

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

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**Evangelical
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Editorial

Theology is currently in disrepute as never before. A recent remark by an evangelical leader, that theology does not produce Church renewal is biting, but certainly has an element of truth, provided theology is understood only in the Abelardian sense of *theos+logos*, the discourse or science of God. Actually, the origin of the term goes beyond the rational definition of Abelard, namely, to *theos+logia* the songs or praises of God. It is the lack precisely of this doxological element that has brought theology into disrepute. This lack also explains why sometimes theology borders on ideology. In the current use of the term in well-known phrases like the theology of liberation, theology of society, theology of prayer, etc., what is meant is that it is an intellectual grappling with liberation, society, prayer, etc., with God-hypothesis thrown into the struggle. Evangelicals are more concrete, restricting their understanding of God to what the Bible reveals of Him, and so what *they* throw into the struggle is the Bible. In any case, the fact remains that in current debates the term theology has a variety of meanings and scopes, and one cannot afford to be blind to them in dealing with it.

Review includes analysis, summary and evaluation of the object under review, such as in a book review. A book is analysed with a certain set of tools, summarized in relation to a certain set of frameworks, and its worth estimated on the basis of a certain set of norms. In reviewing theology also, the same basic questions hold good: what are the tools, frameworks and norms employed?

The word 'evangelical' in the title of this periodical, EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY, supplies exactly these data. Roughly speaking, the term evangelical refers to a commitment to the authority of the Bible and to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. More precisely, it refers to a commitment to the nine tenets of the Evangelical Alliance of 1846 (some of its definitions need of course to be sharpened to be relevant to current issues). I rejoice that the forefathers of this periodical called it not A REVIEW OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY, but rather and with foresight, EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY. The former deals with newer expressions of ancient truths—dogmatics, while the latter has to do with evangelical response to issues raised in our time—apologetics. The former must by no means be discarded; as apostle Paul himself does, those who are called to be Christian ministers must constantly remind the Church of the fundamentals of the Christian faith for time does not make all the ancient truths uncouth! Yet, taking the cue from our Lord Jesus himself, the latter approach is to be preferred. For Jesus understood the Kingdom of God as *leaven* among the kingdoms of this world (minus p. 296 universalism, please). If the gospel of Jesus Christ is the truth relevant to all men in all places at all times, then one need not defend it—it will defend itself in whatever situation it is thrown into.

As I take up the editing of the periodical, I feel I am old enough to be faithful to the tradition of ERT, in continuing to keep it an *evangelical* review of theology, yet hope I am young enough to meet the issues of our time eyeball to eyeball! I am convinced that in our attempts at doing theology we will be repeatedly thrown back on our heritage.

At this point, it is possible that some eyebrows might be raised considering the fact that thus far not a single mention has been made of *ethics*. We will have to take this up later. I have said what I have said above to invite your response to my making explicit the underlying convictions of the periodical, which apply also to the choice of articles in this issue. Your response will be published.

All articles in this issue are original, not published elsewhere as yet. The first four come from the recent Third Triennial Meeting and Theological Consultation of the WEF Theological Commission, held at Singapore from 27 June to 2 July, 1986 (see report in

Theological News, October, 1986). Due both to the unusual length of some of the articles as well as to the need of making room for the Consultation's papers, the usual format of the periodical could not be retained (as in similar cases in some earlier issues). The papers and the findings of the Consultation will be published in the form of a book early next year. Hence some selections from the Consultation are published in this issue and the next.

The first two articles were plenary papers presented at the Consultation by Gerhard Maier and Ron Sider respectively, and touch the nerve-centre of the Consultation's theme, JESUS CHRIST OUR REDEEMER AND LIBERATOR—namely, the Kingdom of God. The scope of each is more complementary to the other than contradictory. The third article, by Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali was written for Group Study at the Consultation in the area of Community—its role in redemption and liberation. Unfortunately it could not be discussed, due to the lack of time. The fourth is an important document of the Commission as well as of the WEF, and is the result of more than two years of study by the Commission's Task Force on Ecumenical Issues, headed by Paul Schroetenboer. The last article by Peter Chang shows how TEE comes of age in a third-world way—to equip blue collar ministers!

In one way or the other, these articles emphasize the crucial role Church renewal plays in reaching out to the world in proclamation and service. This precisely was the theme of the last General Assembly [p. 297](#) of the World Evangelical Fellowship, also held at Singapore in June 1986: RENEW THE CHURCH—REACH THE WORLD. We trust that the Consultation's papers published in this issue prod us a bit to do both—thus taking us a little step further in Evangelical thought and action.

Editor [p. 298](#)

The Gospel as Judgment and Hope for the Nations

Gerhard Maier

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I. THE GOSPEL AS JUDGMENT FOR THE NATIONS

Every preacher of the Gospel speaks also of the imminent kingdom of God. He wants to bring salvation from a world which is marked by death and degeneration into the eternal life of the coming world ([Acts 2:40](#)).

But what does this mean in the light of hope, life and righteousness of the peoples?

1. The Gospel is no human projection of the future. Perhaps some preachers of the Gospel give the impression as if they are thoroughly disgusted with the contemporary world and have fallen prey to a hopeless scepticism. The Gospel has nothing to do with such a *scepsis*, neither can it be compared with any human projections such as that of 'the Club of Rome'. The Gospel rather comes alive because of the revelation which God gave the prophets and apostles of old all of which has been inscripturated in the Bible.

Therefore, anyone who wants to know what will happen to the world must have his knowledge by the revelation of God—and by nothing else. Everything else collapses and does not last.

2. The Gospel speaks clearly and unambiguously that the sinner has no future. He lives under the wrath of God and will receive the judgment of condemnation at the end. Significantly, [Romans 1](#) speaks not only of righteousness before God as the content of the divine revelation, but specifically also as ‘the wrath of God being revealed from heaven against all the Godlessness and wickedness of men’ ([Romans 1:18](#)). Should a preacher keep silent over this aspect, then he would be preaching no Gospel that the Bible portrays, because the biblical type of evangelization (which can be seen at its best in the ministry of Jesus) takes place neither at the level of emotion nor of intellect, though both participate. Primarily it takes place at the level of the will and deliberation. It takes up the question, ‘What shall we do to be saved?’ ([Acts 2:37, 16:30](#)). But this question can be posed only when it is clear that the old way of life leads to death. Man must know where he is heading when he continues in the old way. Precisely, therefore, *must* the *Gospel*—the Gospel itself—protect the sinner from the wrath of God (cf. [Romans 1–21](#)). Unfortunately, both the Lutheran p. 299 distinction between the Law and the Gospel, as well as Karl Barth’s distinction between ‘the Gospel and the Law’ in practice have sometimes had the effect of making the affirmation of the wrath of God as being contradictory to the Gospel.

3. The Gospel unambiguously affirms that the individual peoples and kingdoms have no eternal future. Assyria is sunk, Babylonia has disappeared and the kingdom of Alexandria is no more. There is the assurance of durability only for the people of Israel so long as this *aeon* lasts. From this perspective the life of peoples (nations) is relativized most emphatically. He who dedicates his life to politics can no doubt significantly serve the neighbourly love, but he is labouring for something which is short-lived. Only from such a biblical point of view can it be explained as to why the early Christians prayed, ‘May thy kingdom come, may this world pass away.’

4. Not only the individual peoples and kingdoms, but also the systems and religions of the peoples have no eternal future. Since 1789 the occident lives in the spell of the French Revolution. Millions of people have died for the sake of freedom and equality. Since 1917 all over the world we are living in the spell of the Russian Revolution. It has produced innumerable martyrs who have given their lives for the ideal of Communism. Who knows what revolution we will experience yet! But all the systems are condemned for death ([Matthew 24:7](#)). The same holds good also for religions and the peoples. Here by religion I understand a system created by man, such as Buddhism, materialism, animism and the like.

5. The Gospel affirms unambiguously that the creation as it is now is doomed for destruction: ‘The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken’ ([Matthew 24:29](#)). ‘Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them’ ([Revelation 20:11](#)). The present creation is like a burning building: the walls, the roof, the rooms and the furniture are still intact, but the fire is discovered and one knows that in a very short moment all this will collapse ([II Peter 3:10f.](#)). The details of such a destruction belong to eschatology and do not interest us here. Actually the only detail which interests us here is that the guilt-intoxicated earth and the universe which are desecrated through the rebellion of man give way and make place for ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ ([Revelation 21:1f.](#)).

So we must ask once more: What does the judgment upon the sinner, the sinful humanity, its systems and the fallen world mean concerning the life, hope and righteousness of the nations?

Here the answer concerns only the dimension of the judgment. It [p. 300](#) will be good for us to remember that we must also sketch the dimension of grace. This shall be done in Part II.

6. The Gospel still comes as a blessing to the peoples even under the banner of judgment, since it gives to all men a valid norm, a measuring rod. Here we have, to use expressions out of the history of theology, not 'the human thoughts over God, but God's thought over man' before us (Karl Barth). This makes us free from all strivings to find the affirmations of the Gospel upon the scientific and other affirmations, projections, etc. On the contrary, the Gospel becomes the norm with which all that can be said about the Word must be tested. This one norm brings all Christians under one single community. The new humanity grows from among the hearers and doers of the Gospel, the *tertium genus*, the coming generation which is already here beyond all earthly possibilities.

7. There is a second way in which the Gospel as judgment becomes a blessing to the peoples; namely, that it reveals the truth. 'Thy Word is truth' ([John 17:17](#)), says the Son of God and the cross-bearing Saviour. Paul calls his message 'The Word of truth' ([II Corinthians 6:7](#)). Today this truth is more urgent, more necessary, and more relevant than ever before because there would be few periods in history which are richer in illusions than the present one. Who can bring disillusionment in such a situation if not the Gospel? For, only by waiting on God can one get clarity. Many of our contemporaries are under the illusion that peace is humanly achievable. They have taken over the illusion of the Atlantic Society that anything can be achieved. A religious version of such a wishful thinking is the idea that world peace can be evolved through a coalition of unity of all religions. Innumerable congresses meet for this purpose. It is in the face of all this that the preachers of the Gospel have the necessary service of producing the truth. Lasting peace, including its external aspects, comes only through the return of Jesus. Therefore, only a turning to Jesus Christ can bring an age of grace and, hence, of peace. A godless peace movement—perhaps with some successes at the beginning—can only strengthen dissension in the world. In fact, there is also an anti-Christian peace through the antichrist which may last for a short while.

The truth reveals that even the best designs of the sinner, his highest idealism and his burning zeal for sacrifice, can only stabilize the system of sins.

Therefore, the Gospel also becomes a necessary critique of all idealism, be it capitalistic or Marxistic.

Many of our contemporaries live under the illusion that a better, more just world can be created through liberation movements and [p. 301](#) specific 'humane' revolutions. In the last few years I have noticed in Germany a sobering process. If one spoke of a 'more just' world earlier, nowadays one speaks only of a 'somewhat more just' world. From our side we should in no way underestimate the drawing power of such goals, especially for the youth. Wherever we hear the resounding of the passwords 'grab', 'you can do it', 'together we are unconquerable', we should ask back quite plainly: Who is actually speaking here, is it a man of Christ, born again, or is it the old man with a lot of pluck? Is it the man who wants to liberate himself or is it the one who hopes on God alone? All earthly revolutions can be compared to a wheel whose axle stays immovable, but what is above, sooner or later comes down, and what is under before long will come above—it does not stay there long. No doubt this kind of revolution indeed gives the world another face, but the heart is not changed; the axle of the wheel doesn't move up or down. Of course, the disillusionment which the Gospel brings here is painful, but it is also necessary because, if not the Gospel, what else can testify to the great overthrow that took place at Golgotha and the truth that God's revolution is coming upon us which does away with the old heaven and the old earth but inaugurates a new creation?

8. The Gospel as judgment has a further significance: it shows how and where co-operation with individual non-Christians and with political and social institutions is possible. It keeps the Christians in what can be called 'a merciful distance' from these.

In that it says to the nations and the kingdoms of this world that they as such (without the fellowship of God) have no future, the Gospel denies that the Church is ever bounded by a particular nation or kingdom. As such, the Gospel is neither the Gospel of the Europeans nor of the Asians nor of the Americans. It glorifies no nation, it demands no definite political structure. That is its distance.

On the other hand, the New Testament forbids us from 'keeping off the world' ([I Corinthians 5:10](#), compare [John 7:15](#)). The limited and the timebound mandate of a nation can also be a help for a bearable co-existence in this world. Therefore Christians give 'to the Caesar what is Caesar's' ([Matthew 22:21](#)). That means they try to be loyal to the existing nation and society to the extent that they are not forced to take up another religion ([Acts 4:19](#), [5:21f.](#)). They do so especially because of their knowledge that the kingdoms, peoples and nations are only forerunners and they dare to keep the burning till it collapses. What the Russian priest Dudkov wrote after great humiliation, viz., 'We struggle not against the officers ...' has made a great impression on me. p. 302

9. The Gospel as the preaching of judgment offers (though very seldom it may so appear) a help for overcoming disappointment. Ideologies and religions, time and again, lead to frustration and doubt, because their claims are bigger than their realizations. The 'real existence' is never what one had originally wished. And exactly here, where the Gospel brings the word of judgment to all these autonomous movements, it preserves itself from falling prey to them. It directs one's hope on what lasts and enables one to do the best in the given situations in a sober way and without illusions. Gabriel Marcel called hope 'the substance of the soul', but false hope must be broken in order that 'the substance of the soul' may be won.

10. As seen above, the gospel as judgment announces also the end of this world. Here again the aspect of judgment has a constructive effect. It brings a consciousness of temporariness in which we live. But this 'temporary consciousness' must bring also the dimension of eternity at least as a question, and exactly this clear announcement of the end of the world helps men to pose the question concerning eternity. Such an announcement is an answer to a creaturely condition which is given to man irrevocably. 'My heart, O God, is restless until it finds rest in Thee', said Augustine. All human quests and longings, all human aggressiveness and passivity can be understood as an attempt to bring back the lost eternity. If the church gives the impression that this world itself is eternal, then she only strengthens these strivings which in the end can only mean an escape from true eternity. She will then become a deceiver of men rather than a comforter; but if she proclaims the true Gospel, then she prevents an escape movement. Then the true eternity, the incorruptible new creation, including the new humanity, will become the criterion for personal and suprapersonal history. What kind of validity has this step in the light of eternity? What remains of this deed? These are the questions which become necessary for man. Death will no more be the touchstone for life, but the incorruptibility will be the touchstone for the corruptible. The question which was once written on the walls of the Tübingen University building has a deep meaning: 'Is there a life before death?' If the dimension of eternity is taken away from man, then perishes his humanity, too.

So far we have considered the foregoing under the aspect of judgment. It is time now that we turn to the second part.

II. THE GOSPEL AS HOPE FOR THE NATIONS

The kingdom is at hand! At hand! Till now it has begun, but it has not **P. 303** yet finished yet. We are pilgrims to the kingdom. What does it mean for the nations in which we live?

1. *The Gospel sets signs of hope.* The Gospel is a powerful word ([Jeremiah 23:29](#), [Hebrews 4:12](#)). Converted people change their lifestyles. He who stole must steal no more ([Ephesians 4:28](#)). He who told lies must no more tell lies ([Ephesians 4:25](#)). All these are the visible signs of the hope. All need not be so corrupt and degenerated as it is until now. Where earlier doubting and resignation ruled, there is now visible improvement. It is definitely a sign of hope when the new President of the Philippines explained at the beginning of April that she would forgive her enemies, basing it on the Gospel demand, 'As Christians we are taught to forgive'.

Signs of hope are also those promised in [Mark 16:17f.](#) which follow the missionary mandate. Men can experience protection, they can experience healing. We know, however, that innumerable believers still continue in sickness or become martyrs. Yet, throughout church history, wonders and signs are taking place through which God confirms His actions. These signs are, as in the times of Jesus, signs for a comprehensive physical, psychological and spiritual healing at the end, when the kingdom of God is to be established in its full power.

The great English historian, A. Toynbee, once said, 'The world history cannot continue without a vision of God'. Where the Gospel is present there one sees not only transformed nations and the wonders of God, but he sees more: a God who holds all the threads of world history in His hands. We do not indeed see Him with our physical eyes but with spiritual eyes and with our love ([1 Peter 1:8](#)). But we see him at work with ever newer certainty, and that is the greatest sign of hope: to see God at work, to understand the whole world as being in His hand.

Here I would like to add one further point. The gospel makes us priests and kings ([1 Peter 2:9](#)). By that is not meant a kind of caste or clergy of our churches. It is rather an expression which includes every Christian. Therefore one speaks of a 'universal priesthood of all believers'. Also, universal priesthood is not limited to working together in worship services, counselling Bible study and the like. Rather, it includes the whole activity of a Christian, whatever the profession. From such a standpoint flow many far-reaching consequences which, as far as I can see, have not yet been adequately thought through. A Christian who exercises his political duty and his profession with a full trust in God yielded to His will becomes a blessing for everyone around him. A famous example is that of the Christian, William Wilberforce, who persevered in the English parliament for the removal **p.304** of slavery. A further example is that of Auguste Herman Franke who in Germany in the 18th Century formulated the fundamentals of education. We need such burning lights. All these rays are also the signs of hope. We should only note that the universal priesthood of all believers and clericalism are two fundamentally different concepts. One of them, clericalism, makes the church a lobby and leads to ever newer 'genetic theologies' as, for example, 'theology of liberation' or 'theology of feminism', etc. Such a process is false according to the Bible. Otherwise the church will be unquestionably swallowed by social responsibility and become a prey to the intellectual or activist fashion of the time. Instead of that we as a church should encourage the members of our congregations to be responsibly active in every field according to their best knowledge and conscience, so that the church and the world are not mixed up. And precisely here it becomes a blessing for all nations, including the non-Christians. This indeed is the universal priesthood at work.

2. *The Gospel gives freedom from pressures.* We live in a world where evil plays a powerful role. Enlightenment expected a time of perfection. Instead there came a time of external (ecological degeneration, wars) and inner (moral) destruction. We have a very

high material progress only at the cost of the destruction of the traditional morality. Jesus and New Testament prophecy foretold precisely this aspect ([Matthew 24:3f.](#), [Revelation 12:12](#)). The Bible has rightly held its ground against the Enlightenment and its over-optimism.

