

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 12

Volume 12 • Number 4 • October 1988

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Review of
Theology** p. 291

Editorial

Renewal to Relevance

In many countries, particularly in the West, the institution of the Church is under attack. The process of secularization has spread so much that Church's relevance is assessed by its participation in secular affairs of the world. An unexpressed thesis of the articles in this issue of ERT is rather the reverse: that only as the Church renews itself does its relevance become evident. In some of the Two-Thirds World countries, we are slowly realizing that what we need primarily is not social reform but Church renewal, not so much political leaders as servants of God. Church is the hope of every nation.

Both for the Church and for the individual disciple of Christ, renewal leads both to mission and relevance. I think that it is generally true that the world expects the Church to do her work, namely, to be God's prophet in a godless world. As the prophet Ezekiel says, if the trumpet makes a strange noise, how can the soldiers prepare themselves for the war? If the Church does involve in activities which are not germane to her own being, how can the world recognize her Master's voice?

Dr. Lim's article on the understanding of Church as the servant of the world; Dr. Houghton's article on the Indian caste system, which raises the basic question of human dignity and justice, and of man's creation in the image of God; Sam Vassell's emphasis on personal purity as an authenticating mark of the gospel; Samuel Escobar's concern for Latin American missionary enterprise; Brian Fargher's analysis of the charismatic movement; Dr. Geisler's article on the modern crises in Christology, bringing us back to the basic question of God's revelation—all are concerned about this twin issue of renewal and relevance in individual and corporate Christian life.

Paul's words to Roman Christians is apt here: 'I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect'.

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Asian Churches as Servants of God

David Lim

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Dr. Lim pleads here not so much for new forms of ecclesiology (such as the Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, or ashrams in India) but rather for a new understanding of the Christian Church in Asia. This is a healthy and a very welcome approach since—thanks to the pluralist traditions of Asian societies, religions and cultures—such an understanding of Church is very badly needed. He describes at length the Asian multi-faceted situation (although unfortunately much of his discussion has had to be omitted due to the lack of space) and then deals with the churches' function in society in four basic areas: religious,

socio-cultural, economic and political His Filipino background is evident as he describes these areas which are right now in the flux in his homeland.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

We are living in an exciting and challenging time for missions, theology and ethics in Asia. We have begun to overcome our frustrations over our lack of resources to combat the 'foreignness' of church life and mission in the contexts of our vast continent. The stage is now set for fresh readings of the Scriptures and the discovery of grander theological, ecclesiastical and socio-political visions, not from without, but from *within* the living experiences of Asian peoples.

This article seeks to explicate some of the dimensions of what Asian churches should pray and work for, if we are to be faithful 'servants of God'. Briefly, it defines *servant-leadership* as any activity which helps people to function at their best, believing the best about others, reaching out and pulling them up with oneself, and seeking to push them up even higher—in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. [Mk. 10:42-45](#); [Phil. 2:3-8](#); [I Pet. 5:1-3](#)). As Lao-Tze said, 'When the leader's work is done, the people say, "We did it ourselves."'

Looking at Asian (and perhaps all other) societies, we realize that 'servant leadership' is quite *counter-cultural*; for in most, if not all cultures, leadership tends to domineer over, rather than serve, the people—Jesus style. Our dominant leadership patterns have been paternalistic and authoritarian, with highly structured hierarchical [p. 293](#) systems; and in religious matters, priests, imams, gurus, shamans, bishops and pastors have held almost absolute powers.

And so this is precisely our challenge: Jesus, Paul, the apostles and the early church lived under similar autocratic customs and structures; yet they taught and tried to practice 'servant leadership', based on the doctrines of the impartiality of God, the common fallen *imago dei* of humanity (and hence, the equal value of each human being), and the universal scope of God's love revealed supremely and uniquely in Christ's redemptive work. Hinduism legitimized the archetypal caste system in India; traditional Buddhism and Confucianism, in whatever form, do not provide any basis for calling for social change. It is even harder for Islamic nations to allow new ideas in. Leaving room for a few exceptions, we can agree with Myrdal's comment that 'understood in [a] realistic and comprehensive sense, religion usually acts as a tremendous force for social inertia. The writer knows of no instance in present-day South Asia where religion has induced social change' (Myrdal, 1968, 103). We can even predict that in the midst of secularization, what is most likely is that, as usual, the religious authorities will follow the movement of society, and will supply their societies with ideological justifications in close conformity with the requirements of the economic policy their governments will have chosen (as evident also in Christianized nations in the West).

Asian Christianity has not fared (and may not fare) much better; but its arrival in Asia had naturally brought about reforms and resurgence among these ancient religions. Its impact had been greater than the proportion of its membership because it came with the Western conquerors, and in many cases its access to Western finances had no counterpart among other religions (until 1973 when Muslims found their oil to be profitable and useful in promoting their faith). Such association with the West helped keep Christianity more visible than one might have expected in Asia, but this has proven to be less beneficial in post-colonial times.

Though Christianity seems to be making some headway in its efforts to evangelize in such a threatening environment full of dominant religions, there seems to be no prospect of any great breakthrough in sight. Many of its 'people movements' have been among tribal folk; and so praying and strategizing to bring such religious adherents into the Christian fold still remains our formidable challenge.

TRANSFORMING ASIA: OUR BIBLICAL VISION

Do the Asian churches have a *blueprint* for a better way of life which [P. 294](#) would show that the Christian gospel is relevant and able to make life really abundant (cf. [ln. 10:10](#)) and worth living, not just in heaven, but in Asia today? In order to serve our Lord and our peoples faithfully, a wholistic worldview which we can apply to them wisely and meaningfully, in workable 'Christian social orders', seems a necessity.

More than just reacting to issues which Asia sets before us, we must also help create the spiritual agenda which our Lord sets for Asia. Let us be *servant-leaders*: as the Malaysians say, 'If you do not paddle, the boat will drift'. Sadly we have only criticized those things which we believe to be wrong. But we can not *lead* from a predominantly negative posture; we need to show the alternatives—for biblical and positive servant-leadership.

Through his death on the cross, Christ has set the agenda for the realization of salvation for fallen humanity. With him beside us and beckoning us, in spite of our minority status in much of Asia, we can (and should) make the gospel we preach visibly relevant to our people whom we have been sent to serve.

1. In Multi-religious Co-existence

People are essentially spiritual beings who exteriorize their souls through physical and social means. People act according to their belief-systems and so in this deeper sense, religion is the 'soul' of a culture. Through the secularization phenomenon, most Asians have shifted their religious piety from spiritual foci to material pursuits, and religious institutions have become just like private corporations. It is in these secularized contexts of enlarging 'markets' of free pluralistic choices that Asian churches are called to incarnate the gospel, and in the religious sphere, to coexist with many other churches, denominations, sects, cults and religions.

This calls for courage in creating *authentic traditions* which live through fresh and innovative re-experiencing of the spiritual realities as each religious community lives, loves and shares meanings among its members and with each other. We have to learn to handle different viewpoints and welcome dialogue as a method of clarifying issues and understanding one another. It is in this atmosphere of *interfaith dialogue* that we can best do evangelism, for example sharing Jesus with a Muslim friend who considers him to be an illegitimate son of Mary but does not know that the Koran teaches that he is the 'spirit of God'.

As 'servant-remnants' among non-Christian majorities, we must show a positive attitude towards people of other religions without [p. 295](#) losing our distinctive Christian character and our evangelistic concern. Each of us must thus learn what others believe and how to distinguish between the negotiables and the non-negotiables of the Christian faith. As Indians say, 'Do not burn the house to get rid of the rat'. This also involves learning how to form coalitions or networks for corporate action among Christians, between Christians and those of other faiths, and between religious and non-religious groups.

In societies where religion has been one of the chief causes for conflicts and wars, we need to seriously show *practical servant-love* first: *agape* and *chesed*, *zakat* and *bhakti*, *kuruna* and *zen* are starting points for 'lifestyle evangelism'. Through this neighbourly love, we may not only be joined with similar actions by those of other faiths, but also be able to convince them that the love of Christ is the true 'religion' revealed by the only God.

Of course, we must be wary of 'syncretism', the 'unjustifiable fusion of irreconcilable tenets and practices' with other religions (Ro & Eshenaur, 1984, 13). Yet emphasizing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ must not inhibit *theological contextualization* and *missionary incarnation*. Our great challenge is to use local symbols and art forms to convey our faith for our generation, knowing that humans tend to debase mystery into magic, just as some debase mystery into rationalistic formulae devoid of grace. The best antidote to this fear is the sincere desire to communicate God's revealed truth to the lost: 'theology that is mission-centred is itself the best protection against syncretism' (*ibid.*).

EVANGELIZING ASIA: OUR MISSIONARY METHOD

God has prescribed not only the goals of our kingdom-mission, but also the *means* by which such goals are to be attained. There are attitudes and methods which are right in themselves regardless of their consequences, because they are inherent to the gospel: love does not always bring about conversions, but it is right nonetheless; repentance does not always lead to happy endings, but it is right nonetheless. This section will elaborate on what [2 Corinthians 6:2b-10](#) means for Asian churches: how do 'God's servants' do his missions '... poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things' (v. [10](#))?

Above all, we must pray for political and other institutional leaders 'that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness' ([1 Tim. 2:1-3](#)). Without downplaying the need for action in answer to our own prayers, we need to recognize that *acts of praying* are in transforming and evangelizing societies. We cannot [p. 296](#) love the world until we have prayed for it ... and let God change our selfishness, our cowardice, our hypocrisy.

News of church growth in the past decades in Korea and China reminds us to use spiritual weapons (such as prayer, fasting, suffering) in order to overcome difficult religious circumstances. Only through intimacy with God can we find the perspective and the strength to live out his servanthood and compassion in our world. Such disciplines are not ascetic games, but life-offerings whereby we train our bodies and minds to become truly free to serve our God and our people in concrete works of love.

Second, in our concern to transform Asia, we must remember that the best weapon which God has given us is 'the sword of his Word'. To withhold the gospel is to deprive our people of what can turn their lives into exciting and fulfilling adventures of faith. To see lives and nations changed, Asia needs gifted and skilled *expositors and teachers of his Word*. Let us not be found ignorant or lazy or uncaring in taking time to serve 'full meals' of his truths to meet the total needs of our people.

