹ And he says that God showed him some things he had been wrong about—faith, confession and prosperity that were out of balance—and that he had stopped teaching such things and made it clear that he no longer believed them.⁴⁰

Despite this change, Hinn still emphasizes the positive side of Prosperity Theology. He said he had no doubt that God wants to bless his people and take care of our needs. Citing [Psalm 37:26](#), 'I've never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread', he states that God wants to bless his people⁴¹ and that healing is part of our inheritance as believers and it is a provision of God's covenant with us.⁴²

It is very wrong to think that Pentecostals seek nothing but prosperity and success. The early history of the Pentecostals in society was in reality a story of mutual rejection. The Pentecostals rejected society because they believed it to be corrupt, wicked, hostile, and hopelessly lost, while society rejected the Pentecostals because it believed them to be insanely fanatical, self-righteous, doctrinally in error, and emotionally unstable.⁴³

The early Pentecostal movement spread among the poor and lower classes.⁴⁴ In its process, financial success was pursued and there was a tendency to understand prosperity and success only in a material sense. Nevertheless, the Pentecostal movement does not always relate prosperity to financial achievements. In the early Pentecostal

³⁶ D. R. McConnell, p. 170.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 170–171.

³⁹ 'Benny Hinn Speaks Out,' *Charisma and Christian Life*, August 1993, p. 28.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴³ Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States*, MI: William Eerdmans Pub., 1989, p. 185.

⁴⁴ Robert Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*, MA: Hendrickson, 1992, pp. 238–240.

movement, holiness and sanctification were emphasized as much as power. According to the Statement of Fundamental Truth, which was written in the early days of the Pentecostal movement and had hardly been revised until 1969, sanctification is an act of separation from that which is evil, and of dedication to God and that is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

Pentecostals are also concerned about social participation as well as the sanctification of individuals. In 'A Statement of Social Concern' of the Assemblies of God in America, they state, 'We pledge to exert our influence as Christian citizens to justifiable social action in areas of domestic relations, education, law enforcement, p. 36 employment, equal opportunity, and other beneficial matters.'⁴⁶

III CORRECT UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION OF PROSPERITY

Priorities in the Concept of Prosperity

David Yonggi Cho points out that American Theology stresses the blessing of the kingdom like a sugar-coated gospel but does not emphasize the importance of repentance and keeping God's commands in order to enjoy the blessing of the kingdom of God.⁴⁷

To be given a measure of wealth, fame, power, and self-fulfilment is to be given a gift to be used with great care for the glory of God. Jesus' stow of the talents ([Matt 25:14-30](#)) illustrates the proper approach to such stewardship. It also teaches that those who use their talents wisely can please their master.⁴⁸ The Bible says that God has plans to prosper us, not to harm us ([Jer. 29:11](#)). It is important for the minister to guide his congregation correctly so that the blessing of God will be a real blessing—not a curse. The ministers should maintain a good balance of biblical teachings and they should discipline themselves first by living in accordance with the Word.

The change of our conception about prosperity should start with getting our priorities right. Prosperity or success should never be put ahead of God. Satan tempted Jesus by such things, but Jesus rejected them and put God above everything else. Since prosperity and success follow those who serve God, any prosperity or success without God is nothing but a curse. Therefore a minister must lead his congregation to serve God correctly, to be open to God's blessing or prosperity and success, to have right priorities and to use the blessings wisely.

The second important issue about prosperity is that we should ascribe glory to the right person. God declares, 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine. ([Hag. 2:8](#))' God is the Creator and the source of all blessings. A minister, therefore, must teach his congregation lest they should take the blessing for granted or think that they have achieved it by themselves. Since the blessing is not ours, we should thank God for it and use wealth, fame and power for God's glory.

The third important issue about prosperity is that it should be considered in relation to American and European work ethics. From the 1600s Puritan writers had written many

⁴⁵ William W. Menzis, *Anointed to Serve*, MO: Gospel Pub., 1988, p. 388.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 395.

⁴⁷ 'Cho's problem with Prosperity,' p. 71.

⁴⁸ Denis Haack, p. 93.

books on work, success and their relation to the Christian life.⁴⁹ Ralph Waldo Trine spoke of the work ethic and the Puritan tradition of faith in God's provision:

God holds all things in His hands. His constant word is, My child, acknowledge Me in all your ways, and in the degree that you do this, in the degree that you live this, then what is Mine is yours. Jehovah-jireh,—the Lord will provide.⁵⁰ p. 37

He continued to say that this kind of understanding had an ethical demand.

All the time be faithful, absolutely faithful to the situation in which you are placed. If you are not faithful to it the chances are that it will not be the stepping-stone to something better, but something poorer ... Don't fold your hands and expect to see things drop into your lap, but set into operation the higher forces and then take hold of the first thing that offers itself. Do what your hands find to do, and do it well.⁵¹

According to Trine, the spirit of prosperity is to trust the provider, Jehovah-jireh, and to be faithful with one's task, doing one's best.

The Pastoral Life of the Minister

Satan, the enemy, tries to tempt ministers of God using wealth, fame, and seduction. The fall of the two former televangelists in America may be a perfect example. No one is completely on guard in this matter. Whoever is not alert can fall into similar danger. Thus ministers as church leaders must hold a sound biblical doctrine about prosperity.

First, a minister should always be humble, whether he is prosperous or not. The more God blesses him with grace, the more he should humble himself and give glory to God, striving to do the work that God has assigned to him.

Second, a minister should never neglect studying the Bible. Without the biblical understanding of prosperity, he is likely to mislead his people as well as himself. It is more desirable to study the Bible and pray then to insist on biased theological doctrines.

Third, a minister should be alert in prayer. Although he is well established theologically and theoretically regarding the issues of wealth, fame or seduction, he cannot always skilfully deal with them on his own. Thus he should pray to God that he might receive power from above and guide his people well.

Fourth, to live successfully in the world, a minister needs the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The most successful man on earth was Jesus and, at the same time, he was the most Spirit-filled man. The Bible describes Jesus as the most spiritual man from the very beginning of his public ministry.⁵² He knew about success better than anybody who ever lived on earth. He granted the motivation of success to people more than anybody ever did, and he made the fulness of the Spirit concrete.⁵³

Fifth, a minister should lead a godly life. While leading the congregation to an abundant life, he should control himself completely. Jesus sanctified himself till the last moment of his public ministry. He said, 'For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. ([Jn. 17:19](#))' The teaching given to the congregation about biblical success

⁴⁹ William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit*, Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1992, p. 165.

⁵⁰ Ralph Waldo Trine, *In Tune with Infinite*, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., p. 177.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 180, 183.

⁵² William H. Cook, p. 228.

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 224.

and prosperity and how to manage it will be more effective if it is demonstrated through his own life than just taught theoretically.

Sixth, a minister should keep the balance of faith. The Bible does not cover only one topic. Since it speaks about God, man, degeneration, salvation, [p. 38](#) blessing, and so on, we should be very careful not to be biased toward one issue or the other. Either to overly emphasize material blessing or to totally reject it by emphasizing only spiritual blessing cannot be the right attitude toward God's blessing. It will be desirable for ministers to study the Bible carefully, to understand the current situation of their people, and to preach the gospel in a balanced way.

Although the Bible speaks about both the spiritual and the material sides of prosperity, it stresses that all things are in the hands of God alone. Therefore, pleasing God and focusing on Jesus should be the basis of Christian prosperity. No doubt the Christian church should reject a shamanistic attitude to worshipping material things. However, it should guide its congregation so that they will accept the biblical concept of prosperity and success with open minds and that they will grow in spirit and lead successful lives. For this purpose a minister should take very good care of his people like a good shepherd by controlling himself. This is not to say that he should be totally ascetic under compulsion. It should be his voluntary choice as a man of holy calling to remove any obstacles to the spiritual, abundant life of his congregation and to let them continuously grow in faith.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of prosperity is to glorify God and to help our neighbours. This is because all that we have has come from God.

Serious problems will rise when we become interested in the blessing itself, forgetting God, the source of all blessings. The Bible tells us to take interest in the poor and underprivileged, especially widows and orphans ([Ex. 22:22](#); [Deut. 10:18, 14:29](#); [Isa. 1:17; 10:2](#); [Jer. 22:3](#); [1 Cor. 7:8](#); [1 Tim. 5:3, 16](#); [James. 1:17](#)). This is what God asks of those who have received the blessing of prosperity.

Therefore the true purpose of prosperity is to share it with others, not to keep it to oneself ([Ac. 20:35](#); [2 Cor. 8:1-15](#)).

When we share the blessing with others, we

- (1) acknowledge that all our possessions belong to God ([1 Chron. 29:14](#)),
- (2) understand that what we do to our neighbours, we do to God ([Matt. 25:25](#); [Heb. 13:16](#)), and
- (3) trust God more than the materials by giving God what is God's ([Mal. 3:7-10](#)).

The Old Testament puts more stress on material prosperity, while the New Testament puts more stress on spiritual prosperity. However, they do not contradict each other, but are in harmony with each other, since all prosperity has the same purpose—to give glory to God. What we have to do with the two sides of prosperity is to make a good balance between them, to share them with others who are in need, and use them for God's glory. Prosperity should be used in such a manner as to express our love for God and for our neighbour. And I believe that in this way we practise [p. 39](#) the love of Jesus Christ manifested on the cross. Moreover, we should never forget that we must be faithful with our task and do our best in order to gain prosperity. That is because God blesses those who are faithful. When we correctly understand the meaning of prosperity and when we use it according to the biblical teachings, the purpose of the coming of the Lord will be fulfilled.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because 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. ([Lk. 4:18-19](#))

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Dr. Young Hoon Lee is Senior Director, International Theological Institute and Professor, Soonshin University, Korea. **p. 40**

Prosperity Theology and the New Testament

W. Ward Gasque

INTRODUCTION

Prosperity theology—the idea that God loves you and has a marvellous financial plan for your life—is less than fifty years old. While its intellectual roots lie in the New Thought philosophy of the nineteenth century that produced the movement known as Christian Science, among other new religious and secular speculations, it is much more a product of the American optimism that was the result of the unprecedented economic boom that took place in the USA following the Second World War. You can search the pages of the history of the Christian church and you will find no evidence of this eccentric theological teaching prior to the 1950s.

‘Positive confession’ or ‘word of faith’ or *rhema* (from Greek ῥῆμα ‘word’) theology is the teaching of a sub-group of the larger Pentecostal or Charismatic Movement. It is important to point out that this is a minority viewpoint within this larger community of Christians and that it has been roundly criticized by many mainstream Pentecostal leaders.

Its leading proponents in America are evangelists Kenneth E. Hagin (1917–), Frederick K. C. Price (1932–), Charles Emmitt Capss (1934–), Kenneth Copeland (1937–), and, in a less extreme form, Oral Roberts (1918–). Another less extreme form of prosperity theology is the ‘possibility thinking’ or ‘theology of self-esteem’ of the Reformed pastor-evangelist Robert H. Schuller (1926–). On the other hand, this teaching has been secularized by many contemporary self-styled preachers and authors and a variety of New Age evangelists in North America, and, I imagine, also in Korea.

In its evangelical Protestant form, prosperity theology teaches that it is God’s will that all of his children should be financially prosperous. To put it another way, it is not his will for any of his children to be poor. Poverty, like sin, is the result of the fall. Therefore, to accept poverty is to accept less than God’s best. To be content to be poor is to accept spiritual defeat.

If we are poor, then we are not trusting God as we should, for he [p. 41](#) wishes to bless us, to make us a success; and his blessing includes financial success. If we are poor or if we are financial failures, it is an embarrassment to God. And it’s a bad witness to the world.

This teaching is often connected with a similar emphasis upon God’s desire for each of us to experience perfect health. God is a God of peace. The Hebrew word for ‘peace’ is *Shalom*, which implies ‘wholeness and well-being—hence, both **health and wealth**. To accept only a spiritual gospel is to believe in something less than the *full* gospel.

EXEGESIS OR EISEGESIS

Prosperity theology claims to be biblical:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you ([Matt. 7:7](#)).

Until now you have not asked for **anything** in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete ([Jn. 16:24](#)).

If you believe, you will receive **whatever** you ask for in prayer’ ([Matt. 21:22](#)).

Therefore I tell you, **whatever** you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours ([Mk. 11:24](#)).

‘I tell you the truth, my Father will give you **whatever** you ask in my name’ ([Jn. 16:23](#)).

So if you need a job, or a new car, or a bigger house, a larger salary—whatever you need, you should ask the Lord, for he desires to bless you! ‘Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you **the desires of your heart**’ ([Ps. 37:4](#)).

The exegetical foundations of the *rhema* or ‘word of faith’ theology is based on a rather idiosyncratic interpretation of a handful of key texts. [Romans 10:8](#) is one of these: ‘ “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the **word of faith** we are proclaiming:’ (Ἐγγύς σου τὸ ῥῆμά ἐστιν ἐν τῷ στόματί σου καὶ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, τοῦς ἐστιν τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς πίστεως ὃ κηρύσσομεν.) The Greek for ‘word’ in this text is ῥῆμα, which means an utterance or a concrete expression of a λόγος. In classical Greek the word is sometimes used of stating something specifically. The phrase ‘word of faith’ is taken totally out of context to mean: ‘whatever is spoken by faith becomes immediately inspired and therefore dynamic in the particular situation or event to which it is addressed’. The distinction is made between two kinds of knowledge—‘revelation or faith knowledge’ and ‘sense knowledge’, the former dealing with matters that the empirical senses cannot discover or know but must be revealed by the Spirit and the latter dealing with natural, human knowledge. So ‘by faith’ we can speak of things that are not and bring them into being. Hence the nickname: ‘Name it and Claim it Theology’!

Other key texts for Rhema Theology are [Proverbs 6:2](#), [Romans 4:17](#), [John 10:10](#), and [3 John 2](#).

‘I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly’ ([Jn. 10:10b](#)).

The last text reads: ‘Beloved, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, [p. 42](#) even as your soul is getting along well’ ([3 Jn. 2](#)). [The KJV reads: ‘... even as your soul prospereth.’]

The fact is that each of these texts is taken wholly out of context and misinterpreted. They are used in a sense that is quite contrary to what the original authors actually intended. [Romans 10:8](#) is about the saving faith that God gives to those who confess Jesus to be their Lord. [Proverbs 6:2](#) refers to a security deposit in a financial transaction, not a ‘word of faith’. [Romans 4:17](#) is a description of the faith of Abraham rather than ours. [John 10:10](#) has nothing whatever to do with material prosperity. To interpret it in this way does extreme violence to the immediate context. [3 John 2](#) is a formal greeting to an individual, not an affirmation that it is God’s desire than all his children should be healthy and wealthy.

The first point of criticism of contemporary prosperity theology, then, is that it is **based on the misinterpretation of specific texts of Scripture**. The key proof-texts that are quoted do not say what they are interpreted as saying. The prosperity evangelists are doing *eisegesis* rather than *exegesis*; they are reading their own meanings *into* the texts rather than reading *out* the meanings which are there.

BIBLICAL REALITY IS OTHERWISE

The second point of criticism is even more serious. Not only do the preachers of prosperity theology attempt to read into certain key texts of Scripture a doctrine that is not found there, they are teaching **a doctrine that is quite contrary to hundreds of other New Testament texts**.

To recognize poverty and sickness as evil consequences that are ultimately results of the fall is not to say that it is God’s will that those who believe in Jesus should always be financially prosperous and in perfect health. It is quite clear from the New Testament that our Lord Jesus, contrary to the assertions of the prosperity evangelists, was poor ([Matt. 8:20](#); [Lk. 9:58](#); [2 Cor. 8:9](#)). He was regularly dependent on friends for food and housing; and he was buried in a borrowed tomb ([Matt. 27:57–60](#); [Lk. 23:50–53](#); [Jn. 19:38–41](#)).

It is also quite clear from reading the New Testament that many of the early Christians were also poor, and this was not the result of any lack of faith on their part ([Lk. 6:20](#); [Rom. 15:26](#); [1 Cor. 1:26](#); [2 Cor. 6:10](#); [Gal. 2:10](#); [Jas. 2:2–6](#); etc). God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends his rain on the just and the unjust, according to Jesus ([Matt. 5:45](#)). The Galileans whom Pilate killed and the eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell were not great sinners ([Lk. 13:1–5](#)). The consequences of the fall have permeated the created order so that all are affected, yet God is still the benevolent Creator who showers his blessings upon the wicked and the good alike. God gives eternal life to those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and he may choose to intervene at any time to heal or to provide for our daily bread in an unusual manner. But even faithful Christians get sick and are poor—in fact, **the majority of the world's** p. 43 **faithful Christians have been and are poor—and all of us**, this side of the parousia, **will someday die**, presumably of a final illness.

[Hebrews 11](#) speak of saints of old who won great victories in this life *by faith*, but also of others who were impoverished, imprisoned, tortured, and even killed *by faith* ([Heb. 11:24–39](#)). The writer pens these words to encourage believers who had ‘joyfully accepted the confiscation of [their] property’ ([Heb. 10:34](#)) so that they would not lose heart but rather remain faithful to the Lord in the light of their present suffering. They are promised vindication, but not in this life. Rather, they shall be vindicated by God in the age to come ([10:30–39](#)).