One of the most terrible aspects of evil is this, that man is forced to do evil in spite of his good will. This is to be seen primarily in the spiritual sphere as [Romans 7](#) shows us. But it holds good also at many other levels of our existence. He who fears for his life must do things which otherwise he would not have done, or sacrifice his conscience for the sake of his career. But the Gospel has greater power than that of the pressures of evil. As I visited Korea earlier this year I was deeply impressed by the martyrdom of Rev. Soon in the Korean War. Many times he was offered security for his life as the Communist troops advanced, but he rejected because he wanted to suffer with his sick ones. So he died a martyr's death. I think also of the example of the Polynesian Catholic priest Maxmillian Kolbe. In a concentration camp of the Nazis, for some reason every tenth person was shot. When the turn came for a man who was the head of a family, Kolbe volunteered to take his place and was shot instead of the man.

Perhaps our daily lives may pass insignificantly and dully. Normally fear of man originates out of such situations. It is a wonderful gift of the Gospel that it enables men all over the world to stand against such a [p.305](#) pressure of the evil. The Gospel educates one to its own standpoint and towards an opinion for which one is personally responsible to God. People who are independent and who are responsible to God are urgently sought after in all nations. Precisely because of their Christian liberty can such people make the love of God transparent to mankind.

I want to emphasize that what is said thus far is essentially related to the theological streams of our times. We should not go with the theological majority or with extremes which are theologically attractive or the way of least resistance. But as men liberated from God, we should testify to the biblical truth concerning these problems where 'the Gospel is preached in its purity' (Confesio Augustana, 1530 Article 4), there freedom comes to birth. Such liberated men can do the service of divine love in their nations, a service which every nation needs urgently. In this connection I would consider it a catastrophe if our biblical evangelical message is watered down or becomes more like liberal theology, such as, for example, in the World Council of Churches. This way leads to a levelling of all theologies to a grey common denominator.

3. *The opportunity of an external christianization of the nations.* In this third point we touch a very ticklish matter because it was precisely the biblical evangelical movement which became a front against a pure traditionalism and against a nominal Christianity. So long as there were movements like Pietism, Methodist revival, evangelical missions and the like, it was emphasized that an external Christianity does not save. It was demanded time and again from our side that a conversion is necessary. That is the reason why an external christianization of the nations is considered with greatest scepticism.

Such a point of view cannot naturally be given up, but it needs to be enlarged. The power of the Gospel is so great that even in an external christianization of the nations there is still a help for them. Such a help comes first of all out of a study of the biblical writings. The repentance of the Ninevites in the third chapter of Jonah had certainly not made all Ninevites the followers of the living God. Yet God has placed a blessing on that repentance. Jesus considered it positively ([Matthew 12:41](#)). The book of Esther shows that conversion to the Jewish had positive effects upon the Persian kingdom. Even though the motives of such a conversion were not always spiritual ([Esther 8:7](#); [10:2f.](#)).

The history of our churches also shows in the same direction with respect to the christianization of the Roman Empire. Slavery gradually disappeared, justice became

more charitable, and the care for the poor more intensive. In the middle ages the christianization of the European peoples made possible the so-called 'peace of God' (*treuga p. 306 dei*); that is, there were times when battles were stopped and weapons rested. Till today this Christian custom has a healthy moral responsibility and the restriction of evil drive as a consequence. Conversely, rejection of Christian norms in Europe means a total change with many negative moves. Families will be destroyed, egoism and hate increase, etc. It is now usual to denounce all Christian morals as hypocrisy. It is high time we return to a proper evaluation of these things. Christianization obviously had also negative and damaging effects. Yet I affirm that the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones. I want to assert the same also for the Brazilian Red Indian tribes who accept the Gospel. They stop buying alcohol and living in strifes. Numerically they increase while other tribes die out over the years.

To repeat for the sake of clarity, we should not sell the Gospel as a cultural or political medicine, but we shall also not close our eyes to the fact that nations which allow a free hand for the Gospel or have Christian majority do have a blessing. This gives us the right, even on a human plane, to demand freedom of religion everywhere and to appeal that in all nations the suppression of Christian witness may be stopped.

4. *The Gospel creates a new man.* The quest for a new man is ancient. It plays a vital role in the Indian doctrine of incarnation which builds its teaching upon the possibility of a better, higher, 'newer' man. It also plays a role in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin, who likewise considers the possibility of a 'superhuman' new man. The 'superman' of Friedrich Nietzsche is a further example. Religious dedication was understood as the 'birthday' of a new man. In the Hellenistic mystery religions at the time of Jesus the blood of sacrificed animals was poured over men in order to enable them to become new men filled with the divine.

Later ideologies have taken up this quest. It is moving to study the new humanism, such as that of Lessing; to consider the dream of Marxism, of the new man in Karl Marx's communist manifesto of 1847, and, finally, to compare it with the reality of the so-called 'real existing socialism'.

Must all this dream remain an unreality? No, for the Gospel creates the real new man. It becomes effective with those who 'accept' Jesus Christ, who 'believe in His name' ([John 1:12](#)). It takes place as a miracle of God through baptism and new birth ([John 3:5](#); cf. [1:13](#)). This new man is a child of God. We must emphasize this point especially. Biblically speaking indeed all of us human beings are the creation of God, but the children of God and the people of God are only those who accept Christ in faith as Saviour and Lord and have experienced the miracle of rebirth. This is the 'new man' according to the [p. 307](#) gospel. Theologically speaking it is sometimes affirmed that there is a hidden Christ in all religions, or even a 'hidden Christianity', but we do not see how such affirmations can be harmonized with the Bible.

The new man is first a citizen of the kingdom of God. Paul says, 'our citizenship (*politima*) is in heaven' ([Phil. 3:20](#)). That is why in early times Christians were called 'tertium genus', 'the third(=the new) generation' besides male and female. It is this aspect which makes all the nations, especially those who emphasize the state, distrust Christians. But the other side of the matter is that the new man is a visible part of the kingdom of God, of the new creation, and so embodies in himself in a most intensive way that hope. The kingdom is invisible until now, but its members are already visible. As Christians we have the duty to make transparent this new man as the launching pad of hope for all nations ([Ephesians 4:22f.](#)).

4. *The Gospel enables to share a new community.* Just now we spoke of the new man. This new man is no isolated individuality; rather from the beginning he is incorporated

into the body of Christ. Here we enter into the secret of the church of Jesus Christ as a new fellowship to which the Gospel gives access. In connection with our theme we would like to bring out three aspects of this fellowship.

Firstly, this fellowship is an order of the coming visible kingdom of God. This fellowship possesses an unquenchable fountain of love which comes from God ([Romans 5:5](#)). It does not follow the human norms, of the orders of authority and rulership. Not power but service to others is its criterion ([Matthew 20:26f.](#)). It lives in a free communication with God. Further it lives in the assurance of eternal life which triumphs over death. Its distinctive characteristic is the freedom of the children of God. Trust is its atmosphere.

Secondly, such a fellowship carries with it as before the earthly aspects. The law of sin is still at work among the members of the fellowship ([Romans. 7:25](#)). It does still experience the shatter of good purposes and errors in its knowledge. We are, as Luther said, justified and sinners at the same time, we exist 'in the penultimate, not in the ultimate', to express the same truth in the famous formulation of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Therefore, we must strictly warn against the separation of the driving power of the Gospel from the credibility of the Christian church. The reverse also is true; despite the lapses of the Christians, despite the painful lack of their trustworthiness, the glory of the Gospel shines through in the world. What is decisive is that God is trustworthy.

The third aspect of this fellowship is an answer to the question, To what extent can this new fellowship co-operate with other religious or [p. 308](#) social fellowships and movements in this world? Such a co-operation is thinkable only in one form; namely, the form which allows the church of Jesus Christ to retain its freedom and uniqueness. It cannot allow a servile yoke to be forced upon it. Even through such alliances it cannot tread the path of the works of the law in the hope of pleasing either God or man. The fellowship must reach all decisions through faith, it must never forget the distance which the cross of Jesus Christ has created from all the spiritual—be they secular or religious—movements. It must reject every kind of adaptation. Its way is determined by the Gospel: not only in the diagnosis, but also in the treatment. So, for example, it is impossible for the fellowship to take up either the Marxist or humanist or capitalist or sociological analysis. In these spheres, a limited co-operation is thinkable, for a short period which does not deny the Gospel in principle ([Luke 9:59f.](#)).

The Gospel limits the time of wickedness. The fact that 'the kingdom of God is near' is an essential part of the Gospel. Such affirmation explains at the same time that the time of wickedness is limited but, is such an explanation really something special? Are there not numerous religious as well as secular affirmations which likewise speak of the end of wickedness?

There is a threefold particularity in the Gospel. Firstly, the Gospel is neither completely new nor unexpected; rather, it is a result of divine prophecy (cf. [Jeremiah 31:31ff.](#)). Its message as well as the coming of the Saviour has been announced over centuries. Thus, it manifests fulfilled prophecy, but its affirmations have a completely different driving power and credibility, in contrast to those of the vague hopes which are present outside the Gospel. Through burdens and sufferings it encourages one to take a glance at the already near and certain redemption.

Secondly the Gospel is based upon immovable historical facts. Jesus lived; He lived and acted in the way the Gospels describe Him. He died factually for the sake of our redemption on Golgotha. The Holy Spirit, 'the other comforter', was factually poured down at Pentecost. All these facts which are the historical characteristics of the Gospel are insolvably bounded up with Christian faith and history and increase our trust in the affirmation that the period of the evil is actually run out.

Thirdly, the Gospel couples mission with the end of wickedness. When the Gospel is preached to all nations according to God's will, then comes the end ([Matthew 24:14](#)).

As such the preaching of the Gospel itself is a contribution to end the evil. In this sense we can therefore say 'the Gospel limits the time of evil'. p. 309

7. *The Gospel frees one for indescribable joy.* Among the heroes of Greek-European legends, Sisyphus takes a special place. He must continuously roll a heavy stone up a steep incline as a punishment for his lapse. When he has arrived almost at the peak the stone falls down and Sisyphus must again start at the beginning. Since then Sisyphus has become a symbol for most intensive striving which is, after all, useless in the end.

The fear of vanity of human activity weighs upon the nations as a terrible curse. Yet paradoxically nations feel themselves bound to most diverse forms of achievement: traditional, moral, religious, economical and others. Moreover, there enters a fear of emptiness which in any case in the western world is producing even greater numbers of neurotics. To be sure, here we find only a modification of this fear of emptiness, in which the beyond is forbidden in human thoughts by the sheer striving of the will. As such the statement of Confucius holds good for many: 'We do not understand this world itself, why should we think about the world beyond?'

Here the Gospel opens fully new dimensions, for it is the Gospel of grace which 'without the works of the law' (which also means without human achievement) leads one into harmony with God. It is a Gospel also of truth which is offered and not just grasped in bits after hard struggles. It is a Gospel which precisely through the destruction of all human illusions—that means also of religious illusions—leads us into freedom. It is a Gospel which precisely through one's relationship with Jesus Christ introduces a liberation from all coercions. It is a Gospel which gives meaning to human life because it makes men the children of God. It is a Gospel which need not neglect death and the beyond, but transforms death into an entry into eternal life.

This zeal of the Gospel for liberation cannot perhaps be better expressed than through a small well-known anecdote. At the end of the conversation between two people, one explains to the other, 'We have two different religions; your religion consists in the word "do" but my religion consists in the word "done".' Do—that is the basic model of all those appeals which excite humanity to unfold its own powers. Do—that is the basic plan of all-too-human religions and ideologies which want to transform the world. But done—that is the joy which the Gospel brings with itself. Since the joy is gifted and not achieved, no human effort can destroy it, as well as 'no one shall take away your joy from you' ([John 16:22](#)).

This joy remains with those whom the Gospel has grasped. Such joy is neither hidden nor monopolized; rather it converts the disciples of Jesus into fountains of joy and light in their nations, and time and again p. 310 breaks through the darkness which has covered the nations and individuals in guilt and suffering throughout human history. So the Gospel once again becomes the hope of nations through liberation for indestructible joy.

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The Churches as Peace Making Communities and Agents of Change

Ronald J. Sider

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I. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The heart of the theological base for this paper can be stated in two theses: (1) The Gospel is the Good News of the kingdom of shalom and righteousness that broke into history decisively in the person and work of Jesus Christ and will come in its fullness when Christ returns. Therefore, (2) the church as Jesus' Messianic community must model the kingdom's shalom and righteousness or its common life is a public denial of the Gospel it preaches. I want to give a brief definition of shalom and righteousness and then develop these two points.

Shalom, the Old Testament term for peace, is a rich, comprehensive word.¹ 'Well-being' and 'wholeness' are good synonyms. Shalom refers to wholeness in every area: material abundance, national prosperity, right relationships among persons in society. [Leviticus 26:3-6](#) paints a glorious picture of this comprehensive shalom which God will give Israel if the people walk in his law. The earth will yield rich harvests; wild animals will not ravage the countryside, and the 'sword shall not go through your land'. Perhaps the best short definition of shalom is right relationship—with God, neighbour and the earth.

Righteousness has a very similar meaning. In the Old Testament, *tsedheq* (115 times) and *tsedhaqah* (117 times) are the words most often translated righteousness. The root meaning was probably 'straight'—i.e. something which matches the norm. It is used of accurate weights and measures ([Leviticus 19:36](#); [Deuteronomy 25:15](#)) and straight paths ([Psalms 23:3](#)). It is also essential to notice that *tsedhaqah* is very often used in passages of Hebrew parallelism as a near synonym for *mishpat* (justice) (e.g., [Amos 5:21-24](#); [Isaiah 5:7](#)).

Both justice and righteousness have a theocentric foundation. The holy God who is just and righteous made a covenant with Israel and at the heart of that covenant is the divine demand that God's people imitate his justice and righteousness. ([Psalm 7:11](#); [72:1](#); Deuteronomy p. 312 [4:37-40](#); [6:25](#); [10:17-19](#); [1:17](#); [Leviticus 19:15](#).) Righteousness means faithfulness to God (as defined in the first four commandments) and faithfulness to other people (as defined by the other six commandments). Like shalom, righteousness means right relationships with God and neighbour as stipulated by God's Covenant.

This understanding of shalom and righteousness is at the core of Jesus' proclamation of the Good News.

A. THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM OF SHALOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

¹ See Gerhard von Rad's discussion under '[eirene](#)' in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (hereinafter cited as *TDNT*), 10 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 2:402-6. See also Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976).

Jewish Messianic Expectation. To understand what Jesus meant by announcing the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God, we need to explore Jewish Messianic expectations which were rooted in the prophetic predictions of a future Messianic age. The prophets announced God's judgement on the idolatry and economic injustice of Israel and Judah. But they also pointed to a future day when God would raise up someone from the shoot of Jesse to bring God's shalom—i.e. right relationships with God, neighbour and the earth.

It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be raised up above the hills;
and peoples shall flow to it,

and many nations shall come, and say:
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob;
that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.'
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between many peoples,
and shall decide for strong nations afar off;
and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war any more;

but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree,
and none shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

[\(Micah 4:1-4\)](#)

As [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#) shows, right relationship *with God* was central to this Messianic hope:

Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new [p. 313](#) covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ... I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother saying, 'Know the Lord' for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.'

Right relationship *with neighbour* was also at the core of the prophet's Messianic hope.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;
and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called
'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.'
Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,
upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and for evermore.

[\(Isaiah 9:6-7\)](#)

Although the word for *peace* is not used, the vision of messianic shalom in [Isaiah 11](#) is at least as breathtaking. When the messianic shoot from the stump of Jesse comes forth, he will judge the poor with righteousness (verse [4](#)). Peace and harmony will prevail throughout the earth:

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them ...
They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.
[\(Isaiah 11:6, 9\)](#)

Von Rad summarizes the Messiah's role in the prophetic hope for shalom: 'The Messiah is the Guarantor and Guardian of peace in the coming Messianic kingdom.'²

Jesus Fulfills Messianic Prophecy. The early church declared Jesus to be the fulfilment of these messianic prophecies. [Matthew 4:15-16](#) quotes [Isaiah 9:1-2](#) in connection with the beginning of Jesus' proclamation of the coming of the messianic kingdom. Paul refers to [Isaiah 11:1](#) and [10](#) in [Romans 15:12](#). In [Luke 1:68-79](#), Zechariah announces that John the Baptist will prepare the way for Jesus, the Messiah. Quoting [Isaiah 9:2](#), Zechariah points with eager anticipation to the Messiah who will 'guide our feet into the way of peace' ([Luke 1:79](#)). When the angels ([Luke 2:14](#)) announce Jesus' birth with the p. 314 choral shout 'peace among men,' they simply confirm the dawning fulfilment of the prophetic vision of messianic shalom.

Shivers of excitement must have raced through first-century Jewish folk when Jesus announced the ringing words: 'The time is, fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel' ([Mark 1:15](#)). I believe Jesus meant two things: He meant he was the long-expected Messiah, and he meant the Messianic age of shalom and righteousness was breaking into the present.³

The Kingdom as Present and Future. Vigorous scholarly debate has raged over whether Jesus thought the kingdom was entirely future or entirely present, or partially future and partially present. Some have argued that the kingdom was entirely present in his life and work. Others have insisted that for Jesus the kingdom was exclusively future. It would come only at the end of the age. But there is a growing consensus that, in striking contrast to contemporary Jewish thought, Jesus viewed the kingdom as both present and future. Jewish eschatology (belief about the 'last things') looked forward to a supernatural convulsion when the Messiah would come to destroy Israel p. national enemies in a bloody battle and initiate the new age of messianic peace. In Jewish expectation, there was a radical, almost total break, between the old age and the new messianic age. Jesus, on the other hand, taught that the messianic age had actually broken into the old age. Its powers were already at work in this old age in his person and work, even though the kingdom would come in its fullness only at the end of history.

Several incidents from the Gospels support the contention that Jesus considered the messianic kingdom to be present already. Luke places the programmatic account of the visit to the synagogue at Nazareth at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. There Jesus read from [Isaiah 61:1-2](#), widely accepted as a messianic passage. A tremor of anticipation must have surged through the synagogue as they listened to the words about the coming Messiah who would release captives, heal the blind and liberate the oppressed. When he

² Gerhard von Rad. 'Eirene', *TDNT*, II, 405-6.

³ See George Eldon Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 135-92.

was finished, Jesus informed the audience, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' ([Luke 4:21](#)).

Jesus made a similar claim when John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to ask if he was 'he who is to come' (that is, the Messiah). Jesus' answer contained clear allusions to messianic prophecies: 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and [p. 315](#) the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up and the poor have good news preached to them' ([Matthew 11:4-5](#)). His actions, Jesus said, demonstrated that he was fulfilling messianic expectation. After a dispute with the Pharisees about the source of his power over demons, Jesus declared: 'If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast our demons, then the kingdom of God *has come upon you*' ([Matthew 12:28](#)). The kingdom is truly present.

