

Theme:  
Evangelism – Amsterdam 2000

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EVANGELISM – AMSTERDAM 2000

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# *Evangelical Review of Theology*

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# Editorial

## Amsterdam 2000

One of the most memorable events of the year 2000 for many people was the conference of evangelists convened by Billy Graham and held in Amsterdam July 29–August 6. Attended by 10,732 people from 209 countries, including many who are related in some way to the World Evangelical Fellowship. Theological Commission Executive Director, Dr James Stamoolis was deeply involved, as were many others with Commission associations.

Amsterdam 2000 was the most recent and perhaps the last in a series of influential gatherings coming from Dr Graham's unique leadership. Although he was not physically present, he was able to participate, thanks to modern technology, and address the closing service.

Amsterdam 2000 was unique in many ways, but one feature was particularly relevant to this journal—the special emphasis placed on theology and the work of theologians in relation to evangelism. One of the three study tracks was devoted to theology (the others were leadership and strategy) and conclusions from this track found their way into the final conference declaration; in fact, in addition to significant recognition of theology in its main paragraphs, the declaration contains a separate twelve point section defining key theological concepts. The convenor of the Theologians' Task Group, (which was attended by almost 200 people from about 100 countries), was Dr James I. Packer. It is with his assistance, and that of Dr John Akers of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, that we are able to

present some material from the Amsterdam 2000 in this issue. (Many of the addresses and other information were available on the Internet during the conference and were archived for later access at <<http://www.amsterdam2000.org/>>

The Theologians' Task Group sessions consisted of a fifteen minute presentation on key topics followed by discussion amongst the delegates arranged in groups of ten. The topics included the uniqueness and centrality of Christ, contextualisation, pluralism and dialogue, hermeneutics, theology and the powers. Dr Packer explained that the topics were selected to help theologians deal with attempts arising from pluralistic, postmodern and other contemporary worldviews and philosophies to diminish the historic doctrines of Christ as the only Saviour. He said that the Task Group was also intended to encourage theologians to think of themselves as resource people for church's evangelistic enterprise. At the end of the conference, he was satisfied that there had been significant bonding between participants, and in the process vital convergence of theology and evangelism had developed, with theologians becoming part of the infrastructure of evangelism.

The Declaration, drawn up by a drafting committee headed by Dr Timothy George, a member of the theologians' track and Dean of Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Alabama, reflects the work of the three Task Groups in its opening paragraphs—on evangelism in relation to mission strategy, leadership and theology. The con-

text of evangelism is prominent in sections 4-7 (worldviews, human need, religious pluralism and culture). Then come seven paragraphs dealing with the nature and dynamic of evangelism (Scripture, church, prayer, social responsibility, holiness, conflict and unity). In the second section of the Declaration, the work of the theologians is again conspicuous, with a series of 'definitions of key terms'—twelve in all—God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, Bible, Kingdom, Gospel, Salvation, Christian, Church, Mission, Evangelism and Evangelist.

While the Declaration would not be judged to be ground breaking in many of its statements, it places the focus of evangelism correctly in first paragraph by stating that 'We have from our Lord a mandate to proclaim the good news of God's love and forgiveness to everyone, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching all peoples.' By placing 'the good news of God's love and forgiveness' ahead of questions of truth, biblical infallibility and the church, the Declaration avoids the danger of evangelism being confused with proselytization and ecclesiastical or cultural imperialism.

The work of theologians within the evangelistic task is identified as 'clarify[ing] and safeguard[ing] God's revealed truth, providing resources for the training of evangelists and the grounding of new believers in the faith'. This means that there are intellectual, training and teaching components. The intellectual aspect consists of explanatory and defensive or apologetic aspects, whose touchstone is Scripture, in its capacity as the revealed will of God. Given the context of the statement within the overall purpose of Amsterdam 2000, this emphasis is understand-

able but many of the issues confronting evangelists and apologists (including several mentioned in the Declaration itself) call for positive initiatives in articulating the Christian message and relating it to the worldviews of its hearers.

Yet this intellectual task is ultimately experiential, for theology is defined as 'the task of careful thinking and ordering of life in the presence of the triune God'. Again, this is a welcome note, providing the right focus for theological work. If theologians keep it in mind, they will hardly need 'evangelists and pastors' to help them 'maintain an evangelistic motivation, reminding them that true theology is always done in the service of the church' (or we could better say, 'in the service of the gospel and the kingdom'.)

Nevertheless, we can endorse the 'pledge' climaxing this paragraph—'to labor constantly in learning and teaching the faith according to the Scriptures, and in seeking to ensure (1) that all who preach the gospel are theologically equipped and resourced in adequate ways for the work they have in hand, and (2) that all professional teachers of the faith share a common concern for evangelism'.

With that commitment in mind, we are also pleased to present in this issue some other supporting papers—a comprehensive document on evangelism and reconciliation from Japan, a call for greater focus on preaching the Cross from Klaas Runia of the Netherlands, and a fresh approach by John J. Davis to the Great Commission text pointing out its application to evangelism in the market place. Kevin Giles' popular survey of 'Models of the Church' is also included.

**David Parker, Editor.**

# Amsterdam 2000

## The Amsterdam Declaration: A Charter for Evangelism in the 21st Century

**Keywords:** Strategy, evangelism, leadership, theology, truth, pluralism, culture, Scripture, church, prayer, social responsibility, suffering, unity

### Preamble

As a renewal movement within historic Christian orthodoxy, transdenominational evangelicalism became a distinct global reality in the second half of the twentieth century. Evangelicals come from many churches, languages and cultures but we hold in common a shared understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, of the church's mission, and of the Christian commitment to evangelism. Recent documents that express this understanding include the Berlin Statement (1966), the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Amsterdam Affirmations (1983), the Manila Manifesto (1989), and *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration* (1999).

At the invitation of Dr. Billy Graham, some 10,000 evangelists, theologians, mission strategists and church leaders from more than 200 countries have assembled in Amsterdam in the year 2000 to listen, pray, worship and discern the wisdom of the Holy Spirit for the unfinished task of world evangelization. We are stirred and encouraged by the challenges we have heard and the fellowship we have shared with

so many brothers and sisters in Christ. More than ever, we are resolved to make Christ known to all persons everywhere.

This Amsterdam Declaration has been developed as a framework to surround the many action plans that are being made for the evangelization of the world. It is based on the principles set forth in the documents referred to above, and includes these three parts: A charter of commitments, definitions of key theological terms used in the charter, and a prayer of supplication to our Heavenly Father.

### Charter of Commitments

This charter is a statement of tasks, goals and ideals for evangelism in the 21st century. The order of topics reflects the range of our concerns, not the priority of these themes.

**1. Mission Strategy and Evangelism** The mission of the church has at its heart world evangelization. We have from our Lord a mandate to proclaim the good news of God's love and forgiveness to everyone, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching all peoples. Jesus

made it clear in his last teachings that the scope of this work of evangelism demands that we give attention not only to those around us but also to the despised and neglected of society and to those at the ends of the earth. To do anything less is disobedience. In addition, we affirm the need to encourage new initiatives to reach and disciple youth and children worldwide; to make fuller use of media and technology in evangelism; and to stay involved personally in grass-roots evangelism so that our presentations of the biblical gospel are fully relevant and contextualized. We think it urgent to work toward the evangelization of every remaining unreached people group. (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8)

*We **pledge ourselves** to work so that all persons on earth may have an opportunity to hear the gospel in a language they understand, near where they live. We further pledge to establish healthy, reproducing, indigenous churches among every people, in every place, that will seek to bring to spiritual maturity those who respond to the gospel message.*

## **2. Leadership and Evangelism**

We affirm that leadership is one of Christ's gifts to the church. It does not exist for itself; it exists to lead the people of God in obedience to our Heavenly Father. Leaders must submit themselves in humility to Christ, the Head of the church, and to one another. This submission involves the acceptance of the supreme authority of scripture by which Christ rules in his church through his Spirit. The leaders' first task is to preserve the biblical integrity of the proclamation of the church and serve as vision carriers of its evangelistic vocation. They are responsible to see that

vocation implemented by teaching, training, empowering and inspiring others. We must give special attention to encouraging women and young leaders in their work of evangelism. Leaders must always be careful not to block what God is doing as they exercise their strategic stewardship of the resources which Christ supplies to his body. (Ephesians 4:11-13; Mark 10:42-45; Colossians 1:18)

*We **pledge ourselves** to seek and uphold this model of biblical servant-leadership in our churches. We who are leaders commit ourselves afresh to this pattern of leadership.*

## **3. Theology and Evangelism**

Christian theology is the task of careful thinking and ordering of life in the presence of the triune God. In one sense, all Christians are theologians and must labor to be good ones rather than bad ones. This means that everyone's theology must be measured by biblical teaching from which alone we learn God's mind and will. Those called to the special vocations of evangelism, theology, and pastoral ministry must work together in the spread of the gospel throughout the world. Evangelists and pastors can help theologians maintain an evangelistic motivation, reminding them that true theology is always done in the service of the church. Theologians can help to clarify and safeguard God's revealed truth, providing resources for the training of evangelists and the grounding of new believers in the faith. (Mark 7:13; 2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16)

*We **pledge ourselves** to labor constantly in learning and teaching the faith according to the Scriptures, and in seeking to*

ensure (1) that all who preach the gospel are theologically equipped and resourced in adequate ways for the work they have in hand, and (2) that all professional teachers of the faith share a common concern for evangelism.

**4. Truth and Evangelism** Under the influence of modern rationalism, secularism, and humanism (modernity), the Western intellectual establishment has largely reacted into a relativistic denial that there is any global and absolute truth (post-modernity). This is influencing popular culture throughout the world. By contrast, the gospel which is the authoritative word of the one, true and living God, comes to everyone everywhere at all times as truth in three senses: its affirmations are factually true, as opposed to false; it confronts us at every point with reality, as opposed to illusion; and it sets before us Jesus Christ, the co-Creator, Redeemer, and Lord of the world, as the Truth (that is, the one universally, real, accessible, authoritative, truth-telling, trustworthy Person), for all to acknowledge. There is a suspicion that any grand claim that there is one truth for everyone is inevitably oppressive and violent. But the gospel sets before us one who, though he was God, became man and identified with those under the bondage of sin to set them free from its enslavement. This gospel of God is both true for everyone and truly sets people free. It is therefore to be received in trust not suspicion. (Romans 15:16; Galatians 1:7, 2:14; 1 Corinthians 9:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; John 8:31-32)

We **pledge ourselves** to present and proclaim the biblical gospel and its Christ, always and

everywhere, as fully sufficient and effective for the salvation of believers. Therefore, we oppose all skeptical and relativizing or syncretizing trends, whether rationalist or irrationalist, that treat that gospel as not fully true, and so as unable to lead believers into the new divine life that it promises them. We oppose all oppressive and destructive uses of God's wonderful truth.

#### **5. Human Need and Evangelism**

Both the law and the gospel uncover a lost human condition that goes beyond any feelings of pain, misery, frustration, bondage, powerlessness, and discontent with life. The Bible reveals that all human beings are constitutionally in a state of rebellion against the God who made them, and of whom they remain dimly aware; they are alienated from him, and cut off from all the enjoyment of knowing and serving him that is the true fulfillment of human nature. We humans were made to bear God's image in an endless life of love to God and to other people, but the self-centeredness of our fallen and sinful hearts makes that impossible. Often our dishonesty leads us to use even the observance of religion to keep God at a distance, so that we can avoid having him deal with us about our ungodly self-worship. Therefore all human beings now face final condemnation by Christ the Judge, and eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord. (Romans 1:18-32, 5:12, 18a; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Genesis 1:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:9)

We **pledge ourselves** to be faithful and compassionate in sharing with people the truth about their present spiritual state, warning them of judgment and hell that

*the impenitent face, and extolling the love of God who gave his Son to save us.*

**6. Religious Pluralism and Evangelism** Today's evangelist is called to proclaim the gospel in an increasingly pluralistic world. In this global village of competing faiths and many world religions, it is important that our evangelism be marked both by faithfulness to the good news of Christ and humility in our delivery of it. Because God's general revelation extends to all points of his creation, there may well be traces of truth, beauty and goodness in many non-Christian belief systems. But we have no warrant for regarding any of these as alternative gospels or separate roads to salvation. The only way to know God in peace, love and joy is through the reconciling death of Jesus Christ the risen Lord. As we share this message with others, we must do so with love and humility, shunning all arrogance, hostility and disrespect. As we enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions, we must be courteous and kind. But such dialogue must not be a substitute for proclamation. Yet because all persons are made in the image of God, we must advocate religious liberty and human rights for all. (Romans 1:18-20; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Mark 10:41-45; James 1:20; Genesis 1:26)

*We **pledge ourselves** to treat those of other faiths with respect and faithfully and humbly serve the nation in which God has placed us, while affirming that Christ is the one and only Savior of the world.*

**7. Culture and Evangelism** By the blood of the Lamb, God has purchased saints from every tribe and language and people and nation. He

saves people in their own culture. World evangelization aims to see the rise of churches that are both deeply rooted in Christ and closely related to their culture. Therefore, following the example of Jesus and Paul, those who proclaim Christ must use their freedom in Christ to become all things to all people. This means appropriate cultural identification while guarding against equating the gospel with any particular culture. Since all human cultures are shaped in part by sin, the Bible and its Christ are at key points counter-cultural to every one of them. (Revelation 5:9; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 9:19-23)

*We **pledge ourselves** to be culturally sensitive in our evangelism. We will aim to preach Christ in a way that is appropriate for the people among whom we witness and which will enrich that culture in all appropriate ways. Further, as salt and light we will seek the transforming of culture in ways that affirm gospel values.*

**8. Scripture and Evangelism** The Bible is indispensable to true evangelism. The Word of God itself provides both the content and authority for all evangelism. Without it there is no message to preach to the lost. People must be brought to an understanding of at least some of the basic truths contained in the Scriptures before they can make a meaningful response to the gospel. Thus we must proclaim and disseminate the Holy Scriptures in the heart language of all those whom we are called to evangelize and disciple. (1 Thessalonians 2:13; Acts 2:14-39, 13:16-41)

*We **pledge ourselves** to keep the Scriptures at the very heart of our evangelistic outreach and message, and to remove all known lan-*

*guage and cultural barriers to a clear understanding of the gospel on the part of our hearers.*

### **9. The Church and Evangelism**

There is no dispute that in established congregations regular teaching for believers at all stages in their pilgrimage must be given, and appropriate pastoral care must be provided. But these concerns must not displace ongoing concern for mission, which involves treating evangelistic outreach as a continuing priority. Pastors in conjunction with other qualified persons should lead their congregations in the work of evangelism. Further, we affirm that the formation of godly, witnessing disciples is at the heart of the church's responsibility to prepare its members for their work of service. We affirm that the church must be made a welcoming place for new believers. (1 Corinthians 14:13-17; Matthew 28:19; 2 Timothy 2:2)

*We **pledge ourselves** to urge all congregations in and with which we serve to treat evangelism as a matter of priority at all times, and so to make it a focus of congregational praying, planning, training and funding.*

**10. Prayer and Evangelism** God has given us the gift of prayer so that in his sovereignty he may respond in blessing and power to the cries of his children. Prayer is an essential means God has appointed for the awakening of the church and the carrying of the gospel throughout the world. From the first days of the New Testament church, God has used the fervent, persistent praying of his people to empower their witness in the Spirit, overcome opposition to the Lord's work and open the minds and hearts of those who hear the message of Christ. At special times

in the history of the church, revivals and spiritual breakthroughs have been preceded by the explicit agreement and union of God's people in seasons of repentance, prayer and fasting. Today, as we seek to carry the gospel to unreached people groups in all the world, we need a deeper dependence upon God and a greater unity in prayer. (Acts 1:14, 2:42, 6:4; Acts 4:23-30, 12:5; Ephesians 6:18)

*We **pledge ourselves** to pray faithfully to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers for his harvest field. We also pray for all those engaged in world evangelization and encourage the call to prayer in families, local churches, special assemblies, mission agencies and trans-denominational ministries. (Matthew 9:37-38)*

### **11. Social Responsibility and Evangelism**

Although evangelism is not advocacy of any social program, it does entail social responsibility for at least two reasons. First, the gospel proclaims the kingship of the loving Creator who is committed to justice, to human life and the welfare of his creation. So evangelism will need to be accompanied by obedience to God's command to work for the good of all in a way that is fitting for the children of the Father who makes his sun shine on the evil and the good and sends his rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Second, when our evangelism is linked with concern to alleviate poverty, uphold justice, oppose abuses of secular and economic power, stand against racism, and advance responsible stewardship of the global environment, it reflects the compassion of Christ and may gain an acceptance it would not otherwise receive. (Psalm 47:7; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation

17:14; Galatians 6:10; Matthew 5:45; Deuteronomy 24:10-13, 14-15; Luke 1:52-53, 4:18-19; James 5:1-6)

We **pledge ourselves** to follow the way of justice in our family and social life, and to keep personal, social and environmental values in view as we evangelize.

## 12. Holiness and Evangelism

The servant of God must adorn the gospel through a holy life. But in recent times God's name has been greatly dishonored and the gospel discredited because of unholy living by Christians in leadership roles. Evangelists seem particularly exposed to temptations relating to money, sex, pride, power, neglect of family and lack of integrity. The church should foster structures to hold evangelists accountable for their lives, doctrine and ministries. The church should also ensure that those whose lives dishonor God and the gospel will not be permitted to serve as its evangelists. The holiness and humility of evangelists gives credibility to their ministry and leads to genuine power from God and lasting fruit. (1 Timothy 3:2-13; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:11-13, 19-20)

We **pledge ourselves** to be accountable to the community of faith for our lives, doctrine and ministry, to flee from sin, and to walk in holiness and humility. (1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy 2:22)

## 13. Conflict, Suffering and Evangelism

The records of evangelism from the apostolic age, the state of the world around us today, and the knowledge of Satan's opposition at all times to the spread of the gospel, combine to assure us that evangelistic outreach in the twenty-

first century will be an advance in the midst of opposition. Current forms of opposition, which Satan evidently exploits, include secular ideologies that see Christian faith as a hindrance to human development; political power structures that see the primacy of Christians' loyalty to their Lord as a threat to the regime; and militant expressions of non-Christian religions that are hostile to Christians for being different. We must expect, and be prepared for, many kinds of suffering as we struggle not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Acts 13:6-12; Ephesians 6:11-13, 14-18)

We **pledge ourselves** ever to seek to move forward wisely in personal evangelism, family evangelism, local church evangelism, and cooperative evangelism in its various forms, and to persevere in this despite the opposition we may encounter. We will stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer persecution and even martyrdom for their faithful gospel witness.

## 14. Christian Unity and Evangelism

Jesus prayed to the Heavenly Father that his disciples would be one so that the world might believe. One of the great hindrances to evangelism worldwide is the lack of unity among Christ's people, a condition made worse when Christians compete and fight with one another rather than seeking together the mind of Christ. We cannot resolve all differences among Christians because we do not yet understand perfectly all that God has revealed to us. But in all ways that do not violate our conscience, we should pursue cooperation and part-

nerships with other believers in the task of evangelism practicing the well-tested rule of Christian fellowship: "In necessary things, unity; in non-essential things, liberty; in all things, charity." (Ephesians 4:1-6; John 17:21-23; Romans 11:34; 2 Peter 3:15; Romans 14:14, 23)

*We **pledge ourselves** to pray and work for unity in truth among all true believers in Jesus and to cooperate as fully as possible in evangelism with other brothers and sisters in Christ so that the whole church may take the whole gospel to the whole world.*

### Definitions of Key Terms

The message we proclaim has both a propositional and an incarnational dimension—"the Word became flesh:" to deny either one is to bear false witness to Christ. Because the relation between language and reality is much debated today, it is important to state clearly what we mean by what we say. To avoid confusion and misunderstanding, then, we here define the following key words used in this Declaration. The definitions are all Trinitarian, Christocentric, and Bible-based. (John 1:14)

**1. God** The God of whom this Declaration speaks is the self-revealed Creator, Upholder, Governor and Lord of the universe. This God is eternal in his self-existence and unchanging in his holy love, goodness, justice, wisdom, and faithfulness to his promises. God in his own being is a community of three coequal and coeternal persons, who are revealed to us in the Bible as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Together they are involved in an unvarying cooperative pattern in all God's relationships to and within this world. God is Lord of history,

where he blesses his own people, overcomes and judges human and angelic rebels against his rule, and will finally renew the whole created order. (Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:11; Psalm 24:1-2, 33:6; Acts 4:24-30; Psalm 90:2, 119:42; Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Daniel 7:1-28; Acts 2:23-24, 4:28; Ephesians 1:9-10)

**2. Jesus Christ** The Declaration takes the view of Jesus that the canonical New Testament sets forth and the historic Christian creeds and confessions attest. He was, and is, the second person of the triune Godhead, now and forever incarnate. He was virgin-born, lived a life of perfect godliness, died on the cross as the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, was raised bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, reigns now over the universe and will personally return for judgment and the renewal of all things. As the God-man, once crucified, now enthroned, he is the Lord and Savior who in love fulfills towards us the threefold mediatorial ministry of prophet, priest and king. His title, "Christ," proclaims him the anointed servant of God who fulfills all the Messianic hopes of the canonical Old Testament. (Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrew 1:8; John 1:1, 14; Hebrews 4:15; Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 1 Timothy 3:16; Philippians 2:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Acts 2:26; Romans 1:1-3)

**3. Holy Spirit** Shown by the words of Jesus to be the third divine person, whose name, "Spirit," pictures the energy of breath and wind, the Holy Spirit is the dynamic personal presence of the Trinity in the processes of the created world, in the communication of divine truth, in the attest-

ing of Jesus Christ, in the new creation through him of believers and of the church, and in ongoing fellowship and service. The fullness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relation to the knowledge of Christ and the enjoyment of new life in him dates from the Pentecostal outpouring recorded in Acts 2. As the divine inspirer and interpreter of the Bible, the Spirit empowers God's people to set forth accurate, searching, life-transforming presentations of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and makes their communication a fruitful means of grace to their hearers. The New Testament shows us the supernatural power of the Spirit working miracles, signs and wonders, bestowing gifts of many kinds, and overcoming the power of Satan in human lives for the advancement of the gospel. Christians agree that the power of the Holy Spirit is vitally necessary for evangelism and that openness to his ministry should mark all believers. (John 3:8; 14:16-17; 14:26; 16:13-15; Acts 2:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Acts 2:43, 5:12, 6:8, 14:3, 15:12)

**4. Bible** The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the written Word of God. As the inspired revelation of God in writing, the Scriptures are totally true and trustworthy, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. In every age and every place, this authoritative Bible, by the Spirit's power, is efficacious for salvation through its witness to Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; Luke 1:1-4; John 14:26; 1 John 1:3)

**5. Kingdom** The kingdom of God is his gracious rule through Jesus Christ over human lives, the course of history, and all reality. Jesus is Lord of past, present, and future,

and Sovereign ruler of everything. The salvation Jesus brings and the community of faith he calls forth are signs of his kingdom's presence here and now, though we wait for its complete fulfillment when he comes again in glory. In the meantime, wherever Christ's standards of peace and justice are observed to any degree, to that degree the kingdom is anticipated, and to that extent God's ideal for human society is displayed. (Daniel 7:14; Luke 11:20; Hebrews 13:8; Luke 22:29; Luke 6:20; Matthew 5:3)

**6. Gospel** The gospel is the good news of the Creator's eternal plan to share his life and love with fallen human beings through the sending of his Son Jesus Christ, the one and only Savior of the world. As the power of God for salvation, the gospel centers on the life, death, resurrection and return of Jesus and leads to a life of holiness, growth in grace and hope-filled though costly discipleship in the fellowship of the church. The gospel includes the announcement of Jesus' triumph over the powers of darkness and of his supreme lordship over the universe. (Romans 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:2; Acts 2:14-39; 13:16-41; Romans 1:1-5; Colossians 2:15; 1 Peter 3:22)

**7. Salvation** This word means rescue from guilt, defilement, spiritual blindness and deadness, alienation from God, and certainty of eternal punishment in hell, that is everyone's condition while under sin's dominion. This deliverance involves present justification, reconciliation to God and adoption into his family, with regeneration and the sanctifying gift of the Holy Spirit leading to works of righteousness and service here and now, and a promise of full

glorification in fellowship with God in the future. This involves in the present life joy, peace, freedom and the transformation of character and relationships and the guarantee of complete healing at the future resurrection of the body. We are justified by faith alone and the salvation faith brings is by grace alone, through Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 5:9, 3:21-26, 8:30; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12-13, 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:43; 2 Thessalonians 1:9-10; Mark 4:42-48; Romans 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:4-7; Romans 11:36, 15:9; Philippians 1:11)

**8. Christian** A Christian is a believer in God who is enabled by the Holy Spirit to submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in a personal relation of disciple to master and to live the life of God's kingdom. The word Christian should not be equated with any particular cultural, ethnic, political, or ideological tradition or group. Those who know and love Jesus are also called Christ-followers, believers and disciples. (Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16)

**9. Church** The church is the people of God, the body and the bride of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The one, universal church is a transnational, transcultural, transdenominational and multi-ethnic family, the household of faith. In the widest sense, the church includes all the redeemed of all the ages, being the one body of Christ extended throughout time as well as space. Here in the world, the church becomes visible in all local congregations that meet to do together the things that according to Scripture the church does. Christ is the head of the church. Everyone who is personally

united to Christ by faith belongs to his body and by the Spirit is united with every other true believer in Jesus. (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:25-27, 32; Matthew 28:19; Romans 3:27-30; Revelation 7:9-10; 1 Corinthians 1:2)

**10. Mission** Formed from *missio*, the Latin word for "sending," this term is used both of the Father's sending of the Son into the world to become its Savior and of the Son's sending the church into the world to spread the gospel, perform works of love and justice, and seek to disciple everyone to himself. (John 17:18; 20:21)

**11. Evangelism** Derived from the Greek word *euangelizesthai*, "to tell glad tidings," this word signifies making known the gospel of Jesus Christ so that people may trust in God through him, receiving him as their Savior and serving him as their Lord in the fellowship of his church. Evangelism involves declaring what God has done for our salvation and calling on the hearers to become disciples of Jesus through repentance from sin and personal faith in him. (Luke 4:18; Romans 1:15-17)

**12. Evangelist** All Christians are called to play their part in fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission, but some believers have a special call to, and a spiritual gift for, communicating Christ and leading others to him. These we call evangelists, as does the New Testament. (2 Timothy 4:5; Ephesians 4:11)

### Prayer

*Gracious God, our Heavenly Father, we praise you for the great love that you have shown to us through the redeeming death and*

triumphant resurrection of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that you would enable us by the power of your Holy Spirit to proclaim faithfully the good news of your kingdom and your love.

Forgive us for failing to take the gospel to all the peoples of the world. Deliver us from ignorance, error, lovelessness, pride, selfishness, impurity, and cowardice. Enable us to be truthful, kind, humble, sympathetic, pure, and

courageous. Salvation belongs to you, O God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.