Paul’s teaching in [1 Timothy 6](#) underlines the Christian perspective on wealth and poverty: He writes of those ‘who think that godliness is a means to financial gain’ ([6:5](#)). It is interesting to note that the people who believe that godliness leads to financial success, according to Paul, are the people who are teaching the false doctrines that he urges Timothy to oppose.

To the contrary, Paul writes, ‘godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses ...

‘Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life’ ([1 Tim. 6:6–12, 17–19](#)).

As Gordon Fee has pointed out, ‘Wealth and possessions are a zero value for the people of God’ (*The Disease of the Health and Wealth Gospels* [Beverly, MA: Fronline Publishing, 1985], p. 7). Godliness does not necessarily lead to financial success. On the contrary, wealth and possessions may lead one away from the Lord. Those who desire to be wealthy very often lose sight of true spiritual values. They quickly begin to value things in terms of the temporal rather than the eternal, in terms of what is seen rather than what is unseen. And they are tempted to trust in their wealth rather than in their God. They become arrogant, forgetting that God is the source of their wealth and that he has entrusted wealth to them only as a temporary loan. Worse, they often begin to assume that their wealth gives them a moral superiority p. 44 over other people! Thus, Paul urges

Timothy to remind the few Christians who are rich to be generous with what they have been entrusted with and to share it with those who have less than they have, so that they may not lose out on the blessings of the age to come.

Wealth and possessions are, according to the Bible, gifts of God. But they can also be a snare and temptation. It is easy to say that it is not so much a matter of whether you are rich or not but how you view your riches. Most people who have wealth seem to believe that they have the right values. But we should not overlook the fact that the New Testament has a lot more to say about the dangers of wealth than the positive benefits of wealth.

‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God’ ([Mark 10:25](#)).

‘He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty’ ([Lk. 1:53](#)).

‘But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort’ ([Lk. 6:24](#)).

‘No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon’ ([Matt. 6:24](#)).

The rich man, ‘who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day’ while the poor beggar lay at his gate and longed to eat what fell from his table, ‘died and was buried.’ He woke up ‘in hell, where he was in torment ...’ ([Lk. 16:19–23](#)).

The prosperity evangelists seem to suggest that we should give in order to receive more. If we give, they suggest, God will give us more in return. This is quite different from the New Testament ethic of *agape* (altruistic love) and *charis* (grace).

New Testament theology is both christocentric and theocentric, focused on the grace of God that has been manifested in Christ. **Prosperity theology is fundamentally anthropocentric**, focused on us and our desires. It is a product of the highly individualistic and self-centred culture of late twentieth century Western capitalism. The great themes of God’s holiness, God’s glory, and God’s grace are missing from the proclamation of the prosperity evangelists. Except for the fact that they are ostensibly quoting from the Bible, their message is more akin to the doctrines of self-actualization and self-esteem of the contemporary pop psychologists than it is to the motifs of classical Christian theology.

A FALSE UTOPIA

Finally, **the teaching of prosperity theology is simply nonsense in view of contemporary economic realities**. For a start, not only are the majority of the people living on this planet poor, but the majority of the Christians living in the world are poor. And it may come as a surprise to you that the continent in which there are more Christians today than any other continent, and where the church is growing faster than in any other place, is the poorest continent. I speak of Africa. And, contrary to what the prosperity evangelists would have us believe, it is getting poorer rather than richer. **P. 45**

The economic situation in West, Central, East and Southern Africa is little affected by the reality of the faith and commitment of the millions of believers who live there. Rather it is a product of forces that are at work quite independently of the faithful discipleship of African Christians. A vast array of cultural, environmental, and economic factors are at work to prevent the type of economic growth that Europe and America experienced in the 19th and 20th centuries and many Asian countries, such as Korea, are experiencing today.

And yet God is at work mightily in Africa, calling out a people for his name from all of the many tribes of Africa. Africa is experiencing one of the greatest outpouring of God's Spirit that the world has ever known, in spite of its great poverty.

There is, in fact, some evidence to suggest that as people become more economically prosperous they tend to forget God. Secularism seems to be a by-product of modern economic growth. This does not mean that we should be promoting poverty, but it does mean that we should never promote economic growth at all costs or allow it to become an idol.

It is also nonsense to think that the wealth that *some* people in the West have experienced in the past and that more and more people in Asia are experiencing today could ever become universal. Even in America and Europe, where there are millions of relatively poor people, many of whom are sincere and faithful Christians, it is far from universal. Sadly, many of the poor people who are frequently in the audiences of the prosperity evangelists, are being offered false economic hopes, just as many invalids and physically handicapped people are offered the false hope of perfect health by some of those same preachers. It simply is not possible for all Christians to become rich, and even if it were so, it would be spiritually unhealthy! I wonder how many people have been turned away from God by the failure of their financial dreams, that were implanted in their minds by the preachers of prosperity, to materialize.

Wealth then, can be not only an opportunity for *koinonia* but also a very real danger to the Christian. Whatever wealth the believer has is to be regarded as a loan from the Lord to be invested in his work, to be used for his glory, to be shared with his people, particularly with those who are poor. The rich Christian, like all Christians, is a steward of all that he or she possesses. All wealth belongs to the Lord.

On the other hand poverty is not seen by the New Testament writers to be better than wealth. God is the One who pleads the cause of the poor, who is concerned about justice for the widow, the orphan and the alien. But this does not mean that he is blessing poverty, or that poverty is to be preferred to wealth. The New Testament does not romanticize or idealize poverty as some forms of Christian piety have done in the past.

In conclusion, the New Testament perspective suggests that whether one is wealthy or poor should be a matter of indifference to the Christian. Neither wealth nor poverty is a positive value. The values of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus free the Christian from being p. 46 overly concerned about material things ([Matt. 6:22-34](#)). Kingdom values take precedence over worldly values. To desire to accumulate wealth represents the values of the old order, which is passing away. To share what one has with others is a core value of the new community of the kingdom of God ([Lk. 3:11](#); [Lk. 12:33](#); [18:22](#); [Ac. 20:35](#); [2 Cor. 9:2](#), [7](#), [11](#); [Eph. 4:28](#); [1 Jn. 3:17](#); etc).

A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

A third and even more telling criticism of current theology is that **it either neglects or seriously misrepresents fundamental New Testament theological themes.**

What does one make of **the theology of the cross**, which is at the heart of the New Testament?

'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' ([Mk. 8:34](#)).

'Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple' ([Lk. 14:27](#)).

'Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple' ([Lk. 14:33](#)).

Jesus himself set the example of sacrifice for the disciple of Jesus by forsaking the riches of heaven ([Philp. 2:5-8](#)) 'for us men and for our salvation,' as the Nicene Creed confesses.

'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich' ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)).

Prosperity theology also misses the heart of the New Testament's teaching about giving. Those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ give because they are responding to God's unconditional love. God has lavished his love upon us ([Rom. 5:8](#); [Eph. 1:7-8](#); [1 Jn. 3:1](#)). We give in response to his great love for us ([2 Cor. 5:14](#); [Eph. 2:4](#); [5:1-2](#); [1 Thess. 1:3](#)). His gift is without any strings attached ([Eph. 2:5-10](#) etc). His gift of grace causes us to desire to exercise the gift of grace by giving to others who are in need ([Rom. 12:6-8](#); [2 Cor. 8:1, 6, 9](#); [9:7-8](#); [1 Jn. 3:14, 17](#)).

We should fight against the poverty that imprisons so many of the world's peoples, as we should fight against sin, disease, and political tyranny. But there are much better and more effective ways to fight against these evils than to support teaching that is unbiblical, impractical, and, indeed, ultimately disillusioning. In short, the so-called 'word of faith' or *rhema* theology is not the 'full gospel' at all. Rather, it is at best a very partial gospel, or, at worst, what Paul calls 'a different gospel' ([Gal. 1:6](#); [2 Cor. 11:4](#)).

Dr. W. Ward Gasque is Vice President and Academic Dean of Ontario Theological Seminary, Toronto, Canada. p. 47

A Response

C. Kee Hwang

It is great privilege for me to respond to Dr. Gasque's 'Prosperity Theology and the New Testament'. I thank the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission and Korean Evangelical Theological Society for this opportunity.

Dr. Gasque has presented a timely subject. In Korea the theology of prosperity is, I suppose, not known widely as a theological discipline *per se*, but as a theological teaching that puts great emphasis on prosperity in the present life of this Age rather than the life of the Age to Come. It could be characterized as a Pentecostal Neo-Pentecostal tendency, impacting no less powerfully the contemporary Christian community in Korea than any other influence.

Dr. Gasque's presentation demonstrates a firm biblical foundation and his assertion maintains a remarkably sound theology. He describes the teaching of prosperity theology as 'the idea that God loves you and has a marvellous financial plan for your life'.

Dr. Gasque closes his paper with this final comment. 'In short, the so called "word of faith" or *rhema* theology is not the "full gospel" at all. Rather, it is at best a very partial gospel, or at worst, what Paul calls "a different gospel" ' ([Gal. 1:6](#); [2 Cor. 11:4](#)).

Although I may generally agree with Dr. Gasque's assertion on prosperity theology, let me point out some reservations.

First of all, it seems that his definition of prosperity theology is too narrow or one sided, because Dr. Gasque understands 'prosperity' mainly in terms of financial success. I

assume that his understanding derives from an American point of view, which is different from a Korean point of view. According to the Korean value system, the term 'prosperity' implies not only financial success and physical health but also achievement of social status including even their children's well-being including fame, promotion, and academic success. Hence, his understanding of 'prosperity theology' cannot, I suppose, be properly applied to Korean churches.

Second, while he presents many biblical references, there are few references to the claims of the proponents of prosperity theology so that I may properly evaluate Dr. [p. 48](#) Gasque's argument against prosperity theology. There must be, for an example, an emphasis on prayer life on the basis of the key proof texts with regard to the prayer request passages. I believe that even a wrong prayer-life is, in a way, better than a prayerless-life. (cf. [Rom. 8:26](#)).

Third, I have reservations about his perception of what the original author intended in [3 John 2](#). He seems to understand [3 John 2](#) as a formal greeting to an individual only; hence it has nothing to do with us i.e. contemporary Christians. In most Pauline epistles, however, we find that the letter opens with a formal greeting 'Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.' That means that there are more than a dozen greetings in the Pauline epistles. Are those passages merely a formal greeting to the readers of that time? Can we insist that those greetings do not hold any significance for contemporary readers? As a matter of fact the Bible testifies that many things that Jesus did were not written down in the Canon of the New Testament ([In. 20:30-31; 21:25](#)). In view of those many omissions in the Bible, why is there such a great repetition of greeting in the biblical texts? Do not the repetitions, as a whole, imply that they have great significance for contemporary Christians?

In this regard, let me ask this, not in order to criticize Dr. Gasque, but to criticize our own spiritual state. How much do we listen to the scriptural truth that we are the ones who overcome the world ([1 In. 5:4](#) ff.), and are given eternal life in Jesus Christ. ([1 In. 5:11](#)) We also possess his power of resurrection from the dead ([Eph. 1:19](#) ff.), and we are seated with him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus ([Eph. 2:6](#))? Do we really believe these truths and practise them in our lives, or regard them merely as teachings to the readers of that time?

Let us try to test ourselves to see if we truly believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Do we as Bible students, not regard our Lord Jesus as merely an historical figure who walked on the Galilean seashore in the first century? In the meantime, do we not totally forget the fact that he is an historic Jesus as well, and the greatest truth is that, when he died on the cross we also died with him; when he was raised again from the dead, we were raised with him? ([Rom. 6:9](#)).

Finally, he seems to be reluctant to see any merits in the Pentecostal or Charismatic Movement. I think we must learn from them evangelistic enthusiasm and a zeal for an unceasing prayer life. Our early Korean Church which has introduced the idea of the dawn prayer meeting from the midnight prayer of Shamanism, has enjoyed an unusual growth in church history. [p. 49](#)

Jesus' Teaching on Salvation and Suffering

Se Yoon Kim

According to the New Testament, Jesus proclaimed the 'gospel' (good news) of salvation in the kingdom of God to suffering people. He proclaimed that the kingdom of God was not only imminent (e.g. [Mk. 1:15](#); [9:1](#); [Matt. 10:7](#); [Lk. 21:3](#)) but had already come in his ministry (e.g. [Matt. 11:12f](#); [Lk. 16:16](#); [Matt. 12:28](#); [Lk. 11:20](#); [Lk. 17:21](#)). His apostles were convinced that in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus the eschatological salvation of God had taken place, so that in an even more definite language they proclaimed the 'gospel' of that salvation in Christ to the world. God has wrought salvation for the whole world; so the eschatological salvation is already here!

Yet the New Testament knows well that with salvation in Christ suffering has not ceased in the world and that even Christians, those who have entered the kingdom of God or received salvation in Christ, suffer. Indeed, the various writers in the New Testament agreed that Christians *are bound to* suffer.

Then, how are we to explain the discrepancy between the NT's affirmation of salvation and the reality of suffering in the world, especially between the NT's assurance of the believer's salvation and its affirmation of the necessity of his/her suffering? This question naturally leads us to consider questions like: what is the salvation proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles? Is there a possibility of the believer's enjoying the blessings of salvation without suffering?¹

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE KINGDOM OF SATAN

The two most fundamental pre-suppositions of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God are 1) that the world was created by God, and [P. 50](#) therefore God is its rightful lord and the world has (or can have) life only in him, its creator; and 2) that the world has however, fallen under the lordship of Satan.² Satan, the usurper of God's rightful lordship, rules the world in sin and death, i.e. forces us to sin and rewards us with death for the obedience rendered, that is, for sinning ([Rom. 6:23](#)). He 'tempts' human beings to be gods unto themselves ([Gen. 3:5](#)), to assert themselves against God, to be self-sufficient and self-seeking, or, in the language of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son ([Lk. 15:11-24](#)), to claim their 'share of the property' and leave the father for a self-sufficient life in a distant country. Sin, i.e. their self-assertion, thus results, on the one hand, in their separation from God, the creator and source of life, and, on the other hand, in their transference into the sphere of Satan's lordship and in their imprisonment in their finitude that manifests itself in their deprivation. So, conditioned to time and space they get old, weak, sick and dead, never being able to enjoy the freedom of the omnipresent; lacking in wisdom and power,

¹ Originally I planned to write this essay in two parts, with the second part dealing with the apostle Paul's teaching on Christian salvation and suffering. Space and other factors have made me postpone the second part to another opportunity. On this dialectic of salvation and suffering as on other issues (cf. S. Kim, 'Jesus, Sayings of, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin & D. G. Reid (Downers Grove, 1993), 474-492), I have found Paul a really faithful follower and profound interpreter of Jesus.

² For further presuppositions, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids, 1986), 3-68.

they always suffer from anxiety and problems; and lacking in love, they constantly suffer from conflicts with others. All the forms of suffering—physical, psychological, social, spiritual; this-worldly or other-worldly; or however we may identify them—are symptoms of death that Satan has inflicted upon human beings by ‘tempting’ them to rebel against God and to be separated from the source of life. In the imagery of the parable of the prodigal son, having been separated from the rich father, they suffer in their destitution and the suffering is the concrete form in which death manifests itself ([Lk. 15:24, 32](#)).³ For the prodigal son, his only chance of salvation is to return to the father and get restored to sonship for abundant inheritance and for participation in the father’s feast. So for human beings the only chance of salvation is for them to be transferred from the kingdom of Satan back to the kingdom of God, their creator, and participate in his infinite wealth.

JESUS’ PREACHING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND ACTUALIZATION OF ITS SALVATION

Jesus proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom of God and indeed its arrival in his ministry. It was his ‘gospel’—good news—to the suffering: the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the hungry, the weeping, and the persecuted ([Lk. 4, 18](#); [6:20–22](#); [Matt. 5:3–11](#)). It spelled to them God’s eschatological salvation or deliverance from suffering. He described the kingdom of God chiefly in terms of feast ([Matt. 8:11](#); [Lk. 7:29](#); [Matt. 22:1–4](#); [Matt. 25:1–12](#); [Lk. 14:15–24](#); [Mk. 15:25](#); etc) and inheritance ([Matt. 5:5](#); [19:29](#); [25:34](#); [P. 51 Mk. 10:17](#); cf. also [Lk. 12:32](#))⁴ and demonstrated its present saving power by making people whole: by releasing sinners from the sufferings brought by their sins and restoring them *shalom* with God and with their neighbours ([Mk. 2:1–12](#); [Lk. 19:9](#); [7:36–50](#); [Lk. 15:2](#); [Mk. 2:15f](#); [Matt. 11:19](#); [Lk. 7:34](#)),⁵ by driving out demons ([Mk. 1:23–28](#); [Lk. 4:33–37](#); [Mk. 5:1–20](#); etc), and by healing the sick ([Mk. 1:40–45](#); [10:46–52](#); [Matt. 11:12–19](#); [Lk. 7:1823](#); etc).⁶ As ‘the “Son of Man” ’, the eschatological representative of God’s kingly reign or the eschatological agent of his saving work, Jesus exercised the divine authority to forgive sinners their sins and gave them the foretaste of the feast of the kingdom of God ([Mk. 2:10](#); [Matt. 11:19](#); [Lk. 7:34](#)). His proclamation of the kingdom of God and actualization of its

³ Cf. [Rm 8:36](#) (Ps 44.23); [1 Cor. 15:31](#); [2 Cor 4:10f](#); [Phil 3:10](#); etc. in which Paul also reflects the common Jewish idea of all suffering as manifestation of death; S. J. Hafemann, ‘Suffering’, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, 1993), 919; J. Jeremias, *Neutestamentlich Theologie* (Gütersloh, 1979), 107.