Yet Jesus recognized that the kingdom had not reached its culmination. Sin and evil continued to flourish so Jesus looked ahead to a time of eschatological fulfilment when at the close of the age, the kingdom would come in its fullness.

The kingdom which Jesus announced then was the reign of God which broke decisively into history in the person and work of the Messiah and will come in its fullness only at his Second Coming.

The Shape of Jesus' Messianic Kingdom. But what was the shape of this reign? Was it a political order like Rome? Or an invisible Spirituality in the hearts of isolated individuals? No, it was rather the shalom, the right relationships with God and neighbour that comes when one accepts Jesus' Messianic proclamation. It is as [Matthew 6:33](#) says the shalom that comes when we seek first the new kingdom and its righteousness (i.e. right relationships). As the Lord's Prayer makes clear, it is the visible new social order of Jesus' disciples that comes by faith in the Father of our Lord Jesus when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven ([6:10](#)).

If anything is clear in Jesus, it is that we enter this kingdom by sheer grace and forgiveness, not by human effort and merit and certainly not mere societal engineering. Jesus disagreed sharply with the Pharisees. They thought that the Messianic Kingdom would come if all Jews would totally obey the law. Jesus on the other hand insisted that one enters the kingdom by sheer grace as a little child. 'For the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard' ([Matthew 20:1](#)). No matter how long the labourers worked, they all received the same salary. In parable after parable, Jesus taught that God is a forgiving Father who seeks lost sheep ([Luke 15:3-7](#)) and forgives prodigal sons and daughters ([Luke 15:11ff](#)).

His actions matched his words. To the extreme annoyance of the self-righteous Pharisees Jesus associated with prostitutes and tax collectors. He forgave such sinners because he knew that the Father in Heaven is like the father of the prodigal son. And it was the same understanding that led him to the cross to die as the substitutionary atonement for the sins of all who would believe on Him. Central to any [p. 316](#) understanding of the reign Jesus announced is the biblical teaching that it is for sinners who repent and accept unconditional divine forgiveness through Christ's cross.

Equally important to an understanding of the Messianic Kingdom Jesus proclaimed is the fact that it was a new social order in which all things were being restored to that shalom, that set of right relationships, intended by the Creator. Jesus formed a circle of disciples and together this new Messianic community began to model a challenge to the status quo at every point that it was wrong.

He upset those who were happy with the easy divorce laws that enabled men to dismiss their wives for many reasons. Instead he insisted that God intended one man and one woman to live together in lifelong, joyful union. Jesus also disregarded social patterns that treated women as inferior. According to Jews of the time, a woman's word had no

authority in court. It was a disgrace for men to appear publicly with women. A widely used prayer recommended for daily use by Jewish males thanked God that they had not been created a Gentile, an ignorant man or a woman. Jesus, on the other hand, appeared publicly with women ([John 4:27](#)), taught them theology ([Luke 10:38–42](#)) and honoured them with his first resurrection appearance.

Jesus upset political rulers, smugly satisfied with their domination of their subjects. In the dawning messianic age, servanthood must replace domination. The greatest in the kingdom is the Messiah who is servant of all. Therefore those who aspire to leadership in Jesus' kingdom must likewise be humble servants rather than domineering masters.

Jesus terrified the economic establishment of his day. It would be easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle, he insisted, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom ([Matthew 19:24](#)). He summoned those with capital to lend to the needy even if they had no hope of recovering their investment ([Luke 6:30, 34](#); [Matthew 5:42](#)). He recognized in the rich young ruler that idolatrous materialism that plagues many rich people. Therefore he summoned him—and presumably all others who worship the same idol—to give all his wealth to the poor ([Matthew 19:21](#)). And he denounced those who oppress poor widows. If, as an increasing number of scholars have argued, [Luke 4:18–19](#) represents Jesus' announcement of the Jubilee, that simply underlines his call for sweeping changes in economic life.

Most astonishing of all perhaps, Jesus taught that right relationship with neighbour included love even for vicious enemies. 'You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbour and hate your p. 317 enemy. But I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.' Rejecting ethnic limitations on neighbour love, rejecting violence and retaliation, Jesus taught his circle of followers to abandon the old age's search for shalom through the sword. Imitating the perfection of the Heavenly Father means loving one's enemies.⁴

It is crucial to see that the new Messianic kingdom Jesus announced involved a very concrete set of right relationships between husband and wife, men and women, rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed. Nor was Jesus merely talking about a private ethnic for personal relations. Jesus came as the Messiah of the entire Jewish people. Rich and poor, leaders and 'unimportant' folk listened to his teaching. The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' Messianic manifesto to which he called the entire Jewish people. Not all accepted it to be sure. But they should have. To suggest otherwise is to make a farce of the claim that Jesus was indeed the Jewish Messiah sent by God to inaugurate the Messianic kingdom.

And Jesus did that in a concrete visible form even though the majority rejected him. In the circle of his disciples, he formed a new community, a new social order, that began to live out the ethics of the New Messianic reign he announced.

Cross, Resurrection and Pentecost. Most of Jesus' contemporaries, however, found it hard to believe that the carpenter's small circle of forgiven tax collectors, prostitutes, and fishermen was truly the beginning of the glorious Messianic kingdom promised by the prophets. Jesus' circle was too weak and insignificant; his teaching was too demanding and costly; and his claims were too presumptuous if not indeed blasphemous. To prove he was wrong the religious and political leaders had him crucified. That, as Jurgen Moltmann rightly insists, destroyed the credibility of Jesus' fantastic Messianic claims. 'For the disciples who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem, his shameful death was not the consummation of his obedience to God nor a demonstration of martyrdom for his truth,

⁴ For my most intensive treatment of this problem, see Ronald J. Sider and Richard K. Taylor, *Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope* (Downers Grove and London: InterVarsity and Hodder and Stoughton, 1982, 1983), chapter 5–8.

but the rejection of his claim. It did not confirm their hopes in him, but permanently destroyed them.⁵

But then God raised him from the dead. The resurrection proved to the discouraged disciples that Jesus was truly the Messiah and that his Messianic kingdom had begun. And Pentecost confirmed it. As one p. 318 read's Peter's sermon in [Acts 2](#), one sees clearly that it was the raising of the crucified One and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit that convinced the early church that the Messianic Age predicted by the prophets had truly begun ([Acts 2:17ff](#); [29ff](#)). Jewish Messianic hope had expected the giving of the Spirit when the Messiah came. The Messianic prophecy of Joel had come true ([Acts 2:17ff](#).) at Pentecost. That event therefore, confirmed the belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

The New Testament uses two interesting words to express the early Christian belief that the Messianic age had truly begun even though it was not yet fully present. They are the words *aparche* (first fruits) and *arrabon* (pledge or down payment). In [I Corinthians 15:20](#) and [23](#), Paul says that Jesus' resurrection is the first fruits of the general resurrection which Jewish Messianic hope expected to occur at the coming of the Messiah. In [II Corinthians 1:22](#) and [5:5](#), Paul describes the Holy Spirit as a down payment or guarantee (cf. also [Romans 8:23](#); [Ephesians 1:14](#)).

The word first fruits is used in the Old Testament to talk about the early harvest festival which celebrated the first arrival of the new crops (see [Exodus 23:16](#), [19](#); [Deuteronomy 26:2](#), [10](#)). The full harvest was not yet present, but the beginnings of the harvest had already arrived. The presence of those first fruits were cause for rejoicing for they were visible tangible evidence that the full harvest would surely come.

Arrabon (down payment or guarantee) is a loan word from the Semitic. It comes from the area of commerce and means a deposit which pays part of a total debt and gives a legal claim for the full repayment. It is a present tangible pledge that ratifies a contract. As the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says, 'it always implies an act which engages to something bigger.'⁶

These words were particularly suited to express the early Christian belief that the resurrection and Pentecost were visible tangible evidence that the Messianic kingdom had begun. Like the first fruits of the harvest, the Messianic Age had truly dawned. The early Christians had already tasted the power of the age to come ([Hebrews 6:5](#)). Therefore, in spite of the powerful evidence that the old age was still very active, the early Christians were certain that the fullness of the Messianic Kingdom would surely arrive in God's good time.

Cosmic Hope of Coming Kingdom. It was the present reality of the already dawning Messianic kingdom that anchored the breathtaking cosmic hope of the early Christians. They dared to believe that the crucified and Risen Carpenter was the key to history. They dared to p. 319 believe that he was even now King of Kings and Lord of Lords ([Revelations 19:16](#); [1:5](#)). They dared to believe that at his return he would complete his victory over every rule and authority, even death itself ([I Corinthians 15:20-26](#)) and bring all things into subjection to God. They even believed that creation itself would be freed from its bondage and decay and experience the glorious freedom and wholeness of the children of God ([Romans 8:18-23](#)). Even though they were an almost infinitesimally insignificant minority in a powerful pagan Empire, they dared to proclaim that God would reconcile all things in heaven and on earth through the cross of this Jewish Carpenter ([Colossians 1:15-20](#)). They dared to hope for that cosmic completion of the Kingdom of shalom and

⁵ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (New York: Harper, 1974), p. 132.

⁶ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, I, 475.

righteousness Jesus announced precisely because the resurrection and Pentecost were solid tangible evidence that the Messianic reign had already begun.

B. THE CHURCH AS MODEL OF THE KINGDOM'S SHALOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

One of the weaknesses of Protestantism in general and Western Protestantism in particular is its inadequate doctrine of the church. Seduced by Western individualism, we have too often failed to understand and live the fact that according to Jesus and the apostles, the church is a new social order, a new redeemed community of shalom and righteousness. The church is not a mere collection of persons individually on their way to heaven. From the biblical perspective, the church is Jesus' new Messianic community, a ready living now the radical challenge to the status quo required by the values of Jesus' dawning kingdom. In fact, the church is part of the Gospel we preach.

That does not mean, as CRESR insisted, that we reduce salvation to the horizontal communal transformation occurring by God's grace in the body of believers. The justification of sinners through Christ's substitutionary death and the regeneration and sanctification of individuals through the work of the Holy Spirit are at the core of salvation.

But CRESR rightly insisted that salvation and the Gospel include a powerful communal element:

Salvation continues with the *new community*. For salvation in the Bible is never a purely individualistic concept. As in the Old Testament, so in the New, God is calling out a people for himself and binding it to himself by a Solemn covenant. The members of this new society, reconciled through Christ to God and one another, are being drawn from all races and cultures. [p. 320](#) Indeed, this single new humanity—which Christ has created and in which no barriers are tolerated—is an essential part of the Good News ([Ephesians 2:11–22](#)).⁷

It is essential to realize the implications of the statement that the church is part of the Gospel. If the Good News we preach were merely justification of sinners (as some radical Lutherans occasionally suggest) then we would not expect Christians to live any differently from the world. If the Gospel were only justification and regeneration of isolated individuals (as some radical pietists occasionally imply), then we would not expect the church as a community to be fundamentally different from other social groups. But if the Gospel is the Good News of a new *community* which has broken into history and which lives a new set of values in defiance of the evil of the status quo, then the church is a visible public denial of the very Gospel it preaches whenever it does not concretely model that messianic shalom and righteousness that Jesus announced and lived.

[Ephesians 2–3](#) makes it very clear that St. Paul understood the church to be part of the Gospel. [Ephesians 2:11–22](#) describes how the blood of Christ's cross brought an end to the social, ethnic hostility between Jews and Gentiles as both confessed Christ and found peace with God on exactly the same basis—namely the unconditional grace of God at the cross.

Then in chapter [3](#), Paul talks about the gospel as the 'mystery of Christ' (verse [4](#)) which he preaches. Verse [6](#) is a careful definition of this mystery which is the Gospel: 'This is how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, partakers of the promise in

⁷ *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment* (LCWE and WEF, 1982), Sect. 5a (pp. 28–29).

Christ Jesus through the gospel.' The fact that there is now a new multi-ethnic church where the racial hostility of Jews and Gentiles is publicly being overcome is a fundamental part of the Gospel Paul preaches.⁸

The church is Jesus' new Messianic community where the broken relationships between men and women, rich and poor, black and white, oppressed and oppressor, master and slave, are now being overcome concretely and visibly for the world to see. The fact that it is now possible by God's grace to enter this new community (still imperfect to be sure, but gloriously transformed and far less broken than unredeemed society) is one central part of the Gospel.

That, of course, is exactly what we should expect from the fact that [p. 321](#) Jesus defined the Gospel as the Good News of the Kingdom. If the prophets' messianic predictions foretold a Messiah who would bring shalom and righteousness, i.e. right relationships with God and neighbour; if the New Testament claims that these Messianic hopes began to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the dawning kingdom he announced; and, if the church is now (between the Incarnation and the Eschaton) the place where Jesus' Messianic kingdom comes to visible expression in human history; then obviously Jesus' new multiethnic, multi-class community is an essential part of the Gospel. This new social order must either be a living, public demonstration of the shalom and righteousness (whether economic, social, marital, etc.) Jesus announced, or it stands condemned as a damnable hindrance to and public denial of the Gospel it claims to announce.

I have argued thus far first that the Gospel is the Good News of the Kingdom of shalom and righteousness and second that the church as Jesus' new messianic community is an essential part of the Gospel. If those two propositions are true, how then does the church work for peace and justice?

II. WORKING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

The church promotes peace and justice in two ways: first, simply by being the church, Jesus' radical new community of shalom in a fallen world; and second, by using whatever appropriate means are available to change surrounding society through relief, development and structural change.

A. JUST BEING THE CHURCH

Merely living the full biblical reality of what it means to be the body of Christ has a powerful impact on surrounding society. Merely living as Jesus' new multi-racial, multi-class community of shalom in a world rent by racism, nationalism, tribalism and militarism profoundly shapes the larger social order even apart from any direct political outside the church.

Think of what would happen if the Church in South Africa or Northern Ireland, India or Greater Philadelphia would just be the church. Racial prejudice, ethnic hostility, gross economic inequality, and caste bias rend the body of Christ and separate brother from brother and sister from sister within the church all over the world. Quite apart from direct political involvement, if black and white Christians in South Africa would dare to worship together, share their [p. 322](#) economic resources the way the early church did and be mutually accountable to each other, apartheid would collapse. If rich Christians in the West and the new Christian elites in the Third World would devote as much time to

⁸ Obviously, the extensive discussion of the homogeneous unit principle relates to this point. See René Padilla's excellent treatment in *Mission Between the Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 142–169.

economic sharing in the worldwide body of Christ as did St. Paul who spent years on his intercontinental offering, we would offer the world a new model of economic caring that would undoubtedly prompt greater attempts to end the global scandal of starvation and poverty. Just being the church, merely living visibly and publicly a new communal reality of racial, economic and social shalom within the body of Christ is the first way that the church works for peace and justice.

In fact, unless we do this, it is absurd to work politically to introduce greater justice into societal social structures. It is a farce for Christians to ask government to legislate what their own congregations refuse to live. If I am not allowing the Holy Spirit to bring reconciliation to whatever brokenness exists between me and my wife and between me and my sisters and brothers in my local congregation, it is hypocritical arrogance to suggest that I know how to bring peace to the global political community. That does not mean we must have perfect marriages and churches before we engage in politics, but we had better be on the way. Otherwise, our political engagement lacks integrity and weight.

One could develop an almost infinite number of subpoints and applications of this proposition that the first way the church works for peace and justice is simply by being the church. But I will restrict myself to four.

First, evangelism is central to the way the church works for peace and justice. Christians reject the naive notion of Marxists and other children of the Enlightenment that we can create new persons if we merely adjust the social order. Humanist educators supposed that better education would create good people. Liberal social theorists argued that a better environment would eliminate crime. And Marxists cheerily predicted that the elimination of private property would create unselfish socialist men and women eager to love their neighbours as themselves. This is naive nonsense. The human predicament, unfortunately, is deeper than evil social structures. It lies at the core of each of our selfish hearts twisted by the Fall and our idolatrous rebellion against the Creator. Nothing short of a living personal relationship with God in Christ is adequate to transform selfish sinners. Certainly, changing social structures can do important things. But it cannot create new persons. Only divine grace can do that. [p. 323](#)

One part of the evangelistic task is a prophetic condemnation of and call for repentance from all forms of sin. If we preach repentance biblically and therefore condemn all forms of sin, both personal and social, we will, simply by doing faithful biblical evangelism, help reduce economic injustice, idolatrous nationalism, indeed every structural evil in society. People enmeshed in evil social structures need to know that those structures displease God. They need to know that knowing participation in social evil is not just an affront to neighbour but also a damnable sin against almighty God. Similarly, the faithful evangelist will call converts to let Christ be Lord of every area of life including their business, economics and politics.

Evangelism also leads to teaching a full biblical worldview. A biblical approach to the dignity and equality of all people, male and female, black and white produce social transformation. So does a biblical attitude toward work, creation as finite but very good, and the value of creating wealth. Evangelistic activity which leads people to replace Eastern monism, secular materialism, animism and castism with biblical theism also contributes powerfully to peace and justice.

Simply doing biblical evangelism contributes in many ways to peace and justice. Knowing that, and learning from the last century of liberal Christianity a failure, this generation of evangelicals will, precisely as they plunge deeply into the search for peace and justice, not loose or even weaken their central passion and commitment to personal evangelism. It is only as individuals are transformed by grace and adopt a Christian

worldview that the church has the 'people power' to live as Jesus new community which can in turn offer a new mode of shalom to a troubled world.

Second, it is only as the church avoids the twin dangers of cultural conformity and cultural withdrawal that its communal model of transformed relationships can best impact the larger society. If it is faithful to Jesus' dawning kingdom which challenged the status quo at every point that it was wrong, then the church will be a counter-cultural community defying surrounding society by challenging its brokenness with a new model of shalom and righteousness. Unfortunately, sinners resent those who call attention to their sin. The world, therefore, regularly persecutes those Christians who attempt to live the full reality of kingdom values. In the face of persecution, Christians historically have either conformed or withdrawn. The greater temptation seems to have been slow, subtle but pervasive conformity to surrounding cultural values. Occasionally, small bodies of Christians withdrew to mountain retreats or rural solitude. In the latter case, they may have continued to model Jesus' kingdom values [p. 324](#) but their cultural and physical isolation prevented their model from impacting the total society in a maximal way. Conforming Christians, of course, had little corrective impact at all because they had already abandoned Jesus for the way of the world.