To be his mouthpiece for our generation, we need to master the world as well as the Word. We need to study and work hard to *understand our times*, so that we can accurately, forcefully and relevantly (that is, prophetically) apply the biblical worldview, principles and values to our particular contexts. The churches in each generation have to discern and answer the questions which our contemporaries are asking; the gospel does not change, but the manner in which it is communicated and heard is greatly affected by our cultures. This is an exciting endeavour for us, for the backgrounds of both the Old and New Testaments are still very similar to ours: idolatries, polytheism, authoritarianisms,

social injustices, spiritism, lack of filial piety, and so on. Both the text and our contexts coalesce to set our theological and missiological agenda!

Third, we must be constructive rather than destructive. We should not try to impose our views through moral crusades, nor refuse to influence our societies for fear of reprisals; rather, we are to use gentle and patient *moral persuasion* which treats human consciences with the greatest respect (cf. Stott, 1984, 73–83).

In the midst of so many sensitive and explosive areas in Asia, we have to be more vocal and visible about our *non-violent stance*, to show that our convictions are independent of ideological interests. In many Asian countries, some government policies infringe on basic human rights. Many church leaders have rightly advocated *civil disobedience* to oppose such practices non-violently and suffer the legal consequences; we will know clearly someday how much just p. 297 laws have helped decrease the hold of societal evils, thereby giving people more freedom to respond to the gospel.

Fourth, as a minority we are tempted to panic for numbers of converts. But may we have the patience, perseverance and self-sacrifice to *make disciples* (not just decisions)—converts who do not just warm the pews and appreciate good sermons, but those who share Jesus with others and serve as blessings to others. Our missionary efforts will have to be executed primarily through grassroots evangelism, largely done by lay people in their homes and offices, through family and friendship evangelism; thus, let our Churches be training centres for more *lay-servants* (lay-ministers!).

Fifth, we cannot truly serve people with whom we are not willing to live. In the incarnation we seen our Lord leaving behind all privileges to come down and live among us as one of us ([Phil. 2:5–8](#)), so that through his *voluntary poverty*, those whom he was sent to save might no longer live in poverty ([2 Cor. 8:9](#)). The community where we serve must see how real he is, just where they live. Our lifestyles must be open to constant inspection; thereby we can be available to the people twenty-four hours a day, too. Our verbosity seems hollow in the character-oriented cultures of Asia; as Indonesians say, ‘Rippling water is a sign of shallowness’.

Without rejecting the material world, we must rediscover the *simplicity* and beauty of God’s creation. Amidst so much poverty, we must creatively find effective means of interpersonal communication which do not depend heavily on the sophisticated electronic technology; it may just be the rediscovery of the ‘old, old way’ of telling the ‘old, old story’, gossiping about Jesus in the shops and stalls. From our position of outward simplicity and inner humility, our people will see us as their equals, their friends, their partners. Moreover, if we limited our ostentation and our self-centred spending, we would have more resources for both evangelism and socio-political concern.

Next, we need to live in a position where we can know the truly needy; God is glorified whenever the needs of hurting people are met without their begging for help. The countryside in Asia is still where the majority are, but the town or city is where Christians are (cf. Digan, 1984, 35). Herein lies the weakness of the Asian churches: we are not where the majority of our people are today (though perhaps we are already where our people will probably be tomorrow). Yet if the Chinese revolution and the Indo—Chinese wars teach anything, it is the importance of the peasantry: ‘the fact that people in Asia are still mostly peasants should be reason enough for peasants to get priority in p. 298 movements like Christianity, which claims to give priority to people, regardless of their degree of importance in global politics’ (*ibid.*).

‘Rich churches in poor communities’! What a common criticism of the churches in most Asian countries. Among the reasons for this general impression are: the connection of the churches with the rich West, the flow of foreign resources, the relatively high standard of living of missionaries and some church leaders, large numbers of paid

employees in the churches and Christian organizations, and the growing size and number of Christian educational and welfare institutions. Our buildings, equipment and personnel seem to have become the symbols not of compassion, but of power and foreignness (cf. Itty, 1978, 149). This display of relative wealth appears so strange and inauthentic, not only because of the context of poverty around, but also because most Christians belong to the poorer sectors of society; they have very little to contribute to these institutions (cf. Bonk, 1985). Besides, this has proven to be a poor witness to our people (especially Buddhists, Hindus and Chinese) who see *voluntary poverty* as a religious value and a great virtue (Cherupallikat, 1975). The Catholics and ecumenical Protestants have started to see that the servant-church should be the church of the poor: will they be able to live up to the full implications of this conviction, or will it be just pious rhetoric?

We praise God that in spite of the hardships and dangers of our continent, Asian cross-cultural missionaries are on the move, especially from Korea and the Philippines, and inside Bangladesh, Burma, Indonesia, India and the Philippines. However, our people have bad memories of Christianity: gunboat diplomacy, the Opium War and other humiliating experiences are still fresh in the Chinese psyche. Other Asian nations also have 'gospel-cum-imperialism' engraved in their recent past, and 'gospel-cum-capitalism' in the present. It is a big challenge for Asian Christians to revise our image and convince our people that indeed we have come 'not to be served but to serve', to suffer with them and for them! When we have really *shared their sufferings*, then we shall have earned our right to be heard!

Lastly, the way we have tried to do missions has generally been too cheap: we may seem to have given up millions, but we have retained much for ourselves. Unless we are willing and able to lay down our very lives on behalf of our brethren for Christ's sake, we will never get Asia and the world evangelized. Many have suffered for the Lord in his service; some have to give up social position, wealth and sometimes family, and face the constant dangers of arrest, imprisonment and torture in order to share the gospel. [p. 299](#)

But too many of us have been little more than 'nominal Christians' who have been uncritical of the superficial Christianity which avoids anything that disturbs our comfortable piety and profitable status quo. We are not living lives in such a way that at any moment we might be required to give our lives for the sake of others. We fail to see that whoever serves others must also suffer with those whom he is helping to bear their burdens: there is no deliverance or salvation unless someone suffers and sacrifices! The servant's 'daily dying-to-self' lifestyle often leads ultimately to a saint's 'faithful unto death' martyrdom. In short, *Asia needs more Christian martyrs*.

2. In Pluralistic Socio-cultural Contexts

Asian churches continue to face the identity crisis of being minorities living in societies dominated by non-Christian religious majorities or highly secularized (communist or capitalist) nations. We recognize that the gospel will judge and destroy the idolatrous elements, and redeem and transform those which do not conflict with God's revelation (Ro & Eshenaur, 1984, 11f); e.g., family solidarity and filial piety in Confucian cultures, the spirit of self-sacrifice and renunciation of the world in service to God in Hindu societies, and the faith in the greatness and majesty of the all-knowing God in Islamic cultures.

Another problem is the Western image of the Asian churches. Though freed from Western political domination, Christian missions and Western economic expansion are presently seen as new forms of 'Western imperialism'. Though this does not imply that indigenous Asian Christianities would automatically make the gospel more acceptable to Asians (since the gospel will retain its *skandalon*), it does suggest that we must shed this Western image (in liturgical forms, evangelistic materials and strategies, financial base,

leadership and decision-making positions) to gain a better hearing from those whom we seek to win.

Indeed, Asians have started to take over the leadership of many Christian groups, and to found more indigenous groups; but their methods and programmes remain basically Western. It is because most of them are *Western-trained* or *Western-oriented*. Most churches are economically poor, but prefer to use modern media; since they can not afford the sophisticated equipments and complex organization involved in such kinds of ministries, they have tried to get funding from the West. Thus modern Western ideas and media are easily adopted whether they are relevant to the context or not, for ‘we have the money’! Creative ventures have lacked encouragement, and since [p. 300](#) those who pay the piper usually call the tune, uncritical uses of imported media predominate, for ‘we need the money’!

Instead, our gospel must be incarnated—internalized and exteriorized, nurtured and dressed in each of our respective historico-cultural contexts through creative encounters between our faith and the different cultures and people-groups. Sadhu Sundar Singh referred always to his desire to give ‘the water of life in an Indian cup’. What a challenge boldly to break our flower-pots so that the Plant could take root in our Asian soils! (Cf. Saphir Athyal in Ro & Eshenaur, 1984, 60). After all, our Asian contexts are much more close to those of the Scriptures than the Western forms that we have inherited or are trying to follow.

Perhaps we should revive popular festivals, with their media of live performances—seeing and hearing friends, neighbours and co-workers transformed into artists, actors and singers, thereby creating grand experiences of communal life. Asia has had many traditions of theatrical arts, from the folksy to the more sophisticated kinds. An excellent example is the Synod of Christian Protestant Churches in Bali: their church buildings are fashioned like mountains, for the Balinese associate mountains with God’s presence; they use coconut shells for communion cups, white robes for pastors and Balinese bridal gowns for weddings; they have dance-and-dramas for both evangelistic and pulpit ministries.

In areas where socio-cultural majorities dominate over minorities, we need to work for the acceptance of *pluralistic social orders* where all differences are freely shared and where the dignity of each person and group is respected. Pluralism would protect against demagoguery and legitimize (and even glorify) diversities and freedom to dissent; it would give everyone some elbow-room, so long as no one tries to elbow everybody else out of the room! This will always be a precarious if not an untenable situation to aim at, but we should exercise leadership in this fashion: let us serve as reconcilers, especially to help those individuals or groups which have been marginalized by being deprived of their dignity and security to contribute to the human project. Let us work to help retain any group’s *sense of peoplehood*: God does not merely reproduce carbon copies, but loves to produce new originals; he is never depleted of fuller and richer creativity.

3. In Economic Development

God and Asia will judge Asian churches by our response to the cries of [p. 301](#) the hungry, naked, homeless, handicapped, prisoners and refugees in our midst (cf. [Mt. 25:31-46](#)). Since World War II, we have developed technologies which could make everyone enjoy at least a bit of the good life; but instead, more and more are becoming malnourished, landless, and hopeless. Instead of getting wealthier and more humane, most of Asia sinks into deeper poverty! Even the ‘little Japans’ of Singapore, Hongkong, Taiwan, and South Korea have flourished as ‘export platforms’ dependent on ‘lucky access’ in the world

market and do not provide good models of just, participatory and sustainable economies of our Kingdom-vision.

From its beginnings in Asia, Christianity provided the first modern assistance to uplift our socio-economic conditions by founding schools, hospitals, social welfare institutions, relief work centres and agricultural training institutes, even in countries where Christians remain a minority (cf. Itty, 1978, 143–7). We have also started to realize the inadequacies of some social services which fail to address the root causes of poverty and injustice. Paternalism, lack of people's participation, inadequate understanding of systemic causes of poverty and other such factors have contributed to these good-but-not-good-enough services. Thus, we know that we should be providing the tools, training and opportunities necessary to enable our people, especially converts, to successfully function as responsible producers; *self-sufficiency* can be fostered through education, vocational training, employment and co-operatives (such as housing projects or credit unions).