⁴ See S. Kim ‘Jesus’ Preaching of the Kingdom of God and the Christian Political Existence’, *Essays on Jesus and Paul* (Seoul, 1993), 48f.

⁵ Cf. J. Jeremias, *Theologie*, 116ff., 155f.; B. F. Meyer, *The Aim of Jesus* (London, 1979), 158–162) Note how Jesus identified forgiveness of sins and ‘healing’, physical as well as spiritual and social (e.g. [Mk. 2:1–12](#); [2:15–17](#); [Jn. 5:1–15](#); cf. [Ps. 103:3](#)). For this, cf. O. Betz, ‘Jesu Lieblingspsalm’, *Jesus der Messias Israels* (Tübingen, 1987), 198f. It is quite clear that Jesus saw sufferings, physical, spiritual, social or whatever, as consequences of sin in a general way, as we describe here, but he cautioned his disciples not to accept the contemporary folk belief uncritically, that every concrete form of suffering was the result of God’s specific judgment upon a concrete sin of the one who suffered (e.g. [Lk. 13:1–5](#); [Jn. 9:11ff](#)). Especially in interpreting Christians’ sufferings, this scheme of sin and punishment is not applied elsewhere in the NT, either (perhaps the only exception being 1 Cor. 11.30). Cf. Michael Wolter, ‘Leiden’, *TRZ* 20 (1990), 686.

⁶ For Jesus’ exorcism and healings as his demonstration and actualization of the salvation of the kingdom of God and his healings on the sabbath as the eschatological restoration of the sabbath blessings, see Kim, ‘Jesus’ Preaching of the Kingdom of God’, 50f.; J. Roloff, *Das Kerygma und der irdische Jesus* (Göttingen, 1970), 52–88; B. F. Meyer, *Aims*, 154–162; C. Dietzfelbinger, ‘Vom Sinn der Sabbatheilungen Jesu’, *EvTh* 38 (1978), 281–297; W. Grimm, *Der Ruhetag* (Frankfurt, 1980), 45–84.

saving power was the work of overthrowing Satan and liberating people from his reign of evil and death, which he could do because he had ‘bound’ Satan ([Matt. 12:22–30](#); [Mk. 3:22–27](#); [Lk. 14–23](#)). He also sent his disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God and actualize its saving power in healing the sick. In their successful ministry he rejoiced to see Satan falling from heaven ([Lk. 10:9, 17f.](#)).⁷

Thus, with this kingdom proclamation and actualization, Jesus ‘came to call sinners’ out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God. He called them to come out, by repentance, of the sphere of Satan’s reign in sin and death, and to come, by faith, into the sphere of God’s reign in righteousness and life; he called them, like the prodigal son, to come out of the creaturely destitution into the creator’s wealth, out of the world of suffering caused by their finite into the world of life—divine life—made of God’s infinite wealth. So Jesus aimed at creating the new people of God who, restored to the right relationship to their creator, as children to the father, could participate in his abundant ‘feast’ or [p. 52](#) ‘inherit’ his infinite wealth.⁸ Thus, his proclamation of the kingdom of God and his demonstration of its saving power, was essentially a *promise* of ‘life’—divine life or, in the biblical idiom, ‘eternal life’—and a *call* or *invitation*—to be the people of the kingdom of God in order to receive salvation. Those who responded to this invitation in repentance and by faith, Jesus made children of God who could call the creator ‘*abba*’ and ‘inherit’ his wealth.

What Jesus had *promised* by his kingdom proclamation, he *wrought* through his death. For he interpreted his death in terms of the eschatological sacrifice of atonement and new covenant (esp. [Mk. 14:17–25](#)) that made the believers the eschatological, righteous people of God,⁹ and by raising him from the dead God vindicated him, confirming his death as the vicariously atoning and covenant-establishing sacrifice as well as his kingdom proclamation as his eschatological agent or ‘Son’. So, in the death (and resurrection) of Jesus, the kingdom of God which Jesus had proclaimed as imminent and indeed as already exerting its saving power in a proleptic way was decisively *realized*. The salvation *promised* by Jesus in his kingdom proclamation was *realized* in his death (and resurrection). So arose the apostolic preaching of the ‘gospel’—the good news—of Jesus’ death (and resurrection) as the eschatological saving event, as his work as the Messiah or the eschatological Saviour ([1 Cor. 15:3–5](#)).¹⁰

THE FUTURE CONSUMMATION OF THE KINGDOM AND CHRISTIANS’ PRESENT SUFFERING

Yet Jesus looked forward to the future consummation of the kingdom of God (e.g. [Mk. 14:25](#)) beyond its decisive coming or realization in his death (and resurrection). His death and resurrection would mark a decisive victory over Satan ([Jn. 14:30](#); [16:33](#)),¹¹ whom he had already ‘bound’ and whose ‘house’ he had already plundered ([Mk. 3:22–27](#); [Matt. 12:22–30](#); [Lk. 11:14–23](#)). So Jesus confidently expected the gradual ‘growth’ of the

⁷ Cf. Jeremias, *Theologie*, 98f.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 164–196; B. F. Meyer, *Aims*, 129–222.

⁹ See S. Kim, ‘Interpretations of Jesus’ Death in the NT’, *Essays*, 223–241.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 241–243; also S. Kim, ‘Jesus, Sayings of’, 483.

¹¹ See S. Kim, ‘Jesus’ Baptism and Trial’, *Essays*, 35–38. All four Gospels show Jesus struggling with and triumphing over Satan through his ministry, death and resurrection, but it is John who shows most clearly that precisely in the death inflicted on him by Satan Jesus triumphed or was ‘glorified’.

kingdom of God: though it began small like a mustard seed or leaven in his ministry, it would gradually and inconspicuously 'grow' eventually to bring all the nations under its shelter ([Mk. 4:30-32](#); cf. [Mk. 4:26-29](#)) or it would gradually penetrate into the whole world, enriching the world with its salvation ([Matt. 13:33](#); [Lk. 13:20f.](#)).¹² Yet he knew that Satan would not yield but put up his last desperate opposition to the kingdom of God, causing an even greater degree of suffering for the **p. 53** people of God ([Mk. 13](#)),¹³ until he is finally destroyed or their salvation is complete at his parousia as 'the "Son of Man" ' ([Mk. 8:38](#); [Lk. 12:8f.](#); [Mk. 13:26f.](#); [14:62](#); etc).¹⁴ So, as history moves toward the eschaton the day of the final consummation of the kingdom of God, there would be 'growth' both of the kingdom of God and of Satan's opposition, and therefore 'growth' both of salvation and suffering.

So, even before the parousia of 'the "Son of Man" ', the believers enjoy the salvation of the kingdom of God *already* wrought in Jesus' Christ-act, but, since it has *not yet* been consummated, until the parousia they enjoy it only in prolepsis. To that extent, even as the saved, they are exposed to suffering inflicted upon them by Satan at present. Hence the present dialectical situation of the people of the kingdom of God!

THE DOUBLE COMMAND OF LOVE FOR LIFE IN THE KINGDOM

For those who responded to Jesus' call and entered into the kingdom of God, he set forth as the principle of life for the people of God or the kingdom ethic the two commandments: to love God with their whole being and to love their neighbour as themselves, which were in fact the summary of the whole law of the OT ([Mk. 12:29-31](#)).¹⁵ The former, demanding their total trust in and obedience to God, the creator, was contrasted with idolatry, in which human beings' sinful attempts to secure their life, their security and happiness, by themselves or apart from the creator manifests itself (cf. [Matt. 6:25-34](#); [Lk. 12:22-31](#)). Jesus warned them especially of mammonism as the most real form of idolatry ([Matt. 6:24](#); [Lk. 16:13](#)).¹⁶ The second commandment, to love one's neighbour as oneself, was a natural corollary of the first commandment. One's self-assertion against God inevitably leads to (or expresses itself in) self-assertion against one's neighbour; or, to put it in another way, one's attempt to secure one's security and happiness by oneself inevitably involves the principle of exploitation of others. Likewise or contrariwise, one's total devotion to God or one's living out of the creator's *pleroma* enables one to give oneself to others. Jesus spelled out this kingdom ethic of the double command in various concrete ways in various situations (see esp. the Sermon on the Mount/Plain), and made the self-denial and servanthood as the fundamental principle of his discipleship, setting himself forth as the example ([Mk. 8:34f.](#); [10:42-45](#)).

Confronted by Jesus' call, Zacchaeus abandoned his idolatry of mammon and his exploitation of his neighbours, deciding for the double command of the kingdom of God, **p. 54** and Jesus declared, "Today *salvation* has come to this house ...!" ([Lk. 19:1-10](#)). But

¹² Cf. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, 194-201.

¹³ Cf. Jeremias, *Theologie*, 231-234.

¹⁴ On the question of Jesus' self-designation 'the "Son of Man" ', see S. Kim, *'The "Son of Man" ' as the Son of God* (Tübingen, 1983; Grand Rapids, 1985).

¹⁵ Cf. Jeremias, *Theologie*, 204-211 ('Das Liebesgebot als Lebensgesetz der Königsherrschaft'); W. Schrage, *Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen, 1982), 69-88.

¹⁶ Cf. L. Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen, 1975), 130-135.

confronted by the same call of Jesus, the devout rich man who ostensibly had kept all the commandments since his youth, chose his mammon instead of God as the provider of his life, of his security and happiness. So instead of the *salvation* that God, the infinite, would give, he turned to the salvation that mammon seemingly promised to give ([Mk. 10:17–31](#)). The former is the fulness of life, without any shadow of death, that God the creator gives. But the latter is only that which is conditioned by creaturely limitation and therefore by the sufferings arising out of the limitation. Hence it is only an *illusion* of salvation.

Yet Satan always tempts human beings with the illusion that they can be ‘gods’ unto themselves, to secure their life by their own strength. In the kingdom of Satan, self-assertion, against God and one’s neighbour, is the principle of living. Insofar as the kingdom of God has not yet fully come, the Christians, those who have already entered into it, are still exposed to Satan’s lordship. So they are constantly confronted by the rival claims of lordship, on the one hand, of Jesus on behalf of God his Father, and, on the other hand, of Satan. Obedience to Jesus’ lordship and observance of his double command concretely brings salvation already now, albeit in prolepsis of the full salvation at the eschaton, in the form of greater individual wholeness, of social freedom, justice and peace, and of ecological health. Obedience to Satan’s lordship in self-assertion concretely leads to all forms of alienation and conflict, to sufferings. However, it is difficult for Christians to resist Satan’s temptation and to live as the people of the kingdom of God wholeheartedly, because in the world which, still dominated by Satan, has self-assertion as the very principle of existence, forsaking self-assertion and giving one-self in love of God and neighbour inevitably involves sacrifice and loss. Jesus demanded: ‘Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you’ ([Matt. 5:39–42](#); [Lk. 6:29–31](#)). He demanded that the people of the kingdom of God turn away from this world’s ethos of lording it over others, and become slaves of all ([Mk. 10:42–45](#)). To live like this in obedience to Jesus’ lordship as the ‘children of the Most High’ ([Lk. 6:35](#)) in this world in practice means poverty, ridicule and oppression, while to live in a ‘normal’ way (i.e. in obedience to ‘the ruler of this world’—[Jn. 14:30](#) cf. also [1 Cor. 2:8](#); [2 Cor. 4:5](#)), asserting oneself and exploiting others, often means wealth, power and honour.

THE NATURE OF SALVATION IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The wealth, power and honour, the fruits of successful self-assertion, which are so much valued and desired in this world, produce as much suffering as happiness, if not more suffering **P. 55** than happiness, for those who have them as well as for others, as the dehumanizing, miserable culture of drugs and violence in the affluent west today demonstrates. So they are no way of securing one’s life, as Jesus taught ([Mk. 8:35f.](#); [Lk. 12:16–20](#)). Yet poverty and oppression are also real sufferings, only too real to millions of people in the world! Then, has salvation in the kingdom of God that Jesus Christ has already brought into this world nothing to do with deliverance from these forms of suffering? Has it only to do with the ‘soul in the next world’, as some forms of Christian theology have taught on the basis of a mixture of Jewish eschatological dualism and Hellenistic ontological dualism? Certainly Jesus was opposed to reducing salvation to the physical, psychological and social well-being in this world, as his parables of the rich fool ([Lk. 12:16–20](#)) and of the rich man and Lazarus ([Lk. 16:19–31](#)) as well as his refusal to

comply with the demands of the contemporary Davidic messianism clearly indicate.¹⁷ At the same time, he does not support an understanding of salvation only in terms of the well-being of the 'soul' in the next world. For, as we have seen, his central claim was that the kingdom of God with its saving power was being manifested concretely in his ministry of 'healing', in delivering people from their physical, psychological and social sufferings. His 'healings' of sinners and the physically ill were not just 'signs' for his eventual salvation of their souls in the world to come.¹⁸ If they had been, what was the meaning of the central affirmation of Jesus and his apostles that the kingdom of God or its salvation '*has already come*'? They were rather the anticipatory (yet real) manifestations of the salvation of their whole beings which was to be consummated at his parousia. For Jesus, salvation was the all-comprehensive concept of making human beings whole in all dimensions of their existence, which of course would be consummated only as they participate in God's infinite wealth at his parousia. So his teaching on salvation allows no form of reductionism, neither the liberation theologians' this-worldly reductionism (salvation only in terms of liberation from poverty and oppression here [P. 56](#) and now) nor the pietists' otherworldly reductionism (salvation only in terms of the well-being of 'the soul in the next world').¹⁹ Neither does it allow an essential separation of (the present/this-worldly) 'blessing' from (the eschatological/otherworldly) salvation. The 'blessings' that Christians experience are really the concrete manifestations here and now of the salvation of God's kingdom that has already been realized and has yet to be consummated.

We have already said that the saving power of the kingdom of God which Jesus has brought, manifests itself concretely in the restoration of individual wholeness, social *shalom* and ecological health, as the people of God live by the kingdom ethic. It is easy to see how the lives of God's people lived in obedience to Jesus' double command of love for God and neighbour would promote a fair distribution of wealth, preventing the suffering of the materialistic dehumanization on the part of the wealthy as well as the suffering of hunger on the part of the poor, how it would also lead to social justice, freedom and peace, and how it would also lead to appropriate use of the ecological resources with care. All these would, of course, promote our physical health as well! So, the salvation of the

¹⁷ Cf. S. Kim, 'What Kind of Messiah Was Jesus?', *Salvation in Christ*, 10th revised ed. (Seoul, 1993), 111–148.

¹⁸ See the note 5 above. Gappelt, *Theologie*, 203f., correctly affirms: 'Jesus claims that his healings signify the events of the fulfilment (Mt. 11.3f.par) or the coming of the Kingdom ([Mt 12:28](#) par). This is understandable if people become believers, because thereby *their relationship to God and with it all (the rest) become whole* ... if faith means deliverance, then the bodily healing also belongs to it unquestionably according to the (OT) prophecy. If we were to leave the bodily life to the laws of nature and reduce the religious (life) to the internal dimension as in Liberalism, then God would be no longer God, the creator.' Then, he goes on to say: 'The bodily healing during Jesus' earthly ministry is nevertheless only a *hidden sign of the new*: the new, the Kingdom of God ... The miracles of his earthly ministry were hidden signs of the new; the new breaks in at Easter, no longer as sign, but as reality of resurrection but still as hidden reality' (his emphasis). But his designation, in the second paragraph, of 'hidden sign of the new' for the concrete manifestations of the saving power of the kingdom of God in Jesus' earthly ministry is inadequate for, if not inconsistent with, Jesus' claim which he correctly interprets in the first paragraph.