Christians today must retain a sharp understanding of the radical difference and deep incompatibility between Jesus' kingdom and fallen society. And they must live the alternative kingdom in the very midst of the fallen world which so desperately needs a different model even though its sin leads it to reject and persecute those who dare to offer it. Only if we avoid both cultural withdrawal and cultural conformity can the church best work for peace and justice by being the church.

Third, if the church is to impact society by being the church, then loyalty to sisters and brothers in other tribes and nations must transcend tribal and national loyalties. One thinks of significant illustrations such as the Christian members of the kikuyu tribe in Kenya who condemned terrorism against people including Christians in other tribes during the Mau Mau terror. More often, Christians allow national or tribal loyalties to supersede the oneness of the body of Christ. Most Christians in the United States have a higher commitment to 'fellow Americans' than to brothers and sisters in Christ in the Soviet Union. A poster that is receiving wide circulation makes the point. It is called: 'A Modest Proposal for Peace: Let the Christians of the World Agree not to Kill Each Other'.⁹ If American and Russian Christians cannot commit themselves to even this minimal definition of what surely it ought to mean to be part of the one body of Christ, then they need the prodding of other believers in the worldwide church in order to take this step toward peace. If all Christians in the world would seriously announce that they will henceforth refuse to participate in preparations for or engage in the killing of other Christians, they would make an enormous contribution to peace. Here too, just being the church is the first way to work for peace.

Finally, let me come even closer home and talk about the division and institutional competition that exist in the church. Too often, good evangelical agencies devoted to evangelism or development allow personality conflicts and institutional self-interest to supersede the best interests of the cause of Christ. Why, in spite of widespread demand from Third World leaders, cannot the WEF and LCWE unite and thus avoid unnecessary duplication and fragmentation? In the world, personal agenda, institutional identities, and a host of other things lead [p. 325](#) to hostility and war. Christians condemn this sin. But what integrity does our prophetic condemnation possess if the church itself cannot model that righteous shalom that overcomes unnecessary duplication of religious structures and

⁹ Available from Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, P.A. 17501.

denominations? Jesus said that genuine Christian love and unity would convince the world that He came from the Father ([John 17:20–23](#)). It would also foster peace in the world. Are we willing to restructure present relationships between evangelical denominations, between the WEF and LCWE, and between numerous para-church agencies in order to enable the church to be the model of shalom Jesus intended?

If the church wants to promote peace and justice it ought to start by being the church. Anything less is a farce.

B. SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH RELIEF, DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE IN THE LARGER SOCIETY

Until Christ returns, all attempts at short term remedial assistance to victims (relief), longer term promotion of self-sufficiency in local communities (development) and the fundamental transformation of basic socio-economic-political systems (structural change) will at best only produce somewhat less suffering, oppression and violence in a fallen world. Does that mean that Christians should keep all their activities for peace and justice within the church?

Not at all—for several reasons. The doctrine of creation tells us that the Creator wills people to enjoy physical and social wholeness during their short sojourn on earth. Second, both the Old Testament and the New Testament clearly indicate that God continues to desire the good gifts of creation for all even when we stupidly rebel against him. God patiently continued for a very long time to grant Israel and surrounding nations the good gifts of creation in spite of gross sin. Jesus taught that God sends his sun and rain on the just and unjust and commands us to do the same ([Matthew 5:45–58](#)). Third, Christians know that the Risen Lord is *now* king of kings and Lord of lords. The ancient usurper still refuses to bow to the reigning Sovereign’s rightful claim to dominion over all the earth, but that is no reason why Christians should accept the devil’s deceitful, blasphemous claim to be Master of the present age. Christ is the rightful ruler and to the extent that we make the larger society a little more like what he wills, to that extent we give concrete expression to our faith in his universal sovereignty.

Finally, we know that eventually, at the Parousia, the kingdom of shalom and righteousness will come in its fullness when the Risen Lord [p. 326](#) reigns *de facto* as King of Kings. That is the way history is going. At that time, adultery, poverty and war will be no more. Knowing what the Prince of peace and justice intends for the future, Christians will eagerly seek to erect imperfect signs of that coming kingdom in societies whichever offer them the freedom to engage in relief, development and public life.

To be sure, even the most successful structural changes will not create a new people. Sin will remain pervasive. Therefore, we should not, as the Lausanne Covenant and CRESR rightly insisted, use salvation language to talk of the limited social transformation in the larger society effected by Christian social action.¹⁰ But peace in Vietnam and Northern Ireland, justice in South Africa and the Philippines, and freedom in Afghanistan and South Korea are all important even though their realization would not be salvation.

Again, a host of specific issues clamour for discussion. I can only touch on a few.

Perhaps the first and most difficult issue is what socio-political activity is appropriate for the church as church and what is better done by individuals and para-church Christian

¹⁰ *Evangelism and Social Responsibility*, Sections 3(b) (p. 17), and 5(a) (p. 29).

organizations. But this topic is vast and complex, and CRESR has made important suggestions.¹¹ Hence, I will make only a couple of brief comments.

It seems to me that there is nothing wrong in principle with the church as church (whether local congregation, regional conference or national or international synod or assembly) taking an explicitly political stand. If the leaders at such an event wish to speak *to* the church, they may do so, but should make it clear that they are speaking for themselves and addressing the church. If Christian leaders wish to claim to speak *for* their total church, then they must first have a careful process of discussion and discernment within the body to see what the Spirit and the Word are prompting that body to understand as their joint declaration to the world. Too often in political pronouncements, Christian leaders have claimed to speak *for* their churches when they should have been speaking *to* them.

Many factors suggest that normally, detailed political stands should be taken by individual Christians and para-church organizations, devoted to Christian political engagement. The complexity of issues and the importance of accepting and affirming honest, divergent socio-political views within the church both suggest caution frequent political pronouncements by official church structures. At the same time, courageous acts like the Confessing Church's Barmen p. 327 Declaration or the Catholic church's demand for freedom and justice in the Philippines were right and essential.

Second, the church's self-conscious identity as a counter-cultural community committed to Jesus' kingdom values is just as important for her political work in the larger society as it is for her existence as the new community. If Christians simply endorse the tired ideas of current ideologies, they merely reinforce an unjust, violent status quo. That is about the last thing most societies need. Only if Christians are very clear that their attempt to change the larger society must be fundamentally shaped by biblical values rather than secular ideologies, only then can they make a significant contribution.

That means that Christians must have their own internal structures for thinking through fundamentally biblical approaches to public life and the concrete problems that need alternative solutions. That is a complex task. It involves careful exegesis, attention to hermeneutics, and a sophisticated analysis of contemporary society.¹² We dare not simply endorse the current left wing or right wing proposals for peace and justice. Instead, we must do extensive, sophisticated analysis within the body of Christ working with those who share our biblical commitments, in order to develop profoundly biblical alternatives for economics, politics and public life generally. To do that well in the next two decades, we will need a host of new national and international evangelical publications, organizations and think tanks. Otherwise, the current worldwide evangelical interest in public life will be a failure because we will simply endorse secular ideologies rather than offer the world a biblically informed Third Way.

Third, Christians must resist the demonic temptation to absolutize any current political reality. Many American Christians tend to equate or at least to closely identify God and country (or even the Republican party) and fail to understand the evils perpetuated by American power. Nicaraguan Christians sympathetic to the Sandinistas tend to exaggerate the accomplishments and overlook the faults of the 1979 revolution. And so the temptation goes from country to country.

Absolutizing any political reality is idolatry. Since we know every socio-political order will be very imperfect until our Lord returns, we must vigorously apply biblical norms to

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Section 7 (pp. 43-61).

¹² I have tried to spell out a methodology in my 'An Evangelical Vision for Public Policy', *Transformation*, July-September, 1985, pp. 1-9.

every social order. That will mean praising the good and denouncing the evil on the basis of biblical values rather than current national propaganda.

When Christians do that successfully, they offend all contending p. 328 parties. Partisan politicians want our unqualified endorsement, not limited praise and prophetic criticism. Samuel Escobar's recent article in *Transformation*¹³ shows how evangelicals in Peru offended both the government and the guerrillas when they even-handedly condemned both Marxist terrorism and police and army brutality. South African Christians find themselves in a similar no-man's land when they condemn violence and injustice on all sides and seek reconciliation with justice.¹⁴ Because the ultimate loyalty of Christians is Christ and his kingdom and because they insist on reconciliation with enemies rather than extermination even of oppressors, they will at best fit only awkwardly within partisan political movements. But precisely in that disturbing prophetic presence lies their most significant contribution.

III. SEIZING THE PRESENT OPPORTUNITIES

The situation has changed fundamentally in the last fifteen years. In the Chicago Declaration, the Lausanne Covenant, the Madras Declaration and similar previous evangelical statements on social responsibility,¹⁵ the first concern was to plead with evangelicals to become involved in social issues. It was necessary to argue that social action was also biblical and that evangelicals must do more than evangelism.

That has all changed. At least in North America and I think increasingly elsewhere, the debate is no longer over *whether* biblical Christians should do social action as well as evangelism. In the U.S., all evangelicals from Jerry Falwell to Jim Wallis agree we should. The debate today is over the precise shape of our socio-political proposals and agenda. Should we be democratic socialists or democratic capitalists? Should we support or reject abortion and nuclear weapons? The debate flows vigorous—and sometimes vicious.

The worldwide debate over the concrete shape of evangelical social engagement will be one of the most difficult and crucial items on our agenda in the coming decade. Never have we had a larger number of well educated, strategically located evangelical leaders in all areas of society. Never have we had a greater opportunity to shape our national societies and the international community in a way that reflects biblical principles. This could be our finest decade of social engagement.

It could also be the time when we self-destruct in ferocious p. 329 fratricide. The difference between the political proposals of Jerry Falwell and Jim Wallis are enormous, in spite of the fact that both honestly seek to be biblical. The disagreements among theologically conservative Christians in Northern Ireland, South Africa, South Korea, Nicaragua—indeed everywhere—is immense. Either we learn how to listen to each other in a new way and submit our differences to the norm of scripture in humble, prayerful, intercontinental dialogue, or we lose an historic opportunity.

Four things would be especially important.

First, we must somehow figure out how to do a better job of listening to the insight and corrective counsel of other Christians in other social and geographic contexts. American Christians are at a dangerous stage of nationalistic idolatry and pride. South

¹³ January–March, 1986, pp. 9–15.

¹⁴ See the April–June 1986 issue of *Transformation*.

¹⁵ See René Padilla, 'How Evangelicals Endorsed Social Responsibility (1966–1983)', *Transformation*, July–September, 1985, pp. 27–32.

Korean evangelicals seem hesitant to speak out for justice and freedom. White South African evangelicals still sometimes act as if they had decades to dismantle apartheid. Is there not some way that the wisdom of other parts of the worldwide body of Christ can more successfully provide insight and accountability for each of us in our specific situations?

Of course, no one understands each local setting in all its uniqueness and complexity as well as the national church. And, of course, I'm not urging an arrogant Western ecclesiastical imperialism dictating to Third World churches. But we are one worldwide body. And we easily become so enmeshed in the details of our local setting that we lose perspective. People from the outside can see things we miss.

Will evangelical Protestantism really offer *no substantial way* whatsoever for mutual worldwide accountability and counsel? Quite honestly, I do not know how to do it. A Journal like *Transformation* and an occasional international conference on simple lifestyle or justice and peace are simply inadequate. One thing I ask of this consultation is that we spend some time thinking about how we can develop new networks and mechanisms for intercontinental evangelical exchange, counsel and accountability on issues of peace, justice and liberty.

Second, and closely related to the first, we all need to resolve as individuals to listen carefully to and affirm the strengths of the arguments of those who disagree with us. One illustration will suffice. In recent decades Christians concerned with justice have sometimes neglected freedom and liberty. And Christians concerned with freedom (political and religious) have sometimes been willing to sacrifice justice. Surely both concerns grow out of biblical faith. Both groups would be better if they could hear the strength of their p. 330 'opponent's' critique and insight. More diligent listening and a readiness to acknowledge the strong points of others would help enormously.

Third, we need more attention to the precise areas of our disagreement over issues of peace, justice and liberty. Reaching a conclusion about the best or most biblically faithful domestic policy on welfare or foreign policy toward South Africa is an exceedingly complex undertaking. It demands more than a few biblical proof-texts and a casual glance at the morning paper. I think evangelicals would understand their different political conclusions better and progress more quickly toward resolving their disagreements if we were more self-conscious about all the components that contribute to those political decisions and tried harder to isolate the *precise* areas of disagreement.

There are at least four crucial components in any political judgment by Christians: (1) each person's personal history and ideological background; (2) one's interpretation of the Bible; (3) one's reading of history; and (4) carefully examined generalizations (some would call such a set of generalizations an ideology) that are consciously derived from the above, especially two and three.

We all bring along assumptions and convictions from our family church and education. Mine includes the individualism and free enterprise assumptions of a typical farm boy; the biblical assumptions derived from devout, pietistic, Anabaptist parents and church; and the influence of both socialist and anti-socialist professors in college. Anyone who wants to be biblical must vigorously and consciously seek to evaluate every element of inherited ideology on the basis of the scriptures. But no one should pretend to have succeeded fully. Therefore, we should always welcome others who help us discover ways that unconsciously inherited ideology—whether of the left or right—still shapes our thinking.

The Bible is the crucial norm for all political judgments of those who want a biblically informed political agenda. But a common commitment to biblical authority does not preclude major disagreement.

Sometimes, we disagree over the *exegesis* of specific tasks. For instance, I am inclined to think that although the literal meaning of [Matthew 25](#) is that Christians must feed and clothe brothers and sisters in Christ, nevertheless Jesus' extension of neighbour love to include everyone in need ([Matthew 5:43-44](#)) means that [Matthew 25](#) also summons Christians to offer food and clothing to all the needy they can assist. Others limit the application of [Matthew 25](#) to fellow Christians. The way to overcome disagreements on specific exegesis is [p. 331](#) to do our exegesis more carefully and do it together with those who challenge our interpretations.

Sometimes we disagree when we attempt to summarize the central themes of the scriptures or when we try to state a comprehensive overview of the biblical teaching on a particular area such as the family or economic justice. When I try to listen carefully and systematically to what the Bible says about economic justice, I hear the Bible saying that God has a special concern for the poor, weak and marginalized; that God is opposed to extremes of wealth and poverty; and that God as the only absolute owner wants the productive resources of the earth distributed in a decentralized way so that individuals and families can earn their own way and co-operate with God in the shaping of history. (Therefore, I am not a socialist, if socialism means state ownership of the means of production. I believe decentralized, limited private ownership rather than the concentration of power as in state ownership or huge corporations is what the Bible suggests.) Others disagree vigorously. Again, the way to make progress on these disagreements is to challenge the specific biblical work which provides the foundation for each other's biblical generalizations.

Sometimes we disagree over more fundamental hermeneutical questions. Anabaptists, dispensationalists and Reformed thinkers all bring different assumptions about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments to their understanding of the text. Those assumptions as well as others obviously affect how each of us relates the biblical material to specific public policy proposals for contemporary secular societies. Hermeneutical differences are harder to resolve. Nevertheless, we should try to help each other see where we think a more faithful reading of all scripture would lead to different hermeneutical assumptions.

Our different readings of history are a third area of disagreement. We often differ both in our interpretation of the broad sweep of history and also in our understanding of what is really the case (the 'facts') in a particular situation. My reading of history leads me to conclude that the history of twentieth century Marxist-Leninist states shows that in spite of some positive results their overall impact has been so negative that we ought to vigorously resist any expansion of Marxist-Leninism. Another broad historical assumption of mine is that Western colonialism has had massive evil components as well as positive elements. Others would disagree vigorously.

Similarly, it is not easy to agree even on specific 'facts'. What 'really happened' when the Pope visited Managua? How strong is the hard core Marxist-Leninist element in the Sandinista party? If my answer to [p. 332](#) the latter question had been 'totally dominant', I would have supported a different U.S. policy toward Nicaragua in the last seven years than I have.

Disagreements over matters of fact are difficult but not impossible to resolve. If they result from a mere lack of information, sharing facts will help. Joint exploration by groups like Evangelicals for Social Action and the Institute for Religion and Democracy is one way to resolve different interpretations of the facts in places like Nicaragua or South Korea. If either side is afraid of such a joint exploration, the public ought to know and draw the appropriate conclusions. If disagreements result from conflicting methodologies in the social sciences, the process of adjudication is far more complex, but not impossible. We

dare not give up the attempt to help each other see the facts more accurately. Whether or not the impact of British colonialism in Nigeria or U.S. political and economic involvement in the Philippines has been positive *is* a factual question. If we refuse to confuse such disagreements with moral failure and instead look more carefully at the data together, we will make more progress.

Finally, we disagree over the broad generalizations (or ideology) that we consciously derive from the complex of previous decisions. I believe that on balance a market economy (with certain parameters to restrict injustice) rather than a state owned, centrally planned economy as in the U.S.S.R. is more likely to produce both freedom and justice. I believe that a pluralistic political process with more than one political party is more likely to produce liberty. And I believe that many independent centres of power (church, media, economic life, education, the state) rather than one centre of state power controlling all the others leads more surely to peace, justice and freedom. Again, others—including faithful Christians—disagree

If we can become more clear about *precisely* where we disagree, we can at least understand each other better. And we can probably proceed more quickly to lessening the disagreements. It is essential that a disagreement over the specific exegesis of [Matthew 25](#) not be misconstrued as an immoral lack of compassion for the poor or Marxist-Leninist politics. If you disagree with someone here, you need to question his exegesis, not his compassion or his politics. It is tragically misleading to see a different judgment about the degree of Marxist-Leninist influence in the Sandinista party as an ideological commitment to Marxist-Leninism. If you disagree you need to challenge her facts not her commitment to democracy. It is dishonest to portray an honest conclusion from history and the Bible that democratic capitalism is the surest path to justice for the poor as a lack [p.333](#) of compassion. If you disagree, you need to question his broad reading of history and the scriptures, not his concern for the poor. If evangelicals are to make a maximal contribution in the area of public life, they must pay much more careful attention to the precise areas of disagreement.

Finally, we need a new covenant to dialogue civilly, honestly, fairly and biblically. The debate should flow fast, but not furious, vigorous but not vicious. In particular, the evangelical leadership needs to enter into a mutual covenant personally to avoid and publicly to condemn: name calling and slanderous stereotyping; inaccurate, one-sided depictions of others positions; distortion of the facts; unwillingness to test one's views with others on the basis of the scriptures.

