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# Editorial

## *Relevance: What on Earth is It, Really?*

'Relevance'. I am convinced the word reflects a major theological trend of our age. Pick up any theological writing, evangelical or otherwise, and the concept surfaces in a prominent way. Take for example the articles in this issue of *ERT*. Both the articles and the book reviews feature the concept quite centrally, in spite of their international authorships. The European contribution (Bockmuehl) has *relevance* as the very heart of its content; after all, ethics is dogmatics in action. The Australian article (Banks) speaks not just of the usefulness of theology for experience, but goes one step further, to find an essential place for experience in the very making of theology. The American essay (Snyder and Runyon) challenges the Churches to develop relevant ministries for the ten major trends of the future. Interestingly, the Third World contributions deal with the principle of relevance in the concrete, as they try to analyse situations in which the Gospel must show its relevance, such as urban mission (Lim and Ro) or the Church's role in politics (Chao).

Chenchiah, the well-known Indian theologian, often remarked that Indian theologies are answers to the questions which Hindus have never asked! The full force of this came home to me years back as I was telling the Gospel to a high-caste Brahmin. I was non-plussed by his repeated affirmation, that he was by no means a sinner and had committed no sin, so did not need Jesus Christ! How can we show the relevance of the Gospel?

What actually *is* relevance? A working rule of thumb would be: to be relevant means to be useful *now*. The etymological root of the term shows that it is derived from Latin *re+levare*, to show in relief, as in embossment, hence 'to be easily conspicuous', hence 'to bear upon', 'to be applicable to', 'to be pertinent', 'to be helpful'. Since the emergence of liberation theologies the question now asked is not so much about the logical coherence as about the existential relevance of our theologization. It is therefore normative to speak about our theology as being faithful to the Text, relevant to the context and related to the tradition. Does the relevance of the Gospel mean its capability to clarify or solve the problem at hand? Such questions seem to challenge the traditional baggage we have inherited, be it the Enlightenment's polarization between doing and knowing, the 'evangelical' bifurcation of life into spiritual and secular realms, or Luther's doctrine of two regiments. I believe relevance is a burning issue in the first, second or third world debates equally. [p. 100](#)

To begin with, may I suggest that there are at least three questions involved in the principle of relevance: *a.* For the Gospel to be relevant means that it must be able to *answer the question* asked, *solve the problem* raised and *meet the felt need* in a given situation. This is what we call the cutting edge of the Gospel. However priceless a diamond might be, it is useless for a hungry stomach, *b.* But then should the Gospel meet *all* the felt needs or solve *all* the problems in a situation? If the Gospel reveals a divine plan for mankind's salvation, then I think the Gospel must also clarify and evaluate the situation itself. For example: in India a high-caste Brahmin may sincerely feel that the problem of caste discrimination is entirely solved, but a low-caste Harijan may feel that it is on the increase. Whose understanding should one consider? As divine wisdom the Gospel has the right to go beyond the felt needs to *real* needs. Should not mothers continue to insist that children drink milk, however tasteless they may find it, and avoid Coca-Cola, whatever kick or tingle it may give them? *c.* Are there then situations to which the Gospel may not be relevant? I believe not. Speaking *theo*-logically, to proclaim the Gospel means to show its universality to each and every human situation. The principle of relevance must also express in what ways the Gospel is universal in its ramifications.

The whole process of secularization and Marx's dictum (that it is not enough to understand the world; what really matters is to change it), as well as the existential emphasis which began with Kierkegaard, are all clearly parties to this emphasis on the context in our generation. Here Banks' provocation to re-define theology as more than an intellectual exercise takes meaning. With the current re-emergence of prophecy in the church, it seems we are in for an age when the Christian theologies become Christian pneumatologies, demanding not explication of the *truth* of the Spirit but more the demonstration of the *power* of the Spirit in our personal and corporate lives.

Would someone better equipped than myself take up the challenge of this felt need to clarify the principle of relevance—what on earth is it, actually?

*Editor* p. 101

# Protestant Ethics: The Spirit and the Word in Action

Klaus Bockmuehl

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*In this fine theological analysis Dr. Bockmuehl touches the nerve centre of evangelical theologizing: the realm of ethics. He considers two alternatives to Christian ethics—individualized norms, and situation ethics—traces and assesses the unfortunate polarization between the Law and the Spirit since the Reformation, and attempts a convincing synthesis of both. This was a paper presented to the theological faculty of Basle University, Basle, Switzerland, in June 1987. Bockmuehl is hopeful that such a synthesis would be a working hypothesis for the reconciliation not only of Reformation orthodoxy and theological liberalism, but also of major Protestant denominations. It deserves a serious hearing.*

Editor

Protestant ethics today is faced with a number of questions for which its traditional means do not seem to provide adequate answers.

A first round of questions is created by the process of individualization that has shaped social history in modern times. Picture the following stages. If one was born in Western Europe before the days of the Reformation one would normally automatically have become a Christian within the Catholic Church. After the Reformation this general statement remained true in a limited sense in as much as one's religion was then determined by the religion of the ruler in whose territory one was born (*cuius regio, eius religio*). In the nineteenth and early twentieth century the family rather than the state decided about the character of one's religious beliefs. Now, at the end of the twentieth century, one's religion (or its rejection) has become primarily a matter of personal choice.

It seems that the same can be said of our ethical guidelines. The trend towards fragmentation is intensified by the various value systems to which modern man is expected to equally conform at work and in time of leisure, within the family and in the political arena. In addition, the ever increasing pace of secularization confronts us with

the dissolution of all social bonding, the result of which the sociologist Emile Durkheim has aptly called 'anomie'.

If so many of the traditional norms and collective patterns of [p. 102](#) behaviour no longer apply, how are we then, as individuals, to govern our actions? Can we still turn to the legacy of Protestant ethics for help?

These questions are intensified by another trend in the history of ideas. The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century confidently proclaimed that man had come of age. No longer was man in need of the tutelage of clerics and casuists. Instead, he had become conscious of their own competence and discretion in matters of proper conduct. The Enlightenment demanded not only the individualization of objective norms, it also called for subjective decisions concerning action.

In the nineteen-sixties these two trends, this two-fold challenge of the Reformational-orthodox legacy of Protestant ethics, culminated in the so-called 'new morality' of Joseph Fletcher and John A. T. Robinson. The old morality had been based on timeless and objective standards. The new morality rejected them as useless, and, in the perennial tug-of-war between norm and situation, chose to be identified with the 'demands of the situation'. This attitude has governed modern Protestant ethics to a large extent. A similar debate arose in Roman Catholic moral theology. Following the Second World War the need for an 'existentialist ethics' was much discussed, and led to a critical declaration by the Vatican in 1952. Wherever we turn we are faced with this problem of 'differential ethics', with the demand for moral instruction that relates to the respective person and situation.

Another set of questions, a constant challenge to the heritage of Protestant ethics arises from what has been known as the ethics of missions. It is thoroughly perplexing that Protestant ethics for a long time failed to perceive the task and content of the Great Commission Christ gave to his disciples which, given a different viewpoint, could well be seen as the 'imperative No. one' of Christian ethics. Not only this specific assignment to evangelism seems to be absent, but church-building activities in general, the pastoral, teaching, and serving/ diaconal ministries do not figure in textbooks on Protestant ethics. Is there altogether no '*specificum*', no '*proprium*' in Christian ethics? Is there nothing characteristic, nothing special about Christian ethics, nothing distinct—not primarily from the morality of other religions, but distinct from God's creation order, i.e. his general demands for the preservation of life?

The place of the Great Commission within the framework of Christian ethics also turns into a question in today's debates with Marxism, especially as expressed in the ethics of Lenin. His instructions to the cadres of the Communist Party, the 'emissaries of the revolution', represent a case of goal-oriented situation ethics [p. 103](#) clearly demarcated from the code of ethics held to be appropriate for the post-revolutionary era in which the standards that have governed human affairs from time immemorial, i.e. natural Law, are again to be the norm. Although the two systems hardly bear comparison, ought we in Christian ethics not also to reckon with two realms of conduct, general moral demands and the Christian's additional tasks in church and mission?

Inevitably these two sets of questions, that dealing with differential ethics and that dealing with specifically Christian actions, will enter into any serious ecumenical discussion. On the one hand the special emphasis contained in Catholic moral theology will, in this era of ecumenism, again become a challenge to traditional Protestant ethics, or, at least, an opportunity for critical introspection. In this context we are being reminded of the three 'evangelical counsels' of monastic ethics—viz., poverty, celibacy, and obedience—of the works of supererogation, and of the connection between ethics and

ascetics, i.e the doctrine of the spiritual life which Catholic theology has preserved more effectively.

On the other hand, as a measure to overcome the differences of the past, the dialogue with the Anabaptists and the Spiritualists, the so-called left wing of the Reformation, is as important for Protestant ethics as is the dialogue with Rome. The ethical codes subscribed to by these groups contain a significant challenge for Protestant mainline churches: The Anabaptists, in particular, give much emphasis to the question of which ethics is specifically Christian.

## REFORMATION ETHICS

Now, then, are we to balance the legacy of Protestant ethics with the questions concerning differential ethics and the quest for a *proprium* of Christian ethics, in particular church-building activities? Because of the limitation of space, we shall restrict ourselves to the first of these questions, viz., that dealing with individual and situation ethics.

It would not be true to say that traditional ethical inquiry was unfamiliar with the problem posed. Ethical instruction in medieval times already stressed the appropriateness of action, i.e., it weighed the questions of what, when, how, how long, and wherefore. The Reformation and post-Reformation Protestant orthodox ethics responded to the questions of individual and situation ethics with a direct application of its two basic categories—Law and vocation. These two principles determine all of Reformation ethics. All human beings are subject to the Law of God, i.e. the Ten Commandments and their p. 104 corollaries, in addition to which *individuals* are subject to the dictates of the ‘station and vocation’ in which they find themselves by the providence of God. These are the two forms in which the will of God expresses itself. (Calvin differentiated between them by using the terms *voluntas dei* and *arbitrium dei* and in Protestant Orthodoxy they were known as *voluntas signi*, God’s will revealed in the Law, and *voluntas beneplaciti*, God’s hidden purpose.) Let us examine these two basic categories, law and vocation, a little closer.

## THE LAW OF GOD

For Martin Luther the Ten Commandments were the source of ethical instruction and a formula to guide confessions, as well as a mark of a true church. To him they were *doctrina doctrinarum*, the doctrine over all doctrine, ‘by means of which we discern the will of God, both in what he would have us do and in what we have failed to accomplish’.<sup>1</sup> It would be true to say that in the Reformation the Decalogue was both ubiquitous and omnipotent in matters of ethical instruction. Thus Martin Luther concludes his reflections on the Ten Commandments in his Large Catechism with these words: ‘Here, then, we have the Ten Commandments, a summary of divine teaching on what we are to do to make our whole life pleasing to God. They are the true foundation from which all good works must spring, the true channel through which all good works must flow. Apart from these Ten Commandments no deed, no conduct can be good or pleasing to God, no matter how great or precious it may be in the eyes of the world’.<sup>2</sup> Notice, however, that the Decalogue is not simply the measure, framework or limitation for good works as the imagery of the channel

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<sup>1</sup> Luther’s *Works*. Weimar Edition, Table Talk (WATR) 5, 6288.

<sup>2</sup> Large Catechism, para. 311, cp. The Book of Concord, *The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. Philadelphia, Fortress, 1978, p. 407.

may suggest, it is also their origin, their fountain-head. Luther teaches both the plenitude and the sufficiency of the Ten Commandments for the full purview of Christian action.

This conviction necessarily leads to a rejection of the 'works of supererogation' that play so prominent a part in Catholic moral theology, expressed in religious exercises, e.g., pilgrimages, and especially in the 'evangelical counsels' or the monastic vows. The Reformers always place God's commandments over and against 'human commands and teachings' and 'self-imposed worship' (Col. p. 105 [2:22](#), [23](#) NIV), even where these are not linked to the concept of reward. They reject the view that ethics is based on a division into commandments and counsels, and the ensuing division of Christendom into two separate categories, i.e. the laity and the 'religious'. The Ten Commandments suffice. Christ did not come as a new legislator adding to the Decalogue a new Law in his Gospel. He did not revoke the Commandments; he simply expounded them, and gave his followers the power to fulfill them, thereby granting them the righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees ([Mt. 5:20](#)). That is why the Reformers repeatedly remind the monks of the warning expressed by Ecclesiasticus: 'You are already commanded more than you can fulfill' (Eccl'us. 3:25). At heart, therefore, Christian ethics means keeping the Law, fulfilling the Commandments of the Decalogue.

Calvin and his followers placed an even greater emphasis on the perfection and completeness of the Law. The Genevan Catechism puts it this way: 'In the Law we have the perfect guide-line of righteousness'.<sup>3</sup> Bullinger expounds this statement in the Second Helvetic Confession by saying that in this Law God communicates his whole will and all details requisite for all aspects of life, and concludes *plenissima et absolutissima est lex*.<sup>4</sup> He justifies this conclusion by pointing out that God himself forbade additions and deletions ([Dt. 4:2](#) and [12:32](#)). Or, to quote Calvin again, 'Any zeal for good works that wanders outside God's Law is an intolerable profanation of divine and true righteousness'.<sup>5</sup>

It follows that this doctrine of the perfect Law also implies the doctrine of the so-called third use of the Law. This doctrine reflects the conviction that the Ten Commandments not only safeguard communal life in general (first use) and, as a confessional formulary, prepare faith by pointing out sin (second use), it also expressed the belief that the Law ought to serve as a rule of life for the regenerate (*usus in renatis*).<sup>6</sup> It goes without saying that for Calvin and his followers this doctrine is of the utmost importance. But it can also be found in Melancthon's writings and in the Lutheran Formula of Concord. In essence it can be found in Luther too. p. 106

*It is the method of exposition by synecdoche* which provides the key to Luther's understanding of the 'completeness' of the Law, as indicated by his statement that the Ten Commandments are 'the true fountain from which all good works must spring (and) the true channel through which all good works must flow'. Luther used this method from the very outset; Calvin elaborated on it in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.<sup>7</sup> According to this method a negative commandment needs to be supplemented by its positive corollary, and vice versa. Thereafter both command and prohibition need to be applied

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche*. hg. W. Niesel, Zollikofen-Zurich, no date, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> A. C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, Philadelphia, Westminster 1966, p. 248.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., Philadelphia, Westminster, 1960, 11.8.5.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Institutes* 11.7.12f.

<sup>7</sup> *Institutes* 11.8.8f.

progressively to our actions, our words, and our thoughts. In this way the Ten Commandments are developed into a complete system of Christian ethics governing even the minutest detail. In this manner Reformation ethics arrives at its confident claim that by way of interpretation the Ten Commandments provide an answer for every question of conduct that may arise, be it of a personal or situational nature.

Of course, exposition by *synecdoche* presupposes that skilled interpreters be available—skilled in analyzing and solving a problem in the light of the appropriate commandment, or, vice-versa, in construing *a priori* a system of conduct in different ‘cases’ and situations, for future application. Thus there arose within a hundred years of the Reformation the extensive discipline of casuistry and moral guidance. Believers received instruction from the ‘ministers of the Word’.

At this point it is interesting to see how Calvin defends the doctrine of the sufficiency of the Law against two opposing views. To him the sufficiency of the Law is but a special case of the doctrine of the perfection and sufficiency of Scripture, and he defends it against Roman Catholic theology on the one hand, and against the theology of the Anabaptists and the spiritualists on the other.

Calvin’s controversy with Rome finds expression in his response to the statements made by Cardinal Sadolet. Sadolet defended the traditions Rome had added to Holy Scripture by pleading that the Church had added them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To this Calvin replied: By Scripture only! *Sola scriptura*. In doing so he also undercut the basis for any ethical additions, such as monastic vows.

His exchanges with the Anabaptists and the enthusiasts were more acerbic. He attacked their ethics in a number of writings, for to him their much flaunted doctrine of the guidance of believers by the Holy Spirit went hand in hand with the promotion of lawlessness. Calvin p. 107 accused both Rome and the fanatics of emphasizing the Spirit at the expense of Scripture (‘without the Word’), and unrelentingly confronted them with the statement that the Spirit speaks through the Scriptures (‘through the Word’).

Did Calvin do the Anabaptists an injustice? His accusations seem to apply to at least one leading figure among them, Pilgram Marpeck (1495–1556), who had been exiled from Strasbourg shortly before Calvin arrived there. In his writings Marpeck had quoted the apostle Paul so selectively that in the end he presented a Gospel of freedom in which all of God’s commandments and prohibitions were declared null and void. For him Christ was in every respect the end of the Law; only the Holy Spirit beckoned or constrained the regenerated.<sup>8</sup> A similar attitude is to be found in Juan de Valdes (1500–1541), a representative of the Italian Reformation. In his meditations on ‘The Benefit of Christ’ he compares the light of the Bible with that of a candle and the light of the Holy Spirit with that of the sun. When that light shines, he writes, one need no longer search only in the words of Holy Scripture. However, he does concede that one would not therefore throw away the candle. It might yet be of use to others.<sup>9</sup>

Calvin goes to war against this idea of ‘the Spirit without Scripture’. These ‘fanatics’, he writes, despise the preaching of the Word, and generate from within themselves would-be secret revelations of the Spirit. These are but hallucinations.<sup>10</sup> God no longer speaks to us in oracles as he once revealed himself to the patriarchs of the Old Covenant; he speaks to us through Scripture. Calvin interprets [Hebrews 1:1f.](#) as meaning that God’s

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<sup>8</sup> *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, eds., Kitchener, Ontario, and Scottdale, PA, Herald, 1978, pp. 315–331.

<sup>9</sup> Juan de Valdes, *The Benefit of Christ*, J. M. Houston, ed., Portland, OR, Multnomah, 1984, p. 52f.

<sup>10</sup> Comm. [Eph. 4:12](#), CO 51, 199. [Acts 10:5](#), CO 48, 228.

revelations have come to an end in the person of Christ.<sup>11</sup> We ought to be content with the ‘perfection’ of Christ’s teaching; we ought not to construe new revelations. Accordingly, Calvin defines ‘prophecy’ in the New Testament ([Rom. 12:6](#), [1 Cor. 14](#), etc.) as interpretation of Scripture and, in addition, claims that interpretation is not for ‘all’ ([1 Cor. 14:5](#)) to handle. It is to be entrusted only to the trained and ordained ministers of the Word.<sup>12</sup>

In brief: although Calvin uses surprisingly strong pneumatological language, compared, say, to Melanchthon, so that some have been inclined to call him the theologian of the Holy Spirit, all such p. 108 expressions as ‘governance’ and ‘guidance’ of the Holy Spirit, and ‘listening to the voice of God’ which he does use, nevertheless point back to Holy Scripture. And that, in the study of ethics, means the Law. Here are two quotations from the *Institutes*. ‘Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture.’<sup>13</sup> And ‘God (is) dictating (us) as from his own Word what is good or unprofitable to do’.<sup>14</sup>

Calvin is led to this conclusion by his anxiety that in the minds of many the alleged guidance of the Spirit would, according to the adage ‘so many minds, so many opinions’, rapidly lead first to anarchism and then to a victory of the Counter-Reformation. The events of Munster in 1535 were vividly before his eyes. A generation later, the Lutheran Formula of Concord (1577), in a similar confrontation, follows Calvin’s example of insisting that the Spirit speaks only ‘through’ Scripture: true, the Holy Spirit speaks to the believers at all times, but he does so exclusively by means of the Ten Commandments.<sup>15</sup>

Let us now turn to the second basic principle in the ethics of the Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy which differentiates ethical instruction in terms of the individual person and situation, i.e. *vocation*.

Vocation has to be understood in the sense of one’s station in life. In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession this term occasionally equals a person’s occupation, craft or profession.<sup>16</sup> But it is more correct to think of vocation in terms of one’s standing within the three ‘orders’, or hierarchies, within which we all inevitably have our place. They are, first, the family, distinguishing the vocations of husband and wife, parents and children, and, inasmuch as a family is an economic unit, master and servant; next, the state, differentiating between those in authority and those subject to it; and finally, the church with its clergy and laity, its preachers and hearers. Individuals thus find their duties from a grid of obligations within this social structure.

Also, in the static and stratified society that prevailed in the days of the Reformation, vocation and station in life were often determined by the social stratum into which one was *born*. Although we do not p. 109 normally talk of a caste system, it was generally held to be true that ‘the sons of the swineherd do not make burgomasters’.<sup>17</sup> At least one half

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<sup>11</sup> *Institutes* IV.8.7.

<sup>12</sup> Comm. [1 Cor. 14:29](#), CO 49, 259.

<sup>13</sup> *Institutes* 1.7.5.

<sup>14</sup> *Institutes* IV.13.2. Cf. my book *Gesetz und Geist, Eine kritische Wuerdigung des Erbes protestantischer Ethik, 1: Die Ethik der reformatorischen Bekenntnisschriften*, Giessen/Basel, Brunnen, 1987, pp. 372ff.

<sup>15</sup> SD VI, 12: The Book of Concord, l.c., p. 566.

<sup>16</sup> Apology 27, 49; The Book of Concord, l.c., p. 227.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. W. Elert, *Morphologie des Luthertums*, Munich, 3rd ed, 1965, Vol. 2, p. 68.



of the population was immediately subject to this accident of birth: girls were destined to be housewives and mothers.

Here we can see that vocation, the principle of differentiation for personal ethics, can also serve as a key to situational ethics. Take the calling of a mother. Her actions are prescribed in minutest detail by the daily tasks of caring for her family. Likewise the father, as head of the household and in his occupational work, is continually faced with new, objective challenges. In his trade and craft a mere look at his tools tells him what has to be done.

In response to the question 'What ought I to do?', the individual is thus instructed by his or her social and personal circumstances as they stand in the moment of asking, 'where you find yourself without your own doing' (Luther), but as the result of divine *providence*. Thus providence becomes the third horizon that governs personal conduct, in addition to one's civil vocation (occupation) and one's standing within the three hierarchies.

It was Calvin who placed special emphasis on this providential ordering of the life of the individual. His doctrine of vocation carries the full weight of his doctrine of predestination. Therefore he can say, 'The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling ... Each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him as a sort of sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about through life ... lest through stupidity and rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy'.<sup>18</sup>

The three orders or hierarchies that form the core of this system of ethics are often said to reflect Plato's division of society into the three classes of soldiers, teachers, and farmers, and there clearly is some kind of correspondence. Neoplatonic thinking also influenced Christian doctrine: Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite in the sixth century taught that the hierarchy of church and civil authority corresponded to a graded system of 'choirs' of angels. But perhaps it is again Ecclesiasticus who stands godfather to this way of thinking. The Reformers removed this apocryphal book from the Catholic Bible for dogmatic reasons, yet it continues to influence Christian ethics strongly. In Ecclesiasticus the divine order of society is derived from the created order of celestial bodies, and here we also find the admonition which the Reformers p.110 were so fond of repeating, 'Heed not what others have been commanded, but heed what God has commanded you' (Eccl'us 3:23). Here, Reformation ethics also found the proof texts for patriarchalism, e.g. Eccl'us 33:25ff.