¹⁹ Cf. R. T. France, 'Liberation in the NT', *EQ* 58 (1986), 3–23. In this balanced exposition of Jesus' teaching, he emphasizes, in a manner similar to the present essay, both that contrary to the wishes of the zealots and their modern followers (liberationists) Jesus had no socio-economico-political programme in his kingdom preaching, and that contrary to the pietistic spiritualization his kingdom preaching did nevertheless bring 'personal liberation', 'socio-economic liberation', and 'political liberation' by changing people's relationship to God and to one another and by changing their value system. However, France does not emphasize, as we do here, that these 'liberations' were concrete manifestations of the eschatological salvation that has yet to be consummated.

kingdom of God is already real here and now in its comprehensive sense, not just in comforting our 'souls' for our eventual salvation in the next world, but in removing our existential sufferings. Thus, the salvation of the kingdom of God that Jesus has brought does also mean deliverance from poverty, illness and oppression.²⁰ p. 57

CHRISTIANS AS THE BEARERS OF SALVATION WHO SUFFER

Then, how are we to understand the aforementioned sufferings of God's people that arise precisely out of their obedience to Jesus' lordship rather than Satan's lordship, out of their living as the citizens of God's kingdom in this world dominated by Satan? They are part of the sufferings which Jesus warned his disciples would suffer for the sake of his name and the gospel ([Mk. 8:35](#); [13:9-13](#)). Clearly Jesus saw them as inevitable, as a real part of the active opposition of the Satanic forces before the consummation of the kingdom of God at his parousia as 'the "Son of Man"'.²¹ Being fully conscious of them ([Lk. 10:3](#)), Jesus sent his disciples into the world to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom and to demonstrate the life of the kingdom of God in terms of love or service ([Matt. 10:5-15](#); [Lk. 9:1-6](#); [Lk. 10:1-12, 17-20](#)). So, it is clear that he expected his people to be bearers of the salvation of the kingdom of God for the world as well as enjoying that salvation themselves. Through their proclamation of the gospel and self-giving service they would make the salvation of the kingdom of God real for the world. Their self-giving service inevitably means sacrifice and suffering for them, as we have seen, but through it a greater degree of well-being individually, socially and ecologically is realized for the world, as we have seen. This was exactly the path that Jesus trod: the Son of God or 'the "Son of Man"' came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as ransom for many' ([Mk. 10:45](#)), so that 'by his poverty' we have 'become rich' ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)) and 'by his wounds (we) have been healed' ([1 Pet. 2:25](#); [Isa. 53:5](#)). Jesus commanded his disciples to follow him in this path of self-denial and service to bring about the salvation of the kingdom of God to the world ([Mk. 8:34](#)). The apostle Paul was a faithful follower of Jesus on this path, as by becoming 'poor' he 'made many rich' ([2 Cor. 6:10](#)). So, the Christians' life in obedience to Jesus' double command as the people of the kingdom of God realizes in a proleptic way the salvation of the kingdom from which all, including themselves, benefit; yet, at the same time, for themselves it also involves sacrifice and suffering. Jesus exhorted his disciples to bear the sufferings and

²⁰ So Jesus' message of the kingdom of God was really 'good news' for the poor, the sick and the enslaved ([Lk. 4:18](#); [Lk. 6:20-22](#); [Matt. 5:3-11](#); [Matt. 11:5](#); [Lk. 7:22](#)). 'The poor' (*anawim*) was indeed an honoured title in the OT and Judaism for those who, being faithful to the covenant, knew themselves to be totally dependent upon God. Their life of loyalty to God usually resulted in their material poverty and oppression by the wicked. So, in interpreting the sense in which Jesus used the term, we are not to 'spiritualize' it completely, in spite of [Matt. 5:3](#). This is prevented by his use of the term in association with various synonymous terms such as 'the hungry', 'the weeping', 'the hated', etc ([Lk. 6:21f.](#)), the hungry and thirsty, the naked, the imprisoned, the sick, 'the least' ([Matt. 25:31-46](#)), etc and by Jesus' strong concern for the materially poor ([Mk. 10:21](#); [14:17](#); [Lk. 19:8](#); [14:13](#); [16:19-21](#); etc). Further, the fact that [Matt. 11:5](#) ([Lk. 7:22](#)) has the simple *πτωχοι* indicates that in [Matt. 5:3](#) *τω πνευματι* is a Matthean addition to the original tradition preserved in [Lk. 6:24](#). So, by 'the poor' Jesus probably had in mind those who, being physically, materially, socially and spiritually weak, could look only upon God for their salvation, and while Luke highlights the external side of their need, Matthew seeks to stress the need in relation to God. See Jeremias, *Theologie*, 114f.; France, 'Liberation'. 14; further, E. Bammel, art. in TDNT vi, 888-912. It goes without saying, however, that Jesus encouraged the mammonistic idolatry of 'the poor' no more than that of the rich.

²¹ Tradition-historically, of course, this teaching of Jesus stands in the line of the *passio iusti* tradition prominent in the OT and Judaism: the idea that the righteous, those who are faithful to the covenant and the law, are to suffer at the hands of the wicked but are eventually to be vindicated by God at the end. On this, see K. Th. Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte* (Tübingen, 1984), I. Hauptteil.

persevere to the end in their commitment to his lordship, assuring them of the consummation of their salvation at his parousia as ‘the “Son of Man” ’ ([Mk. 8:34–38](#); [Lk. 12:8f](#); [Matt. 10:32](#)’ [Mk. 13:9–13](#), [26f.](#)) and promising them the help of the Holy Spirit ([Mk. 13:11](#)).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In *summary*, we highlight the following points in Jesus’ teaching on Christians’ salvation and suffering in this world:

- (1) The kingdom of God has been inaugurated with his ministry, p. 58 death and resurrection, demonstrating its saving power.
- (2) The salvation of the kingdom of God that he has brought is all-comprehensive; it is making human beings and the world whole again in all dimensions of their existence by restoring them to the right relationship to their creator, i.e. by liberating them from the reign of Satan in sin and death and by making them participate in the creator’s infinite wealth. The salvation may not be reduced either to this-worldly well-being of the ‘body’ nor to the other-worldly well-being of the ‘soul’. It concretely takes its form in deliverance from all forms of suffering, physical, psychological, spiritual, social, this-worldly, other-worldly, or however we may identify it.
- (3) However, the kingdom of God has not yet been consummated, so that the world is still exposed to Satan’s reign in sin and death and there are still sufferings. Until the consummation of the kingdom and its salvation at the parousia of Jesus as ‘the “Son of Man” ’, Christians as well as non-Christians are subjected to the sufferings of the world under Satan.
- (4) Jesus set forth as the principle of life for the people of the kingdom of God the double command to love God with their whole being and their neighbour as themselves. In contrast to the Satanic principle of self-assertion against God and one’s neighbour that brings death, it leads to salvation. A Christians’ life in accordance with it concretely brings about salvation in the form of individual wholeness, social *shalom*, and ecological health.
- (5) Confronted by the rival claim of Satan’s lordship before the consummation of the kingdom of God, however, Christians cannot always render perfect obedience to Jesus’ lordship, to his double command, so that to the extent of their failure in this they cause sufferings to others and they also suffer under the reign of Satan.
- (6) But in this world where the Satanic principle of self-assertion against God and against one’s neighbour is the rule of life, the Christians’ very obedience to Jesus’ double command can also mean sacrifice and suffering for them as well as salvation for them and others. Jesus set forth this path of self-denial and service for the salvation of others as a requirement of his discipleship, and exhorted his disciples to bear the sufferings and persevere to the end when the salvation of the kingdom will be consummated.

Some of the *corollaries* of these points for the theologies of prosperity and suffering are:

- (1) The salvation of the kingdom of God that has been inaugurated in Jesus Christ *does* involve health and wealth (liberation from illness and poverty) as well as other values. But it involves making people *properly* rich and healthy, so that the preacher of the gospel must not identify salvation or ‘blessing’ simply with the mammonistic or purely materialistic prosperity, any more than he must

abstractize or 'spiritualize' it p. 59 in terms only of salvation of the soul in the next world.

- (2) Until the consummation of our salvation at the eschaton, our Christian life is marked by a dialectic of salvation and suffering. Any attempt to resolve the dialectical tension into a one-sided theology of prosperity without a theology of the cross is to ignore the eschatological reservation, to reduce salvation to a few materialistic values, and to encourage a life contrary to the double command of Jesus (i.e. mammonistic idolatry and exploitation of neighbour). The Corinthian *Enthusiasmus* is a perennial reminder of these dangers!
- (3) The preacher of the gospel must point to both the joy of salvation in Jesus Christ and the cost of discipleship. He must encourage Christians to persevere in the sufferings that arise out of their obedience to the Lord Jesus' double command, convincing them that only by living in such an obedience they can have salvation—their own as well as others—in the kingdom of God realized and hope to have the consummation of their salvation at the eschaton.

Dr. Se Youn Kim is Professor of New Testament at Chongshin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Seoul, Korea. p. 60

The Communist Impact on the Church in Eastern Europe

Peter Kuzmič

It is a well known fact that wherever Communists came to power their long-term goal was to create not only a classless but also a religionless society. Christian faith was viewed as superstitious, obscurantist, obsolete, pre-scientific and thus a totally irrelevant way of thinking. Christian institutions were treated as a reactionary remnant of the old order and a hindrance to the progress of the new society and full human liberation of their citizens. Since Communists had a monopoly on both power (which they abused) and truth (which they have distorted) they developed comprehensive strategies and powerful instruments for the eventual elimination of religion. This included restrictive legislation, total atheization of educational institutions and media, control of selection and activity of church leaderships, discrimination in the work place, active persecution and other measures. The policies and methods have differed from country to country and in different periods even within the same countries, depending on what was politically expedient during various historical periods and in different regions. Generalizations are impossible for Eastern Europe has never been totally monolithic when it came to the treatment of religion, due to the complexity of the national, cultural, and religious history of different nations, and depending on international relationships and considerations. At best, however, Christian faith was barely tolerated and Christians marginalized and discriminated against as 'second class citizens', and at worst they were brutally persecuted. In Albania, for example, all visible expressions of religion were, from 1967, totally eradicated, as that small country prided itself on becoming the 'first atheistic state

in the world'. The story of Christian persecution under Stalin in the Soviet Union and during the Krushchev era is well known and does not need to be retold.

With the massive collapse of communism a new spirit of hope filled the widened horizons of new freedom. Since the end of 1989 we have seen a rapid dismantling of what Orwell, Hannah Arendt and others [p. 61](#) regarded as 'the pre-eminent political phenomenon of our time': totalitarian states ruled by party elites that control all political, economic, cultural and even religious life. We have been witnesses of what is expressed in a somewhat overstated triumphalistic title of the American edition of the latest book by Michael Bordeauz—*The Gospel's Triumph Over Communism* (1991). Fifteen years before it actually happened, Trevor Beeson in his excellent study based on first-hand observations, when comparing the two competitors for human minds and hearts, came to a similar conclusion. He summarized it as follows: 'The basic doctrines of Communism have neither convinced the mind nor satisfied the emotions of the intelligentsia or of the proletariat. On the other hand, religious life has displayed remarkable resilience and, far from disappearing, has in many instances found new vitality and power.'

Though the recent dramatic changes contain many elements of unpredictability, the followers of Christ all across the lands of formerly communist Eastern Europe are aware that this is the work of the Lord of history who has seen their suffering and longing for freedom, answered their prayers and provided them with a special *kairos* period to call their nations back to God and to the spiritual foundations for a free and truly 'new society'.

SOME PROBLEMS OF THE PRESENT TRANSITION

The general euphoria of East Europeans with a newly found freedom, however, has quickly given place to a sober encounter with the grim realities that threaten the prospects of a free, peaceful and prosperous future society. Eastern Europe is presently going through a very difficult political transition in moving away from the one-party totalitarian regimes toward some kind of multiparty parliamentary democracy. Mistakes have been made, and are being made as the ABCs of democracy first have to be learned, and new institutions and traditions of democracy have yet to be established. The transition is equally painful economically as Eastern Europe moves away from the centrally planned 'command' economy towards some kind of a viable free-market economy. Economic recovery will be slow as the huge bureaucratic apparatuses have to be dismantled, many state-subsidized factories closed (potentially causing massive social unrest and thus bringing instability to the society) and the mindset of the people changed. Re-education towards creativity and initiative, which was formerly stifled but which is so important for the free-market economy, may take considerable time. Social unrest, disillusionment of the impoverished masses and the general mentality of dependence may create environments conducive to new dictatorships or at least tempt politicians to control the economy in similar ways to those of the Communist period.

The major problem for the Christian church and its mission may be the temptation to return to a quasi-Constantinian model of church-state cooperation. In the process of replacement of Communist ideology by nationalistic ideologies there is an [p. 62](#) intense and somewhat valid rediscovery of national-religious identity. The churches are given rightful recognition for having historically preserved the sense of nationhood, language and culture, especially in the Balkans under the centuries of the Islamic Ottoman-Turkish imposition. They are also rightfully credited for their opposition to the Communist system and for keeping alive certain endangered national and spiritual values. On the negative side, however, the discernible shifts 'from totalitarianism to tribalism' (issuing in inter-ethnic conflicts and wars) and 'from rights to roots' threaten the democratic processes in

most of the East European countries. They also present a dangerous resurgence of new national-religious totalitarianisms. National churches, especially the Orthodox church in several republics of the former Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, and the Catholic church in Poland, Hungary and Croatia, are reasserting their claims of monopoly on religious life and activity in their nations. In these countries, belonging to the national church is becoming less a question of theological persuasion and allegiance to Christ and more a question of patriotism, and bona fide citizenship.

Protestantism in general is looked upon with great suspicion as a radical movement which in the past has divided Christendom, and as a modernized, western faith, and thus a foreign intrusion which at present, in its various fragmented forms, threatens the national and religious identity and unity of the people. Democratically and ecumenically illiterate clergy and militant fanatics among laity, are frequently opposed to Protestant evangelicals as disruptive sectarians involved in dangerous proselytizing and unpatriotic activities. Violent clashes, legal and illegal discrimination, and cultural marginalization are not excluded. It is not inconceivable that some evangelical and other leaders of religious minorities could become the new 'dissidents' of the post-Communist era in Eastern Europe.

The nature of this paper demands that we now leave the future in the hands of our sovereign Lord and return to the analysis of how Communists treated the Christian communities and their faith and what the followers of Christ have learned in that antagonistic context. It is against the backdrop of the lessons learned from the past and in active participation in the creation of the anticipated future that we continually ask the question about the ways in which we can 'enlarge our hopes and diminish our fears'.

STATE (PARTY) POLICIES AND PROPAGATION OF ATHEISM

'The struggle against religion is not a campaign, not an isolated phenomenon, not a self-contained entity; it is an inseparable component part of the entire ideological activity of Party Organizations, an essential link and necessary element in the complex of communist education.' This statement is taken from *Pravda*, January 12, 1967 and summarizes well the ideological position and comprehensive programme of former Soviet policies toward believers and the religious communities.

In 1929 the USSR introduced a [p. 63](#) law on religious associations which became a model for similar legislation introduced in the late 1940s in the other Soviet bloc countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The law contained some sixty articles which articulated what religious organizations could or could not do and what the rights and duties of believers were. The law underwent several revisions. During the Stalinist period, especially up to 1941, limiting articles were vigorously applied and almost regularly over-enforced by the abuse of political power during the intense persecutions of the Stalin era. From 1941–1959 the law was in effect but was almost totally disregarded. The period is considered by historians to have been marked by an unwritten 'concordat' between the church and the state. During the Khrushchev era especially after 1959, a period marked by vigorous anti-religious campaigns, the 1929 law was again rigidly applied.

The following statements from the law are particularly relevant to the topic of Christian education:

Religious associations [that is: congregations and denominations] may not: organize for children, young people and women, special prayer or other meetings, circles, groups, departments for biblical or literary study, sewing, working, or the teaching of religion, etc., excursions, children's playgrounds, libraries, reading rooms, sanatoria or medical care.

Only books necessary to the cult may be kept in the prayer buildings and premises (art. 17).

The activities of the clergymen, preachers, teachers and the like shall be restricted to the place where the members of the religious association reside and in the area where the prayer building or premises are situated. (art. 19) (see Hill, 465 ff.)

From the time of the revolution until the collapse of communism, the Soviet government, through educational agencies and youth organizations, pursued a comprehensive campaign of militant atheization, especially of its younger generations. On Easter Day of 1925, the 'League of Militant Godless' was founded. It was led by a group of Communist intellectuals and was under the patronage of the government. Its main goal was the spreading of atheism and the destruction of all religion. By 1935 it had approximately five million members organized in about fifty thousand local groups. 'Godless Youth' and 'Societies for the Dissemination of Scientific and Political Knowledge' were established with a similar purpose—to spread atheism and develop mass membership throughout the nation. The group called 'Octoberists' specialized in training children aged seven to nine and had 14.5 million members. Twenty million children aged ten to fifteen were involved in the systematic training programme of the old union pioneers. The 'Komsomal' involved youth aged fourteen to eighteen and had 28 million members. One of its main goals was to prepare candidates for membership of the communist Party.

In contrast to the organizations training children and young people in atheism, Christian organizations for youth and children were forbidden. Sunday schools, at least officially, were non-existent, and youth under the age of eighteen years old were forbidden to attend p. 64 church services. The Soviet government proudly claimed that one of the successes of its educational system was evident in the fact that around ninety percent of the young people, aged sixteen to nineteen, adhered to atheism as their world view.

The educational nature and role of Soviet museums of atheism is well known. Also, within the university system, twelve specialised departments existed for the main purpose of promoting 'scientific atheism'. Some 160 newspapers were dedicated to the spread of atheism. Prior to 1957 there were few anti-religious books in the [USSR, except for the monumental series of collected articles published by the Academy of Science under the title, *Problems in the History of Religion and Atheism*. After 1959 anti-religious literature was produced on a large scale and disseminated widely. A few examples:

The Bible for Believers and Unbelievers, reprint of the classic by E. Yaroslavsky, crudely frivolous in its treatment of Old Testament stories, 150,000 copies;

Considerations on Religion, same author, 150,000 copies;

The Origin of our God, by early Bolshevik writer Skvortsov Stepanov;

Sputnik Ateista (voluminous manual of atheism), 2nd ed. 1961, 180,000 copies;

Foundations of Scientific Atheism, 1961, 455 pp., 100,000 copies.