We ask you to make our gospel witness effective. Anoint our proclamation with the Holy Spirit; use it to gather that great multitude from all nations who will one day stand before you and the Lamb giving praise. This we ask by the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Revelation 7:9-10)

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# Amsterdam 2000

## A Covenant for Evangelists

**Keywords:** Worship, Bible, gospel, evangelise, Holy Spirit, prayer, church, unity, humility

As a company of evangelists called and gifted by God to share the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the world, we earnestly pledge ourselves to:

1. Worship the one true and living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Deuteronomy 6:4);
2. Submit to the Holy Scriptures, the infallible Word of God, as the basis for our life and message (2 Timothy 3:16-17);
3. Proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, God's Son and our redeemer, the one and only Savior of the world (Acts 4:12);
4. Seek always to preach and minister in the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:29-31);
5. Live a life of constant personal prayer, Bible study and devotion to God, and also be part of a local fellowship of believers (James 4:10; Hebrews 10:25);
6. Pray that all persons of all languages and cultures may have access to the Gospel and the Bible (Acts 1:8);
7. Practice purity in both singleness and marriage, caring for our family and bringing up our children in the nurture of the Lord (Ephesians 5:25, 6:1-4);
8. Walk humbly before God and our fellow human beings, renouncing

arrogance, pride and boastful self-promotion (Micah 6:8; Ephesians 4:1-2);

9. Maintain financial integrity and accountability in all of our activities, so that the cause of Christ may not be discredited (1 Timothy 6:10-11);

10. Serve the needy and oppressed, remembering the mercy and compassion of Jesus (James 2:14-17);

11. Encourage the discipling and nurturing ministry of local churches (Matthew 28:19-20);

12. Work together in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ (John 17:23);

13. Equip others for the practice of evangelism, giving special care to involve new believers in the sharing of their faith (Ephesians 4:11-13);

14. Stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer persecution and even martyrdom for their faithful Gospel witness (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).

Knowing that apart from Jesus Christ we can do nothing, we make these pledges with prayerful reliance on his help. As we do so, we ask for the prayer and support of all Christ's followers so that world evangelization may be advanced, the church built up and God glorified in ever-increasing measure.

# Amsterdam 2000

## The Content of the Gospel

James I. Packer

**Keywords:** Bible, gospel, preaching, truth, Kingdom of God, salvation, fellowship, heaven

### Introduction

In the Bible, the gospel is the entire saving plan of God, all revolving around the person, the place and power of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the incarnate, crucified, risen, reigning, returning Lord.

Preaching the gospel requires us to show how Jesus Christ relates to every part of God's plan, and how every part of it relates to us who are savingly related to the living Christ

through faith. Evangelism involves explaining life in Christ as well as inviting sinners to him. This means dealing with six main topics, as follows:

### 1. The Truth about God

The one God who made and rules everything is revealed as three persons through his plan of salvation. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit love us, and work together to save us from sin and make us holy. Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, is Lord over all the powers of evil. Any other view of God is idolatry.

### 2. The Truth about Ourselves

We were made for God, to bear his image and be like him in moral character, but sin controls and spoils us so that we need to be brought back to God to be forgiven and remade. Jesus Christ, who brings us back, is himself the model of true godliness. Any other view is deception.

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**Dr James I. Packer, a senior editor of *Christianity Today*, is Board of Governors' Professor of Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, Canada where he has served since 1979. Previously he was associated with Tyndale Hall and Trinity College, Bristol, and Latimer House Oxford. An influential lecturer and writer respected around the world, Dr. Packer's many books include *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, *Knowing God* and *Growing in Christ*. His most recent publications are *Collected Shorter Writings of J.I. Packer* in four volumes and *Never Beyond Hope*. He was convenor of the Theologians' Task Force at Amsterdam 2000. This paper is a brief summary of his plenary address to the conference, and is used with permission.**

### 3. The Story of God's Kingdom

Step by step, as Scripture tells, God has been working to establish his kingdom in this fallen world. Jesus Christ is the King, and our lives are to be his kingdom. King Jesus is also the Judge, and those who have not bowed to his kingship here will not share his joy hereafter. Trusting, loving and honouring Jesus, and serving others for his sake, is true godliness at its heart. Any other form of religion is error.

### 4. The Way of Salvation

Jesus Christ, our sin-bearer on the cross, now from his throne reaches out to rescue us who are lost in the guilt and shame of sin. He calls for faith (trust in him as Saviour) and repentance (turn to him as Master). He sends his Holy Spirit to change us inwardly so that we hear his call as addressed to us personally and respond wholeheartedly to it. Whereupon we are forgiven and accepted (justified); received as God's children (adopted); made to rejoice at our peace with him (assurance); and made to realize that now we are living a new life in Christ (regeneration). Any other view of salvation is deficient.

### 5. The Life of Fellowship

Christians belong in the church, the family of God, sharing its worship, work, witness and warfare, and enjoying its worldwide brotherhood in Christ. Any other view of the Christian is sectarian.

### 6. Walking Home to Heaven

Helped by the ministry in the church of word and sacrament, prayer and pastoral care, spiritual gifts and loving support, Christians live in our constantly hostile world as travellers, heading for a glorious destination. Led and inspired by their Saviour through the Holy Spirit, they seek to do all the good they can as they go, and to battle all forms of evil that they meet. Any lesser view of the Christian life is wordly.

All this is permanently and universally true, transcending all differences of colour, race, culture, age, gender, health, economic standing, social position and political background. As the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit sustain us all, so the gospel levels us all, teaching us to know ourselves as great sinners saved by God's greater grace, and to see all non-Christians as needing that same grace themselves.

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# Amsterdam 2000

## The Evangelist's Message is Bible-based

### John Stott

**Keywords:** Bible, evangelist, preaching, Christ, revelation, authority, power, interpretation, humility

Our second topic this morning is a fine statement or affirmation, namely 'The evangelist's message is Bible-based'. Indeed the Bible is the only base on which the authentic evangelist builds his ministry and message. The Bible is indispensable to all true evangelism. Without the Bible evangelists would have nothing to say, nothing worth listening to, and no hope of success.

If, however, it is based on the Bible,

the evangelist's message is radically different. First, it has rich gospel content, for it is God's good news for sinners. It is concentrated on the atoning death and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Secondly, it breathes an authority which compels attention and even assent. It rings true. Thirdly, it has liberating and transforming power. It sets people free. These three features of the gospel (its content, its authority and its power) all come from the Bible, which is the Word of God.

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**John Stott, an evangelist, preacher, biblical scholar and author, is Rector Emeritus of All Souls Church, Langham Place, London. Dr Stott has travelled widely around the world, especially for evangelistic missions at universities and for ministry in third-world countries. He has been involved in many of the most important global evangelical initiatives over many years, including the Lausanne Congress. Amongst his books are *Basic Christianity*, *The Cross of Christ*, *The Message of Romans*, *The Contemporary Christian* and *Evangelical Truth*. In 1986, he became president of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity after having served four years as its director. This paper is a summary of his plenary address at Amsterdam 2000 and is used with permission.**

#### 1. The Bible gives the evangelist's message its content

Biblical content is essential to true evangelism. For evangelism (at its simplest) is the communication of the gospel, and the gospel has God-given content. Since 'The Content of the Gospel' was Dr. J. I. Packer's topic yesterday morning I will not trespass into his territory. But I am anxious to underline two points.

a) *The gospel comes from God.*

The gospel is God's good news. It is not a human invention or a human speculation; it is a divine revelation. If God had not taken the initiative to make himself known, he would have remained for ever unknown. And all the altars in the world (like the one Paul found outside Athens) would be inscribed 'to an unknown God'.

The fact is that we cannot even read each other's minds, let alone God's. If I were to stand here silent, could you know what I was thinking about? Try! (silence). What was I thinking about? You don't know! We could never know what other people are thinking if they remain silent. If, then, we cannot read each other's minds, how much less can we read the mind of God? Let me remind you of what is written in Isaiah 55:8-9: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways', declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.' Thus God's thoughts are as much higher than our thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth—which is infinity.

How then can we know God's mind? We cannot. It is altogether above and beyond us. There is no ladder by which we can climb up into the infinite mind of God. There is no way to bridge the chasm between us. So if God had not spoken, we could never have understood his mind or his saving purpose in the gospel. But God has spoken! His word has come down to us. Consider Isaiah 55, verses 10-11: 'As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth:

it will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.'

Thus God has clothed his thoughts in words. Just as at this moment you know what I am thinking because I am speaking, so we know God's thoughts because he has put them into words. He has communicated the thoughts of his mind by the words of his mouth, supremely in his incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, but also in his written word, which bears witness to Christ.

Thank God for the Bible! It is rightly called 'the Word of God' in and through which God has disclosed his mind and revealed to us his message for the world.

#### *b) The gospel focuses on Christ.*

You remember what Paul wrote to Timothy: 'You know...how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 3:14,15).

That is, the Bible is essentially a book of salvation. Its chief purpose is to teach us the way of salvation. And since salvation is by grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone, Scripture focuses on Christ crucified, risen and reigning, and urges us to put our trust in him as our Saviour.

Jesus was himself quite clear about this. 'The Scriptures bear witness to me', he said. Again, 'Moses wrote about me.' And 'he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (Luke 24:27,44). So then, as we read the Scriptures, we must look for Christ. As the great 5th century church father Jerome wrote, 'ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ'. Conversely, knowledge of Scripture is knowledge of Christ.

This explains why we love the

Bible. Evangelical believers are sometimes accused of being 'bibliolaters', 'Bible-worshippers'; but this is slander! We do not worship the Bible. We worship the Christ of the Bible, and we love it because it focuses on him. For example, there may well be a man in this assembly who is in love. In consequence, you carry with you in your wallet a picture of your beloved. And sometimes, when no-one is looking, you take her picture out of your pocket and give it a surreptitious kiss. But kissing the picture is a poor substitute for the real thing! Just as you love the picture because it speaks to you of her, so we love the Bible because it speaks to us of him, of Christ!

But if we love the Bible because we love Christ, others love neither. On the contrary, they are hostile to Christ. So if in our evangelism we focus faithfully on Christ, on the authentic Christ of the biblical witness, we are bound to suffer for our testimony. What is it, then, about the gospel of Christ which arouses people's hostility? There seem to be three main causes.

The first concerns the uniqueness of the gospel of Christ. In our increasingly pluralistic cultures our insistence on Jesus as the only saving name causes great offence, and I fear that the offence will increase as pluralism spreads.

Secondly, there is the freeness of the gospel of Christ. Proud human beings would give anything to be able to earn their salvation, or at least contribute to it. To be told that it is a non-contributory gift, absolutely free and utterly undeserved, is extremely humiliating to people's arrogant self-confidence. This is the stumbling block of the cross.

Thirdly, the high moral standards of the gospel of Christ are another

stumbling block. People love their sinful ways and want to be left alone in them. They resent the gospel call to holiness and to surrender to Jesus as Lord.

If then we are faithful to Christ in these ways (affirming the uniqueness and the freeness and the high ethical standards of the gospel), we are sure to suffer for it. Indeed, if we compromised less, we would undoubtedly suffer more.

With regard to the content of the gospel, then, we affirm that the gospel comes from God and focuses on Christ. In these ways the Bible gives the evangelist's message its content.

## **2. The Bible gives the evangelist's message its authority**

The word 'authority' is increasingly distasteful to many people today. They are looking for freedom (they say), not authority, and they assume that authority and freedom are mutually incompatible, which they are not. For it is not in discarding the yoke of Christ that we find rest, but in submitting to it.

Ever since the 1960s the world has been in revolt against every authority figure, against the authority of the State, the church, the school, the family, the Bible and the Pope. Yet it is a psychological fact that adults, like adolescents, crave the very authority they resent. Whatever people may say to the contrary, human beings are longing for a word of authority, for a word they can trust. And the only word which is unconditionally trustworthy is not a human word, but the Word of God.

So authentic evangelists are not apologetic about the gospel. On the contrary, they believe it to be truth

from God and they proclaim it with clarity, conviction and courage. In our post-modern era, in which the very possibility of truth is being denied, it is wonderfully refreshing to sense the strong assurance of the biblical authors, and to communicate their message with their authority to the world. Wise evangelists stick to the Bible for their message because there is authority in God's Word.

Yet in saying this, I have made it sound a bit too simple. Honesty compels me to add two important qualifications about the Word of God.

*a) The Word of God does not include everything we would like to know.*

We human beings are restlessly inquisitive. We demand to have answers to all our questions. But God has not revealed everything to us. In this respect Deuteronomy 29:29 is a very important text for us to know and to remember: 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us, and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law.'

Truth is here divided into two other categories—on the one hand 'the secret things,' which belong to God, and on the other hand 'the revealed things,' which belong to us. In other words, some truths have indeed been revealed (we would not know them otherwise), while other truths have not been revealed, but have been kept secret by God. For this reason Christian believers are an unusual combination of the dogmatic and the agnostic—dogmatic about those truths which have been plainly revealed, and agnostic about those things which have not. About the revealed truths, it is right to say 'we know', and to proclaim them with

authority. About the secret things, however, it is right to say 'we don't know', and to be willing to handle them tentatively.

Indeed, many of our problems arise from a failure to observe this distinction. It is equally foolish to allow our dogmatism to trespass into the secret things and our agnosticism into the revealed things. Among us evangelical Christians, the former is the commoner fault. That is, we tend to be overly dogmatic, more so than Scripture itself permits, and then we cause offence by our arrogance. We need to remember the modesty of the apostles. The apostle John wrote of our future state that 'what we will be has not yet been made known' (1 Jn. 3:2), while the apostle Paul wrote: 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror...Now I know in part...' (1 Cor. 13:12). If two of the leading apostles acknowledged their partial ignorance, it is only right that we should do the same.

I confess that I would love to see among us both more evangelical confidence in what God has revealed and more evangelical humility before what God has kept secret. To maintain this distinction in our evangelism would commend our gospel for its honesty.

*b) The Word of God needs to be interpreted.*

To be sure, we believe in what the 16th century Reformers called the 'perspicuity' of Scripture, namely that Scripture has a transparent or see-through quality. But they were referring to the way of salvation through Christ by faith. That is as plain as day in Scripture. Even the uneducated, even little children, can understand and believe the gospel. But not everything in Scripture is

equally perspicuous. Peter confessed that some things in Paul's letters were 'hard to understand' (2 Pet. 3:16). So if one apostle could not always understand another apostle, it would hardly be modest for us to claim that we can!

The main reason why some parts of Scripture may be obscure concerns the problem of culture. God did not shout culture-free truths out of a clear blue sky. On the contrary, he revealed himself within the particular cultures of the human authors, and these may be alien to us in ours. Indeed, one of the glories of divine revelation is that God condescended to speak through human languages and cultures. No word of God was spoken in a cultural vacuum. Every word of God was spoken in a cultural context.

In consequence, we cannot evade the task of building bridges between the ancient world in its cultures and the cultures of the modern world. I beg you not to resist this task, this sweat of interpretation and application. We need to repent of our tendency to evangelical laziness, behaving as if Scripture would yield up its treasures to those who do not dig for them. We need both to explore the Word of God and to cry to the Holy Spirit for his illumination. As God said to Daniel, 'Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard...' (Dan. 10:12). Humility and industry, prayer and study, go together.

So then, although not everything has been revealed, and although what has been revealed is not always easy to grasp, yet Scripture has a unique authority in evangelism. We come to it with confidence. We study it with painstaking care. We humble

ourselves before it and pray for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. We determine to proclaim its sacred teaching with conviction. I sometimes wonder if anything is more necessary for the health and growth of the church in our day than a recovery of conscientious biblical preaching, by both evangelists and pastors.

### **3. The Bible gives the evangelist's message its power**

It is important to distinguish between authority and power. In the context of evangelism 'authority' is largely subjective (the conviction with which we preach), whereas 'power' is objective (the effect which God's Word has on those who hear it). And true gospel preaching combines authority and power. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, 'our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction' (1 Thess. 1:5). Thus it is the Holy Spirit who gives us both conviction and power in our evangelism. We long that our message, which is often spoken in great human weakness, should be carried home with divine power to the mind, heart, conscience and will of the hearers. There is power in the gospel. I trust we can all echo Paul's resounding affirmation: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...' (Rom. 1:16).

Scripture itself emphasizes the power of God's Word by the use of rich imagery. The Word of God is like fire; it burns up rubbish. It is like a hammer; it breaks the rock in pieces. It is like seed; it germinates and bears fruit. It is like food; it nourishes us. It is like good pasture in which the sheep may safely graze.

And above all it is like a sword, for 'the sword of the Spirit...is the Word of God' (Eph. 6:17).

Never, then, should we separate the Word and the Spirit. Some Christians have great confidence in the Holy Spirit, but neither study nor expound the Word of God. Others are great students of the Word (our desk is piled high with study books!), but we seldom if ever fall on our knees, crying to God for the light and power of the Holy Spirit. Why must we always polarize? Why separate what God has joined?

Because the Bible is the Word of God, we should read it as we read no other book, on our knees, in prayerful humility before God, looking to him for light. But because the Bible is the Word of God through the words of the human authors, we

should also read it as we read every other book, paying careful attention to both text and context. The double authorship of the Bible demands this double approach to the Bible.

Our topic has been that 'the evangelist's message is Bible-based'. Evangelism without the Bible is inconceivable, even impossible. For without the Bible the evangelist's message lacks content, authority and power. It is the Bible which gives our message its content (Christ crucified and risen), its authority (so that we proclaim it with deep conviction) and its power (as the Spirit reinforces the Word).

This is the Trinitarian shape of all authentic evangelism. In it the Word of God focuses on the death and resurrection of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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# Amsterdam 2000

## The Evangelist Works with the Local Church

### Paul Negrut

**Keywords:** Church, organization, body, evangelism, people of God, history, eschatology, mission, worship, priesthood of all believers, gifts

#### 1. Introduction

Fifteen years ago, in September 1985, Dr. Billy Graham visited Romania and preached in my church. It was a historical event in my life and in the life of the Romanian believers. In spite of serious restrictions imposed by the Communist authorities of that time, there were about 60,000 people in the auditorium, on the streets and on the rooftop of the surrounding build-

ings. It took all our loudspeakers of the church to be placed on the trees and the surrounding buildings in order for the crowd to hear the message of salvation in Christ (the healing of the blind man Bartimaeus—Mark 10:46-52). Even today there are people who ask to be baptized in our churches as a result of that event. That September evening, these people were in the crowd and accepted Christ as their Lord and Saviour. After years of struggles and hesitations, they are still aware of the decision they made to follow Jesus, and realize the need to join a local church. Somehow, in their minds there is a clear association of the message of salvation with the local church.

My message today is about the relationship between the evangelist and the local church. I do believe that such a topic has both theological and practical implications for the contemporary church. However, instead of a sociological, pragmatic, and prescriptive approach to this issue, in this presentation I will focus on some theological aspects concerning

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the church, evangelism and the relationship between them. It is my belief that a clear theology generates clear praxiology.

## 2. The Nature of the Church

Although, since Schleiermacher, some have accepted the idea that the church is 'a society which originates only through free human action and which can only through such action continue to exist', or that the church is a 'communion or association relating to religion or piety', it can be argued that the church is not simply a human institution at a horizontal level (like a trade union, an association of fishermen, or a local club).

The being of the church is closely related to the being of God, of men and of the world. Using New Testament language, one can affirm that the church is simultaneously a divine-human organism and a historical-eschatological community.

### *a) The Church is a divine and human organism.*

The divine dimension of the church is given by Christ who is the Head of the Body and by the Holy Spirit who is the life of the Body. Therefore, the apostle Paul could say to the Colossians: 'And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in all things he may have the preeminence' (Col. 1:18; cf. Eph. 4:15). The human dimension is constituted by saved sinners who are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body as members. The apostle Paul affirms: 'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it' (1 Cor. 12:27), due to the fact that 'by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body' (1 Cor. 12:13).

The body metaphor teaches the headship relation between Christ

and believers in a clear ecclesial, corporate setting and not as isolated believers or disjointed members. The source of everything in the body is Christ, the head and the life giving Spirit. The glory and the strength of the church resides in the Head and the Spirit. The weakness and the frailty of the church resides in the members. However, there is a relation between the Body and the Head. The Head is not without a Body and the Body is not without the Head. Yet it must be underlined that the Head and the Body do not share the same prerogatives. The Head is divine, infallible and all-powerful, while the members of the Body are human, fallible and weak. Some are inclined, however, to believe that since the church is the Body of Christ, whatever is true about the Head is true also about the members of the Body in its institutional structures. The risk of such an approach is to develop a sort of triumphalistic institutional ecclesiology with dramatic consequences for praxiology.

The New Testament analogy of the body makes a clear distinction between the Person of Christ and his Body, the church. Christ is declared to be the Saviour of the Body (Eph. 5:23). The body receives its nurture and unity from the head (Col. 2:19). The Body is to grow and mature in every respect in him who is the Head (Eph. 4:15).

Alternatively, some believe that the church is simply a voluntary human organization with religious purposes on horizontal level. Consequently, the church is not an essential part of the Christian life: to belong to a local church or not is an optional matter. Since, salvation is a personal relation with Christ, belonging to a local church is a secondary issue.

The metaphor of the body offers a clear vertical dimension to the church. Believers are personally and corporately 'members of Christ himself' (I Cor. 6:15). Moreover, the church is Christ's instrument in this world: 'He put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all' (Eph. 1:22-23).

The understanding of the church as a simultaneous human-divine organism offer a clear perspective on evangelism. Thus, evangelism is not an additional work to the being of the church, but its very mode of being. It would be difficult to biblically substantiate a non-salvific relation between Christ and the Holy Spirit, on the one hand, and the lost world, on the other. If that is true, the presence of the New Testament church in this world must be evangelistic. Speaking about evangelists we have in mind simultaneously all the believers and the specially gifted believers in the ministry of evangelism. In both senses of the term, the evangelist is not and cannot be an isolated member of the body in his/her private relation with Christ. This aspect is further emphasized by the historical-eschatological dimension of the church.

*b) The Church is simultaneously a historical-eschatological community.*

Another analogy the apostle Paul uses to explain the mystery of the church was drawn from the Old Testament idea of the people of God. Schnackenburg argues that in Hebrew thought, the people constituted a whole, a corporate entity to the extent that the individual was perceived to be involved in the future of the entire community, even in a

supra-temporal way. As with their Hebrew predecessors, a corporate personality characterizes the new people of God, the community of those who trusted in the risen Christ. Behind the establishment of this new people of God was the reality of the risen Christ, 'who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good' (Titus 2:14).

This new reality is a historical community of concrete living persons in the flesh, living in time and space. Yet, it must be emphasized that although the church lives in this world is not of this world, it is an eschatological community with its gaze fixed on the Parousia. Moreover, the historical people of God are simultaneously citizens of their lands and 'citizens of heaven'. In other words, the church is part of this age and the age to come, history and eschatology.

The simultaneity of history and eschatology in the life of the church underlines also, the simultaneity of its historical and eschatological mandate. The historical mandate is 'Go into all the world' (Mark 16:15), while the eschatological mandate is 'Come you blessed of my Father' (Matt. 25:34). Although the life of the church is multifaceted and needs a careful study, it could be argued here, in general terms, that the dynamic of the church is determined by the relation between 'Go' and 'Come,' or between missions and worship. Historically speaking, some have over-emphasized missions to the detriment of worship, while others have emphasized worship to the detriment of missions. In other words, some 'Come' but never 'Go', while others always 'Go' and never 'Come'. A balanced church empha-

sizes both worship and missions.

The interplay of the divine-human and historical-eschatological dimensions of the church provides a theological frame of reference for the relation between evangelism and local church. Evangelism is the way of life of a worshipping community. The evangelist is not a lonely ranger on earth, but a member of the ecclesial community. However, before we explore this aspect, it is important to look at the nature of evangelism.

### 3. The Nature of Evangelism

The Bible uses a number of clues to explain evangelism, such as the proclamation of the gospel, making disciples, bearing witness to Jesus Christ, fishing for men, being the salt of the earth and the light of the world, bearing fruit that remain, being the aroma of Christ, the ministry of reconciliation and declaring the wonderful deeds of God. However, due to the complexity of the subject and the variety of methodologies, Christianity is far from having a universally accepted definition of evangelism. Moreover, J.I. Packer argues that:

There is confusion about evangelism in the modern church. The trouble comes from our habit of defining the activity institutionally and behaviourally rather than theocentrically and theologically. Some give the name of evangelism to any kind of meeting in which the leader works up an altar call of some sort, never mind what has or has not been affirmed before the calls comes. Others will equate evangelism with any activity that expresses goodwill to persons outside the church . . .

The following definitions of evangelism will illustrate this fact:

The 1918 Anglican definition affirms that:

To evangelize is so to present Christ Jesus

in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him as their Saviour, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church.'

One of the most quoted definitions of evangelism is D.T. Niles' 1951 definition: 'It is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food.' The context of the definition is this:

Evangelism is witness. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to get food. The Christian does not offer out of his bounty. He has no bounty. He is simply guest at his Master's table and 'as evangelist', he calls others too. The evangelistic relation is to be 'alongside of' not 'over against.' The Christian stands alongside of the non-Christian and points to the Gospel, the holy action of God. It is not his knowledge of God that he shares, it is to God Himself that he points. The Christian Gospel is the Word become flesh. This is more than and other than the Word become speech.

The 1977 Church Growth definition argues that:

To evangelize is to proclaim Jesus Christ as God and Saviour, to persuade people to become his disciples and responsible members of his church.

The Lausanne Covenant defines evangelism as follows:

To evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. Our Christian presence in the world is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God. In issuing the Gospel invitation we have no liberty to conceal the cost of discipleship. Jesus still calls all who would follow him to

deny themselves, take up their cross, and identify with his new community. The results of evangelism include obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church and responsible service in the world.

George Hunter gives the following definition of evangelism in his 1979 volume, *The Contagious Faith*:

Evangelism is what *we* do to help make the Christian faith, life and mission a live option to undisciplined people, both outside and inside the congregation. Evangelism is also what *Jesus Christ* does through the church's *kerygma* (message), *koinonia* (fellowship), and *diakonia* (service) to set people free. Evangelism happens when the *receiver* (receptor, respondent) turns (1) to Christ, (2) to the Christian message and ethic, (3) to a Christian congregation, and (4) to the world, in love and mission—in *any order*.

Delos Miles in his book, *Introduction to Evangelism*, gives the following definition:

Evangelism is being, doing and telling the gospel of the kingdom of God, in order that by the power of the Holy Spirit persons and structures may be converted to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

And finally, L.A. Drummond defines evangelism as:

A concerted effort in the power of the Holy Spirit to confront unbelievers with the truth about Jesus Christ and the claims of our Lord (Acts 2:22-24, 31) with a view to leading unbelievers into repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) and thus into the fellowship of His church so they may grow in the Spirit.

From the perspective of the relation between the evangelist and the local church, it can be argued that in spite of different theologies of evangelism enshrined in these definitions, there are some common trends:

First, the role of the local church in evangelism is being perceived almost exclusively as the place where the converts should be directed for fel-

lowship and discipleship after evangelism, and not as the agency that actually does evangelism. Secondly, evangelism is defined either in impersonal or individualistic terms and not in corporate terms. And finally, evangelism is defined in the context of the kingdom of God and lordship of Christ with no clarification regarding the relation between the kingdom and the church.

Moreover, due to the fact that some fail to understand the relation between the local and universal church or between what has been referred to as visible and invisible church, there are evangelists with no clear church affiliation and accountability, and churches with no commitment to evangelism. Additionally, there is an urgent need to distinguish between post-denominationalist type of evangelism and inter-church cooperation type of evangelism. A coherent theology of church and evangelism could avoid some of the contemporary issues in this area.