Finally, looking at the ethical teaching on station and vocation in the days of Reformation orthodoxy, we are left with the impression that here Paul's doctrine of the church as a body with many members and endowed with many gifts (cf. [1 Cor. 12](#)) has been transferred to civil society. These gifts and services complemented each other; here stations and vocation are meant to do the same. Such a transfer of ideas is understandable if we bear in mind that the Reformers still presupposed the identity of church and society within Christendom, the *Corpus Christianum*.

## A CRITIQUE OF REFORMATION ETHICS

We have already expressed concern whether the legacy of Protestant ethics can cope with questions regarding, first, differential ethics, and second, particular Christian activity, e.g. church-building activities. We now move to examine the two basic principles of the ethics of Reformation orthodoxy, again with special emphasis on individual and situational ethics. Looking first at the concept of vocation, it would appear that the ethics on station and vocation is no longer adequate to provide guidance for the individual in today's

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<sup>18</sup> *Institutes*, III.10.6.

circumstances. We will, of course, emphasize that certain basic structures and their corresponding duties persist forever: such as providing the necessities of life, food and shelter, educating the young, and maintaining social justice and security. Modern society, however, is no longer a static, but a mobile system, governed by significant geographical shifts in population and, at times, by an unavoidable mobility between occupations. Rapid industrial development often leads to job changes and to changes in function, especially in the present 'second industrial revolution'. And then there is movement within one and the same profession with its frequent concomitant promotions and demotions. Also, what are we to make of an ethical code based on station and vocation in the face of endemic unemployment (and lack of a secure station) in so many countries today? In addition, how are we to cope with the changed role models forced upon us by social necessity and economic circumstances? What about wives, say in times of war, becoming the bread-winners, or, more recently, husbands having to keep house and raise children, because of a restructuring in the economy? Add to this the [p. 111](#) general erosion of patriarchalism and tutelage in all three departments of society—the political, the ecclesiastical, and the economic (including the family). Under these circumstances, principles of guidance based on concepts such as vocation and standing become questionable, to say the least.

It is, moreover, regrettable that the Reformation reduced the spiritual gifts of the New Testament, and the related commission to serve, to the level of civil vocations, especially in the case of the clergyman who was assigned much of the specifically Christian activity, primarily of church-building, as a civil vocation. This also resulted in an accumulation of offices which has led to the much lamented 'one-man show' within the church. So much for vocation. What about the Law? What can be said about the claim made by the ethics of Reformation orthodoxy that it can give specific guidance in particular cases? Synecdochic interpretation does not keep what it promises. This method of exposition often leads to quibbling and arbitrary judgment. In my view, the attempt to develop casuistry *a priori* has proven itself inadequate by its neglect of the Great Commission and of other New Testament admonitions which represent essential elements of Christian action. Perhaps they can all be traced back to the Ten Commandments, but they cannot reliably be deduced from them. Perhaps this weakness will explain why Protestantism failed to engage in missionary work for its first two hundred years.

Then, too, it is less than desirable that in this ethics of the Law the individual—no less than in the Middle Ages—remains dependent on a teaching office that is skilled in interpretation by synecdoche! This dependency leads to a disenfranchisement of the congregation and shall we say, to an aristocratism in the interpretation of Scripture. That is not the picture the New Testament paints of the Church.

A fundamental weakness of this method, too, is that the interpreter is a human being and as such can never fully enter the situation of the one posing the question. By definition he remains a stranger to the problem. If the inquiry concerns more than a technical exposition of the Law, if it concerns, e.g., the spiritual analysis of a situation, there is no apparent reason why the inquiring lay Christian cannot have immediate access to the Spirit of God, just as the minister has. The same needs to be said about patriarchalism: in both cases the problem of discerning the will of God is simply shifted from the layman to the would-be expert or to the superior.

It is also unsatisfactory that Reformation orthodoxy in essence presents us only with an Old Testament legal code of ethics. It overlooks the New Testament dialectic between Law and Spirit, Law [p. 112](#) and liberty, and thus easily relapses into a legalism of its own. This can actually be demonstrated by pointing to the Protestants' opposition to the so-called works of supererogation which go beyond the call of duty, an opposition that is based on the doctrine that the Law is sufficient and complete. True, the Roman Catholic

Church linked its teaching about these good works with the idea of reward; but if one cancels that linkage (which is quite possible), one can soon think of examples of deeds which exceed any direct commandment. It is not true to say that *all* Christian ethics is derived from duty. Paul, for example, writes to Philemon, 'Confident of your obedience I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I say' (v. [21](#)); and Calvin admits that the woman who anointed Jesus' feet (according to [Luke 7:36ff.](#)) was not obliged to do so.<sup>19</sup> The same can be said of the widow's mite, and of the restitution offered by Zacchaeus, which went beyond what was required by the Law. Incidentally, supererogatory works are again being discussed in philosophical ethics, and are defended as being an expression of human liberty, creativity, and dignity.<sup>20</sup>

All these examples point to the more fundamental relationship between Law and love, which is a special case of the relationship between Law and Spirit. Christian charity and the Holy Spirit will fulfil the requirements of the Law ([Rom. 8:4](#); see also [Rom. 13:8-10](#), [Gal. 5:14](#), and [Mt. 24:12](#)). That will always become apparent, in retrospect. But the Law as such cannot completely predict or even prescribe acts of love. Law and love, I submit, are not congruent. Love is the fulfilment of the Law, but Law is not the fulfilment of love. Nor can Law describe the perfection or completeness of love. Law is an exposition of love, or, if you will, its framework. It is the channel through which love flows; it is not its fountain-head. Contrary to Bullinger it must be affirmed that the Law is not 'most absolute'.

Further, a critical examination of the system of ethics provided by Reformation orthodoxy has to take into account the consequences that flow from its combination of Law and vocation. This juxtaposition necessarily leads to the thesis that the requirements of the Law are to be fulfilled within the context of our civil occupations. It can be shown that at least within the Lutheran tradition this emphasis has led to a neglect of what might be called the ethics of the first table of the Decalogue—man's attitude toward God. Silence shrouds the love and [p. 113](#) friendship of God. Then, and now, the twofold commandment to love ([Mt. 22:37-39](#)) is reduced to its second part, the love of one's neighbour. Ethics is limited to a doctrine of earthly duties, and in that capacity it unwittingly promotes a secularization that no longer corresponds to the Gospel. However, our relationship to God, i.e., our spiritual life, inevitably constitutes part of Christian ethics. Wherever this is forgotten, the specifically Christian motivation to do good will with the passage of time also be lost sight of in the field of human relations.

Both Law and vocation are expressions of objective ethics in which an individual is taught by others, from the outside, just as in the Middle Ages. Even where this form of ethics tries to differentiate, it can only guide us by 'remote control'. Legend has it that at the Diet of Worms Luther declared, 'Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise', and Calvin spoke of the inner witness of the Holy Spirit within the heart of man. The Reformation marks the beginning of a new era in the realm of dogma. In the realm of ethics everything remained the same. At least for the time being.

## THE SYNTHESIS: NECESSARY AND POSSIBLE

Having said all this, we find ourselves in a dilemma. On the one side are those who play off freedom against the Law, on the other are those who advocate Law versus freedom. Must it be the one or the other? Reflecting on the time immediately following the Reformation, Emil Brunner said that the Reformation balance of Word and Spirit

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<sup>19</sup> J. Calvin, *Harmony of the [Synoptic] Gospels* on [Mt. 26:10](#).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. D. Heyd, *Supererogation, Its Status in Ethical Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982

collapsed. That has remained true to this very day, certainly in the realm of ethics. What, then, ought we to do? Needed is a solution that avoids both versions of an antithesis of Law and Spirit. We need to seek a dialectic that makes room both for norm and situation, for the commandments of God in general and God's contemporary command in particular.

The synthesis of Law and Spirit can already, at times, be found in the Reformers. Martin Luther knew that one could not simply oppose an attitude 'without the Word' as represented by 'the fanatics' with a programme of 'Word without the Spirit', if one wished to be true to the biblical evidence. The proper response to 'the Spirit without the Word' (*spiritus sine verbo*) is simply 'the Spirit and the Word' (*spiritus cum verbo*). (The contention that we find the Spirit only *in*—or *through*—the Word (*per verbum*) clearly is an over-reaction in which the balance between the two is jeopardized.) In the Smalcald Articles Luther turns against the enthusiasts 'who boast that they possess the Spirit without p. 114 and before the Word and therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or spoken Word to their pleasure', as Thomas Muenzer did. He writes that 'in these matters, which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts ...'<sup>21</sup> Luther therefore insists that the Spirit comes *through* the Word, but he also allows that the Spirit comes *with* the Word. His study of Old Testament prophecy obliges him to state both aspects.

Calvin, too, at least once testifies to this 'togetherness' of Law and Spirit. In his sermons on Job he says that we do not know if Job lived before or after Moses. Whatever the case may be, Job did not need the Mosaic Law in order to know that he ought to love his enemies. That he could learn from the Law that is inscribed in the heart of every believer. Has God, in the two tables of the Law, Calvin asks, put together anything other than he, through his Holy Spirit, always writes into the hearts of his children? 'Of what benefit is Scripture to us today,' Calvin continues, 'if not this, that it holds before our eyes what the Spirit chisels into our souls?' So it comes to pass that 'there is utter agreement (*summus consensus*) between the doctrine that is preached and the inner grace that God gives through his Spirit'.<sup>22</sup>

We have already mentioned the heterodoxy of Juan de Valdes. He too comes very close to seeing this high degree of consensus between the Spirit of God and the Law of God, when he, in a different place, says that the believer compares that which he learns from the Spirit of God with what he finds written in Holy Scripture. In other words, he tests his spiritual insight with the Bible.<sup>23</sup>

This is the way in which the formula 'Law and Spirit' is to be expounded, and to be defended against one-sided interpretations, be it by those who advocate the Law without the Spirit, or those who preach the Spirit without the Law. This also points in a direction that could lead to some degree of reconciliation between main-line Protestant churches and the so-called left wing of the Reformation, the Anabaptists. Most of their representatives knew themselves bound to the Bible no less than Calvin did.

Calvin's harsh words were directed to extremists. The ethics represented by the Anabaptist is not typically antinomian. What it does p. 115 do, however, is to relegate the

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<sup>21</sup> A. Sm. pt. III, art. VIII; The Book of Concord, l.c., p. 312f.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted by P. Lobstein, *Die Ethik Calvins*, Strassburg, 1877, p. 59, from the Amsterdam Latin edition of Calvin's works.

<sup>23</sup> J. de Valdes, l.c., p. 38.

Law as found in the Old Testament to a secondary position behind the ethics of the New Testament, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the apostolic exhortations.

Why should we not find a synthesis where both are represented: the ethics of the Reformation on the one hand, based as it is on the moral Law and on wisdom literature of the Old Testament, and on the other hand the ethics of the New Testament and the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Such a synthesis would lead not only to a reconciliation among different denominations, but also to regaining an integrated view of biblical teaching. We need, at least, to reverse the present-day division of our biblical inheritance.

'Law and Spirit'—one could be tempted to call this a 'pietistic' solution. Seen historically, Pietism has always endeavoured to preserve intact the legacy handed down by the Reformers and the biblical insights of the Anabaptists. We could even go further. Perhaps this formula might even yield a working hypothesis for the reconciliation of Reformation orthodoxy and theological liberalism?

*(Translated by Manfred W. Fleischmann)*

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# Paul—The Experience Within The Theology

Robert Banks

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*The great lack among evangelical theologians, as many have remarked, is the lack of an evangelical way of doing theology. This article by Robert Banks is a fine attempt to bridge the gap created by the Enlightenment between knowing and doing. Taking Paul as a good example, Banks shows how one's experience is integrally bound to one's theologization. On this basis, the author also calls for new models of theological education along with a new definition of theology.*

Editor

We hear conflicting voices today about the relationship between theology and experience. According to some, we must first get our theology right through Bible study, reading and reflection, and then our experience will follow the right channels. According to others, we must give first priority to our experience of God and allow that to shape our theology. Many Christians find themselves torn between these two or on the move from one to the other.

It is a pity that theology and experience have become polarized in these ways. Increasing familiarity with the Bible, and with the great Christian thinkers of the past, calls into question any sharp separation of the two or subordination of one to the other. In the biblical writings, and in the books and sermons of Augustine, Luther and Calvin, Wesley

and Kierkegaard, we find a close connection between theology and experience. The two are not confused but nor are they as strongly differentiated as they are today. The theological and experiential are found in dynamic interrelationship.

I would like to illustrate this from the writings of the apostle Paul. Paul is an excellent choice in this regard, partly because he is so often misinterpreted both as a thinker and as a man, and partly because what he said and did is normative for all who come after.

## PAUL THE MAN AND THEOLOGIAN

The close integration of Paul's life and thought should make us wary of [P. 117](#) any attempt to discuss his thought in isolation from his life. It is impossible to abstract the content of Paul's writings from Paul the person. The two are inextricably entwined. Not as perfectly as in Jesus, who both proclaims and is the Word and invites people to follow him as well as obey his teaching. But Paul does see his life as in some sense an embodiment of the Gospel and also calls upon his readers to imitate him as well as put his teaching into practice.

I would not wish to be misunderstood here. I am not arguing that Paul's theology had its roots in human experience rather than in divine revelation. Instead I would insist that divine revelation characteristically comes through personal experience, sometimes as with Hosea, in a most devastating and painful way. I am not suggesting, therefore, that Paul's theology is subjective rather than objective. What I would say is that objective truth is not communicated apart from subjective experience of it, so that we must be careful not to set these categories over against each other in an unbiblical way. Nor am I implying that Paul's theologizing was a second-order affair and that experience was primary. As I see it, occurrences and their interpretation are interdependent and it is the combination of the two that forms the building-blocks of our theology. An emphasis on either one at the expense of the other leads to an imbalanced outlook. Only rarely do we experience an event without being granted some understanding of that event. Occasionally there may be a short interval between the two but generally they go together. So there should be a real intermingling and interaction of the two.

Paul was trained in the theological methods of his time and, in a distinctive way, employed these in his writings. In both his sermons and his writings Paul displayed considerable intellectual power. But, as Adolf Deissmann points out, he was

... far more a man of prayer, a witness, a confessor and a prophet, than a learned exegete and close thinking scholar.<sup>1</sup>

Although, in my opinion, Deissmann underestimates the specifically theological dimension in Paul's writings and interpreted Paul too much in terms of a Romantic notion of personality, he placed his finger on a central weakness in many modern treatments of the apostle. By 'modern understanding' I do not mean only academic but also popular understandings of Paul. Both tend to view him too much in the light of [p. 118](#) the contemporary meaning of the word 'theologian'; i.e. as a systematic teacher and writer who was primarily interested in imposing his views on others; and to respond positively or negatively to this image of him.

Paul was more a theologian-evangelist and pastor than a theologian in the modern sense. Or, perhaps we could say, he was an evangelistic and pastoral theologian. But there

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<sup>1</sup> A. Diessmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, New York, Harper and Row, 1957.

is something else about Paul. He invests far more of himself and his experience in his writing that we associate with most theological literature. As J. B. Lightfoot once said:

In the whole range of literature there is nothing like St. Paul's letters. Other correspondence may be more voluminous, more elaborate, more studiously demonstrative. But none is a more faithful mirror of the writer.<sup>2</sup>

It is unfortunate, therefore, that the letter least well served by commentaries on the New Testament is Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.<sup>3</sup> All Paul's letters contain an autobiographical element, but 2 Corinthians is his most intimate and moving communication. Comparative neglect of this letter and of the autobiographical or experiential dimension in all Paul's writings has resulted in a one-sided understanding of his approach.

Nevertheless, to some extent his family upbringing left its mark on his teaching about parental nurture and household responsibilities. When we read these passages we can catch echoes of Paul's experiences as a child and youth. His pharisaic training continued to affect some of his methods of argument, use of scripture, metaphors and analogies as well as general concepts. While all of these have felt the touch of Christ and his Spirit, they are still present in some measure in his later writings. Paul's possession of Roman citizenship also shaped the course of his travels, audiences he reached and approach he adopted. In part, it also influenced his views on and manner of dealing with political authority. But his conversion and call was the most decisive experience of his formative years and therefore I would like to begin with them.

## **PAUL'S CONVERSION AND CALL**

Paul's conversion and call obviously had a great influence on his life and work. It transformed him from a Pharisee into a Christian and his **P. 119** mission from the Jews to the Gentiles. But his conversion also had a major impact upon his theology. It began to do this from the very moment it took place. This is clear from the immediate effect it had upon his preaching and teaching: within a few days of his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road he had revised his understanding of Jewish religion as well as of Christ himself.

In the past, many writers have seen in Paul's conversion the genesis of a number of his most characteristic views.<sup>4</sup> Recently a full-scale investigation of the connection between the two has demonstrated how close, both in time and in content, this was and how far-reaching were the theological effects of Paul's encounter with Christ. In the summary of the detailed exegetical arguments that make up the substance of his book on *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, the author Seyoon Kim lists the areas of Paul's thought that had their basis in the encounter with Christ on the Damascus Road.

a. It was there, in a first-hand way through the appearance of Christ to him and the commission he was given, that Paul received his first understanding of the gospel, the good news that Christ had triumphed over death and ushered in a new era in God's relations with mankind, and also received the revelation of the 'mystery', namely God's plan of salvation embodied in Christ for both the Jews and the Gentiles.

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted from M. Muggeridge and A. Vidler, *Paul: Envoy Extraordinary*, London, Collins, 1972, 12.

<sup>3</sup> A. Deissmann, *op. cit.*, 128-130.

<sup>4</sup> For example, by G. Bornkamm, J. A. T. Robinson, J. Dupont, et al.

b. It was there that Paul actually saw Jesus as the Lord exalted by God and enthroned at his right hand in fulfilment of [Psalm 110:1](#); this entailed a recognition on his part that Jesus was the Messiah who had long been promised by God and that he was also the Son of God, not just in the sense that this has been said of Israel's kings, but more profoundly in the sense of a being who stood in a unique relationship with God.

c. It was there that Paul began to realize that Jesus was the expression of God, a perception that led him ultimately to conceive Christ as the 'image' of God, and in this view of the Son who has restored the divine image and glory lost by Adam, lay the seeds of Paul's conception of believers being adopted sons of God, being transformed into Christ's image and being made a new creation.

d. It was there that Paul first glimpsed the fact that Christ had circumvented the law in establishing contact between God and mankind, that acceptance by God took place through Christ by God's grace alone and that forgiveness and reconciliation were available [p. 120](#) through him, convictions that became the foundation of some of his most characteristic teachings.<sup>5</sup>

Given the existence of these connections, it is no wonder that in his writings Paul regularly refers to what happened to him on the Damascus road. More than once he retold the story of his conversion (cf. [Acts 9](#) with [22](#) and [26](#)) and often he alludes to this event in his writings (as, for example, in [Gal. 1:13-17](#); [1 Cor. 15:8-11](#); [Romans 1:1](#); [Eph. 3:8-12](#); [Col. 1:25](#) and see [2 Tim. 1:11](#)).

We should not jump to the conclusion that Paul saw the full theological implications of his conversion experience only through deductive reflection on it. It is obvious from his letters how profound a part prayer played in Paul's life. In his prayers (cf. [Col. 1:9-11](#)) Paul also refers to the fact that wisdom and understanding come through and from relating to God in this way. It is clear that when he was meditating on the Scriptures, Paul was given charismatic interpretations of what certain passages meant in relation to Christ. These too were a fruitful source of theological understanding. So both praying and meditating, as well as reflecting, contributed to his developing theological as well as personal maturity.

It only remains to stress the objective nature of what was, for Paul, a deeply subjective experience and the fact that the experience itself already contained an interpretative or theological element. The fact that Paul began to preach the Gospel so soon after his conversion suggests that he quite quickly began to understand some of its theological implications, even if the developing nature of some of his ideas which we can trace in his letters (e.g. of the 'body of Christ') indicates that this was an ongoing process.

## PAUL'S TASK AND SUFFERING

I would like to concentrate on the way Paul attempted to come to terms with the general thrust of his vocation. Although I will not examine the process by which this produced change in his self-understanding or the extent to which from time to time it continued to cause him perplexity, I would like to consider the fundamental effect it had upon a number of his views.

Despite the way it has often been interpreted, Paul's most celebrated letter, the letter to the Romans, is less a systematic treatise than a personal apology. It is Paul's account of how he, a Jew, came to terms with his commission to the Gentiles. According to Donald Robinson, [p. 121](#) the intimate and personal tone of the prologue and epilogue suggest that

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<sup>5</sup> S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1982, 330-332.



Paul cannot separate his own role from the operation of the gospel which he explains to his Gentile readers in Rome.<sup>6</sup>

This personal note, he says, is not present merely at the beginning and end of Romans: it pervades the whole letter. This means that the pathos with which Paul speaks of his compatriots' rejection of Christ in the central section of the letter ([Romans 9:1-2](#)) or the anguished cry, 'Who shall deliver me from this body of death?' ([Romans 7:24](#)), are not autobiographical intrusions but expressive of Paul's intention.<sup>7</sup>

If this is true of Romans, the most systematic of Paul's letters, what are the implications of similar personal statements elsewhere in Paul's letters?

a. In the first place, so far as Paul's central theme in Romans is concerned, Paul

is describing justification, and its results as he, an Israelite, had experienced it, this being his qualification to be the teacher to the Gentiles ...<sup>8</sup> [Therefore] it is from his own experience of salvation as a member of the remnant of Israel according to the election of grace that Paul is able to speak with such assurance and joy, and is able to hold out the hope of glory to the Gentiles [and] the justification and glorification ... of the Israel that will be saved. (cf. [Romans 9-11](#))<sup>9</sup>

b. Mention of Paul's allusion to his own spiritual struggles in [Romans 7:24](#) brings to mind other passages, especially in Second Corinthians, where Paul draws on his own experiences to highlight the paradoxical nature of Christian existence. The autobiographical, and at times deeply moving, references throughout chapters [1](#), [2](#), [4](#), [6](#), [7](#), [11](#), [12](#) to his own weakness, anxiety, perplexity, inner tensions, outer pressures and suffering demonstrate how much Paul was aware of what was happening in and to him. These references also show how much Paul learned through these experiences and fashioned his teaching about the Christian life from them. The process is documented for us in his account of how his struggle with an ongoing physical ailment, his p. 122 'thorn in the flesh', led him through suffering, prayer, meditation and reflection to a more profound understanding of the necessary role of weakness in experiencing the power of the Spirit ([2 Cor. 12:7-10](#)).

c. Paul's experience of what he refers to as a kind of 'death' before death, also enabled him to see more deeply into the nature of Christian ministry. This 'death' was induced by both the 'fears within' and 'fightings without' ([2 Cor. 7:5](#)) that he encountered in himself and in his opponents as he went about preaching the gospel and caring for his communities. It is only as death becomes part and parcel of the believer's experience that the life of Jesus comes to visible expression. This is why Paul can take such a positive attitude towards inner and outer suffering, even going so far as to rejoice in it. This also explains why Paul is never satisfied with merely preaching the gospel of the suffering Christ but sees the need to embody that message in his own person. Unless this takes place only a theoretical statement about the gospel takes place, not a genuine imparting of it.