Pamphlets:

On the Opposition between Christian Ideology and Scientific Communism, by Ju. Krianov, 1961, 300,000 copies;

Why is Religious Morality Harmful in Socialist Society?, by A. Rakitov, 1960, Moscow, 48 pp.;

What is Atheism? 1961, 100 pp., 300,000 copies;

On the Devil and on Miracles, 1959, 100,000 copies;

Unmasked, 1960, 108 pp., 150,000 copies;

Religion and Women, 1960, 50 pp., 50,000 copies;

Relics, 1961, 113 pp., 100,000 copies;
I Take a Look at Believers, 1961, 113 pp., 85,000 copies;
The Fanatics, 1961, 54 pp., 175,000 copies;
We were Baptists, 1960, 110 pp., 100,000 copies;
Before the Judgment Seat of Science, 1960, 64 pp., 178,000 copies;

Other titles: *Religion and Daily Life*; *Attempts to Modernize Religion*; *The Proceedings of the Holy Fathers of the Vatican*; *God and the Conquest of Space*; *Men, Idols and God*; *God, Adam and Society*; *The Story of a Former Priest*; *In Search of Biblical Hell*; *Did Christ Exist?*; *The Myth of the Immortality of the soul*; *The origin of Life*; *War and Religion*; 355 titles, with a circulation of 5,422,000 were published in 1961 (three times the amount in 1954, when there 119 titles, circulation 1,944,000, and two times that in 1930 when anti-religious propaganda was most intense).

Monthly anti-religion review *Nauka i Religia* (90,000 copies in 1970, 132,280 copies in 1961, 140,000 in 1963, compared to great literary reviews *Nouvi Mir* and *Oktiabr*, with only 110,000 and 130,000 copies). p. 65

Monthly *Voiovnicky Ateist* (The Militant Atheist), from 1961 until the fall of communism, at Kieve in Ukranian,. 60 pp., 47,000 copies.

These are listed as just a small sample of examples (largely unknown in the West) of the massive anti-religious propaganda at the time when all religious instruction and publishing was outlawed. There are many other examples of the way in which Christian faith was assaulted and religious freedom denied.

In their famous letter of complaint (which earned them many years in prison), the Russian orthodox priests Eshliman and Yakunin (now members of Parliament!) list the following abuses (as summarized by Beeson):

1. Illegal registration of the clergy as a means of interference in their placement.
2. Illegal campaign of the mass closing of churches and monasteries and illegal liquidation of religious societies.
3. Illegal insistence on registration of baptisms and other religious rites.
4. Illegal restriction on the freedom to conduct burial services at cemeteries and to administer communion to sick people in their homes.
5. Violation of the principle of freedom of conscience by forbidding children to participate in public worship.
6. Violation of the principle of separation of Church and State through administrative interference in the financial affairs of a church congregation.
7. Illegal limitation of the number of members of a religious society to the *dvadsatka* (the twenty) and denial in practice to the large majority of believers of their legal right to participate in managing the administrative life of the Church.
8. Illegal limiting of the number of clergy and inhibiting the performance of religious rites. (Beeson, pp. 46–47).

TEMPTATIONS FOR THE CHURCH UNDER PRESSURE

The Withdrawal-Emigration Syndrome

Christians who live under repressive political systems which are antagonistic to their faith face severe temptations. The first temptation is to *withdraw from the society*, literally to 'flee the world'. This can take place either by *internal or external emigration*. Both are caused by fear of the new system which is conceived as evil, powerful and bent on the total destruction of those who would dare to oppose it. Until recently most of the

communist countries refused to allow their citizens to emigrate to other lands. History, however, records several examples of large exodus movements of soviet evangelicals, Pentecostals in particular.¹ Their desire to leave their homeland has been motivated by two factors—severe persecution and warnings of even greater calamities. According to some estimates, even p. 66 at the height of the perestroika-glasnost opening, up to seventy thousand Pentecostals wanted to leave the USSR. The numbers of those officially allowed to emigrate have significantly increased since 1988 due to Gorbachev's 'glasnost' policy. That year alone, some 3500 Pentecostals left the Soviet Union with 10,000 projected Pentecostal emigrants for 1989.² This is an unfortunate trend as it weakens the evangelical witness in their own spiritually needy land at a time of greater freedom and increased opportunities for evangelism.

Those who opt for the easier internal withdrawal by isolating themselves from the surrounding secular society are by and large also lost for effective evangelism. They very often develop a ghetto mentality with a reactionary life-style. They are marked by a high degree of legalism and insulation that prevents them from having a positive 'salt and light' influence on their society. They develop their own pietistic subculture with its own pattern of behaviour, language, dress code, etc. This is very often understood as an apocalyptic escapist eschatology and as a whole seems to validate certain aspects of Marxist criticism of religion. Extreme examples of such isolated groups of conservative Christians (Baptists, Pentecostals, and Mennonites) have unfortunately at times been highlighted in the soviet anti-Christian propaganda to prove the socially and mentally harmful effects of Christian faith.

This internal withdrawal very often leads to a loss of relevance, denies the mission of the church and undermines Christian impact on society. It is tempted to deal with outdated issues, answers questions that are no longer asked and has very little to say to the contemporary man and to the socialist/post-socialist society. Although some conservative Christians have succumbed to this temptation, it is not an option for authentic biblical evangelicals. Withdrawal is preoccupied with survival; Spirit-filled evangelicals are concerned with revival.

2. Crusader Mentality

A second temptation for followers of Christ who have suddenly found themselves surrounded by an enemy and ruled over by an atheistic system is to *react by fighting*, taking a posture of *active opposition* to the government and its policies. The simple reasoning is that the new system is ungodly and evil, inspired by the devil and should be neither obeyed nor tolerated, but rather actively opposed in the name of Christ. There are several dangers in this posture of unrelieved hostility. It is at times based on an oversimplified political and correspondingly spiritual division of the world with the accompanying character of an eschatological struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness. Recent history provides many examples of such perceptions. 'During the times of the "Cold War" when the political antagonism between the Western and Eastern bloc countries came to a very critical and dangerous climax, there was in fashion much over-generalized and simplistic speaking of the "Christian West" and

¹ See Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (London: SCM Press, 1972), p. 274; Kent R. Hill, *The Puzzle of the Soviet Church: An Inside Look at Christianity and Glasnost* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989), pp. 292–296.

² Hill, K. R. *Puzzle*, pp. 292–293.

“atheistic East” and p. 67 mutual denunciation in almost mythological terms.³ The perception that Christianity and Marxism are irreconcilable enemies which can meet only on a battleground has enormous destructive potential for the international community and the future of humanity. This crusader mentality is a betrayal of the gospel for it reduces Christian faith to a politico-ideological force. It may also be a distortion of Marxism by reducing it to militant atheism, without a proper understanding of the genesis, nature and widespread influence of atheism. Many evangelicals who have emigrated from the Soviet Union to the United States were dramatically disillusioned by the realization that the so-called ‘Christian West’ is also deeply permeated by humanistic atheism and that while in the East, Christian truth and values are officially opposed, in the West, they are often only verbally honoured while practically ignored or even totally rejected.

Evangelicals who lived and evangelized in Marxist dominated areas ultimately learned that such reactionary attitudes were counter-productive. They ended up in unfruitful negativism and caused the Marxist authorities to treat the believing community as a ‘fifth column’ representing foreign ‘imperialistic interests’ rather than Christ and his gospel of redemptive love. ‘A church’s intransigent opposition to socialism may either relegate it into obscurity or catapult it into the focus of opposition ...’⁴

History records that in most countries the first years of the communist takeover were marked by bitter and at times violent confrontation. In some cases the state resorted to the most brutal repressive measures that produced countless Christian martyrs and caused enormous devastation of church property and institutions. Christians who were trapped into the assumption that their major task was to fight communism handicapped themselves by becoming incapable of winning the communists with the Good News of Christ. As I argued some fifteen years ago, evangelicals should be free from all ideological captivity and geopolitical bias in order to

make it clear that Christianity is not the official ideology of the West and that capitalism is not the economic theory of biblical faith. Old extreme positions must go: Christianity should no longer be identified with anti-communism nor should Marxism be reduced to militant atheism. In this respect, both sides must undergo a change of mental attitudes and recognize that open confrontation does not bring results desired by both and is commonly based on faulty conceptions of each other. (8)

3. Compromise with the Authorities

The third temptation in the new ideological environment is to *conform or compromise*, to tailor the p. 68 message and the method to the new situation and to *accommodate to the prevailing ideology*. Some Christian leaders in both Eastern Europe and China have yielded ground theologically and otherwise to establish rapport with the new rulers and gain some concessions, if not privileges, in the areas of religious freedom, social status, international travel, etc. Accusations of opportunism and careerism by the suffering believers were not uncommon. Although this approach was at times naive and its motives questionable, in many cases it led to a temporary *modus vivendi* between church and state. In China it found expression in the Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and in Easter

³ Kuzmī, Peter. ‘Christian-Marxist dialogue: An Evangelical Perspective,’ in *Proclaiming Christ in Christ’s Way: Studies in Integral Evangelism*. ed. by Vinay Samuel and Albrecht Hauser (Oxford, Regnum Books, 1989) p. 161.

⁴ Mojzes, Paul. ‘Impact of the East European Churches Upon Their Own Societies,’ in *Information Letter of the Lutheran World Federation, Marxism and China Study No. 37* (Genoa, Switzerland: LWT, Feb 1983) p. ?.

Europe in the minority approach known as 'religion for socialism' movement. The unregistered and persecuted evangelicals of the Soviet Union used to accuse the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (the major and until recently the only recognized evangelical body, composed of Evangelical Christians, Baptists, Pentecostals and Mennonites) of having made serious compromises with the atheistic authorities.⁵

Although in all the socialist countries there was a formal and constitutionally defined separation of church and state, religious activities were controlled through special legislation and government apparatus. Illegal activities such as non-registered 'underground,' and house-churches, itinerant evangelism and religious instruction of children were especially abhorred by the government and were punishable by law. The government used the recognized church bodies to implement its policies. In the Peoples' Republic of China the government's apparatus of control involves United Front Work Department (UFW) of the Communist Party, the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB), operating under the State Council and local governments, the Public Security Bureau (PSB) which stands for China's police system, and the patriotic organizations, including those that are under government supervision, organized as religious bodies, such as the Protestant TSPM and Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA). At the central level the Party's UFW formulates religious policies which are supplemented at the provincial and local levels through the Religious Affairs bureau and with the cooperation of the patriotic church organizations such as TSPM.

An example of the church's subservience and compromise in China was the process of implementation of the 'Document No. 19' which is the definite statement on current Chinese communist religious policy. It was issued in March 1982 by the Communist Party's Committee. In September of 1982 the national leadership of TSPM was called to Beijing to hear UFW and RAB officials elaborate on the document's religious policy and instruct on its implementation. The leaders of the TSPM then organized similar meetings in their provinces and cities for the TSPM pastors and with UFW p. 69 and RAB officials explaining the policy. The same procedure was then applied at local levels. The result was that several local TSPM committees produced 'patriotic covenants' which Christians are asked to obey. Since early 1983 these patriotic covenants were also used to exert pressure on the house churches (many of them distinctly Pentecostal in belief and practice) to join the TSPM and abide by these regulations. These 'patriotic covenants' are a ten-point summary of the 'Spirit of Document 19'. Some of the essential points of this restrictive document are as follows:

1. That Christians will uphold the four basic principles of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), namely, insist on Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, insist on walking the pathway of socialism.
2. That Christians should not interfere with politics, education, marriage or family planning.
3. That Christians will not proselytize or baptize those under 18 years of age; that they may not pray for the sick or exorcise demons.
4. That Christians will abide by all the laws and policies of the State and will resolutely resist all infiltration by churches abroad, including Bibles, literature and economic assistance from abroad.

⁵ See Walter Sawatsky, *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II* (Kitchener, Ont: Herald Press, 1981); K. R. Hill, *Puzzle*; Steve Durasoff, *Pentecost Behind the Iron Curtain* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1972) and *The Russian Protestants: Evangelicals in the Soviet Union, 1944-1964* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses Inc., 1969).

5. That the churches will practise the three-designated policy: Designated place, personnel, and areas (time added later).⁶

The obedient attitude to the government is shown by some leaders who are sincerely motivated, and is justified by their patriotism, and by appeals to the apostle Paul's admonition to 'submit to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established' ([Rom. 13:1](#)). The submission, however, has at times led to idolatrous adulation and extravagant praise that have no justification whatsoever. For example, on August 1, 1989, an 'Interconfessional Conference of Homage' sent the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceausescu, a telegram congratulating him as 'the most beloved son of the Romanian nation, a hero among the heroes of our country, a brilliant founder of socialist Romania ... a man whose mind and soul have realized the interests of the people'.⁷ No wonder that some of these and other churchmen went into hiding or were swept away by their believing communities only a few months later with the downfall of the tyrant.

The church of Jesus Christ is a pilgrim community—*communio viatorum*—'in the world' but not 'of the world,' still on the journey to the eternal city and, therefore, never comfortably at home in any society. As Jan Milic Lochman, a Czech theologian remind us, 'any attempt to relate the gospel too closely to an ideology is dangerous for its integrity p. 70 and its identity'.⁸ An uncritical identification with the world inevitably leads to critical loss of both identity and spiritual authority.

EVALUATION AND PERSPECTIVES

Strengths and Hopes

Evangelical believers in Marxist dominated lands were marked by a *theology of the cross*. The words of Jesus—'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' ([Mk. 8:34](#))—have a deep experiential meaning for them. They were not adherents of popular religion offering ready-made answers to all of the problems and needs of their vulnerable existence. Their Christian life had a depth of commitment and a spirit of sacrifice going far beyond anything known as a superficial and self-centered response to the 'cheap grace' and its pseudo-Pentecostal variables such as 'health and wealth,' 'name it and claim it' or the 'prosperity gospel' all popular in some segments of Western culture-dominated Christianity. Their faith and suffering have taught them that external pressures, legal restrictions, social discrimination and even physical persecutions serve the noble purpose of purifying and strengthening the church. They have empirically learned the truth of the prophetic assurance that it is 'Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Lord Almighty ([Zech. 4:6](#)). Relying totally on the Lord, they have not only survived but also grown under difficult circumstances.

William Fletcher, a noted authority on religion in the USSR, concludes his study, *Soviet Charismatics: The Pentecostals in the USSR* with the following observations: 'The

⁶ Chou, Jonathan, ed. *The China Mission Handbook: A Portrait of China and Its Church* (Hong Kong: Chinese Church Research Center, 1989), p.38.

⁷ *Newsweek*, January 29, 1990, p. 20.

⁸ Lochman, Jan Milic. *Encountering Marx: Bonds and Barriers Between Christians and Marxists* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), P. 15. Lochman, an active Czech participant in the Christian-Marxist dialogue of the sixties and following 1968 a 'Czech theologian in exile,' has given us a very helpful case study of Christian-Marxist relations in Czechoslovakia in *Church in a Marxist Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

Pentecostals in the USSR can look to the future with some confidence. Should the state revert to unrestrained severity in its policy against them, the past history of the movement has demonstrated that Pentecostalism can endure whatever measures the state can apply ... Pentecostals have a demonstrated ability to survive handily and even to grow ... (I)n the massively unequal struggle against the hostility and the concerted might of the state the Pentecostals ... have been winning handily.⁹ The same has been stated of the church in China which has miraculously survived the fiery furnace of the cultural revolution. 'In spite of the dark days of trial the true church has not only survived but flourished, emerging from virtual invisibility to be seen clearly by all.'¹⁰

Prayer is considered a holy task, the most vital part of Christian life and the supernaturally efficient weapon in everyday struggles and spiritual battles. Emphasis on prayer is evident in both individual spirituality and congregational worship. Many lay p. 71 pastors raise daily at four o'clock to spend a couple of hours in prayer before their secular job requirements. Very frequently the first hour of the Sunday morning service the entire congregation will spend on their knees in fervent prayer. Weekday congregational prayer meetings are a regular feature of the church life and are taken as seriously as Sunday worship services.

Ivan Efimovich Voronaev, the well known Assemblies of God missionary-pioneer in the Soviet Union, wrote of the significance of the individual's private prayer life. 'Our daily, private conversations with the Lord, by some unique and inexplicable means, concentrate the divine presence. If only we consciously personify, embody the truth of Christ in ourselves, His presence immediately begins to act within us in every direction, and after such conversation and inspiration we can perform the most excellent actions.'¹¹

Church membership was taken with utmost seriousness, for the cost of publicly identifying with the believing community had been counted in advance and fostered unwavering commitment. The faith of those who were baptized—usually after prolonged periods of waiting and preparation to see the genuine 'fruit of repentance'—and thus received as church members, had been experienced and tested. There was a deep solidarity of love, mutual support and protective confidentiality between those who are bona fide members of the new spiritual household. Every church member was expected to live a life of holiness, have a good public reputation, contribute sacrificially to the church, care for the poor, widows and needy, attend all services and prayer meetings and witness for Christ to unbelievers. If a member was caught in sin or his behaviour was not deemed in accordance with biblical standards, church discipline was practised. In milder cases it meant temporary prohibitions to participate in the Lord's supper and more serious failures resulted in public excommunication from church membership.