We must lead in *modernizing the rural farms and the urban slums*. Rural development would mean more money to support church workers and assist families in need. Urbanization is irreversible, especially in light of the fact that only five per cent of a population is enough to produce a nation's food; thus the plight of the urban poor must be addressed since they will form the biggest bunch of Asia's new job-seekers. We must bring 'modern industry' in human small-scale levels (commonly called 'appropriate technologies') into these areas: it is foolish to worry about raising standards of living higher when the people around us are struggling for survival and dying of unemployment.

Christian professionals should be models of enablers rather than exploiters of these poor: let us be motivated by the desire to serve rather than by job security. We can use our education and advantages to help those who cannot help themselves. Their needs are simple: they just want to know where tomorrow's meals will come from; they just want to have a decent job, proper housing, a little culture, and a [p. 302](#) future for their children. If we can veer our societies and our resources to help *meet these basic needs*, then we will have demonstrated our servant-love to at least 75 per cent of our peoples.

We must *humanize our economies*: people are worth more than modern weaponry, luxury hotels, and giant dams, all of which are considered to be more important than people in Asia today. But Christ assures us that people are of much more value than all of these. Yet how many of our people have been expendable in our nations' march toward 'progress' to catch up with Western technological 'development'? Will our people continue to be sold for bigger GNPs without our prophetic voices announcing the gospel of the Kingdom where community, love and justice enhance personhood?

Perhaps our greatest challenge is to change the system which produces so many victims. Perhaps a *Christianized form of socialism* patterned after the Swedish and Canadian economies, or the Chinese communes and Israeli *kibbutzim*, may be the best for Asia. On a global scale, we need to join our voices with the 'Group of 77' in calling for a *New International Economic Order*, the concept of which was endorsed without objection by the United Nations in 1974 (cf. McGinnis, 1979).

Meanwhile, let us pay farmers, fishers, handicraft-makers, etc. justly for what they produce, and see to it that they keep their own resources. They should be free to form co-operatives after being provided training and credit to help them become small entrepreneurs in their own right!

4. In the Political Arena

In the past, Asian Christianity seemed to have been a significant force behind the rise of some ideals, such as patriotism (especially in Korea and indirectly in the Philippines), political democracy (especially in China), human rights (especially in Korea, Taiwan and

the Philippines), economic equality (especially in Japan and China), women's liberation (especially in China and India), and moral legislation, all over Asia.

To serve our fellow-Asians, we must continue to lead in the restructuring of our societies into more *just and free democracies*, according to the biblical vision of the Kingdom. Though there can be no perfect government, we must work for a political order which will be more conducive for good to prosper over evil.

Let us *visualize* our nations having the supreme power truly vested in the people, where they exercise such authority through their elected p. 303 officials chosen in periodically held free elections. Let our societies be characterized by tolerance and appreciation for minorities, freedom of expression, and respect for the dignity and value of the human person, with equal opportunity for each to develop freely to one's fullest capacity in a co-operative community. As Confucius envisioned long ago, may we have political servant-leaders (may our churches produce many of these!) who (a) cultivate their personal conduct, (b) honour worthy people, (c) identify themselves with the interests and welfare of the whole nation, (d) show themselves as fathers or mothers to the common people, (e) show tenderness to strangers from other countries (cf. Lin, 1942).

In fast-changing political situations in Asia, we need to be *prophetic visionaries and activists* for Christ: we must help ameliorate those conditions against which we preach or write, or else we are just like parasites feeding off the sores of a sick patient in pain. To be authentic and credible in what we preach, we must show that our gospel can and does transform peoples. If we choose to stand afar and watch and talk about social sins without getting involved personally, then no matter how good or dynamic our message may seem, we are just 'clanging cymbals' (cf. Stott, 1984, 19-51). 'To see what is right and not do it is cowardice' (Confucius, *Analects* 2:24). Also, as Billy Graham says, 'We cannot simply mourn the fate of the earth. We cannot act as though we are helpless to work for the world's renewal. We must do what we can, even though we know that God's ultimate plan is the making of a new earth ... Signs indicate that the end of the age is near, yet there is no certainty. It may be several generations from now.'

Just as some of us have started to do, let us not just be the 'voice of the voiceless', but also those who let the voiceless gain voices of their own; let us not only do things for the poor but empower them to do things for themselves. Modern Asians have been taught to believe that our governments can solve our problems, when in fact they cannot. Their best way is to lessen our dependence upon them and their eventual totalitarian control by forming groups in which people are organized to meet their local needs. We need to *decentralize power structures* by organizing our people to help themselves locally.

The biblical goal in politics is *justice*, not power: the prophets denounced the abuse of power of their rulers; the early Christians refused to worship Caesar, and were thus persecuted; they did not sacrifice their integrity to the demands of political popularity and expediency. For those living in oppressive situations, we must pray and seek possible strategies that will produce just results; *non-violent* p. 304 *resistance* has proven to be effective by Gandhi, Martin Luther King and recently Cory Aquino, since it puts injustice on public display.

Christian socio-political servanthood seems to be impractical for many who live *under communist rule*: Marxists have concluded that Christians are reactionaries, just as most Christians fail to see the good side of communism. But far from disappearing, Christianity has proven to be remarkably resilient (as in post-1949 China and post-1975 South Vietnam). The institutional churches may be isolated by the authorities, but the church has grown as many dared to become martyrs. Persistent concern for others' needs, a mixture of discretion and courage, and decisions made in the painful experiences of

persecution have a spiritual dynamic which will not leave non-Christian neighbours unaffected.

We should also lead towards a new Asian political order as our people seek fresh solutions for democratic decentralization of power. As ambassadors of peace and reconciliation, let us encourage more cooperative ventures in our regions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the newly formed South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Let us blur the past posture lines of confrontation between superpowers by furthering the movement of non-alignment that started in the Bandung Conference of 1955. At the same time, let us remember that our present political boundaries hardly correspond with our pre-colonial socio-political realities; our modern maps were made by the colonial powers. This should help us to understand and respect the demands of most revolutionary movements for autonomy today.

CONCLUSION

In the light of Asian realities and Christian hope, are these ends and means of our 'servant-leadership' role *realistic*? We believe that although there will be no perfect fulfillment until the *parousia*, God will bring about many surprising 'partial yet substantial' fulfillments if his churches remain faithful to their respective callings. Unlike corporations, universities and nations, churches have no pressure to succeed, for success is not the reason for our existence and mission. We are called to be God's servant-communities on earth, not for our own enhancement, but for the giving of help to those around us.

The whole of Asia (or any specific area) will not respond to Christ positively ... so we are not deluding ourselves. But we know that we are called to be faithful: the Almighty God has delegated the task of building his Kingdom to us, and this mission will not happen by itself! p. 305 It needs self-sacrificing servant-leaders, which we each have to be. We are called to be self-effacing pointers, showing that God will intervene again to transform the world and all his people into a perfect society where his *shalom* (peace), justice, love, and righteousness reign. Our earthly roles will most certainly be fulfilled imperfectly often (by trial and error, perhaps), but the important thing is that our grain of seed is buried in the ground and dies ... so that it may multiply a hundredfold or more (cf. [In. 12:24](#)).

Our theological institutions face the challenge of training *servant-leaders* for Asian churches and nations. May we be open and able to bring together diverse theological traditions and insights to inform and enrich one another. May we help create theologies, ethics, politics, and economics that are true to the gospel of King Jesus and at the same time authentically Asian. May we be continually cooperative and supportive of other theological communities who are also engaged in this task of reflecting and equipping Asian churches with Spirit-gifted leaders who live and speak out from within the socio-political, historico-cultural and religious realities of Asia. May we produce graduates who will avoid the pitfalls of imbalanced piety, narrow theologies and affluent missions, but rather become balanced, open-minded and modest *servants* of the Most High.

'Servant-leadership' is extremely costly—very costly indeed, for it we are to be empowered by the Spirit, we have to pay the price of doing God's agenda in God's way, humbling ourselves to serve, and following the pattern of our Master rather than our own tastes. Though our message will not necessarily be well-received, let us be found faithful in giving all of our selves, committed to love him above all and to serve his people with our best until we meet at his judgment seat. What joy, then, to hear his 'Well done, thou good and *faithful servant*' for all eternity!

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Dr. David Lim is teaching in Asia Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines in the department of Church History. [p. 307](#)

Current Chalcedonian Christological Challenges

Norman L. Geisler

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Christology being the heart of Christian faith and life, the debates concerning it are perennially relevant in every situation. In this thought-provoking article, Dr. Geisler deals with five basic challenges in modern times to the age-old Chalcedonian formula: the logical, theistic, scientific, historical and soteriological contradictions. In a scholarly way he brings out the contradictions in the criticisms themselves, and gives the alternatives in a convincing manner. His missionary concern emerges clearly as he establishes the deity of Christ.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

Jesus' question is still fresh today: 'Who do men say that I am?' As of old, today's answers vary: a pure myth, a mere man, a great guru, are only a few. For orthodox Christians of all major confessions, Jesus of Nazareth is 'very God of very God'. He is the second person of the ontological Trinity. He is both God and man co-joined in one person without separation or confusion. This Chalcedonian confession has come in for hard times among contemporary scholars.

John Hick contends that to affirm 'that the historical Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square.'¹ Frances Young agrees, claiming that 'to reduce all of God to a human incarnation is virtually inconceivable'.²

There are numerous reasons offered by contemporary writers for rejecting orthodox incarnationalism. Most of them are reducible to five basic charges: a Chalcedonian view of Christ is:

1. Logically inconsistent;
2. Theistically unfounded;
3. Scientifically implausible; p. 308
4. Historically unjustified;
5. Soteriologically unacceptable.

Obviously an exhaustive treatment of all these attacks is not possible here. Our purpose is simply to set forth the problem areas and to sketch a brief response to them.

LOGICAL CONSISTENCY

It is true that orthodox Christology affirms that 'one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, [is] the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man ...'³ It is also true that Chalcedon confessed 'one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, *inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably*; ... not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son ...'⁴ Thus there are two different and distinct natures—one of deity and the other of humanity—cojoined in one and only one person, Jesus of Nazareth.

The logical problems with this can be exposed as follows:⁵

The Person Jesus Christ is

in his humanity:

in his deity:

finite

infinite

¹ John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977, 178.

² Frances Young, 'A Cloud of Witnesses', in John Hick, *ibid.*, 35.

³ Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2.62.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.62.