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<sup>6</sup> D. W. B. Robinson, 'The Priesthood of Paul in the Gospel of Hope', *Reconciliation and Hope: Essays in Honour of L. L. Morris*, ed. Robert Banks, Exeter, Paternoster, 1974, 232.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robert Banks, 'Romans 7: 25a: An Eschatological Thanksgiving', *Australian Biblical Review*, 26, 1978, 34-42.

<sup>8</sup> D. Robinson, *op.cit.*, 236.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, 235.

This was the lesson Paul learned when, on his first visit to Corinth, he had seen the gospel working powerfully, not despite but through his weakness ([1 Cor. 2:3ff](#)).<sup>10</sup>

d. It is interesting to note here that this experience helped Paul come to a deeper appreciation of what it meant to be incorporated 'in Christ', both in the present and in the future. The experience of Christ in the present, he saw, was as much the experience of death as of life ([Romans 6:5](#); [Galatians 2:19–20](#); [6:14](#)), and as such was nothing less than a sharing in and even extension of Christ's own suffering ([2 Cor. 1:5](#); [Col. 1:24](#)). His strong orientation towards the Last Day, as an experiential longing of the most intense kind not just as a doctrinal conviction, also sprang from the pain engendered by his ministry. He looks forward to the resurrection and transformation he will experience when the *parousia* comes ([Romans 7:24](#); [Phil. 3:10–14](#)).

e. There is also a strong likelihood, as Edwin Judge has suggested, that it was reflection on his own suffering which enabled Paul to enter into and understand the meaning of the atonement more profoundly than anyone else. In other words, it was not so much reflection on the Cross which enabled him to understand his experience of the suffering more profoundly so much as the other way round. Putting it another way, it was not primarily because he was more intellectually gifted than the other apostles that he had the most developed view of the atonement in the New Testament, but rather that, as he himself p. 123 confessed, he suffered more than any of them and was forced to come to terms with that suffering.

The greater reversal of social status he suffered on becoming a Christian—he appears to have come from a relatively wealthy family and also possessed Roman citizenship—and the greater opposition he encountered as an apostle, led him into a sharper awareness of the pain of rejection, humiliation and affliction. Martin Luther's well-known response to the question, 'What is the chief qualification of a theologian?' was quite correct. He replied: 'suffering'.<sup>11</sup>

So then, as Dunn says:

The role which Paul attributes to suffering and death in his soteriology is in no sense a matter of mere theory ... in all these passages Paul is talking in experiential terms: he actually experienced a new power of life and a dying of which his suffering were the most obvious manifestation; and he experienced both the life and the dying as Christ's—he was conscious of Christ in both the life and the death—they were both somehow his.<sup>12</sup>

This conclusion of Paul's, he says, was not simply a logical deduction but a consciousness of Christ in his suffering as well as his renewal. It does not matter, he suggests, whether we describe this process as 'mystical' or 'charismatic', so long as we are as clear as possible on the experience it describes.

## PAUL'S CONTACTS AND TRAVELS

Let me focus on those aspects of Paul's itinerant lifestyle which reveal interesting links between his experience and his theology. These are the existential nature of the content of his letters; the parabolic character of some of his everyday activities; and the experiential dimension of a number of Paul's metaphors.

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<sup>10</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of the First Christians*, London, SCM, 1975, 327.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in H. G. Haile, *Luther*, Sheldon, London, 1980, 304–305.

<sup>12</sup> Dunn 327, 333, 336.

a. Paul's theology is expressed in letters, some highly personal and quite brief, others more general and extensive. Most of these letters were occasioned by questions directed to him in writing or in person by members of various churches. Sometimes not. But the occasional character of Paul's writings indicates that his theology is largely a response to specific situations, not a systematic elaboration of his beliefs.

Paul himself tells us that the greatest burden he carried was the daily anxiety he felt for his converts ([2 Cor. 11:28](#)). He carried these people around in his heart. When he learned of their weakness he felt weak p. 124 himself; when he heard of their breakthroughs he celebrated with them. He bore their burdens as Christ had borne his. It was out of this Cross-like concern for and identification with his churches that his letters were written and theology formulated.

So then, Paul's theology was generated out of his prayerful and reflective encounter with real-life situations. Indeed, some of his most profound theological statements were occasioned by quite concrete, at times even mundane, issues. For example, it is in the context of a discussion of financial giving that he gives us the wonderful picture of Christ, though he was rich, becoming poor for our sakes, so that through his poverty we ourselves may become rich ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)). Echoes of Paul's yielding up of his own social and economic status—several times expressed in his writings—in accepting his commission as an apostle can be overheard in this remark. He, like Christ, had travelled this route as well and he no doubt spoke in a heartfelt way about it. One only has to think of the way he talks elsewhere about the fact that 'poor ourselves, we bring riches to many' ([2 Cor. 6:10](#)).

Another example of the close link between everyday situation, personal experience and theological conviction may be found in his discussion of the appropriateness of accepting dinner invitations of various kinds. It is in this context that he first enunciates his basic doctrine of Christian liberty and concern for the weaker brother ([1 Cor. 8:7-13, 10:27-33](#)). Whether Paul first came to an understanding of this outlook as a result of attending such meals and working through the implications of doing so, we do not know. He certainly refers to his own practice in the matter when he says that 'for my part I always try to meet people half-way, regarding not my own good but the good of many' ([1 Cor. 10:33](#)). But the discussion touches him deeply and calls forth from him one of his most heartfelt cries: 'Therefore, if food be the downfall of my brother, I will never eat meat any more' ([1 Cor. 8:13](#)).

But nowhere is the close link between actual situation, personal experience and theological conviction more movingly present than in his explanation to the Corinthians why he has written a painful letter to them and altered his plans to visit them. The troubles in the church there, its ambivalence towards him and the tension created by his letter, form the background to what he has to say in [2 Cor. 1:23-3:6](#). The convictions to which he gives expression include the idea of his being a co-worker with them and not being their leader, of his identifying with them and not viewing himself in some sense as separate from them, of the proper pastoral balance between discipline p. 125 and forgiveness, of the priesthood of all believers being exercised through corporate decision-making and of weakness in ministry being the channel through which Christ achieves success.

In between the actual situation and the formation of these convictions, as the crucible through which one becomes the other, are Paul's express feelings about all that is going on. He talks openly about his 'concern' ([1:23](#)), his 'distress', his 'anxiety', his 'many tears' ([2:4](#)) and his 'restlessness' ([2:13](#)). Without openly identifying them, he also reveals in this passage a wide range of other emotional responses, from confidence in them to feeling vulnerable himself, all of which show how closely intertwined and mutually instructive were Paul's emotional and cognitive interpretations of what was happening.

b. Not only his interactions with his churches but even the circumstances of his travels had an effect upon Paul's theology. This could be illustrated by reference to the opposition he encountered and the way he interpreted it. But let me suggest a more everyday example, one that has not yet been sufficiently appreciated even by experts in the field. The main metaphor Paul uses in talking about the Christian life is derived from 'walking'. In fact, he describes the life of believers as a walk more than thirty times in his writings. (Unfortunately, this is obscured in many of the modern translations which prefer more prosaic words like 'behave', 'conduct', etc.) Scholars have puzzled over the source of the metaphor. While it clearly has some connection with the Old Testament notion of the 'way' of Israel or occasional expressions like 'walking' according to God's statutes, it cannot be derived purely from such sources. The term Paul uses has a different derivation, he uses it far more often and he associates it with a whole range of other metaphors for which there is no earlier parallel.

This suggests that there is a strong case for Paul describing the Christian life so much as a 'walk' because he walked so much himself. In other words, the experience of walking itself suggested to him a comparison between physical and spiritual walking. His actual walking became a parable of his walking with God. This explains why although he can refer to the Christian's 'walk' in a quite general way, elsewhere he draws parallels between specific aspects of the process of walking and specific aspects of the Christian life.

For example, between 'learning to walk' and 'beginning the Christian life' ([1 Thess. 4:1](#)), 'putting shoes on your feet' and 'taking the gospel wherever you go' ([Eph. 6:15](#)), 'walking carefully' and 'walking discerningly' ([Eph. 5:15](#)), 'walking in the light' and 'living blamelessly' ([Romans 12:13](#)), 'walking a straight path' and 'conducting yourself honestly' ([Gah 2:14](#)), 'walking in another's footsteps' and p. 126 'imitating another Christian's example' ([2 Cor. 12:18](#)), 'walking slowly' and 'living idly' ([2 Thess. 3:6](#)).

Like the wise men of old, then, Paul found God speaking to him through experiences of the most ordinary kind. This reminds us that encounters with God that have theological consequences are not confined to so-called 'religious' experiences. Any of our activities or any aspect of life may become a prism through which God may reveal something of himself to us. For this reason it is a great pity that the original link between physical and spiritual walking in Paul's letters is obscured in modern translations of the Bible. This prevents the reader from realizing how Paul came to view the Christian life in this way and from following his own practical example in developing their theological understanding.

c. Another window on the role of experience in Paul's theology is provided by the wide range of metaphors he uses. I have just discussed one of these that up till now has been completely overlooked. There are many others in Paul's writings, as there were in Jesus' sayings before him. But, as E. W. Hunt notes, unlike Jesus, the countryman who went to rural scenes for his figures:

... Paul, the townsman drew most of his illustrations from the activities of urban society [and these] cover the whole range of human experience.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that they do this indicates how broad an experience Paul had, how little was locked into a 'religious' setting and how 'religiously' he was able to view the whole of life.

Paul is fond of using metaphors even for the central doctrinal and ethical convictions he is trying to convey. His understanding of the atonement, for example, is largely conveyed through picture-language, e.g., the language of sacrifice (from the cult), of

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<sup>13</sup> E.W. Hunt, *Portrait of Paul*, London, Mowbray, 223, 234.

justification (from the law-court), of redemption (from commercial practice), of reconciliation (from human relationships) and of adoption (from family life). His understanding of sanctification is also saturated with metaphors of various kinds. He talks about our being transferred from one form of slavery to another, from one kingdom to a new form of rule, from one married state to a second one, from bearing a certain kind of fruit to bearing a different kind of fruit. His understanding of the church is also permeated with metaphors drawn from family life; e.g., brothers, sisters, from household activities; e.g., stewards, servants, from inanimate life; e.g., the body, the field, from human activity; e.g., buildings, the temple. [p. 127](#)

Many of these metaphors are drawn from areas of life where Paul had first-hand experience. Others come more from observation or, on occasions, general knowledge. It is not always easy to discern how much they were triggered by experience of the actual condition to which the metaphor refers. How much, for example, did Paul's many appearances and acquittals before legal authorities, or earlier familiarity with the temple cult, encourage him to use the metaphors of justification and sacrifice at appropriate points in his writings? On the other hand, although Paul had never been literally enslaved or married to anyone he also uses these metaphors to explain his ideas.

What we can say is that the way Paul uses metaphors so often, at times piles metaphor upon metaphor, uses metaphors in different ways, or continues to develop metaphors is not accidental. The same may be said of the occasional lyrical, hymnic and celebratory flights in his writings where his spirit soars and gives eloquent expression to the deep stirrings of his heart. In both cases ordinary prose is not adequate to express the daring and moving character of God's ways with mankind: only the more imaginative and emotional language of poetry can begin to convey something of the depth and complexity of what he experiences.

## CONCLUSION

I conclude with several important implications of what I have been saying.

1. In seeking to understand what Paul said and wrote, we should bring the connection—sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit—between his theology and his experience more into the foreground. This includes trying to discern the events that shaped his life, the emotions he felt and the metaphors he used as well as the thoughts he was expressing. In reading Paul we should be sensitive to what was happening inside him, what he was feeling and what images were governing him as well as paying attention to the principles he was advocating. This means that we should approach Paul as we would approach anyone. We should come desiring to get to know a person not just listen to a teacher. If we did this more, it would have a radical effect on our individual and corporate study of the Bible. But only so are we able to become imitators of Paul in the way he asks of us as Paul himself was an imitator of Christ.

2. How true is it to the spirit of Paul's writings to teach and learn theology in a way that does not encourage or allow time for people to enter into the experiences that are inextricably bound up with it? This [p. 128](#) cannot be done in a mere three years. Is this not a problem with a great deal of theological education today? Does this not account for so much of its ultimate irrelevance and powerlessness at the congregational level, even when it tries to remain true to the content of Paul's thought?

Should we not be discovering new models of theological education which yield a better balance between the experiential, practical and reflective aspects of learning? If we sought to do this, we would find ourselves moving away from the theological college model in the direction of the more informal and down-to-earth approach to theological education that

Paul was engaged in with people like Timothy and Titus? He did not teach theology in a formal setting to pupils who had to learn what he imparted so that they could repeat it to others. For him, theological education took place as a practical preparation for or response to an actual evangelistic and pastoral task by a group of people in close community with one another.

3. Our definition of theology needs to be broadened. As we have seen, Paul's theology had a decidedly practical orientation. It was not, like most theology these days, mainly a product of his own private interests or the interests of his theological peers. It was not formulated chiefly by study and reflection, which was the way any good Pharisee would have gone about it. No, it arose from his experiences as an apostle and his attempts to make sense of these by whatever means God placed at his disposal. This certainly included the scriptures, which for him rightly occupied a normative place. It also involved other, at times more direct, encounters with God, through prophecy for example. But it embraced a range of other experiences, such as everyday actions and observations. It arose from personal struggles and suffering. It entailed learning from colleagues on the road as well as from mutual ministry in the church. It came during times of prayer as he wrestled with a particular problem. All these should be drawn into the search to know God if there is to be a fully-rounded, personally appropriated and life-changing theology.

Only if we take these three matters seriously do we have much hope of bringing our experience and our theology more closely together. Paul is the supreme example of a person in which we see this taking place. That is why he continues to speak as personally and relevantly to us today as he did in his own times.

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## The Major Trends Facing the Church

Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon

*Reprinted with permission from International Bulletin of Missionary Research, April 1987.*

*This article is a summary of the authors' recent book, Foresight: Ten Major Trends That Will Dramatically Affect the Future of Christians and the Church. The study is based on an empirical survey, of interviews with knowledgeable church leaders, denominations, evangelists, educators, etc., most of whom are North Americans. All these trends are the result, as can be seen, of the revolutions of modern times—of secularization, technological revolution and the liberation of oppressed people. What is significant in the paper is that the ten key trends major on ethical issues rather than dogmatic questions. Since it represents the findings of denominational leaders, the summary can be a watershed in future church mission and theological planning.*

Editor

What major trends will shape the church's life and witness over the next fifty years? Out of curiosity, we decided to find out by polling a number of knowledgeable church leaders as to their perceptions. Using an initial survey and a follow-up, we elicited 'trends perceptions' from more than fifty denominational leaders, evangelists, educators, missionaries, writers, and others. Our sample represents a spectrum of theological and ecclesiastical perspectives and gives their perceptions and ranking of major trends in the church, or trends in the world affecting the church. Most respondents were North Americans, but we chose people with a broad knowledge of the international scene.

While this methodology is somewhat impressionistic, still it gives a fascinating and useful reading on perceived trends and on the issues with which church leaders will be dealing. We compiled the ten leading trends, researched them, and did some analysis in light of the church's life and mission. The results have been published in *Foresight: Ten Major Trends That Will Dramatically Affect the Future of Christians and the Church*. This article condenses the major points from the book.

Our profile of trends varies markedly from recent trends discussions in *Christianity Today* and elsewhere. The major reason, we think, is that we have tried to take into consideration the world scene, not just North America. And in that perspective, it seems clear that the most dominant, shaping trend is what might be called the new internationalization of the church—the emergence of the world church. [p. 130](#)

## **1. FROM REGIONAL CHURCHES TO WORLD CHURCH**

The church has always considered itself 'universal', but today this is empirically true as never before. In the nineteen centuries following the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity grew to embrace one-third of all humanity—yet more than 80 percent of these were whites. In the twentieth century Christianity has become a global faith, the most universal religion in history. The church is said to be growing at the rate of some sixty-five new churches daily, mostly in the populous, poorer nations of the southern hemisphere. Today Christians number about one-third of all humanity and more than half the population in two-thirds of the world's 223 nations. The Christian church has become an amalgam of the world's races and peoples, with whites dropping from more than 80 percent to about 40 percent.

This new internationalization of the church is producing a historic revolution: a shift of the church's 'centre of gravity' from the North and West (mainly Europe and North America) to the so-called two-thirds world. In 1900 the northern hemisphere counted some 462 million Christians, 83 percent of the world total, while the South had about 96 million Christians, or 17 percent of the total. By 1980 the church in the South had grown to 700 million, nearly half of the world total. Today the church of the historically 'Christian' nations is probably the minority church worldwide.

What does this mean for the future? We shall likely see a world church emerge that is much more diverse ethnically and culturally; exhibits a greater mutual respect for the leadership, styles, ministries, and traditions of other Christian believers; is increasingly urban; and ministers more intentionally to the poor, oppressed, and suffering.

## **2. FROM SCATTERED GROWTH TO BROAD REVIVAL**

New hope for revival in North America is being sparked by rapid church growth in places like South Korea and Central Africa. The United States is seeing a dramatic increase in religious education programmes, Bible studies, evangelization programmes, and other religious activities *outside* formal worship.

This continues a 200-year-old trend. In 1776 only 7 percent of United States citizens were church members. This figure rose to 20 percent by 1850, to 36 percent by 1900, and in 1976 approached 60 percent. These statistics may merely indicate that the church is simply getting fatter, not healthier. But many people anticipate a deep and genuine movement of renewal centered in a 'third wave' of p. 131 charismatic renewal, renewal in mainline denominations, resurgence of the Roman Catholic Church, and new dialogue among Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox Christians. The growth of house churches and of 'power evangelism' churches may be part of a new wave of revival.

Now that the world has become one global, interconnected communications network, the unprecedented Christian growth worldwide is bound to have an impact in the traditionally Christian lands of North America and Europe.

### **3. FROM COMMUNIST CHINA TO CHRISTIAN CHINA**

The Christian church has come alive powerfully in China. While no one knows for sure how large the church has grown, the China Church Research Centre in Hong Kong estimates 30 million Christians, or 50 million if border regions and secret believers are included. Dr. James Hudson Taylor leans toward the 50 million estimate, about 5 percent of the population and more than fifty times the number of believers thirty-five years ago when missionaries were expelled by the communist revolution. Others put the size of the current renewal much less.

Today the Chinese church exists in three main groups: a Somewhat fragmented Roman Catholicism, the officially recognized Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and the house churches growing in the populous nonurban areas. The success of widespread lay leadership and house churches or other small groups suggests that the contemporary renewal in China is among the great Christian movements in history—especially considering the sheer numbers involved.

The resurgence of Chinese Christianity is likely to impact world Christianity in several ways. The Chinese church may provide sources of major new vitality, leadership, and structural forms for the church worldwide. Chinese Christianity will also enrich the theology and self-understanding of the world church. Historically the church has been dominated by Greek, Roman, European, and North American cultural and thought forms. We have yet to discover what the impact will be of a new and dynamic church rooted in one of the oldest and culturally richest societies on earth.

### **4. FROM INSTITUTIONAL TRADITION TO KINGDOM THEOLOGY**

A word church touched by renewal will require a global theology. Such a theology seems to be coalescing around themes of the reign or rule of God, stressing God's sovereign direction, despite and through p. 132 human agency, in the course of world history. The kingdom theme is receiving increasing attention in conferences, journals and book publishing.

Pressures for a new 'world theology' that expands the way Christians understand the universe and their role in it are coming from several sources. The most important of these are internal, arising from the three trends previously mentioned. Others are external, arising from economic, social, scientific, and political developments now shaping the world.

Increasingly, Christian thinkers are pointing out that the kingdom of God was prominent in Jesus' preaching and is a central category unifying biblical revelation. Kingdom theology speaks of justice in economic, political, and social relationships, and



ecological harmony and balance throughout the creation. God as supreme Ruler and Friend of all will be worshipped and glorified by the whole creation. Biblically, this is not an otherworldly, disembodied, nonhistorical realm of existence. Rather, it is something sufficiently like present experience that human bodies will be resurrected to be a part of it. Kingdom theology foresees not the total destruction of this world but its liberation ([Rom. 8:21](#)) through a process of death and resurrection.

Such a theology has wide-ranging implications for all areas of the church's life, including worship, the church's internal community life, its witness through evangelism and justice ministries, and its relationship to political powers.

## **5. FROM CLERGY/LAITY TO COMMUNITY OF MINISTERS**

A new model of pastoral leadership appears to be emerging, which will produce a very different kind of church in the future. The New Testament pattern of each congregation being led by a team of spiritually mature leaders is receiving new emphasis. A long-term trend towards plural leadership and the New Testament 'equipping' model of pastoring may be underway, especially outside the United States. The evidence is spotty here so far, but this is an area that bears watching.

The equipping model, based on [Ephesians 4:11-12](#), stresses the primary function of nurturing and leading the congregation so that each believer grows and finds his or her unique function and ministry within the body. This model may be carried out through a range of possible culturally viable patterns. Its main principles include (1) plurality or team leadership, (2) mutuality and consensus decision-making among the leaders, rather than top-down authority, and (3) a primary [p.133](#) focus on enabling all believers for their particular gift ministries and spiritual priesthood.

If the equipping model is adopted broadly, some anticipated results could be a greater emphasis on and practice of the priesthood of believers, the emergence of alternative forms of pastoral training and some reformulation of seminary curricula, and a more organic integration of a wide range of ministries.

## **6. FROM MALE LEADERSHIP TO MALE/FEMALE PARTNERSHIP**

In the last decade the North American church turned a historic and probably irreversible corner with a shift towards women as pastoral leaders on a par with men. In 1970 only 2 percent of United States pastors were women. That doubled by 1984 to 4 percent—still small, but continuing to grow annually. The number of women in seminary jumped 223 percent from 1972 to 1980, compared to a 31 percent increase in male enrolment. By 1980 one-fourth or more of all ordination-track seminarians in several United States denominations were women (this was true in the American Baptist, Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist, United Presbyterian, and Episcopal churches). We estimate that by the year 2000 approximately 20 to 25 percent of pastors in the United States will be women, with the total possibly approaching 50 percent by the middle of the next century.