Evangelicals in most Marxist dominated lands have practised the biblical *priesthood of all believers*. Church leadership was both plural and pluriform and the clergy-laity divide was practically non-existent. Due to persecutions and legal restrictions in the Soviet Union and China there was no professionalism in the ministry, very few or no salaried and trained clergy. In most countries the professional terms like 'clergy' and 'reverend' were abhorred by the evangelicals as they smack of the religious functionaries of the traditional churches and have no biblical foundations. Every-member ministry of 'preachers' rather than controlled by a professional pastor. Evangelicals under pressure discovered the

⁹ Fletcher, William C. *Soviet Charismatics: The Pentecostals in the USSR* (New York: Peter Lang, 1985), pp. 161–162.

¹⁰ Lyall, Leslie, *God Reigns*, p. 179.

¹¹ Quoted by W. C. Fletcher, *Soviet Charismatics*, p. 72.

biblical patterns of shared ministry under the lordship of Christ who by his Spirit gives gifts and ministries to all members of the body for the common good of edification.

The Marxist revolution in China used two steps to weaken and finally destroy the church. Firstly, all the pastors and church leaders were separated from their congregations [p. 72](#) and sent to labour camps in far off places. Secondly, most of the church buildings were destroyed or appropriated by the government and transformed for state or other public purposes. The intent was to destroy the congregation by taking away from it the two basic pillars of organized church life—leadership and buildings. This, however, has not weakened but rather strengthened the Chinese church which was forced to discover New Testament principles of congregational life and growth and thus started on the pathway of an unprecedented revival in the history of the church universal.

By separating the pastors from their congregations, the Communists have forced the Chinese Church to seek leadership from within the congregation. These leaders are laymen or laywomen who, for the most part, were not indoctrinated with the Western concepts of leadership. The result has been that the Chinese Church has sought its own level, a level in which it could function most effectively. Thus the church in mainland China has formed itself into family units where leadership would already exist. The present form of the Chinese Church is both the ideal form in the Chinese culture and the closest to the New Testament pattern.¹²

Evangelism, although often discreet in proclamation, was amazingly effective because of the attractive quality of new life evident in believers and their families. In the persecuted church in China the explosive growth in the house churches is in many cases ascribed to ‘power evangelism,’ the Holy Spirit confirming the Word of God by extraordinary phenomena, the biblical signs and wonders. East European evangelicals are known for taking evangelism very seriously and for using a variety of approaches to reach their friends and neighbours for Christ. Weddings and funerals are two totally different public occasions when non-believers present are regularly challenged to receive Christ as their Saviour. Personal evangelism is thorough and most effective. A book published by Moscow University on *Certain Peculiarities of Contemporary Religious Ideology* contains the following interesting note.

In one of the Moscow Districts the notebook of one Pentecostal was found. There she had transcribed the names and addresses of those she intended to entice into the sect. No prayers were written in the book. In it, with thorough practicality, several biographical data were written: Opposite each name what disturbs the person in his life and what difficulties stand in his way were noted.¹³

Until recently evangelical believers have suffered when caught openly evangelizing. Soviet courts have interpreted article 52 of their constitution to allow only worship (confined to the walls of the registered church building) while forbidding ‘religious propaganda’. The article referred to in the 1977 Soviet constitution reads: ‘Citizens of the USSR are guaranteed freedom of conscience, that is, the right to profess or [p. 73](#) not to profess any religion, and to conduct religious worship or atheistic propaganda. Incitement of hostility or hatred on religious grounds is prohibited. In the USSR the church is separate from the state, and the school from the church.’ Still Fletcher concludes: ‘Pentecostals in

¹² Kaufman, Paul E. *China Tomorrow: China's Coming Revolution* (Hong Kong: Asian Outreach, 1977), p. 132.

¹³ Fletcher, W. C. *Soviet Charismatics*, p. 112.

the USSR seem thoroughly committed to reaching out to others in Soviet society with their faith.’¹⁴ This is true of most evangelicals across other lands of Eastern Europe as well.

PROBLEMS AND WEAKNESSES

Evangelicals in communist dominated areas were a small but growing minority that faced many problems. They lived in societies where Marxist dialectical materialism imposed itself as an all-encompassing world-view and atheism was given the privileged status of a new ‘state religion’. Various state policies, administrative measures and educational methods were systematically employed to speed up the process of the, to use a Marxist expression, ‘withering away’ of religion.¹⁵ Christians were at a great disadvantage in combating Marxist atheism due to none or limited (different from country to country) opportunities for providing Christian education for their children and young people, lack of solid Christian literature, and no access to public means of communication. By special restrictive legislation their faith was confined to the privacy of one’s inner piety and to the walls of scarcely available church buildings. As a result, the chances of evangelical Christians making a significant impact on their societies and influencing current affairs were minimal. They lacked trained leadership, were usually marked by a weak organizational apparatus and had no public platforms to articulate their convictions.

Lack of systematic theological training, coupled with the pressure of external circumstances, often led to speculative escapist eschatology that in turn justified the Marxist charge of alienation, Christian faith was often, in most cases unfairly and at times justifiably, suspected of reactionary ideology as a remnant of the old bourgeois order or an infiltration of the ‘imperialistic’ Western influences. Due to such associative accusations some religious activism has been considered synonymous with political dissidence.

The generation gap was and still is another problem evident in many segments of evangelicalism. Older Christians with their time conditioned forms of piety, traditional ways of worship, coupled with legalism as the norm of Christian life, and a lack of concern for larger human and social issues, have often alienated the more enthusiastic and better educated young people who are facing the challenges of modern life and new society and are attracted to a more innovative, lively p. 74 and reflective presentation of the gospel. Unfortunately, until very recently, the evangelical establishment was marked by a retreat from the world, forcing them into the undesired position of a merely tolerated and a largely irrelevant minority.

Evangelicals in most of the communist countries were by and large isolated from the broader international evangelical community and lacked information about it. Very few leaders have been able to travel to world conferences and other international gatherings. International publications were hardly accessible while their own limited (some had none) publications suffered in content and creative exchange of ideas.

In some places evangelicals have to grow out of prevalent suspicion of education and legitimate intellectual pursuits if they are to make an impact on the youth and intelligentsia who are increasingly searching for acceptable spiritual realities. Believers,

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive and well documented study of various Soviet means and methods to fight religion see David E. Powell, *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1975). For Marx’s original views on religion see Saul K. Padover, ed., *Karl Marx on Religion* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974) and the most helpful study by David McLellan, *Marxism and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

and especially ministers, will have to overcome widespread ignorance of Marxism and other secular streams of thought. They need to study and take seriously secular world-views so as to be able to relate their own faith and experiences in terms and concepts that are firmly rooted in the Word of God while also relevant to, and understood by, the secularized man trained in 'scientific atheism'.

For the evangelizing minority this is an enormous and complex challenge. The vast majority of the people in Eastern Europe, China, etc. are biblically totally illiterate. The radical ideologically inspired secularization has totally distorted, if not completely abolished, the basic facts of the Christian faith. The message of the cross and salvation can hardly have any meaning and argues with the authority of the 'goddess of science' that belief in God is superstition and a dangerous escape from reality. As noted earlier, Soviet government, for example, used to claim proudly that one of the successes of its educational system was that around 90 percent of their young people aged 16–20 adhered to atheism as their world-view. All of these and until hundreds of millions of others must hear and read the gospel, translated and interpreted into their language and thought-categories, in order to understand its significance for their own lives and salvations.

TASKS AND PROSPECTS

Twentieth century evangelicalism understands itself as a recovery of the full-fledged apostolic Christianity, of the whole gospel. The whole gospel means total commitment to all the demands of Jesus, including the whole spectrum of ethical (personal and social) requirements that are inherent in the gospel message. The whole gospel implies joyful celebration of God's gift of salvation and continuous openness to the Holy Spirit to confirm the Word by resultant spiritual fruit and power. The whole gospel covers proclamation of truth and exhibition of love, manifestation of power and integrity of life. It is in word, deed, and sign.

Only such a gospel in its totality of beauty, truth and power, faithfully proclaimed, consistently lived, lovingly exemplified and powerfully [p. 75](#) demonstrated, will restore credibility to the message of Christ in Marxist dominated and/or Marxist influenced areas of the world. Evangelicals have to recognize that Christian religion has a long and heavy historical ballast which presents a serious hindrance to world evangelization. In Eastern Europe we have learned that Marxist criticism of religion—with all its stereotypes, abuse of science and false propaganda—is not all wrong and have come to acknowledge that the rise and spread of (Western and) Marxist atheism is proportionately related to the shrinking credibility of the institutional Christian church. Free-church evangelicals, due to their ecclesiological self-understanding and historical experience agree with the Czech theologian Hromadka who stated: 'The real Church is always being born anew, always in tension with tradition and its official labels.'¹⁶ Much of communist atheism is at least partially a reaction against backslidden Christianity and may legitimately be interpreted as God's judgement on the historical unfaithfulness of the church. This is why when going out to evangelize I used to tell our seminary students in former Yugoslavia that our preliminary task may be to 'wash the face of Jesus,' for it has been dirtied, distorted and made unrecognizable by both the compromises of the Christian church through the centuries and the antagonistic propaganda of atheistic communism in this century.

We must humbly acknowledge that religion was frequently used as a manipulative tool of the powerful and mighty and has often served as an ideological screen to justify the actions of powerful oppressors to pacify the poor and exploited. White-washing unjust

¹⁶ Hromadka, Joseph L. *Thoughts of a Czech Pastor* (London: SCM Press, 1970), p. 100.

wars, justifying economic injustices and blatant exploitation, and smoke-screening racial discrimination are only some of the obvious evils that the church has practised for ages. Although somewhat over-generalized, and overstated, the statement of Girardi is historically demonstrable: 'Whenever the working class expressed its aspirations and demands, the Church stood with the opposition against the workers. The workers grew up, therefore, considering the Church as their class enemy.'¹⁷ We humbly agree with Charles West:

It is the disgrace of Christian theology that Marx found it, not the Gospel of Good News to the whole man, body and soul, especially to the humble and the poor, not the promise of the coming of an already risen and ruling Christ, but only the division of body from Spirit, the hope of a spiritual eternal life, and the neglect or the sanctification of the material arrangements of this world.¹⁸

The evangelicals as the 'church of the working class'—as they have been occasionally labelled in some parts of the world, especially Pentecostals in Latin America—and as a movement of the life-transforming gospel of Jesus Christ, are in a unique position to overcome this p. 76 and other Marxist prejudices and stereotypes.

In order to do so, it is imperative that we practise Christian love without creating our own ideological prejudices and stereotypes that would blind us to real human needs and problems. Marxist analysis of social realities often uncovers concrete situations which have definite implications for Christian ethics and should not be suppressed or ignored merely on the basis of the fact that they have been exposed by the enemies of the faith. As Hordern puts it, 'No Christian has a right to condemn communism until his own passion for social justice equals its passion and supersedes it. To paraphrase the saying of Jesus, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Communists and Capitalists, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of God".'¹⁹ The famous exiled Russian philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev, himself a convert from Marxism to Christianity, concludes his book *The Origin of Russian Communism* with the following statement about the human need in our world and the spiritual answer to it:

The world is living through the danger of a dehumanization of social life, the dehumanization of man himself. The very existence of man is in danger from all the processes which are going on in the world. When Christianity appeared in the world it defended man from the danger arising from demonolatry. Man was in the power of cosmic forces, of demons and spirits of nature which tormented him. Christianity focused man spiritually and subjected his fate to God; thus was prepared the possibility of man's power over Nature. At the present time Christianity is again called upon to protect man, to protect his whole image from a demonolatry which tortures him anew, from servitude to the old cosmic and the new technical forces. But this can only be done by a rejuvenated Christianity which is true to its prophetic spirit and which is turned toward the Kingdom of God.²⁰

¹⁷ Girardi, quoted by J. M. Bonino in *Christians and Marxists*, p. 60.

¹⁸ West, Charles in *Opening for Marxist-Christian Dialogue* Thomas W. Ogletree, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 331.

¹⁹ Hordern, William. *Christianity, Communism and History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 105.

²⁰ Berdyaev, Nicolas. *The Origin of Russian Communism*. (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), p. 188.

Today Berdyaev's own homeland and to a great extent the other lands so long captivated by the forces of the most powerful secular substitute religion, stand on the threshold of a new era. The formerly Marxist societies are in a period of rapid transition with a new spirit of hope and immense expectations on the widened horizons of new freedom. Though the drastic changes contain many elements of unpredictability, the followers of Christ are aware that this is the time of special grace—*kairos*. The problems are many, but the spirit-filled believers recognize both the problems and the whole range of new possibilities as occasion for the kingdom of God. May the evangelical movement be at least in part an answer to Berdyaev's insight and plea for a 'rejuvenated Christianity' and thus, God's answer to Marxism.

Dr. Peter Kuzmič is Rector of the Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia and Professor of Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, USA. [p. 77](#)

Suffering in Latin America

Pedro Arana Quiroz

Suffering is inherent in human life as we know it. The central figure of the oldest book of the Bible is Job, the sufferer. At the heart of the gospel is the suffering Servant of Jahweh who, even after his resurrection still carries the mark of that suffering in his body. The Christian hope, according to the seer's vision is: 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, ...' and he heard 'A loud voice from the thron saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them ... He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the order of things has passed away.'¹

SOCIETAL SUFFERING IN LATIN AMERICA

However, in talking about suffering in Latin America,² we pass from strictly personal or family suffering to the suffering of society in general. We would like to point out those traumatic and painful experiences of the people which have left lasting scars. Overcoming these experiences or their results may well correspond to a resurrection or a miracle of healing. There are many examples in history similar to the liberation of Israel from Egypt, or the resurgence of the Allies after the Second World War. Without a doubt, other examples will come to mind.

There had been suffering among the Mayas, Aztecs and Incas, but the discovery of the sub-continent by Columbus and the following conquests by the Spanish and Portuguese marked the beginning of the first painful traumas in our indigenous America. The very humanity of its inhabitants was questioned and when it was decided that they were no better than animals, the floodgates of slavery were opened wide. The Dominican priest,

¹ Rev. 21.1,4.

² German Archineigas, *America Magica*.

Bartolome de las Casas,³ stood out clearly as a defender of the human rights of the p. 78 Indians of Latin America. However, he was the exception.

Here we must make room for distinctions. The Christianity that came to Latin America was that of the Counter-Reformation. It saw Christ on the cross, not the Christ of the resurrection. In his masterly work *The Other Spanish Christ* John A. Mackay wrote of the Christianity of the conquerors in the following terms:

But, was it really Jesus Christ that came, or was it some other religious figure that carried the same name and a few of his characteristics? Sometimes I think that Christ, before he could go west was imprisoned in Spain while another who took his name cruised over on the Spanish boats to the New World. This Christ was not born in Bethlehem, but in North Africa. This Christ became naturalized as a citizen of the Iberian colonies of America while the son of Mary, our Lord, has not been much more than a foreigner passing through from that time up to now.

The Christ that arrived was one that placed men in different positions in life and told them to be content with their lot and to accept things as they are and the truth as it seems to be. But the other, the one who makes people unsatisfied with the way they are; the one who says that through him life can be transformed and the world can be overcome and its followers put into harmony with God, and with the truth; this other Christ desired to come but was not allowed to. None the less, the voices of spring that announce his arrival are being heard again today.⁴

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA

From Mexico to Argentina, wars for the independence of our countries from Spain (with the exception of Brazil that shook off Portuguese imperialism) brought with them the trauma of the discovery of national identity by the people, the result of the tenure of the silent Christ. The material prosperity and the aggressive economic and social dominance of the great northern neighbour began to open a painful wound, as yet uncured in Cuba and Panama.⁵

The advent of republicanism in our twenty countries brought political independence, but the social and economical domination persisted under the new ruling classes, which were both intermediary and subsidiary to foreign economic power. The discrimination of those of Spanish descent against the natives, negroes and Asians in our countries was evidenced in many forms. Even the most European republics like Argentina began to be conscious of the erroneously called 'Indian Problem'.⁶ Within this ethnic reality, in which all Latin American suffering is summarized, with its marginalization and penury, there was developing an appeal for revolutionary social change.

The first social revolution took place in Mexico. The Bolivian revolution of the fifties failed. The first and only Communist regime was installed p. 79 in Cuba in 1959. The enemy that they wished to defeat was the poverty of the majority of the populations that was blamed, by the activists themselves, exclusively on US imperialism. A popular saying

³ See Gustavo Gutierrez, *En Busca de Los Pobres de Jesu Cristo*. El pensamiento de Bartolome de las Casas. CEP Lima, Peru, 1992. Samuel Eseobar, 'Se Revisa la Noeva Leyenda Negra? Cuadernos Reforma, Suplemento 1992, Madrid, España.

⁴ See also Stanley Rycroft, *Fe y Religiosidad en America Latina*, Casa Unida de Pulicaciones, Mexico.

⁵ The USA military presence has left its footprints in Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua.

⁶ It has been an unsolved problem in many Latin American countries. In our days it has appeared in a new form at Chiapas, Mexico.

reveals the feeling and perception of this reality: 'Poor Mexico so far from God and so close to the USA.' The economic and military backing of the Soviet Union converted Cuba into a small but dangerous neighbour for the USA.⁷ Suffering now takes the form of persistent political instability in the republics due to the rise of guerrilla groups fed by Marxist ideology.