The level of name-calling and malicious stereotyping has ballooned in the last few years. I disagree intensely with President Reagan's nuclear policy. But I believe he desires peace in the world as much as I do. It is valid for me to argue that his nuclear build up will probably lead to nuclear war, but it is immoral name-calling to call him a warmonger. Similarly, it is quite proper for someone to charge that my advocacy of a bilateral verifiable nuclear freeze increases the danger of nuclear war or even a Soviet take-over, but it is slander to call me a Marxist.

There *is* a difference between honest categorizing and malicious Stereotyping. We cannot avoid using categories for people and movements. It is not wrong to think that on nuclear policy, I tend toward a liberal-left stance and Jerry Falwell toward a conservative-right position. But it would be very wrong to ignore Falwell's repeated affirmation of democratic pluralism, and the separation of church and state and imply that he is a Fascist. Similarly, it would be dishonest to ignore my repeated repudiation of Marxist-Leninism and marshall selective quotations to imply that I secretly favour Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism.

We need a new covenant to portray each other's opinions fairly. We all know tempting it is to exaggerate one aspect and ignore another side of an 'opponent's' perspective. There is a fairly simple way to check whether we have accurately understood and fairly summarized another's views. We can ask the other person! I suspect that at least one half of the current battles in church circles would end if the major contestants merely consulted each other personally and directly to see if the views they were denouncing were actually held by the other person. One criterion of honesty in debate is that we state the views of a person we criticize in such a way that that person says, 'Yes, that is what I mean'. p. 334

Until we do that, we have no right to criticize. Of course, people may sometimes dishonestly deny what they are actually saying. There must be room for showing carefully and factually that a person pretends to be something other than what he really is. Nor am I saying we can never object to other views without picking up the telephone. But I think we would make an enormous step forward if the evangelical leadership would covenant together not to engage in any major public criticism of each other until they had personally checked with the other party to make sure they were accurately stating the other's views.

Third, we must get our facts straight. We dare not continue to accept a situation where different Christian organizations offer the public contradictory facts and then refuse to meet together or search together to resolve the contradictions. The most rigorous submission to the facts, however unpleasant, is essential for maximal evangelical impact on public life.

Finally, we need a new covenant to search the scriptures together. It is a farce to have Jerry Falwell and myself continue forever telling the American public that our mutually contradictory public policy stands are thoroughly biblical. There is a way to work at that. Evangelical leaders could sit down privately twice a year for two days of confidential conversation and explain prayerfully and openly to each other the biblical foundations of our different political proposals. As we survey Christian history, we see that even Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Wesley occasionally got it wrong. We ought to conclude that since we are making at least as many mistakes, we desperately need the insight of other Christian leaders who are striving to submit their total lives in biblical revelation. (I know that some try very hard to do this and that others persistently refuse to co-operate.) One criterion of the integrity of evangelical political leadership should be a willingness regularly to test the biblical validity of one's views with other biblically committed Christian leaders.

In the late twentieth century, evangelicals face an unprecedented opportunity. In order not to squander it, we need new structures of international counsel and accountability; a new openness to acknowledge the valid arguments of those who disagree with us; greater self-awareness of the precise areas of our disagreement; and a new covenant of integrity in debate. Even if all that happened by special supernatural intervention, we would still have different perspectives and organizations. But we might at least be viable instruments that the God of shalom and righteousness could use to make our world a little more free, just and peaceful.

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Wholeness and Fragmentation: The Gospel and Repression

Michael Nazir-Ali

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The creation narratives speak of man as having been created in the image of God and as having been invested with the exercise of vice-regency over the rest of creation on God's behalf.¹ This view of man implies that man has a certain dignity and a certain freedom *vis à vis* the rest of creation. The idea that man is a free, responsible being is characteristic of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Islam too, claiming to stand within this broad tradition, affirms the vice-regal nature of man and regards man as a trustee for the rest of creation.² Freedom then is a necessary aspect of the whole man as God created him.

It is, however, equally true that servitude, oppression, exploitation, in short the end of freedom, is a necessary consequence of man's fall from grace. Man's freedom is never regarded as absolute in the Scriptures, it is always subject to God and to his sovereign Law, but fallen man puts himself in God's place and attempts to exercise sovereignty over his fellow man—with the important difference that man's usurpation is characterized by a notable lack of integrity and justice, the very qualities which characterize divine sovereignty. *Sedāqāh* in the Old Testament (N.T.=dikaiosunē) as the righteousness of God affirms, over against numerous pagan beliefs, God's integrity in the act of creation as well as his moral relation with man. God in the Bible is contrasted with the 'godlings' of the nations who have made man for sport and cannot be expected to be just in their dealings with him.

Not only, however, is God just in his dealings with man but he requires man to be just in his dealings with his fellow human beings. It is true that both the Old and New Testaments speak of God justifying the sinner on the basis of faith but this justification, if it is not to be allowed to become mere legal fiction, must result in the restoration of justice in relations between man and man.³ It is characteristic of natural man that such justice is not to be found in his relations with his fellow human beings. The absence of this justice is seen not only in inter-personal relationships but also in social structures which fallen man has created for himself. We can say, therefore, that there is a total lack of justice in the way tyrants throughout the course of history have dealt with the subjects they have tyrannized. This continues today p. 336 where personal power is expressed in oppressive and exploitative ways. On closer examination, however, it will be seen that such oppressive power exercised by an individual is often (if not always) supported by unjust socio-economic systems. In Asia, for example, personal dictatorships are nearly always maintained by feudal-military axes which prefer them to more popular regimes, which may come to depend upon the people for their power! There is usually a parasitical relationship here: the dictator, in his turn, enriches and thus makes powerful the axis which keeps him (sometimes her) in power. Social structures are not oppressive only when they support and are supported by a personal dictatorship. Their very structuring

¹ [Gen. 1:26-30, 2:28-34.](#)

² Q2.30, 33.72.

³ [Gen. 15:6, Rom. 4:3, Gal. 3:6](#), cf. [Rom. 6:15-19, Gal. 5:13-15, Jas. 2:28ff.](#)

may be oppressive in character and may reflect the division between the powerful and the powerless, the exploiters and the exploited. The caste system in India is an obvious example of a social structure which has been developed to perpetuate the power-relations which exist between victor and vanquished. Military superiority has been transformed by this feat of social engineering into socio-economic hegemony. Again, *Apartheid* is nothing but a microcosm of the North-South divide which places power and economic muscle with one group of nations. It is indisputable that apartheid could not have survived without the military, economic and technological backing of 'the North'. Coming to the North-South question itself, the immorality of conventional capitalist economics is seen in its deification of the demand-supply principle. This, of course, is having disastrous consequences for the social fabric of Northern countries, but its effects on the emerging economies of Asia, Africa and Latin America catastrophic. The North creates demand and then controls it. power of large trans-national firms is such that they can virtually dictate the price of commodities produced by the South. A permanent relationship of dependence is created and sustained. There is no morality in the market-place and the weak are continually being made weaker. The North, moreover, finds a pliant market for its goods in the South which is again made dependent upon them by a complex process which involves offering a developing country 'soft term loans' (usually and outrageously called aid!), 'industrialization', the corruption of its ruling elite, and the creation of demand for totally unnecessary goods. It is true, of course, that there is much necessary transfer of technology from the North to the South, but this is not what causes chronic indebtedness. Prestigious projects, unnecessary and inappropriate 'development', corruption and the lack of an appropriate technology cause the syndrome of dependence. It needs to be said also that the North often prevents, by very dubious methods indeed, p.337 the emergence of appropriate technology in the South. The recent difficulties experienced by the emerging pharmaceutical industry in Bangladesh are a case in point.

The emergence of ideology as a means of manipulating power is a comparatively recent development in that most ideological states have come into being only in the last hundred years or so. Ideologies, whether fascist or socialist, have a populist appeal but in fact vest power in a ruling elite consisting of an intellectual vanguard, political bureaucrats and the armed forces. The perpetuation of the ideology, on which the existence of a state is alleged to depend, also results in the perpetuation of the power of the party and, more particularly, of those who have power within the party. The ordinary citizen, on whose behalf the ideology has been promoted, is more and more marginalized and, if he seeks change, oppressed. Heterodoxy becomes the main evil in society and is to be rooted out at all costs but real social evils such as corruption, misuse of power, or inefficiency in bureaucratized and centralized industry are ignored.

In this second half of the twentieth century we are witnessing an even newer phenomenon—the emergence of ideological states based on religious fundamentalism. The Wahhābi revolution in Saudi Arabia created an ideological state there in the last century. This state was and is based on a rigor st interpretation of Islam as given in the two primary sources of that religion: The Qurān and the Sunhah, or practice of the prophet of Islam. Now, however, we find that there are other Muslim fundamentalist states whose fundamentalism has a somewhat different basis. Importance might be given, for instance, to an 'apostolic succession' of authoritative figures, or to the cultural and geographical homogeneity of a people as much as to the primary sources of religion.⁴ Religious fundamentalism (of all kinds) exploits the innate conservatism of people. Power, however, is ultimately wielded by a religious establishment who claim to have a monopoly

⁴ See the present writer's: *Islam: A Christian perspective*, Paternoster 1983, pp. 95ff., and 124ff.

in the interpretation and application of the Sacred tradition. Power is sometimes gained with the help of the masses, who see in religious fundamentalism a 'third way' between capitalism and socialism, but it is maintained by an alliance of the clergy, the armed forces, the bureaucracy and elite armed guards who owe loyalty to the clergy. In global geopolitical terms, such regimes are tolerated and even supported to maintain alleged balances of power. In the western democracies too religious fundamentalism can be a powerful political force and because of its appeal to the masses, it can influence state p. 338 policy in important respects. One important effect of the rise of fundamentalism as a state ideology is the suppression of religious minorities. Just as political fundamentalist ideology forbids political dissent, so religious fundamentalist ideology discourages religious dissent. (It is also true that political fundamentalist ideology often discourages religious belief as it can be an alternative source for the ordering of life and so is regarded as a danger to the state ideology. On the other hand, religious fundamentalism frequently suppresses political dissent, as its custodians regard themselves as possessors of a divinely revealed ideology to which there can be no alternative.) In recent years there have been serious cases of the violation of the human rights of minority groups by fundamentalist regimes. The religious beliefs of such groups have been vilified, their places of worship seized or demolished, and many have been driven out of their homes or put in prison. These are surely matters of concern to all who love justice and tolerance? An element of repression which must concern the sensitive Christian is the particular mentality it creates in those who are repressed. Systematic economic exploitation, for example, creates a mentality where mistrust and suspicion become the basis for social relationships. This ultimately results in social fragmentation and psychological alienation. Again, political repression, apart from creating fear and suspicion of political institutions, finally weakens such institutions and may even cause their demise. Other symptoms of a repressed mentality can be outward sycophancy accompanied by inner hostility. This has very adverse effects on the integration of personality and also results in what has been called 'communal schizophrenia'.⁵

What does the Gospel's offer of wholeness mean in a context of repression? Before we address the question, it would perhaps be appropriate to acknowledge that the invitation of the Gospel to repentance and new life has been presented by Christians and Churches with a great deal of power, influence and money. The repressed have, therefore, tended to see the Church as one more institution seeking to exploit them. In some areas, such as Latin America, the Church has wielded considerable political and financial influence and is seen as an oppressive institution even by its own theologians! In Asia the situation is somewhat different—here a generally poor Church regards its leaders with mistrust as they are suspected (sometimes justifiably) of exploiting the poverty of their p. 339 constituency for their own enrichment. The lesson to be learned from this is, of course, that the most effective commendation of the Gospel comes from those who are powerless in worldly terms but have found the new life in Jesus Christ to be a profound source of power for living and loving. The coming into existence of base ecclesial communities in many parts of the world, numerous ministries of identification with and care for the poor and the emergence of theologies which take the question of justice seriously are all signs that such a commendation of the Gospel *is* taking place at least in some contexts. The struggle to achieve and to maintain power in the Church, is, however, one of the greatest

⁵ I owe the term to the Rev. Robert Wilkes. See further an old but important work on the subject: J. C. Heinrich: 'The Psychology of a Suppressed People', London 1937.

stumbling blocks to an effective proclamation of the Gospel to the poor.⁶ We need to reiterate the vital link between God's justice and the justification of the sinner. This must be seen not simply as a royal pardon, as a reversal to some kind of *tabula rasa*, but as the gradual (but nevertheless real) creation of righteousness in the justified sinner. The justification of the sinner, his being accounted righteous, must result in his being made just, and this in turn should result in an effort to establish justice in the Christian's social, political and economic environment.⁷

As far as the Christian's duty to witness *for* justice and *against* injustice is concerned, certain Gospel principles need to be kept in mind: First, a Christian is forbidden to employ violent means to safeguard his *own* rights.⁸ Second, he is to obey secular authority only 'insofar as the Law of Christ allows'. In other words, where secular authority attempts to usurp God's place or to violate his law, obedience is not mandatory. The refusal of the early Christians to ascribe divine titles to Caesar or to sacrifice to the gods are an example of this kind of godly disobedience. The Christian (or a group of Christians) cannot, therefore, struggle for their own rights, but they may rightly struggle for the rights of other (Christian and non-Christian) oppressed groups. The Christian, in keeping with the whole of prophetic and dominical tradition, may witness for justice in a situation where there is oppression and exploitation.⁹ Identification and an expression of solidarity with the oppressed is an area of Christian concern which has attracted considerable attention in recent years. There are numerous Christian communities throughout the third p. 340 world whose main aim is to live with the poor, experience their suffering with them and offer the Gospel to the poor in word and deed. Such communities are transforming the Church's understanding of her own mission and also compelling a cynical world to take the Church more seriously. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation provides a theological basis for the Church's involvement with the poor in this way.¹⁰

It is necessary to say at this point that the Christian will affirm and will stand with all those who seek justice and truth. He will acknowledge as 'signs of the Kingdom' all efforts to establish justice and to do away with exploitation and greed. He will endeavour to work with all men of good will, whatever their belief or lack of belief, who seek to promote a more just and humane world.¹¹

Apart from social action, however, there is another dimension of the Gospel's offer of wholeness to humanity and that is *Spiritual Healing*. Such healing is not to be confused with 'Faith Healing' whatever that might mean. Those Christians who take spiritual healing seriously will declare that such healing is concerned with the whole person and that true healing should not be merely physical but should bring wholeness to all areas of the person's life. It should bring him integration of personality, mental stability, and experience of salvation along with physical healing. An area that is much emphasized these days is the healing of relationships. Christians as a community should show marks of restoration and wholeness in their communal life. This has ever been a powerful witness to the world.

⁶ J. C. England: *Living Theology in Asia* SCM London 1981. V. Samuel & C. Sugden (eds.); *Sharing Jesus Christ in the Two Thirds World*, Bangalore 1983. K. Y. Bock (ed.): *Minjung Theology*, Singapore CCA 1981.

⁷ Rom. ch. 8, [Phil. 2:12-13](#).

⁸ [Matt. 5:38ff](#)

⁹ Amos, [Matt. 23](#), [25](#).

¹⁰ See for example, Leon Howell: *People are the Subject*, CWME-WCC Geneva 1980.

¹¹ See further: *Your Kingdom come*, CWME-WCC Geneva 1980.

One of the most exciting developments in theology in recent years has been the recovery of the biblical teaching that God suffers with and for us, i.e. He is compassionate in the strict sense. God's suffering is not simply compassionate, however—it is also redemptive. Divine involvement with human suffering has a purpose and that purpose is the elimination of suffering. God comes to us in our situation to save us from our predicament.¹² The Church, in continuing the *missio Dei*, is also called to suffer. Certainly, such suffering refines Christian character but it should also be a means for the redemption of the world.¹³ Identification with the oppressed is not enough—there must be such a proclamation of the Kingdom and its values, such a humble service and such a commitment to Gospel truth that the poor are saved in every sense of the word: saved not only from outside oppression and exploitation but saved from their own ignorance, mentality, and brokenness. In other words saved from their own sin.

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An Evangelical Perspective of Roman Catholicism

(The Executive Committee of the Theological Commission of WEF decided to establish a task force on Roman Catholicism in 1980. The decision was recorded in the minute that follows: 'In the light of the growing apprehension among the evangelicals in several parts of the world concerning the relationships with Roman Catholics at different levels, the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship has appointed a special Task Force to study afresh different aspects of Roman Catholic theology and practice as they relate to biblical principles and the evangelical community. These, in turn, will be examined as to their traditional content and the particular present day expressions with a view to understand them, evaluate our own position, and arrive at adequate conclusions.' The study was originally intended to cover basic doctrinal issues: soteriology, bibliology and authority, Mariology, natural theology, sacraments and grace, ecclesiology; and practical issues: baptism, conversion of practising Roman Catholics, ecumenism and the place of Pope John Paul II. Subsequently, the scope was modified to include the following: Relation to other Churches, Religious liberty, Mariology, Authority of the Church, Papacy and Infallibility, Modernism/Theological Liberalism, Justification by faith, Sacramentalism and the Eucharist, and the Mission of the Church.

The following procedure was adopted to carry out the above mandate: 1. Draft a brief statement indicating the areas where the study should begin; 2. Erect a Task Force of 13 persons; 3. Appoint a Drafting Committee of 6 persons; 4. Solicit comments from the Members of the Theological Commission; 5. Solicit initial written statements from the Task Force members; 6. the Drafting Committee to meet two full days to consider the responses; 7. Send the revised Draft to Task Force and Theological Commission members for further

¹² K. Kitamori: *Theology of the Pain of God*, Richmond Va. 1965. J. Moltmann: *The Crucified God*, London 1974.

¹³ [Matt. 5:11](#), [10:16ff.](#), [20:23](#). [John 21:18ff.](#), cf. [2 Cor. 4:7-12](#).

comments; 8. Submit Draft Statement and comments received to the Executive Committee of the Theological Commission; 9. The Convenor to meet with the Executive Committee to consider the progress made and to chart further activities; 10. Submit Statement to the WEF General Assembly in June, 1986; and 11. proceed with other areas of study. In addition to these steps, the full Task Force itself met in Madrid towards the end of 1985 for four days, and the revised statement was submitted to the WEF General Assembly as scheduled. The General Assembly adopted the Statement in its meeting in June last year. Though the Executive Committee of the Theological Commission cleared the document for publication, it will be considering in its next session the line of action it should take concerning the document.

What follows is the first half of this document; the second half will [p. 343](#) be published in the next issue of ERT. Any response to the document may be sent to the editor.