⁵ Normal L. Geisler and William Watkins, *Perspectives: Understanding and Evaluating Today's World Views*, San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1984, 188.

caused to exist	uncaused existence
ontologically dependent	ontologically independent
mutable	immutable
spatial	nonspatial
temporal	nontemporal
complex	simple

It can be readily seen from this contrast that many of the human and divine attributes of this one person are mutually exclusive. There are, of course, many unorthodox alternatives to the apparent logical incoherence of this orthodox Christology.⁶ These come

⁶ The heterodox views on Christ can be classified as follows:

<i>Position</i>	<i>Christ's Humanity</i>	<i>Christ's Deity</i>	<i>No. of Persons</i>
Docetism	denied	affirmed	1
Ebionitism	affirmed	denied	1
Arianism	affirmed	diminished	1
Apollinarianism	diminished	affirmed	1
Nestorianism	affirmed	affirmed	2
		but separated	
Eutychianism	affirmed	affirmed	1
(or Monophysitism)		but mixed	
Adoptionism	affirmed	affirmed	2
		but separated	

from either p.309 denying, separating or mixing his deity and humanity. But none of these options is acceptable to those who confess a Chalcedonian Christ of two natures—one divine and another human—cojoined but not confused in one and the same person of Jesus of Nazareth. But once we have rejected these positions, the question remains: Is orthodox Christology logically consistent?⁷

The answer emerges from a careful examination of the logical form of the argument against the coherence of the Chalcedonian confession, which goes as follows:

1. It is contradictory to affirm that one individual possesses mutually exclusive attributes at the same time.

2. But the claim that Jesus possessed both divine and human p.310 attributes (such as infinite and finite) is claiming one individual to possess mutually exclusive attributes at the same time.

3. Therefore, it is contradictory to affirm that Jesus is both God and man simultaneously.

Once the logical skeleton of this argument has been exposed it is not difficult to detect its flaw: it contains an incomplete statement of the law of non-contradiction (in premise 1). A sentence is not self-contradictory simply because it is affirmed of opposites at the same time. It must also be affirmed *in the same sense*. But this is precisely what the orthodox view of Christ does not do. Thus it avoids the charge of incoherence in the following way:

1. It is not contradictory to affirm opposing attributes of the same individual at the same time as long as it is *in a different sense*.

2. The mutually exclusive attributes (such as ‘infinite’ and ‘finite’) are not being attributed to Jesus in the same sense.

3. Therefore, it is not contradictory to affirm of Jesus the attributes of both deity and humanity.

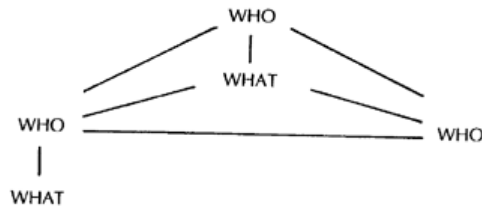
For example, the sense in which Jesus got tired and slept is not the same as the sense in which as God he ‘never slumbers or sleeps’ ([Ps. 121:3](#)). And the sense in which Jesus ‘grew in wisdom’ as a man was not the same sense in which he is the eternal Wisdom and Logos ([John 1:1](#)). For each case the first is true of his human nature and the second of his divine nature. A diagram will help illustrate the point.

(Geisler and Watkins, *ibid.*)

⁷ The rational discomfort of this doctrine is manifest even in orthodox circles. Vernon Grounds, former president of the Conservative Baptist Seminary in Denver, cited with approval the conclusion of Søren Kierkegaard, Benedict de Spinoza and Reinhold Niebuhr, all of whom he believed claimed that this view of the incarnation is logically absurd and nonsensical (Grounds, ‘The Postulate of Paradox’, *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 7 (1964) 13–14). Another conservative scholar, John V. Dahms asks:

... by what logic is it possible for a nature that cannot be tempted to be united with a nature that can be tempted, or for a nature that cannot grow weary to be united with one that can grow weary, or for a nature that is always in full and perfect favour with God to be united with a nature that can grow in favour with God? (Dahms, ‘How Reliable is Logic?’ *JETS* 21 (1978) 373).

One evangelical writer has gone so far as to argue that Jesus has only one nature. He is ‘the one-natured God-man’ (Ronald W. Leigh, ‘Jesus: the One-natured God-man’, *Christian Scholar’s Review* 11:2 (1982) 124). From a strictly orthodox standpoint this is a kind of monophysite view which, to borrow Chalcedon’s terminology ‘confuses’ the two natures. It fuses the two natures into one incoherent hybrid, a divine-human nature.



In the Trinity there are three persons (whos) in one Nature (what). in Jesus there is one person (who) in two Natures (whats). Hence, the mutually exclusive attributes of deity and humanity are not predicated of Christ in the same sense (that is, of the same nature). For the sense in which Jesus is infinite (viz., as God) is different than the sense in which he is finite (viz., as man). Thus, there is no contradiction involved because, for example, Jesus is infinite and eternal only in his divine [p. 311](#) nature and temporal and finite only in his human nature. These two natures are distinct (though not separate). And as long as there is a distinction between them, then there is no contradiction in the Incarnation.

It would be contradictory to affirm that there is only one nature in Christ which possesses mutually exclusive attributes (such as created and uncreated, changeable and unchangeable). But this contradiction is avoided when we affirm that there are *two* different natures in this one person. This is a mystery but not a contradiction. That is, it goes *beyond* our finite reason but not *against* it. We cannot comprehend how both natures are cojoined in one person, but we can consistently affirm that they are.⁸

THEISTIC GROUNDING

In addition to the charge of logical incoherence, it is necessary to respond to those who would wrench orthodox Christology from its traditional theistic orientation. Although this attack comes from several directions, the common element is a denial of Jesus' unique claim to be ontologically identical to the monotheistic God of orthodox Judaism and Christianity.

Some offer the implausible thesis that Jesus' claims were not qualitatively different from those made in pantheistic or polytheistic cultures. They have suggested Greek, Roman, Buddhist, or even Hindu parallels. The problem with these proposals was pinpointed by C. S. Lewis when he wrote:

Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God.⁹ He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now let us get this clear. Among pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world Who had made it and [p. 312](#) was infinitely different from anything else. And when you have grasped that, you will see that

⁸ The Incarnation (and Trinity) may be in some sense *unimaginable* but they are not *unintelligible*. Neither can we imagine (i.e. picture) a Euclidean point, since every representation of it has dimension, and a point is a dimensionless intersection of two lines. And yet we can meaningfully *state* (define) what it is. Likewise, whatever inadequacies there are to concepts, images, or pictures of the Trinity (and Incarnation) do not thereby render all statements (predications) about them as unintelligible. In short, all truth is *predictable*, but not all truth is *imaginable*.

⁹ See below for a discussion of Jesus's claims to be identical with God.

what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips.¹⁰

In brief, if Jesus had said, 'I and the Father are one' ([John 10:30](#)) in Bombay, no Hindu would have batted an eyelash, but in Jerusalem the Jews took up stones to kill him, saying, 'because you, a mere man, claim to be God' (v.[33](#)).

John Hick offers the implausible thesis that the unique deity claims of Christ can be explained away because

Within Judaism itself the notion of a man being called son of God already had a long tradition behind it. The Messiah was to be an earthly king of the line of David, and the ancient kings of David's line had been adopted as son of God in being anointed to their office: the words of [Psalm 2:7](#), 'He said to me, You are my son, today I have begotten you', were probably originally spoken at the coronation ceremony.¹¹

This, however, overlooks several important facts. First, Jesus claimed to be identical with *Yahweh*, an Old Testament term reserved only for God.¹² Second, Jesus claimed to be the 'I Am' or self-existing God of [Exodus 3:14](#) (in [John 8:58](#)). Third, the fact that many Old Testament passages about the Messiah's deity (not cited by Hick) imply his clear identity with *Yahweh*. Hence, to admit the Old Testament origin of Jesus' claims to be the son of David is to acknowledge also that he is David's 'Lord' ([Ps. 110:1](#); [Mt. 22:44](#)). For example, the Messiah is identified with *Yahweh* or Deity in many passages. He is called 'mighty God' in [Isa. 9:6](#) and *Yahweh* in [Zech. 12:10](#) and again in [14:3-9](#). The Messiah is labelled 'Lord' (*Adonai*) in [Ps. 110:1](#) and 'God' (*elohim*) in [Ps. 45:6](#) (cf. [Heb. 1:8](#)).¹³ According to [Micah 5:2](#) he pre-existed before Bethlehem. And he is identifiable with the Old Testament angel of *Yahweh* ([Isa. 63:7-10](#)) who is the 'I Am' of [Exodus 3:14](#) (cf. vv. [3-5](#)).

In brief, on the one hand, to deny that Jesus made unique claims to be identical to the monotheistic God of orthodox Judaism is to rip it from the historical context in which Jesus lived and made his claims. p. 313 And on the other hand to admit the Jewish (Old Testament) roots of his claims is to acknowledge the full force of his claims to be ontologically one with the *Yahweh* of the Old Testament.¹⁴

HISTORICITY OF NEW TESTAMENT RECORD

Of course we have thus far assumed that Jesus actually claimed to be God.

In order to defend this claim two pivotal points need support:

1) The Gospel record presents Christ as claiming ontological identity with the monotheistic God of orthodox Judaism.

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1943, 54-55.

¹¹ John Hick, *ibid.*, 174.

¹² See discussion below.

¹³ While the word *elohim* does not always refer to deity in the Old Testament, yet both the context here and the decisive use of it in [Hebrews 1](#) to refer to God (o theos) support this conclusion. At any rate, it is a possible rendering of [Psalm 45:6](#), and together with the other clear Old Testament references to Messiah as God, it makes a strong case.

¹⁴ This is not to say that Jesus' claims to deity were always explicit and forthright. Given his monotheistic audience this is understandable. However, even though Jesus' claims were often covert, they were nevertheless very clear and his Jewish audience clearly understood them as claims to deity ([Mark 2:10](#); [John 10:33](#)).

2) The Gospel records reliably report the teachings of Jesus regarding his own identity.¹⁵

1. First, do the Gospels say Jesus claimed deity for himself?

There are at least eight different ways the Jesus of the Gospels claimed to be God.

First, Jesus explicitly claimed to be the Old Testament Messiah on many occasions ([Mt. 14:61-63](#); [16:15-17](#); [In. 4:25-26](#)). When the Jewish High Priest demanded of him, ‘ ‘Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed one?’ ‘ ‘I am,’ said Jesus. ‘ ‘And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming in the clouds of heaven’ ’ ([Mark 14:61-63](#)). But, as was shown earlier, the Old Testament Messiah was identical to Yahweh. So to claim to be Messiah is to claim to be one with Yahweh.