Women already comprise a significant minority of ordained pastors in many church bodies. By 1985, 10 percent of all Disciples of Christ pastors were women. The figure was 12 percent in the United Church of Christ, 7 percent in the Episcopal church, 5 percent among United Methodists, and 6 percent among Presbyterians. In Pentecostal groups, 17 percent of all pastors are women in the Pentecostal Holiness Church, 12 percent in the Church of God in Christ, and 11 percent in the Assemblies of God. One-third of female ordinations reportedly occur in Pentecostal churches.

The implications of this trend include the following:

1. The definition of the pastoral role will probably become broader and more flexible as women bring more variety, fresh ideas, differing perspectives, and a broader range of leadership styles into church leadership.
2. The emphasis on community, informality, and nurture in the church will be enhanced.
3. Theologically and conceptually, more women in church leadership will increase the tendency towards organic and ecological models of the world and the church. [p. 134](#)
4. More women in ministry may augment the trend towards 'lay' ministry and the equipping of all believers.

## **7. FROM SECULARIZATION TO RELIGIOUS RELATIVISM**

The church has always faced the problem of how to be in the world yet not of it. But secularization comes in waves. Today the church faces a tidal wave, with many Christians in North America and Western Europe accommodating to values shaped more by the world than by biblical faith. Surveys show little difference between the views and behaviours of those who claim to be committed Christians and those who don't.

In the last fifty years United States attitudes have largely changed from the survival mentality of the Great Depression to a drive towards self-identity and recognition as persons. Yet the understanding of the road to success hasn't changed. The survivor of the depression sought security through good pay and financial stability. The modern 'identity achiever' still follows the materialistic route to reach his or her objective.

According to Barna and McKay, Christians are no different from the larger population in this regard.

Rather than adhering to a Christian philosophy of life that is occasionally tarnished by lapses into infidelity, many Christians are profoundly secularized, and only occasionally do they respond to conditions and situations in a Christian manner. Recent research shows that many Christians are especially vulnerable to the worldly philosophies of materialism, humanism, and hedonism.<sup>1</sup>

## **FROM NUCLEAR FAMILY TO FAMILY DIVERSITY**

The traditional North American church has been ambushed by cultural diversity, especially in family lifestyles. By and large, white Protestant churches still assume the importance of the nuclear family (two parents, two or more children), when in fact very often that's not the primary clientele they deal with, especially in cities.

The 'typical family' is almost extinct. Only 7 percent of the North American population fits the traditional profile of father as breadwinner and mother taking care of the home and two or three children. [p. 135](#) Demographers count as many as thirteen separate types of households, and these are rapidly eclipsing the conventional family pattern.

Some of the multiple forms of people living together are morally unacceptable to Christians, but many are morally neutral. Diversity and homogeneity both have their place, in society as well as in the church where there are 'many members but one body'. Single households, extended families, and shared households, are viable Christian options. The challenge for the church will be to minister to this diversity without compromising the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> George Barna and William McKay, *Vital Signs: Emerging Social Trends and the Future of American Christianity* (Westchester, III.: Crossway Books, 1984), p. 136.

## 9. FROM CHURCH/STATE SEPARATION TO CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ACTIVISM

In the 1980s Christians in North America entered a new phase of political involvement. The religious right, increased political activism by fundamentalists and evangelicals, and the growing number of theologically conservative Christians holding public office reflect what appears to be a new trend. Meanwhile, the 'people power' revolution of Corazon Aquino in the Philippines, where the Roman Catholic Church played a key role, reveals other dimensions of Christian political activism.

Conflicting views of church and state have been with us down through church history. At one level the struggle has been between the legitimate claims and powers of political and religious authority; at another the question is how to achieve a balance between spirituality and social and political involvement. In their quest for the spiritual, monks and mystics through the ages attempted to transcend not only human affairs but the material world itself. In contrast the Roman emperor Constantine became a Christian and saw no conflict in attempting to Christianize secular government (and in the process substantially politicize the church).

Earlier in the 20th century conservative Protestantism, especially, tended to drive a wedge between religious experience and matters of economics and public policy. Adherents often turned inward, sharply dividing the spiritual and material realms. Yet the trend today is towards political involvement. The most visible example is the new right.

While most media attention has focused on such conservative new-right groups as the Moral Majority, not all Christian political efforts are on the side of political conservatism. Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) is a broadly based coalition working for greater sensitivity and activism on issues of social justice, poverty, and international peace. ESA is organizing local chapters across the country. Bread for the [p. 136](#) World, another primarily Christian organization, lobbies for legislation and policies that will provide adequate food for the world's peoples. *Sojourners* magazine and the Sojourners community agitate for international justice and promote a new abolitionism against nuclear weapons. And in 1986 a new broad-based political action committee, Justlife, was formed to advocate a 'consistent prolife stance,' particularly on the issues of poverty, abortion, and the nuclear-arms race.

As Christian political involvement expands to include far-reaching issues such as foreign policy and the earth's resources, a crucial question is whether or not Christians can distinguish between kingdom priorities and narrowly nationalistic interests. This applies certainly to North American believers, but equally to Christians in places like South Africa, Lebanon, and Taiwan. The issue can be boiled down to this simple question: Will tomorrow's Christians be able to see, and persuade others to see, that the priorities of God's kingdom are ultimately more in one's own national interests than are narrower self-serving aims?

## 10. FROM SAFE PLANET TO THREATENED PLANET

Three major world realities are shaping a new and volatile situation for the church. They are so basic and potentially dangerous that together they constitute a world of mega-dangers for all earth's peoples. These realities are (1) the widening gap between rich and poor, (2) our threatened ecosphere, and (3) the dangers of nuclear armaments.

One need not be a prophet to see that eco-crisis and nuclear terror in a world increasingly split between rich and poor, yet intimately linked by radio and television, could easily add up to a recipe for global convulsions as devastating as any world war.

These issues present not a scenario for despair but simply the dimensions of the challenge we face. Europe survived the Black Death of the fourteenth century, though in many places half the population died. Floods, earthquakes, disease, and wars have threatened major parts of the globe in the past and will do so again. Today's issues, however, are unprecedented in their scope and reach, and in the way they interact and touch the very fabric of life for all earth's peoples.

From a Christian standpoint, these issues caution us against triumphalism or an easy optimism. Human sin is still with us, not only in each individual and group, but cumulatively, clogging the structures of our social and environmental systems. As we move into [p. 137](#) the twenty-first century, the world is one family at war with itself and threatening to poison or explode its own home.

## CONCLUSION

Where does all this leave the church? First of all, these and related trends will require much more study and analysis. Some are clear and empirically validated; others are more questionable and may clash with significant countertrends. But all represent areas of ferment or challenge for the church.

In our book we have reviewed these trends in light of John Naisbitt's *Megatrends* and have suggested possible long-range implications. In the conclusion we suggest four possible 'alternative futures' for the church and society: friendly fascism, Armageddon, nuclear terrorism, and world revival. We stress that any of these scenarios is possible, in whole or in part, or possibly in combination or sequence. The future rests on the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the church and, finally, on God's sovereign activity. We hope that some attention to actual and potential trends will aid Christians in sorting out the challenges they face and responding faithfully of the good news of the kingdom.

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# The City in the Bible

David S. Lim

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*In this comprehensive and well-documented piece of research, Dr. David Lira expounds a (badly needed) biblical theology of the City, which he himself sub-titles as 'Eschatological Hope in Historical Realism'. Starting with a definition of the city in the light of biblical data he proceeds to present a theological paradigm built around five biblical motifs on urbanization: history, Babylon, Jerusalem, New Jerusalem and the church. His main thesis: 'The scriptures reveal that God desires to fully redeem and ultimately perfect the city, and that this process is happening in world history.' The inclusion of a long section on the role of the church in this whole process of urbanization throws fresh light on current missiological*

*debates not only for the Asian churches but for the church universal This is a paper presented at the recent ATA Theological Consultation in October/November 1987 at Singapore.*

Editor

The Bible starts with a perfect garden and ends with a perfect city.

This paper seeks to expound a biblical theology of the city, which may be subtitled 'Eschatological Hope in Historical Realism'. It starts with a definition of 'city' in relation to biblical data, and proceeds to present a theological paradigm built around five motifs about urbanization. It advances the thesis that the Scriptures reveal that God desires to fully redeem and ultimately perfect the city,<sup>1</sup> and that this process is happening in world history. Thus it includes a long section on the role of the church in light of this interpretation of biblical revelation.

## DEFINITION OF 'CITY'

In the Scriptures, the term 'city' appears about 1,600 times in the Old Testament and 160 times in the New, without counting the instances in which the cities' proper names are used. Although the plain factual description or account of the cities occur in historical narratives, yet it **P. 139** seems clear that these occurrences can be made to fit into a framework from which a 'biblical theology' of cities can be presented.

This article views the city from three perspectives: as a social system or lifestyle, as a cultural centre, and as a religious centre.

### City as Social System

The city may be seen as a social order because it offers its residents not just a common territory, but also a total way of life. It is a community that consists of a population more dense than the village; thus it evolves a lifestyle that contrasts with the village and the wilderness.<sup>2</sup> Near eastern cities seem to have arisen *circa* 3500 BC as fortified strongholds (in contrast to unwallled villages; cf. [Num. 13:29](#)); they gave protection against enemies and potential attackers.<sup>3</sup> Upon settling in Canaan, the tribal Hebrews had difficulty overcoming and occupying the cities there ([Idg. 1:27ff](#); [3:1-5](#)), but they were also able to build large cities ([Num. 13:28](#); [Dt. 3:5](#); [Josh. 6:5](#); [Neh. 3:1-3](#), [11](#), [25](#)), each with strong towers and gates ([Idg. 9:51](#); [2 Sam. 18:33](#), etc.). Until New Testament times, 'city residents are known to be those who earn their living through occupations not directly related to farming, fishing, herding or mining'.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, it can be seen that urbanization was happening in biblical times; and this centripetal pull of humanity being gathered into cities and developing urban lifestyle seems to be taken as a historical phenomenon which does not necessarily conflict with

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<sup>1</sup> This avoids the extreme views of optimism (e.g. H. Cox, *The Secular City*) or of pessimism (e.g. J. Ellul, *The Meaning of the City*) on the city. For a brief history of Christian thought concerning the city, cf. H. M. Conn, 'The Kingdom of God and the City of Man: A History of the City/Church Dialogue'. *Discipling the City*, ed. R. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 9-59. For a survey of modern Christian views on the city, cf. H. M. Conn, 'Christ and the City: Biblical Themes for Building Urban Theology Models', *ibid.*, 222-286.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. R. F. Hock, 'Economics in New Testament Times', *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 239. Though ancient (and biblical) cities may differ in complexity of forms, they are similarly 'mothers of [rural] towns' (cf. [Ezek. 16](#)). Also cf. R. Bakke, 'A Biblical Theology for Urban Ministry', *Metro-Ministry*, ed. D. Frenchak & S. Keyes (Elgin, Illinois: David Cook Publ., 1979), 18.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. H. Bietenhard, '*polis*', *NIDNTT, II* (Zondervan, 1976), 802.

<sup>4</sup> Hock, 239.

the apparently centrifugal mandate of 'Fill the earth and subdue it' ([Gen. 1:28](#)) in the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

From a social scientific viewpoint, urbanization has been found to have great impact on people: as people congregate in cities, 'what p. 140 comes into being is a new order of relationships among persons, radically different from what is obtained in rural areas and heavily imposed on newcomers'; it is an impersonal process, not a lifestyle chosen by individuals, but 'the collective condition of all those who live in the city'.<sup>6</sup> The existence of this 'urban complex' does not mean that every city is composed of one or a few people-groups, but that all cities reveal a culture that is distinctly urban. In this sense, as large communities with a particular type of lifestyle, nation-states may be viewed as bigger versions of city-states, and empires as those of nation-states.

### City as Cultural Centre

Cities serve as centres of human culture (and civilizations). Cultures may be viewed as the creative production of human work and as the projection of human personhood created in the image of the creating God. As products of human creative powers, cultures and cities are significant, for they fit into the original purposes of God given in his cultural mandate ([Gen. 1:26-28](#); [2:15](#)). As points of great concentrations of culture, cities may thus be considered the symbols or personifications of human achievements.

The city is the place where human migratory and wandering existence ends: people become food-producers (not just food-gatherers) as they learn how to control and use nature (hence, the rise of science and technology),<sup>7</sup> build 'permanent' houses, and establish social structures that facilitate their community life while minimizing social conflicts. The city becomes an area's mercantile centre where the accumulation and distribution of wealth occur;<sup>8</sup> it also serves as the seat of power (even military and colonial power) over weaker and less developed human settlements, as well as the focus of civilization where culture (including arts, sciences, etc.) is developed. Thus the p. 141 king and those in authority (e.g. priests and governors) are used as symbolical representatives of the city.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Humanity may have been unintentionally fulfilling the 'fill the earth' aspect of the cultural mandate, by spreading throughout the globe, though not as evenly as God may have originally intended. Before the industrial revolution, people resorted to cities only for specific requirements; thus urbanization proceeded at slow rates and was relatively non-disruptive and even sometimes reversed, but now it has been accelerating under the centripetal force akin to a mass movement; cf. B. Tonna, *Gospel for the Cities* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 5, 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, which also shows that this 'urban complex' is 'formed ... by the regularity that patterns the normal interaction among residents and imposes on each one of them a particular way of reacting to reality and of behaving in daily life'. Louis Wirth notes, 'When different kinds of people live in densely populated areas in large numbers, the impact on personality and lifestyles are predictable', e.g., family life becomes nuclear (for easier mobility).

<sup>7</sup> Towns and villages become annexes of the city, for the need to get equipments and comforts distributed from the city. Though the city seems to eliminate natural necessities (e.g. climatic changes), it thrives by night shifts, tight working schedules and the presence of cheap labour.

<sup>8</sup> In NT times, the city's big households belonged to the aristocracy who owned lands in the outskirts; cf. Hock, 240f.

<sup>9</sup> On the 'powers' as primarily human, cf. G. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 87-92; and W. Wink, *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) and *Unmasking the Powers* (Fortress, 1986).

## City as Religious Centre

Archaeological evidences also point to the religious nature of the rise of cities. Many, if not all, ancient cities were walled precincts with a temple area devoted to a main city-god and other deities. Some had fortress-temples (e.g. [Gen. 32:30–32](#); [Ex. 14:2](#); [Jdg. 8:8f, 17](#)) or temple-towers (i.e. ziggurats); and some became sacred sites themselves (e.g. Bethel, Shiloh, Thebes, Mecca).

This author concurs with those who believe that city-building has been primarily a religious enterprise. The city developed, not just to benefit its settlers, but also (even mainly) to benefit its divinity; hence religion plays a significant role in the city.<sup>10</sup> This metaphysical dimension of the city reveals the spiritual motivation that underlies the construction of human civilizations.

There are five major motifs which concern the city in the Bible: history, Babylon, Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem and the Church.

## HISTORY: GOD INTENDS URBANIZATION

The city is the key to biblical visions of humanity's final destiny, and hence the meaning of human history. Urbanization is, therefore, the apparent consequence of obedience to God's cultural mandate. Even after the Fall, the works of humans created in God's image are spared from destruction. In [Genesis 4](#), animal husbandry, entertainment and technology are developed without divine condemnation; in fact, God's concern for human welfare is repeated to Noah ([Gen. 9:1–7](#)).

In salvation history, the cities of Egypt and Gerar offered tribute to Abraham ([12:16](#); [20:14](#), cf. [23:6](#)); cities sprung from the wells dug by Isaac ([26:18–33](#)); Bethel arose from the spot where Jacob saw a vision ([28:16–19](#)); and Joseph became an empire-manager to save Israel ([41:57](#); [42:6](#); [47:6](#)). Israel developed its civilization, and when [p. 142](#) brought into exile, many (e.g. Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah) served in the courts of pagan kings. Above all, through the incarnation, God affirmed his deep concern to redeem the world and humanity: that is, to fill the incompleteness of human development in history.

Urbanization includes human liberation from fate and 'powers and principalities' which dominate rural or primitive life;<sup>11</sup> the Bible envisions humans ruling (not *being determined by*) the world and its dehumanizing forces, including nature's 'groanings'. Yet, though called to 'defatalize' these powers, humanity has consistently tended to misuse and abuse the city's freedom; hence the need for God's redeeming work.

Nevertheless, even in the most pessimistic strand of biblical eschatology (the apocalyptic view), where history is seen as the arena of God's conflict with Satanic forces, God is also at work in history and will receive every human accomplishment in history into glory ([Rev. 21:24–26](#)). The eschatological city accepts the gifts of different cultures; e.g. laden camels from Midian, Ephah and Sheba, cargo-laden ships from Tarshish, and precious wood from Lebanon; it receives the 'wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession', and there is no more oppression and destruction (cf. [Isa. 60](#)).

Thus the Bible reveals that God takes human efforts focused in urbanization seriously, and he will judge all peoples (and individuals) on what they have done in light of the

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<sup>10</sup> E. g., L. Mumford, *The City in History*; and P. BerBer, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 3. The latter avers, 'Every human society is an enterprise of world-building. Religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise.' Thus, rather than call cities 'secular', they may better be called 'idoltrous', living without regard for God, or really worshipping Mammon.

<sup>11</sup> cf. Cox, 110–111.

cultural mandate. In the end, he will not abolish or destroy the works of humankind; instead he will gather up their achievements, so that nothing that has been made by human creativity (except sin) will be discarded.

## BABYLON: HUMANITY MISUSES URBANIZATION

However, the technology-making and city-building project is shown to be not just a neutral development: it grows out of the line of Cain. It is highlighted in the construction of the tower of Babel, and symbolized in the 'great image' of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, of Babylon and her daughter-empires ([Dan. 2](#)). In the New Testament, Babylon becomes the code name for Rome ([Rev. 14:8](#); [17:1–19:3](#)), the embodiment of the city's evil.

As a social system, Babylon is marked by individualism and its accompanying evils. From the beginning is revealed its propensity to [p. 143](#) break up community ([Gen. 4:1–14](#)), especially the family (vv. [19](#), [23f](#)). Though Cain was condemned to wander, yet he defied the curse by taking roots in the city to establish his own Eden; though he found the self-sustaining security of his city,<sup>12</sup> it seems clear that he lived a very lonely life. In the [Genesis 11](#) account, this human search for communal security proved to be illusive: a common project actually resulted in the confusion and isolation of one from the others. The city seems to have an inherent basic weakness: the inability to maintain and facilitate communication among its inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> In its goal of centralizing its social organization and services, families and local neighbourhoods become meaningless and marginal, while its bureau-cracy becomes inefficient and expensive to maintain. Thus most city residents feel helpless, meaningless and dehumanized.

As a cultural centre, Babylon is controlled by 'powers and principalities' who tend to be corrupt, oppressive and self-centred, thus hindering the full development of the human potentials as God purposed. Babylon's oppressive nature is seen in its cruelty in taking nations into captivity and in destroying cities and their populations (cf. Habakkuk). Israel experienced such oppression in Pharaoh's Egypt, where Hebrews built store-cities as slaves ([Exod. 1:9–11](#)); and in Solomon's reign and thereafter ([1 Ki. 4](#); [9:15–23](#)), especially under Rehoboam ([2 Chron. 11:5–10](#)).<sup>14</sup>

In addition, as a religious centre, Babylon exhibits her idolatrous tendency to produce gods, cults, temples and religious symbols which claim allegiance to anything other than the true God. Babel was constructed because of the human 'refusal to live with the diffusion plans of God' (cf. [Gen. 11:4](#)).<sup>15</sup> Solomon's cities (e.g., Baclath, Beth-Horon) were named after foreign gods ([1 Ki. 9:17f](#));<sup>16</sup> so later came the prophetic rebuke: 'Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities' ([Hos. 8:14](#)).

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<sup>12</sup> Conn, 'CC', 227–230.

<sup>13</sup> Tonna, 121.

<sup>14</sup> These cities were built with forced labour ([1 Ki. 4:6](#); [5:13](#); [9:15–22](#)), disregarding tribal boundaries and reorganizing Israel into tax-districts ([4:7–19](#)). On the significance of Solomon's tax-districts, cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York:McGraw-Hill, 1961), 133–138.

<sup>15</sup> Conn, 227.

<sup>16</sup> On [Jeremiah 11:13](#), Ellul, 32 comments, 'The reference here is probably only to cities bearing the names of gods, but we must never forget the importance of a name: giving a name to a city is giving it the very being of the name it bears.' Cf. Conn, 238.



The cities built by kings became political showcases of disobedience to God, encouraging worship in the high-places and making covenants p. 144 with Gentile nations.<sup>17</sup> Modern cities may not have the sense of transcendence or the sacred, but they celebrate (in a manner similar to religious worship) what people can do without God; this ‘this-worldly cult’, that sees only the temporal and rejects the metaphysical, has left urban multitudes trapped in the busy schedules of atomistic and aimless lives.

## JERUSALEM: GOD CHOOSES A CITY

From the beginning, the Lord of human history had determined that Babylon will not be the final form of the city; He chose one city to represent the ideals of ‘the city of God’. Jerusalem is *the* city ([Ezek. 7:23](#)) chosen by Yahweh ([2 Chron. 6:38](#)) to make his name dwell there ([Dt. 12:5](#); [14:23](#)),<sup>18</sup> the city where his people will live exemplary lives and offer worship before him. This was typified in primeval history through the line of Seth when people ‘began to call upon the name of Yahweh’ ([Gen. 4:26](#)); and prefigured in the Mosaic legislation through the ‘cities of refuge’ ([Num. 35](#); [Josh. 20](#)) which retained the city’s role (preservation) but changed its significance (liberation from death).<sup>19</sup>

Yahweh did not build his own city separately from the cities common to humankind; rather he took one city among others (it was even a pagan city) with all the common faults of cities. In fact, God actually did not make the choice; he let a man (David) choose a city for him. David chose a useful, militarily strategic and well-situated city, revealing God’s loving condescension to accept whatever humans offer to him for consecration,<sup>20</sup> when in God’s eyes Jerusalem was actually a worthless baby from its day of birth ([Ezek. 16](#)).