Dr. L.A. Drummond has made significant steps in this direction in his book *The Word of the Cross: A Contemporary Theology of Evangelism*. Evangelism is explored both theologically and practically. From a theological perspective, evangelism is rooted in the being of the Triune God. The trinitarian perspective on evangelism not only re-emphasizes the richness of the trinitarian gospel, but also offers the perfect ontological foundation for a simultaneous personal and corporate evangelism. Unfortunately, Dr. Drummond does not extend his trinitarian definition of evangelism to the people of God who are simultaneously, personally and corporately called to evangelism.

A definition of evangelism that is both trinitarian and ecclesial could

be:

A concerted effort of the people of God simultaneously personal and corporate in the power of the Holy Spirit to confront unbelievers with the truth about Jesus Christ and the claims of our Lord (Acts 2:22-24, 31) with a view to leading unbelievers into repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) and thus into the fellowship of His Church so they may grow in Spirit. (M. Erickson, *Christian Theology*)

#### 4. Local church and evangelism

If the church is simultaneously a divine-human organism and a historical-eschatological community, then evangelism is a mode of being of the church. The church was not created to be an end in itself, but to perpetuate Christ's ministry to the world. Erickson argues that the function of the church is fourfold. *First*, evangelism which is an imperative of the Great Commission: the church exists to make disciples of all peoples. *Second*, to edify believers through fellowship, teaching and the practice of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. *Third*, worship—praise and exaltation of the triune God. Worship should always precede evangelism and edification. And *fourth*, to demonstrate a social concern for believers and non-believers alike.

Assuming that few would deny the fact that there is divine-human cooperation in the spreading of the gospel, it must be underlined that evangelism is also simultaneously historical and eschatological. Not only that the church is the body of Christ (personal and corporate), but the believers are also called to be a kingdom of priests (I Peter 2:9). In this kingdom the individual is not swallowed up by the crowd and the

community is not threatened by individual members. Although limited and imperfect, the ecclesial community is a historical mirror of the Trinity. The 'one' and the 'many' co-exist in harmony. This is beautifully illustrated in the Book of Acts through the words 'all...and each and everyone'. The relation between the 'one' and the 'many' in the theology of Acts avoids both individualism and collectivism.

Another aspect of concern is the balance between the 'priesthood of all believers' and special callings according to the gift(s) of the Spirit. Some may be inclined to downplay the role of the 'many' priesthood believers in favour of the 'one(s)' specially gifted evangelists; or alternatively to belittle the ministry of the gifted 'one(s)' in favour of the ministry of the 'many'. When such things occur, not only is there tension in the church, but the witness of the whole body is affected in a negative way. In such cases, some gifted believers in the area of evangelism may consider the independent route as the best alternative. However attractive this model might be, it must be observed that the apostles did not abandon the church in times of crisis. Rather, they worked under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to correct the distorted theology that generated the crisis, in order to heal the church.

Therefore, bearing in mind the sinfulness and limitations of human and historical dimension of the church, there must be both personal and corporate accountability to Christ. This may sound anachronistic, bearing in mind the fact that the culture of post-modernity breeds individualism and relativistic ethics. Regardless the pressure of history, the church must constantly maintain the balance between history and eschatology,

between this age and the age to come. Consequently, it can be argued that biblical evangelism is both historical and eschatological. The Manila Manifesto of July 1998 argues that:

Every Christian congregation is a local expression of the Body of Christ and has the same responsibilities. It is both 'a holy priesthood' to offer God the spiritual sacrifices of worship and 'a holy nation' to spread abroad his excellences in witness (1 Peter 2:5, 9). The church is thus both a worshipping and a witnessing community, gathered and scattered, called and sent. Worship and witness are inseparable.

As a pastor and evangelist, I am aware of the fact that pastors, teachers, evangelists and missionaries and local churches are not perfect, yet. However, there is the promise that Jesus 'gave himself for her (the church), that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but

that she should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:25-27). Such an eschatological perspective is calling upon us to commit ourselves afresh to our triune God, his church, and the Great Commission.

## 5. Conclusion

Speaking about the relation between the church and evangelism, the Lausanne Covenant affirms:

We affirm that Christ sends His redeemed people into the world as the Father sent Him, and that this calls for a similar deep and costly penetration of the world. We need to break our ecclesiastical ghettos and permeate non-Christian society. In the church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary. World evangelization requires the whole church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world. The church is at the very centre of God's cosmic purpose and is His appointed means of spreading the gospel.

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# Transcultural Theology and Contextualisation

Richard Howell

**Keywords:** Culture, truth, pluralism, transcendence, communication, revelation, mission, contextualisation, conversion, syncretism, hermeneutics, morality

## Introduction

Evangelical theology addresses the issue of truth that transcends culture and serves the church in understanding the gospel and communicating it in multiple contexts. As a rule faith precedes theological reflection. Yet personal assurance of faith requires confirmation by experience and reflection. By nature it is thus open to validation in the sphere of polemic pertaining to the universal validity of the truth. Theology deals with the universality of the truth of the revelation of the triune God in creation and in Jesus Christ. God's nature transcends all cultural variables and racial and caste prejudices and does not change.

Evangelical Christianity believes in the transcultural realm of reality and its interaction with human cultural

factors. This results in a faith and conduct that have their source in transcendence. But since the context keeps changing, evangelical theology would be inadequate if it is only a repetition of the past. For what is in fact communicated and understood today can be very unlike its original meaning. But evangelical theology would be heretical if it is only creative and forfeits its timeless biblical message. This timeless biblical message which is transcultural must engage itself with contemporary perplexities and culturally rooted questions.

Evangelicalism today must enhance its dialogue between the Scripture as a relevant and revealed Word of God and the contextual issues and needs of the postmodern secular society and a world of plurality of living religions. The imperative of world evangelization and the urgency to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to every person, require evangelical theology to articulate a theology of mission and evangelism that does not tend to be culturally and ethnically imperialistic. Contextualisation is a missiological imperative.

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## I. The Communications of the Triune God

Evangelical theology has affirmed that the knowledge of the transcendent God is conceivable because it proceeds from the Triune God and is due to the working of his Spirit. From eternity transcending the boundaries of space and time, meaningful communication was prevailing between the three divine persons: Holy Father, Holy Word, and Holy Spirit. God is neither an impersonal energy nor non-rational. Rational meaning and purpose are prior to creation.

God's eternal Logos not only gave meaning to the things in the world but also gave purpose to the course of events in history. Jesus Christ entered history as an actual demonstration of transcendent love. Jesus' teaching originated, not with himself, but with God the Father (John 7:15-16). The conceptual content of Jesus' teaching in history harmonized with the Father in eternity. Jesus taught that divine revelation could be communicated in human concepts and words (John 17:8). The teachings of Jesus were not restricted to his time alone but were time related. 'Heaven and earth will pass away', Jesus said, 'but my words will never pass away.' (Mark 13:31)

Jesus' teaching communicated reliable information pertaining to what is and normative principles regarding what ought to be. In the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, there is no need to distance propositional and relational truth or to separate the conceptual from experience. The teachings of Jesus have demonstrated that God's truth can be communicated in human, culturally influenced categories and languages.

Like the message of Christ, the apostles' messages originated with God the Father, came through human concepts and words and were kept from error by the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

## 2. Trinity the Model for Missions

A constructive engagement with the issues which impact upon the evangelistic work of the church requires an understanding of the nature and work of the Triune God as Father Son and Holy Spirit. Gerald H. Anderson, writes, 'A major confusion in missions today comes from the inadequacy of the various attempts to formulate the theology of mission in recent years ... from the culture-centered, man-centered, revelation-centered, eschatology-centered, kingdom-centered, Bible-centered, church-centered, and Christ-centered points of view.'<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the relativism of postmodernity and the plurality of religions, the question of the finality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ has to be presented with new sharpness. But this question can be correctly answered within the framework of a fully and explicit Trinitarian doctrine of God; the same is true of the relation between what God is doing in the mission of the church and what God is doing in the secular events of history. Mission deals with the realities of the life of humanity and helps understand what God is doing in the secular movements and changes which are taking place every where. This is possible through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church and

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, 'Theology of Mission among Protestants in the Twentieth Century,' in *The Theology of Christian Mission*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), p. 15

the life of the believer, which causes him to trust the creative and providential power of the Father to direct all things towards the glorifying of the Son.

We are invited to become, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, participants in the Son's loving obedience to the Father. All things are created that they may be summed up in the Son of God. All history is directed towards that end. All creation has this as its goal. The Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of the Son, is given as the foretaste of that consummation, as the witness to it.

### 3. The Formulation of the Theological Questions.

Genuine inquiry begins by defining the issue to be researched and becoming aware of its significance. The development of theological concerns and the formulation of theological questions are closely associated with the process of Christian self-definition. Christian identity emerges as an essential component of the whole process of contextualizing with clearly marked theological pursuits. Kwame Bediako writes:

The ethnocentrism of a large part of missionary work in Africa not only prevented sufficient understanding of African religious tradition, but also led to a theological misapprehension of the nature of the Christian Gospel itself. African theology in the post-missionary era, therefore, is as much a response to missionary underestimation of the value of African pre-Christian religious tradition, as it is an African theological response to the specific and more enduring issues of how the Christian Gospel relates to African culture. Thus modern African Theology emerges as a theology of African Christian identity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992), p. xvii

The motivation for diligent theological reflection and action often comes from traumatic experiences of life. People need to feel poverty and powerlessness, racial and caste discrimination in order to appreciate Latin American Liberation theology and Indian Dalit Theology. Lewis and Demarest write, 'Stimulation of thought may come from the whole range of theologies, religions, philosophies, new consciousness groups, cults, and the occult. Creative contextualizations of the Christian faith may come from any cultural horizon in any country in the world. An objective survey of varied perspectives helps students become aware of their own presupposition.'<sup>3</sup> Contextualisation is not a private or purely individual task. It is the responsibility of the local church and must be undertaken within the framework of the believing community. The Holy Spirit illuminates the individual interpreter within the context of the church. The body of Christ has an historical dimension. The historical traditions of the church have great value in interpreting the realities of our modern existence.

### 4. The Need for Cultural Sensitivity

Communicators of the gospel have often underestimated the cultural factors in communication. Some have been insensitive to the cultural thought patterns and behaviour of those to whom the gospel is proclaimed. Similar words, like salvation, sin and heaven, convey different images and meaning in the

<sup>3</sup> Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Academie Books), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), Vol 1 p. 38

minds of the hearers. When the communicator brings with him alien ways of thinking and behaviour or attitudes of superiority, paternalism or preoccupation with material things, effective communication is hindered.

Culture in contemporary language is a modern word. It appears in the seventeenth century and was first established in eighteenth century Europe. The *Sanskrit* dictionary gives an equivalent for cultivation, but not for culture—except perhaps the artificial compound of *vidyanusevanam*—cultivation of science. A *visyanusevin* is simply a scholar, an erudite, somebody engaged in learning, a *pandita*.

The notion of culture is as wide as its vagueness. It is generally understood as a sum total of values by which a particular human group lives. It represents a general worldview. There is one human nature but many cultures. Cultures are not static entities but they undergo change. Pannikar writes, 'Each culture begins with, or at least develops, a vision of reality. The principle enlivening this vision is what we call religion. The meeting of culture when it goes deep enough is always a religious encounter. Ultimate values are at stake.'<sup>4</sup> Culture is not an accident of human life, which we may change at will. The problem of inculturation is an anthropological and theological question. Culture is something belonging to the very nature of man created in the image and likeness of God. Any cross-cultural communication of the gospel must take cultural realities into account.

Conversion brings about cultural

change. The convert accepts a set of beliefs, which articulate a vision of the world which is certainly different from the previous one. At the same time a convert carries with him a number of conscious and unconscious archetypes, attitudes, reactions, which serve as a factor of change in both directions. The Word of God changes the direction of culture and transforms it. The life style of the Christian community of faith will be different from the wider community. It will reflect both the universality of the gospel and the particularity of the human culture. Nicholls writes, 'The gospel is never guest of any culture; it is always its judge and redeemer.'<sup>5</sup> The gospel does not exalt one culture over another, but instead it evaluates all culture according to the revealed criterion of truth and righteousness.

Theological syncretism denies the finality of revelation as recorded in the Bible in terms of its historical and verbal truth. It assumes that all theology is culturally conditioned. It confuses the transcultural with the cultural. It reduces all theology to the storytelling of one's experience and faith. The ministers of God's word must address the difficulties raised by different cultural, conceptual, and linguistic influences on time. The challenging task for theology is to reflect how the transcultural truth of the saving act of God in Jesus Christ relates to the unavoidable issues and questions which arise from the Christian's cultural and historical contexts and present a coherent worldview and way of life.

<sup>4</sup> Raimundo Pannikar in 'Indic Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism from the Perspective of Interculturation', *Religious Pluralism*, ed K.Pathil (Delhi: ISPCK, 1991), p. 268.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver: Regent College Bookstore, 1995: First ed, 1979), p. 15

## 5. The Hermeneutical Task

The Bible is the authentic and trustworthy record of this unique and saving revelation. Therefore our theology must be grounded in the revealed Scriptures, for they carry supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. Nicholls writes,

The ground for a theology of mission demands a further step in knowing how to understand the Scriptures in their own historic and cultural context and to be able to rightly interpret them for the context in which we live. This is a hermeneutical task involving the careful exegesis of the Scriptures and interpreting them for our context. This is a dialogical process between text and context. The context raises issues, which are addressed to the text which in turn raises further issues not consciously addressed by the context but which are relevant to the context. This dialogue is not an endless cycle of debate, nor is it simply a clear linear interpretation. It is better to understand it as an upward spiral, involving both uncertainty and certainty but ever leading to a truer knowledge of God. It is a teleological process culminating in the personal knowledge of God, which is eternal life (John 17:3). Only as our horizon of understanding the conflict merges with God's horizon of revelation does our theological task become clear and have direction.<sup>6</sup>

The objective-subjective principle of distancing from and identification with the text involves the interpreter's encounter and response with both the Word of God and with his own culture and that of the receptor. It presupposes a two way process of distancing oneself from the text—involving critical study and reflection and then fusion or identification with the text—and calls for commitment and obedience.

The same two way process is

essential in the interpreter's encounter and response with the receptor of the Word and with his culture. This is the task of contextualising theology, and it is set in the framework of the church's mission in the world. Its goal is cross-cultural communication for evangelism and service. The comprehension of biblical and systematic theology is required as an authoritative base from which to contextualise theology.

The distancing must be followed by identification with the receptor's culture. The incarnation is the absolute model of this identification involving both renunciation and identification. There will be no real cross-cultural communication apart from this identification. It begins as an attitude of the mind and leads to the practice of costly servanthood (Philp. 2: 5-8). This is the missionary calling of the church, the price to be paid for true contextualization.

## 6. The Transcultural Theology and Morality.

The natural laws of creation and essential humanness are not modified by cultural differences. However much the universal requirements of the Ten Commandments (which were written by God on human hearts, given by Moses, and repeated in the New Testament) may be distorted, they are universal imperatives. They uphold universality of moral accountability, of failure to attain the moral ideal, and of divine condemnation. These principles hold true without respect of persons for all nations and peoples in the world. Although there are varied perspectives as relativists have emphasized, a universal ability to know some objective truth about cre-

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Nicholls, 'Gospel and Culture', unpublished paper. p. 4

ation and the creator is implied in natural theology. Many of the first scientists worked creatively because they were guided by the conviction that 'the enduring rationality of the cosmos made sense only so long as the world, its laws and its constants were given in the deepest ontological sense'.<sup>7</sup>

### **7. The Transcultural Theology and Cross-Philosophical Communication**

A transcultural theology in a pluralistic postmodern world makes cross-philosophical communication possible. When others dispute the truth of Christianity, can Christians discover any points of contact on which both can agree? As Christians begin conversations with non-Christians, are there any common principles of sound thought or valid argument to which both can appeal? There is a common ground in metaphysical dependence on God and need for acceptance by God. At Athens, the apostle Paul established the truth about God as creator and as the giver of the moral law by recovering distorted common ground in the writings of one of the Stoic pantheists' own poets. Paul's use of the common ground did not make the Athenians independent of God or autonomous. It made them more responsible for what they knew.

### **8. The Transculture Theology and Cross-Culture Communication**

A transcultural theology by common grace in a pluralistic world provides

the basis for cross-cultural communication. We must understand the distinctive content of revelation in creation and should not confuse it with redemptive revelation. In presenting the gospel, we must not fail to establish cultural points of contact with non-Christians, otherwise we will be isolated from the very people we seek to reach. This may also result in one-directional communication and insensitivity to people's needs. And the Christian message may appear to be meaningless and irrelevant.

Contextualization is a missiological necessity. Christian missionaries need revelation in creation for points of contact with people in every culture on earth. But since revelation in creation is law, not gospel, every missionary urgently needs to preach the good news of grace in Christ, not the message of salvation by works. The gospel is not suspended in air; it presupposes the order of nature and speaks to life everywhere in the world at its ultimate level.

Lewis and Demarest write, 'Not everything practiced in non-Christian cultures need be given up as people receive the perfect righteousness of Christ. All that evangelical missionaries need to ask people is to give up their sin. All the true and good elements of non-Christian cultures by common grace can be incorporated in a Christian worldview and way of life.'<sup>8</sup>

### **Conclusion**

We should present the truth of the redemption in Christ in varied ways to those who do not know they are God's moral and spiritual children. While witnessing to a diverse range

<sup>7</sup> Stanley L.Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 180

<sup>8</sup> Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, p. 88

of people in a pluralistic world, we need to review the many factors the Spirit uses to bring people to Christ. The example of Paul is commendable, who said,

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jew I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to regenerate sinners, and the primary task of every Christian

(including theologians) is to communicate the gospel to sinners. Our confidence is in the Holy Spirit, who has chosen to bring the world to Christ through his people's sowing and watering of the seed of God's transcultural truth. We are called to serve diligently and faithfully, but leave to God his work of redeeming, judging, and making new. The great commission and the spiritual condition of the lost should impel believers to minister to the unreached with a holy passion. The crucial causes of global evangelism, social justice, and family values must be our prime priorities. We must be willing to obtain necessary education to minister the transcultural gospel effectively and contextually in all cultures to every person.

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# Religious Pluralism and Dialogue in Evangelism: Evangelism and Human Rights

Elaine Storkey

**Keywords:** Culture, dialogue, human rights, racism, evangelism, engagement, pluralism, exclusivism, inclusivism, grace

## Introduction

There is no culture on the globe where the issue of other faiths is entirely absent for Christian evangelism. In some cultures this is the main issue facing those who would preach the gospel: how to do it in the context of other religious voices, especially when those voices are in a powerful or vociferous majority. In other cultures, the issue is hidden beneath the appearance of secular-

ism, where Christianity is lumped together with other world religions and the majority of the population sees itself as non-religious.

I had an experience of this recently in Britain when I was asked to be interviewed on a television programme with the BBC. During her briefing of me in the pre-broadcast discussion, the researcher discovered that I regularly worked for the BBC Religious Department.

'I don't know why they carry on making those programmes', she volunteered, 'They seem so irrelevant.' 'Really,' I asked, 'What's your position, then?' 'Oh, I don't have any position', she replied. 'I just don't believe that God exists.' I explained, of course, that this was indeed a position; in fact it formed the basis of a whole view of the world which would colour every value she had and every programme she made. 'Well, maybe', she insisted, 'But I'm just normal.'

In much of western culture some form of secular religious worldview has become dominant, and it decides what is real and true for the majority. For in any culture, normality is

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defined in relation to the prevailing worldview and that worldview is inevitably religious in nature.

### Old and New Religions

Globally, the world is constituted by old religions and new religions. Old religions are still very powerful, especially in non-western cultures. Islam is growing in Africa, the Middle East and in western Europe, especially in old Catholic cultures such as France. Christianity is flourishing in parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, but still dying in Europe; Hinduism is reasserting itself; Buddhism is becoming more and more attractive in the West; Sikhism is gaining more converts; Bahai, Confucianism, Animism and various forms of spiritism continue to flourish; almost every indigenous religion is gaining new confidence. Probably only Judaism is retrenching. It has, of course, become an important political force in the State of Israel, as Islam is a strong political force wherever it exists in a majority. But since Judaism is not an evangelistic religion it loses numbers elsewhere every year, to intermarriage and conversions.

Some faiths believe in a personal God—Christianity, Judaism and Islam are often put together as Semitic Religions. Others believe in many manifestations of God, or in many gods, as in Hinduism. Others, like Buddhism, do not focus on a faith in God but on a religious way of life. Indigenous religions have their own ancestral gods or their local forms of worship. Each major religion also has its subsections and regional derivations. Sects, cults and cultural adaptations exist in every faith.

But in addition to all these old reli-

gions, we have many new religious movements. In fact, in most of the major cities of the secularised West we would find a plethora of spiritual expressions competing for the heart and the attention of the population. Many of these are individualised, subjective, and 'quirky'. Many are secretive forms of Eastern mystic religions and contemporary New Age mythology. The majority of these faiths are highly experiential. Come with me, then, on a multi-faith tour of London. (And, for those who want to go out in the capital city of Holland, you will find something very similar in Amsterdam.)

*(Here followed a multi-faith description of London, incorporating traditional Anglicanism, Hara Krishna processions, Theosophy, Transcendental Meditation, Yoga, Hinduism, Islam, New Age spirituality shops, proselytising Islamic converts, Methodism, Levitation, Yogic flying, Natural Law, Sikhism, Paganism—Druidism, white witches, occultism. The tour ended with a large poster which decorates Picadilly Circus announcing 'Yesterday was yesterday. Live for the Present.')*

### How Do We Relate to those of Other Faiths?

It would be a mistake to assume that there is only one model for engagement. There is not. How we engage with our non-Christian neighbours depends largely on our context. I want to consider two different ways of engagement.

#### 1. To engage on issues of oppression and denial of human rights

In some cultures, the question of dialogue is an academic one.

Christians there are into survival mode, for they are being persecuted by other religions, and their greatest single challenge is faithfulness. For these brothers and sisters the typical mode of engagement is that of receiving persecution and oppression, witnessing the martyrdom of family members, and even facing their own death. The concept of dialogue is almost irrelevant here. Surviving as faithful servants of Christ overrides everything else.

Dialogue is a very pluralist concept. It occurs in those places where pluralism is a way of life—in contemporary western cultures, but also in older Asian cultures where Christianity has lived in a multi-faith context for all of its life. In cultures of oppression, pluralism is not on offer. In the Sudan, Saudi Arabia, parts of Nigeria, Pakistan, and many more places, Christians have to coexist with oppressive Islamic (and sometimes other) regimes who are not interested in any dialogue with them, only with the exercise and extension of Islam—even in law and political expression—because they believe this will please God. Yet, as Christians who understand the New Testament, and worship the Prince of Peace, we have to say that it is not pleasing to God. As St Paul found on the Damascus Road, God cannot be served by violence and bloodshed. Zealots who use persecution, torture, attempts at annihilation, coercion and oppression to spread their message are always wrong.

In these cases, the issue for the wider, global Christian community is to support brothers and sisters undergoing such persecution, to let their plight be known, and to call for the proper exercise of human rights. We have to go out of our own way to ensure that what God has given to

each person, namely the right to worship him, must not be denied by others. This means, of course, that we also must defend the rights of other faiths to worship. For God issues the call to each of us: 'Choose this day whom you shall serve.' It is our responsibility, and we stand accountable to God for the choices we make. The proper avenue for conversion is through faith, proclamation and Christian witness, not by manipulation, force or coercion.

This is pertinent to us, because Christian evangelism is often perceived as some form of racism. Jews, for example, accuse Christians of being anti-Semitic when they target Jews for evangelism. Asian people in Europe also often allege racism when their own Muslim or Hindu identity is challenged. This is an issue western Christians must face. For our cultures do not have a great record on racial equality. We are often accused of harbouring attitudes of white supremacy.

However, it is also easy to misunderstand the nature of oppression and human rights violation. I do not think that this is ever just a 'white' or colour issue. We have seen tyrannical outrages against many racial groups from those of identical skin colour. It is an issue about power. People who have power are often afraid of what might happen if it is taken from them. Many of those who have used it to their own ends fear retribution when power passes to the opposition. So, given the ubiquitous nature of human sin, those in power often find a way of reinforcing and maintaining it, even when others are silenced or violated.

Unfortunately, Christians are not exempt from this either. We can hide behind organisations and money, and not realize that they contain

people who are on a power trip, and who need to control others. This was never the way of Christ. I pray that Christians may be open to hear God on this, and be ready to relinquish power when it gets in the way of the gospel. We also need to recognize that we are called to defend the human rights of every people group. Whenever people are violated or oppressed by others, Christians should be speaking out on their behalf.

## 2. *To evangelise with courtesy and respect for other faiths*

Western Christians are to have a different approach to engagement with those who are themselves in a minority situation, whether they are Jews in the Diaspora, refugees to Western Europe and North America, immigrant groups and overseas visitors. It is important that courtesy and respect dominate the relationship. There is much fear that conversion to Christianity will erase the culture and ethnicity of those whose roots are elsewhere.

*(An example followed here about a visit to Israel and a series of seminars with Jewish rabbis on the question of 'What is a Jew?'. The argument from the Jewish side was that a Jew was anyone with a Jewish mother who had not become a Christian. So although it was possible, technically, to be Hindu Jew, it was not possible to be a Messianic Christian Jew. Although the Jewish people perceived the greatest political threat to come from their Middle Eastern Islamic neighbours, they perceived the greatest spiritual threat to their Jewish identity coming from Christianity.)*

When minority groups become religiously organised and assertive in

cultures of the North and West the concept of dialogue is of crucial importance. It is also important in cultures which are much more truly pluralist, e.g., in Hindu cultures, and in those where the gospel is being absorbed into indigenous religious situations. However, dialogue can never replace evangelism. It is a different process. The heart of the Christian gospel is that the Good News must be communicated. Dialogue is one of the processes whereby we can better understand how to do that.

## What is Dialogue?

I believe a number of features are involved in dialogue

1. A readiness to hear the other person. We come ready to have our assumptions about them challenged and to learn something new.
2. A willingness to be vulnerable. Christians often make the mistake of thinking that because the gospel is true, they themselves are always right, and those of other faiths are therefore wrong. Sometimes, we have to recognize that there are things we do not know about. We are not omniscient.
3. A preparedness to recognize what we have in common. Christians with a truly biblical theology will find that those of other faiths share many of our values and live in the same reality created by God. We should expect to find common areas.
4. A need to be sure about the basis for dialogue—both philosophical and theological. It is rooted in a biblical theology of creation, and a recognition of the universality of sin. It is not rooted in a belief

- that there are many ways to truth.
5. An openness about our own beliefs and commitment. People respect us less, not more, when we compromise our own commitments in order to be more acceptable to others.

### **A Theology of Engagement**

Whether or not Christians feel able to engage in dialogue is related to their overall theological position on engagement. Historically, there have been three main positions, often referred to as Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism.

#### **Pluralism**

Pluralism has traditionally espoused dialogue whole-heartedly. But that is often because dialogue is at the centre of their theology. It defines truth. For many pluralists, truth is a process. It is that which emerges through the process of listening to one another. It comes about in our multiple stories of faith, in their narration, dissembling, deconstruction and reconstruction. In fact, it would not be unfair to say that the only substantial theology here is a theology of dialogue, and that the central notion of truth of something is constructed, plural and, by implication, in the constant process of change.