Second, Jesus directly claimed to be the Old Testament Yahweh in many New Testament passages, the most notable of which is [John 8:58](#), ‘ ‘Before Abraham was, I am.’ ’¹⁶
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When Jesus made these claims his monotheistic audience responded with statements like these: ‘ ‘Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?’ ’ ([Mark 2:7](#)). ‘ ‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ ’ replied the Jews, ‘ ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God’ ’ ([John 10:33](#)).

¹⁵ There are those who claim that history is not knowable because our knowledge of the past is fragmentary and world view dependent. But if this were so then neither would classical history nor historical geology be legitimate disciplines. (See N. L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 198, ch. 15.)

¹⁶ The following comparison shows that Jesus claimed to be Jehovah (Yahweh).

<i>Of Jehovah (Yahweh)</i>	<i>Mutual title or act</i>	<i>Of Jesus</i>
Isa. 45:22 ; 43:11	Saviour	John 4:42
I Sam. 2:6	Raise dead	John 5:21
Joel 3:12	Judge	John 5:27 ; cf. Mt. 25:31 f.
Isa. 60:19-20	Light	John 8:12
Exodus 3:14	I Am	John 8:58 , cf. 18:5-6
Psalm 23:1	Shepherd	John 10:11
Isa. 42:8 , cf. 48:11	Glory of God	John 17:1, 5
Isa. 41:4 ; 44:6	First and last	Rev. 1:17 ; 2:8
Isa. 62:5 (and Hosea 2:16)	Bridegroom	Rev. 21:2 , cf. Mt. 25:1 f.
Jer. 31:34	Forgiver of sins	Mark 2:7 , 10

Third, Jesus claimed to be one with God the Father.

“I and the Father are one.” Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him ...’ because, said they, ‘you, a mere man, claim to be God’ ([John 10:30-33](#)). He told Philip, ‘If you have seen me you have seen the Father’ ([John 14:9](#)). Certainly they would not have reacted in this way if Jesus was merely claiming to be of the same *purpose* as the Father and not of the same nature.

Fourth, Jesus claimed to possess the eternal glory of God.

Yahweh said to Isaiah, ‘I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another’ ([Isa. 42:8](#)). Yet Jesus prayed to the Father, ‘Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began’ ([John 17:4-5](#)). John records elsewhere that when Isaiah wrote in chapter six about the Lord high and lifted up that ‘he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him’ ([John 12:37-38, 41](#)).

Fifth, Jesus claimed to be equal with God.

Mark wrote that ‘when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”’ ([Mark 2:5-7](#)). In [John 5](#) Jesus said, ‘Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him ...’ ([John 5:22-23, 26-29](#)).

Sixth, on numerous occasions Jesus accepted worship that is due to God alone.

The Law declared: ‘Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God’ ([Ex. 34:14](#)). Yet ‘the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him ...’ ([Mt. 28:16-17](#)). On another occasion when Jesus reached out his hand and caught a p. 315 drowning Peter, ‘then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God”’ ([Mt. 14:31-33](#)).

Seventh, Jesus placed his name on the same level as that of God the Father.

This is evident from the fact that he asked the disciples to baptize in his name, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit ([Mt. 28:18-19](#)), thus placing himself on equal footing with the Father.

Eighth, Jesus asked his disciples to pray in his name.

‘And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it’ ([John 14:13-14](#)). Indeed, Stephen even prayed to Jesus, saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’ ([Acts 7:59-60](#)).

Ninth, even in his parables Jesus claimed functions reserved only for Yahweh in the Old Testament, such as being Shepherd ([Luke 15](#)), Rock ([Mt. 7:24-27](#)), and Sower ([Mt. 13:24-30](#)).

Any Jew with a knowledge of the Old Testament imagery could discern that Jesus was placing himself on the level of Yahweh who was Israel’s Shepherd ([Ps. 23:1](#)), Rock ([Ps. 18](#)), and Sower ([Amos 9:15](#)).¹⁷

It is abundantly clear from this evidence that the Gospels and other New Testament records present Jesus as one who claims to be equal with the monotheistic God of first century orthodox Judaism.¹⁸ This leaves the one remaining and highly important

¹⁷ See Philip Payne, ‘Jesus’ Implicit Claim to Deity in His Parables’, *Trinity Journal* (1981):2:1:3-23.

¹⁸ When Jesus said, ‘The Father is greater than I’ ([John 14:28](#)), he referred to the office of the Father, not his nature. Whether human or divine, both Father and Son have the same nature. And when [Colossians 1:15](#) speaks of Christ as ‘Firstborn’ it refers to his being first *over* creation, not first *in* creation. After all, he cannot be a creature if he is the Creator of all things (v. [16](#), cf. [John 1:2](#)).

question: are the Gospel records creating or reporting the sayings of Jesus? Are they putting their words in Jesus' mouth, or did they get their words from Jesus' mouth?

There have been several obstacles to an acceptance of the historical reliability of the Gospel records. As we shall see, none of these is insurmountable.

It has been claimed that the New Testament records are in some non-historical sense legends, myths, or literary embellishments. From David Strauss to Rudolf Bultmann there is an unbroken tradition of negative biblical criticism which has perpetuated this attack on orthodox Christology. However, the foundations of such criticism are [p.316](#) crumbling. And indeed they should, for they are constituted of unjustified presuppositions.

First, it is often wrongly assumed that the basic New Testament documents were of late (even second century) origin. This view is more speculative and pre-archaeological and has now been largely discredited, even in circles which do not embrace Chalcedonian Christology. After decades of study the renowned paleontologist, William F. Albright, concluded that 'every book of the New Testament was written by a baptized Jew between the forties and the eighties of the first century AD (very probably sometime between about 50 and 75 AD)'.¹⁹

More recently the late radical theologian John A. T. Robinson redated the New Testament to 'the period between 40 and 70 [AD]'.²⁰ In response to contemporary critics who persist in holding late dates for the New Testament, Robinson castigates the 'almost wilful blindness of investigators to the seemingly obvious'.²¹

C. H. Dodd added:

You are certainly justified in questioning the whole structure of the accepted 'critical' chronology of the NT writings, which avoids putting anything earlier than 70, so that none of them are available for anything like first-generation testimony. I should agree with you that much of this late dating is quite arbitrary, even wanton, the off-spring not of any argument that can be presented, but rather of the critic's prejudice ...²²

Second, it is often incorrectly assumed that the New Testament record about Christ was not composed by contemporary or eyewitness writers.

In addition to being based on unjustified late dating, this unsubstantiated charge is contrary to the unequivocal claim of the New Testament documents themselves. The writer of the Gospel of John said of himself in his Gospel, 'This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true' ([John 21:24](#)). In his first epistle John declared, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we [p.317](#) proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it ...' ([1 John 1:1-2](#)).

The apostle Peter insisted, 'We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty' ([1 Peter 1:16](#)).

In fact, of the four Gospel writers, three (Matthew, Mark and John) were eyewitness contemporaries of Christ, and Luke declared:

¹⁹ William F. Albright, 'Toward A More Conservative View', *Christianity Today* (Jan. 18, 1963) 359.

²⁰ John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976, 352.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 342.

²² C. H. Dodd, cited in *ibid.*, 360.

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account ... so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught ([Luke 1:1-4](#)).²³

The apostle Paul, whom even the begrudging critics grant four New Testament letters (Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians), claimed to be an eyewitness contemporary of Christ (cf. [1 Cor. 15:8](#)). He even challenged his readers (AD 55) only 22 years after Christ's resurrection (AD 33)²³ to check with the eyewitnesses to verify what he said ([1 Cor. 15:6](#)).

Once it is admitted that the New Testament was composed in the first century (as both manuscript and archaeological evidence indicates), then it is unreasonable to deny apostolic claims to authorship. In fact, to dispute the authorship claims of the New Testament books is [p. 318](#) to impugn the integrity of the earliest disciples of Christ and thus the documentary foundation of the Christian church.

Third, it is sometimes mistakenly assumed by negative New Testament critics that the New Testament record shows signs of mythological embellishment.

This is, however, without basis in fact. First of all, there was not enough time between Jesus' death (AD 33) and the first written documents (AD 40-60) for a myth to develop.

²³ See Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.

There is substantial evidence for accepting the historical accuracy of John's report of Jesus' sayings.

1. John A. T. Robinson dated the Gospel of John at 40-65 AD. This date places it within two decades of the events recorded, much too early for typical embellishment to occur. Even late dates place it within the lifetime of the eyewitness writer, John the Apostle.

2. John's account of Jesus' sayings are not different from those found in the synoptic Gospels (cf. [Mt. 11:25-27](#)). Even the 'I am' statements have parallels (cf. [Mk. 14:62](#)).

3. The account of miracles that also occur in the Gospels does not show any more significant variation than occurs from one synoptic to another. This includes walking on water, feeding the five thousand, and the resurrection.

4. Strong deity claims, characteristic of John, are also found in the synoptics (cf. [Mark 2:7-10; 14:16-62](#)).

5. John is careful to distinguish what Jesus actually said and what the disciples later understood by it (cf. [John 2:17; 6:60](#)).

6. The distinction between Jesus' words and those of the writer of the Gospel is so clear that a 'red-letter' edition of John is easy to make.

7. The claim that John put his own words in Jesus' mouth cannot avoid the charge of deception.

²³ See Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.

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2. John's account of Jesus' sayings are not different from those found in the synoptic Gospels (cf. [Mt. 11:25-27](#)). Even the 'I am' statements have parallels (cf. [Mk. 14:62](#)).

3. The account of miracles that also occur in the Gospels does not show any more significant variation than occurs from one synoptic to another. This includes walking on water, feeding the five thousand, and the resurrection.

4. Strong deity claims, characteristic of John, are also found in the synoptics (cf. [Mark 2:7-10; 14:16-62](#)).

5. John is careful to distinguish what Jesus actually said and what the disciples later understood by it (cf. [John 2:17; 6:60](#)).

6. The distinction between Jesus' words and those of the writer of the Gospel is so clear that a 'red-letter' edition of John is easy to make.