As a social organization, Jerusalem was called to be the witness to the world’s cities of the community and *shalom* of Yahweh ([Ps. 122:6–9](#); [147:2](#)).<sup>21</sup> This prioritization of community in which each person is valuable is prefigured in Abraham’s intercessory attempt to save Sodom: ten people could have saved the city from destruction ([Gen. p. 145 18](#)); one individual and his family was delivered (as Rahab’s was in Jericho’s destruction later). As his people, Israel was formally organized as a national community symbolized by the tabernacle ([Ex. 25–40](#), cf. [15:1–18](#)). Why? For the meaning of history (and the significance of Jerusalem) is to manifest community among the family of peoples: ‘... inasmuch as God made humankind something corporeal, human community is realized in bodily form—and we call it “city”.’<sup>22</sup>

As a cultural centre, Jerusalem was also called to be the model of justice where every citizen can have an equitable share of the production of the community. This egalitarian model of social life is founded on the Torah, given to Israel right after its liberation from

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Conn, 230. Ellul, 38f. notes, ‘Of all the [OT] historical books, only the Chronicles give an account of the construction of cities ... [and it] consider[s] the city as one of the predominant forms of man’s opposition to God.’

<sup>18</sup> Jerusalem is also called ‘city of God’ ([Ps. 46:4](#); [48:1](#), [8](#); [87:3](#)), ‘city of the great king’ ([Ps. 48:2](#), cf. [Mt. 5:35](#)), and ‘the holy city’ ([Isa. 48:2](#); [52:1](#); [Mt. 4:5](#); [27:53](#); [Rev. 11:2](#)). Cf. Bietenhard, 803; and H. Schultze, ‘Jerusalem’ *NIDNTT*, II, 324–329.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Conn, 249; and de Vaux, 68–74.

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that David did not first give Jerusalem a holy army or prosperous economy. The city was taken only during David’s time ([2 Sam. 5:6f.](#)).

<sup>21</sup> Conn, 240.

<sup>22</sup> Tonna, 123.

Egyptian slavery; from its independence, Israel was called to be a nation of small peasant-entrepreneurs who owned property communally and redistributed their land equally among its families once every fiftieth year.<sup>23</sup> Israel's 'decentralized state' ('not like the nations') lasted for about 200 years, until the rise of the monarchy in the middle 12th century BC, due to pressures from the Philistines; thereby Israel lapsed into the oppressive hierarchical social order 'like other nations' ([1 Sam. 8:4, 20](#), cf. vv. [11–18](#)). But God raised prophets who constantly reminded Israel of its past 'Golden Age', that those who lived in Jerusalem (especially the kings) should live in justice ([1 Ki. 21](#); [Isa. 1:10–27](#); [5:8](#); [Jer. 5:1, 27f](#); [7:5–7](#); [9:3–6](#); [22:3](#), [13–17](#), etc.). In the post-exilic, rebuilt Jerusalem, Nehemiah Corrected oppressive practices ([Neh. 5:1–13](#)), avoided living on taxes ([5:14–19](#)), and made the city a centre of sharing of earth's produce ([12:44–47](#); [13:5, 13](#), cf. [11:1–3](#)).

At the same time, Jerusalem was called to be a model religious centre marked by faith in Yahweh. Israel considered Jerusalem as the spiritual centre of the world, for Yahweh dwelt in Zion ([Isa. 8:18](#), cf. [2:2f](#); [Mic. 4:1f](#)): 'Historical experiences, but also theological p. 146 reflection, strengthened and extended the idea of the inviolability and indestructibility of the temple city' (cf. [Isa. 36f](#); [2 Ki. 18f](#); [2 Chron. 32](#); [Jer. 7:4](#));<sup>24</sup> even during and after the exile, eschatological hopes focused in a renewed permanent *earthly* Jerusalem. Its trust is to be exclusively on God alone; its king must not depend on horses or foreign alliances, nor on wealth (Dr. [17:14–17](#)), but in obedience to Yahweh's Torah (vv. [18–20](#)).

## THE NEW JERUSALEM

However, Jerusalem's history reveals that this chosen city of the chosen people of God failed to fulfil the purposes of Yahweh. (This shows that the city tends to become *selfish, unjust and idolatrous*.) Jerusalem developed to be like Sodom or Babylon: bloody ([Mic. 3:10](#); [Ezk. 16:6f](#)), proud ([Jer. 13:9](#)), oppressive ([Ezk. 16:48–58](#), esp. v. [49](#)) and idolatrous ([Jer. 19:11](#) ff; [Ezk. 16:21, 52](#)).<sup>25</sup> Calls to repentance (e.g., [Ezk. 22:2–4](#)) went unheeded, even when they came from the Messiah himself (cf. [Mt. 23:37–39](#)).

Therefore, the eschatological vision of a New Jerusalem from heaven has developed: though the earthly Jerusalem falls, God's purposes will prevail, for surely the New Jerusalem will be manifested on the new earth ([Ezek. 40–48](#); [Rev. 21:2, 18ff](#); cf. [Isa. 33](#); [Jer. 31:38–40](#)).<sup>26</sup> God will provide a final consummation in which humanity's valued accomplishments in Babylon or Jerusalem will be gathered up into the eternal city.

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<sup>23</sup> Recent OT scholarship shows that each of Israel's tribe was autonomous, consisting of a collection of extended families organized into mutual-protection 'clans'; their land was divided into tribal allotments and subdivided for family use, given by Yahweh to them in perpetuity for stewardship; they became one 'state' only for mutual self-defence and common religious practices; cf. D. C. Hester, 'Economics in the Old Testament,' *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (Harper & Row, 1985), 243f. G. E. Mendenhall, 'The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine', *Biblical Archaeologist*, 25 (1962) 66–87 maintains that this was promoted and even created by Israel's religion (Yahwism), but N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) believes that Yahwism is only one of the factors that *supported* (not *created*) the egalitarian social ideals of early Israel.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Schultze, 325f. Conn, 239 also observes, 'Preeminently ... the theme of redemption and the Edenic return to peace in God's dwelling place focuses on Jerusalem in the Old Testament.'

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hester, 244f. Jerusalem killed the prophets ([Mt. 23:37](#)) and the Messiah ([Rev. 11:8](#), cf. [Lk. 13:33](#)), thus its downfall is sure ([Mt. 24:2f](#) para.).

<sup>26</sup> The eschatological hope was retained in Judaism ([Sir. 36:12f](#); the fourteenth of eighteen benedictions; cf. [2 Esd. 7:26](#); [8:52](#)); see Bietenhard, 803.

Socially, people will be living in full community: not just 'being together', but also 'living together'. God's love will be manifested in its fullness, binding all peoples together as they fellowship with God himself ([Rev. 21:7](#)), as brothers and sisters in communion together with the Father (cf. [1 Jn. 1:1-4](#)). The gates will never be closed ([Rev. 21:24-27](#); [Isa. 26:2](#)) since all nations are welcome ([Jer. 3:17](#); [Ps. 87:4f](#)).

Culturally, the New Jerusalem will be known for its *shalom* built upon justice (cf. [Isa. 11:4](#); [Ps. 72](#); [Mt. 25:31-46](#)). An innocent child [p. 147](#) will become its righteous king, and oppression will be gone forever ([Isa. 9](#)). It is indeed the restored and egalitarian paradise of God ([Rev. 21:1-22:3](#)).

Religiously, the eschatological city will have no more need for temples, for God is the Temple and will be all in all ([Rev. 21:7](#), [11](#), [23](#), cf. [Ezk. 48:35](#); [Isa. 60:18](#); [Jer. 3:17](#)). In [Ezekiel 40-48](#), the New Jerusalem grows out of the temple, not out of Jerusalem; because the city has no human foundation (cf. [Hebrews 11:16](#)) and is God's gift to humanity ([Rev. 3:12](#); [21:2](#), [10](#)).

## CHURCH: GOD IS TRANSFORMING THE CITY TODAY

The challenge of biblical revelation is that the eschatological reality of the New Jerusalem is not just to be fulfilled in the future, but is also to be the basis for God's construction of 'new cities' on earth today. God is calling out a people called the Church to be his agent of transformation in the cities since Pentecost until the New Jerusalem is finally unveiled.

The Church is the vanguard or the 'firstfruits' of God's new creation; it is the New Jerusalem 'already', though its full consummation is 'not yet'. While it seeks for the heavenly city ([Heb. 11:10](#), [16](#); [13:14](#)), it already partakes of the citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem ([Gal. 4:25](#), cf. [Eph. 2:19](#); [Col. 3:1-4](#); [Phil. 3:20](#)). Manifesting its heavenly archetype on earth in different urban contexts is thus one of the significant ways of looking at its mission in history.

Let us look at some of the major themes involved with the Church's role in transforming the city into New Jerusalem on earth, or changing Babylons into Jerusalems in history.

### As a Social System

On the sociological level, the Church is called to transform the selfcentred, individualistic city into a self-giving, co-operative community, at least in four main ways:

First, the Church must proclaim the eschatological vision of the reign of God concretely seen in the New Jerusalem; it is not a utopian dream, but a revelation of the future already given by God to humankind. Based on this vision, the Church may be able to discern (sometimes imperfectly) the acts of God in the events, movements and [p. 148](#) structures in the city.<sup>27</sup> The vision will guide and inform the Church's efforts to establish urban justice and righteousness, not to bring in the New Jerusalem directly, but to be faithful signs or witnesses of it in a world filled with Babylons. Besides, like any movement or institution, the Church will be able to influence the city for good only from the positive advocacy of an alternative city-model better than those presented by others.

Some have felt that proclamation is a weak, unprofitable aspect of the Church's mission. But this view fails to understand that what is proclaimed is a costly (even

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<sup>27</sup> Tonna, 119. The Bible does not explicitly reveal what future humanity would have had, had Adam and Eve not disobeyed God. But it seems clear that if the first couple obeyed the cultural mandate, humanity would have built perfect cities, grand technologies and magnificent cultures—all in a beautiful harmony of multiplex diversities.

subversive) radical demand for repentance (the city must acknowledge its Babylonian nature) and faith (that it will obey Yahweh and become a theocracy under his kingship). Proclamation includes denunciation of sin and presentation of God's righteousness, and thus it serves to inhibit evil and encourage the good.<sup>28</sup> The Bible includes the story of how one of the most cruel cities (Nineveh) was entirely brought to full repentance through the message of a reluctant preacher.

Second, the Church must incarnate itself *in* the city to demonstrate God's love and power *in* a Babylon. It is very tempting indeed to carry out proclamation from a safe distance, by stationing ourselves away from the pressures and dangers of the city. But God has proposed that his redemption plan will follow the pattern of incarnation:<sup>29</sup> immersion in the very context of those who are to be redeemed.

This incarnational model was supremely revealed in Christ who 'tabernacled' himself among those whom he came to save. In the Old Testament, God positioned many heroes of faith among the powers of the city: Abraham ([Gen. 14:1-20](#)), Joseph, Moses, David, Esther, etc. Even Babylon was served by godly leaders, like Daniel and Ezekiel. And in the New Testament, instead of following the imperial, Babylonian pattern of destroying existing cities and establishing new ones, the early church entered into existing cities and planted 'bridgeheads' within them rather than planting new cities.<sup>30</sup> p. 149

Third, the Church must establish model communities in the city; it must serve as God's showcase of his purposes for the city through its life of mutual love ([Jn. 13:34f; 17:21-23](#)),<sup>31</sup> as exemplified by the Spirit-filled earliest church in Jerusalem itself ([Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-37](#)). God's saving presence has been incarnating itself in small groups of redeemed people within the city; Christians become God's witnesses in the city in the form of networks of small groups there.<sup>32</sup>

The Church's identity is intimately linked with (not separated nor segregated from) the city in which it was located: the idea of more than one church in the same city is never mentioned in the New Testament;<sup>33</sup> rather all Christians living in the same city formed a single unit. This reveals that the early church demonstrated a new model of community

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<sup>28</sup> Those who raise issues or advocate positive changes help city leaders to be alert to their duties and to mobilize their resources to meet needs.

<sup>29</sup> Though raised in a rural town, Jesus was no stranger to Jerusalem ([Lk. 22-25, 41-51; 9:51-53](#)); cf. Conn, 242f. On why he was based in a provincial area, see below.

<sup>30</sup> T. W. Manson, 'Martyrs and Martyrdom, I', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 39 (1957), 477 observes that whereas Alexander the Great and his successors established Greek cities (as centres of hellenistic culture) in the strategic places they conquered, 'that policy was reversed by St. Paul. He did not establish new cities; he was content to attack the cities that were already established at strategic points and capture and hold them for the Christian gospel.'

<sup>31</sup> For a more nuanced discussion of the biblical conception of community, cf. P. D. Hanson, *The People Called* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> 'Networks' is used here not to refer to a loose organization of people with occasional contacts, but to a close community of individuals and groups who mutually affect each other's identity, values and lifestyles, yet not formally organized.

<sup>33</sup> Planting new churches in each city did not break the unity of the church universal. It is significant that the use of the term *ekklesia* in the NT coincides with the boundaries of any given city (e.g., Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, etc.). References to churches *by region* are always plural. The Church Fathers addressed letters to 'the church that is in ...', 'the church that is in pilgrimage in ...' or 'that resides at ...', which later evolved to the usage of *paroikia* or 'parish'. Thus, to the early church, the *ekklesia* is the eschatological reality that is historically seen in decentralized groups of those who share a common identity as God's people in each city.

(unity at the city level) and understood its mission to be co-extensive with the city.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, each city-defined Church was subdivided and based in house-churches (most probably because the urban households were the basic, natural community grouping then),<sup>35</sup> and there was no central city-wide organization nor p. 150 external hierarchy for each city-church.<sup>36</sup> Thus it seems clear that it is through its city-defined framework and its decentralized confederation of small groups (where *koinonia* is actually experienced) that the Church finds its unity, mission and organizational structure.

Lastly, in relation to its efforts to build community, the Church must help the helpless in the city. The city tends to be uncaring and insensitive to the needs of its constituency, especially the poor.<sup>37</sup> By its lifestyle of sharing with the needy (which has its archetype in the 'common purse' of Jesus' apostolic band and the 'communal property' of the earliest church in Jerusalem),<sup>38</sup> the Church demonstrates to the city its message that people will be judged by their concern for the poor in their midst (cf. [Mt. 25:31-46](#)).

The concern of the redeemed community for the needy is based on creation: every person (not just the 'blessed') is created in the image of God, and thus should have the necessary resources for life. In the Exodus, Israel experienced Yahweh's love for the underprivileged ([Ex. 3:7-12](#)); he delivered needy people from their conditions of misery. Thus, Yahweh judged Sodom for not caring for the poor in her midst ([Ezk. 16:49](#)). God created each person to image himself, thus each deserves access to life's basic necessities for survival and dignified subsistence.<sup>39</sup>

### As a Cultural Centre

Besides seeking to transform the city as a social system, the Church must also try to effect change in the city as a cultural centre. Sociocultural progress will certainly go on, with or without the Church's interference or endorsement. But the Church must help the city set

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<sup>34</sup> This contrasts with their contemporary models, e.g., synagogues, philosophical Schools and *thiasoi* of the mystery religions. This calls for re-examination of denominational structures and mission brand names. Cf. Tonna, 125.

<sup>35</sup> References to house-churches are [1Cor. 16:9](#); [Rom. 16:5](#); [Phil. 4:15](#); Philm. 2. On the existence of multiple house-churches in a city, cf. J. Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 62f; A. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity, Second Enlarged Ed.* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 69; and P. Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief an Philemon* (Zurich: Benzinger, 1981), 72-75. On the contemporary practice of house-churches, cf. C. Guy, 'Pilgrimage Toward the House-Church,' in Greenway, *op. cit.*, 107-127, and H. Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975).

<sup>36</sup> Bakke, 20f., who also notes that the apostles always left the churches in the hands of local resident (house-church!) leaders; also cf. Tonna, 125.

<sup>37</sup> The city neglects and even humiliates the poor. In Asia, this can also be seen in national elites riding on the poverty of the majority. The middle class and those who succeed in getting out of the lower class strive and compete to gain a higher standard of living, and often forget the community and the conditions from which they have risen.

<sup>38</sup> See [Jn. 12:6](#); [13:29](#); [Acts 2:44f](#); cf. [Acts 6:1-7](#); [1 Jn. 3:17f](#); Js. 2:15-17. As in the OT where Yahweh alone had the right to own real estate in the Promised Land, the NT Church holds property together 'in trust', ready to be shared gladly to meet needs in the community, free from covetousness ([Col. 3:5](#)) and free to live in contentment and simplicity ([Heb. 13:5](#); [1 Tim. 6:6-10](#)); cf. Conn, 257f.

<sup>39</sup> G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 173 notes that *needs* include 'everything that a man, in his isolation, might need: wealth and honour ([Prov. 8:18, 21](#)), guidance and security in life ([Prov. 1:33ff](#); [2:9ff](#); [4:6](#); [6:2](#); [7:4f](#)), knowledge of God and rest for the soul ([Prov. 2:5](#); [Sir. 6:28](#); [51:27](#))'. Cf. W. Brueggemann, 'The Kerygma of the Priestly Writers', *Z.A.W.*, 84 (1972) 397-413.

its priorities right in light of the fact that city development and [p. 151](#) technological progress have often resulted in more dehumanizing and oppressive conditions: prosperity has a lower priority than equality (cf. [2 Cor. 8:14f](#)); and higher GNP lower than social justice.

The major way in which the Church can do this is to decentralize cities, although this may appear to be detrimental to the cities' growth in power, wealth and culture. This is not a call to return to the village, but to multiply average-sized cities (or to accelerate the urbanization of villages). Let the villagers enjoy the same cultural benefits as the urbanites, but without losing the communal spirit of rural lifestyle.<sup>40</sup> Actually, it is only through decentralization that the city can provide true community,<sup>41</sup> true freedom,<sup>42</sup> political democracy,<sup>43</sup> and economic democracy<sup>44</sup> among all peoples of various cultures and subcultures.

To accomplish this, the Church must lead by providing models of 'little cities'. Churches must become signs, where diverse groups in the city can be in close Christian fellowship without destroying each other's uniqueness. No one culture will dominate or overpower the others, for unity in Christ does not obliterate cultural diversity (cf. [Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 9:18-23](#)).<sup>45</sup> [p. 152](#)

As much as possible, city-churches must decentralize into local neighbourhoods; it is in these 'house-churches' that the vision of community-in-diversity takes shape, community is realized, and transformation can occur, as the city-residents decide that their neighbourhood can be a 'Jerusalem'.<sup>46</sup> New church forms (often *ad hoc* and less permanent) should be allowed to develop alongside these residential church structures; in the industrial world of the city, new socio-cultural arrangements have evolved as work,

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<sup>40</sup> So far the villages have been depopulated in order to concentrate manpower to keep the city's machines functioning efficiently.

<sup>41</sup> No person in the city can possibly relate to all others. Many try to increase the number of relationships or group memberships, yet they grow lonelier, living with superficial 'friendships' and weak ties that fail to reinforce anything from their past. Hence, people lose their sense of identity, become alienated, powerless and even derelict; local neighbourhoods and families become meaningless and marginal. Decentralization into viable groups will allow people to mould their own lives in caring contexts better.

<sup>42</sup> The divine pattern is unity-in-diversity, hence decentralization helps maximize the potential even for the smallest sub-cultural unit to create its own future without undue pressures to conform to the mass-mind or pop-culture; cf. Bakke, 25. Conn, 247 observes, 'All the cities of the earth are represented in the city of God, maintaining their particularities, their glory tribute for the city.' (Cf. [Isa. 60:15](#); [Rev. 21:3](#)).

<sup>43</sup> God's justice desires that each person will be empowered to make decisions that affect his/her family and community. Through decentralization, the smallest or weakest political unit can allow maximum participation of individuals; cities will then be less able to make demands for more production and industrial concentration without consulting the affected people.

<sup>44</sup> God's purpose for humanity is that each person will be able to participate in productive work (according to his/her ability) and to share resources with others (while taking only according to his/her needs). Decentralization takes away the need to develop welfare programmes, but rather encourages community projects that fit local needs so that the people will not be continually poor.

<sup>45</sup> Living together demands great tolerance of different groups for each other. To encourage each group to retain and develop their unique gifts, the Church must make maximum allowances for variety, and respect various customs and traditions. On the absence of centralized structures in the NT, cf. R. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 48; and E. Hatch, *The Growth of Church Institutions* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1887).

<sup>46</sup> 'House-churches' provide 'democratic space' for people to ask basic questions about life and create new possibilities on how to organize their lives, while enabling them to heal the victims of urban life.

politics and leisure have moved out of residential areas; hence different forms of church life are needed.<sup>47</sup>

### As a Religious Centre

Finally, the Church must try to transform the city as a religious focal point. In order to do this, the Church must act on at least four ways, as follows:

First, the Church must relativize the city-gods, for the city is not neutral, but idolatrous; more Babylonian than Jerusalemic. City-structures are not necessarily evil (for they are needed for social order), but they always tend to devolve into oppressive entities used for the protection and security of the powerful and affluent. God and his purposes are often neglected in all aspects of city life—political, economic, educational, family etc. *Thus it is the Church's prophetic role to denounce any absolutization of human/city institutions, ideologies and policies that fall short of God's absolute standards.* God must be recognized as Lord over the city; just as the prophets mocked the city-gods,<sup>48</sup> so must the Church call modern city-gods to conform to God's will. [p. 153](#)

Second, the Church must desacralize the city, urbanism and its Mammonism (cf. [Mt. 6:24](#); [Col. 3:5](#)). Cities tend to be Babylons which sacralize themselves, demanding the centralization of power and wealth towards themselves. Upon urbanization's hidden agenda are the dichotomization of life into public and private spheres, the privatization of the Gospel, and a weak view of corporate or structural sin.<sup>49</sup> It would be sinful, therefore, for the Church to allow excessive (or absolute) powers to the city (or *any* state or institution).

The Church must not blindly follow the urban pull; rather it should stay detached from urban things, avoid hoarding or accumulating, and lay up treasures in the New Jerusalem (cf. [Mt. 6:19–21](#)). By its willingness to part with anything with the attitude of contentment and without a twinge of regret (cf. [1 Cor. 7:29–32](#)), the church witnesses against the city's bondage to Mammon, and witnesses to the New Jerusalem's wealth through its *voluntary poverty* on earth.<sup>50</sup>

This leads to the third religious action of the Church in the city: it must patiently endure (cf. [Rev. 13:10](#)) the city's persecution. Citizens of the true Jerusalem will often be the minority in this world's Babylons; they have to accept, like its Lord who came to

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<sup>47</sup> E.g. Bible study groups, prayer meetings, basic Christian communities, etc. Cf. Cox, 136–138. Perhaps as a rule, churches should seek to transform each social grouping into a Christ-worshipping community.