There are many forms of pluralism. The old pluralism of people like John Hick, the philosopher, was essentially that of a secular rationalism. Although they maintained that there are many ways to truth, ultimately, human rationality decided between them. Now, however, rationalism has been dethroned and contemporary pluralism needs no arbiter. Who needs to decide? The old pluralism was not truly pluralist,

for it believed in the ultimate truth of human reason. Now pluralists accept that there are simply many truths. And of course, it is not a long step from the idea that there are many truths to the idea that there is no truth. Pluralism often disintegrates into relativism. And to say there is no truth is ultimately an absolutisation of indifference.

There are, of course, logical and epistemological problems with relativism. To start with, it cannot be articulated. What status does the statement, 'Everything is relative' have? If it is relative, then it has no universal import so can be largely ignored. If however, it is spoken with universal intent (which indeed it is) then it assumes the status of being absolute. In that case, it contradicts the very statement it is making. Yet, even though the relativist position is untenable, many hold it!

It is possible to be pluralist in an operational or political sense—that is, to acknowledge that many views about God exist and are institutionalised in organisations—without being pluralist in a theological sense. Once we separate the two, Christians can learn to handle the issue of coexistence peacefully, without being afraid of affirming relativism.

#### **Exclusivism**

For good reasons, then, evangelicals have not been known for their enthusiasm for pluralism. By contrast, they are mostly to be found in the very opposite camp, amongst the exclusivists. The position here is that we should not accept the right to existence of other religious views, let alone try to work with them. For not only are non-Christian religions fundamentally in error, they are also

dangerous. They point the way to God, but it is the wrong way. So other religions are harmful, destructive, evil and idolatrous. They worship something other than God and they lead people deeply astray.

Clearly, from this perspective, dialogue is not only unlikely, it is also unprofitable. For what dialogue can light have with darkness? What engagement can the one true faith have with idol-worshippers? By even opening up the process of listening, we could be guilty of giving space to those forces of evil, which would utilise Christian goodwill for its own evil ends.

It is important to notice that this is precisely the position taken by fundamental Islamists. They are not interested in dialogue, because they alone are right and righteous in their worship of the one true God. I believe that the results of this approach are what we are witnessing in the world today. If, as evangelicals, we believe we can hold to an exclusivism whilst still being active for those of other faiths who are persecuted, we need to show some evidence of this.

### **Inclusivism**

Many more evangelicals are now identifying themselves as inclusivists, and again there are several expressions of this position. They would say that we cannot be exclusivist in every area of our theology. If we have a fully biblical theology of creation, sin and redemption, then that gives us much scope for dialogue and even for working together in some areas. For a theology of creation helps us to acknowledge that many other religions see God as Creator. God made the world, the skies, seas, animal kingdom, and ourselves as human

beings. Most religions see human personhood and identity as derivative. We rely entirely on the activity of God. Most other religions also see God as holy, and therefore see the call for human beings to reflect and emulate the holiness of God in the ways that we live. Our theology of creation leads us to expect that other religions will all have a positive view of creation ordinances—the family, for example, and good neighbour relations, and sometimes, even the stewardship of the earth.

A theology of sin also gives us scope for dialogue. For many other religions recognize and affirm that much of what goes on in our world is the result of sin. People harm each other. There is jealousy, greed, theft, adultery, malice, murder, power-mongering. Most religions feel the weight of sin heavily. Indeed, many Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs living in Europe and North America are perplexed why Christians seem to live so comfortably with sin in their midst. (I have been in more than one multi-faith meeting where it has fallen to the Muslims to support me in my rebuke to the media or advertising industry for implicit blasphemy against Christ. Whilst the liberal Christians have been silent, on pluralist grounds, the Muslims have spoken up, on the grounds that Jesus is one of their prophets.)

It is ultimately on the theology of redemption that the issue of dialogue faces its greatest difficulty. And here, although I hold an inclusivist position, I recognize that our grounds for dialogue are shaky. For we cannot maintain anything else other than there is salvation only in the name of Jesus. And how can people call upon that name unless they have heard? And how can they hear unless we proclaim the Good News?

Consequently, Christianity has always been a missionary religion, precisely because we believe that through Jesus alone do we have our sins forgiven, and a redemptive relationship with God and each other.

Yet, it is possible to hold that only through Christ can people be saved, and yet be agnostic about the relationship between the faithful believer of another faith, and the love of God. None of us knows the secrets of the human heart, or just how the Holy Spirit works in conviction and giving knowledge about God. This does not in any way water down the salvific work of Christ, for everything depends on the Cross. Nor does it justify any inactivity in Christian evangelism and witness. But it does urge the need for humility. And it also acknowledges that the love of God is bigger than we are, and the justice of God is beyond that of human beings.

Dialogue is therefore an important way forward for us to consider, as both preparing us for evangelism and in getting to know our non-Christian neighbours. But we should never forget that Christianity is a unique journey of faith, based on the love of God in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. At the heart of this journey is the centrality of grace.

I was recently involved in an inter-faith broadcast with the BBC World Service. The Jewish Rabbi and Islamic Professor and I were all answering questions sent in by listeners from all over the world. The discussion was courteous, good-humoured and pleasant until one question came up. It was about how we can identify the real believer from the counterfeit. We all agreed that it was by their fruits that we could know them. Then the Rabbi told us about the enormous weight of the

Law which had been given to the people of Israel, and how we would need to see some evidence of seriousness about living in accordance with God's norms and standards. The Muslim went through all the obligations to worship, the great holiness of God, the need to counter all forms of evil and infidelity, the importance of the moral law, and on and on. When it came to me, the presenter changed the question. 'What do Christians have to do, Dr Storkey?' I took a deep breath and explained that Christians did not have to do anything. We had to simply hold out empty hands to receive all that Christ had done for us. For we could not reach these standards of God's on our own. It was only through the grace of God in the work of Christ that we were acceptable.

The Islamic professor was horrified, and lectured me for many minutes on the way this would open the door for young people to do anything they wished. I had two attempts to reply, when the Rabbi finally came to my aid. Putting a hand on the Muslim's shoulder he said, 'My dear friend, you will have to accept what she says. You and I will never understand this. We are a Jew and a Muslim. But this grace is what Christians are all about. It is what makes Christianity different from every other religion.'

Dialogue, you see, had worked. This dear Jewish man now understood the heart of the gospel. And we have to leave it to him to make his own response to God. But dialogue can work for all of us, if we approach believers of other faiths with respect, courtesy, love and commitment. And if we truly know the power of God, and who it is that we believe, we do not need be afraid of listening to other people.

# **Fourth Japan Congress on Evangelism Declaration, June 30th, 2000**

## **The Church Responsible for Evangelizing 21st Century Japan Living Together in the Gospel of Reconciliation**

**Keywords:** Reconciliation, unity, creation, ecology, history, war, militarism, peace, forgiveness, family, church, society, hope

### **Introduction**

We are committed to the evangelical faith, and desire the advancement of the gospel. Seeking to increase this mutual understanding and cooperation among the churches, we have held three previous congresses on evangelism, sponsored by the Japan Evangelical Association (JEA). The first congress took place in 1974 in Kyoto. There we affirmed the biblical basis for our faith and the need to cooperate in evangelism. We made clear our existence as a group of people in Japan who seek to put into practice our biblical faith. Again, in 1982 the second congress was held in Kyoto. At that time we confirmed our conviction that evangelism is the church's core ministry, explored issues related to evangelism in Japan, and sought to develop answers and strategies concerning these issues. In 1991 the Third

Congress on Evangelism took place at Shiobara. There we focused not only on our local areas, but also the world, affirming that we must be involved in evangelism in Japan and also reach out to Asia and the rest of the world.

Building on the three previous congresses and prayerfully seeking to deepen our relationships and cooperation, the Fourth Congress on Evangelism has been held, guided by an executive committee which was expanded to include non-JEA participants. As we straddle two millennia, we are aware of the important time in which we live. We believe that this Congress will have made an important contribution, helping us to reflect on our experience in the 20th century and gain a perspective concerning the church's walk in the 21st century.

It is in the providence of God that

this Congress has taken place in Okinawa. By gathering here, we have reflected upon the special history of suffering Okinawa has experienced because of Japan. As followers of Christ we have sought to better understand that suffering and to share that suffering within the biblical and evangelical perspective.

The theme of this Congress has been 'The Church Responsible for Evangelizing 21st Century Japan—Living Together in the Gospel of Reconciliation'. We affirmed that this gospel of reconciliation appropriately expresses the essential nature of the biblical teaching concerning salvation. Especially in this age of religious pluralism we must hold fast to the truth that reconciliation to God through Christ is the only way to obtain salvation. In this 21st century, with society filled with divisions and fighting, and with the danger of environmental destruction, we must understand that reconciliation between God and man also relates to humans in relation to one another, and touches all of creation. We have been given the mission from God to intercede in prayer for reconciliation, to preach the gospel of reconciliation, and to live the gospel of reconciliation.

In order for the Japanese church to preach the gospel of reconciliation and live together in the gospel of reconciliation in this coming 21st century, we publicly declare at this congress the following as a summary of our understanding, repentance, desires and prayers.

## **Chapter 1 Confirming Together the Gospel of Reconciliation**

### *1. Reconciliation with God*

Humankind, even though made by the Creator of all things, the one true God, and declared good, has sinned and broken relationship with God, becoming God's enemy. Being sinful, humankind has entered into a condition where it cannot atone for its sins, nor repair the broken relationship with Righteous God. But God, through his great love, sent the Lord Jesus Christ to earth. Through his atoning sacrifice and resurrection from the dead God promises to release the sinner from the bonds of sin, and bring the sinner back to a correct relationship with him. This reconciliation with God can only be received through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the essence of the Gospel, revealed as the main theme of the Bible, the inspired Word of God.

This 'Gospel of Reconciliation' is the only way that sinful people can obtain salvation; there is no other way. It is completely unique and based on the unilateral love and grace of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We as Christ's followers have entered into this perfect relationship with God and are sent out into the world for the glory of God to preach the Gospel of reconciliation with God to the world, and live by the Gospel in this world.

### *2. Interpersonal reconciliation*

We speak of interpersonal reconciliation as that which happens when people make mutual concessions and end their conflict. Often this only ends merely with a cessation of conflict, without a restoration of the relationship. But followers of Christ whose sins have been forgiven through the love of God, have become, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and following the example of Christ's love, people who forgive.

On the basis of this unilateral love we seek to repair broken relationships with our neighbors, and positively strive to develop these into healthy relationships.

We are deeply concerned about human relationships which have been damaged by sin. We believe that when the followers of Christ live as peace-makers in the love of God, damaged relationships will be healed, and humans made in the image of God will develop mutually healthy relationships in our homes, churches, communities, society, nation and the world.

### 3. *Reconciliation of creation*

Humankind was made by the Creator of all things to be his representatives, ruling the earth, and acting as stewards of this earth. But humans, being separated from God because of sin, have rebelled against the will of God, have instead taken the earth that they were supposed to rule, and used it to fulfill their own desires and profit. In so doing, humans have created problems such as environmental destruction, the depletion of natural resources, and global warming. At the end of this 20th century 'the groaning of the land' has spread throughout the earth, as all creation waits for the salvation brought by the appearing of the children of God. The followers of Christ, having been restored to fellowship with God, as God's intended representatives, especially at this time, feel keenly the need to make a true contribution in all areas of life. This includes efforts for liberation of this earth in the areas of politics, economics, education, science, and medicine. We must utilize our God-given gifts to their full potential in this world, while we ultimately wait for the coming of God's Kingdom

which will be ushered in by the glorious return of Christ. At that time his rule will extend throughout the world.

## **Chapter 2 Living Together in the Gospel of Reconciliation--in Times like These**

We live 'in times like these.' Therefore we must understand these times in which we live, in order to rely on this Gospel of reconciliation, proclaim it and live together in this Gospel.

### *1. As those with history written on our hearts*

We live in a time in which the twentieth century is coming to an end. During this twentieth century, there were two world wars, colonial battles, confrontations between races, and an ideological cold war between East and West, among other calamities. It was a century of confrontation and war. Especially in the last ten years there has been an intensification of fighting between ethnic groups involving religion, including Christianity, resulting in many refugees. We have rebelled against God, and this broken fellowship has resulted in our becoming self-centered, fighting among ourselves for our own profit. Taking a hard look at this condition makes us understand how important the Gospel of reconciliation is.

Because this congress took place in Okinawa we were able to experience Okinawa's history, and understand more deeply the meaning of the Gospel of reconciliation. Okinawa had been invaded by the Satsuma Domain, and was then forced to be part of the Japanese Empire and the Emperor system when the Meiji government broke up

the Ryukyu Kingdom. During the Pacific War Okinawa suffered much, becoming the last-stop defense line for the rest of Japan. After the peace treaty ended the war, the island became a trust territory under the U.S.A. military administration. Even though in 1972 the administration authority reverted back to Japan, even now 75% of the American military bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa. This continues to force many restrictions and hardships on the people's lives. We confess and repent that most of us have failed to understand or even care about their situation.

This problem has not resulted just because of a deficiency of historical knowledge. The sin that gave birth to the war and strife lies concealed within our present lack of knowledge and interest. The sin that led the Japanese Empire into invading Asia, now in somewhat different form appears in many of our hearts when we deny responsibility for the invasion and war. Sin always robs people of the power to enter into the pain of others, and destroys relationships with one another.

Starting with Okinawa, we must face the problems throughout Japan and Asia. It is necessary also to direct our attention to the indifference and enmity found in our families, churches and society. We must also reflect upon the problems close at hand, noting the ways we have selfishly sought our own prosperity, and ignored our relationships with others.

## 2. *As those who make history*

We have been given the mission not only to study the past, but to also shape our future history.

Our first mission mandate is to proclaim the Gospel of reconcilia-

tion. Wars, strife, hostilities and hatred, the many kinds of evil and crime, all come from humankind's sin as enemies of God. Therefore, we urge people who are estranged from God to receive his reconciliation. We know that only the proclamation of the Gospel can bring peace to this new century.

Only those who have been forgiven by God can, on the basis of that forgiveness, forgive one another. We who have been made peacemakers seek to do God's will in history. Of course, peace is not possible by our efforts alone. The Bible teaches that as we approach the end times and the fulfilling of God's ultimate will, the evil in this world will increase. Having said this, we cannot brush aside this evil. As those who have experienced salvation and anticipate that final completion of our salvation in the last day, we work to fulfill God's righteousness and love. We have confidence that this labor is a testimony to God's wonderful salvation, and in the Lord this will ultimately not return void.

In order to proclaim the Gospel of reconciliation to this world and to live the Gospel of reconciliation in this world, we as the Body of Christ must be united. We must repent of our past indifference, self-centeredness, jealousy, and feelings of rivalry. We must forgive one another, and through this forgiveness enter into fellowship with one another. We believe that this forgiveness and fellowship in Christ can indeed be the basis for shaping history.

So we reaffirm the church's unity, and we pray and strive to carry out the will of God for this world in the place to which God has sent each of us.

### **Chapter 3 Living Together in the Gospel of Reconciliation--in Places like These**

We are to live together in the Gospel of reconciliation in the actual places where we reside; our home, church, local society. This also includes the broader area of Japan and the whole world.

#### *1. In our homes*

Having been made in the image of God, we are not intended to live in solitude, but to live together in a family setting. However, because of humankind's sin the family life which is intended to be lived in loving fellowship is being destroyed. This is evidenced by marital discord, adultery, divorce, neurosis in children, abuse of children, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, etc. The home has become not a place of peace, but a place filled with pain. We keenly feel the need for families to again be able to live by the Gospel of reconciliation.

Reconciliation within the family begins with one person, whether husband or wife, parent or child, older or younger sibling, asking and trusting God to enable him/her to live and serve in meaningful, fulfilling human relationships. When we seriously wrestle with the problem as our personal problem, we enter into fellowship with others who also suffer from the same problem. The church must spiritually develop, providing a biblical perspective of the family which will help to regenerate the home, and provide a place for fellowship, sharing and counseling. The peace of God can be modeled in the Christian home, and as the church reaches out to help those struggling with family problems, this becomes an opportunity for evangelism.

We have not necessarily been successful in evangelizing families. We must recognize ourselves as imperfect human beings whose sins have been forgiven, and accept each family member as they are. With a posture of love we can become ministers of reconciliation in our families. Trusting that the salvation of one family member will lead to the salvation of the entire family, we must have patience and continue to uphold our families in prayer.

#### *2. In our churches*

We, the church, have been saved by Christ, and are a community which serves in love. The church testifies to the Triune God, and makes clear the Gospel of Christ. In contrast to the hatred and discrimination, confrontation and fighting which is ruining our society, we the church are to serve as a community of reconciliation.

However, at this very point we must pause for reflection. Discord and schism within the church have often not just been the result of a zealous desire to preserve the truth of the Gospel, but have been caused by the weakness of the flesh. In order to guard our particular convictions we have caused division, clinging to things that are not essential, and by being overly cautious concerning different ways of thinking, we have destroyed the fellowship. We repent of these actions and long for a biblically-based unity in the church. We do see examples of movement toward unity at the local level with mass-media, crusade evangelism, city-wide Christmas activities, pastors' meetings, early morning prayer meetings, cooperation in times of disaster, etc. We will strive to achieve even greater unity in the future.

It is sad that today differences in

understanding the work of the Holy Spirit have caused divisions in our fellowship and injury to both sides. While acknowledging our differences we must strive to reestablish our fellowship in the Lord. We acknowledge not only the disunity found within church associations and denominations, and among churches, but also often found within local churches themselves. We give testimony to the riches of the Gospel of reconciliation when fellow church members, fellow pastors, pastors and church members, men's groups and women's groups, the elderly and the youth all serve one another.

The unity of the church also needs to be seen in the relationship between churches and para-church groups and among para-church groups themselves. We must throw away our attitude of exclusivism and indifference towards others, and develop mutually agreeable guidelines, which will build positive relationships of cooperation. Also, we will pray and cooperate in developing evangelism programs geared to each age level, media evangelism, efforts to establish a more just society, educational institutions based on a Christian world view, pastoral training, believers' training and the creation of Christian culture.

We will seek to deepen our unity in the Lord between missionaries who have sacrificed much to serve the Japanese church and Christians. Evangelism in Japan was begun by missionaries. We are thankful for this historical blessing, and remember that Japan remains a mission field. We rejoice to work together with missionaries from other countries.

As was emphasized in previous evangelism congresses, we are conscious of the universal nature of the Church, and have sought to increase

our fellowship with churches in Asia and around the world. But as this age continues to become more globalized, we must, while guarding our individual uniqueness, more earnestly think, pray and cooperate with the many churches and missions around the world.

### *3. In our local society*

We believe that evangelism will make progress as we live together in the Gospel of reconciliation in our local communities. At the second Kyoto congress the issue of the contextualization of the Gospel in Japan was presented, but we acknowledge that our understanding and efforts in this area have been inadequate. We must remember that the local area is our first place of evangelism, and a weak connection with the community negatively affects our evangelism. We must seriously consider how the church can more actively and practically develop better community relationships.

As the number of children continues to diminish, coupled with the growing aging population of the 21st century, the church is being called upon to work to meet the needs of the elderly and to work for a society in which physically and mentally handicapped people can live a life of hope. We must also make efforts to meet the spiritual and physical needs of those who are socially handicapped (e.g. those who suffer from prejudice, the homeless, foreigners, etc.). Even though the following problems go beyond the normal scope of the church, we must consider how best to serve our communities in problem-areas such as juvenile delinquency, the public gambling institutions, child-raising concerns of younger parents, and families who have suffered from cult activities.

#### 4. In Japan

Because of our love for Japan, we are concerned about the problems facing our society, and desire that God's righteousness and love be realized in this country.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, and the Gospel of reconciliation offered in the Bible is the Gospel of peace, exhorting us to also seek peace. In contrast to that peace, Japanese *Wa* (Harmony) seeks uniformity which has created a society of discrimination. Hence, by feeling the pain of those who are being discriminated against and standing with them, we expose the source of this prejudice which is built into the Japanese *Wa*. By understanding the pain of the Okinawa people we are led, not to settle for a stability based upon the sacrifices of others, but to pray for the eradication of war and the establishment of peace. By helping those who are handicapped we challenge the basic nature of Japanese society which emphasizes only wealth and prosperity. We also need to address the competition and discrimination that is built into the educational system.

We are aware that the 21st century church in Japan must begin with the fundamental issues and grapple with the country's condition which has been based upon the emperor system, to pray concerning the problems within our government and economy, and as believers to be faithful to our consciences. Further, we must take serious note of the government's nationalistic tendency as seen in their steamrolling through the Diet, the bill to officially recognize the national flag and anthem, the compulsory use of the *Hi no Maru* and *Kimigayo* at educational institutions, the bill to inaugurate 'Showa Day,' and the prime minis-

ter's statement concerning Japan being a divine country centered in the emperor. While being vigilant concerning the government, we must endeavor to diligently work for peace.

We as Christians in Japan are to always be involved in politics, economics, education, the arts, welfare work, science, technology, information communication, etc. We believe that along with evangelism we are called to hold a Christian world view which practically touches all areas of life, and impacts all of society.

#### 5. In the world

We hold a vision for world missions. The world is divided into rich and poor societies, with more than one billion four hundred thousand people in hopeless poverty. Also over two billion people are living in areas which have no contact with the Gospel. We are called to pray and minister to meet this need, especially since a large percent of the poverty and unevangelized areas are concentrated in Asia.

We keenly feel the responsibility to send missionaries around the world. There are places in the world where Japanese can enter, while Western missionaries have difficulty. Even in countries that refuse missionaries we can send teachers, technical experts, medical personnel, etc. who can be involved in missions through their work place.

In order to live together in the Gospel of reconciliation we must actively reach out to those suffering from famine and disaster, providing emergency relief and assisting them to become independent. Also, we are being called on to protect the rights of those who are suffering from fighting and those minorities who are being oppressed, and to

eliminate the gap between the rich and poor nations. We have a responsibility to pray that God's righteousness and love be active in international politics and economics, and to train and send out people to work in these fields.

Living together in the Gospel of reconciliation in the community, Japan and the international society are all closely related aspects. For instance, when the church becomes involved with the problem of international famine, it can include other people in the area, which in turn touches the community, and has the potential of changing Japan itself. We believe that when the church becomes a true community, putting into practice God's righteousness and love within the local community, it will change the community, change Japan, and has the power to reform the whole world.

When we turn our eyes to the world around us, we have no room for optimism. Therefore, we will hold strongly the hope of Christ's Second Coming, fully trusting the sovereignty of the Almighty God. We will trust the work of the Holy Spirit, and join together to pray for and dedicate ourselves to the ministry of the Gospel of reconciliation.

We have been given the mission from God to preach the Gospel of reconciliation, live together in it, and to intercede on behalf of this reconciliation, to stand in the gap for this world and pray.

### **Prayer**

O God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Forgive us for our sins in that we did not obey Christ, the Prince of Peace, during this 20th century, but made it a century of war.

We repent of our sins, having dis-

placed Christ from his throne, and having been deceived by that which is centered on human, racial and national thinking. We have failed to seek first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness.

O God of peace. As we enter this 21st century, fill us with your Holy Spirit, and make us messengers of the Gospel of reconciliation. Help us to proclaim the Gospel in the places you have placed us, and make us peacemakers there.

O God of love. Set us free from the hatred that leads to war, discrimination, prejudice and hostility, and fill us with love for our neighbors.

Help us to lead the families which you have given us to be families which worship your name, and serve you in peace. May the whole world become the family of God.

O God of righteousness. Make us into priests who are prophets, people who can pray for your blessings on this nation. Guide us that we will never again sin by making the emperor god, and thus fall under your anger.

Make us into people who will daily look to you as the Prince of peace, the Christ, Lord of history, so that this 21st century will truly be a time of peace. And now, in this place, make us those who will fulfill the Gospel of reconciliation.

'Here am I. Send me' (Isaiah 6:8).  
'Amen. Come Lord Jesus'  
(Revelation 22:20).

# The Preaching Of The Cross Today

Klaas Runia

**Keywords:** Cross, atonement, charismatic, Enlightenment, sin, law, gospel, liturgy, images, faith, interpretation, postmodernism

Today it is by no means self-evident that the cross has a central place in preaching. A few years ago the Dutch Reformed theologian, C. Graafland, pointed out that this is true not only of the more progressive circles within the churches, but also of circles that emphatically call themselves Reformed. All kinds of other themes have taken the central place in preaching: the 'eclipse' of God, questions about the experience of God and the meaning of life, the struggle with evil and suffering, and so on.

Why is this so? According to Graafland this process started rather soon after the Reformation. In Calvin we already observe that

besides the doctrine of justification by faith (which he calls the 'first grace') regeneration (the 'second grace') becomes pivotal. This line is continued in Puritanism (Britain), the 'More Precise Reformation' (the 'Nadere Reformatie' in the Netherlands) and Pietism (Germany). God's salvation *in* man becomes the central moment of preaching. The main questions are: Am I reborn? Am I really a child of God? People are looking for *special experiences*.

The main question is no longer the experience of the atonement that happened on the cross, but the experience of inner renewal, of regeneration and conversion, the experience of the reality of God and the personal encounter with God. The work of atonement accomplished by Jesus Christ becomes a kind of natural background music.

The same may happen and does happen in the Charismatic Movement. There is no doubt that Christians associated with this movement regard the cross of Jesus as the place where they were reconciled with God. But their emphasis on the charismatic experience can easily lead to the same effect: the atonement becomes a kind of natural background music.

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In more progressive circles there is another kind of discomfit when the topic of atonement is discussed. Progressive Christians most likely would feel more at home in the view of my former colleague C.J. den Heyer, Professor of New Testament in the Theological University of Kampen, who wrote the following words in his book on the atonement:

I know the old and familiar religious truths, but they can no longer move or inspire me. . . . The confession of the church says that Jesus' death accomplished the reconciliation with God. But what does that mean? How can the death of someone in the far past mean salvation and redemption for me who lives many centuries later? . . . Rather, this idea raises resistance on my part. Am I not responsible for the consequence of my own words and deeds?<sup>1</sup>

Most certainly, Den Heyer is not the only one to entertain these ideas. I am afraid that many church members increasingly have problems on this score.

### Why?

In an article in the Dutch journal *Kontekstueel* the Rev. T. Poot makes an attempt to answer this question. He distinguishes two kinds of causes. In the first place there is the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age, which is moulded by a longstanding change in our western culture. The Enlightenment, which started in the 18th century and aimed at the emancipation of humankind (i.e., it wanted to make people independent of authorities outside themselves), in the sixties and seventies of this century all of a sudden penetrated into all layers of society. Modern man

wants to be free and to decide for himself what he believes and what is of crucial importance for his life. This is also the tenor of the quotation from Den Heyer's book.

All this is intensified by the *strong individualism* that characterizes modern society. 'I do what I want to do, and what I do is my personal decision, just as what you do is your decision. It does not concern me what you do and it does not concern you what I do.' In addition, there is the phenomenon that many *other religions* have entered our western countries. Their adherents have quite different perspectives of faith. In the majority of these religions the central tenet is not deliverance from sin and guilt, but they strive after enlightenment so that they may discover the meaning of life. Usually this enlightenment is found by descending into the depth of one's own being where one can encounter the Divine Self. In some of these religions (e.g. Hinduism) the ideas of karma and reincarnation play a dominant part. In other religions (e.g. Islam) obedience to Allah is the decisive factor. Finally, there is the ocean of suffering, which by means of the modern mass media daily floods our minds. Auschwitz, Biafra, Cambodia, Rwanda, Zaire are names that remind us constantly of this *ocean of suffering*. Within this worldwide context of human suffering why would the death of one man about two thousand years ago mean the atonement of all guilt?