In the decade of the sixties, the growth of the population was more rapid and a slow process of internal migration began. The economy based on agriculture began to decline in Latin America, the commercial balance was reversed and outer-urban populations began to appear. The capital cities became the 'Promised Land' but in reality, as for Moses of old, it could not be reached. This uprooting, the lack of work and promiscuity are marks of suffering. Nevertheless, the development of what is known today as an **informal economy**⁸ began. It was the popular response to an absentee State, incompetent to solve the needs of its people. Some see in the migration, the informal economy and the popular organizations the solution the poor have created to face the problems that were not solved by their indolent governments.

Higher prices for petroleum at the beginning of the seventies and the availability of foreign loans with low interest rates coincided with the stagnation of the agricultural economy in many of the Latin American countries. This, in turn, increased the migration from the country to the cities. In the cities, an industrial crisis was set in motion. Thus, the process of indebtedness moved ahead, replacing the effort towards internal savings and turning the foreign debt⁹ into a generator of suffering for the Latin American people. This came about because the governments after wasting the loans unwisely, now sacrificed the social investment in education, health and employment to pay off the interest on that debt.

In the seventies the Theology of Liberation also raised its head within the Roman Catholic Church with a message of hope for the poor. Some Protestant groups, mainly ecumenical, supported them. The Latin American Theological Fraternity came into existence, seeking to respond to the suffering of the major part of the human race with biblical and theological teaching that seeks to give a contextual answer and it has continued to be systematized in what is [p.80](#) known as the holistic mission of the church.¹⁰

The eighties have been outstandingly marked by the exponents of violence: guerrillas in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala; policies of national security in Chile and Argentina; terrorists in Peru¹¹ and the drug traffic in Columbia. All of these are added to the structural and secular violence that the poor majority have been suffering as history unfolds itself. We have given in this paper just a few milestones.

Historically, the economic powers, the armed forces and the Roman Catholic Church were seen as sharing the political power in the Latin American nations and preventing the access to government of those who fight for the improvement of quality of life of the majority of the population. Since the early sixties the Evangelical churches have made a

⁷ Last year in New Delhi I asked our Consultation to raise our voice to ask for the ending of the United States of America's economic blockade. A few weeks ago the Latin American presidents presented to the Government of the United States of America. For the first time, the same request. Cuba is no longer a military danger to the United States of America. Now, as always in politics, human passions are brought into play, against the welfare or human beings.

⁸ Hernando de Soto, *El Otto Sendero Apoyo*, Lima, Peru, 1990.

⁹ Pedro Arana y Milton Guerrero, *Christian Faith and Foreign Debt*, published in Sadok International, Sydney, Australia, 1991.

¹⁰ C. René Padilla, *Mision Integral*, Nueva Creación, Bs.As. Argentina, s/f.

¹¹ See John Maust, *Peace and Hope in the Comer of Death*, Latin America Mission.

significant difference.¹² The poor and marginalized members of these communities learned to read and write because they needed to read their Bibles and write the minutes of the meetings in their ecclesiastical organizations. These people, when they embraced the faith in the risen Lord, abandoned their negative customs and vices and progressed socially and economically. They looked for better education and quality of life for their children. The Bible and evangelization mark a new course for the nation through these small communities, which became factors for dignity and hope.¹³

In the nineties we are witnessing the internationalization of economics after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites. Latin America expresses its suffering in the shameful reality of its poverty in the form of abandonment, infant mortality, hunger and unemployment, the rescuers of populist style democratic governments. This has been made more acute by putting into practice neoliberal economic policies where the market is the new name for providence.¹⁴

THE DILEMMA OF THE EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY

Sad to say, the market is not only economic and political, but religious also.¹⁵ It is here that the theology of prosperity in its different versions, most with a strong charismatic presence, derails the message of the gospel that should be preached to all the world. The Bible, however, has an undeniable preference for the poor, who are normally denigrated by those who believe and teach that Christians should always be rich and healthy. **P. 81**

The Evangelical community In Latin America has been, historically, materially poor and now it is becoming impoverished, stricken by preaching, teaching and ethics that no longer consider the supreme and final authority to be the Bible, **only** the Bible and **all** of the Bible. But in the **practice** (pragmatism! is another of the great words of the movement) its **prophets and other supernatural revelations**¹⁶ are not only put on the same level as the Bible but displace it, constituting in this way a mode of special revelation.

Let me share with you what the Brazilian pastor, Caio Fabio D'Araujo Filho relates as an incident that graphically illustrated what we say.

'The revival' in Latin America is that which teaches that any business is valid if it results in the reaching of the gospel. A few days ago, I received a telephone call from an Evangelical representative of the Brazilian Congress. He said that the president of the republic, before his fall, had invited him to have dinner with him. During the meal, he looked at him and said, 'I will give you anything you want if you'll get the Evangelicals to vote for me.'

The congressman in question called me and said, 'Brother Caio, I have to vote against the interpellation of Collor because he promised to give me anything I asked for.' To that I said, 'Brother, can't you hear in your statement the echo of an ancient declaration made some 2,000 years ago by an emperor much more powerful than Collor in the desert of Judea? ALL

¹² See John Kessler, *Historia de la Evangelizacion en el Peru*, El Inca, Lima, Peru, s/f.

¹³ See The United Bible Society Magazine, *La Biblia en America Latina* and the Clade Volumes of its Continental Consultation.

¹⁴ See Milton Guerrero, *Peru 1950-1993, Sintesis de su Evolucion Economica, Impacts de Las Politcas de Establizacion Y Ajuste Estructural, Y Tendencias Economicas Mas Notables*, Junio 1994. Pedro Arana, 'The Integral Message to the Poor', paper presented in the *Consultation on Euangelization of the Poor*, New Delhil, India, October 1993.

¹⁵ See article, 'Cristianismo en Crisis O Etica Editorial en Crisis?' *El Librero Cristiano*, pp. 18-24, 1994.

¹⁶ Interview to Benny Hinn, Published by the Evangeical newspaper, *La Luz*, Lima, Peru, August 1994.

*OF THIS I WILL GIVE YOU IF YOU FALL DOWN AND WORSHIP ME.' He replies, 'But brother Caio, the president told me he would concede a few TV channels and radio stations that would be very useful in spreading the gospel.' Then I said 'Look brother, there is one who is a just Judge. God is the God of truth and justice and his name is not for sale.'*¹⁷

This incident demonstrates a new situation in Latin America. The Evangelical community has electoral weight and is being pursued by the politicians. In Peru, it was used politically and the collaboration of the Evangelicals was decisive in the triumph of Fujimori. The legitimate aspirations of evangelical citizens to participate in politics to serve the common good becomes confused with the organization of Christian Evangelical parties¹⁸ that constitute a 'cross that the church must carry'. Thus to the theological divisions within the same congregation. 'Evangelical party' is a contradiction of terms. 'Party' implies to be with some and against others. The gospel is to be for everybody, even our enemies.

Nearly two hundred years after the independence of our republics, we find that neither the conservatives nor the liberals nor the populists nor the revolutionaries have been able to generate development and overcome poverty. Just the opposite is [p. 82](#) true, because the situation is becoming worse with the resultant social suffering. (See annex with statistics)

Within this context, we will analyze a particular Peruvian case that I think summarizes the context of Latin America and the answer of the church. Last year in New Delhi, I presented the case Mallea; now we must analyze it and see the biblical, theological and missionary consequences. The regal function of the church is expressed through service, which is the manifestation of love for God and one's neighbours. The model is the Servant Lord, who had for his throne, the cross. Love, service and the cross are the permanent triad by which Christians and the church live. The church is called to be a servant, not a master. She is called to fight against the ever-present temptations of power, pleasure, prestige and possessions. In the diaconal budget of the church the surplus is suffering. The church should participate in the suffering of the world and suffer for the sake of benefit for the world.

The church will complete her diaconal work with the same eschatological perspective as the Lord Servant who 'knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.'¹⁹ The church will only be able to serve unto suffering and eventually to death, if she knows she is going to pass 'from this world to the Father' ... and that her 'present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed ...'²⁰

THE CASE OF JUAN MALLEA

The Evangelical Juan Mallea was accused of making the map of Cieneguilla. In the press it was called the "Passion according to Mallea".²¹

¹⁷ Article, 'El Avivamiento Actual' Published in the magazine *Apuntes Pastorales*, pp. 27-32, Vol 11, No 5, 1994, Lima, Peru.

¹⁸ Article by Pedro Arana, 'Los Cristianos, La Política Y 1995', published in *La Responsabilidad Evangelica En La Realidad Nacional*, Misiur, August 1994. P. Alberto Deiros, *Los Evangelicos Y El Poder Politico En America Latina*, Neuva Creacion, Bs.As., Argentina, s/f.

¹⁹ John 13.1-3.

²⁰ Romans 8.18.

²¹ This is the version of the Peruvian magazine *Caretas*.

The first week of July, 1992, the police agency Dincote was on the trail of some Senderists, the Shining Light terrorists. The information had been passed on to the National Intelligence Service that a map of the place where the graves of those who had been victims of La Cantuta had appeared in the magazine SI. An operation was carried out and concluded with the capture of several supposed subversives. One of them was Mallea Tomaylla, whom they indicated as the author of the sketch showing the location of the graves.

Thus, the Dincote, whose director was now General Carlos Dominguez Solis, an old time member of National Intelligence Service, appeared to be carrying out its mission very efficiently. The message was clear. The terrorists had kidnapped a professor and some students from the university La Cantuta and had later killed them and to cover up, made it seem that the government had been responsible for the deaths. Paralleling this, those addicted to the regime took the theme up. Alberto Fujimori himself received the news from his security counsellor and in successive meetings with high army officials they discussed the idea that this was [p.83](#) a crude manoeuvre to accuse the army of what had been done. The president made statements on the 5th September, two months after Mallea's capture, on the TV programme, La Revista Dominical, that were published the next day in the official newspaper, El Peruano.

'What is most important to us, and to myself as president, is that all of these crimes such as Cieneguilla with five people assassinated be totally cleared up. I have enquired as to the innocence or culpability of Mallea and the handwriting tests show him to be definitely guilty.'

It is quite possible that for the government this proof presented by the police, dependent on the government, was sufficient to accuse him. However, at the request of the CCD's Human Rights Commission, the Peruvian Institute of Criminalysis did another handwriting test and they concluded that Mallea had nothing to do with the maps.

The other investigations had already been made by the retired commander of the PNP, Guillermo Neyra Castro who used to be head of the police handwriting department. His conclusion was admitted by the court. Another was made by Lyndall L. Shaneyfelt who had worked with the FBI for twenty years in this field. America Watch requested his opinion. Both of these men agreed that Mallea was not the author of the Cieneguilla maps.

In the face of all the evidence that the military really was involved in the deaths of the teacher and students of La Cantuta, and the new graves found in Huachipa, the Mallea case was pricked like a balloon.

The provincial D.A., Juan Coraje also pronounced him innocent. The Evangelical National Council, CONEP, protested against his continued detention and organized public marches. Thus, Judge José Díaz Vallejo, of the 14 penal court, passed down the decision that he should be released. The court document has been turned over to the tribunal of judges without faces that should give their opinion in few days.

But Mallea's case is not unique. According to the Legal Defense Institute, there are 180 cases of unjustified detentions. CONEP has indicated on their part that 50 Evangelicals have been unjustly jailed.

Mallea has now spent more than six months in prison. He suffers problems from the detachment of a retina as a result of the beating he received at the hands of the Dincote. He hasn't even seen his two-month-old son, since his wife can see him only once a week and that through a wire mesh for only a few minutes each time.

As Mr. Fujimori himself accused him publicly, as part of a plan to disparage the government, it is hoped that he will now publicly recognize his innocence. And those who made up the false police attestations should be investigated along with those who wrote up the report that assured the court that he was a Senderist.

CUINEGUILLA: MALLEA IS INNOCENT²²

I thank the Creator of the earth and heavens, my God, that I have been **P. 84** able to defend myself and communicate the following:

After 14 days in the Dincote and during the investigations I was never shown the plans or map that they accused me of drawing. Once in court, they showed me a photo copy of the map I was supposed to have made and at that time I was informed that I was the author of another map that appeared in the magazine, SI. The 21st of July at 2:00 A.M., one day before my presentation to the public in a press conference offered by Sincote, they beat me while shouting that I was the author of the maps, but since I knew nothing about them, they began to threaten me and insult me with the most vulgar words in existence. They also threatened my wife and child and the rest of the family. My problem was that I knew absolutely nothing of what they were saying. Finally, one of them said that they would have to turn me over to the army and that they would certainly make me talk. They ended up saying, "Let them do what they want with him, what do we care?"

The 13th July, the Dincote called a press conference adding that they had captured a group of subversives that had made the plans in the case of Cieneguilla. But I would like to report that they did not take a sample of our writing until the 16th for the use of their handwriting experts. That date is on the very samples and on the documents of proceedings. I was being judged for some maps that never passed through my hands.

My torturers were three members of Dincote. I wish to indicate that the one who did the most damage to me was a certain Captain Bonilla and a Major Tello stood by and witnessed it all. As a result of this action, I have a broken tooth and a rib on the left side damaged and to date, 35 days afterwards, I have not received any medical attention.

On the 22nd of July, right after being questioned in court, they took me running to a press conference where I found myself in a group of six people dressed in striped prison uniforms with our respective numbers.

Today I find myself right in the middle of this war, with Sendero on one side and the government on the other. My only banner is that of Jesus Christ and my only hope for my very existence is the overshadowing protection that God has promised to those who trust in Him.'

This is the testimony of Juan Mallea Tomaylla, accused on the basis of hand writing experts of the police as being the author of maps showing where the graves in Cieneguilla were and of being a member of Sendero Luminoso. The handwriting report has been amply questioned. He is a respected member of an Evangelical congregation where he has been active for many years. The circumstances and the testimony of those who know him, like the National Evangelical Council, gave evidence of his innocence.

MALLEA, A CASE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN PERU²³

The case of Juan Albelardo Mallea Tomaylla has meant that the Evangelical churches, represented by **P. 85** CONEP, assume a Christian responsibility that is a combination of theological and pure law within a precarious political situation.

Mallea could be any of us here in Peru. This case is paradigmatic and reflects the sum and total of contradictions within the breakdown of moral standards, the relativization of human rights, the dominion of the tyranny of the strong, the poverty structure in our laws

²² *Idee* Magazine No 55-56.

²³ Report of the Evangelical National Council of Peru, (CONEP).

that exults in hurting the weak, in short, what the Word recognizes as the hour of those that, 'call the good bad and the bad good'.

An imperative of faith, of obedience, obliges us to assume the defence of an innocent person who has been charged with an action he never committed. This case reflects the pressures exerted that go far beyond the law, pressures of political interference, the need to find a scape goat in trying to win the internal war against terrorists at all or any cost.

The steps we have taken within the possibilities of Human Rights have been:

The opportunity to charge that this was not just an error of part of the police, but a deliberate attempt to accuse an innocent person that was expressed in the legal process with the presentation of several personal testimonies, memorials, etc. that informed the judicial authorities of the moral condition and personal qualities of Juan Mallea.

The Evangelical National Council of Peru's formal presentation as an institution backing and defending him by placing two lawyers at his disposal.

The offer and the later presentation of the handwriting expert, Commander PNP retired, Julio Guillermo Neyro Castro of his conclusions. He also took part in the debate with the police experts before the judge, demonstrating the poor quality of their technicians in the investigation that led to Juan Mallea's incrimination. The judge recognized the impressiveness of Commander Neyra's conclusions in denying that Mallea was the author of the Cieneguilla map.

The formal presentation of an investigation report by the North American handwriting expert, Lyndal Shaneyfelt who took part, thanks to the intervention of America Watch. After studying the incriminations and comparing them with Mallea's handwriting, he declared categorically that, 'The writing on the map contained impressive differences from Mr. Mallea's writing.

In coordination with the Congressional Human Rights Commission, another study was asked for and the Peruvian Institute of Crimenalistics, after studying the handwriting, declared that Juan Mallea was not the author of the plan of the graves in Cieneguilla.

Visiting the judge of the 14 Penal Court of Lima, Dr. Diaz Palacios and the Provincial Penal district attorney of the 14 district, Dr. Juan Coraje Carranza, manifested the opinion of CONEP as to the innocence of Juan Mallea and our commitment to seek his liberty.

At the conclusion of the judicial investigation against him and the others accused of disturbing the peace and terrorism against the State, the District Attorney Juan Coraje modified his judgement stating that [p. 86](#) the crime of terrorism had been committed but was not his penal responsibility.

This opinion is very important in the process, but not definitive. CONEP will continue to try to demonstrate legally his innocence in the second step of the process.

Also, international pressure has been brought to bear by organizations such as Tear Fund, Christian Solidarity International American Watch, among others. The British, US and Swiss governments through their ambassadors in Peru have shown interest in a fair trial for him.

At the same time, a global coverage by the communication media in Peru was designed by our communication's team reaching radio stations like Cadena, Radio Red, Antena and TV stations like channel 4 in its programme, La Revista Dominical. Magazines and weeklies such as, SI, Caretas, Ideele, carried articles. The national newspapers Expresso, La Republica, El Comercio and others have taken up the Mallea case defended by CONEP and other Christian organizations as a case for reflection, and the fight for the life of an innocent person and his family.