<sup>48</sup> They mocked the gods of Egypt ([Ex. 12:12](#); [Num. 33:4](#); cf. [Ps. 74:12ff](#); [Isa. 51:9ff](#)), Ahab and Jezebel (i.e., Baal; [1 Ki. 18](#)), Ninevah (so Nahum) and Babylon ([Isa. 46–47](#)). W. Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) points out on Egypt, 'the mythic claims of the empire are ended by the disclosure of the *alternative religion of the freedom of God*. In the place of the gods of Egypt, creatures of the imperial consciousness, Moses discloses Yahweh the sovereign one who acts in his lordly freedom ... At the same time, Moses dismantles the politics of oppression and exploitation by countering it with a *politics of justice and compassion* ... It is the marvel of prophetic faith that both imperial religion and imperial politics could be broken ... Moses introduced not just the new free God and not just a message of social liberation. Rather his work came precisely at the engagement of the *religion of God's freedom* with the *politics of human justice*' (pp. 16f) and on Babylon, 'When the Babylonian gods have been mocked, when the Babylonian culture has been ridiculed ... then history is inverted. Funeral becomes festival, grief becomes doxology, and despair turns to amazement' (p. 75).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Conn, 230–236.

<sup>50</sup> The Church's voluntary poverty is patterned after Christ ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)) and the apostles: 'as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things' ([6:10](#); cf. [Mt. 10:9f](#); [Lk. 12:33](#); [14:25–33](#); [Acts 3:6](#)).

establish a new order,<sup>51</sup> the rejection of (and the sufferings inflicted by) those who cling to the security provided by the empty glamour of the earthly city. In humble suffering love, Jesus rode a colt to confront the powers (cf. [1 Cor. 2:8](#)) and wept over the coming destruction of apostate Jerusalem ([Mt. 23:37–39](#)); in any mission to overcome evil, the deliverer must absorb it by taking it on personally. For Christ this inevitably meant death (cf. [Lk. 9:22](#); [13:33](#); [17:25](#); [18:32](#)), crucified outside the city gate ([Heb. 13:12](#)).

Thus the Church must reject Christendom's crusading mentality, p. 154 which tries to overcome the city's evils by power or by wealth; rather it must use the spiritual power (cf. [2 Cor. 10:3–5](#); [Zech. 4:6](#)) of suffering love, participating in Christ's sufferings (cf. [Col. 1:24f](#); [2 Cor. 4:10–18](#)) in trying to call Babylons to repentance and faith.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, this means also that if the Church is faithful in its mission, it will inevitably become a church *among* the poor, and *of* the poor and marginalized.<sup>53</sup>

Fourth and last, the Church must have times of retreat periodically, especially to gain spiritual vision and power to meet the challenges of the city. Though marginalized (and sometimes forced to flee temporarily, cf. [Rev. 18:4f](#)),<sup>54</sup> the Church must stay in, or force its way into, the city in order to confront it with the claims of Christ—just like its Lord who felt compelled to go to Jerusalem, though he knew that the godly were persecuted and killed there ([Lk. 9:51](#); [18:31–34](#)).<sup>55</sup>

However, in order to have 'staying power', the Church must withdraw regularly 'into the desert', to be free and detached from the city's power. There seems to be a historical pattern of godly people requiring a key desert experience (or a *continuing* one, or *both*);<sup>56</sup> even Jesus himself had desert retreats ([Mk. 1:2–6](#); [1:35](#); [Jn. 11:54](#), etc.).<sup>57</sup> The redemptive pattern seems to start with spiritual power from the periphery, and then extend in mission to the centre (the city).

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>51</sup> The city which Jesus revealed was different from (or more costly than) the one envisioned by the chief-priests, Pharisees and even the disciples!

<sup>52</sup> An important implication is that the Church should reach the city through costly people-to-people discipleship, and not depend on technique or technology, impersonal events, media blitzes or simplistic formulae; cf. Bakke, 22ff.

<sup>53</sup> The NT Church started among the poor: the masses of Jerusalem (not its elite classes); in a colonized centre, not the colonial power. Paul seems to have consciously avoided cities where the well-to-do Jews were in greater number (e.g., Tyre, Alexandria, Berytus, Delos, Putoli, etc.); cf. S. Applebaum, 'The Social and Economic Status of the Jews in the Diaspora', *The Jewish People in the First Century, II* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 706f.

<sup>54</sup> Flight is an option, particularly if every means is blocked for Christians to fulfil their mission; cf. Ellul, 181 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Jesus also knew that not many will accept him and his sacrifice; in this is true love, that even if rejected by many, there is no flight nor despair, but proceeding anyway to save the few who will respond.

<sup>56</sup> E.g., Abraham ([Gen. 11:31](#); [14:23f](#)), Joseph ([47:29f](#)), Moses ([Heb. 11:23–26](#)), David, Elijah, etc.; cf. Conn, 227f.

<sup>57</sup> It is from the least possible place that God chose (and continues to choose) to reveal himself; the resurrection happened outside the city gate, too. Jesus lived as a pilgrim wanderer (cf. [Lk. 9:58](#)); 'not in complaint, but in recognition of the divine curse on the sins of the city, Jesus bears the curse of wandering that Cain had sought to escape', Conn, 243. It is in this light that the early Christian imagery of 'pilgrim' and 'exile' can be better appreciated; cf. Conn, 249.



So, to the question, 'Is there hope for redemption of the city?', the **p. 155** Scriptures reply, 'Indeed, God has a plan for the city and is working in history to realize this plan.' The city will be the fulfilment of paradise: the eschatological perspective of the Scriptures

ties the future of the city with the original, sinless part of Eden and its restoration in Christ. Even under the curse, man's cultural calling will be maintained. Adam's painful labour will subdue the resistant earth; Eve's travail will fill it.<sup>58</sup>

God is Lord over the city, and thus he does not need to wait for the full consummation in the New Jerusalem for its implementation. In and through the Church, he is transforming the city into a more humane social order, a more just cultural centre and a Christ-honouring religious centre. The presence of God's people in the city is a witness to possible reconciliation (cf. [Ps. 87:4-6](#)).

Of course, the Church may fail, just as Jerusalems tend to become Babylons. The reality of fallenness in the city precludes any naive optimism about it. However, God cannot fail, and will not let his plan fail: 'The ultimate purpose for which the universe was created, embedded like a seed in the heart of the world, will be attained. The whole of history meets in Christ, its alpha and omega.'<sup>59</sup> Though Satan is still the 'ruler of this world' ([Jn. 12:31](#), cf. [Eph. 2:2f](#); [1 Jn. 5:19](#)), he has already been vanquished ([Jn. 16:11](#), cf. [14:30](#)); Christ has already triumphed over the powers that rule the city.

Therefore the Church is called to be God's mission-community in the city, which stands for all that is righteous, humane and good, and denounces all that is unjust and inhumane.<sup>60</sup> Its mission is to set the city free to worship and obey God, calling it to repentance and faith, so that it will build its future according to God's revealed will. Such transformation will not occur merely at the end of history, but is always occurring in history, as the Church participates in God's urban mission today.<sup>61</sup> **p. 156**

With such eschatological hope in historical realism, may the Church be faithful to God's mission in the city!

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## Urban Missions: A Historical Perspective

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<sup>58</sup> Conn, 237.

<sup>59</sup> Tonna, 119.

<sup>60</sup> The Church's mission is not to build a separate history, but to direct world history into a history of God-glorifying fulfilments amidst an ambiguous history of struggles for human liberation from all bondages (spiritual, social, political, economic, etc.) through its prophetic preaching and self-sacrificial service in the name of Christ.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Conn, 276f. This optimistic tendency is based not on youthful idealism nor sociological analysis, but on the eschatological vision. This is not post-millennarian, but historic premillennarian, which recognizes that the consummation will be brought about only through a dramatic intervention from heaven, not through human achievements.

# Bong Rin Ro

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*Not only is the Asian Church itself come of age; but also the Asian churches' mission and ministry. With his vast experience in Asia as the Executive Secretary of Asia Theological Association, Dr. Bong Rin Ro gives a survey of the history of the urban mission starting from the early church through Medieval, Renaissance and Reformation periods right through to modern times, and also chalks out the future of urban missions in Asian churches. The article ends with concrete steps to develop full-fledged theological courses on urban mission in Asian churches. (This is another paper presented at the recent ATA Theological Consultation in October/November at Singapore on the theme of Theological Education for Urban Ministry in Asia.) Theological courses in urban ministry, systematical, supervised practical ministry for the students and the search for and implementation of nontraditional forms of education in the urban churches are the burden of the author. No doubt these suggestions can be taken up in other regions of the world too.*

Editor

## INTRODUCTION

Every day 10,000 Indians are pouring into the commercial city of Bombay from rural villages to find employment. This phenomenon is typical throughout Asia and around the world. The interest in urban studies in recent years has captured the attention of both secular and Christian scholars. Yet as the study of urban ministry is a relatively new phenomenon, historical materials on the subject are quite scarce. Here I have selected only two questions relevant to the Asian church; namely first: how has urban ministry developed historically from the Early Church to the modern era? and secondly: how has the Asian church responded to the urban situation, particularly since World War II?

## URBAN MINISTRY

Dr. Francis M. DuBose, professor of missions at the Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, states that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem, **P. 158** grew up in the city of Nazareth, and was crucified and resurrected in the city of Jerusalem. He loved the city and wept over it ([Luke 9:35](#)); he went around cities and villages to preach the Kingdom of God ([Matt. 9:35-36](#)).<sup>1</sup>

The ministry of the Apostle Paul centred around major cities of Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome to plant churches. Ervin E. Hastey's article, 'Reaching the Cities First: A Biblical Model of World Evangelization' in *An Urban World: Churches Face The Future*, describes the apostles' urban ministries in the 1st century.<sup>2</sup>

## THE EARLY CHURCH (100-450)

Early Church Christianity was rapidly spreading throughout the major cities of the Roman Empire, and by 180 AD the gospel was spread to all the Roman Empire. By 200 AD the

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<sup>1</sup> Ervin E. Hastey, 'Reaching the Cities First: A Biblical Model of World Evangelization', in Rose and Hadaway, *An Urban World* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Hastey, pp. 147-165.

first church buildings appeared in cities only, while the Christians prior to this time had their worship in homes.

Dr. David B. Barrett, who edited the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, published a very helpful booklet, *World Class Cities and World Evangelization*, with ample statistics and historical data. There were many early church fathers who established strong Christian centres in cities. Irenaeus (120–202), who wrote *Against Heresies*, became Bishop of Lyon in 175 AD. In Rome, Hippolytus (170–235) fought against Manicheanism, and in 249 seven missionary bishops were sent by Cornelius of Rome to the cities of Tours, Arles, Narbonne, Toulouse, Paris, Limoges and Clermont in Gaul. There were 45,000 Christians which represented 5% of 900,000 people and 46 Presbyters in Rome in 251. More than 100 bishoprics existed in southern cities in Italy.<sup>3</sup>

To the east, Abgar IX, King of Edessa in the Tigris-Euphrates valley (now Urfa) became the first Christian ruler in 179, and by 225 Edessa became the first city-state religion and thus became the mission centre for Eastern Syria.<sup>4</sup>

In North Africa Christianity spread to major cities from the 2nd to 5th century, and the North African Church became one of the strong p. 159 Christian witnesses in Early Church history. Men such as Tertullian of Carthage (150–225), Bishop Cyprian of Carthage (248–258), Clement of Alexandria (155–220), Origen of Alexandria (185–254), who wrote the *Hexapla*, and St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) actively engaged in Christian ministries. St. Augustine, who produced the 14 year work of the *De Civitate Dei* depicted the fall of Rome and introduced a new model of a city which Christ established.<sup>5</sup>

Enormous spiritual contributions to the cities of Palestine and Asia Minor by the Cappadocean Fathers cannot be forgotten: St. Basil of Caesarea (329–379), Gregory of Nazianzus (329?–389), and Gregory of Nyssa (330–395). Since the dedication of the city as the capital by Emperor Constantine I in 330, Constantinople (now Istanbul) became the centre of Christianity in the Eastern Empire. Renowned preachers such as John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (398–403), preached the gospel fervently. In Antioch by 380 AD 50% of the population of 200,000 people claimed to be Christian.<sup>6</sup>

The system of the metropolitan bishops was developed in the Early Church. The bishop was the spiritual leader in a city in which all the Christians joined the city-parish. The principle of one parish per one city was decided by legislation, and the Council of Chalcedon (451) even made a condition that a parish must be built in a city for it to be recognized as a city.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Christianity was predominantly urban in the Early Church.

The beginning of rural churches occurred only in the 3rd century in northern Italy. In the 4th and 5th centuries rural churches began to multiply in France, and by this time Christianity became widely spread throughout Europe.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David B. Barrett, *World Class Cities and World Evangelization* (Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope, 1986), p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Harvie M. Conn, 'The Kingdom of God and the City of Man', *Discipling the City*, ed. Roger S. Greenway (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 14–14. See Raymond J. Bakke, *The Urban Christian* (Bromley, Kent: MARC Europe, 1987). pp. 85–87.

<sup>6</sup> Barrett, p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Crawley, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE MEDIEVAL CHURCH (450–1350)

With the fall of the Roman Empire in 476, while the church became a powerful institution in Europe, Rome and other cities were deteriorating because of the invasions of barbarians (Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths) from northern and central Europe. The imperial authority had no power to protect the citizens in the cities, and the urban **P. 160** population sharply declined. This initial five hundred years after the fall of Rome is known as the Dark Ages.

With the weakening of the central power, the feudal system fully developed, especially from 900–1150 AD. In the feudal age most parishes had rural populations, towns were neither numerous nor populous. Castles and walled towns were safely guarded by the feudal lord's armies that provided security to peasants and townsmen. Consequently, the church structures disintegrated because of feudalistic pressures.

During the medieval age a new religious movement, known as monasticism, developed. With the establishment of the Benedictine Order at Monte Cassino in 529, monasticism spread quickly throughout the Medieval Church. The monastery which was a religious community, 'in fact a new kind of *polis*',<sup>9</sup> replaced religious functions of the theopolis of the Early Church and became a link between the classical city and the medieval city.

It was in the monastery that the ideal purposes of the city were sorted out, kept alive and eventually renewed. It was here too that the practical value of restraint, order, regularity, honesty, inner discipline was established before these qualities were passed over to the medieval town and post-medieval capitalism, in the form of inventions and business practices: the clock, the account book, the ordered day.<sup>10</sup>

Thus the monastery played a very important role of keeping alive the relationship between the image of the heavenly city and the Roman cities.

The withdrawal of the church from cities to monasteries caused the church to be more inwardly oriented than the outward ministry and helped to create spiritual strength to meet the chaotic challenges of the medieval period: consequently, it affected the church to be illprepared for the new urban development of the Renaissance period.<sup>11</sup>

From the 11th to 13th centuries a resurgence of new urban development took place. With the rise of the new Holy Roman Empire (962–1806) in Europe, imperial conflict with papal authority intensified. In 1054 there was a permanent separation between the Eastern **p. 161** Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The papal power in the West sharply gained ascendancy through Pope Gregory VII (1075–85) who degraded Emperor Henry IV of the Holy Roman Empire at Canossa in 1077. Papal authority reached its peak during the time of Pope Innocent III (1195–1216).

With papal blessing the imperial rulers of Europe launched eight major Crusades (1096–1270) against the Muslim Turks to recover the Holy Land. The decline of feudalism saw a new developing mercantilism in the 12th century. Guilds, free crafts, corporations, and unions along with the new commercial-industrial classes developed in the 12th century. By the 13th century, a credit system was established in cities; consequently, Venice and Genoa became influential commercial cities in Italy. Early scholasticism began

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<sup>9</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (N.Y.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), pp.246–247. See Crawley, p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, XIV, 28, quoted in A. H. Armstrong, ed., *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), p. 414. See Conn, pp. 15–16.

<sup>11</sup> Conn, p. 40.

to rise in the middle of the 11th century and universities were erected in cities like Salerno, Bologna (1150) in Italy, Paris (1200), and Oxford (1207); and Aristotle's literature was introduced to the West (ca. 1130–1280).<sup>12</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Thomas Aquinas (1226–74), John Dun Scotus (1265–1308), William of Ockham (1280–1349), and other scholars tried to unify reason with faith. Thus the late medieval cities became the education centres that made contributions to urban development.

The new religious orders of friars, the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians and Carmelites, developed in the 12th–13th centuries in cities and outskirts of the cities. Quite different from the earlier monastic monks who spent time alone in prayer and meditation, these friars worked in urban hospitals and almshouses.

In the Eastern church one must not forget the important development of the Nestorian church, based in Syria. By 1000 AD the Nestorian church in Eastern Syria had 250 dioceses across Asia with 12 million members. These dioceses were organized in cities under 15 metropolitan provinces within the Arab Caliphate and five in India and China. The patriarch of Constantinople in the Greek Orthodox Church managed 624 dioceses in eastern Mediterranean cities. By 1150 the Western Syrian Church (Jacobite) had 20 metropolitan sees and 103 bishoprics based in cities.<sup>13</sup>

## THE RENAISSANCE (1350–1650)

With the sharp decline of the papal power from the beginning of the P. 162 14th century, and the rise of the Renaissance, the secularization of cities took place in Europe. Harvie Conn in his 'Kingdom of God/City of Man' states that the nominalism of Ockham, which emphasized the concept of positivism and empiricism, led the Christian faith into probability rather than certainty; consequently, the humanist tendency developed not only within secular society but also within the church during the Renaissance period.<sup>14</sup>

New scientific discoveries uplifted human aspiration. Gunpowder began to be used from 1350, and Gutenberg's lead-cast printing published the first book in 1450. Copernicus (1473–1543) with his 'heliocentric theory', Galileo (1564–1642) with his use of the telescope and Johann Kepler's theories of planetary motion all challenged the traditional scientific views held in the church.

The money economy in this period created the banking system and led to the rise of capitalist economy. From the end of the 15th century exploration trade began in Europe. Columbus discovered America in 1492 and Vasco de Gama went to India through Capetown in South Africa in 1497. The next 450 years of the Western colonial period have been labelled by K. M. Panikkar, the Indian historian, in his *Asia and Western Dominance*, the 'Vasco de Gama Epoch' (1497–1945).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Renaissance art, sculptures and gorgeous cathedrals created the humanistic and secularistic interpretation of religion and urban development.

## THE REFORMATION ERA (1517–1600)

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<sup>12</sup> Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), pp. 240–241.

<sup>13</sup> Barrett, p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Conn, pp. 18–19.

<sup>15</sup> K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1961), p. 13.

In the midst of the rapid transition from the 'theopolis to megalopolis',<sup>16</sup> (i.e., from the church-state supported urban cities inherited from the Constantine Era, to the very large urban development of the Reformation Age), the Reformation encouraged the further development of urban cities.

First of all, the Reformation doctrines of *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, p. 163 *sola gratia*, and the priesthood of all believers, minimized the authority of the medieval church authority and helped the secular rulers to be free from the medieval concept of the *Corpus Christianum*, a Christian society in which both the church and state as God's instruments were to achieve God's purpose for man.

On the other hand, the Reformation attempted to bring the church and the state to the authority of the Scriptures, and exhorted true Christian freedom to be exercised for the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. Neither Luther nor Calvin, as the children of the medieval *Corpus Christianum* tradition, separated church from state as the Anabaptists advocated.

Luther emphasized in his Commentary on [Psalm 101](#) the distinctive and peculiar nature and commission of the state which he considered God-ordained, not as the secular arm of the Church. There is no doubt that the separation of the two powers was a real problem to Luther. Recent historians somewhat differ in their interpretations of Luther's separation of two powers as to whether he was more concerned with the Medieval concept of the church and state. However, his main concerns were to bring Christian moral and spiritual blessings to a society deeply stricken by sin.<sup>17</sup>

Calvin, 26 years younger than Luther, called Luther 'much respected father', and also distinguished the two separate worlds, repudiating both the magistrate's interference in the internal affairs of religion and the ecclesiastical claim of authority in the secular government. Paradoxically, it may seem, Calvin also believed in close interrelation between church and state, based on his belief that church and state had the same Lord and the same goal. After two decades of struggle, Calvin finally established a theocentric 'Christian commonwealth' in the city of Geneva (1555–64).<sup>18</sup>

The impact of the Reformation on the development of urban development cannot be minimized. Fifty out of 65 imperial cities in the Holy Roman Empire officially recognized the Reformation either permanently or periodically as a majority movement. Almost 200 cities and towns in Germany with a population of over 1,000 people including large cities with over 25,000 such as Nuremberg, Strasbourg, Lubeck, Augsburg, and Ulm had strong Protestant influences.<sup>19</sup> p. 164

## THE MODERN CHURCH AGE (1600 ONWARDS)

### Industrial Revolution and Rapid Urbanization

With new discoveries in science in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Industrial Revolution made inroads into major cities in Europe. Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity (1687),

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<sup>16</sup> Harvie Conn uses four terms to describe the urban development from the early church to modern time: *Cosmopolis* for ancient cities, *Theopolis* for the medieval cities, *Megalopolis* for the cities of the Renaissance and the Reformation, and *Necropolis* for modern cities. See Conn, pp. 10, 13, 26, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Bong Rin Ro, 'The Church and State in Calvin' (unpublished S.T.M. thesis, Concordia Lutheran Seminary, St. Louis, 1967), pp. 20–21.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52–56.

<sup>19</sup> Conn, p. 21.

Richard Arkwright's spinning machine (1768), James Watt's steam engine (1769), Edmund Cartwright's power-loom (1784), James Hargreave's 'spinning Jenny' (1770), and steam power and coal fuel (1775) produced the first Industrial Revolution in England (1760–1830). This later followed in other European nations, and finally crossed the Atlantic Ocean to America in the middle of the 19th century. Adam Smith published the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 to encourage the *laissez-faire* concept of free enterprise.

The Enlightenment Age in Europe from the middle of the 18th century further undermined traditional biblical beliefs. With Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (1848), man became nothing but an animal conditioned by socio-economic environments.

One of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution was the rapid growth of urban population. According to Barrett's report, the population of London jumped from 861,000 (1800) to 2,320,000 (1850), then 4.2 million (1875) and 6,480,000 (1900), and that of Paris, from 547,000 (1800) to 1,314,000 (1850),<sup>20</sup> 2,250,000 (1875) and 3,330,000 (1900). The population of New York City had sharply increased from 682,000 (1850) to 1.9 million (1875), and then 4,242,000 (1900). Teeming millions migrated to cities to find jobs and happiness. Conn remarks that the question during the medieval time was 'Am I a good man?' and the question of the modern man is 'Am I a happy man?'.<sup>21</sup>

In 1800 no city had a million people, but in 1900 11 cities had more than a million, all in Europe and America except Tokyo and Calcutta. In 1980, 235 cities had over a million and in 2,000 AD there will be 439 cities with over a million people, 25 of which will have more than 11 million. Twenty-two out of these 25 metropolitan cities will be in the Third World, By 2,000 AD, the number of cities with more than 100,000 will be 2,200.<sup>22</sup>

The over-crowded urban cities had many problems: child and p. 165 female labour, slums, poverty, prostitution, congestion, air-pollution. The horrible conditions of industrial cities in Europe and the United States caused churches to pay more attention to these human needs.