7. The claim that John put his own words in Jesus' mouth cannot avoid the charge of deception.

Myths are known to take at least two generations to develop.²⁴ Second, the New Testament is markedly different from the second- and third-century mythological embellishments known as the New Testament Apocrypha.²⁵ Third, this critical assumption is contrary to the very claim of the New Testament writers who said that they were not writing myths (cf. [2 Peter 1:16–17](#)). Fourth, the New Testament records do not possess the literary characteristics of unhistorical myths, legend, or *midrash*.²⁶ C. S. Lewis concludes of the Gospel stories: ‘I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this.’²⁷

Fourth, other critics have suggested that the New Testament writers did not distinguish between their words and those of Jesus. But this is untrue in the Gospels (*passim*), Acts ([20:35](#)), the Epistles ([1 Cor. 7:10, 12, 25](#)), and the book of Revelation (e.g. [1:8, 11, 17b–3:22](#)). Even without the aid of quotation marks, the ease with which a ‘red letter’ edition of the New Testament can be made demonstrates how clearly and consistently the New Testament writers distinguished their words from those of Jesus. At times the Gospel writers even take pains to distinguish what Jesus said at the time with what they later thought about it (cf. [John 2:17, 22](#)). This is not to say that the Gospel writers did not select, arrange, and even paraphrase Jesus’ words. It is only to affirm that they did not misrepresent, distort, or invent them.²⁸ p. 319

Fifth, some have suggested that the Gospel writers were not giving a historical narration of events but were really presenting a Jesus of their own literary creation.²⁹ But this is contrary to their own claims. John said, ‘That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of Life’ ([1 John 1:1](#)). Peter wrote, ‘We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’ ([2 Peter 1:16](#)).³⁰ And Luke explicitly claimed, ‘I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning’ in order to write ‘an orderly account’ ([Luke 1:3–4](#)). The

²⁴ William L. Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1981, 101.

²⁵ See Gospel of Peter 8:35–42.

²⁶ See Scott Cunningham and Daryl Bock, ‘Is Matthew Midrash?’ *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April–June, 1987): Vol. 144.

²⁷ C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, Walter Hooper, ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967, 155.

²⁸ It is also crucial to the historicity of the Gospels to recognize that, when they declare ‘Jesus said or did’ something on a given occasion, that Jesus did in fact say or do this on that occasion. Otherwise the writer is intentionally misrepresenting the facts. All of the Gospel data which seems to conflict with this can be accounted for by remembering that as an itinerant preacher Jesus said many of the same things on different occasions (like the Sermon the Mount); that he performed similar acts on different occasions (like cleansing the temple); and that sometimes events are recorded for topical reasons without really claiming they occurred in the stated order.

²⁹ By insisting that genre decisions are made ‘up front’, a subtle *a priori* methodological assumption is made which imposes meaning on the text, rather than discovering the meaning of the text. Genre decisions should be made only *after* the text is exegeted by the normal historical-grammatical method of interpretation which seeks to discover what the author meant, in the context in which it is expressed. Otherwise, alien genre choices made ‘up front’ can distort what the author really meant in the passage.

³⁰ The evidence for the authenticity of 2 Peter is substantial (see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction: Hebrews to Revelation*, Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1962, 151–171).

Gospel writers were not artificially creating a myth; they were accurately reporting the truth.

Finally, it is often wrongly assumed that the New Testament records about Christ are not historically reliable because of the presence of supernatural events.³¹ This unjustified presumption leads us to our next main point. [p. 320](#)

THE SUPERNATURAL NATURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT ACCOUNTS

As early as 1670 the pantheist Benedict Spinoza concluded that nature 'keeps a fixed and immutable order'. Thus 'a miracle ... is a mere absurdity'.³² The effect of his view on the Christ of the Gospel is clear: no miracle recorded in the New Testament actually occurred. Jesus was merely a man. Thus Spinoza understood much of the Bible allegorically.

It was almost one hundred years before David Hume updated Spinoza's antisupernaturalism in his famous *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748). Here Hume argued that 'a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined'.³³ Almost a hundred years later David Strauss wrote his famous *Life of Jesus* (1835–36)³⁴ which was based on Hume's antisupernatural presupposition. The devastating results have endured to the present, aided more recently by Rudolf Bultmann's *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (1958).³⁶ Bultmann's acceptance of such antisupernaturalism led him to conclude that 'man's knowledge and mastery of the world have advanced to such an extent through science and technology that it is not longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world—in fact, there is hardly anyone who does'.³⁷

The *Myth of God Incarnate* theologians reflect the same antisupernatural bias. Michael Goulder, for example, claims that although 'historical study does not disprove divine

³¹ There are at least ten different lines of evidence which converge to support the historicity of the New Testament. Briefly enumerated they include the following:

1. New Testament Books were quoted and collected as authentic by other New Testament writers ([Col. 4:16](#); [1 Th. 5:27](#); [2 Pet. 3:15–16](#)); 2. It is quoted as authoritative by other writers in apostolic times (for example, *The Epistle of Barnabas*, Clement of Rome); 3. The New Testament was considered apostolic by the disciples of the apostles (such as Polycarp); 4. Early fathers (from the second to the fourth century) quoted as authoritative the whole New Testament; 5. Early commentaries and harmonies were written on the New Testament (e.g. Tatian's *Diatessaron*, AD 170); 6. New Testament lists and collections were made at an early date (second century and following); 7. All the basic books (Gospels, Acts, Paul's Epistles) were included in virtually all the collections; 8. Even the early enemies of Christianity (Celsus, Porphyry, Julian) recognized the historical nature of the Gospels; 9. The apocryphal books (second and third century) are unlike the Gospels; 10. Archaeological discoveries confirm the historicity of the New Testament.

³² Benedict Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, Vol. 1, trans. by R. H. M. Elwes, London: George Bell and Sons, 1883.

³³ David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1955 (1748), 122.

³⁴ David Strauss wrote, 'For if the Gospels are really and truly historical, it is impossible to exclude miracles from the life of Jesus; if, on the other hand, miracles are incompatible with history, then the Gospels are not really historical records' (Strauss, *The Life of Jesus* 1.19).

³⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.

³⁷ Rudolf Bultmann, 'New Testament and Mythology' in *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, Hans Werner, ed., London: Billing and Sons, Ltd., 1954, 4.

activity', it just 'renders the old inspiration model implausible'.³⁸ Since Ernst Troeltsch first wrote p. 321 on historiography,³⁹ a naturalistic bias has become ingrained in modern historical methodology. Troeltsch laid down his rule of analogy: the only way in which one can know the past is by inspecting analogies in the present. The unknown is arrived at only through the known. In his own words, 'on the analogy of the events known to us we seek by conjecture and sympathetic understanding to explain and reconstruct the past ...'⁴⁰ On the basis of this historical uniformitarianism some have argued that 'no amount of testimony is every permitted to establish as past reality a thing that cannot be found in present reality ...' Even if 'the witness may have a perfect character—all that goes for nothing ...'⁴¹

This predisposition to judge historicity 'up front' in terms of supernatural claims is unwarranted, as can be seen by an analysis of the basic argument against miracles, formulated by philosophers from David Hume to Anthony Flew.⁴² The argument runs like this:

1. A miracle is a singular event.
2. Natural laws are based on regular patterns of events.
3. But the evidence for the regular is always greater than evidence for the singular.
4. Therefore, the evidence against miracles is always greater than the evidence for miracles.⁴³

Even from a purely naturalistic viewpoint, the flaw in this argument is evident. For it is simply untrue that the evidence for a *regular* pattern of events is always greater than that for a *singularity*. If this were true, then no philosophical naturalist should accept the 'Big Bang' theory as most contemporary astronomers do. For this 'Big Bang' was a radical singular event which has not been repeated since. Yet most scientists in the field accept its occurrence.⁴⁴

Likewise, if it is true, as anti-supernaturalists insist it is, that the evidence is always greater against singularities, then why do all naturalistic biochemists accept the spontaneous generation of first life in some 'primordial soup' or elsewhere? As far as the actual evidence p. 322 goes this is an unrepeated singularity. The truth is that naturalists have their own set of singularities, even though they reject the Christian's. It underlines the fact that the real problem is not what the Hume-Flew argument suggests: that there cannot be good evidence for unrepeated singularities, past or present.

The contemporary agnostic, Carl Sagan, believes that a 'single message' on a radio telescope⁴⁵ can prove the existence of highly intelligent beings in outer space. Why then is a single communication (or activity) of the intelligent Creator of the Cosmos ruled

³⁸ Michael Goulder, 'The Two Roots of the Christian Myth', John Hick, *ibid.*, 84.

³⁹ Ernst Troeltsch, 'Historiography', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*.

⁴⁰ Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and Modern Thought*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1982, 88.

⁴¹ Carl Becker, 'Detachment and the Writing of History', *Detachment and the Writing of History*, Phil L. Snyder, ed., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972, 12-13.

⁴² Antony Flew, 'Miracles', in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, ed., New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967, 346-353.

⁴³ Geisler, *ibid.*, chapters 3-5.

⁴⁴ See Norman L. Geisler and Kerby Anderson, *Origin Science: A Proposal for the Creation-Evolution Controversy*, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987.

⁴⁵ Carl Sagan, *Broca's Brain*, New York: Random House, 1979, 275.

unscientific? In fact, in a theistic context miracles are to be expected. As Lewis aptly noted, 'If we admit God, must we admit Miracle? Indeed, you have no security against it. That is the bargain. Theology says to you in effect, "Admit God and with Him the risk of a few miracles ..."'⁴⁶

Jesus lived and acted in the context of a theistic world. Therefore, granting this theistic setting, miraculous claims of and about Christ should not be ruled out on any but evidential grounds. In short, a good historian does not legislate miracles out of existence; rather he looks for the evidence of their authenticity.

There is another objection against miracles that is more subtle than the first. It is identified with the Bultmannian view. It argues that miracle stories are not normal history: they are part of sacred or spiritual history. It claims that miracles are spiritual truths or myths. For example, the virgin birth of Jesus is not a biological event but a spiritual event. Likewise, the resurrection of Christ is not a medical event but a redemptive act. This argument can be formulated as follows.⁴⁷

1. Miracles are by nature more than objective, historical truths; they are transcendent truths of faith.

2. But what is more than the objective, space-time world cannot be known historically.

3. Therefore, miracle stories cannot be known historically.

It seems clear enough that miracles are more than purely empirical, historical events. They do have a transcendent, redemptive dimension to them. The resurrection, for example, is more than the resuscitation of the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth. It is an act of God by which redemption for mankind is secured ([Rom. 4:25](#); [1 Cor. 15:1-4](#)). However, the Bultmannian mistake is to assume that since miracles [p.323](#) are *more* than historical that they are *less* than historical. The miraculous event is still part of the space-time world, and as such it is a legitimate object of historical enquiry. For even though there is a divine origin and significance to the virgin conception of Jesus (without a male sperm), nevertheless it resulted in an actual birth in Bethlehem of Judea about 2000 years ago.

Events such as the virgin birth of Jesus are subject to historical research. The same is true of the resurrection. Even though its cause (God) is *beyond* time, its occurrence was *within* time, and as such it too is the object of legitimate historical enquiry. In short, simply because miracles are not events *of* the natural world we may not say that they are not events *in* the natural world. Even if they are not merely events *of* history, they may yet be events *in* history.