It is a paradox that an Evangelical of good standing should be the object of human injustice. It is no secret that hundreds of Evangelicals have been vilely assassinated by the

subversives of Sendero Luminoso and one is now being accused of being one of their followers. Such nonsense!

The action begun by CONEP is a crusade of faith, hope and love with the confidence that the God of life and of history will protect his own according to his perfect purposes.

JUAN MALLEA APPEALS TO THE GOVERNMENT²⁴

The evangelical, Juan Mallea Tomaylla, who was let out of prison on the 27th of April after ten months of unjust imprisonment after being charged as a Senderist, asked that the government modify the procedures used with persons indicated as terrorists by the police. The present system, he believes, is contrary to human dignity and implies an anticipated sentence.

Mallea demanded that the government authorities be more careful in accusing possible terrorists and not base their appraisals only on the police charges, but wait until the tribunals have done a more complete investigation. Only after those steps have been taken can the situation of the arrested person be determined.

It is the courts who are in charge of sentencing, and for that reason, the police should not continue to have the power of publicly exhibiting people who they think might be terrorists as though they already were convicted.

He also said that this procedure, as well as the Law of Repentance must be changed drastically. He explained that by using this law many 'repented' terrorists have dragged innocent people to jail who had nothing to do with terrorism. He added that he himself had proved this while in prison through testimonies. Since they give credit to the word of a repentee, they fool the p.87 police by giving any name, including some who are complete strangers to terrorism. The terrorist does not have to offer any proof of his accusations so the person who is guilty of proven terrorist activities is on the outside of the jail while an innocent person is on the inside.

On the other hand, he exhorted the churches to be more sensitive to those that are suffering, especially prisoners. He indicated that from his experiences and of others that are still inside, he felt a passive and even indifferent attitude on the part of the majority of Christians toward Human Rights. That some organizations, congregations or Christian groups have defended Human Rights does not imply that the church as a whole has done so, he declared.

The Evangelical leader called on the churches to be more conscious of what is happening in the country. They ought to be alert to what is occurring and not just be a bystander, but to act, to serve those in dire need, just as Christ came not to be served but to serve. He mentioned that it is urgent that the Evangelical Churches develop a pastoral ministry within the prisons where human beings are practically forgotten and without hope.

In this respect, he recalled the attitude of some Christians and churches in his own case. A bitter memory was how the official congressman, Gilberto Siura, who says he is an Evangelical Christian, accused him publicly of being a subversive and the author of the maps of Cieneguilla. He told, how Siura came to visit him in jail, in January of '94 but not to carry out a ministry of consolation; on the contrary, to question him on his knowledge of the Bible for, according to him, many terrorists were infiltrating the churches. When Mallea mentioned that there were certain proofs of his innocence, Siura responded that he could tear down all of those supposed proofs. The congressman also said that he had taken an opinion poll in his neighbourhood and that no one thought that Mallea was

²⁴ Form CAMINOS a publication of the Christian Center of Promotions and Services pp. 4-5, June 1994.

innocent. The Christian leader asked him in what part of the town that was and if he had talked to the pastor of his church. There was no answer; it was then that Mallea formed in his mind the image of an accuser who had come to visit him in prison.

In reference to the phenomenon of subversion, he said the society and the government must make the care for children a priority. He believes that the majority of subversives are children abandoned or who never knew who their parents were and grew up marginalised and filled with resentment. He stated that a society is well founded when it takes care of its children who are the reality today and not just tomorrow. He added that the well-being of the family must also be a part of that care.

Rev. Pedro Arana Quiroz is Executive Secretary of the Bible Society of Peru. p. 88

Suffering in North Korea

Sung Tae Kim

The historical philosophers E. H. Carr and Collingwood name the events which bring epochal changes and influences greatly to human life as Historical Events. The drastic collapse of Communism which had been controlling about 40% of the world's population in the late 20th century is indeed a Historical Event. Herbert Butterfield, the Christian historian-philosopher, explained that such historical events are divine works of God which happen under the sovereignty of God.

I intend to focus on the situation we are in today from the perspective of the mission of the church. It is inevitable that the series of changes happening in Eastern Europe, the former USSR and in China today will also bring changes in North Korea. The variables that acted to change the communist countries will also act as the variables of change in North Korea. I firmly believe that God is the supreme ruler of history and is working according to his will in today's series of visible events; also that his kingdom is growing rapidly in spite of the fact that North Korea is a firmly closed society.

The situation of the churches in North Korea that I am intending to include is general in its extent. Although the information is collected from personal interviews and participant observations I will not identify the sources for the sake of the safety of the people involved.

I. THE FORMATION AND EXPANSION OF NORTH KOREAN CHURCHES

In 1874, John Ross, a Scottish Presbyterian missionary, who was working in the area of Sandong, went to Dandong which is situated on the border of China and North Korea with the vision to evangelize Korea. At the time he met a young man called Lee Eung Chan, who was in a state of despair after having failed in the trading business, he witnessed to him, and led him to Christ. Then John Ross employed five Korean young men to translate the Chinese Bible into Korean and all five men were converted to Christ. In 1882, the gospels of Luke and John were translated into Korean **p. 89** for the first time and in 1887 the new Bible 'Holy Scripture of Jesus' which was called the 'Ross Version' was published. In the process of distribution a young man called Kim Chong Sung sold hundreds of Bibles in his

home town, many people were converted and accepted Christ as their Saviour. In 1884 John Ross baptized 75 Korean converts.

Seo Sang Ryon, Back Hong Jun, Lee Sung Ha, the assistants to John Ross, crossed over the border to Korea many times passing over the dangerous line of demarcation between China and Korea. There were three routes which were used to distribute the Bibles at this time. The first, although small, was through Manchuria. In the second they were assessed by a German, Mullendort, who was working as a customs inspector at the area of Inchoon. Here John Ross sent 6,000 Bibles to Seo Sang Ryon by ship. In the third they were helped by the Japanese, who were cooperating with the British and Foreign Bible Society, centred on Yokohama.

These efforts gave rise to the formation of the first church, So Rae Church. The Korean people organized this church themselves in the form of a house church. In 1885 Underwood, who had come from Japan, met Seo Sang Ryan in Seoul and heard the news that there were about twenty Christians converted throughout Manchuria who were thirsty for the Word of God. Eventually, these people became the founding members of the first Korean Presbyterian Church, Sae Moon An church, opened in 1887.

In 1887, Underwood began itinerant evangelism. With the guidance of Seo Sang Ryon, Underwood met the religious leaders in what is now North Korea. In 1892 he married his bride, whom he had met in Korea as an itinerant preacher. From the district of Eyuju, he took 33 people across the Yalru River into DanDong, China for baptism.

I have visited the areas in China where these early Korean Christians left their mark. It is surprising and a cause of thanksgiving that people of God are still living and praising God there, and that these churches are more like early Korean churches than ours today in serving God.

In 1894, a missionary, Samuel Moffet, settled down at Pyungyang and established a mission station. As a result of his devoted efforts many churches were established around Pyungyang. Seven pastors graduated from the Seminary at Pyungyang to form a single presbytery in 1907. In 1912, other presbyteries such as Hwanghe, South Pyungnam, North Pyungnam, South Hamkyung, North Hamkyung were born in North Korea and the result was the establishing of the first General Assembly of the Korean Presbyterian Church. In 1910, after the Japanese annexation of Korea, many farmers lost their lands and were forcibly moved into Manchuria by the political movement of Japanese militarists who dreamed of making Asia a Japanese colony. At the time, the North Korea church was the leader in missions. Not only ministers and preachers but also Bible women were sent out. As a result, four presbyteries were established in Gando, Manchuria. In 1925 there were 500,000 Korean inhabitants and about 200 churches among these. Of these churches, p. 90 about 80 were Presbyterian with a membership of 10,000. In 1930, the Japanese militarists who were responsible for the War of Manchuria made a fierce attack on China, and persecuted the church and the patriotic Korean Christians in Manchuria.

The Christians had also to face the difficulties caused by the communist guerrillas who were prevalent around Manchuria. Since then, the Manchurian church has started to produce martyrs. First was Pastor Han Kyung Hee, a Presbyterian pastor. In 1918 North Assembly Presbyterian missionaries started working in today's Tonghwa and became martyrs there in the 1930s. Hunt also, who was known as Han Bu Sun in Korean, worked in the area of Harbin and was imprisoned by the Japanese. However the churches in Manchuria prayed wholeheartedly. Preachers and Korean church leaders such as Pastor Kil Sun Ju and Kim Ik Du visited Manchuria and encouraged the Christians with the Word of God.

Once when I was travelling in China I met an old woman who had studied at a Bible School established by the first PCUSA mission in Manchuria in the 1920s. She was very

old but could remember her past clearly, moreover, she was ministering to the underground Christians in North Korea. The work done by our God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit through his people has never been in vain, no matter how difficult the situations. As Jesus has claimed, no dark power will overcome Christ's power. The trials of North Korean churches were bearing fruit in several places in Manchuria and these fruits were being used to serve the North Korean Christians.

II. THE SUFFERINGS OF NORTH KOREAN CHURCHES FROM 1945

On August 15, 1945, Korea was liberated from the thirty-six-year long Japanese occupation. However, a tragic event occurred. Soviet Russia occupied Korea north of the 38th parallel as a result of the Yalta and Potsdam Summits.

In 1941 Stalin chose Kim IL Sung, who was taking refuge in Russia from the Japanese, as the puppet ruler of their satellite state. Kim IL Sung, with the support of the Russian Army, ignored the advice of the National Preparation Committee, led by elder Cho Man Sik, and obeyed Russia's order to establish a communist government. In the process of communization in North Korea, Kim IL Sung purged many who were considered to be his enemies. He and Russia most feared the North Korean churches. In 1945, Yoon Ha Young and Han Kyung Jik organized the Christian Socialist Party. Eventually this led to the famous Sin Eyu Ju student uprising in November 16 1945. Kim IL Sung formed the Chosun Christian Federation in 1949 to take over the North Korean churches and began persecuting church leaders through it. Many Christians fought fiercely against the communists and suffered difficulties or lost their lives. Between 1945 and 1950 there was a big revival in North Korea. Although there were few shepherds the churches were full of people and the air was filled with cries of repentance, prayer for the future of the country and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

During the Korean war about [p. 91](#) three million North Korean refugees moved to South Korea. Among these were many Christians and these began planting churches across South Korea. In the 1950s the number of North Korean Christians was about two-thirds of the total number of Christians. From a reliable source I heard a touching story that many Christians in North Korea stayed in that country during the war in order to preserve the churches and help the people.

For five years after the Korean war the North Korean government, with the help of the Soviet Union, started to rebuild the country. According to the sources I collected, the government did not have a mind to search out and pressure the Christians. Many Christians were active in secret. However after 1958, under the name of a massive search programme, the Central Communist Party started to classify people into three large groups and fifty-six different levels. As a result of this search many Christians were exposed and were killed or sent to concentration camps for the rest of their lives.

Since 1980 the exposed underground churches include those at places such as Sineyuju, Kangge, Hambuk, Hamnam, Pyungbuk and Hwanghe. In spite of the fact that churches are restricted and controlled, North Koreans are fighting hard to expand the kingdom of God.

III. THE CHOSUN CHRISTIAN FEDERATION AS A TOOL OF THE MARXISTS

During the Korean War the Chosun Christian Federation was used to help build the communist country and penetrate the South Korean churches. After 1958, when the five

year economic plan had been fulfilled, the Federation was disbanded. Mr. Kang Yang Euk who was the president of the Federation died in 1987.

The sudden reappearance of the Chosun Christian Federation in 1972 was for the purpose of influencing the churches in South Korea, in the Agreement of the North—South Adjustment Committee. At the time some churches were deeply involved in anti-government movements and the North Korean government wanted to use the Chosun Christian Federation as a tool for the United Front Strategy.

In 1979, the leader of the Chosun Christian Federation attended the Christian Conference held in Vienna, Austria. Kim Hae Jun who was in Canada at the time also attended the conference. On September 5, 1984 Ko Ki Jun, Kim Bong Rok, Kim He Sik, Kang Nam Hyung and others represented the Chosun Christian Federation at the International Church Affairs Conference held in Glion, Switzerland. These conferences were sponsored by the World Council of Churches.

In 1989, and subsequently in 1990, Kim Duj Ryoung and Ko Ki Jun visited the USA at the invitation of the National Christian Council of the USA. Recently the leaders of the Chosun Christian Federation attended the Far East Justice-Peace Conference held in Tozanso and had fellowship with the Korean leaders of an organization under the auspices of Han Ki Chong.

From these facts I would like to point out two things. First it is clear [p. 92](#) that the WCC has been promoting ideological talks between Christians and Marxists since 1960, especially in East European communist countries. The WCC sponsored Peace Movement was clearly based on Liberation Theology, and the conflict between the haves and the have-nots. Such developments played into the hands of the Marxist governments. The North Korean Communists think that these various international conferences affiliated with the WCC can be used to enhance the promotion of North Korean policies and the international revolutionary movement.

Second, the Chosun Christian Federation is deeply influenced by the ideology of Kim IL Sung and the Labour Party. In the international conferences sponsored by the WCC the North Korean leaders have been strong advocates of the removal of the atomic bomb from South Korea, the unification of Korea and the withdrawal of the United States Army from South Korea. The leaders of the Chosun Christian Federation are used to promote the political policies of the North Korean government. Kang Young Sup is the chairman of the Chosun Christian Federation, while the son of Kang Yang Euk is a member of the Unification Committee affiliated with the Highest People's Congress and Ko Ki Jun who is the chief secretary of the same organization is a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Can we say that these men are true Christians or not?

In 1976 the North Korean Labour Party published a booklet called 'Revolution of South Korea and Unification Strategy', based on the Principal thought of Kim IL Sung. This booklet gives Kim IL Sung's guide on how North Korea should enhance the South Korea Revolutionary Movement through the unification strategy by using the religious force in South Korea which advocates the thought of secular 'Missio Dei' and Minjung theology.

In 1989 there was a plan to hold a large evangelistic crusade in Pyongyang under the agreement of two parties, one mainly the ministers of Korean-American churches in the US and the other the Chosun Christian Federation. This plan failed as the leaders from the US realized the ulterior motive of North Korea as they visited there a number of times.

North Korea tries to introduce the principal thoughts of Kim IL Sung into the North Korean official church. But I strongly assert that although it may be possible to attempt to engraft the principal thoughts of Kim IL Sung into Christianity theoretically and ideologically, there is no common denominator between them in origin, essence and history.

IV. SIGNS OF CHANGE AND MISSION STRATEGIES

When we consider the various factors in the North Korean situation, changes are inevitable. The changes in traditionally friendly countries have also brought about some changes directly or indirectly in North Korea. The closed and self-justified economic system within North Korea has led to a situation where the country cannot continue any longer without contacts with the outside world.

I anticipate changes in North Korea in three ways and propose p. 93 appropriate missions strategies for each. First, the possibility of a massive refugee problem and the risk of civil war due to the drastic collapse of North Korea.

Second, the possibility of war and drastic revolutionary change. The North Korean government is blaming the US and South Korean governments for its problems and deluding North Korean people and by so doing, creating a civil war situation.

Third, there is the possibility of gradual change within North Korea and active exchange with the outside world. North Korea has been studying the possibility of change within their country and devising a plan to revive their economy and at the same time maintain their current government power system for as long as possible. Recently, North Korea has amended the constitution and distinguished religion from superstitious belief. However, it is promoting an anti-bourgeoisie movement across North Korea and strengthening its ideological stance.

Further, it is supervizing the village movements and has started an intensive classification of people with different ideologies. This is seen in areas such as Najin, Sunbong, Sabyul and Chungjin. From watching the process of their open-door policy, I expect that North Korea will gradually open the door for the economy to survive and at the same time for the North Korean government to maintain its current ideology and power system. If North Korea's open-door policy becomes as successful as that of China, then the supervision mentioned above will be extended to other areas.

Personally I am praying for the third situation described above to take place. In the event of it happening I would propose the following missions strategy.

Firstly, we should work for the increase of public exchange with the Chosun Christian Federation. The open-door economic policy of North Korea will surely take a soft policy in the aspect of religion and they will allow a certain amount of increased freedom in the United Front strategy. I think that these signs are already in progress.

Secondly, we should establish direct and indirect strategical measures for missions in the expectation of North Korea's increased opendoor policy. As there are more contacts with North Korea in both domestic and foreign affairs, the South Korean churches will have more chances to evangelize the people of North Korea. I have been told that there are many being converted through contacts with outside people.

Thirdly, we should help North Korean Christians to encourage reform within themselves and to enhance the efforts of the underground churches. This is not impossible. If the churches all over North Korea become more active and the influence of Christians increase, then the upheaval or reform which took place in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union will also take place in North Korea. Although the names of specific locations of churches cannot be revealed to the public for the safety of the missions strategy and for the people involved, more underground churches are being identified all over North Korea. And p. 94 in spite of the extreme control and stringency the churches are growing continuously.

We in the South Korean church should pray for the people of North Korea with specific prayer topics and identify with their difficulties. I hope that special missions

organizations will be more active and pray that these missions organizations will work wisely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Sung Tae Kim is Professor of Missiology at the Chong Shin Theological Seminary