Besides all this there are various *theological factors*. During and after the Second World War we increasingly came into contact with the world of Jewish thinking. Here God and man are seen as covenant partners who need each other and are mutually dependent on each oth-

<sup>1</sup> The book is also published in an English translation by SCM Press: C.J. den Heyer, *Jesus and the Doctrine of the Atonement*, 1998.

er. In Jewish theology there is also an increasing appreciation of the person of Jesus. He is seen as one of the many suffering *tsadik*, or righteous people, who are found during all of Israel's history.

Many people of our day have *little awareness of sin and guilt*. If there still is such an awareness, it has a collective rather than a personal character, and represents a feeling of powerlessness rather than one of guilt. Many people are deeply troubled by their own fate and by the need of the world as a whole. They cannot understand the part God has in all this grief and suffering. Poot also points to the remarkable fact that many *modern movies* have their setting in deserted factory premises with dilapidated buildings and broken windows or in dark underground car parks or on lonely, wet and glistening bitumen roads. These movies clearly show how 'unheimisch' and sinister the world has become for modern men and women.

Quite often preachers associate themselves with these feelings of their parishioners and consequently the questions they deal with in their sermons are quite different from Luther's famous question: 'How do I find a gracious God?' Of course, we should remember that in asking this question, Luther also associated himself with the spirit of his own day. People in the Middle Ages were burdened with the question of guilt. We can still see it today in the great medieval cathedrals with their very large picture of Christ as the Judge of the whole world right over the entrance to the cathedral (cf. also the medieval hymn *Dies irae, dies illa* from the Requiem Mass). There is therefore no reason whatever not to deal with the questions that burden

modern man, provided that we do not forget to move on to the great question God puts to us and the answer he himself has given to that question.

### Law and Gospel

But how can one preach God's atonement of sin and his reconciliation with us through the cross of Jesus Christ to people who have hardly any sense of guilt? Should we perhaps in the line of Luther and Lutheran theology in general give much more attention to God's law and in particular to the accusing function of the law? Before we preach the gospel, should we perhaps evoke a sense of guilt on the side of the hearers by first preaching the law in all its threatening power?

To be honest, I have my doubts here. Surely, in our preaching we should not ignore the second function of the law (cf. Lord's Day 2 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*: Question: 'How do you come to know your misery? Answer: The law of God tells me.'). but we would be making a big mistake if we transform the relationship between law and gospel into an order or sequence: first the preaching of the law and only after that the preaching of the gospel.

I believe we must start at the point where the people in the church are. They live in a secular world and often are more influenced by secularization than they realize themselves. They are burdened by the questions of suffering, both personal and collective. They are vexed by their own fate and God's role in it. They are troubled by their feeling that God is so inconceivably great and so elusive; they are also concerned that they notice so little of his presence in their every day lives. We must not

ignore these questions.

But even so the question returns: How should one in this situation of confusion preach about the cross and the atonement that took place there?

### Changes in the liturgy

In my own country the situation is aggravated by changes in the traditional 'Christian year'. In many congregations the so-called 'passion period' is replaced by the 'forty day period' of fasting and preparation for Easter. This replacement is more fundamental than people usually think.

The idea of a passion period, covering the six Sundays before Easter, is typical of the Reformation and in particular of the Reformation in the Netherlands. In the ancient and medieval church (and it is still so in the Roman Catholic Church of our own day) the period preceding Easter was first of all a period of fasting and of repentance and penance. Only the so-called Holy Week was devoted to the suffering of the Lord. A change took place at the end of the Middle Ages. The mendicant orders of the 13th and 14th centuries introduced the Lenten sermons with their prominent passion theme. In the Netherlands the Reformed Church followed this lead and did away with the idea of a fortyday fasting and decided that during this period the churches should concentrate in their preaching on the suffering of the Lord. The provincial Synod of Assen (1619) decreed that 'every year during the seven weeks before Easter the ministers shall preach on the passion of the Lord.'

In the period after World War II there was yet another shift in the liturgy of the morning service. Since

the Reformation it was customary to read the Ten Commandments as the first Scripture reading. After the war this was replaced by a prayer of repentance, a word of grace and a reading of some portion of the law. In this way the congregation prepared itself for the encounter with God in the reading and preaching of his Word. In recent years this preparation has been replaced in many churches by a so-called Kyrie prayer, followed by a hymn of praise (the so-called *Gloria in excelsis*). This is quite a different beginning of the service. The emphasis is no longer on our own guilt and that of the whole world, but on the needs of the world and of ourselves. The transition from this emphasis at the beginning to the preaching of the cross is much less 'natural' than when we start with a prayer of repentance.

### The New Testament

It is quite obvious that in the New Testament the passion and the death of Jesus has a central place. This clearly applies to the *Gospels*. At the close of the previous century the famous German theologian Martin Kähler called the *Gospels passion stories with an introduction*. As a matter of fact, already in the introductions of the *Gospels* we encounter the first onset of Jesus' suffering. In the so-called prologue of the Gospel according to John we hear threatening undertones: 'He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him' (1:11). In that very first chapter John the Baptist points to Jesus with the following words: 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (1:29). In the nativity stories of Matthew and Luke we also observe the shadow of the cross: the massacre of the inno-

cent children of Bethlehem and the flight to Egypt (Matt. 2) and Simeon's words to Mary: 'A sword will pierce your own soul too' (Luke 2). Jesus' baptism is also a preparation for his suffering and death for in that act, he, who is without sin, identifies himself with all the sinners who were baptized by John. The refusal of the three temptations, in which the devil tries to keep Jesus away from the road to the cross, means that Jesus deliberately accepts this road. The conflicts with the Jewish leaders start soon after his first public appearance (Mark 2:1-12).

How central the preaching of the cross was to Paul appears from what he writes in the first letter to the Corinthians: 'For I decided to know nothing while I was with you except *Jesus Christ and him crucified*' (2:2). In the same letter he summarizes his own preaching in the expression: 'the message of the cross' (1:18). In all his letters these fundamental thoughts recur. By all kinds of images he tries to make clear to his readers what the death of Jesus means. And in all cases the underlying idea is that of *substitution*: he died 'for us', 'for our sins', at times even: 'in our stead'.

This last idea had a very prominent place in the form that was read at the beginning of the Lord's Supper service in the Reformed Churches in Holland. It said:

We remember that all the time he lived on earth he was burdened by our sin and God's judgment upon it; that in his agony in the garden he sweated drops of blood under the weight of our sins; that he was tied in bonds to set us free forever; that he suffered disgrace and ridicule to give us the dignity of being children of God forever; that he, the innocent One, was condemned to death to have us, guilty ones, acquitted at the judgment seat of God; that he took upon himself our curse

that we might be filled with his blessing; that he humbled himself into the deepest desolation and agony of hell, when on the cross he cried: 'My God, my God why have You forsaken Me?', so that we might never be forsaken.

(It is very regrettable that similar words are no longer used in the contemporary services.)

### The depth of our Fall

At the same time the cross shows the depth of our fall into sin and guilt. It shows that we have fallen into an horrific abyss, from which we can never extract ourselves. As a matter of fact, we see this not only in the cross, but also in the suffering preceding it. Gradually all people turn against Jesus: the religious leaders (appealing to the God of Israel they pronounce the death sentence, Matt. 26:65); the representatives of the government (Pilate and Herod); the multitudes (when Jesus enters Jerusalem on 'Palm Sunday', they all sing 'Hosanna!' but a few days later it is 'Crucify him!'); the disciples (Judas betrays him, in the garden they all abandon him; Peter, who had confessed him as the Messiah, denies him three times). Finally, even the Father turns against him and in the agony of death and hell he can only cry with the author of Psalm 22: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' This terrible cry reveals the fathomless abyss under our existence.

The depth of our fall becomes particularly clear in the attitude of the religious leaders. Of course, they are very pious. They do not want to put the blood money of Judas into the temple treasure (Matt. 27:6). They refuse to enter the court of Pilate, for then they would not be allowed to eat the Passover (John 18:28). They do

not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath (John 19:31). But here human piety and the keeping of the law is like a foul stench, ascending to heaven.

But did not they all do it in *ignorance*? Does not Jesus, hanging on the cross, pray: 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34)? Literally these words apply to the soldiers, who drove the nails through his hands and feet and a little later decide by lot which part of his clothes each one of them will get and who will have the seamless undergarment (John 19:23, 24). But I believe that in the context of the entire passion story these words apply to all persons involved. Sometimes this ignorance is interpreted as a kind of 'excuse', but I doubt this very much. I think we should read it as an indication of the depth of our alienation from God: it goes so far that even in ignorance we commit sin. Apparently there is a permanent breach between God and us. But he, the innocent One, takes this guilt also upon himself and intercedes for the people then present and also for us.

### A variety of images

Den Heyer is undoubtedly right when he points out that the New Testament uses many images and metaphors to show us the significance and meaning of Jesus' suffering and death. My problem with his book is that in a typically postmodern fashion he selects one image (Jesus' death as that of a righteous Jew) and ignores the rest.

In my opinion we must take all these images seriously. This means that our preaching of the cross is also very inadequate if it is restricted to a

continual repetition of the terms 'for us', 'for our sins' or 'in our stead'. Undoubtedly, these are very central concepts in the New Testament, but preaching that is limited to them becomes monotonous and after a while it is taken for granted by the hearers: 'Of course, Jesus died for us and everything is fine now!' There are many colours in the rainbow of the atonement as pictured in the New Testament and we need them all for a good understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death.

I will briefly mention the main images and metaphors.

(1) The term *ransom*. This word is used quite often in the Septuagint as the translation of the Hebrew *kopher* and refers to the restoration of a balance that has been disturbed by a crime. This restoration could take place in two ways: according to the rule 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', or by the payment of a ransom. Such a ransom could also be paid for the release of a captive or a slave. In Mark 10:45 and Matt. 20:28 Jesus uses the term for his own life that he will give as 'a ransom for many'.

(2) Related to ransom are the words *to buy* and *to pay* (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; cf. 2 Peter 2:1; Revel. 5:9; 14:4). These words are derived from the socioeconomic sphere of life. The question to whom the price is paid is never asked. All emphasis is on the costliness of the price. It cost Jesus (and God) so much to purchase our freedom (cf. 1 Peter 1:18f.).

(3) *To save, salvation*. This terminology can refer to salvation from a dangerous situation (cf. Matt. 14:30; 27:40, 42, 49), but quite often it refers to salvation from the divine judgment (Rom. 5:9; 8:4).

(4) *To redeem, redemption*.

These terms refer to the practice of buying back something that formerly belonged to the purchaser, but for some reason has passed out of his possession. It is applied to the suffering and death of Christ as a means of redeeming us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13; cf. also Rom. 8:21; Heb. 2:15 and 9:15).

(5) *To atone, atonement.* The words that are used here have their background in the cult and carry the meaning of propitiation (Heb. 2:17; 9:5; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Rom. 3:25). In the sacrifice of his life on the cross Jesus made atonement for our sins.

(6) *To reconcile, reconciliation.* These words have their setting in the social sphere of life and have the meaning of bringing together two estranged parties (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18-20).

(7) Closely related to the previous terms is the word *Mediator*. We encounter the term already in the Old Testament, especially in reference to Moses. In his case the function appears to be doublesided: he is the representative of God in the presence of the people and of the people in the presence of God (Ex. 32:11-14; 30-32). In the New Testament Jesus is called the Mediator of a new and better covenant (Heb. 8:6; 9:5; 12:24) and he also has this double function.

(8) *Sacrifice, lamb, high priest.* This terminology is very prominent in the letter to the Hebrews, but we encounter it also in John 1:29; Rom. 3:24; Revel. 5:6-9.

(9) *Blood.* This term is closely related to the idea of sacrifice and is an apt summary of the mystery of Jesus' death on the cross (cf. Mark 14:24 and parallels, John 6:53ff., Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25f.; etc.).

(10) Christ's suffering as an *example* for the believers. In his suffering Christ left us an example: we should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21ff.; cf. Eph. 5:2). In both passages, as appears from the context, the exemplary character of Jesus' suffering is directly related to the substitutionary nature of this suffering.

I believe these are the most important concepts, but they are by no means the only ones. The significance and meaning of Jesus' suffering and death are expressed in *many more ways*, including the following: God gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16); God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all (Rom. 8:32); God sent his Son into the world (Matt. 10:40; 21:37). In addition, we must not lose sight of the fact that nearly all NT images and metaphors have their background in the *Old Testament*. Augustine said that the New Testament is hidden in the Old and that the Old is opened in the New. The Dutch theologian, F.J. Pop, writes in his biblical dictionary the *fact* that Jesus died for our sins we read in the New Testament, but *how* he did it we read in the Old Testament (cf. the Passover lamb, the sacrifices in the temple, the Day of Atonement, and in particular the suffering servant in Isaiah 53).

### **'Multicoloured' preaching**

The idea that Jesus died 'for us', 'for our sins' or 'in our stead' is nearly always present in the terms and concepts just mentioned. Nevertheless, it would be improper to bring the idea of *substitution* always to the fore and make it the central theme of the sermon. In each text we should diligently search for the particular secret of this specific text. Each text has its own colouring and we should

not stop before we have found this particular colouring.

Take, for instance, the term 'salvation'. The fundamental idea no doubt is to save one who is in distress from the dangerous situation he is in. As a matter of fact, in one third of all occurrences the word has this original meaning (e.g., the disciples during the storm on the lake, Matt. 9:21; the woman who for many years had been subject to bleeding, Matt. 8:25; the daughter of Jairus, Mark 5:23). In about one fifth of all 150 texts it refers to the eschatological salvation at the consummation of history (e.g., Rom. 13:11; 1 Peter 1:5). But the New Testament also speaks of salvation that has already taken place (e.g., Rom. 8:24; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:5).

*That from which we are saved* is also indicated in various ways: from sin (once only: Matt. 1:21); from darkness into light (1 Peter 2:9); from alienation to participation in the people of God (1 Peter 2:10; Eph. 2:12, 13); from guilt to forgiveness (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14); from slavery to freedom (Gal. 5:1; 2 Cor. 3:17); from fear of the powers of darkness to confidence (1 John 4:17, 18; 2 Tim. 1:7).

The deliverance *from the powers of darkness* played a very important part in the Early Church (cf. Gustaf Aulén's classic book on the subject, *Christus Victor*) and is without any doubt solidly based on the New Testament. Jesus delivered us from the power of death (1 Cor. 15:26, 54ff; 2 Tim. 1:10) and from the power of Satan (Heb. 2:14; cf. Acts 10:38). Many wonderful blessings are associated with the death of Christ: peace with God (Eph. 2:14-17; Rom. 5:1); freedom (Rom. 6:22; 8:2; Gal. 5:1); sonship and adoption (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5); joy

(Rom. 5:11); justification (Rom. 5:9); sanctification (Heb. 10:10; etc.).

Although salvation becomes a reality only *by faith* on the part of man (Eph. 2:8), it is always *due to the grace of God* (2:5). God is always the *subject* of reconciliation (Rom. 5:11; 2 Cor. 5:18ff.). The *object* is indicated in various ways: we ourselves as ungodly people, as sinners, even as enemies of God (Rom. 5:6-10); the world (2 Cor. 5:19); humanity as a whole (Rom. 5:12ff.); all things, i.e. the entire creation (Col. 1:20); Jews and pagans (Eph. 2:16). The atonement has a universal import and is always focused on a world or on human beings who are alienated from God.

However, we are *saved or freed* not only *from* something, but at the same time also *unto* something. It is striking how often Jesus' suffering is mentioned in a paranetical, admonishing context (Matt. 11:29; Philp. 2:5ff.; 1 John 2:6). Characteristic of Paul's letters is the fact that the first part is used for an exposition of what Christ has done for us, while in the second part he deals with the ethical implication of Christ's work (cf. Rom. 1-11 and 12-15; Gal. 1-4 and 5-6). This order is significant and decisive. The indicative always comes first and the imperative rests on it. Only in this way can we avoid legalistic preaching.

### Preaching and faith

The apostolic preaching tells us in all kinds of ways that the atonement has been accomplished (although we are still looking for the eschatological redemption and consummation). But the fact that the atonement has been accomplished nowhere becomes an 'automatism'. This is very evident in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. First Paul

says that God has reconciled us to himself (aorist!), but he relates this immediately to the apostolic commission of the 'ministry of reconciliation' (v. 18). In verses 19-21 he gives an elucidation. The ministry is now defined as: 'We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God' (v. 20).

God saves sinners 'through the foolishness of what is preached' (1 Cor. 1:21; cf. Rom. 11:14; 1 Cor. 9:22). The gospel itself is a power of God for the salvation of '*everyone who believes*' (Rom. 1:16). This last aspect is an essential part of salvation. Preaching is not only a matter of proclaiming a new state of affairs, quite apart from faith on the part of the hearers, but it calls them to accept this message in personal faith. What John writes in the first ending of his Gospel holds true of the atonement as well: 'These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (20:31).

### The need for 'interpretation'

It is evident that nearly all images and metaphors used by the New Testament writers have their origin in the social, cultural and religious *context of their own day*. This makes preaching on them a rather difficult assignment. For we are not allowed to assume simply that these images and metaphors are directly transparent to people who live in the *context of the first years of the third millennium*. A while ago a minister reported that when he asked his catechumens what association was evoked by the word 'blood', they replied: 'Aids'! Nor should we lose sight of the fact that in our Western culture a shift is taking place

from a 'culture of guilt' to a 'culture of shame'. Furthermore, the idea that a human being is always part of a greater entity is no longer taken for granted by modern man. Consequently the notion that the death of someone who died some two thousand years ago on a cross outside Jerusalem can affect us is incredible, even absurd.

How, then, should a minister preach on the topic of the atonement in Christ's death on the cross? First of all, he should not assume that the New Testament (and also the Old Testament) images will be understood automatically by his hearers. He will have to *explain* them *very carefully*. What is a 'ransom'? When is it paid? Who pays it? and so on. What is 'substitution'? Are there any modern images for this idea? We could instance the story of the German pastor Kolbe, who in the concentration camp, asked the German commander to allow him to take the place of a man and a woman who were condemned to die. Are there any modern concepts that could help people to discover something of the mystery of the atonement? Could the concept of 'solidarity' be of any help here? Did not Jesus show his *solidarity* with all sinners when he, the innocent One, forced John the Baptist to baptize him and thus chose the way that eventually led to Calvary? Cannot this concept of solidarity offer some consolation to people in distress: 'I am not on my own in this cruel world'? Does not solidarity also mean that even the most horrible sin has been atoned for?

Of great significance, too, are the words which *people* speak in the passion stories. With the help of the principle of 'identification' they offer us quite a clear insight into what is

really happening. Quite often there are three 'levels' in the stories.

(a) The words spoken by the *bystanders* show us the *depth of human sin*. Almost every kind of sin was perpetrated against Jesus. In this way we realize how true the following lines of a well-known passion hymn are:

*Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon you?*

*It is my treason. Lord, that has undone you.*

*'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied you; I crucified you.*

(b) At the same time they all, in spite of themselves, speak the *truth* about this man dying on the cross. The soldiers mock Jesus as a pseudo-king, not realizing that he is a real king. Pilate acknowledges that Jesus is innocent (John 19:4; Matt. 27:23). He has a notice prepared in three languages and has it fastened on the cross: 'The king of the Jews' (John 19:20), and so he tells the whole world that Jesus is a king indeed.

(c) In spite of themselves the *enemies* are *servicing God's work of salvation*. Caiaphas, the high priest at that moment, who condemns Jesus on purely political grounds, nevertheless prophesies that it is better that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish. John, the evangelist, adds that he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but for all scattered children of God (John 11: 49ff.). Pilate speaks the words: *Ecce homo*—'Look, this is what man is like in God's eyes: a wretched rebel, a failed king'. The people tell Pilate that they have a law and according to this (divine) law Jesus has to die (19:7). Pilate perpetrates the greatest injustice and is himself aware of this, yet at the same

time, as the representative of the highest justice (God's justice), he sentences Jesus to death (19:16). This is what all human beings deserve.

### More than a martyr

In all our preaching on the cross people should hear that Jesus is much more than just a martyr, who dies for a good cause. Undoubtedly, Jesus was also a martyr. He was a suffering Jewish *tsadik*, who in spite of all that is happening to him puts his trust in God. He is the suffering Servant of the Lord of Isaiah 53. But in that very same chapter we see that this suffering goes far beyond mere martyrdom. In particular in verses 5-8 we hear the dark tones of the divine judgment: 'The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.' 'The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.' In 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 Paul follows this line of thought and speaks the mysterious words: 'God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' These are incomprehensible words and all our imagination falls short here. Luther called this the 'great exchange'.

This exchange was not brought about by us, but by God. We were *totally alienated from God*. The Dutch poet Joke Verweerd expressed the pain of a broken relationship in these words:

Where are you, where are you?  
In your eyes that are turned away  
I see no recognition.  
How shall I ever get used to this?  
It is as if I suffocate.

Distance stretches around your soul  
like an electric fence.  
You are the lord of the manor  
and I am banished.

Is it not this that all of us have done to God? Have we not banished him from our lives? But God did not give up. He put his own Son into the balance: he with his unfathomable suffering in the one scale, and we with our incalculable guilt in the other. Indeed, God did even more: he took our guilt and put it also into the scale of his own Son in the flesh!

### **The great drama between God and man**

*Postmodern* people say that all this is rubbish. The time of the 'great stories' is over. This is also true of the great story of Jesus' passion and the atonement accomplished by him. According to postmodern thinking we all select our own truth to live by. In this way postmodern people draw the logical conclusion of what started in the 18th century *Enlightenment*. Its aim was to free humanity from the tutelage in which we were held by the church and by the Bible, which was regarded as divine revelation. People themselves should determine how they shall live. There is no need whatever to subject oneself to outside authorities, but as an autonomous individual, a person is free to decide what to believe or not to believe.

In our day pure individualism is added to this. There is no longer room for a *larger unity* of which we are part. Nor is there room for the larger unity of the relationship between God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and humanity. But this is exactly the great story of the Bible. It already becomes visible in the first book of the Old Testament. The Voice says to Abraham that 'all people on earth will be blessed through him' (Gen. 12:3). At Sinai this great promise seems to be limited to the

nation of Israel. But later on we see that time and again the prophets point beyond the borders of Israel and speak of the whole world and all of humanity as the object of God's saving activity. In the New Testament this great story finds its focus and culmination in *Jesus of Nazareth*, who according to the unanimous testimony of all the writers is the Messiah, who was once promised to Israel, but now appears to be the Messiah of the whole world.

In him the great drama of human history, which is a history of alienation from God, finds its nadir and at the same time its climax. The cross is the *nadir* of history: we, human beings, in blind rage nail the One sent by God, his only begotten Son, on a cross. But the great wonder is that God accepts this broken life as the atoning sacrifice for the guilt of the world. In God's hand this nadir of hatred and guilt becomes the *climax* of his divine mercy.

Many people today wonder how this is possible. How can the death of some one who lived two thousand years ago accomplish my reconciliation with God? From the viewpoint of the Enlightenment this is impossible. I stand before God as an individual who has come of age and who has to battle it out with God, hoping perhaps that he may be gracious to me. Den Heyer has this hope, for he believes that the words of Psalm 103 are true: 'The Lord is compassionate and gracious.' To him this is more than enough. No further atonement through the cross of Jesus is necessary.

But when we listen carefully to the apostolic preaching, as it comes to us in the New Testament, the situation is quite different. Indeed, I am of age and I am responsible for my own words and deeds. But I am more than

an isolated individual. As a member of the whole human race, I am involved in the great drama that is taking place between God and humankind. To say it once more in the words of Paul: 'God was reconciling the *world* to himself in Christ' (2 Cor. 5:19).

The way of salvation is not a purely individual way, let alone an autonomous way. And yet it is a way in which we are *personally involved*, for it is the way of *faith in*

*Jesus Christ*, in whose cruel death on the cross the alienation between God and man was 'solved'. According to the whole New Testament, the great exchange took place once and for all on Calvary. And it becomes reality in my life only when I heed Paul's call: 'We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God' (2 Cor. 5:20). Reconciliation is not an automatism. We ourselves must also desire and seek it.

### **The Nature of Hell**

#### ***A report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity & Truth Among Evangelicals (ACUTE)***

These days, popular notions of hell tend either to consign it to the realms of fantasy, or to reserve it for the very worst of villains. The biblical picture is quite different, but even very conservative Christians disagree on certain aspects of that picture.

Evangelicals have traditionally held that unbelievers will be condemned without exception to eternal conscious punishment. However, increasing numbers of evangelical thinkers are declaring sympathy for conditional immortality, a position which emphasises that God's final punishment for sin is death rather than everlasting torment, and that God's promise of a re-created universe cannot be squared with the classical understanding of hell. This is a form of the more general doctrine of annihilationism, which sees hell as a realm of destruction rather than endless retribution. For some, this shift represents a dangerous dilution of evangelical faith. For others, it offers a much-needed corrective to a harsh misunderstanding of God's purposes.

These and related issues are tackled in this report by a special Working Group of the Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals (ACUTE). The report aims to be biblical and pastoral, and to be accessible to interested lay people as well as to theological specialists.

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# 'Teaching Them to Observe All that I Have Commanded You'

## The History of the Interpretation of the 'Great Commission' and Implications for Marketplace Ministries

John Jefferson Davis

**Keywords:** Laity, missionary, evangelism, baptism, teaching, Trinity, church, apostles, evangelical, market place, biblical criticism

In their comments on the Great Commission's command to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matt.28:18-20), the editors of the *Promise Keepers Men's Study Bible* note

that these words imply '... changing your attitude and being a more positive force at work.'<sup>1</sup> The editors of the *Christian Growth Study Bible* comment that Jesus' command to teach 'all that I have commanded' applies to '... every aspect of life—to our education, our finances, our sexuality, our families ... our government and every other influential area'.<sup>2</sup> Astonishing as it may seem, there appear to be only a few scattered examples in the history of the church's interpretation of the 'Great Commission' where the powerful implications of this text for the mar-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Promise Keepers Men's Study Bible*, New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), on Mt. 28:18-20.

<sup>2</sup> *The Christian Growth Study Bible*, New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), on Mt. 28:18-20.

*ketplace ministries* of the laity have been developed.

In this paper it will be argued that the history of interpretation of Matthew 28:18-20 from the time of the early church to the present shows that the full meaning of the text has been obscured by the ecclesiastical controversies of the day, and by the particular concerns of its clerical and academic interpreters. For many centuries—from the fourth century to the time of William Carey—the full *mis-siological* implications were largely forgotten. The *marketplace* implications of this crucial text are just beginning to receive attention at the present time. Having examined the history of interpretation of this text, it will then be argued exegetically that the Great Commission inescapably commands the *whole church* to extend the kingdom of Christ not only through personal evangelism and foreign missions, but through witness and discipleship in the workplace and daily life as well.