Ed.

PREAMBLE

We as the World Evangelical Fellowship confess wholeheartedly our commitment to the evangelical faith. We stand together upon the word of God embodied in the witness of the prophets and the apostles. We draw our strength from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. We acknowledge our deep indebtedness to the historic Christian faith rearticulated in the heritage of the sixteenth century Reformation. This is the common ground which sustains our fellowship. These are our credentials. Therein lies our identity and our reason for existence. Thus united, we seek the promised leading of the Holy Spirit in nurturing our fellowship and defining our common mission in the world. In common faith and mutual trust we seek to fulfil our God-given calling to proclaim the Gospel and to serve as agents of reconciliation in a broken world.

Standing within this rich tradition, we now face the enormous spiritual challenges of our day. Looming large among them is the ongoing urgent task to clarify our relationship to Roman Catholic faith and practice. During the past centuries, and especially in recent decades, significant changes are evident along many fronts. There is great ferment in Roman Catholic circles and the picture is far from clear. In it all we welcome every hopeful sign pointing to the revival of true apostolic faith. We experience continuing dismay, however, whenever the Gospel is blurred or eclipsed. It seems sometimes that everything is changing, when at times nothing has changed. Clearly the central issues of the sixteenth century struggles are still very much alive among the heirs of both Rome and the Reformation.

In the midst of these contemporary vortices we reaffirm the fundamental truths of the way of salvation as formulated by the Reformers. Our rule for faith and life is *sola Scriptura*. The work of atonement was wrought *solo Christo*. We are adopted as children of God *sola gratia*. Our justification is *sola fide*. Our worship and service is *solis Deo gloria*.

In working out the implications of these common convictions, we must learn together to practise the truth in the spirit of love. Our fellowship embraces Christians from many different ethnic, national and cultural situations. Our far-flung churches are called to live out the Christian faith under sharply contrasting circumstances. We must therefore demonstrate mutual trust as together we rely on God's [p. 344](#) presence and power to keep us all faithfully and fruitfully active in the various sectors of his Kingdom. We must exercise understanding and restraint lest our fellowship impose upon brothers and sisters elsewhere burdens which neither they nor we are able to bear under the given circumstances.

In the spirit of Christian discipleship we must be careful not to allow internal strife and dissension to obstruct the ministry to which God calls us in his world. We must keep the avenues of service open to the work of the Holy Spirit so that he can accomplish his purposes in the lives of people and in the institutions of society that are sensitive to his Word. For we live in a world where millions are strangers to the Gospel and other millions, nominally Christians, are in need of evangelizing. We may not compromise the essentials of the Gospel; we cannot afford to harbour tensions and divisions which stand as obstacles in the path of our mission.

Our solidarity in the confession of our faith as expressed in the WEF Statement of Faith shapes our approach to Roman Catholicism.¹ Standing strong in Christ, we can share the treasures of the Gospel in candid and fearless contact with the Church of Rome. Such actions must be motivated by commitment to the truth. And mutual love constrains us to reach out to others. This challenge is inescapable, given the large role which the Roman Catholic Church plays as a very formative social and political reality in many nations. Our actions must indeed be guided by faithfulness to the Gospel. But such faithfulness should reckon with the great diversities which manifest themselves currently in Roman Catholic popular piety, style of worship, church rule, and understanding of doctrine—even though the binding authority of the dogmatic declarations issued by her central teaching authority ultimately lay their claim upon all her followers. All diversities, both within the Roman Catholic Church and p. 345 the World Evangelical Fellowship, must be judged by the light of the Scriptures.

In our consideration of Roman Catholicism, some aspects of the contemporary spiritual condition of the world demand special attention from evangelical leaders and pastors all over the world.

1. The growth and spread of secularism and anti-Christian ideologies in an increasingly hostile world has produced among some Christians an increased sense of urgency concerning the need for cooperation and unity between different churches.

2. The wide and intelligent use of mass media by the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the particular gifts that the present Pope has for public exposure, has projected to the world a completely new image of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution which is very attractive.

3. In Protestantism there has been a formidable growth of independent churches, new evangelical denominations and parachurch movements. Many of these bodies are not clearly conscious of the doctrinal heritage of the Reformation and consequently of the sharp doctrinal differences between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. This goes along with the ahistorical and antirational stance of vast segments of the population in contemporary society.

4. The clear anti-Marxist stance of the present Pope has provided Catholicism with a new ground for acceptance even among Protestant or evangelical persons in North

¹ *Statement of Faith*. We believe in: (1) *The Holy Scriptures* as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy, and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct. (2) *One God*, eternally existent in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (3) *Our Lord Jesus Christ*, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His vicarious and atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediatorial work, and His personal return in power and glory. (4) *The Salvation* of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit. (5) *The Holy Spirit* by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ. (6) *The Unity of the Spirit* of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ. (7) *The Resurrection* of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

America and Europe. This acceptance on ideological grounds often does not take into account the demands of evangelical truth.

All these factors produce confusion, ambiguous schemes of cooperation, deceptive experiences and an abandonment of evangelical truth. These factors also constitute the rationale for this statement. They require that as Evangelicals we not only consider our relation to the Church of Rome, but also that we clarify the doctrinal issues for ourselves and act in harmony with our confession.

Obviously, our study cannot cover all aspects of church doctrine and life. We have therefore decided to limit this initial statement to nine areas which are of particular importance to evangelical Christians, especially in countries where they are a minority among Catholics.

- I. Relation to Other Churches
- II. Religious Liberty
- III. Mariology
- IV. Authority in the Church
- V. The Papacy and Infallibility p. 346
- VI. Modernism/Theological Liberalism
- VII. Justification by Faith
- VIII. Sacramentalism and the Eucharist
- IX. The Mission of the Church

1. RELATION TO OTHER CHURCHES²

According to Catholic teaching, the church is Jesus Christ 'available' to the point that the church exists alongside of Christ, almost like a second person of Christ ('quasi altera Christi persona,' *Mistici Corporis*). As such it is necessary to salvation (*Lumen Gentium*, 14). This idea is very old and widespread in Roman Catholicism. When Paul VI promulgated the constitution *De Ecclesia*, he affirmed that 'nothing really changes in the traditional doctrine' (*Osservatore Romano*, No. 22, 1964).

In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II speaks first of the mystery of the church (Chap. I) and the church as the people of God (Chap. II). It then proceeds to the hierarchy of the church (Chap. III) in which the power and infallibility of the Pope are set forth and the basis is laid for the church's relation to other churches. Our assessment on the role of the Church of Rome in the ecumenical movement should be based, however, not only on the church's official teaching, but also on the way it presents itself in different areas of the world. The relation of the Church of Rome to the churches of the Reformation has been a real concern to evangelical Christians for many years, even centuries. This is especially true in nations where Catholicism has been the dominant religion. In most of these nations the Church of Rome has held a privileged position with the civil government and the evangelical churches have often been oppressed and marginalized in the exercise of their religion and in their civil rights.

In recent decades some significant changes have taken place, both in practice and in teaching, in Rome's relation to other churches.

² Vatican II distinguished clearly between the Church of Rome's relation to the Orthodox Churches and the Churches of the Reformation. Her relation to the Orthodox Churches is formulated in the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches. Our remarks are limited to the relation of the Church of Rome to Protestant Churches and are based largely on the Decree on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and the Decree on Ecumenism (*De Ecumenismo*).

Yet the assumption throughout the Documents of Vatican II is that the Church of Rome is the one true church. This appears from the statement that the one holy catholic and apostolic church 'subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and p. 347 by the bishops in union with this successor ...' (*Lumen Gentium*, 8). This Church, the body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy Spirit (cf. [ln. 2:20, 27](#)), cannot err in matters of belief (*Lumen Gentium*, 12). The Church clings without fail to the faith under the lead of a sacred teaching authority to which it loyally defers (*Lumen Gentium*, 12). This assumption may also be seen to underlie the statement that whoever refuses to enter or remain in the Catholic Church cannot be saved (*Lumen Gentium*, 14).

That Rome considers itself the one true church does not mean that it claims that the other churches (ecclesial communities) are devoid of all the marks of the church. Nor does it speak of these ecclesial communions in a haughty manner. Vatican II made it clear that the separated churches bear many of the qualities of the church. It recognized that all who are justified by faith through baptism are brothers in the Lord (*De Ecumenismo*, 3), that all endowments that build up the Church can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church (*De Ecumenismo*, 3), that 'brethren divided from us' also carry out many of the sacred actions of the Christian religion (*De Ecumenismo*, 3), and that the Holy Spirit is at work in these ecclesial communities.

In a key paragraph Vatican II said that

[the] separated Churches and Communities, though we believe they suffer from defects already mentioned, have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church (*De Ecumenismo*, 3).

Yet, given these qualifications, there is an essential difference between the Church of Rome and the other churches.

... [O]ur separated brethren, whether considered as individuals or as Communities and Churches, are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those whom He has regenerated and vivified into one body and newness of life—that unity which the holy Scriptures and the revered tradition of the Church proclaim. For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who already belong in any way to God's People (*De Ecumenismo*, 3).
p. 348

The Church of Rome is ready to grant that people on both sides were to blame for the divisions in the church and that the church always has need of continual reformation, but she insists that the way to true unity of the world leads to Rome. 'As the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the [Roman] Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time' (*De Ecumenismo*, 4).

Moreover, all the endowments possessed by those outside the Catholic Church 'by right belong to the one Church of Christ'. It is into the Church of Rome then that all those people who belong in any way to God's people should be incorporated (*De Ecumenismo*, 3).

It is widely held that an ecumenical council of the churches will be needed to restore unity to the world Church. But Rome makes clear that it is the 'prerogative of the Roman Pontiff to convoke these Councils, to preside over them, and to confirm them' (*Lumen Gentium*, 22). The call to Rome is no longer in imperial tones, but it is unmistakably present.

Evangelicals have reason to be glad that the former hard line of the Church of Rome regarding the churches of the Reformation has been modified as indicated by Vatican II. They also appreciate the willingness of the Church of Rome to enter into discussion with theologians of various confessions on an equal basis. Evangelicals, however, are not prepared to accept the claim that the Church of Rome is the one only true church, nor that its supreme teaching office is free from all error in matters of belief, nor that the road that leads to Rome is the way to unity.

In the early sixties there was a widespread optimism (although not without deep misgivings from many quarters, especially among Evangelicals in Latin America and Latin Europe) concerning the new approach of John XXIII to open the windows of the Church of Rome to the world, to alter the Church's view of the 'separated', and to engage more vigorously in the activities of the ecumenical movement. But many of these expectations remain largely unfulfilled.

The present stance of the Roman Catholic Church is perhaps best expressed in the address of Pope John Paul II at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva on June 12, 1984:

When the Catholic Church enters on the difficult task of ecumenism, it brings with it a firm conviction. Despite the moral afflictions which have marked the life of its members and even of its leaders in the course of [p. 349](#) history, it is convinced that in the ministry of the bishop of Rome it has preserved the visible focus and guarantee of unity in full fidelity to the apostolic tradition and to the faith of the Fathers. St. Ignatius of Antioch in his time greeted the Church 'which presides in the region of the Romans' as that 'which presides in charity' over the communion. The Catholic Church believes that the bishop who presides over the life of that local Church made fruitful by the blood of Peter and Paul, receives from the Lord the mission to be the enduring witness to the faith confessed by these two leaders of the apostolic community which, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, constitutes the unity of believers. To be in communion with the Bishop of Rome is to bear visible witness that one is in communion with all who confess that same faith, with those who have confessed it since Pentecost, and with those who will confess it until the Day of the Lord shall come. That is our conviction as Catholics and our faithfulness to Christ forbids us to relinquish it. We also know that this constitutes a difficulty for most of you, whose memories are perhaps marked by certain painful recollections for which my predecessor Pope Paul VI asked your forgiveness. But we have to discuss this in all frankness and friendship ... (World Council of Churches Central Committee, Document No. 4.9.2, 9–18 July 1984).

From the actions of Pope John Paul II many infer that the Church of Rome is backing off somewhat from its new openness to the other churches, has reaffirmed certain teachings which Evangelicals find without biblical warrant, and has come to reassert the fundamental sense of Roman Catholic self-identity. Relations with the World Council of Churches have cooled somewhat. If the only choice for Protestants is either to return to Rome or to continue their separate existence, for the time being many feel compelled to do the latter, even while they hope for greater openness on the part of the Church of Rome and they on their part strive more earnestly to heal the divisions which they feel they must overcome.

We as Evangelicals believe that we should work more earnestly to manifest visibly the oneness of the Church of Jesus Christ and are convinced that our unity is a unity in truth. As we consider the teaching and practice of the Church of Rome concerning other churches we are faced with a fundamental question: Should we enter into any relationship

at all with the Church of Rome? And, given an affirmative answer, What kind of relationship should this be? This is a crucial and potentially divisive issue. At stake here is the essential confession of what the church is and the question whether we can recognize the Church of Rome as a church in the biblical sense.

II. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

One grievance of longstanding which Evangelicals have against the **P. 350** Church of Rome is that this church, which assumes that it is the one true church, has often not recognized the right of other Christian churches to enjoy full religious freedom. This grievance of Evangelicals deserves to be heard. The question is: Has Vatican II made significant changes in the church's teaching on religious liberty? And has the practice of the church changed greatly since pre-Vatican II days? It is necessary to look briefly at this issue.

Religious freedom, according to Vatican II,

means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs. Nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.

The Synod further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed. Thus it is to become a civil right (*Declaration on Religious Freedom, 2*).

This statement does not mean, however, that all churches and their members should be accorded exactly the same freedom. For, as a footnote to this Declaration states,

The Catholic Church claims freedom from coercive interference in her ministry and life on grounds of the divine mandate laid upon her by Christ Himself ... It is Catholic faith that no other Church or Community may claim to possess this mandate in all its fulness. In this sense, the freedom of the Church is unique, proper to herself alone, by reason of its foundation. In the case of other religious Communities, the foundation of the right is the dignity of the human person, which requires that men be kept free from coercion, when they act in community, gathered into Churches, as well as when they act alone (*Documents of Vatican II, p. 682*).

Vatican II further acknowledged that the Government should

create conditions favorable to the fostering of religious life, in order that the people may be truly enabled to exercise their religious rights and to fulfill their religious duties ...

If, in view of peculiar circumstances obtaining among certain peoples, special legal recognition is given in the constitutional order of society to one religious body, it is at the same time imperative that the right of all citizens and religious bodies to religious freedom should be recognized and made effective in practice (*Documents of Vatican II, p. 685*). **p. 351**

One might conclude from these declarations that the Church of Rome, if it is true to this statement, will not deal with the religious rights of people in terms of a double standard, demanding freedom when Roman Catholics are a minority or suffer discrimination by the states, and exacting privilege for itself and intolerance for others when Roman Catholics are a majority. The question remains, however, whether the practice of the Church of Rome agrees with the principle thus expressed.

III. MARIOLOGY

There is no question that the place of Mary in Roman Catholicism is unique. Large areas both of Roman doctrine and practice are related to her in many ways. The views on Mary range from the strictly theological through the highly mystical and devotional to the rather ordinary and mundane. She has been exalted above every saint, institution, apostle, or doctrinal expression to the point where, although officially she 'neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator,' yet in effect many Roman Catholics put her on the same level as the persons of the Trinity. All of these perceptions of Mary make the whole area of Mariology a major point of controversy between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals.

The role of Mary in Roman Catholic teaching and practice is related to this church's understanding of itself, to which we have referred in the section on Relation to Other Churches. Here it is important to note that the Church of Rome views itself as 'one interlocked reality which is comprised of a divine and a human element' (*De Ecclesia*, 8), in which the mystery of the synthesis of the human and the divine is realized. The church itself in the teaching of Rome is a sacramental reality, in that it is regarded as the historical extension of the incarnation.

In this perspective it is also possible to understand the importance of Mary for the theology of Rome. For, since Mary is a picture of the church, in exalting Mary, the Roman Catholic Church also exalts itself.

The place of Mary is related further to that of the saints in general. Like the saints, she is to be venerated, only in greater measure. At the Second Council of Nicea (787) a distinction was made between the veneration due to the saints (*dulia*) and the worship (*latria*) due to God alone. Already then Mary was regarded as being in a class by herself, and the veneration given to her was called *hyperdulia*. She was thereby placed above the other saints, but below God. The careful p.352 distinctions made by theologians, however, are usually not reflected in the practice of the faithful. Gradually Mary came to be regarded not only as a witness to the gospel, an example to follow, but also as a 'supernatural friend' who could help in the difficulties of life.

The development of the unique place and role of Mary in Roman Catholicism has its long and deep roots in the history of especially Eastern but also Western Christianity. Marian folklore, rituals, and festivals thrived in many circles as the early church spread over the Mediterranean world and into Europe. Along the way popular practices usually paved the way for official statements of dogma. The phrase *theotokos*, traceable to the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), was originally used in the context of Christology to affirm the true humanity of our Lord. In time it underwent a radical shift, however, serving eventually to elevate Mary as 'Mother of God'. By the Medieval era the piety, art, and architecture of the 'mother church' was saturated with devotion of the Madonna. By the sixteenth century, as evidenced by the spiritual struggles of the Reformers, the image of Mary had largely eclipsed the centrality of Jesus Christ in the life of believers. This distortion was one significant impulse behind the Reformation movement. In its counter-Reformational response, the Council of Trent (1546-63) declared Mary's sinlessness and perpetual virginity. A further decisive step in the development of Marian dogma was taken in 1854 with the promulgation of the papal bull, *Ineffabilis Deus*. In it Pius IX declared the Immaculate Conception of the ever blessed Virgin Mary. This dogma is now binding on all the Roman Catholic faithful. Its core passage reads as follows:

To the glory of the holy and undivided Trinity, to the honour and renown of the Virgin Mother of God, the exaltation of the Catholic faith and the increase of the Christian religion;

by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we declare, pronounce and define: the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment in her conception, by the singular grace and privilege of almighty God and view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin, is revealed by God and, therefore, firmly and constantly to be believed by all the faithful. If, therefore, any persons shall dare to think otherwise—which may God forbid—than has been defined by us, let them clearly know that they stand condemned by their own judgment, that they have made shipwreck of their faith and fallen from the unity of the Church. Furthermore, they subject themselves *ipso facto* to the penalties provided by law if by speech or writing or in any other exterior way they shall dare to express their views.