SALVIFIC IMPLICATION

What is the most important implication of all this? If Jesus is not the Son of God, then he did not provide the means for us to become the sons of God. But if Jesus is the Son of God, then we must take seriously his claims to be the only way to God.⁴⁸ Maurice Wiles noted correctly that if one rejects the Incarnation of God in Jesus, then 'the most likely change would be towards a less exclusive insistence on Jesus as the way for all peoples and all cultures'.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947, 109-110.

⁴⁷ See Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and Modern Thought*, 82.

⁴⁸ [John 10:9-10](#); [14:6](#); cf. [Acts 4:12](#) and [1 Tim. 2:5](#).

⁴⁹ Maurice Wiles, 'Christianity Without Incarnation?', John Hick, *ibid.*, 9.

John Hick outlines a universalist implication of rejecting the orthodox doctrine of the incarnation when he concludes that it would replace ‘the attempt at the mass conversion of the adherents of one world religion to another’.⁵⁰ In brief, the choice is either Incarnationalism or Universalism (or Annihilationism). Conversely, Incarnationalism involves some form of exclusivism. If Jesus is the Son of God, then he is the only way to God. If he was right when he claimed, ‘I and the Father are one’ ([John 10:30](#)), then he should also be believed when he proclaims, ‘No man comes to the Father except by me’ ([John 14:6](#)).

Much of the steam universalists generate against the uniqueness of Jesus’ claim is based on their own (challengeable) assumption that truth is relative. But the very claim that all truth is relative is either itself [p. 324](#) relative (and thus ineffective), or else absolute and self-defeating. Such thinkers are standing upon the pinnacle of their own absolute from which they relativize everything else. Thus, in attempting to avoid exclusivism, they become exclusivists themselves.

Christ’s claims are admittedly narrow, but they are not thereby unfair. For even though no one can be saved apart from him, nevertheless no one will be turned away by him (see [John 6:37](#)). As C. S. Lewis put it,

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done’, and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done’. All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.⁵²

So it is fair to have only one door to heaven as long as it is open to all.

What about those who do not know where the door is? Again the words of Lewis are to the point: ‘We do know that no man can be saved except through Christ’; but in the meantime, ‘if you are worried about the people outside, the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself’.⁵³ Rather, the best expression of concern we can show is to take our place on the solid Rock from which we can throw out a life-line to others who are perishing.

SUMMARY

We have been able to present only the outline of some of the chief criticisms of orthodox Chalcedonian Christology. These central charges have been weighed and found wanting. The historic view of Christ is neither logically inconsistent nor theistically unfounded. And to deny the authenticity of the miracle stories is neither philosophically necessary nor factually justifiable. Thus the unique salvific claims of Christ should still motivate his disciples. He said, ‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ... And surely I am with you always, [even] to the very end of the age’ ([Mt. 28:18–20](#)). Amen.

Dr. Norman L. Geisler is Professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas, USA. [p. 325](#)

⁵⁰ John Hick, *ibid.*, 182.

⁵² C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1946, 69.

⁵³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 65.

Caste in the Protestant Churches: An Historical Perspective

Graham Houghton

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This was a paper presented at a recent meeting of the Theological Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India on the question of caste in the church. The Indian caste system is again in the forefront in sociological and theological discussions, not only in India but also elsewhere. In India particularly, in relation to Donald McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle, it is a hot issue. As a historian the author collects a vast amount of material from the past, to show the various responses the church has given to the evil of caste in India, sometimes successfully. However it is gratifying to note that the evils of caste mentioned in the paper are to a large extent extinct now, such as the use of two cups in the Holy Communion for different castes, and the requirement of caste details in marriage banns. One can only heartily agree with the host of witnesses here, that caste is the root evil in Indian society as well as in the Indian Church. Evangelicals should leave no stone unturned to conquer this monster.

Editor

Any attempt at understanding Indian cultural and political history will be inadequate, if the influence of caste upon people and events is not taken into consideration. This is even the case, in varying degrees, for all three streams of the Christian community, Syrian, Roman Catholic, and Protestant; although over the years each has dealt with the issue in somewhat different terms.

It is certainly clear, from the considerable volume of extant source material available, that caste has been a recurring theme throughout the period of the emergence and development of the Church within the Protestant communion. Even though it was conceded that caste was a difficulty with which the apostolic Church did not have to wrestle,¹ the founders of the Protestant Church in South India did not escape censure. In a paper read at the Missionary Conference in London in May 1894, Sharrock observed that 'the first of the p. 326 difficulties which constitutes caste a problem [arose] from the fact that the old missionaries, dating from the middle of last century, tolerated caste in the Church'.² This derived, according to S. Paul, from their failure to understand the true nature of Hinduism. 'They imagined, perhaps, that if the wild olive branch were ingrafted with the true olive tree, it would partake of the root and the fatness of the olive tree. Caste, however', argues Paul, 'is not a parasite of Hinduism, but one of its chief roots'.³ Sharrock was wisely cautious about throwing 'stones at the old, saintly missionaries; still,' he said, 'we cannot be blind to "the difficult position", as Bishop Sargent described it, "in which the

¹ E. M. McPhail, 'Character of Present-Day Mission Work in the Light of the Conversion of Europe to Christianity in the Early Centuries', *HF* ser.4, 10 (December 1899): 448.

² J. A. Sharrock, 'Indian Problems: Caste', paper read at the missionary conference, London, 30 May 1894 (London, SPG Industrial Press, 1894): 1.

³ S. Paul, 'Caste in Tinnevely', *op. cit.*, p.82.

early missionaries have placed both the people and us".⁴ Earlier still, in 1835, and in a manner quite reminiscent of Abbé du Bois, Bishop Wilson painted an extremely gloomy picture. 'It is no exaggeration to say that the Church was founded in sand', and, that furthermore, 'to call the converts Christian at all' seemed to the Bishop to be 'almost a perversion of the Queen's English'.⁵ Perhaps understandably, there were many things about the character of the growing Church which only attracted 'abhorrence' and 'reprobation';⁶ however it was understood that such things were tolerated in the first place 'not as a licence to continue but to be swept away'⁷ in the course of time.

Even so, the *Harvest Field*,⁸ perhaps the most widely read mission periodical in India of the time, called the early missionary toleration of caste a mistake.⁹ Rajahgopal was much less inhibited. It was 'an unspeakable calamity', he said, 'that the early missionaries, either through pliability or short sightedness ... should have allowed men to come [into the Church] with the vile garments of caste about them ... They knew what caste was ... but they were in a dilemma.'¹⁰ Most of those who responded to the missionary appeal were, according to Rajahgopal, a motley group of families, men and women, who almost p. 327 all came from 'doubtful motives'; either 'a desire of loaves and fishes ... [or] a desire of deliverance from serfism ... and said, "We want you to take care of us."'¹¹ At this point the missionaries 'did not insist upon the renunciation of caste',¹² and, confesses Rajahgopal, 'We do not know whether any of us, had we been in their circumstances, would have acted differently.'¹³

Part of the problem, continued Rajahgopal (and A. D. Arulanantham, writing in *The Indian Church Quarterly Review*, agreed)¹⁴ was that missionaries, impatient for success, from a love of numbers, and a desire to see churches rising, opened the floodgates to heathenism.¹⁵ Rajahgopal and the Free Church of Scotland Mission took the position that converts should have been assisted to renounce caste unconditionally from the very beginning. Instead they were, by and large, baptized into membership in the Christian Church without the issue of caste being adequately dealt with. It was hoped that 'further

⁴ Sharrock, 'Problems', *op. cit.* p.2.

⁵ Quoted by Sharrock, *Ibid.*

⁶ M. V. Samuel, A letter to the President of LELM Synod, Tranquebar, from 16 members of the LELM Church, Madras. 13 January 1910. p.2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The precursor of the *NCC Review*.

⁹ 'Editorial Notes: Caste and the Church', *HF* ser. 3, 5 (September 1893): 117.

¹⁰ P. Rajahgopal, 'Caste in its Relation to the Church'. *The Indian Evangelical Review [IER]* 4 January 1877): 369.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ A. D. Arulanantham, 'Caste and Christianity', *The Indian Church Quarterly Review [ICQR]* 6 (July 1893): 326.

¹⁵ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *op. cit.*, p.363.

instruction, and moral training, and development of Christian life, would work out the heaven'.¹⁶

But this was not the case. For even though bishops decreed against caste, and missionary committees and conferences drafted minutes and enacted laws and regulations to put it down,¹⁷ upwards of a century and a half of toleration had not eradicated it, noted the *Harvest Field* in 1893.¹⁸ Rajahgopal observed in 1877, that caste was 'gathering strength every day, and eating out the vitals of Christianity'.¹⁹

DEBATES ON CASTE

Over the years, considerable discussion took place on the subject, debating whether the caste system was a religious or a social institution. Rev. R. E. Gullison published, in 1903, the findings of his correspondence With more than fifty persons, both missionary and P. 328 Indian Christian, under the title *Symposium on the Toleration of Caste*,²⁰ and it is clear from the responses of participants that most would have accepted Rev. J. Cooling's definition of caste or the caste system. It comprised, he said, 'all those social customs or usages of the Hindus for which they claim religious sanction; and as religion with a Hindu extends to almost every detail of his life, the caste system is a term almost synonymous with the whole social system of the Hindu'.²¹ For Cooling, caste was 'a kind of trade guild'²² whose aims were to prevent pauperism, to provide an association within which the individual was 'taught to subordinate himself to the well-being of the community',²³ and to restrain vice and secure 'the moral purity of the home life'.²⁴ At the same time Cooling was not blind to the fact that at a very early period in Indian history the 'sanctions of religion were claimed'²⁵ for the caste system. It was, he said, in the interests of 'the priests who had arrogated to themselves the highest rank in the social scale, to do all they could to prevent others from invading their privileged position'.²⁶ They taught therefore that the divisions among men, decided on by dint of vocation, 'were ordained by God, and that it would be a violation of His ordained will for a man to undertake any other occupation than that of the caste into which he was born'.²⁷

¹⁶ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *op. cit.*, p.159.

¹⁷ *Christian Patriot*, 21 October 1899. See also *Christian Patriot* 5 December 1908, p.5; *HF* ser. 3, 5 (September 1894): 599; Elizabeth A. Hibbert-Ware, 'Caste and Christianity,' *HF* 32, 11 (November 1912): 425.

¹⁸ 'Editorial Notes: Caste', *HF* (September 1893): 117.