### **Matt.28:18-20 in the History of Interpretation:<sup>3</sup>**

#### **From the Early Church to William Carey:**

At a very early period in the history of the early church the idea took hold

that the apostles of Christ had taken the gospel to the limits of the known world and had, as a result, 'fulfilled' the Great Commission in their own lifetime. In the apocryphal *Acts of Thomas*, for example, a document from the early third century, probably originating in eastern Syria, it is stated that the apostles, gathered in Jerusalem cast lots and 'divided the regions of the world, that each one of us might go to the region which fell to his lot, and to the nation to which the Lord had sent him'.<sup>4</sup>

In the fourth century the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History* cites Tertullian to the effect that the emperor Tiberius actually favoured the Christian message and helped to spread it throughout the empire. According to Eusebius, with this providential help the whole world '... was suddenly lit by the sunshine of the saving word ... the voice of its inspired evangelists and apostles went forth into all the earth ... In every town and village ... churches shot up bursting with eager members.'<sup>5</sup> One must question the triumphalistic version of first-century Christian history that Eusebius presents, but the text nevertheless gives witness to the belief that the gospel had reached the limits of the known world in the lifetime of the apostles. Consequently, 'foreign missions' as

<sup>3</sup> On the history of interpretation of Matthew's gospel generally, see Sean P. Kealy, *Matthew's Gospel and the History of Biblical Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Lewiston, ME: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997). Kealy deals with issues of overall interpretation and not the Great Commission text specifically. For a brief overview of trends in the interpretation of this text see David J. Bosch, 'The Structure of Mission: an Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20,' in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 218-248 at pp. 218-19, and David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), pp. 56-7.

<sup>4</sup> *The Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas*, 1, Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., New Testament Apocrypha, v.2 (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), p. 339.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, tr. G.A. Williamson (London: Penguin Books, 1989) 3.2; 39. Cf. also the statement of Origen in his commentary on Mt. 24:9 that the apostolic preaching had reached Ethiopia, China, India, and other lands: cited in Gerhard Rosenkranz, *Die Christliche Mission: Geschichte und Theologie* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1977), p. 40.

we now understand it was not seen as an urgent and unfulfilled task for the church.

During the patristic period, the reading of Matthew 28:18-20 is dominated by concerns relating to the nature and proper forms of baptism and by controversies relating to the doctrine of the Trinity. Writing in the second century, Irenaeus states that Christ gave the apostles the 'power of regenerating in God' when he said to them, 'Go and teach all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>6</sup> In so doing the disciples would be renewing the pagans 'from their old ways into the newness of Christ.'<sup>7</sup> This appears to be one of the earliest references to the notion of baptismal regeneration.

Tertullian's treatise *On Baptism*, written between the years 200 and 206 A.D., is perhaps the earliest Christian writing devoted specifically to this subject. He quotes Matthew 28:19 in order to demonstrate that the proper form of baptism has been commanded by Christ: 'The law of washing has been imposed, and the form has been prescribed: 'Go,' he says, 'teach the nations, washing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>8</sup> For Tertullian, it is in the church's baptism that '... the sins of our earlier blindness are washed away'.<sup>9</sup>

In his *Commentaries on Romans*,

probably written some time after 244 A.D., Origen quotes Matthew 28:19 in order to argue that valid baptism must be performed in the name of the Triune God: '... the Lord himself told his disciples that they should baptize all peoples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ... for indeed, legitimate baptism is had only in the name of the Trinity.'<sup>10</sup>

Athanasius cites the 'Great Commission' passages several times in the context of the fourth-century controversies over the doctrine of the Trinity. In his *Four Letters to Serapion of Thmuis*, written in the years 359-360 A.D., the great defender of Nicene orthodoxy refers to those who undermine the doctrine of the Trinity by saying that the Holy Spirit is only a creature, differing from the angels only in degree. These heretics should realize that such teaching is inconsistent with the faith of the Catholic Church, which the Lord founded and rooted on the Trinity when he said, 'Go out and instruct every people, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'<sup>11</sup> In *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, written c. 365 A.D. against the Arians, Athanasius quotes the tri-

<sup>10</sup> Origen, *Commentaries on Romans*, 5,8, in Jurgens, 1:209. Origen also states that the church '... received from the Apostles the tradition of giving Baptism even to infants', for the Apostles knew that in everyone is found the 'innate stains of [original] sin, which must be washed away through water and the Spirit'. 5, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Athanasius, *Four Letters to Serapion of Thmuis*, 1,28 and 3,6; in Jurgens, 1:336, 337. Serapion was bishop of the church in Thmuis, near Alexandria, Egypt. Canon 19 of the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325) required the rebaptism of heretics who had not been properly baptized according to the triune formula: Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, v.14, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1979), p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3, 17, 1; in W.A. Jurgens, tr., *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 3v. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1970, 1979) 1:92. The following patristic citations were found, for the most part, through the use of the helpful scripture index in Jurgens.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 13,3, in Jurgens, 1:127.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1,1, in Jurgens, 1:126.

une formula of Matthew 28:19 in order to prove the full deity of Christ and the equality of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: 'Just as we are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son, so also in the name of the Holy Spirit; and we are made sons of God, not of gods ... for the Godhead is one and there is one God in three Persons.'<sup>12</sup>

Writing during the years 356-359 A.D., during his exile in Phrygia, Hilary, bishop of Poitiers, cites Matthew 28:19 in his treatise in defence of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. The Lord commanded his disciples '... to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: that is, in a confession of the Author, and of the Only-Begotten, and of the Gift.' With respect to Christ, '... many of us, indeed, are the sons of God, but not in the way that He is the Son. For He is both truly and properly the Son by origin and not by adoption.'<sup>13</sup>

The fourth-century Greek father Basil of Caesarea also quotes the Great Commission text in the context of trinitarian considerations. Having insisted that the Son alone is 'begotten,' and that the Spirit 'proceeds' from the Father, Basil also notes that there is a certain order or way of speaking of the three persons in divine revelation. 'Indeed', says Basil, 'we must preserve unaltered and inviolate the order which we have received from the very words of the Lord when he said, 'Going forth, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

Spirit'.<sup>14</sup> It is clear from the context that Basil's reading of the text is focused not on missiological concerns but rather on those of trinitarian doctrine.

Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, writing in the fifth century, cites our passage on at least two occasions. In his *Commentary on Isaias* he quotes the words 'All power in heaven and on earth is given to me' to prove that Christ had asserted his authority over all the world.<sup>15</sup> In his *Dialogues on the Holy Trinity* Cyril appeals to the baptismal formula to defend the trinitarian faith of the church: 'Did he not command that Baptism be given 'in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?'<sup>16</sup>

In his great treatise on *The Trinity*, perhaps the most important contribution to trinitarian theology from the Latin fathers, Augustine confesses, 'O Lord our God, we believe in You, Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit.' This confession is consistent with the scriptures, for Christ would not say, 'Go, baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit', unless God were a Trinity.<sup>17</sup> Like his predecessors, Augustine's interest in the text is doctrinal rather than missiological.

While in this latter instance Augustine quotes the text for trinitarian purposes, it is not the case that the great North African church father is without missionary concern. In a letter written c. 419 to his fellow bishop Hesychius, he states that

<sup>14</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Transcript of Faith* [A.D. 373] 125, 3, in Jurgens, 2:5.

<sup>15</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Isaias* 3,5, in Jurgens, 3:218.

<sup>16</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Dialogues on the Holy Trinity*, 2, in Jurgens, 3:214.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15, 28, 51, in Jurgens, 3:81.

<sup>12</sup> *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, 10, in Jurgens, 1:340.

<sup>13</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity*, 2,1 and 3, 11; in Jurgens, 1:373, 375.

there are '... among us, that is, in Africa, innumerable barbarian tribes among whom the Gospel has not yet been preached.'<sup>18</sup> Augustine dissents from the opinion current in his day that the gospel had already been preached throughout the whole world by the apostles.

In the Middle Ages the patristic tendency to read the Great Commission text in terms of Trinitarian and baptismal concerns continues largely unabated. Thomas Aquinas cites this text some nine times in the *Summa Theologica*.<sup>19</sup> Two of these citations relate to the doctrine of the Trinity, five to baptism, two to other subjects, and none to missions. For example, when exploring the question of whether a person can explicitly believe in the mystery of Christ without having faith in the Trinity, he answers that '... once grace has been revealed, all were bound to explicit faith in the mystery of the Trinity ... all who are born again in Christ have this bestowed on them [in baptism] by the invocation of the Trinity, according to Matt.28:19.'<sup>20</sup> If the question is whether or not belief in the Trinity is necessary for salvation, he notes the progressive unfolding of divine revelation over the course of redemptive history, and then cites the Matthean text: 'Afterwards in the time of grace the mystery of the Trinity was revealed by the Son of God Himself, according to Matt.28:19, "Going ...

teach ... baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."'<sup>21</sup>

In his five citations of Matthew 28:19 in relation to baptism, Aquinas makes the points that Christian baptism is hallowed by the invocation of the Triune name;<sup>22</sup> that the text requires a valid baptism to use a specific form of words;<sup>23</sup> that Christ gave his disciples the command to baptize after his death and resurrection;<sup>24</sup> that proper baptism requires the use of the words of the Triune formula;<sup>25</sup> and that the words of Christ in this text confer on the priest the spiritual authority to baptize and to absolve sins.<sup>26</sup>

Aquinas cites the text in two other instances, in relation to issues unrelated to baptism or the Trinity. It was fitting that the gospel be preached first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, because Christ did not wish his doctrine to be preached to the Gentiles before his passion, according to the statement 'Going, teach ye all nations', and so forth.<sup>27</sup> Matthew 28:18 is also quoted to demonstrate that Christ has judicial power over all temporal affairs of humanity, not just authority over matters that pertain to eternal salvation.<sup>28</sup>

The scholastic theologians of the middle ages discussed Matthew 28:19 in regard to the particular questions raised by the difference between Matthew and the book of Acts as to the proper words of baptism. The first gospel uses the trinitarian formula; the book of Acts

<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *Letters*, v.4, tr. Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1955) 394; Letter 199, ch.46. I wish to thank my colleague Timothy Tennent for drawing this reference to my attention.

<sup>19</sup> The following citations from the *Summa* are from the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 volumes (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947).

<sup>20</sup> Pt.II-II, Q.2, art.8.

<sup>21</sup> Pt.II-II, Q.174, art.6.

<sup>22</sup> Pt.III, Q.39, art.8.

<sup>23</sup> Pt.III, Q.60, art.7.

<sup>24</sup> Pt.III, Q.66, art.2.

<sup>25</sup> Pt.III, Q.66, art.5.

<sup>26</sup> Pt.III, Q.84, art.3.

<sup>27</sup> Pt.III, Q.42, art.1.

<sup>28</sup> Pt.III, Q.59, art.4.

speaks of 'baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus' alone (Acts 2:38; 10:48; 19:5). Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus held that the apostles baptized in the name of Jesus alone in view of a special dispensation. In the period following the Council of Trent (1545-63), however, the prevailing Roman Catholic view became that the apostles in fact made use of the triune formula, but the language of the book of Acts was intended to emphasize the distinction between the baptism of John the Baptist and the proper Christian baptism commanded by Christ.<sup>29</sup>

During the Reformation period it is of interest to see how Luther, Erasmus, and Calvin understood the Great Commission passage. There are some 46 citations of the text in the collected works of the great German reformer.<sup>30</sup> Three citations relate to the papacy;<sup>31</sup> three to the nature of priesthood and ordination;<sup>32</sup> fourteen to controversies concerning baptism and the Anabaptists;<sup>33</sup> five to the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper or the

Mass;<sup>34</sup> one to the doctrine of the Trinity;<sup>35</sup> five to the nature of a true apostle;<sup>36</sup> thirteen to the nature of the true church and its teaching;<sup>37</sup> two to the enduring nature of the Word of God;<sup>38</sup> and five relate to a variety of other topics.<sup>39</sup>

In the one instance that Luther cites the text in a missiological context, he does not see in it a present-day 'missionary' obligation! In a letter of October 2, 1539 to the Elector John Frederick, Luther comments on the use of Matthew 28:19 by Martin Bucer to appeal to Luther to send Melancthon to England to help the cause of the Reformation there. Luther states that this verse does not obligate him to send Melancthon, because he [Luther] is 'Going into all the world ... to preach' through *his writings*—and he also does not wish to leave the present work.<sup>40</sup>

Elsewhere in his writings Luther does recognize the church's task now called 'foreign missions'. Christians must go to those to whom '... Christ has not been proclaimed ... so that they, too, may be brought to the spiritual kingdom of Christ.'<sup>41</sup> In his com-

<sup>29</sup> Bernard Henry Cuneo, *The Lord's Command to Baptize: an Historical-Critical Investigation with special reference to the works of Eusebius of Caesarea* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1923), p. 20. This doctoral dissertation is a valuable study on the history of the interpretation of Mt. 28:19 in relation to such questions as the necessity of the use of the triune formula in baptism and the validity of baptisms, in the triune name, performed by heretics.

<sup>30</sup> These citations were located with the aid of the scripture index in Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, eds., *Luther's Works*, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959-1986). The following citations refer to the volume and page numbers from this edition of Luther's works.

<sup>31</sup> 2:99; 35:148; 41:330.

<sup>32</sup> 36:111; 38:196; 38:212.

<sup>33</sup> 3:104; 8:81ff.; 23:78; 35:91; 38:24; 38:27; 38:87; 38:198; 40:245; 40:252; 51:320; 51:376; 54:55; 54:113.

<sup>34</sup> 30:38; 34:74,75; 36:351; 37:331; 38:161.

<sup>35</sup> 12:288. Citations of Matt.28:19 in the context of Trinitarian controversy, common in the patristic period, are not frequent in Luther.

<sup>36</sup> 13:272; 25:8; 26:100; 27:156; 38:161.

<sup>37</sup> 13:19; 13:49; 15:350; 41:196; 41:481; 41:581; 41:107; 41:132; 41:148; 41:155; 41:202; 46:222; 47:117.

<sup>38</sup> 17:309; 17:374.

<sup>39</sup> 6:311 (comfort in affliction); 6:128 (nature of true worship); 20:338 (the Day of Judgment); 28:262 (secret will of God); 51:308 (prayer and faith).

<sup>40</sup> 50:203.

<sup>41</sup> WA, 16, 215ff., cited in John Warwick Montgomery, 'Luther and Missions,' *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 3:4 (1967), pp. 193-202 at p. 197. See the entire article for other citations in Luther on this point. I wish to thank my colleague Garth Rosell for drawing my attention to this article. WA refers to the *Weimar Ausgabe*, the standard, critical, German-Latin edition of Luther's writings.

mentary on Psalm 117 and the words, 'Praise the Lord, all you heathen', Luther writes that the heathen will not praise God unless they have first heard his word. 'If they are to hear His Word, the *preachers must be sent to proclaim* God's Word to them' (emphasis added).<sup>42</sup> In his commentary on Psalm 2:9 Luther states that 'Even the Turks, whom today we seek to overcome only by the sword, ought to be conquered by increasing the number of Christians among them'.<sup>43</sup>

This missionary task is not based, however, on the 'Great Commission' text. Luther's many citations of this text indicate that his understanding of the passage is more influenced by current ecclesiastical controversies than by what later generations would consider the obvious 'historical-grammatical meaning'.<sup>44</sup>

Erasmus of Rotterdam (c.1466-1536) was perhaps the earliest biblical scholar to recover the 'modern' understanding of the Great Commission text, in terms of its original historical context. This recovered understanding was reflected in his 1522 preface to the New Testament, his paraphrase of the Great Commission, and in his annotations to the New Testament.

Erasmus insisted that those who were baptized must be *taught* the '... rudiments and first beginnings of the gospel. For if a man will not believe these rudiments and principles, his baptism will avail him nothing'.<sup>45</sup> Erasmus's exegesis greatly influenced the Anabaptist's critique of infant baptism, and also spurred the Anabaptist reading of Matthew 28:18-20 as obligatory in a missionary sense on the church of their own day. Anabaptists such as Hans Hut and Balthasar Hubmaier and their followers frequently quoted the Great Commission in their sermons and writings and understood it to apply to all believers at all times.<sup>46</sup> The Anabaptists, with their passion for the 'restitution' and rediscovery of the early, apostolic church, anticipated the recovery of the fuller meaning of the Matthean text that was to be crystallized and popularized by William Carey at the end of the eighteenth century.

The Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) quotes the Great Commission text on several occasions, but his concerns are baptismal rather than missiological. He cites Matthew 28 in order to defend the practice of infant baptism against the Anabaptists, to argue that baptism was instituted with John the Baptist rather than after the resurrection, and that the sacraments signify grace, but do not convey grace in

<sup>42</sup> Martin Luther, 'Selected Psalms III,' in *Luther's Works*, v.14, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1958), p. 9. I wish to thank Thorkild Jensen for showing me this and the following reference in Luther.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

<sup>44</sup> Timothy Tennent and others have noted that the Reformer's view of missions was hampered by the prevailing 'territorial' view of Christianity, in which it tended to be assumed that the gospel was to be spread only in areas governed by a Christian ruler; each region was to follow the religion of its ruler (*cuius regio eius religio*). Timothy C. Tennent, 'William Carey as a Missiologist,' *ABE Journal* 7:1 (1999), pp. 3-10 at p. 4. On this point see also David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 246.

<sup>45</sup> *Erasmii Opera Omnia*, 7:674, cited in Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), p. 116. I wish to thank my colleague Timothy Tennent for drawing to my attention this definitive study of the influence of Erasmus' exegesis on the Anabaptist understanding of baptism, theology, and mission.

<sup>46</sup> On this, see Franklin H. Littell, 'The Anabaptist Theology of Missions,' *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 21 (1947), pp. 5-17, containing many citations from Anabaptist writings.

and of themselves in some material way.<sup>47</sup> Zwingli's associate and successor in Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) quoted Matt.28:19 in order to argue that the right administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper required that they be joined to the sincere preaching of the Word of God.<sup>48</sup>

John Calvin shared the common opinion of his time that the Great Commission had been fulfilled during the time of the apostles. In his comments on I Corinthians 12:28, for example, he writes that the apostles were appointed to spread the gospel 'throughout the whole world'. They differed from pastors of the present day, who do not have a mandate to preach the gospel all the world over, but to look after the churches committed to their charge.<sup>49</sup> In his *Harmony of the Evangelists* his comments on the text 'Go out, therefore, and teach all nations' are to the effect that the Pope and his successors disqualify themselves as true successors of the apostles by their failure to teach the true apostolic doctrine. No missiological point is made.<sup>50</sup> Calvin did not advocate a self-conscious missions programme, but believed that the gospel would be extended in ever-widening circles through the normal preaching of the

church and by the dispersion of Christians through persecution.<sup>51</sup>

In the seventeenth century the predominant opinion among Protestant theologians seemed to be that the Great Commission was no longer binding on the church.<sup>52</sup> The Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) argued that the universal preaching of the gospel was no longer necessary, the apostles having finished the job. Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Calvin's successor in Geneva, was of a similar opinion. Matthew Poole (1624-1679) discusses Matthew 28:18-20 in connection with infant baptism, and believes that the text authorizes pastors in any given place to preach and baptize, but does not obligate them to 'go up and down preaching in all nations'.<sup>53</sup>

There were some exceptions, however. The German nobleman Justinian von Weltz and the Dutchman Adrianus Saravia<sup>54</sup> (1531-1613) argued that the Great Commission applied to the church in all ages, but their voices were in the minority. The Protestant churches on the continent felt themselves to be an embattled and threatened minority in the face of the Counter Reformation attack, and were more concerned for survival and preserv-

<sup>47</sup> Zwingli, 'Of Baptism' and 'An Exposition of the Faith,' in *The Library of Christian Classics*, v.24, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, tr. G.W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 141ff., 160, 161, 248.

<sup>48</sup> Bullinger, 'Of the Holy Catholic Church,' in Bromiley, op. cit., p. 300.

<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, tr. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 270, 271. For similar comments, see Calvin's expositions of Romans 15:20 and Ephesians 4:11.

<sup>50</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, tr. William Pringle, v.3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 383.

<sup>51</sup> Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and the Missionary Witness of the Church* (Dissertation, Free University of Amsterdam, 1955), p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> For this period, see R.E. Davies, 'The Great Commission from Calvin to Carey,' *Evangel* (Summer 1996), pp. 44-49 at p. 45.

<sup>53</sup> Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (New York: Robert Carter and Bros., 1852), v.3, p. 146. Poole, a London pastor, was ejected from his church in 1662 because of his Puritan and Nonconformist convictions.

<sup>54</sup> Adrianus Saravia, *De Diversis Ministrorum Evangelii Gradibus* (London: George Bishop, 1590): Microfiche: Inter Documentation Company AG, Poststrasse 14 Zug Switzerland.

ing the purity of doctrine than extending the gospel to foreign lands.<sup>55</sup>

Eighteenth-century interpretation prior to William Carey largely followed the lines that had come to prevail since the fourth century. The Anglican commentator Daniel Whitby, writing in 1703, uses Matthew 28:19 as the occasion to present an elaborate defence of the practice of infant baptism;<sup>56</sup> there is no indication of interest in 'world missions' or 'marketplace ministries'. Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia Christi Americana* ('Great Works of Christ in America'), written in 1702, directs the reader's attention to the work of Thomas Mayhew, who in the year 1642 settled at Martha's Vineyard and began evangelistic work among the Indians. Mather connects the work of Mayhew with the words of Christ who said, 'Go teach all nations: lo I am with you,' but the missiological significance of the text is not developed.<sup>57</sup>

The influential commentator Matthew Henry, writing during the years 1708-1710, expounds the words 'Go ye therefore' as given primarily to the apostles, whose task was to transmit the gospel 'from nation to nation'. In a secondary sense, however, present-day ministers have a commission to transmit the gospel 'from age to age, to the end of the world in time'—i.e., maintaining the gospel witness within the

bounds of the existing churches, until the end of the age.<sup>58</sup> Henry does comment that ministers of the gospel have an obligation to teach the commands of Christ by assisting the people 'in applying the general commands ... to particular cases'. He notes further, 'there is no day, no hour of the day, in which the Lord Jesus is not present with his churches', thus hinting at a 'marketplace' application of the text but not fully developing it.<sup>59</sup>

The commentary on the New Testament by the Lutheran scholar J.A. Bengel, *Gnomen of the New Testament* (1742), was widely used in its day, by John Wesley as well as by many others. Bengel's comments on the Great Commission text focus on the confession of the Trinity as seen in the baptismal formula. The words 'I will be with you always' signify that the '... church of Christ will never die out entirely', but there is no discussion of the ongoing extension of the church in unevangelized lands.<sup>60</sup>

Philip Doddridge (1702-51) was a friend of Isaac Watts, the Wesleys, and George Whitfield. In his comments on the Great Commission passage in his *Family Expositor* he writes that no arguments to the prejudice of infant baptism can be drawn from the text. Christ's words 'I will be with you always, even to the end of the world', cannot be limited to the first generation of the apostles—but Doddridge seems to stop short of

<sup>55</sup> J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), p. 73-75.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Whitby, *A Commentary on the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament* (London: William Tegg and Co., 1853; orig. 1703), p. 186-191.

<sup>57</sup> Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in Americana*, v.2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, repr.1979), p. 429.

<sup>58</sup> Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, v.5 (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., n.d.; orig. 1708-1710), p. 256.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>60</sup> John Albert Bengel, *Gnomen of the New Testament*, v.1 (Philadelphia: Perkinpine & Higgins, repr.1864) 312. Bengel's critical text and apparatus of the Greek New Testament (1734) can be seen as pioneering work in this field of study.

drawing clear missiological implications for his own time.<sup>61</sup> The apostles evidently fulfilled the command to 'go into all the world,' and 'We, to this day, in our remote land [England], enjoy the benefit of it.'<sup>62</sup>

In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1754), John Wesley follows the then traditional lines of interpretation. Discipling the nations involves baptizing and teaching; in the case of children, baptism will precede the teaching, as was the case in the Jewish era of the divine economy.<sup>63</sup> No missiological implications are drawn from the text.

'Sit down, young man; when God wants to convert the heathen, he'll do it without your help or mine.'<sup>64</sup> These now-famous words spoken by John Ryland of Northampton, England in 1785 to William Carey at a ministers' meeting expressed a common sentiment of the day among hyper-Calvinists concerning the heathen overseas. It was necessary to pray for them, but not to use 'means' to bring the gospel to them. Seven years later Carey published his famous pamphlet, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the*

*Heathen* (1792), responding to Ryland and arguing for the present-day validity of the Great Commission. This commission originally given to the apostles is still binding upon the church today, because the command to 'make disciples of all nations' is bound up with the commands to teach and to baptize, both of which are still practised by the church today; Christ's promise to be with the church till the end of the age is still valid; and unlike the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, there is no indication in the New Testament that the missionary mandate of Christ has been repealed. Neither do unfulfilled prophecies in the Old Testament or the existence of unevangelized persons closer to home invalidate the missionary obligation.<sup>65</sup> There is little evidence that Carey's pamphlet was widely read when it first appeared,<sup>66</sup> but this seminal document has been widely seen as marking the birth of the modern Protestant missionary movement and of the modern evangelical understanding of the Great Commission text of Matthew's gospel.

### From William Carey to the Present:

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries conservative commentators generally affirm the continuing validity of the Great Commission, while liberal Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars increasingly become preoccupied with source-

<sup>61</sup> Philip Doddridge, *The Family Expositor*, v.2 (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1828; orig.1739-56), p. 466.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 468. The miraculous gifts given to the apostles have ceased, but the promise 'I will be with you' remains in force, according to Doddridge. His somewhat traditional view of Mt. 28:18-20 notwithstanding, Doddridge was in fact a promoter of evangelical revival in England and of the modern missionary enterprise.

<sup>63</sup> John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book Room, repr.1800), on Mt. 28:19 [no pagination].

<sup>64</sup> Quoted by Ernest Payne in an Introduction to William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, facsimile ed. 1961; orig. 1792), p. iii.

<sup>65</sup> Carey, op. cit., pp. 8-13.

<sup>66</sup> According to Ernest Payne, op. cit., p. xv.

critical issues.<sup>67</sup> The 1810 commentary of the English Methodist Adam Clarke is, however, an exception to this pattern. Clark's interest in Matthew 28:18-20 is in defending the practice of infant baptism against Baptists and the doctrine of the Trinity against Unitarians and deists. There is no discussion of foreign missions or marketplace ministries.<sup>68</sup>

Charles Simeon, pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, England, writing in 1832, notes that while present-day pastors are not empowered to work miracles, they nonetheless have the same commission 'to make known his name to all the different generations from the apostolic age to the present day.' Preachers are to instruct their people in 'practical religion', and, in a hint of 'marketplace' application, are to 'inculcate every moral duty, and to enforce every obligation, whether toward God or man'.<sup>69</sup>

In their widely-used commentary on the whole Bible, Jamison, Fausset, and Brown (1864-1870) write that in the Great Commission Jesus addressed all 'who, in every age should take up ... the same work'. The Great Commission is the work not only of ministers, but of the whole church; the laity is called to cooperate with, aid, and encourage the ministers in the fulfilment of the

task till the end of the age.<sup>70</sup>

Writing in 1870, George W. Clark does presuppose the present validity of the Great Commission, and hints at 'marketplace' ministries when he notes that discipleship 'continues in the service of faith in every duty'. The predominant amount of space in his commentary on the text is devoted, however, to issues relating to the proper subjects and forms of baptism and to the Trinity.<sup>71</sup> Lyman Abbot, writing in 1876, notes that 'Christian missions are the mother of civilization' but devotes more space to the question of baptism.<sup>72</sup> The American Baptist commentator John Broadus, writing in 1886, clearly affirms the Great Commission, stating that 'Christianity is essentially a missionary religion ... it must be active at the extremities, or it becomes chilled at the heart.' The Great Commission involves not simply '... teaching them the commandments of Christ, but teaching them to observe his commandments.' The Christian teacher falls short in his task unless his students have learned both '... what Christ's commandments are, and have learned to observe them'.<sup>73</sup> Broadus clearly seeks to affirm the implication of the text for discipleship in everyday life.