### **Evangelical Christians' Responses to Urban Problems**

Evangelical Christians in England, Europe, and America in the 18th and 19th centuries were not unaware of the crying needs of the cities. Many Christian social agencies were established to help the poor.

The Wesleyan revival in the 18th century produced the Clapham Sect of wealthy Christian politicians and businessmen who initiated social reform in England. Henry Venn ministered to the people of the Clapham Sect, and his son, John Venn, who founded the Church Missionary Society, were champions of the abolition of slavery and prison reform.<sup>23</sup>

At the end of the 18th century, when poverty was the greatest social problem in England, William Wilberforce, prominent Christian politician, set up the 'Society for Bettering the Conditions of, and Increasing the Comforts of, the Poor' in 1796, produced

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<sup>20</sup> Barrett, pp. 42–43.

<sup>21</sup> Conn, p.27.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48. See Barrett, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup> William N. Kerr, 'Historical Evangelical Involvement in the City', *The Urban Mission*, ed. Craig Ellison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 29.

the Clapham Sect's Manifesto in 1797, and led the way for the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.<sup>24</sup>

Lord Shaftesbury out of his deep Christian social concern tried to improve the conditions of the working class, with better housing, health, sanitation, schools, and labour legislation. In 1845 he reported to Parliament about the housing conditions of the poor in St. George's, Hanover Square, in London in which 929 families had one-room dwellings, and sometimes five families lived in one single room; consequently, the 'model lodging houses' were erected.<sup>25</sup>

The *Rauhe Haus* in Germany was a well-known Christian social institution founded by Rev. Johann Heinrich Wichien (1808–1881) a Luther pietist in Hamburg, for abandoned boys. There were 250 branches of *Rauhe Haus* in Germany alone, and these *Rauhe Häuser* finally started '*Die Innere Mission*' in 1848.

Roger S. Greenway, editor of *Urban Mission* in America, has identified a critical period of 1870–1910 in the history of the United States when many Christian social agency programmes developed. The American Christian Commission was established by James E. p. 166 Yeatman in 1865. The Commission gave reports on urban needs in 35 representative cities and recommended a cohesive strategy for Protestant churches for urban ministry.<sup>26</sup>

The Salvation Army, founded by William Booth in London in 1878, had extensive slum ministry both in England and America. D. L. Moody built a humble church structure on Illinois Street especially for the urban poor and invited everyone to the church. Moody hung a sign at the door step: 'Ever welcome to this house of God are strangers and the poor; the seats are free.'<sup>27</sup> In 1876 Jerry McAuley started the Wall Street Mission and founded the Gremorne Mission in 1882 in a deprived area of New York City. Between 1872 and 1892 more than one hundred rescue missions were established in America and abroad.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Rise of the Social Gospel (1900 onwards) and Evangelical Reactions**

The social meaning of the gospel was already found in the writings of Horace Bushnell, J. W. H. Stuckenberg, and others, but it was Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918), of the Rochester Theological Seminary, who popularized the implications of the social gospel for the 20th century through his writings: *Christianity and Social Crisis* and *A Theology of the Social Gospel*. He was influenced by the thoughts of Kant, Hegel, Darwin, Karl Marx, Pleiderer, Ritschl, and Dewey, and tried to establish the Kingdom of God on earth through 'a progressive reign of love in human affairs' (*A Theology of the Social Gospel*, p. 142).<sup>29</sup>

Evangelicals and fundamentalists in the 19th and 20th centuries were very much alarmed by the increasing influence of theological liberalism and the social gospel in theological schools and local churches. J. Gresham Machen, A. T. Robertson, and many

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>26</sup> Roger S. Greenway, 'History of Evangelizing World Class Cities', unpublished paper at the Trinary Consultation on Evangelizing World Class Cities in Chicago (March 14–17, 1986), p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>29</sup> J. L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1946), pp. 316–318, 324–325.



other orthodox theologians and churchmen fought against the theological liberalism which promoted the social gospel. Roger Greenway states: p. 167

The controversy between Protestant fundamentalists and advocates of the Social Gospel did serious damage to urban missions. The one side offered positive suggestions for improved social conditions but lacked the soul-saving message of the Bible. The other side preached the gospel in a truncated form which left society as a whole unjudged and unchanged. In many ways we still face the dilemma caused by this controversy and the fears and suspicions which it created. Consequently, Protestant missions to the city have not moved much beyond the place where they were eighty to ninety years ago.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Changing Ecumenical Theology of Missions for Cities**

Conn has traced the history of ecumenical involvement in meeting human needs in cities from the International Missionary Council in Jerusalem from 1928 to the 1960s.

The rise of liberal theology from the Age of Enlightenment in the middle of the 18th century, down to the present wcc's 'Salvation Today' theology (Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Harnack-Barth-Bultmann-Liberation Theology) has had direct influence upon the present ecumenical urban mission.<sup>31</sup>

The population explosion, the rapid increase of megalopolis, inhumane conditions of living, and rising problems in urban cities, all directly influenced the theology of missions. In 1932 Dr. William E. Hocking in his *Rethinking Missions* redirected the theology of missions to the position of appreciation of other religions rather than bringing other religionists to Christ for conversion.<sup>32</sup> Dr. Gerald Anderson, Director of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in Ventnor, New Jersey, has succinctly summarized the historical development of Christian missions in this way:

The debate had moved from the strategy question of How missions at Edinburgh, to Wherefore missions? (Jerusalem 1928), to Whence missions? (Madras 1938), Whither missions? (Whitby 1947), and Why missions? (Willingen 1952). The Ghana Assembly of 1957-58 pushed it one step further, to the most radical question in history, What is the Christian mission?<sup>33</sup> p. 168

The whole emphasis on the horizontal relationship between man and man in this present world, often at the expense of the vertical relationship with God, has redirected the ecumenical thrust to poverty and human rights in urban cities and rural areas. wcc has a department of urban ministry which has its regional offices in different continents, including Asia.

In recent years the evangelical response to urban ministry has sprung up rapidly. The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) produced a booklet on *Christian Witness to the Urban Poor* out of the Pattaya meeting in Thailand in 1980. Dr. Raymond Bakke, LCWE Urban Ministry Coordinator, has been extensively travelling around the world to conduct urban seminars. The Evangelical Coalition for Urban Mission (ECUM) in England is another effort to reach the cities with the gospel. Urban mission programmes have been set up at an increasing number of theological seminaries both in the West and Asia. Evangelical foreign missions are giving more thought to urban ministry than ever

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<sup>30</sup> Greenway, pp. 23-24.

<sup>31</sup> Conn, pp. 47-51.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 456.

<sup>33</sup> Conn, p. 52.

before. There is no doubt that the future battles for the church and the world will be fought in cities.

## URBAN MISSION IN ASIA

'Modern civilization is European in origin, and it was not till our day that the Asiatics awakened to the need of modernization,'<sup>34</sup> said J. Selwyn Schapiro in his *Modern and Contemporary European History*. Certainly, the urbanization of Asian countries has an intimate relationship with Western trends.

### Colonial Rule, Industrial Development and Rapid Urbanization

Panikkar divides his 'Vasco da Gama Epoch' of Asian History (1498–1945) into four periods: the Age of Expansion (1498–1750) the Age of Conquest (1750–1858), the Age of Empire (1858–1914), and Europe in Retreat (1918–1939).<sup>35</sup> The European colonial powers of the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, Germans, and Americans along with the Japanese during World War II colonized all the nations of Asia except Japan and Thailand.

As the colonialists and Western missionaries developed urban cities in their colonies, rapid changes of life style took place, particularly in cities, for they brought industrial development, modern education, science and medicine, as well as Western cultures, to the East. Ceylon was controlled by the Portuguese (1509–1658), Dutch (1658–1796), and the British (1796–1948). In the 18th and 19th centuries it was *Pax Britannica* which saw the British Empire providing the balance of power around the world. Britain ruled India, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma, and Hong Kong. The Dutch ruled Indonesia, and the French in former French Indo-China (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), Spanish and Americans in the Philippines.

China was torn into pieces by the foreign colonial powers: the British in the Yangtze River valley, the French in the south, the Germans in Shantung Province, the Russians in the north, and the Japanese in Manchuria. Following the visit of Commander Perry to Japan in 1853, Japan was forced to open her doors to the West, and from the beginning of the Meiji Period in 1868, modernization began. The hermit nation of Korea was opened to the West by the Open Door Treaty in 1882.

The Industrial Revolution occurred in Asia later than Europe (from 1750) and North America (from 1850). The Industrial Revolution began in China in the 1870s. The first steam navigation company organized itself in 1872, the first railroad, between Shanghai and Woosung, was built in 1876, and 768 miles of railway were constructed between Peking and Han Kow in 1895. The first telegraph line was established in 1881, and in 1890 the Hanyang iron works started. Timothy Richards founded the first public school in Shanghai in 1891.

Japan first experienced the Industrial Revolution in 1895, with common men and the middle class freely entering into many business careers; the second phase of its Industrial Revolution occurred in the early 20th century (1901–12). The modern Japanese economic miracle traces back to the Korean War (1950–53).

As the British East India Co., Dutch East India Co. and other colonial companies in Europe and America established extensive trade centres in major sea port cities in South

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<sup>34</sup> J. Selwyn Schapiro, *Modern and Contemporary European History* (Cambridge Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1957), p. 617.

<sup>35</sup> Panikkar, p. 8.

Asia and South East Asia, the population of these cities swelled. There was a mass migration of population from one country to another under the colonial rule. For example, a large number of Chinese migrated to Malaysia in the 1850s and 1880s to work on tobacco plantations. Thousands of Indians were brought into Malaysia and Singapore by the British for rubber plantations. Consequently, there are a vast number of Chinese and Indians in major cities in South East Asia today who are controlling the economy of the countries. p. 170

The rapid urbanization of the Far East is rather recent, and in close relationship with the industrial development of the last 25 years. In 1983 among 57,330,000 workers in Japan, 18,820,000 (32.8%) were classified as factory workers and another 14,080,000 (24.5%) as factory-related industrial workers. These teeming millions of workers reside in urban cities like Tokyo (12 million) and Osaka/Kobe.

With the export processing zones developing in urban cities like Seoul and Kaoshiung (Taiwan), millions of factory workers were brought into cities from rural areas. For example, Dr. Tsai Kuo-Shan, Director of the Taiwan Industrial Evangelical Fellowship, reported that the industrial sector provided jobs for nearly 80,000 people in 1952 and over 2.8 million in 1983, and 3,863,000 by 1989 which will represent 46.9% of the total labour force. Between 1953 and 1982 the agricultural employment fell from 52.1% to 18.9% of the total work force, while the industrial work force rose from 16.9 to 41.2%.<sup>37</sup>

Asian cities, like major cities in the West, are becoming overcrowded with increasing economic, political, social and moral problems, and provide tremendous challenges for the Christian church in Asia.

One of the horrible consequences of rapid urbanization is the creation of slums for the poor. Some 730,000 people, according to a survey by the Center for Urban Studies (1983), lived in 771 squatter areas in the modern city of Dakha which had the population of 3 million. By the end of this century, these urban poor may make up the majority population in the city with 20 million people. The destitute conditions of the poor in the relocation area of Manila have also created real concerns within the Filipino churches.<sup>38</sup> In Bangkok there were 1,020 slums in 1985, with only two churches and two house groups in the areas, and two Christian ministers are trying to witness to 600,000 prostitutes. In early 1976 a Christian group launched out in Malaysia to reach 500,000 drug addicts.

### History of Urban Ministry

There is a wide range of development in church history among the p. 171 Asian nations. The Indian church claims to trace its origins to St. Thomas of the 1st century. *The Acts of Thomas*, written in the early 3rd century, describes the ministry of Thomas in north and south India, and by 226 the churches in north-west India, Afghanistan, and Baluchistan had bishops and did missionary work. When Marco Polo visited India in 1288 and 1292, he found many Christians and considered the Mar Thomas Church (which used the Syriac language) very significant.

Nestorian Christianity was introduced in China during the 7th and 13th centuries, and the Roman Catholic friars and the Jesuits did their missionary work in Asia in the 13th and 16th centuries.

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<sup>37</sup> Tsai Kuo-Shan, 'Growing Factory Evangelism in Taiwan', *Asia Theological News*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Oct.—Dec., 1986), pp. 4–5.

<sup>38</sup> Viv Grigg, 'The Urban Poor: Prime Missionary Target', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July 1987), pp. 263–265.

Protestant missions were initiated mainly by William Carey in Calcutta (1793) and Robert Morrison in China (1807), Many foreign mission societies in Europe and North America sent their missionaries to Asia during the 19th century. Except for Japan, most recipients of the gospel in Asia in the initial years of missionary work were rural people. However, missionary popular education revolutionized the traditional educational systems in many Asian nations where only the elite class had the privileges of education. Consequently, missionary education produced the middle class 'white collar' Christianity in urban cities of many Asian nations.

While many Western missions agencies concentrated their ministries in urban areas, others like the China Inland Mission (founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865) had a strong emphasis in the interior ministry of China.

In light of the rapid urbanization of Asia after World War II, national churches and foreign missions agencies have given more thought to urban ministry. The Urban Rural Mission (URM) of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (WCC) has its regional offices throughout the world, including one in Singapore. The ecumenical 'Salvation Today' theology, or 'doing theology', has provided the theological basis for urban mission. A number of urban study centres have been established throughout Asia to train pastors for urban ministry: The Institute of Urban Studies and Development at Yonsei University in Korea, Kansai Institute for Workers' Culture and Education in Japan, and the Asian Labour Education Centre, which is a government agency which Filipino Christians utilize in the Philippines.<sup>39</sup>

Although the Christian mass movements have taken place mainly in rural areas in India, the Evangelical Fellowship in India (EFI) initiated in 1968 the 'City Penetration Plan' in two major cities, Poona in the p. 172 west and Shillong in the northeast. Various pieces of evangelistic literature were distributed to homes, schools, and colleges. At the same time, revival meetings were held in local churches followed by a discipleship training programme and Christian Education seminars. The plan in the Shillong area (which had many nominal Christians) experienced great success, but in Poona (where philosophical Hinduism was strong) the fruits were small.<sup>40</sup>

Dr. Met Castillo, Director of the Philippines Crusade, encouraged Filipino churches to concentrate more on urban ministry with a proper methodology. Since the Filipino culture is dominated with the spirit of *bayanihan* (community self-help), the pastor should build up a healthy team spirit for urban ministry against the foreign elements of destructive criticism, judgmental attitudes, and extreme individualism.<sup>41</sup>

The rapid rise of nationalism and resurgence of traditional values which have been promoted by the government since 1945 have made it increasingly difficult for the church to reach rural communities. Mass migration of people into cities, and the rapid transitional status of national cultures today, have provided ample opportunities for urban evangelism throughout Asia.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>39</sup> Richard P. Poethig, 'Theological Education and the Urban Situation in Asia', *The South East Asia Journal of Theology*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1972), p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> Theodore Williams, 'India, A Seething Subcontinent', *The Church in Asia*, ed. Donald Hoke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), pp. 223, 257.

<sup>41</sup> Met Castillo, 'Shepherding the Urban Church', *Philippines Church Growth News*, Vol. 5 (April—June, 1982), p. 6.

The Barrett survey shows that of the ten largest cities in the world in 1985, four were in Asia: Tokyo/Yokohama (21,800,000), Shanghai (17,500,000), Beijing (14,000,000), and Seoul (10,200,000). By 2025 A.D. seven out of the ten largest cities will be in Asia: Shanghai (36,100,000), Beijing (31,900,000), Bombay (27 million), Calcutta (26,400,000), Jakarta (23,600,000), Dakha (23,500,000), Tokyo/Yokohama (20,700,000), and Madras (20,600,000).<sup>42</sup>

In 1985 there were some 2,400 cities in the world with a population of over 100,000 people and 276 megacities with more than a million. By 2,000 more than half of the world's population will reside in cities.<sup>43</sup> p. 173

What do all these 'mega-numbers' mean to the church in Asia, and particularly its theological institutions?

1. We must develop urban ministry courses in the theological curriculum and offer degrees in this field. Qualified lecturers and research materials must be provided.

2. We must find more urban-oriented practical work for theological students and closely supervise them. Continuing education on urban ministry for pastors is also needed.

3. We must find more non-traditional forms of theological education to train the laity of the urban church, different forms of extension education (TEE). As Jesus wept over the spiritual and physical conditions of the people in Jerusalem in the first century, Christians today must have the same compassion and burden for the peoples of the cities in order to win them to Jesus Christ.

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## **Church and State in Socialist China, 1949–1987—II**

**Jonathan Chao**

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*This is the second and concluding part of Chao's analysis of the political situation in China over the last half century, and the Christian implications of it. The first half was published in our last issue.*

Editor

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<sup>42</sup> Barrett, pp. 45–46. Bakke's statistics describe that 17 out of 25 largest cities in the world by 2000 will be in Asia.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Bakke, 'Sociology and Demographics of World Class Cities', unpublished paper at the Trinary Consultation on Evangelizing World Cities in Chicago (March 14–17, 1986), pp. 4–5.

## DURING 1954–1958 THE STATE REFORMED THE CHURCH THROUGH POLITICAL STUDIES

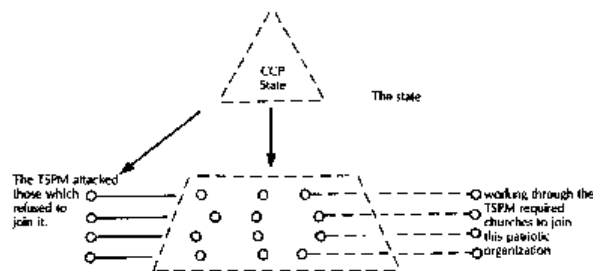
In July 1954 China promulgated its first constitution, and churches were called upon to support it. The Korean war was over by 1953, and a new name was needed for the anti-America Aid-Korean Three-self Reform Movement. The TSRM, therefore, held the First 'National Christian Conference' in July 1954 in Peking. At that conference, the name of the TSRM was changed to 'Three-self Patriotic Movement (TSPM),' and a constitution of the TSPM was adopted.

After the first National Christian Conference, further efforts were made to organize local committees of the TSPM, and all churches were required to join the TSPM, the symbol of anti-imperialist patriotism. Whereas earlier the TSRM led or directed the churches as an *ad hoc* patriotic movement, now the TSPM had become an organization defining the sphere of patriotic religious existence.

Churches which refused to join the TSPM *ipso facto* declared themselves 'non-patriotic.' Furthermore, whereas earlier mainline churches founded by foreign missions were the main targets of attack, after 1954 the indigenous Chinese churches came under pressure. In 1955 those church leaders who resisted the TSPM, such as Wang Ming-tao in Peking and Lam Hin-ko in Canton, were arrested. Similarly, Chinese Catholic clergy who refused to cooperate also came under scrutiny. Bishop Kung Pinmei was also arrested in 1955.

The relationship of church and state during this period may be described as in the facing diagram.

However, even at this stage, individual churches remained intact in that each church could still make its own ecclesiastical decisions, including whether to join the TSPM or not. Within the framework of the TSPM, the state conducted political educational classes for the [p. 175](#) pastors, hoping that they would come to the viewpoint of the party on the place of Christianity in socialist China.



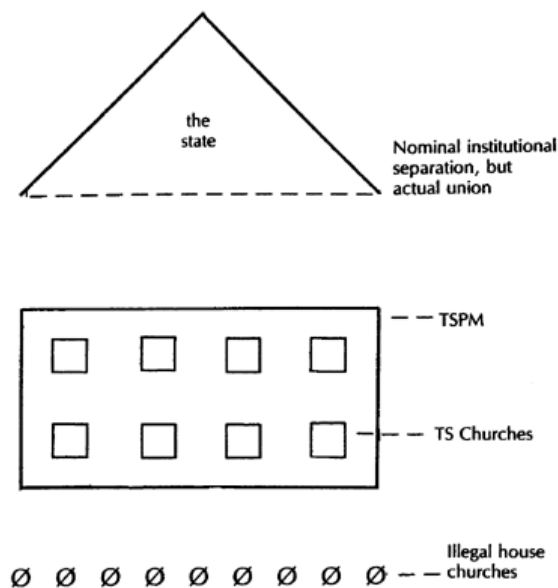
## DURING 1956–1966 A UNION OF CHURCH AND STATE TOOK PLACE IN THE FORMULATION OF THREE-SELF (STATE) CHURCHES

Starting in the summer of 1957 the CCP began to conduct a 'Socialist Education Movement' and, after the launching of the Great Leap Forward Movement (1958), this movement was even more intensified. In the fall of 1958 in Shanghai, pastors who had already joined the TSPM were told to attend political study sessions away from home. These sessions lasted for six months. A second session was conducted during the first half of 1959. During the course of study, the question of the class nature of preachers came up. Are preachers exploiters or exploited? Those who realized that they were exploiters 'volunteered' to join the proletarian class by becoming factory workers. Those who couldn't come to such enlightenment were sent to fields of manual labour anyway for continuous reform.

The prolonged absence of these pastors from their churches and their subsequent departure from the ministry left most congregations half empty and without pastors. The TSPM then called for a 'church union' movement. Some of the congregations 'offered' their church buildings to the state; others united themselves with neighbouring congregations. The result was a remarkable reduction of churches. For example, the 200 plus churches in Shanghai were reduced to eight, and the 66 churches in Peking to four.

The resultant few churches that remained after the amalgamation movement were pastored by men appointed by the TSPM, and since they have been called 'three-self churches.' A team of pastors from [p. 176](#) several denominations who did well in their political studies or whose respected names were still useful to the TSPM worked in these Three-self churches.

This relationship between the church and the state during this period may be described as union of church and state:



Individual congregations in the TSPM no longer had any autonomy; the people in a congregation could no longer make decisions on the election of church officers or the appointment of pastors. After 1958, country churches were closed down by the government, and independent church meetings were considered illegal, and their leaders were subject to arrest. House churches had to meet in secret. [p. 177](#)

## **DURING THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION YEARS (1966-76) THE STATE SOUGHT TO DESTROY THE CHURCH**

When the Cultural Revolution broke out in August 1966, the Red Guards stormed party headquarters, closed down the United Front and the Religious Affairs offices, and stopped all existing Three-self churches. In their attempt to destroy the 'four olds', they sought to do away with all organized religions along with Chinese folk religions which they considered as superstitions. Their attacks represented a drastic shift from the soft-line, united front oriented, religious policy that was operative during 1958-1966, to a hard-line policy which left no room for religion in the new revolutionary society. Although no documents on religious policy were published during the latter part of the Cultural Revolution (1969-1976), the actual practice of the state as carried out by its local revolutionary committees may be described as a policy of relegating religion to a position of illegality and suppressing it from re-emergence. The state no longer tolerated some

religious practices. It simply outlawed them: the state had become a monolithic institution.