This dogma was then endorsed by Vatican I in 1870. [p. 353](#)

Another major development in the Marian dogma came nearly a century later when on November 1, 1950 Pope Pius XII defined in *Munificentissimus Deus* the dogma of the Heavenly Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Here the key passage reads:

From all eternity and by one and the same decree of predestination the august Mother of God is united in a sublime way with Jesus Christ; immaculate in her conception, a spotless virgin in her divine motherhood, the noble companion of the divine Redeemer who won a complete triumph over sin and its consequences, she finally obtained as the crowning glory of her privileges to be preserved from the corruption of the tomb and, like her Son before her, to conquer death and to be raised body and soul to the glory of heaven, to shine refulgent as Queen at the right hand of her Son, the immortal King of ages (cf. [1 Tim. 1:17](#)).

The universal Church, in which the Spirit of truth actively dwells, and which is infallibly guided by Him to an ever more perfect knowledge of revealed truths, has down the centuries manifested her belief in many ways; the bishops from all over the world ask almost unanimously that the truth of the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven be defined as a dogma of divine and catholic faith; this truth is based on Sacred Scripture and deeply embedded in the minds of the faithful; it has received the approval of liturgical worship from the earliest times; it is perfectly in keeping with the rest of revealed truth, and has been lucidly developed and explained by the studies, the knowledge and wisdom of theologians. Considering all these reasons we deem that the moment preordained in the plan of divine providence has now arrived for us to proclaim solemnly this extraordinary privilege of the Virgin Mary ...

Therefore, having directed humble and repeated prayers to God, and having invoked the light of the Spirit of Truth; to the glory of almighty God who has bestowed His special bounty on the Virgin Mary, for the honour of His Son the immortal King of ages and victor over sin and death, for the greater glory of His august mother, and for the joy and exultation of the whole Church; by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we proclaim, declare and define as a dogma revealed by God: the Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven.

Wherefore, if anyone—which may God forbid—should wilfully dare to deny or call in doubt what has been defined by us, let him know that he certainly has abandoned the divine and catholic faith.

A further development can be found in chapter 8 of the document of Vatican II entitled Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Here Mary is seen ‘not merely as passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of man’s salvation through faith and obedience’. She is the ‘mother to us in the order of grace’. [p. 354](#)

The predestination of the Blessed Virgin as Mother of God was associated with the incarnation of the divine word: in the designs of divine Providence she was the gracious mother of the divine Redeemer here on earth, and above all others and in a singular way

the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ, she presented him to the Father in the temple, shared her Son's sufferings as he died on the cross. Thus, in a wholly singular way she co-operated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason she is a mother to us in the order of grace.

The motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix. This, however, is so understood that it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator.

John Paul II, in his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, included a last chapter entitled: 'The Mother in Whom we Trust'. In it Mary, as the Mother of the Church, is given a prominent place in the history of salvation. It is said that when Jesus was raised on the cross

her Son explicitly extended His Mother's maternity in a way that could be easily understood by every soul and every heart by designating, when He was raised on the cross, His beloved disciple as her son ... Later, all the generations of disciples, of those who confess and love Christ, like the apostle John, spiritually took this Mother to their own homes, and she was thus included in the history of salvation and in the Church's mission from the very beginning, that is from the moment of the Annunciation. Accordingly, we who form today's generation of disciples of Christ all wish to unite ourselves with her in a special way ... We believe that nobody else can bring us as Mary can into the divine and human dimension of this mystery. Nobody has been brought into it by God Himself as Mary has. It is in this that the exceptional character of the grace of the divine Motherhood consists. Not only is the dignity of this Motherhood unique and unrepeatable in the history of the human race, but Mary's participation, due to this maternity, in God's plan for man's salvation through the mystery of the Redemption is also unique in profundity and range of action.

We can say that the mystery of the Redemption took shape beneath the heart of the Virgin of Nazareth when she pronounced her 'fiat'. From then on, under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, this heart, the heart of [p. 355](#) both a virgin and a mother, has always followed the work of her Son and has gone out to all those whom Christ has embraced and continues to embrace with inexhaustible love. For that reason her heart must also have the inexhaustibility of a mother. The special characteristic of the motherly love that the Mother of God inserts in the mystery of the Redemption and the life of the Church finds expression in its exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him. It is in this that the mystery of the Mother consists (*Redemptor Hominis*. Printed in the USA by the Daughters of St. Paul, Boston, MA [Vatican translation from Vatican Polyglot Press], pp. 56, 57).

To be sure, Mary, the mother of Jesus, also has a definite place in the hearts and minds of Evangelicals. Their high regard for her is based on the gospel narratives concerning her place in Jesus' earthly ministry and in the early church as recorded in the book of Acts. However, the dogmatic affirmations of her immaculate conception, her perpetual virginity, and her assumption into heaven in bodily form lack biblical foundation. Nor is there biblical basis for titles such as 'Queen of Heaven', 'Mother of the Church', and 'Queen of all Saints', nor for the belief that she constantly intercedes on behalf of the believers.

This last half of the present century has witnessed renewed efforts in many ways by the Roman Catholic Church to assert Mary's uniqueness. From the time of the dogmatic

declaration of her bodily assumption into heaven in 1950 until the present, Mary has been made the object of intensive studies in Roman Catholic theological circles. Much has been said about her function as Mediatrix, with all the consequent connotations of the term. In the Vatican Document, *Marialis Cultus*, produced under the papacy of Paul VI, the centrality of Mary's person for the different seasons of the liturgical year is so emphasized that even Christmas appears to centre on Mary rather than on Jesus Christ.³ Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* accords her a prominent role in the whole process of evangelization, and calls her 'the morning star of p. 356 evangelization'. From a similar perspective, the bishops of Mexico issued a pastoral letter in 1984 calling attention to Mary of Guadalupe's place in the history of evangelization in that country which contributed primarily to the formation of Mexican identity and sense of self-determination. In the light of current trends to rediscover the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Mary's contribution in that ministry has been reiterated to the point where she is called 'the Spouse of the Holy Spirit'. For

it was with her, in her, and of her that He [the Holy Spirit] produced His Masterpiece which is a God made man. 'The Substantial Love of the Father and the Son has espoused Mary, in order to produce Jesus Christ'.⁴

Perhaps the greatest impetus for this Marian devotion—in confirmation of the many dogmas and theological assertions—has been given recently during the papacy of John Paul II, particularly in predominantly Roman Catholic countries. His visits to the shrines of Guadalupe in Mexico, the Black Madonna in Poland, and the Virgin of Lourdes in France were not simply pilgrimages of a devoted soul, but occasions for pontifical pronouncements to exalt the qualities of a virgin as well as her participation in the whole salvific plan of God. Mary of Guadalupe, of Poland, of Lourdes, as well as of many other places throughout the world, are all the mother of the eternal, incarnate Word. In John Paul II's words:

'[Mary], you are the woman promised in Eden, the woman chosen from eternity to be the Mother of the Word, the Mother of divine Wisdom, the Mother of the Son of God. Hail, Mother of God!'⁵

As evangelicals we consider the Roman Catholic doctrines concerning Mary as a formidable barrier between ourselves and Roman Catholics. Moreover, the many syncretistic practices associated with Mary in different parts of the world, particularly in countries of Latin Europe, Latin America, and the Philippines, are abominations to an

³ In the revised ordering of the Christmas period it seems to us that the attention of all should be directed towards the restored Solemnity of Mary the holy Mother of God. This celebration, placed on January 1 in conformity with the ancient indication of the liturgy of the City of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the 'holy Mother ... through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of life'. It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. [Lk. 2:14](#)), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace [Apostolic exhortation of His Holiness Paul VI, 'For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary—*Marialis Cultus*', February 2, 1974. Printed by Daughters of St. Paul, Boston, MA [taken from *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Weekly Edition, 4-4-74, Official Vatican Translation]].

⁴ Patrick Gaffney, S.M.M., *Mary's Spiritual Maternity According to St. Louis de Montfort*, Bay Shore, New York: Montfort Publications, 1976, pp. 38-49.

⁵ Pope John Paul II, 'Homily at the Basilica of Guadalupe', in *Puebla and Beyond*, edited by John Eagleson and Philip Scharper, translated by John Drury, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 72.

evangelical conscience. We join the author of old in saying: ‘The mother of Jesus is not the papal Mary’.

We as evangelical Christians are deeply offended by Rome’s Marian dogmas because they cast a shadow upon the sufficiency of the [p. 357](#) intercession of Jesus Christ, lack all support from Scripture and detract from the worship which Christ alone deserves.

This was the position of the Reformers in the 16th century.⁶ It is still the Evangelical position today. ‘If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One’ ([John 2:1](#), NIV).

IV. AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH

We as Evangelicals confess the supreme authority of the Holy Scriptures for all matters of faith and conduct. As paragraph 2 of the Lausanne Covenant states:

We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God’s word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all mankind. For God’s revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God’s people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes, and thus discloses to the whole church ever more of the many-coloured wisdom of God. ([II Tim. 3:16](#); [II Pet. 1:21](#); [John 10:35](#); [Isa. 55:11](#); [1 Cor. 1:21](#); [Rom. 1:16](#); [Matt. 5:17, 18](#); [Jude 3](#); [Eph. 1:17, 18](#); [3:10, 18](#)).

Most of our churches accept creeds and confessions in which they elaborate their perception of biblical truth, as well as rules and regulations for its application to life. ‘But these are themselves subordinate to Scripture, and being the composition of men are fallible documents’, comments John Stott. He adds: ‘There is only one supreme and infallible rule which determines the beliefs and practices of the church and that is Scripture itself. To this we may always appeal even from the confessions, traditions and conventions of a church’.⁷

As Evangelicals we understand that our position is in conflict with the Roman Catholic acceptance of tradition and the so-called ‘living voice of the Church’ as sources of revelation and authority alongside of [p. 358](#) the Scriptures. To such acceptance we attribute the development of dogmas contrary to what we see as explicit and consistent teaching of Scripture. To it we also attribute the past neglect of the Bible in the daily life of the Roman Church, especially in countries where, it was predominant. By contrast, evangelical church life and missionary activity is characterized by the translation, distribution, and proclamation of the message of the Bible. We as Evangelicals have always accepted the study of the text of Scripture as the centrepiece of theological education and theological work. We therefore now welcome all recent signs of renewed interest in the Bible in Roman Catholic circles.

⁶ The Ten Theses of Berne (1528) openly claimed that, since Christ is the only Mediator and Advocate between God the Father and believers, to invoke other mediators and advocates is contrary to Scripture. The Geneva Confession rejected the intercession of saints as a superstition invented by men (12). The Augsburg Confession states that the Scripture teaches ‘not to invoke saints, or to ask help of saints, because [Scripture] propounds unto us one Christ the Mediator, Propitiatory, High-Priest, and Intercessor’ (XXI).

⁷ John Stott, in R. Padilla (Ed.) *The New Face of Evangelicalism*, Downers Grove, Inter Varsity Press, 1976, pp. 37–38.

Vatican II offers evidence of the degree to which biblical movements have been spreading within the Roman Catholic Church. This is demonstrated by the following paragraphs from the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*:

Easy access to sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful ... And if, given the opportunity and the approval of Church authority, these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them (22).

Sacred theology rests on the written word of God together with sacred tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word. For the sacred Scriptures contain the word of God, and, since they are inspired, really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology. By the same word of Scripture the ministry of the word also takes wholesome nourishment and yields fruits of holiness. This ministry includes pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all other Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should have an exceptional place (24).

This biblical movement started in the Roman Church long before Vatican II. Its rise is evident in the following historic milestones: the Biblical School of Jerusalem and the *Revue Biblique* (1892), the Pontifical Bible Institute (1909), the German Catholic Work for the Bible (1933), and the three great encyclicals on biblical matters: *Providentissimus Deus* by Leo XIII (1893), *Spiritus Paraclitus* by Benedict XV (1920), and *Divino Afflante Spiritu* by Pius XII (1943). Today we cannot deny the abundant biblical references in contemporary Papal documents, the multiplication of Catholic translations of the Bible in Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian, and the development of a formidable array of Roman Catholic Bible scholarship in countries where formerly the Bible had little place. It is evident that Roman p.359 Catholics are now ready to invest a great amount of human and financial resources into the publication of biblical materials.

Does Vatican II represent a change in the traditional Catholic way of understanding the authority of the Bible? It is public knowledge that the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* was one of the most debated documents during the Council. An evangelical observer there refers to it as 'an unusually tension-filled debate'⁸ between those that defended the idea of two sources of revelation and those who proposed a new understanding of the question. The final document shows certain changes from the position of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I:

Christ the Lord, in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (cf. [2 Cor. 1:20](#); [3:16](#); [4:6](#)), commissioned the apostles to preach to all men that gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching and thus to impart to them divine gifts ... But in order to keep the gospel forever whole and alive within the Church, the apostles left bishops as their successors, 'handing over their own teaching role' to them. This sacred tradition, therefore, and sacred Scripture of both the Old and the New Testament are like a mirror in which the pilgrim church on earth looks at God, from whom she has received everything, until she is brought finally to see Him as He is face to face (cf. [1 Jn. 3:2](#)) (7).

This tradition which comes from the apostles develops in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit. For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down (8).

⁸ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965, p. 89.

Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. To the successors of the apostles, sacred tradition hands on in its full purity God's word which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Thus, led by the light of the Spirit of truth, these successors can in their preaching preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence (9).

Vatican II avoided affirming two sources of revelation. Rather, consistent with the Roman Catholic Church's self-understanding, the council connects Scripture and tradition, together with the magisterium, as coming from a single source of revelation. This view is clearly formulated as follows: [p. 360](#)

It is clear therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together, that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls (10).

The document shows a Church which is now more open to Scripture in daily life and in theology. But when it comes to the question of authority, the Roman Church still reserves to herself as an institution a power which according to official teaching is subordinate to Scripture (10), but which in practice is superior to it in the final instance. This position is based upon the role of the Church in the process of the transmission of Scripture. Consequently we must still affirm, with the Reformers of the sixteenth century, the unique authority of Scripture. The words of Calvin are clear and relevant:

Paul testifies that the Church 'is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets' ([Eph. 2:20](#)). If the doctrine of the apostles and prophets is the foundation of the Church, the former must have had its certainty before the latter began to exist ... Nothing therefore can be more absurd than the fiction that the power of judging Scripture is in the Church, and that on her nod its certainty depends. When the Church receives it and gives it the stamp of her authority, she does not make that authentic which was otherwise doubtful or controverted, but acknowledging it as the truth of God, she as in duty bound, shows her reverence by an unhesitating assent (*Institutes*, 1, 7, 2).

Good evangelical theology recognizes that the Spirit judges and corrects both the traditions and the teaching authority of the church on the basis of Scripture. Though the *Constitution on Divine Revelation* makes room for Scripture in Roman Catholic life in a way that contrasts with Trent and the Vatican I, it is still clearly different from the principle of *sola Scriptura*.

The new presence and use of the Bible in Catholic life challenges us to reconsider the serious question of the interpretation of Scripture. This brings the hermeneutical problem to the fore in theological debate. We must acknowledge that often we have also set our evangelical traditions above Scripture. In many instances our lip service to biblical authority contradicts the predominant place we give to our denominational and historical baggage. In many missionary situations the culture of the missionary has often been imposed upon our understanding of God's word. The time has come for Evangelicals around the world to work together on a contextual hermeneutics that will benefit from the rich expressions of evangelical faith that are now taking root in so many nations and

cultures. In this task we should p.361 never forget that for the Reformers the authority of the Bible in our lives is inseparable from the witness of the Holy Spirit:

For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate in our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted (Calvin, *Institutes*, 1, 7, 4).

As Evangelicals we are also concerned that Roman Catholic scholarship has not taken adequate account of developments in biblical studies within the evangelical world over the past three decades. Meanwhile, Catholic scholarship continues to assimilate and accept liberal and neo-liberal Protestant ideas which evangelical faith feels compelled to reject. Such Roman Catholic neglect of evangelical thought can be attributed in part to our own isolation, which itself stems from a misunderstanding of the biblical concept of separation and from reservations about the ecumenical movement. Yet a body of biblical scholarship has emerged from evangelical circles which invites Roman Catholic attention.

As Evangelicals we should not be closed to the power of God's Spirit and God's Word operating in the lives of people within the Roman Catholic Church. Though Roman Catholic dogma closes the way to truly biblical reformation, we should not underestimate the results of Scripture reading and application at every level of Roman Catholic life. The best way to face this Catholicism-in-ferment is by a renewed commitment to and understanding of our evangelical position, thus turning an attentive ear to God's Word and God's Spirit for our own reformation. In that strength we need not fear dialogue or confrontation.

V. THE PAPACY AND INFALLIBILITY

Evangelical reflection on Roman Catholicism cannot ignore the institution of the papacy and its claim to infallibility. For even if the inadequacy of other Roman Catholic doctrines were exposed, but papal infallibility were left untouched, Roman Catholicism could then still sustain its convictions on those other doctrines by an appeal to the authority of the pope.

The question of papal infallibility therefore continues to hold the attention of both Roman Catholics and Protestants. It seems that the papacy is losing credit among some Roman Catholic thinkers. At the same time, however, certain ecclesial circles outside the Roman p.362 Catholic Church are showing a growing interest in it. There is good reason, therefore, to review some of the characteristic elements of Roman Catholic teaching on the papacy.

According to Roman Catholic dogma, authority was conferred by Christ upon the apostles, Peter being the prince of the apostles, and from the apostles upon the bishops in an unbroken line of apostolic succession, provided the bishops remain in communion with the Roman Pontiffs as successors of Peter. The first Vatican Council of 1870, after stating clearly that the doctrine of the primacy of the pope had been professed by the church from the very beginning, declares that when the pope speaks *ex cathedra* in matters of faith and morals, he is gifted with infallibility. His decisions are therefore 'unchangeable in themselves and not because of the consent of the church' (Session IV, 4; Denzinger, 3073-75).

Despite attempts by some to offer a qualified interpretation of this pronouncement, the principle of papal infallibility continues unchanged as Roman Catholic dogma. This remains so, even though the Second Vatican Council made provision for a college of

bishops to assist the pope (*De Ecclesia*, 22–26). For collegiality is always to be interpreted in the light of papal primacy. The pope holds the supreme office. He embodies magisterial authority over the entire life of the Roman Catholic Church. This dogma, formulated definitively by Vatican I, is reaffirmed forcefully in the documents of Vatican II in the following words:

The college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is simultaneously conceived of in terms of its head, the Roman Pontiff, Peter's successor, and without any lessening of his power of primacy over all, pastors as well as the general faithful. For in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme, and universal power over the Church. And he can always exercise this power freely (*De Ecclesia*, 22).