In the twentieth century non-evan-

<sup>67</sup> 'Source-critical' in the sense of questions concerning whether the words attributed to Jesus in Mt. 28:18-20 represent the actual words of Jesus or the theology of the early church, whether the triune formula for baptism is original to Jesus or a creation of the early church, etc.

<sup>68</sup> Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, abridged from the original by Ralph Earle (Grand Rapids, MI: 1966; orig. 1810), p. 835.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, v.11 (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832), pp. 618, 619.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fauset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, v.3 [orig. 1864-70] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1993), pp. 134, 135.

<sup>71</sup> George W. Clark, *Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1870), pp. 407-409.

<sup>72</sup> Lyman Abbott, *The New Testament with Notes and Comments* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1876), pp. 327-329.

<sup>73</sup> John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), pp. 593, 596.

gelical interpreters tend to become preoccupied with source-critical issues in their studies of the Great Commission text. W.C. Allen (1912) devotes a long discussion to the triune formula of Matthew 28 in relation to baptism 'in the name of Jesus' in the book of Acts. There is no discussion of world missions or marketplace ministries as such.<sup>74</sup> Alfred Plummer (1915) does note that making disciples obligated the apostles '... to make them [the Gentiles] as fully disciples of Christ as they are themselves,' and that the light of the world is '... to be sent forth to illuminate every branch of the human race', but most of his attention is devoted to a discussion of whether or not the triune baptismal formula is original to Jesus, and whether these words require a definite form of baptism.<sup>75</sup> Floyd Filson (1960) does comment on the world mission of the disciples, but sees this aspect as Matthew's reflection rather than the literal words of Jesus, and devotes a significant amount of his commentary on the text to the question of the originality of the triune baptismal formula.<sup>76</sup>

W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann (1971) focus a disproportionate amount of attention on baptism and source-critical questions relating to the baptismal formula, and devote only two sentences to the phrase

'teaching them'.<sup>77</sup> David Hill (1972) thinks that the command to disciple all nations came from the early church about fifty years after the death of Jesus; there is no interest in a 'marketplace' application of the text.<sup>78</sup> Eduard Schweizer (1975) hints at a marketplace application, noting that the true wise men and teachers are those who '... authoritatively interpret Scripture for new situations and problems' and who '... follow his [Christ's] teaching and live by his model', but this hint is not fully developed.<sup>79</sup> Francis Beare (1981) notes that the 'teaching' is primarily ethical rather than doctrinal in nature, but devotes more space to the issues of baptism and the trinitarian formula.<sup>80</sup>

Leopold Sabourin (1983) sees 'making disciples' as a reflection of the theology of the early church rather than being the actual words of Jesus.<sup>81</sup> Benedict Viviano (1990) sees the mandate as one to continue the teaching ministry of Jesus, '... thus laying the foundations for Christian education, theology, and other intellectual work'.<sup>82</sup> M. Eugene Boring (1995) focuses on the redactional history of Matthew 28:16-20,

<sup>74</sup> Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, 3rd. ed. (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1912), pp. 305-308.

<sup>75</sup> Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, repr. 1982; orig. 1915), pp. 429-431.

<sup>76</sup> Floyd V. Filson, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), pp. 305-306.

<sup>77</sup> W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), pp. 362-363.

<sup>78</sup> David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew: New Century Bible* (London: Oliphants, 1972), pp. 361-362.

<sup>79</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew* (London: SPCK, 1975), p. 180.

<sup>80</sup> Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 545.

<sup>81</sup> Leopold Sabourin, S.J., *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, v.1 (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1983), p. 932-939.

<sup>82</sup> Benedict T. Viviano, 'The Gospel According to Matthew,' in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), p. 674.

and is concerned to argue that resurrection faith '... is not identical with affirming the historical factuality of any of the Gospels' resurrection stories' or of the empty tomb.<sup>83</sup> George Wesley Buchanan (1996) focuses on the Old Testament and Jewish backgrounds of the text and is not interested in the marketplace implications of the command to make disciples.<sup>84</sup> W.D. Davies and Dale Allison in their recent magisterial commentary (1997) note that this text, so important to William Carey and the nineteenth-century Protestant missionary movement is, from a literary point of view, 'perfect, in that it satisfyingly completes the Gospel', and in fact is a compendium and summary of the theology of the entire book.<sup>85</sup>

In recent evangelical interpretation the missiological significance of the Great Commission is assumed, and there are occasional hints of marketplace applications. In 1968 Robert Culver, noting that the imperative 'make disciples' controlled the force of the participles 'going', 'baptizing', and 'teaching', argued that the proper sense of the Commission was 'As you go, therefore, and wherever you may be, make disciples ... in the particular nation among which you dwell.'<sup>86</sup> Culver was arguing that the

customary interpretations of the text placed too much emphasis on 'going', i.e., 'foreign' missions, and not enough on making disciples. Peter O'Brien concurred, writing that the central point of the text was '... bringing men and women to submit to Jesus as Lord, to become his disciples, wherever they may be'.<sup>87</sup> This proposed shift of emphasis has not gained universal consent among conservative interpreters, however. Cleon Rogers agreed that 'making disciples' is the main verb in the text, and that such discipleship involves putting the commandments of Jesus into practice in daily life. Nevertheless, this does not reduce the 'going' to a non-imperative sense; 'going' remains an integral part of making disciples.<sup>88</sup>

Robert Gundry (1982), notes the Old Testament background of Matthew's phraseology, and observes that '... learning includes doing'.<sup>89</sup> Robert Mounce (1985) comments that 'teaching' in the Great Commission is primarily ethical rather than doctrinal in nature; the converts are to be taught to obey all that Jesus has commanded.<sup>90</sup> Leon Morris (1992) states that Jesus is not concerned about '... education for education's sake ... Jesus is con-

<sup>83</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New Interpreter's Bible*, v.8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 502-505.

<sup>84</sup> George Wesley Buchanan, *The Mellen Biblical Commentary*, v.1, Book 2, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996), pp. 1029-1033.

<sup>85</sup> W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, v.3 (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1997), pp. 676-689 at p. 687.

<sup>86</sup> Robert D. Culver, 'What Is the Church's Commission? Some Exegetical Issues In Matthew 28:16-20,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 125 (1968), pp. 239-253 at pp. 252, 253.

<sup>87</sup> P.T. O'Brien, 'The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20,' *Reformed Theological Review* 35 (1976), pp. 66-78 at p. 78.

<sup>88</sup> Cleon Rogers, 'The Great Commission,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130 (1973), pp. 258-267 at p. 266. For similar conclusions, see also D. A. Carson, *Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, v.8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), p. 595.

<sup>89</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 597.

<sup>90</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew: New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), p. 268.

cerned with a way of life.<sup>91</sup> Craig Blomberg (1992) argues that the text is to be fulfilled by the whole church. New converts are to be nurtured in the whole counsel of God's revelation; every individual is to develop their gifts and strengths for ministry. 'Jesus calls all Christians to be both witnesses and disciples.'<sup>92</sup>

Commentaries in the popular study Bibles in general reflect the concerns and emphases of the more specialized scholarly literature.<sup>93</sup> Harold Lindsell in the Harper Study Bible (1964) focuses his comments on baptism and the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>94</sup> The Lindsell Study Bible (1980) likewise focuses on the proper mode and subjects of baptism, and defends the triune formula against modern critics.<sup>95</sup> The *Life Application Bible* (1988) notes that all believers have been given gifts to

help fulfil the Great Commission, but no marketplace applications are suggested.<sup>96</sup> The *Serendipity Bible* (1989) is unusual in that in one of the study questions an explicit marketplace connection is made: 'In what ways can you fulfill the Great Commission in the context of your family? Work? Community?'<sup>97</sup>

The notes in the *Word in Life Bible* (1993) challenge the reader to ask seriously what it means to accept Jesus' lordship for all nations in a global, cross-cultural context, but, surprisingly, no direct marketplace applications are suggested.<sup>98</sup> The *Quest Study Bible* (1994) comments that all believers are called to share the ministry of disciple-making, but the sphere of this ministry seems to be limited to the traditional evangelistic and missionary contexts.<sup>99</sup> The *Study Bible for Women* (1995) focuses its attention on the appearances of the Risen Christ to women.<sup>100</sup> The *New Geneva Study Bible* (1995) notes that this text is the primary reason for missions and evangelism, but more space is devoted to baptism and the sacraments. The editors comment that 'teaching' means that 'Disciples are not just taught what to believe, but how to obey', but explicit marketplace connections are not drawn.<sup>101</sup>

As previously noted at the begin-

<sup>91</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), p. 749.

<sup>92</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew: The New American Commentary*, v.22 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), p. 433.

<sup>93</sup> Roman Catholic and 'mainline' Protestants study Bibles tend to focus on 'source-critical' questions such as the originality of the triune baptismal formula, and so forth: see, for example, *The New English Bible with the Apocrypha: Oxford Study Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 41; *The New Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), p. 1659 ['This (baptismal) formula is probably a reflection of the liturgical usage established later in the primitive community.']; *The Catholic Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 65 ['It may have been the baptismal formula of Matthew's church, but primarily it designates the effects of baptism, the union of the one baptized with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.']; *The Oxford Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 1303; *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 1914 ['This explicit trinitarian formula is rare in the NT and probably derives from early Christian worship.']

<sup>94</sup> *Harper Study Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 1491.

<sup>95</sup> *Lindsell Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1980), p. 53.

<sup>96</sup> *Life Application Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), p. 1721.

<sup>97</sup> *Serendipity Bible for Groups* (Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1989), p. 1290.

<sup>98</sup> *Word in Life Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993; 1998) 1482. 'Surprisingly'—in light of the fact that the editor of this study Bible is a well known leader in the field of marketplace ministries.

<sup>99</sup> *Quest Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), p. 1379.

<sup>100</sup> *Study Bible for Women* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), p. 72.

<sup>101</sup> *New Geneva Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), pp. 1556, 57.

ning of this paper, two recent study Bibles are unusual in the history of Christian interpretation in that they make explicit applications of the Great Commission text to the workplace. The editors of the *Christian Growth Study Bible* (1997), associated with the parachurch organization Youth With a Mission (YWAM), challenge the reader to see this text as having implications for discipleship in all areas of life, e.g., science, education, the arts, medicine, government, and many others. 'As believers,' they write, 'we must not abandon certain professions and places of influence because of the darkness there. Those are the very places where God wants to shine the light of Jesus!'<sup>102</sup> In a similar vein, the editors of the *Promise Keeper Men's Study Bible* (1997), representing the parachurch organization of that name, tell the reader that in the words of the Great Commission Jesus promises to be with his people as they begin '... even in the smallest way within our own sphere of influence, to affect positive change in the world'. Making disciples can begin by '... changing your attitude and being a more positive force at work'.<sup>103</sup>

In recent years Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International, has given indication that his understanding of the Great Commission has developed beyond the traditional understanding to include equipping the people of God to serve in the workplace. In a letter to Campus Crusade staff workers he stated that he had come to realize that 'full-time Christian service' was not limited to pastors, mis-

sionaries, or workers in parachurch organizations. Whether Crusade's staff is working with students, mid-career people or senior executives, '... we must give special attention and follow up to those whom God calls to serve him in the secular world.'<sup>104</sup>

### Some Concluding Reflections

This survey of some sixteen centuries of Christian interpretation of Matthew's 'Great Commission' passage has shown how profoundly the *ecclesiastical* controversies and concerns of the day have dominated the church's understanding of the text. From the fourth century until the time of William Carey the missiological significance of the text was, with few exceptions, essentially lost. Interpreters tended to assume that Christ's mandate was fulfilled by the apostles, and read the text in terms of controversies about the Trinity and the proper subjects of and form of words for baptism. With the publication of Carey's *Enquiry* (1792) the significance of the text for foreign missions was recovered. This 'missiological' hermeneutic became the standard for subsequent evangelical Protestant interpreters.

With the rise of the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation in Europe in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment eras, liberal Protestant and many Roman Catholic interpreters tended to become preoccupied with 'source-critical' issues such as the originality

<sup>102</sup> *Christian Growth Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), p. 1049.

<sup>103</sup> *Promise Keepers Men's Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), p. 1087.

<sup>104</sup> In *Bright Side* 31:3 (1998). I wish to thank Kelly Madden for drawing my attention to this reference. For a statement of Bright's earlier, more traditional 'missiological' and evangelistic understanding of the Great Commission, see Bill Bright, *Revolution Now!* (San Bernadino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1969), pp. 167-191.

of the words of the triune baptismal formula attributed to Jesus. Twentieth-century evangelical interpreters then began to defend traditional views of the text against the liberal, 'revisionist' understandings. Both liberal and conservative exegetes gave little or no attention to the implications of the text for ministry in the workplace; interpretation continued to be dominated by the ecclesiastical and academic contexts of the scholarly guild. In the late 1990s initial signs of a 'marketplace hermeneutic' began to appear, with such voices being raised from the contexts of parachurch ministries.<sup>105</sup>

This paper concludes with a call to the community of interpreters and to the church as a whole to move forward to recover the full meaning of the Great Commission. This recovery involves moving beyond the usual 'clerocentric' hermeneutic focusing on the concerns of the 'full time Christian professionals' to a 'laocentric' hermeneutic focusing on equip-

ping all the people of God to be disciples in every sphere of life, including the workplace. Taking seriously Christ's mandate to make disciples by teaching them 'to observe all that I have commanded' implies concrete, practical training for all the people of God to be 'salt and light' in every sphere of service in the culture. The *horizontal extension* of the kingdom through foreign missions and evangelism must be accompanied by the *vertical penetration* of the kingdom in every dimension of life if the Great Commission is to be truly fulfilled in our or any other generation.

<sup>105</sup> I.e., in the *Christian Growth Study Bible* (1997) [Youth With a Mission], the *Promise Keeper Men's Study Bible* (1997) [Promise Keepers], and the statement of Bill Bright (1998) as noted above. For historical perspective on the emergence of a 'theology of the laity' since the Second World War, see Robert Banks, 'Appendix A: Lay Theology and Education since 1945,' in *Redeeming the Routines: Bringing Theology to Life* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), pp. 153-174. *The Layman in Christian History*, eds. Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Ruedi Weber (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963) is a standard reference on the subject indicated by the title. William Diehl, *The Monday Connection: On Being an Authentic Christian in a Weekday World* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993) is a fine discussion of the problem of the 'disconnect' between much of the church's preaching and teaching and the concerns of the workplace. It could be plausibly argued that the church's less-than-adequate equipping of the laity to practice Christian discipleship in the workplace has contributed to the secularization of Western culture that has been increasingly evident since the end of the Second World War.

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# Models of the Church

## Kevin Giles

**Keywords:** Church, congregation, institution, sacrament, teacher, evangelist, servant, fellowship, celebration, diversity, renewal

A husband once received a card from his wife on his birthday which said, 'Happy birthday darling, you are a model husband.' He was a bit uncertain as to what this meant, so he looked up the word 'model' in his dictionary. He was somewhat stunned to read, 'A model is a small replica of the real thing.' But there are other meanings of this word. For example, in the physical and social sciences a 'model' is a conceptual way of representing some aspect of

reality. We have all seen one of those formations of coloured balls which we are told is a model of the atomic structure of some compound or element.

In the social sciences models, or 'typologies' as they are more commonly called, are frequently used to distinguish differing social structures or groupings. The pioneer sociologist, Max Weber, initiated this approach by arguing that leaders (or to be more precise, those who exercise authority) may be legitimated in one of three ways: by rational, traditional or charismatic recognition. These alternatives Weber called 'ideal types' for each was a conceptual abstraction. Individuals may be recognised as leaders simply because they have been appointed to an office, or because in their society age (for example) conferred authority, or because of personal charisma — but usually more than one of these things is influential. In each particular case one needs to ask which means of legitimation are present, and which one is of most importance.

In theology the use of typologies

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was introduced by H.R. Niebuhr in his classic study, *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Row, New York, 1951). He delineated five typical ways Christians have related to the society in which they find themselves. The application of such models or typologies to ecclesiology was given explicit formulation in Avery Dulles' important book *Models of the Church* which first appeared in 1974 (2nd edition, 1988). Rather than attempting to give one doctrine of the church, Dulles outlines five alternative ways in which the church has been theologically understood: as a divine institution established directly by Christ; the mystical body of Christ; a sacrament; a herald of the good news, and as a servant in the world.

I will use some of these terms but I wish to take a different approach. I intend to set out a number of models of the church as they can be seen to a greater or lesser degree in the congregational life of local churches. These types are entirely descriptive in nature.

Dulles was not, however, the first to construct models of the church. The first steps in this direction were taken by Jesus who used a wide range of metaphors or pictures to speak of the Christian community (salt, light, vine, flock, etc. – see P. Minear, *Images of the Church*, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1960). The apostle Paul developed yet other images or models, the most profound being the body of Christ. He used this metaphor to explain what it meant to be the Christian community, and to correct erroneous views. It had a descriptive and prescriptive rationale. In writing to the Corinthians, he argues that the church is the body of Christ, and as such it operates like a human body (1

Cor. 12:12-31). Each part has a contribution to make and no part is to be despised. At Corinth the tongue speakers thought of themselves as an elite within the church and Paul uses this model of the church to counteract this error. What he does is present an ideal: a church in which every member is active in ministry and all are equally valued. In the real world the church only ever approximates to this ideal – Paul's visionary model always remains the goal of all our communal life. When faced with different errors Paul developed other models of the church (e.g. the temple of the Holy Spirit, the bride of Christ, the bulwark of the truth etc).

### Contemporary Models

With these introductory thoughts in mind we are now in a position to consider seven congregational types. These are all abstractions, differing possible models of congregational life depicted as starkly as possible. Specific congregations either will approximate more to one model than any other, or reflect aspects of two or more models. These models are descriptive in nature, not evaluative. They typify church life apart from theological criteria or denominational labels. The value in constructing such models is that they help us perceive reality more clearly and having done this to see the possibilities for renewal which lie ahead. Different typologies may be constructed, but I have built on the basis of what may be taken as seven essential aspects of a full orb'd doctrine of the church.

These models all capture something basic to Christian communal existence. In each case the model alludes to a congregation, a local church. Theological conviction is the

most formative force in producing the various models of the church, but we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that catholic, or evangelical, or charismatic, or liberal theology always produces a particular model of the church. The reason for this is that there are wide ranging differences within each of these four schools of theology and other forces than theology bear upon the life of any particular church.

### *1. The Church as an Institution*

When a congregation is seen primarily as an institution then the organisational life of the church is what is stressed. Much emphasis is placed on hierarchical leadership, organisational control, bureaucratic decision making, working by rules, producing reports, outlining policy and on buildings and facilities. The church is run like a traditional business and success is evaluated in terms of numbers, meeting budget targets, the quality of equipment and the size and upkeep of the property which is owned. The minister assumes the role of an administrator or manager.

### *2. The Church as a Sacrament*

Another possibility is that the local church will be seen primarily as a dispenser of the sacraments. When this model prevails a great importance is given to the baptism of infants for it is believed that through this sacrament children are incorporated into the church, the body of Christ. But it is the celebration of the eucharist which is central. The faithful assemble not for fellowship or teaching but to partake of 'the medicine of immortality.' Most of the pastoral work in the parish centres on taking the sacrament to the sick, the elderly and the house bound. The minister stands somewhat apart as a holy

person. In ordination a unique power is given to make Christ present in the eucharist. Architecturally the church building is structured like a theatre. The great drama of redemption is repeatedly re-enacted by a colourfully dressed star on stage with a small supporting cast before a hushed audience.

### *3. The Church as Teacher*

Yet another way in which the church may be appear is as a teaching agent. On this model the Christian life is mainly about learning — understanding more of what it means to be a Christian. When the church gathers, the hymns, the prayers and everything else in the service lead to one focal point, the sermon. In the sermon sound teaching is given and applied to life. Architecturally the building for this model of the church is fashioned on the classroom. The large lectern or pulpit is central, the faithful passively sit in rows looking toward the lecturer and the more zealous take notes as the sermon is given. It is understood that members of the church are to submit to their God-given teacher's instruction. During the week the programme revolves around Bible studies where more good teaching is provided. In pastoral visitation 'the Word' is applied to particular problems. The mature believer is understood to be someone well versed in Scripture.

### *4. The Church as Evangelist*

On this model the great commission (Matt. 28:19) to go into the world and preach the Gospel is the blueprint for all church life. When this model prevails every sermon is explicitly evangelistic, every group is evaluated by its evangelistic effectiveness, each baptism is seen as a wonderful evangelistic opportunity,

and every pastoral visit becomes a chance to speak of the new birth. The laity are mobilised as evangelists. They are trained to witness at work and to go out two by two to witness to Christ in the church visitation program.

#### 5. *The Church as Servant*

A fifth model conceives of the church as the presence of Christ in the world ministering to those in special need and standing as their advocate. The church is there to oppose injustice, to side with the powerless to identify with those committed to social change and to the re-distribution of wealth. In the servant church, mission is seen not in terms of preaching the Gospel but as social action, making a better world, the establishing of the values of the Kingdom of God. When the model is embraced the difference between the world and the church is minimised, and serving Christ and working for justice often seems to take priority over gathering for worship.

#### 6. *The Church as Fellowship*

In an alien and secular society, the Christian needs an alternative community. The church seen primarily as a warm and accepting fellowship meets this need. On this model of the church the emphasis falls on good relationships, there are numerous activities within the church so that the faithful can find all their social needs in company with other Christians, and a sharp distinction between Christians and the world is made. There is much hugging and kissing, holding hands and verbal affirmation of one another. As the big fellowship gatherings limit closeness, small groups which meet during the week provide for this need. In this context, personal problems can be shared and prayed about and

practical support and love can be shown. On this model the worship setting is usually set out in the half round and the minister is seen as a facilitator of group life.

#### 7. *The Church as Celebration*

Finally, we describe the church which sees itself as a celebration of redemptive grace. In this church, worship is understood in terms of praise and adoration. It is an anticipation of the wonder of heavenly existence when the believer will be constantly in the presence of Christ. Joyful singing dominates when the community assembles, times of testimony speak of God's triumphs, the expectation that God can and will do great things is a constant theme, and when people pray they often conclude by thanking God for answering their prayer. In this model of the church the architecture makes what is best called the 'stage' the central focus. On this stage there is always found a band and behind it a large overhead screen. Usually a number of people take part in leading the prayer and praise. In this church the contrast between life in the Spirit realised in worship and life in the world with all its brokenness and pain is very stark.

### **Reflection**

Earlier in this article it was suggested that the value of such models or typologies was twofold: to help us see reality more clearly and to provide direction for change. As we reflect on the models just outlined we need to ask ourself to which model or models our congregation approximates most closely, and then, what would we like to see changed.

In thinking about the alternatives, a positive and a negative evaluation should be considered. Positively we

may think of diversity as a reflection of the mind of God. It would seem that variety and difference is part of the creative activity of the God revealed in the Bible. He has made a diverse world, and human beings in general and Christians in particular manifest this. God is not interested in a dreary uniformity. If this is so, then diversity in congregational life is pleasing to God, not something to be overcome. Churches may differ in the emphases they manifest in their corporate life, and in doing so further the purposes of the Lord of the church. Indeed it would seem that often the most dynamic and vital of churches have a clearly spelt out and focussed rationale for their corporate life (and this may be any one of the seven models just outlined).

But, having said this, it does not follow that any model on its own is to be endorsed without reserve. The possibility should be considered, that when one model of the church becomes so dominant that others are excluded, error has appeared. A church seen almost exclusively as an

institution, or as a dispenser of the sacraments, or as a teaching agent, or as an evangelistic community, or as a servant in the world, or as an accepting fellowship, or as celebration has lost something of the varied and dynamic character of that reality which is the body of Christ. It is good, and we dare to suggest pleasing to God, that each congregation lay special emphasis on one or more aspects of church life, but to ignore the others is to become unbalanced. One may be to the fore but the others should not be forgotten. The Christian community needs institutional form; it should value its sacramental life; it has an important teaching function; it must never forget its evangelistic mission; it is to spend itself in service for others; it does assemble together for fellowship; and praise should be at the heart its worship. A stress on one or two of these matters, we are arguing, is fine but to allow one to eclipse all others is dangerous and possibly the first step in becoming sectarian in outlook.

## The Blessed

*With that profound wisdom of the naive,  
We yield what we cannot keep  
To gain what we cannot lose.  
Choosing to die in order to live,  
We reflect the power of Christ's self-giving  
And applaud his crime of forgiveness.*

From *Becoming...* (poetry reflecting theology)  
by Gerry Harris, Adelaide, South Australia  
(used with permission)

## Books Reviewed

*A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* by Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen reviewed by John Olley

*Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul, An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* by P. T. O'Brien reviewed by John Roxborough

*Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Task, Topics, Traditions* by David Willis and Michael Welker (eds) reviewed by John Jefferson Davis

*Our Father in Heaven: Christian Faith and Inclusive Language for God* by John W. Cooper reviewed by James R. Rohrer

*The Wisdom Literature* (Interpreting Biblical Texts series) by Richard J. Clifford reviewed by Tim Meadowcroft

*A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa, 1900-1998* by James Amanze reviewed by Fidelis Nkomazana

*Worship Old and New* (Revised Edition) by Robert Webber reviewed by David Parker

## Book Reviews

ERT (2001) 25/1, 82-88

0144-8153

### **A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament**

by Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, and David L. Petersen  
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999  
475 pp.; pb  
indices, bibliog., map  
ISBN 0-687-01348-8

*Reviewed by Dr. John Olley  
Principal, Baptist Theological  
College of Western Australia, and  
Senior Lecturer in Old Testament,  
Murdoch University*

Where is there a textbook for introductory courses that treats the Old Testament 'as a resource for (students') own ministry and the life of the church?' Out of shared frustration four prominent Old Testament scholars from different Protestant seminaries in the USA (Wesley,

Columbia, Luther and Liff) have written a book that 'seeks to discuss the Old Testament in theological terms at a level appropriate to introductory seminary students' (from the Preface, p. 11).

The work differs significantly from most 'theologies' of the Old Testament in that it takes 'the narrative story of Israel and its faith experience as now reflected in the shape of the Hebrew canon (as) the most appropriate framework' (p. 12). This is not a 'systematic theology', nor does it have a structure other than the narrative outline. The strength of the approach is that theology is rooted in socio-historical experience and so is portrayed as vital and dynamic, rather than an intellectual abstraction.

The opening chapter gives students an excellent introduction to methodology (18 pp.), including a stirring affirmation of the continuity of Israel's God and ours. The next

eight chapters follow Hebrew canonical order (Genesis-Kings), with prophetic books and selected psalms at appropriate chronological points. The chapter, 'Collapse/Exile/Hope', explores Jeremiah, Lamentations, Nahum, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, Isaiah 40-55. Wisdom literature is examined in chapter 11, before the concluding chapter on 'New Life, Renewed Community, New Crises'.