However, Chinese Christians continued to meet secretly in their homes, especially in the countryside. Such meetings were illegal and were subject to closure, and their leaders subject to arrest. Nevertheless, because of the people's need for comfort, community, and hope, needs which house church Christianity fulfilled, these house churches began to grow in size and in number. They sustained no formal relations with the state, but existed as illegal groups and were often suppressed by local authorities. The church and state relationship may be described as follows:



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Even after the death of Mao Tse-tung and the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976, the above state of affairs continued to exist. It was a totalitarian state which had no room for religion. Nevertheless, because China adopted an open door policy especially after the return of Teng Hsiao-p'ing to politics in 1977, the degree of religious suppression was lessened somewhat, but there was no change in the hard-line policy until April 1979.

### **DURING 1979-82 THE STATE BEGAN TO RESTORE ITS SOFT-LINE RELIGIOUS POLICY AND REVIVED THE PATRIOTIC ORGANIZATION**

With the ascent of Teng Hsiao-p'ing to positions of power, as evidenced by the reform policies of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Central Committee (December 1978), the United Front Work Department was reconstituted in March of 1979, and along with it the Religious Affairs Bureau in April of the same year. Simultaneously, the Central Government began to restore its pre-Cultural Revolution soft-line policy of 'freedom of religious belief.' The church in Peking allowed Chinese worshippers from April 1979.

In August 1979 the Shanghai Committee of the Three-self Patriotic Movement was re-organized. Former TSPM churches, which had been closed down since 1966, started to re-open in larger cities from September, 1979. In February, the Executive Committee of the National Committee of the TSPM held an 'extended meeting' in Shanghai—the first time since 1961. In October of 1980, the TSPM held its third National Christian Conference in Nanking, and thereby formally reconstituted the defunct Protestant patriotic organization, the Three-self Patriotic Movement.

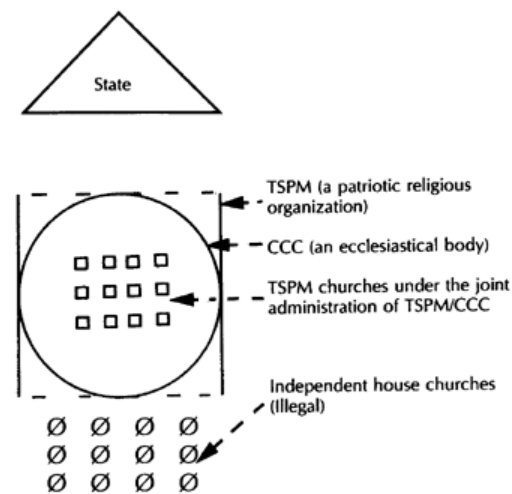
However, at the Nanking Conference another organization called the 'China Christian Council' (CCC) was formed. The TSPM has been described by its officials as a 'mass political organization' whose function is to assist the government in implementing its religious policy and to educate the church to become patriotic. The role of the new council is to take care of ecclesiastical matters in the TSPM churches, such as Bible printing, theological education, Christian publications, and conducting fraternal visits with churches in other lands. In reality, however, these two organizations are staffed by almost identical committee members and they almost always meet jointly.

To the government the TSPM is a patriotic religious organization, but to the church councils in other lands, the CCC is a church body representing the church in China, and so



the name China Christian Council is used when TSPM leaders go abroad for goodwill trips.  
p. 179

The situation of church and state relations during this period may be described as follows:



As the TSPM and the CCC began organizing themselves at the provincial level in 1981 and at the county-level during 1982, they ran into conflicts with the numerous house churches that had been flourishing since 1970. But in the countryside, house churches continued to grow in strength and number, though they had to operate as illegal entities, with their leaders subject to arrest. Yet they maintained their autonomy as Christian groups independent from state control.

## **DURING 1982-87 THE STATE CONSOLIDATED ITS CONTROL OF ALL CHURCHES**

As stated earlier, the Party worked out a comprehensive religious policy for the present transitional stage of socialism, namely, the policy of 'freedom of religious beliefs' as contained in Document No. 19 published by the Central Committee and circulated to county level party secretaries. To study this policy, the TSPM held an extended P. 180 Executive Committee meeting in Peking in September 1982. Thereafter, the TSPM and the CCC in concert with the local RAB offices began to implement the 'three-designates' by urging existing house churches to join the TSPM/CCC. A few of them joined, but the remaining majority refused to do so, preferring to preserve their own ecclesiastical autonomy in order to conduct their ministries according to the teachings of Scripture. Those who refused to comply came under pressure beginning from August 1982, and experienced severe persecution during the latter part of 1983 lasting until the end of 1984. On the other hand, in those areas where there were no open churches, local authorities complied with the believers' requests to restore their former churches.

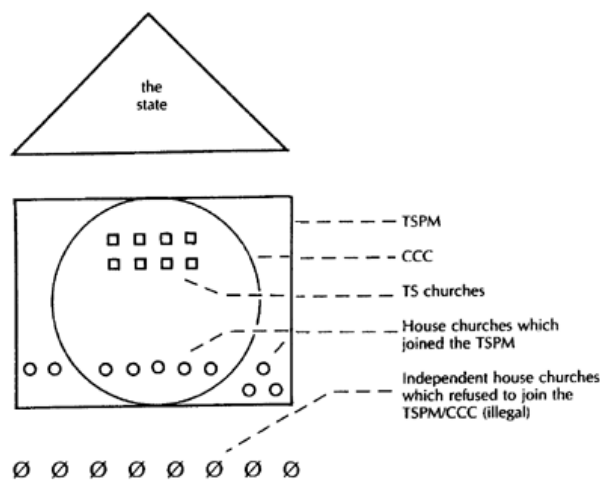
In October 1984 the Party passed a 'Resolution on Economic Institutional Reform', which became a national programme for further economic reform, especially in the urban market economy. As a result, the suppression of house churches was softened somewhat during 1985-86, and not a few house church leaders arrested during 1982-84 were released or had their sentences reduced. During this period a number of independent house churches in the countryside joined the TSPM county committees, paid their annual dues, but continued to conduct their religious activities as before, kept their ecclesiastical autonomy, and submitted themselves to TSPM policies. Still the majority of house

churches remained outside the TSPM. Hence, the church and state relationship during this period may be described as in the diagram opposite.

### CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Church and state relations in socialist China since the founding of the PRC have been determined by the Chinese Communist Party. The Party took the initiative and dictated the terms for religious existence. Religious bodies, such as the Protestant church, were never given an opportunity to negotiate with the government in the development of a mutually satisfactory church and state relationship. From the very beginning, independent Christian bodies representing the Protestant church, such as the National Christian Council of China, were gently pushed aside and later forced to dissolve themselves into oblivion. The control of the state over Protestant Christianity was supreme and unquestioned.

From the very beginning the Party set up its own patriotic body, the Three-self Reform/Patriotic Movement, to lead and to direct Chinese Protestant churches, and caused it to become the spokesman for the p. 181 Protestant churches. This directive has never been relaxed. The TSPM may be seen both as an arm of the state in the control of the church as well as the sphere of state toleration for church affairs. The realm of the TSPM is the realm of legality, and that realm also defines the limits of religious freedom. Within that realm is also socialist education for the clergy. The TSPM is more of a representative of the socialist state to the church than a representative of the church to the state.

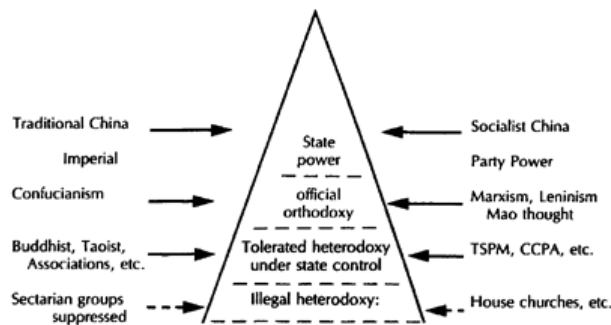


But in their propaganda, the TSPM and CCC claim to represent the Protestant church in China. Perhaps they do represent the 4,000 churches and the three million members under their administration; they certainly do not represent the more than 50 million believers who meet in at least 200,000 meeting points outside their control.

The relation of church and state in socialist China basically follows the pattern of state control of religions in traditional China. The parallelism between the two is very obvious, as shown overleaf.

In the matter of state control of religion, the present totalitarian socialist state inherited and replaced the former feudalistic, imperial state. Hence, it may be said that the current Chinese Communist religious policy is both totalitarian and feudalistic. If China is to make p. 182 any significant progress towards modernization and develop any kind of authentic 'spiritual civilization', her leaders must re-examine both her current

theories and practices of religion and make changes appropriate to a modern, developing and democratic society.



The responses of the Chinese Protestant church to state initiatives may generally be described as passive. During the 1950–58 period the majority of the nearly ten thousand Christian workers gave in under pressure: signed the ‘manifesto’, accused their former co-workers, and joined the TSPM. Only a few chose the prophetic role of demonstrating loyalty to Christ and suffered for such witness. After 1958, those who remained in the Three-self churches accepted the leadership of the government in church affairs, but a number of faithful lay leaders began to develop underground meetings, accepting the consequences of civil disobedience for conscience’s sake.

During the Cultural Revolution years, Christians were forced to confess Christ, and such pressure and concomitant suffering trained many faithful believers for faithful witness in subsequent years. They learned from experience to be ‘gentle as doves and shrewd as serpents.’ They sought to witness Christ by living exemplary lives, to avoid confrontation with the hostile state, and they conducted an active programme of evangelism and church building in secrecy. These principles have now become standing policies for the house church movement even after the death of Mao.

There is no apparent conflict between TSPM pastors and the state. For them, they have already accepted the leadership of the state in church affairs. Some do experience inner conflicts, but in order to [p. 183](#) conduct their ministries within the realm of legality, they have to confine themselves to the limits determined by the state. The house church leaders who choose not to join the TSPM do so in order to express their singular loyalty to Christ in church affairs and to have the freedom to conduct evangelistic work according to the leading of the Spirit of God.

From the churches’ viewpoint, the basic issues in church and state in a socialist country like China are essentially three: (1) the question of lordship for the church: who is the Lord of the church, Christ or the state; (2) the question of evangelism: to evangelize or not to evangelize? (3) the universal character of the church: should a national church cut off her fellowship with the international body of Christ or not?

In the case of the Chinese socialist state, the above conflicts cannot be resolved until the state abandons its adherence to a system of Ideology which its rulers consider as orthodox, thereby condemning all its Competitors as heterodox. Secondly, until there is a genuine separation between party policy and state government according to law, the pattern of state control of religion can hardly be changed. Finally, Until China comes to adopt a policy of ideological pluralism, Christianity cannot enjoy genuine religious freedom under law. These, therefore, are future challenges for those who pray for China and who wish China well.

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**Dr. Jonathan Chao b the Director of Chinese Church Research Centre in Hong Kong. [p. 184](#)**

# Book Reviews

Francis A. Schaeffer

[The Great Evangelical Disaster](#)

Abstracts of reviews by Mark Burkill and Paul Gardner

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# Book Reviews

## THE GREAT EVANGELICAL DISASTER

by Francis A. Schaeffer

(Kingsway Publications, Eastbourne:1985)

192pp., p/b, £4.95

*Abstracts of reviews by Mark Burkill in Evangel, Summer 1986 and by Paul Gardner in Churchman, Vol. 99, No. 3 1985*

This book is radical and calls for response. It is the last that Francis Schaeffer wrote before he died a month later. There is a continuing urgency of a prophet determined to apply scriptures to the age in which he lived.

Schaeffer's main warning is that evangelicals are being subtly infiltrated by liberalism and its spirit of accommodation. This is 'the great evangelical disaster', which, he believed, in the long run will spell ruin for our Churches' biblical witness. It is not enough to bear the label 'evangelical', we must show by the way we handle Scripture and apply it to our lives that this is what we are.

Two main issues are at stake.

*i)* The first is a challenge to treat Scripture as God's Word for this is the watershed for evangelical Christians. Others have already decided against the objective truth of the written word, but evangelicals have traditionally asserted its full truth. This position is now being challenged by an air of accommodation. Schaeffer sees liberalism and neo-orthodoxy as two of the major enemies (p. 49ff). The full *inerrancy* of Scripture must be affirmed, 'not only when it speaks of salvation matters, but also when it speaks of history and the cosmos' (p. 46). This leads into the second issue.

*ii)* With profound insight, Schaeffer shows that unless such a view of Scripture is held then the application of Scripture to *every* area of life (that great principle of the Reformation) is impossible. Absolutes disappear: accommodation and relativism result. Of course, Schaeffer insists that a theoretical acceptance of the inerrancy of Scriptures is not the final issue—and here many traditional evangelicals are challenged—but rather the *practice* of truth. For those who knew this great man of God, for whom the Christian faith was part of his daily life, such an emphasis will come as no surprise. Nor will it be a surprise to see him acknowledge the mistakes of evangelicals who have been unloving in

their stand for the truth. This book exudes love (the Mark of the Christian—chap. 8), concern, compassion and tears, all of which were so characteristic of the author.

Here is a challenge to all who would call themselves 'evangelical': p. 186 is the authority of the Scripture to be the 'watershed'? Even more importantly, are the evangelicals prepared to practice the truth in the area of life? Schaeffer's book is orientated mainly towards the American scene, as are the examples from the American evangelical community. However we should be under no illusion that his message does not apply to the other regions of the world also. For far too long evangelicals have followed men rather than the word of God; fruits of this are now becoming apparent. This is Schaeffer's message: the need for a courageous confrontation before it is too late. Evangelicals need to listen to that message.

## **EVANGELICALISM: THE COMING GENERATION**

*by* James Davison Hunter

(University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 1987)

302pp.

*Reviewed by Douglas Frank in The Reformed Journal Vol. 37, Issue 6, June 1987*

Although the author of this book consults a wide range of statistical and documentary sources, the backbone of his work is a survey, conducted between 1982 and 1985, of the attitudes of faculty and, particularly, students at nine liberal arts colleges (Wheaton, Bethel, Houghton, and the like) and seven evangelical seminaries (Fuller, Westminster, and Gordon-Conwell are typical). These attitudes, he believes, may not precisely foretell the shape of evangelicalism twenty years from now, when the younger generation comes to maturity, but they give strong indications of the rapidity and direction of cultural change among contemporary evangelicals.

Hunter pictures an evangelical sub-culture being battered, or perhaps seduced, by the forces of modernity, a currently popular catch-all term for such things as cultural pluralism, secularization, bureaucratization, philosophical and functional rationality. His data gives evidence that modernity is winning. It is doing this by chipping away at the hard, clear line—the 'boundaries', as they are called—which, a generation or two ago, defined evangelicals as evangelicals. It is thus robbing evangelicals of their sub-cultural cohesion and sense of identity. Hunter finds, for example, that evangelical students are less willing than their forebears to defend the strict, literal truth of every word of the Bible, to condemn to hell persons who have never heard about Jesus, to subordinate social justice concerns to evangelism p. 187 narrowly construed. They have a far shorter list of behavioural taboos: in 1951, 46 percent of evangelical students considered attending *any* Hollywood-type movie wrong, while in 1982 only 7 percent still felt the same way even about 'R-rated' movies; in 1951, 93 percent considered tobacco use morally wrong, a figure that dropped to 51 percent by 1982. Evangelical students seem more interested in self-fulfilment and 'new experiences' than in the self-renunciation one associates with the old Protestant ethic. Although they cling to 'traditional' definitions of the family, their attitudes bespeak the gradual breakdown of male authority, the softening of the fathering role, and the acceptance of wider roles for women outside the family that characterize American society in general. And while they are openly approving of the involvement of religious leaders and groups in the political sphere, they are also more 'liberal' and more 'civil' than previous generations of evangelicals. Far from shoring up these crumbling boundary markers, evangelical higher education 'weakens the tenacity with which Evangelicals hold on to their world view' (p. 178) and thus, contrary to the intentions of

its founders and many of its supporters, only hastens the day when an evangelical will look just like every other American.

The above examples do not do justice to the wealth of data, the depth of historical analysis, the helpful summaries of recent scholarly literature (I'm particularly appreciative of his eight-page 'excursus' on the social history of the family since the Middle Ages), the skilful drawing of fine lines and careful framing of conclusions, all of which characterize this fine work. At several points, Hunter makes helpful corrections to common-sense understandings.

I am particularly puzzled that Hunter does not advance beyond the abstractness of talk about 'modernity' to a serious engagement with the most obvious concrete source of evangelicalism's boundary problems, namely the ever-present, ever-proliferating techniques of media persuasion, given over as they are, virtually in their entirety, to the cultivation of a compliant mass of anxious but eager consumers. So many of the changes in evangelical attitudes which Hunter describes may be traced to the central commandment—by now become an inner compulsion—of a fully matured industrial capitalism: thou shalt consume, and consume again. Hunter's failure to explore this mechanism robs the reader of rich possibilities for the understanding of his or her own life. I wonder whether Hunter's squeamishness about this sort of economic analysis is perhaps a testimony to his own ideological value commitments, and thus raises questions about the very possibility of a value-neutral sociology. [p. 188](#)

At a few points I wondered whether Hunter's conceptual model may perhaps have led him into somewhat stronger conclusions than his evidence warranted. I am thinking particularly of his comparisons of current student attitudes, derived from actual surveys, with impressionistic or documentary evidence of the attitudes (concerning, say, the exclusiveness of salvation or the acceptability of a theistic form of evolution) of past generations. One would expect the official testimony of selected leading evangelical spokespersons of past generations to be more strident and self-assured than the opinions of that same generation's college students (for which, unfortunately, we have very little data), and thus one might want to couch more tentatively Hunter's conclusion that 'the certainties characteristic of previous generations appear to be giving way to a measure of hesitancy and questioning' (p. 40). As to Hunter's very striking statistics showing secularization increasing steadily with each successive year of college, I am tantalized by the possibility (which he does not explore) that to some degree education simply offers verbal explanations and justifications for a process of secularization that may have been consolidated, deep within the personality, long before college, in the home, church, and public schools. These questions notwithstanding, Hunter's evidence of the erosion of moral and other boundaries among evangelical youth is quite overwhelming, and one cannot quarrel with his overall conclusion that 'Evangelicalism participates in precisely the same cultural changes that it decries in the larger society' (p. 164).

How might the biblical authors comment on this question of boundaries? Are not boundaries, whether they be theological, moral, or political, ways of separating people from people—most typically, the good from the bad, the right from the wrong? Do the boundary-makers ever place themselves on the side of the bad or the wrong? If not, then boundaries always serve our heroic, and often tragic, projects of self-justification. The sociologists will tell us, I suspect, that no human group can long cohere without hard, fast boundaries. But if boundaries, in human hands, do indeed become means for self-satisfaction and self-rescue, inevitably issuing in violence, physical or otherwise, then those who confess to faith in Jesus Christ will only with great reluctance, and perhaps with little success, contribute to the cohesion of a subculture. It was, after all, the Pharisees who, of all the biblical people, enjoyed the clearest sense of hard, fast boundaries. The

word of Jesus that when he is lifted up he will draw all persons unto himself might point to Christian faith as that which crosses boundaries, breaks down dividing walls of hostility, refuses those p. 189 markers which point to the righteousness inherent in oneself or one's subculture. If we took this sociological impossibility seriously, evangelicals might very quickly become that 'little flock' towards whom Jesus addressed his words of hope and comfort—or, perhaps, no flock at all. On the other hand, when the loss of boundaries occurs at the instigation of a culture whose concern is that all things be acceptable so that all things can be bought and sold in the consumer marketplace, have we made any advance on the Pharisees? Have we come any closer to that blurring of boundaries that occurs at the foot of the cross, where the merits of our subculture seem trivial in light of our participation in the crucifixion, and our reception of the forgiveness, of the Son of Man?

The evangelicals in Hunter's book stake their claim to be the keepers of Christian orthodoxy on their willing submission to the authority of Scripture. Ironically, Hunter's survey reveals very little evidence of any real impact of a biblical sensibility on evangelical attitudes, or even the existence of a sustained and careful exploration of the biblical text. He is thus describing many, if not most, of the evangelical college students I know, involuntary recipients of an evangelical ideology which has taught them to outline capably the 'plan of salvation', affirm the (admittedly dwindling) proper moral restrictions, offer 'Christian' perspectives on war, poverty, and the free market, and assert their undying confidence in the Bible as God's Word. What Hunter does not unearth, perhaps because it is not the kind of thing many would admit on a survey, is the widespread uninterest in the Bible, or perhaps positive boredom or even hatred of the Bible, that exists among these very same students. Nor does he (it is not his chosen task) reveal the hidden landscape of our colleges, the personal despair that the evangelical ideology does not touch, the suffering and betrayal for which it is no comfort, the doubts and fears, often too private or too inchoate for expression—not to mention how unwelcome such expression would be in polite evangelical company—that it does not assuage. All these represent the substitution of a sterile evangelical ideology, of comfortable and supposedly secure evangelical boundaries, for the living Word—a substitution that has been in process for at least a century.

Hunter's very fine book describes the gradual deterioration of this ideology under the hammer-blows of modernity. The result has been, as Hunter shows, the loss of evangelicalism's hold, not only over the larger culture, but now, increasingly, over its very own adherents. Is this a loss we should mourn? p. 190

## **Journal Information**

### *Publications Referred to in this Issue*

#### **Zadok Perspectives**

Is a quarterly published as a forum for the consideration of contemporary issues within the context of Christian belief by the Zadok Centre, P.O. Box 434 Dickson, ACT 2602, Australia. Subscription for non-members: Australian \$25.00 per year.

#### **International Bulletin of Missionary Research**

Published quarterly by Overseas Ministries Study Centre—6315, Ocean Avenue, Ventnor, New Jersey 08406, USA. Subscriptions: US \$14.00 for a year, US \$26.00 for 2 years and US \$37.00 for 3 years. Postage worldwide. Individual copies US \$5.00.

### **Evangel**

A quarterly review of biblical, practical and contemporary theology, published at Rutherford House, 17 Claremont Park, Edinburgh EH6 7PJ, Scotland. Subscriptions £4.95 U.K., \$14.00 USA.

### **Churchman**

Is published quarterly by Church Society, Whitefield House, 186 Kennington Road, London SE11 4BT. Annual Subscription: £9.50 for four issues. Single copy £2.95 per copy. Prices include postage.

### **Themelios**

Published jointly by the British Theological Students Fellowship and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, 38 De Montfort St., Leicester LE1 7GP, UK, or 233 Langdon, Madison, Wisconsin 53703, USA. Subscriptions: £3.20 UK, \$9.00, Sfr. 15.00 (3 issues).

### **The Reformed Journal**

Published monthly at 255 Jefferson SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Subscription rates are \$15.00 (Can. \$19.50) for one year, US \$24.00 (Can. \$31.20) for 2 years, and US \$31.00 (Can. \$40.30) for 3 years. Individual copies are US \$1.50.