This magisterial authority extends to the entire episcopal order of the Roman Catholic Church.

[For] the order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in teaching authority and pastoral rule; or, rather, in the episcopal order the apostolic body continues without a break. Together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head, the episcopal order is the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church. But this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff (*De Ecclesia*, 22).

Vatican II adds that [p. 363](#)

the infallibility promised to the Church resides also in the body of bishops when that body exercises supreme teaching authority with the successor of Peter. To the resultant definitions the assent of the Church can never be wanting (*De Ecclesia*, 25).

The extent of papal infallibility, claimed by the Roman Church, is clear from the statement that

thus religious submission of will and mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra* (*De Ecclesia*, 25).

Already in the nineteenth century critical discussion within the Roman Catholic Church centred on the primacy and infallibility of the pope, with strong objections being raised against these doctrines. Continuing rigorous historical studies have clearly indicated the many definitely non-theological factors, involved in the First Vatican Council's declaration of the dogma on papal infallibility (suppression of freedom, composition of the commissions, siege mentality, material interests, political pressures, etc.).⁹ Such studies have brought to light the problematic character and serious implications of that decision.

As part of the strong reaction in modern society against all authority structures, sociological critiques have also been directed against papal authority. Such critiques reject the idea of papal infallibility because of its authoritarian premises. They call into

⁹ Cf. August Bernhard Hasler, *Pius IX (1846–1878), päpstliche Unfehlbarkeit und 1. Vatikanisches Konzil: Dogmatisierung und Durchsetzung einer Ideologie*, 2 vols., Stuttgart: Hiersemann 1977, XVII–627; Idem., *Wie der Papst unfehlbar wurde: Macht und Ohnmacht eines Dogma*, München: R. Piper & Co. 1977, 1980 (tr. It., Torino, 1982). Typical of such reaction is the Keenan Catechism, in use in the Roman Catholic Church until 1870 and carrying its official stamp of approval. It attributed the idea of papal infallibility to Protestant inventions, and therefore categorically rejected it. Even after 1870 this catechism continued to be published without substantial change, except for the sentence in question.

question all authority structures. Our misgivings concerning the papacy do not rely upon such arguments, in view of the basic anarchistic spirit which inspires them.

More significant for evangelicals is the larger theological background which forms the context for the pronouncement on papal infallibility. This dogma is a final consequence of that infallibility which is attributed to the Church of Rome itself. If the Church of Rome were indeed infallible and as such prior and superior to Scripture, its appeal to Scripture would be devoid of real significance.

Taking issue with this view, Luther already placed the Roman Catholic position on the same level as the doctrine of the 'Enthusiasts', p. 364 since in both cases the claimed possession of the Holy Spirit implies an independence from the Word of God.¹⁰ For evangelical faith, however, it is not the church which gives birth to the Word, but the Word which gives birth to the church ([1 Peter 1:23](#), [James 1:18](#)). We have but one Master, whose infallible teaching is contained once and for all in the Scriptures. Listening to and obeying that Word, we hear the message of the one and only Lord.

Scripture leaves no room for mere corrections on the Roman Catholic doctrine of the papacy. It compels us instead to reject the very idea of Petrine primacy as the basis for papal infallibility. The New Testament is not concerned to elevate Peter above the other apostles, nor to institute an enduring 'office of Peter'; nor did Peter himself ever suggest it ([1 Peter 5:1-4](#)). Truth and unity are far better served by the confession of the unique lordship of Jesus Christ than in any other way. Under the kingship of Jesus Christ as the sole and supreme Head of the Church, we as Evangelicals therefore seek to honour the subservient role of God's people in the governance of the church through their exercise of the office of all believers.

The papacy, with its claim to infallibility, stands in the way of renewal within Roman Catholicism. It also poses an immense obstacle to Christian unity. It prevents, moreover, an obedient listening to the voice of the one true Lord of the church. The doctrine of papal infallibility is therefore not a 'divinely revealed dogma'¹¹ which 'all Christians must believe'.¹² It is rather an idea which no Christian can accept without denying the teachings of the infallible Scriptures. p. 365

Ministerial Formation for the Working Class: The Jifu Programme

Peter S. C. Chang

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Hong Kong has been prominent in the news recently because of 1997. For sure, the era of British rule will end when China regains her sovereignty. With Hong Kong as a Special

¹⁰ Luther, *Vorlesungen über Mose*, WA, 42, 334, 12.

¹¹ H. Denzinger-A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, No. 3073, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1965.

¹² *Ibid.*, No. 3059-3060.

Administration Region, hopefully changes can be minimal while prosperity and stability prevail. Though the date is still more than a decade away, changes have already begun.

At this historic moment, we see God at work in His church. Christians are awakened by the political situation to reflect more seriously on the meaning of their faith, to long for a deeper spirituality, to be more sensitive to the social responsibility and to search for more valid church models. The lost art of fasting and prayer is once again rediscovered. An unprecedented spirit of unity among the evangelicals is well on the way.

Also at this juncture the TEE department of China Graduate School of Theology (CGST) is launching a new adventure, Jifu. Jifu is the Chinese abbreviation for Theological Training for Ministry among the Basic Stratum. Basic stratum denotes the lower class without any negative connotation. In Hong Kong the great bulk of the population belongs to the basic stratum, which by and large remains outside the church. Jifu is part of a movement to capture this huge territory that the sovereignty of God may prevail among the mass there.

THE BLUE COLLAR GAP

The birth of Jifu is not accidental. It is a response to a long standing need. To keep up with the educational trend of a growing metropolis, which is becoming more and more sophisticated and international, Bible colleges and seminaries in Hong Kong strive to upgrade their academic standard by recruiting more qualified teachers, expanding their libraries and raising their entrance requirement. Also new institutions are created to meet the need. CGST was established to train a new breed of Christian workers from university graduates. The trend to capture the well-educated for Christian service is a correct and necessary strategy. However, it leaves a sizeable gap in theological training. While theological schools focus their attention on the **P. 366** winners in the secular school system, on those who succeed in passing countless examinations, a large group of Christians are left out of the picture.

Can a dedicated factory girl, called by God, ever expect to enter the gate of a Bible college? She may be twenty-five years old now. In her early teens she dropped out of school to earn her livelihood and has already worked for more than ten years. To make up her deficiency and to aim for a high school leaving certificate is asking too much of her. Her dilemma is a trying counselling case for pastors. What is the way out? If God has called dedicated Christians among the working class, why isn't there a single theological school to equip them? Is their call mistaken? Or, is there something missing in the setup? Are we partial? Is our attention on the elite too narrow a definition for 'the best for the Lord'? Can we ignore those whom God chooses to call to enter into the ministry? God certainly has a special regard for the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized.

At present, the theological schools tend to operate with expressions of spirituality most congenial to the middle class. Even if a worker enrolled in one of them, after three or four years of campus life, his or her lifestyle would probably have been assimilated by the dominant mode, and it would be quite an adjustment to live with one's people again.

We can trace this phenomenon back to the church situation, which in turn reflects the value and structure of the society.

UNJUST SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Hong Kong government statistics show that in September 1980 among 5,067,900 inhabitants, the working force consists of 2,370,700 persons, two thirds of them being male. Half of the active working adults have only primary education. Two fifths of them

are in factory or transportation, working 49 hours a week on the average. Their median monthly income is HK\$1,380 and one fourth of them earns less than HK\$1,000 a month.

The industrial workers have contributed enormously towards the prosperity and development of Hong Kong, whereas their earning is hardly commensurate with their contribution. There lacks a strong union to fight for their benefits. There is no social security. They may work for a whole life but retire without pension. Some of them are ignorant of their minimal rights such as compensation for injury, severance payment, or regulations concerning sick leave or paid holidays. If there is ever a means, be it gambling or hard working or p.367 starting one's own business, they would gladly rid themselves of the stigma and get to a more advantageous rung on the social ladder. Unfortunately, the church happens to side with the status quo in her practice and belittle the workers.

In a poignant article, entitled 'Another circumcision',¹ Ms. Agnes Lau points out that advocating reading more devotional books and attending various courses as telltale for spiritual zeal, forbidding T-shirt or blue jeans at Sunday service, promoting classical music instead of popular songs, singing hymns in English, all amount to imposing a different sub-culture upon the blue collar Christians. Besides, these Christians are consistently put in inferior roles. They are expected to be led instead of leading, to be taught instead of teaching. Thus in withholding opportunities for theological education from blue collar Christians, the church is further impoverishing them.

BIASED EDUCATION SYSTEM

In a society, the rich often get richer, the poor get poorer. Such a vicious cycle is equally true for education. The school system is part and parcel of the power structure. Ivan Illich² even regards school as an oppressive system, maintaining the world view of the ruling group, creating a false demand and selling useless commodities to the crowd and instigating the mass to aspire after designated goods while condemning them to be failures in the competitive system. Within the system, the working class not only has a smaller slice of the pie as far as income, housing situation, recreational facilities are concerned; its access to educational resources is also less favourable. A noisy and crowded home, illiterate or barely educated parents and financial pressure to quit school, all work against keen competition in the school system. The poor children are losers not because they are less intelligent but because of their handicaps in developing the academic potentials.

Thus far both the church and theological schools tend to value the better educated. Also, for the past twenty-some years various groups such as the Fellowship of Evangelical Studies, Campus Crusade, Youth for Christ have done good work among the high schoolers and the students. Thus the church has a high percentage of students and professionals. As a result, factory workers in the church would feel p.368 both inferior and weak in number. It is very understandable that theological schools should forget to set up specific training for this minority group of believers.

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

¹ *Vision, Strategy and Involvement* (in Chinese) (Hong Kong: Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship, 1981), p. 16-17.

² *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

In God's grace, we witness a gradual turning of the tide. In 1972, when the number of industrial workers rose rapidly and reached .6 million, God placed the burden of evangelization upon a group of graduates from Hong Kong Technical College and they started the Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship. After numerous difficulties, it has grown to twenty co-workers. A few churches began to start workers' fellowships. Some launched out mission work in industrialized areas and experimented with new forms of programme and worship to suit the life style of the lower class. Another movement among the lower class, Wu Oi Christian Fellowship, was started in 1973. Its aim is to help drug addicts experience the power of the gospel and become new persons in Christ. In God's grace, a decade of hard work has produced wonderful fruit.

All these endeavours prepared the ground for establishing a theological training programme to further equip those dedicated converts from the lower class. Seeing the wisdom of the apostles in selecting seven gifted Hellenist Christians to serve Hellenist Christians ([Acts 6](#)), we believe that the best evangelists for the industrial workers should come from their midst. An outsider can hardly serve as an equal substitute.

Before describing Jifu, we would like to give a brief outline of its development.

FIELD EDUCATION

Since Jifu is to train dedicated working class Christians to become pastors, evangelists and teachers among their own people, it must be a practical, well planned professional training.

Unfortunately, seminary transcripts often reflect a low priority of field work in the curriculum as compared to the various course work. In some schools, students even regard field work more as a source of income to help out with the educational expenses while the church regards it as a type of cheap labour to make up for the shortage of staff. Thus theological training may end up producing pastors who are stuffed with theory and knowledge but ill-prepared to minister in the living context to real people. Such degradation of field education is indeed tragic. [p. 369](#)

The working class are people of action. They use their muscle more than their brain. They are strong in practice but slim in theory. Intellectualism, abstract thinking and conceptual gymnastics as characteristics of much theological training are quite alien to their lifestyle.³ This is why what the church can offer seems to miss their wavelength.

To ensure Jifu to be practical and well adapted to the working class, we put much emphasis on field education, which amounts to some 40% of the total training time. The aim of field education is fourfold: to let the students maintain close contact with their own people, to reflect critically upon their past experience in the lower stratum of the society, to have fresh materials to stimulate their theological thinking, to apply their faith and discover their own gifts while serving.

We stress the learning aspect and demand no remuneration from the field work locale. The students are there first of all to learn. Each student has two supervisors, one from the field and one from the school. He has to write a weekly report and meet each of his supervisors for an hour-long consultation twice a month. In the field work, concrete guide lines are given and appropriate plans made to learn the characteristics and techniques of the specific assignment. The student is encouraged to contact people of different age and sex, to think critically over the existing models of evangelization and service and to find out new mission models. He is to learn how to communicate the gospel by word and by

³ cf. F. Reissman, 'There is more than One Style for Learning' in D. E. Harmachek, ed., *Human Dynamics in Psychology and Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacin, 1977), 13-17.

deed and to build up a believing community oriented towards mission. Even though the existing ministries toward the working class are scanty, we restrict ourselves to these places and include a small number of significant non-Christian organizations where the learning is highly valuable.

Among the eleven quarters, the field education is carried out in five different formats.

Format A: The first two quarters are designated for acquainting oneself with the field and learning some necessary fieldwork techniques. The students are to visit worker ministries, community centres, churches and specialized ministries such as drug addict rehabilitation and prison work that they may be well informed to select fields of their interest for the later quarters when they actually go and learn by doing. They also have class work to learn observation, listening skill, programme co-ordination, games and activities.

Format B: This takes up the third, fifth and sixth quarters. With the [p. 370](#) exposure obtained in the first two quarters, the students are now to choose two fields to engage in half time field work. This is followed by Format C, quarter four and seven, where he is fully engaged in the field. In such internship he is not parachuting, only appearing at very restricted time slots but has a more in depth involvement.

Format D: This is a quarter back to one's home church. In the seventh quarter, the student is to spend two days a week in his home church, to work under the tutelage of his pastor to renew the fellowship and to share with the members the vision of ministry among the working class.

Format E: This takes up the last three quarters where students work in twos and threes at churches and organizations to set up new work towards the working class. For our first class of students, this includes a church wanting to set up a daughter church in a lower income area, another two churches with existing senior citizens and youth centres respectively and planning to start Sunday services, a youth centre with a new project to reach the marginal youths, the squatter evangelistic fellowship, which was established just a year ago, a church located in the industrial area wanting to extend its ministry and a church planning to strengthen its evangelistic work in a temporary housing area. It is a training for frontier and pioneering work because the lower class is by and large a mission field. One must go out to gather a group and create a community.

COURSE WORK

There are thirty required courses. Each meets three hours a week for nine to ten weeks. Approximately one third are devoted to Biblical studies, one fifth to theology and church history, one fifth to practical subjects, one tenth to understanding the social milieu of the working class and one sixth to communication competence. The above division is very rough because we try hard to integrate different disciplines. Theological studies can become a bunch of disconnected specialized studies left to the students to put together. However, such a practice can very much frustrate the worker class Christians. In each course, the teachers not only relate to their background and draw on their experiences but also relate to the content of other courses. After all, in the field different areas of knowledge are put to work simultaneously. So such training should start early. What is unique about the courses hides beneath the rather non-striking course titles.

About half of the courses are taught by CGST's full time staff, half by guest teachers. This is the way to utilize top practitioners in the field, [p. 371](#) those evangelizing the industrial workers, pastoring workers' church, in charge of workers' community centres etc. A full time staff can easily be domesticated by the seminary campus and lose touch with the hustling world. Such a mix of full time staff and guest teachers makes the training

up-to-date, practical and contextual. We believe this to be a way to take the contemporary context seriously that the message of the scripture can come alive here and now.⁴ Since each weekly session is three hours long, this almost forces the teacher to be innovative and not rely solely on lecturing. Actually, workers' life is monotonous. Therefore in their spare time, they like relaxation and recreation. They are not used to long lectures but are fond of drama, role play, simulation and dialogue. Teachers try to discover and adapt to their learning style. No wonder the classroom is sometimes noisy and full of various activities. Individual competition is played down, whereas numerous opportunities for group discussion and group projects are provided to suit and promote their sense of comradeship.⁵

Usually theological education is very expensive. Jifu does not want to give cheap education. We maintain quality training but avoid investment in reality. Most church halls are empty during the weekdays, especially in the mornings and they serve well as Jifu class rooms. We contact churches sympathetic to Jifu and centrally located or close to industrial areas. By going to different churches for class, sometimes five different ones a week, students get a feel of different areas and become acquainted with different churches. This itself is part of education.

DISCIPLING GROUPS

Students are divided into groups of six to eight. Each week there is a time for sharing, discussion and prayer. Occasionally they would have an outing or a film. This helps to bring teacher and students close to one another, while providing a time to discuss problems of study, family and field education. About twice a quarter the group meet together for special talks on subjects such as nutrition, stress and mental health, church growth, self-image etc. There are four-day camps after each quarter to give a break to the strenuous training **P. 372** programme. It may be a work camp, a meditation camp or an activity camp. In addition, teachers will meet with students once or twice a quarter for longer time of counseling. One characteristic of the students is inferiority complex. They are failures in the light of prevalent values. They do not have much schooling. Their job prospects are limited. They lack social prestige or financial muscle. Jifu as a kind of adult education that gives them a second chance must help them to overcome their handicaps and release their potential.

The students commute during the first one or two years in order not to be out of touch with their living environment, but before graduation the single students will also have opportunity to live in the dormitory. They practise pooling together their money for meals and transportation connected with the training programme. That is no easy lesson to learn.

CONCLUSION

Reviewing the development of Jifu, we witness quite a few encouraging signs. The support from local churches has increased steadily. The average age of the second class is older, with more married students. This means Jifu is attracting more mature students who are

⁴ René Padilla, 'Hermeneutics and Culture—A Theological Perspective', in R. T. Coote and J. R. W. Stott, eds., *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 63–78.

⁵ R. M. Smith, *Learning How to Learn in Adult Education* (Dekalb, Illinois: ERIC Clearing House in Adult Education, 1976), L. E. Coleman, 'Simulation Games in Seminary Instruction', *Theological Education* 9 (1973) 141–47.

taking a higher risk than younger ones in pursuing a different course in life. By being part of CGST, Jifu has made the students and faculty more aware of the need of the basic stratum. Some graduates have joined ministries in this area. At this initial stage, we are expanding slowly and only accept students every other year. We look forward to the time when we can start a new class every year. We also look beyond and anticipate a more advanced level of training or continuing education for the graduates. Even before 1997, we believe that by God's grace much can be accomplished. **P. 373**

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Book Reviews

Helmut Thielicke, *Being Human ... Becoming Human*

Review by Harry Boonstra

F. Ross Kinsler (Ed.), *Church Education*

Review by Thomas Hanks

Stanley N. Gundry & Alan F. Johnson, *Theology and History*

Review by Clark H. Pinnock