In using the results of historical and literary research they recognise current fluidity in literary studies and historical scepticism of some. They present the issues, but keep their main task in view. Words such as 'seems likely' and 'suggest' are frequent, so inviting dialogue. The canonical presentation is honoured. Thus, for instance, for Deuteronomy 28-34 'it is usually concluded that (they) were written in the light of the experience. This seems likely, but, narratively, they give readers a lens through which to interpret the books that follow' (p. 170). In this way their insights can be used by a wide range of readers.

Each chapter was initially written by one person, then commented on by the others (one can try to guess the original writer!). The mix of historical reconstruction, literary development and theology varies from chapter to chapter (the first two are generally brief), but in general there is good flow. The informal (classroom) style makes for easy reading, with very few notes (63 for the 12 chapters, 33 of these being in two chapters!) and a brief bibliography after each chapter. The writers are sensitive to students, carefully explaining methodology, outlining commonly accepted views. There is occasional cross-reference (forward and back) so that students can follow

the broad thread of presentation.

Where earlier generations of scholars tended to focus on the 'historical' events, looking for socio-political factors, and treating theology in a separate category, the present work highlights ways in which 'biblical texts emerging from and reflective of this geopolitical scenario' insist that Yahweh 'is the initiator and definer of what happens in the visible world of public power', and hence 'Israel, the peculiar people of Yahweh, is understood as a central participant... This peculiar vision of public history reshapes all of reality—historical, political, military, economic, and theological' (pp. 323-324).

Obviously the writers have their own stances (e.g., the significance of the exile for the present form of biblical books and at times suspense of judgment on historical reliability). However, readers who may differ are not denigrated and will learn from the methodological clarity and theological insights. For example, the longest discussion of historical issues is on the book of Joshua: it is 'useful for students to know what the available alternative answers are to historical questions' but 'finally it is the *text* that must be read and not a hypothesis'; 'no hypothesis is neutral', but nevertheless 'the hypothesis of peasant revolt' provides 'access for us to consider the *ideological force* of the books' (pp. 181-183). 'Ideology' is clearly explained and the significance of the book of Joshua elucidated. Here as elsewhere the openness of the writer invites readers to explore the text for themselves.

There are gems throughout. Whether discussing narrative blocks, legal material, or prophetic literature, there is a good coverage

(although the discussion of Isaiah 1-39 is surprisingly slight, and Isaiah 40-55 and 56-66 are treated independently). While being sensitive to Jews, a Christian perspective is explicit, eg, the discussion of Genesis 1-11 opens with Pauline material (p. 35), Exodus with Christian significance (p. 99-100), and in the tabernacle 'God begins a 'descent' that John 1:14 claims comes to a climax in the Incarnation' (p. 135). Conventional thinking is at times challenged, eg, arguing that the Sinai covenant was unconditional. The contemporary significance that is explicit understandably reflects the nationality of the writers (and intended students). There are references to consumerism and military power and 'failed modernity' which the theology still addresses. Yet these flow naturally from their affirmation that 'Israel held together the *realities of public life and public power and the reality of God in its midst*' (p. 373).

This work admirably fulfils its intention. It assumes students will have other material providing general introduction, and its level of language and approach is appropriate for first year seminary. It will be excellent reading for all looking for a survey such as this (it is not a dull textbook), and for any who question the theological value of the Old Testament. It will be a good refresher for many pastors and teachers. While there may be disagreement with some stances taken and interpretations given, readers (and students) will be stimulated in reading the text of the Old Testament itself, seeing there not simply a source of data, but a vibrant presentation of God involved in life in its complexity. The issues addressed will be seen to be quite practical and contemporary!

ERT (2001) 25/1, 88-89

0144-8153

### **Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul. An Exegetical and Theological Analysis**

By P. T. O'Brien

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1995, Pb

viii + 161pp

ISBN 0-85364-614-7

*Reviewed by John Roxborough,  
Presbyterian School of Ministry,  
Knox College, Dunedin, New  
Zealand.*

There are a number of ways of talking about Paul in relation to mission. It is common to study his conversion, theology and missionary strategy. Paul's place at the centre of issues of continuity and discontinuity with Christian Jewish and Gentile cultural traditions is also a basis for studying contemporary cross-cultural issues of theology, ethics and worship.

Peter O'Brien's questions however focus on what was unique about Paul's own calling and what as a missionary he has in common with other Christians. The book was first published in Australia in 1993, based on his 1992 Moore College Annual Lectures. Its roots lie in his experiences with evangelism in India and Australia where he had sought a more satisfactory basis for different programmes only to find himself asking why were there 'relatively few texts in Paul's letters urging believers in his churches to evangelize others'. O'Brien is also concerned to take seriously more holistic views of Paul's theology and mission, and to question the suggestion 'that Paul's missionary apostolate is so exceptional that it is not possible to emulate him'.

The structure is a series of careful

exegetical studies on key passages from the major epistles but without particular reference to Acts. The initial focus is on Paul's self-understanding, particularly as indicated by passages relating to his conversion, and missionary career, and involvement in the gospel itself. Questions about Paul as a model are explored, along with the puzzle about the shortage of evangelistic texts. The gospel itself is seen as the bridge between Paul and other Christians—it is the Christian message about Jesus Christ which itself provides the missionary imperative. The warfare of Ephesians 6 is also seen as an important point of continuity between Paul's experience as an agent of the gospel and ours. Paul's flexibility of approach allows that other Christians work out the mission imperative of the gospel in the light of their own gifts, calling and context. The passion however should be the same!

In an interesting way the book demonstrates not only the value of solid scholarship which takes care with its questions, logic and analysis, but also the importance of actual engagement in Christian mission for our own understanding of the gospel. The edge of these studies lies in the sharpness provided by the evangelistic context in which the questions arose as well as the academic seriousness with which they were pursued.

ERT (2001) 25/1, 89-91

0144-8153

### **Toward The Future of Reformed Theology: Task, Topics, Traditions**

David Willis and Michael Welker,  
editors

Grand Rapids: William B.  
Eerdmans, 1999

Xvi + 533 pp. Paper ISBN 0-8028-4467-7

*Reviewed by John Jefferson Davis, Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, S. Hamilton, MA (USA)*

*Toward the Future of Reformed Theology* is most likely to be of interest to pastors in the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions and to teachers in theological colleges. Like many anthologies of this sort, the contributions vary in interest and quality. The contributors are intended to be representative of the worldwide Presbyterian and Reformed tradition, but authors from Europe, North America, and Germany tend to predominate. In a brief review such as this it would be impossible to do justice to all 31 chapters. This review consequently will focus on those contributions most likely to be of interest to readers of the ERT.

Jurgen Moltmann's essay '*Theologia Reformata et Semper Reformanda*' emphasizes the occasional nature of the confessional statements in the Reformed tradition. There is a very helpful synopsis here of the development of Covenant Theology in the seventeenth century, and Moltmann also helpfully points to the biblical theme of the *new creation* as a basis for a responsible Christian stewardship of

the earth.

Thomas Torrance's chapter on 'The Substance of Faith' has valuable historical information on the terms 'substance of doctrine' and 'system of doctrine' that played significant roles in the debates on creedal subscription in the Presbyterian churches of Scotland and America. In 'The Logic of Faith' Alexander McKelway shows how the Reformer's emphasis on the origin of saving faith in the sovereign action of God rather than the human will was lost in the modern period and then re-emphasized by Karl Barth.

In her essay 'Toward a New Typology of Reformed Doctrines of Atonement,' Leanne Van Dyke argues (unsuccessfully, in this reviewer's opinion), that John McLeod Campbell's attempt in the nineteenth century to replace the notion of penal substitution with one of 'Christ's perfect confession of sin' deserves a place in the mainstream of Reformed understandings of the atonement.

Lukas Vischer's essay 'The Church—Mother of Believers' examines the historical development of the doctrine of the church in Reformed theology. He notes that in the Westminster Confession the Holy Spirit did not merit an entire chapter, and that only in 1902 was a section on the world mission of the church added to this classic document.

In her essay 'Reformed Theology and Medical Ethics,' Nancy Duff appeals to Calvin, Barth and the Reformed understanding of Christian vocation in support of an ethical approach to suspension of life support decisions that is '... bound neither to legalism nor solely by what is practical.' Unfortunately, the reader is not left with a clear

understanding of how such an approach would in practice guard the crucial distinction between *acquiescing* to the inevitability of an imminent death [suspension of futile medical treatments] and actively and intentionally *killing* the patient [physician-assisted suicide]. Such lack of clarity is especially a matter of concern in postmodern cultures where the moral and legal contexts in which such principles would be applied are fragmented and confused.

Jan Lochman's 'The Ecumenical Contribution of the Czech Reformation' is an insightful study of John Huss and the Czech reformers. He argues that the Hussites should not be seen merely as 'precursors' of the German and Swiss reformation, but rather as those who made a distinctive contribution to the cause of reformation through their insistence on practical discipleship and the church's concern for the poor.

Amy Plantinga Pauw's discussion of the theological legacy of Jonathan Edwards helpfully reminds today's leaders in Reformed circles that concerns for 'justice, peace, liberation, and the integrity of creation' need to be firmly grounded in a Christian vision of the 'reality and certainty of divine things'. Such writings of John Piper as *Desiring God* and *The Pleasures of God* could have been mentioned as good contemporary examples of an Edwardsian combination of doctrinal substance, lively affections, and Christian practice.

In his reflections on 'Reforming the Theology and Practice of Baptism,' Dan Migliore argues that Barth's rejection of infant baptism was flawed in its disconnection of the natural order and the redemptive purposes of God. Infant baptism, rightly understood and practised, can

be the church's witness to the new *creation* and, in an environmentally sensitive world, to Christian concern for 'the whole groaning creation'.

Despite its brevity, John Leith's contribution, 'Calvin's Theological Realism,' is one of the most valuable in this collection. Leith argues that the 'realism' of Calvin's theology, in the sense of its congruence with both the scriptures, human experience, and the nature of God, is a key to its enduring value. Calvin's commitment to express theological truths in clear and simple sentences, and to see theology as the servant of preaching and the sanctification of the people of God, remains exemplary for the church and theologians today.

the debate while consistently maintaining an irenic tone. He provides readers with a thorough and fair overview of the various arguments for inclusive God language, allowing advocates of language revision to speak for themselves, and he engages their arguments with an openness too seldom found among evangelical Christians.

Indeed, while Cooper's conclusions strongly critique the theological underpinnings of the inclusive God language programme, he nonetheless finds significant elements of truth in the inclusivist case. Among these is the often made charge that patriarchalist readings of the biblical text have suppressed the feminine language for God plainly employed by Scripture. Cooper acknowledges that the Bible does indeed use feminine imagery for God, and that 'Our heavenly Father does have a motherly touch' (p. 18). He accordingly calls upon the church 'to bring the language of faith more fully into conformity with the language of Scripture' by intentionally integrating the Bible's feminine imagery into its traditional pattern of speech. Thus Cooper's book will challenge the thinking of many traditionalists as well as feminist Christians.

Cooper begins his study with a fine introduction to the movement for gender inclusive language in the churches and the various theological arguments advanced in support of inclusive language for God. He readily concedes that many dimensions of the revisionist case are on solid biblical ground, so much so that some thoughtful evangelical Christians have been persuaded to embrace inclusive God language. For example, language inclusivists strongly insist upon the transcendence of God, who is beyond gender

ERT (2001) 25/1, 91-92

0144-8153

**Our Father in Heaven:  
Christian Faith and Inclusive  
Language for God**

by John W. Cooper  
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books,  
1998.

301 pp paper, indexed.  
ISBN: 0-8010-2188X.

*Reviewed by James R. Rohrer,  
Assistant Professor of Religion at  
Northwestern College, Iowa.*

John W. Cooper, professor of Philosophical Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary and a minister of the Christian Reformed Church, has produced a gracefully written book that will profit pastors, scholars and lay theologians alike. Discussions of inclusive God language often generate far more heat than light. Cooper's book clearly illuminates the key theological issues of

and thus neither male nor female. From this point they conclude that all gendered terms for God are human efforts to name the unnameable, and that female terminology is as valid as male terminology. While evangelicals, Cooper observes, should reject this conclusion, in doing so they cannot deny the theological truth that God is transcendent and beyond gender. Sorting through the various theological issues raised by language revisionists requires careful discernment and a firm grasp of scripture, theology, and linguistics. Cooper's impressive critique of inclusive God language suggests that he has unusually strong credentials for the task.

Cooper carefully evaluates every biblical text that employs feminine references to God before reviewing the various masculine references to God. He concludes that without exception feminine God language is in the nature of simile or metaphor, as when Isaiah 42:14 images God as crying out like a woman in labour, or when Psalm 90:2 employs the image of childbirth to describe God's act of creation. These relatively infrequent texts 'do not identify God as such but image some of his actions' (p. 89). In contrast, the thousands of biblical referents to God are without exception masculine in linguistic form and meaning (p. 102). Scripture as a whole, Cooper concludes, intends 'to speak of God as though he is a masculine person' (p. 114).

Having established the biblical pattern of naming God, Cooper turns to the core question of whether or not the scriptural form ought to be normative for the church in all times and places. Nearly half his text probes issues of hermeneutics and revelation. Cooper properly focuses the debate upon these crucial theological fronts by demonstrating that all argu-

ments for gender inclusive God language rest upon nontextual models of revelation. The controversy between traditionalists and inclusivists ultimately has less to do with attitudes about gender roles or with theories of language than with hermeneutical presuppositions. Cooper clearly shows that 'one's view of the authority of revelation in Scripture is the best single predictor of one's views about gendered language for God' (p. 182), and that there is no successful way to reconcile inclusive God language with any orthodox stream of the Christian tradition.

Cooper realizes that most advocates of gender inclusive God language will find his critique unconvincing precisely because they reject his *a priori* hermeneutical stance. The real target audience for this study is the evangelical community that affirms biblical inerrancy in one form or another. Cooper hopes to persuade those evangelicals who have embraced inclusive God language that this move is inconsistent with their position on biblical authority. Nonetheless, *Our Father in Heaven* is a book that should also be read by 'progressive' nonevangelicals (Cooper's term), for the incisive way in which he has exposed the fundamental theological issues at stake in what too often becomes a pointless polemical battle. Cooper's book joins Francis Martin, *The Feminist Question* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) on the short shelf of truly essential critiques of Feminist Theology.

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0144-8153

**The Wisdom Literature  
(Interpreting Biblical Texts  
series)**

by Richard J. Clifford  
Nashville: Abingdon, 1998  
181 pp pb. Index of authors  
ISBN 0-687-00846-8

*Reviewed by Tim Meadowcroft,  
Lecturer in Biblical Studies, Bible  
College of New Zealand*

Richard Clifford, who teaches at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, contributes to the *Interpreting Biblical Texts* series with this volume on Hebrew wisdom literature. Clifford handles the topic through a series of chapters, each treating respectively the canonical books of Proverbs, Job, Qohelet and Song of Songs, and the deuterocanonical books of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. Surrounding this central structure are a chapter on the wider context of wisdom in the ancient Near East (ANE), and a concluding reflection on the role of Wisdom in Judaism and Christianity.

The stated aim of the series is to 'introduce the reader to the world of the text' rather than to provide a comprehensive overview of scholarly opinion. This is done through careful selection of key critical issues that impinge on the task of interpretation, and at the same time a conscious attempt to introduce the reader to the various texts in overview. It would be easy for those two approaches to be in tension with one another; for a concern with scholarly questions to detract from appreciation of the world of the text, and for a concentration on the world of the text to skate too rapidly over critical issues.

Clifford seeks to avoid either trap. As we would expect from one with his expertise in the field, he conveys an excellent appreciation of the world of biblical wisdom. At the same time as providing an overview, though, the author develops the thesis that the various expressions of Hebrew wisdom are sufficiently different from one another to require each book to be treated separately. And they are well treated. But at this point the reader senses the tension in the approach, in that the relatedness of the different expressions of wisdom to each other remains undeveloped. And, despite a good overview chapter on other Ancient Near East expressions of the wisdom tradition, the distinctiveness of biblical wisdom is not addressed.

Clifford's perspective is explicitly Christian and implicitly Catholic. He is committed to the applicability of the texts to the modern search for wisdom. This forms the basis of the first chapter of the book, but unfortunately that commitment to applicability is not followed through in the context of the author's considerations of individual books. Ironically that failing means the author cannot be taken to task by the more conservative Protestant reader of this book for making no apparent distinction between the status of the deuterocanonical and canonical texts under discussion. However, lest that same reader be lulled into a sense of complacency, Clifford's appreciation of Sirach opens a window onto a text that is under-read in the evangelical tradition, particularly as it forms a significant part of the universe of ideas that helped to shape the Gospels. In that respect, also, a tantalisingly brief final chapter makes some indicative comments on the wisdom background to the New

Testament.

The author is generally respectful of the unity of the texts and conservative on issues of dating. He appears to read the deuterocanonical material as later expressions of wisdom than, for instance, Proverbs and Job. As an exception, he is compelled to leave his readers to make up their own minds on a satisfactory synthesis of Qohelet.

For those who wish to delve further, each section ends with a judicious selection of further reading, and there is an index of authors cited. This book would be suitable for an introductory level course for students on wisdom, and for the pastor and preacher as a useful supplement to other commentaries on the wisdom books.

ERT (2001) 25/1, 94-95

0144-8153

### **A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa, 1900-1998**

by James Amanze

Gaborone: Pula Press, 1999.  
320 pp ISBN: 9991261717

*Reviewed by Fidelis Nkomazana,  
University of Botswana,  
Gaborone, Botswana*

*A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa, 1900-1998* is an interesting and comprehensive study of the origin and development of the ecumenical movement in Africa. In this book, Professor James Amanze begins by describing the nature of the church as seen by Jesus Christ in John 17: 1-26, in which Jesus prayed for its unity. The author then goes on to discuss the origin and development of divisions in the

church from the apostolic times to the present and indicates their serious consequences. The book then discusses the various attempts made to unite Christians and promote cooperation between Christians and other World Religions, including African Traditional Religions. The book concludes by describing different national, regional and continental ecumenical organizations in Africa, whose aim is to foster and enhance unity among Christians and people of other faiths.

The first chapter attempts to provide a theoretical framework of the study. The second chapter examines the expansion of the church in Africa in the 19th century through activities of different missionary societies. The third chapter discusses the conflicts that arose in the missionary field as a result of competition by different churches and denominations in Africa. This was made worse by the conflicts that existed between Christians, Islam and the African Traditional Religions. The fourth chapter examines the history of the commencement of the ecumenical movement in the church from the Edinburgh 1910 Conference to the formation of the World Council of Churches. The fifth chapter gives an account of the various ecumenical efforts that have been undertaken in uniting the church in different African countries. The sixth and final chapter discusses the emergence of regional and continental ecumenical movements. It specifically describes the work of such organizations as the All Africa Conference of Churches.

This is the first book to attempt to bring together the history of ecumenical movements in Africa. It demonstrates the role played by the African people towards the goal of the unity of the church. The author

argues that Africans have always played a vital and central role in this respect. It is a well researched work that motivates and challenges the reader to think through the various issues raised in a realistic way.

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**Worship Old and New  
(Revised Edition)**

by Robert Webber

Grand Rapids, Michigan:

Zondervan, 1994

287pp Hb Bibliog, Indexes

ISBN 0 310 47990 8

*Reviewed by David Parker, Editor,  
Evangelical Review of Theology*

The revision of Robert Webber's text book on worship twelve years after its original appearance has added to the value of this publication. It has also further reinforced this Wheaton College theologian's reputation in the field, as if that were necessary with all of his other contributions to the understanding and practice of Christian worship.

The book has been rearranged and considerably enlarged, especially with much extra material on recent developments in worship. There is, for example, an opening chapter on 'Biblical Themes in Worship' which provides a focus for Webber's theological understanding of the subject. There is also an entire chapter on 'Worship Renewal in the Twentieth Century', although with so much freshly turned ground to cover, this section is too much dependent on secondary sources and lacks critical depth.

In fact, this is a limitation that is noticeable elsewhere as the author

traverses large areas of the subject. Yet in the process he does succeed in presenting the case for a comprehensive understanding of the nature of worship which is lacking in many popular books on the subject. Thus he covers everything from theology and biblical sources through to anthropological features such as language, forms and signs; he pays particular attention to the contributions of music, the arts, architecture and the place of the Christian year. Perhaps most of all, he shows the importance of structure in Christian worship (using traditional forms for his analysis) and how authentic worship is 'the gospel in motion' as it presents and enacts the gospel. Another important feature is the distinction between content, structure and style, which, when taken into account, can overcome many of the tensions and misunderstandings that occur at a time like the present when worship is in such a state of flux.

Webber's main burden is that 'for the most part, evangelicals seem to be unaware that this story [the gospel] lies at the heart of worship' even though they are familiar with the story itself. In a concluding appeal to his evangelical readers, he charges that they have 'generally defined worship in one of two ways, neither of which grasps the biblical imperative.' The first is 'ascribing worth to God', which he describes as a 'half-truth' because it means that the worshipping community 'must originate words and feelings of praise through music and prayer that God will find pleasing'. In the second approach, 'worship consists of a series of packaged presentations' to an audience which listens to the message. 'The error of both forms of worship', writes Webber, 'is that they do not recognize the divine side of

worship. The God who has acted in history continues to act within the worshipping community as the community remembers, proclaims, enacts, and celebrates with thanksgiving. As God's saving action is recalled and enacted, God is worshiped through the response of thanksgiving.

This perspective, with all the material Webber supplies in its support, is enough on its own to make this a valuable book for leaders and members of the church alike. In addition, however, there is much useful information about the history and practice of worship, many practical suggestions (including orders of service), and plenty of authoritative references for further reading. However, his supporting arguments are sometimes sketchy and he is inclined to make too big a jump from the period of the early church (which is clearly a favourite of his) to the present; he also fails to provide adequate principles of contextualisation for adapting

traditional and historic practices to new situations. (There is also the unfortunate caption on page 246 which links John Wesley with the 'Armenian tradition'! There are many errors in the page numbers in the Index.)

Yet, even with this sometimes over optimistic view of Christian worship, Webber has presented a strong case to show that contemporary liturgical renewal has often rediscovered principles and practices that are not only enriching but also deeply rooted in Scripture and harmonious with evangelical theology. He argues that they should therefore be considered seriously by evangelicalism in its present quest for meaning and authenticity in worship. What is needed most, he believes, is worship that reflects the gospel in both content and form, and worship that is at the same time consistent with the experience of Christian history and relevant to the needs of contemporary people.

## The Rhetoric of the Cross

*Between statement and suggestion,  
Between proclamation and implication,  
Between forthright pronouncement and oblique allusion,  
We discover the meaning in your death.  
Here upon the Cross,  
Between Earth and Sky,  
Heaven and Hell,  
Life and Death,  
We see your giving, your bleeding, your loving;  
And we understand the reason in your sacrifice.*

From *Becoming...* (poetry reflecting theology)  
by Gerry Harris, Adelaide, South Australia  
(used with permission)

Book review – if needed

David W. Bennett

Metaphors of Ministry

Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers

Carlisle: Paternoster /Grand Rapids: Baker Book House

ISBN 0-85364-719-4 0-8010-2091-3 Pb 207pp Bibliog. Index

reviewed by David Parker

It is the subtitle of this book that gives the best guide to its contents (in fact, it was published previously by Regnum Books under this title). Except for a few pages, it consists of explanations, drawn from secondary sources, of a large number of images used in the NT for followers of Jesus – the index lists more than 200 of them. They range from well known terms such as servant and saint to more obscure ones like wheat, patroness and member of the household. There is no space in a 200 page book to give detailed treatment of so many – not even the 35 which are identified as major images by the author.

For ease of reference they might just as well have been arranged alphabetically in dictionary form, but Bennett has presented them structurally in accordance with a complex taxonomy which he has devised. In this scheme, which reaches seven levels, he divides the images up into groups referring first of all to people (brother, assistant, athlete) or things (flock, first fruit, light), and then according to various kinds of relationship and different types of task.

The structure is developed through the book, commencing with the images found in the teaching of Jesus and then in the rest of the NT. A chart depicting this arrangement is presented at each stage of the development and is printed in full at the end, where it extends to four pages.

The point of this taxonomical approach only becomes apparent in the conclusion where the author briefly reflects on the maze of data that he has collected. He sees a consistent pattern throughout the entire NT which shows that in the Christian context, leaders are primarily followers (thus explaining the main book title). He also concludes that there is to be a balance between the church as a community of people related in various ways and the church as an organization committed to certain tasks. He uses his research to counteract tendencies in the church which emphasise one or other these functions to the detriment of the other.

He also finds that his study of these images helps to provide a balance between the role of the leader as leader, and the leader as a fellow-follower of the Lord. He helpfully points that “Just as the leaders ought not to have too high an opinion of themselves, so should they beware of assuming too low an opinion of the other followers of Jesus.” (p 194) Again, he warns against stressing the priesthood of all believers so strongly that the leadership role, as expressed by such images as *episkopos*, *kybernesis* and *hegemonos*, is compromised.

Bennett bases his work on a conservative view of the New Testament that assumes that it yields accurate historical information about the teaching of Jesus and the early church. But alluding to the complex role of images in culture and language, he cautiously concedes that biblical images may not always be appropriate and meaningful to people in other times and places. However,

he believes that the use of images by NT writers was rather restrained and not over-contextualised. Hence he concludes that the modern church and especially its pastoral training would benefit from the study of images that he has identified.

These reflections focus on some important contemporary issues for which biblically sound resolutions are urgently required. However, much more space than Bennett gives would be needed to draw out the implications adequately. In view of his firm conclusion that there is high level of consistency in the data, he could well have omitted treatment of many of the more minor images (some of which are dubious in their relevance) and given more detailed treatment to the major images. This would have clarified his case and given more space to expand his reflections.

### **Verse from**

#### **Becoming . . . .(poetry reflecting theology)**

by Garry Harris, Adelaide, South Australia. (used with permission)

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# *Evangelical Review of Theology*

**Editor: David Parker**

**Volume 25  
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## A Major New Reference Work

# Dictionary of Historical Theology

General Editor: Trevor A Hart

Consulting Editors:

Richard Bauckham, Jan Milič Lochman,

Paul D. Molnar, Alan P.F. Sell

Until now, there has been no concise and comprehensive manual on the history and development of Christian theology. *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* fills this gap. The range and depth of the 314 entries (varying in length from 500 to 15,000 words), written by over 170 contributors representing the best of contemporary scholarship from around the world, are unequalled. Another key feature of the *Dictionary* is its comprehensive index, which enables the reader to track down references to many more subjects than those actually included in the list of entries. Deliberately international and interdenominational, the *Dictionary's* aim is to tell the story of Christian theology – a story that is wider and more complicated than any individual strands of development to which Christians today may belong. Entries focus on the key figures, movements and texts from the early church to the present day and include biographical and wider historical material as well as relevant bibliography. Each entry treats the intellectual antecedents and descendants of its subject, as well as its role in shaping the wider development of the Christian theological tradition. This volume will be of use to students writing essays and dissertations, ministers and priests writing sermons, and the informed layperson interested in furthering his or her general knowledge of the Christian tradition and its development.

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1-84227-002-8 / 260x180mm / c/b / 620pp / £39.99



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