¹⁹ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *loc. cit.*

²⁰ J. Cooling, 'The Christian Substitute for the Caste System', *HF* ser.3, 9 (February 1898): 50.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p.51.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The *Christian Patriot* on the other hand took a contrary position to Cooling and argued instead that the earliest sources on caste 'speak of it as a religious institution'.²⁸ The paper attempted to bolster its argument further by quoting, a few years later, a missionary, the Rev. Wheeler Bogges, who was convinced that caste was a religious rather than a social institution:

Because (a) it has its roots in the sacred literature of the Hindus; (b) its defenders claim for it a divine origin; (c) religious duties are linked with caste in that it formed a necessary qualification for the performance of those various duties; (d) Hindu religion gives the bounds of the various castes so that no one can change his caste from a lower to a higher; (e) religious rites p. 329 are necessary to restore caste when it is once broken; (f) rules for maintaining caste by purification ceremonies are religious.²⁹

Having said all, the crux of the matter for Sharrock consisted in the fact that caste was social as well as religious, 'or rather social because it is religious. The Hindu', he said, 'is nothing if he is not, at any rate in ceremony religious. Religion dominates everything, hence caste, which is the essence of Hinduism, pervades every action of a man's life.'³⁰ In any event Sharrock took umbrage with those who contended that whatever caste was for Hindus it was merely a social organization to Christians.

So long as Christians will associate with Hindus of the same caste, but not with Christians of a different caste; so long as Shanars will not receive the Holy Communion at the hands of a Pareiga priest (though socially and educationally their superior); so long as a Vellalar will send a Shanar to dine in his cattle shed; so long as Vellalars will not sit in the same place in church with Shanars; and finally, so long as clergy of different castes, but of the same social rank, will not inter-marry, it appears to me inconceivable to describe caste as merely a social institution among Christians.³¹

No matter in what form caste manifested itself in the Church, it was in the final analysis, for the *Christian Patriot*, 'contrary to the Spirit of Christ',³² for the system was established upon the fundamental idea 'of the superiority of certain classes of human beings over others, a superiority which has a divine sanction'.³³ In an article, 'The Relation of Missions to Caste', J. D. Maynard, of the Mission of the Society of Friends, saw something else. For him caste was an 'effective political force' conceived by 'Brahmanical genius that sanctified and petrified the distinctions of race, rank and occupation'.³⁴ At first sight, the deep rooted fault of the caste system and its incompatibility with Christianity appeared to be over a detail of practice: Christianity wants to convert, whereas caste forbids its adherents to change. However the much deeper and more significant incompatibility between the two lay, according to Maynard, in the fact that p. 330

Caste is rigid; Christianity is responsive and adaptable. Caste is a system; Christianity is life. Caste is of the law; Christianity is of faith ... Caste is of the dead past; Christianity of

²⁸ *Christian Patriot*, 12 February 1898, p.4.

²⁹ Quoted in *Christian Patriot*, 20 June 1903, p.4.

³⁰ Sharrock, 'Problems', *loc. cit.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

³² *Christian Patriot*, 15 February 1902, p.4.

³³ *Christian Patriot*, 12 February 1898, p.4.

³⁴ J. D. Maynard, 'The Relations of Missions to Caste', *HF* 17, 12 (December 1906): 450.

the eternal future. Caste rests on a conception of the ultimate reality of the distinctions between men, accepts and fixes these, and gives no hope of a change. Christianity rests on a conception of the equal value of all men before God and the temporary character of all earthly distinctions.³⁵

The *Christian Patriot*, at the same time, was in no doubt as to the practical outworking of the system considering that 'the worst evils, social, moral and spiritual that India [was] suffering from [could] be traced more or less to the pernicious influence of caste'.³⁶

Interestingly, and perhaps obviously, opposition to caste extended beyond the concern of the Christian community. There were many Hindus who acknowledged the evils of caste and who agitated against it. The Maharaja of Gaekwar, speaking at the Indian National Social Conference in 1904, affirmed the evil of caste on the ground that it hampered the life of an individual socially, economically and professionally. But, he observed,

its most serious offence is its effect on national life and national unity. It intensifies local dissensions and diverse interests, and obscures great national ideals and interests which should be those of every caste and people, and renders the country disunited and incapable of improving its defects ... It robs us of our humanity by insisting on the degradation of some of our fellowmen who are separated from us by no more than the accident of birth.³⁷

Following this, the editor of *The United Church Herald* included in the journal's January 1913 edition a tenfold statement of objection to caste agreed upon at an 'Anti-Caste Conference' held just prior to that date in Bombay. The significance of the declaration, noted the editor, was in the fact that it was not a statement 'of missionaries or of others outside of the caste system' but that it revealed 'the increasing evils of that system as they bear upon those who have to endure them from within Hinduism itself'.³⁸ Caste was objected to because it was 'directly and indirectly responsible for the huge mass of ignorance and illiteracy ... [because it] created a wholly artificial order of social precedence ... [and] brought about the huge problem of the Depressed Classes'. The statement, published in leaflet form 'to be scattered broadly over the land', concluded with an appeal to everyone who had the good of India at heart to rally against caste and 'seek to change the foundations of a system which has outlived any usefulness it might have had ... and build up a new generation of broader vision, of more catholic sympathies, of a loftier altruism, and of a purer and intenser patriotism'.³⁹

These were among the reasons that the *Christian Patriot*, from the very beginning of its publication in 1890, set itself against what it referred to as 'this baneful system whose unfortunate existence in the Native Christian community has only been marring its usefulness as a body but also has been the source of many a positive mischief'.⁴⁰ It was this same concern for the influence of caste upon the life of the Church that very probably led the Madras Native Church Council, at its inauguration in 1868, to accept a Caste

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Christian Patriot*, 12 February 1898, p.4.

³⁷ H. H. Gaekwar, 'Current Mission News: The Indian National Social Conference', *HF* 16 (January 1905): 30.

³⁸ 'Modern Opposition to the Hindu Caste System from Within', *The United Church World* 4, 10 (January 1913): 407.

³⁹ *Ibid.* See Appendix for Statement in full.

⁴⁰ *Christian Patriot*, 15 October 1896, p.4.

Declaration form which, although drawn up in the first place by the Church Missionary Committee,⁴¹ was signed by all members before taking their seats as members of the Council. The Declaration stated:

Believing the system of Hindoo Caste to be contrary to the spirit and requirements of the Gospel of Christ, injurious to the souls of those who adhere to it, and an impediment to the exercise of brotherly love among the members of Christ and to the spread of the Gospel in this country;—because it inculcates the false idea of pollution on account of birth—because it confines a man and his family forever to the grade in which he was born, and prevents his rising into a higher class [*sic*] of Society, whatever may be his character and merits—and because it recognizes a combination of individuals assuming authority and power to hinder those who follow out the dictates of conscience, and who wish to enjoy liberty in matters of marriage, food, and social intercourse;—I do on those grounds condemn and renounce the system of Caste, and admit it to be the duty of every Christian man heartily to renounce it; and I will, with God's help, discourage it both by my words and example; and I will uphold and assist [*sic*] all those who exercise their Christian liberty in opposition to the system of Caste.⁴²

This Declaration was faithfully signed by all incoming members of the p. 332 Council up to at least 1917. Not all such rhetoric, however, was consistent with actual practice.

One thing was certain: in drawing to a close a discussion that extended over several weeks, the *Christian Patriot* in June 1896 recognized that

Christianity is on trial in India. Many are watching to see how we are affected by it as a community. Let us resolve to bury at the foot of the cross of Him who, though he was God, took upon Himself the form of a servant and made Himself of no reputation, all our egotism, our self-conceit and social bigotry and make an earnest effort to realize in the heart as well as in the outward life, our oneness in Christ. To us, resurrectionized [*sic*] Christians and Christians whose citizenship is in heaven, there is no Pariah, nor Brahmin, no Rajah nor Semirdar but one new man.⁴³

Theologically there was broad agreement as to the nature of caste. One of the earliest statements on the subject, and one that was widely endorsed, derives from a resolution agreed on in the 1879 Bangalore Missionary Conference which regarded

Hindu caste, both in theory and practice, as not a mere civil distinction, but emphatically a religious institution; that viewed in this light it is diametrically opposed to the Christian doctrine of the oneness of human nature, and the brotherhood of all true Christians, and that it is the duty of all missionaries and churches to require its entire renunciation, with all its outward manifestations, by all those who desire to enter the Church of Christ.⁴⁴

CASTE EFFECTS ON CHURCH LIFE

A particularly nasty incident took place in 1915 near Venganoor, Trivanarum, and was related by E. Masilamani, a correspondent to the *Christian Patriot*. A London Missionary Society Chapel had been erected in Mangalatoocoom and was to be dedicated by the

⁴¹ Proceedings of the Madras Native Church Council, 29 November 1884.

⁴² This form was attached to the front page of the MNC Council Minute book. UTC.

⁴³ *Christian Patriot*, 18 June 1896, p.4.

⁴⁴ Quoted in *Christian Patriot*, 21 October 1899. See also William I. Chamberlain, 'The Attitude of Missionaries Towards Hinduism As A Social System', *HF* ser. 3, 8 (January 1897): 5.

District missionary, Mr. H. T. Willis. When he arrived for the service the local pastor informed him 'that there was a slight hitch in the arrangements as the Sharnar Christians would not allow the Pulya Christians to use the Chapel'.⁴⁵ Willis was assured upon inquiry 'that under no P. 333 circumstances would they allow the Pulya Christians to enter the building and their entrance would be prevented by force if necessary the Sharnars having come prepared with instruments of assault'.⁴⁶ Thereupon the missionary closed the doors of the church and left, leaving strict orders that the building should not be opened for services until further orders. Masilameni provided no further comment upon the incident except to say that it 'typifies the spirit of the Christians of South Travencore'.⁴⁷ Caste exclusiveness also led to a refusal by some Christians to permit Pariah⁴⁸ believers to enter their houses for cottage prayer meetings or weeknight preaching services. Still other Christians refused to eat on public occasions, or at Church festivals, simply because they or Europeans were present.⁴⁹ Some, according to Rajahgopal, 'did not scruple to assert that if the Saviour was in India and mingled with the lower classes they would refuse to eat with him'.⁵⁰ Jones did observe, however, that by the turn of the century this practice was becoming a 'diminishing evil'.⁵¹

The use of caste-titles when addressing congregation members was in common use. This was particularly the case in the publication of banns of marriage, where titles indicative of caste origin were used.⁵² It was in fact, said Jones, in relation to marriage customs that the most severe caste rules had 'been carried over bodily into Christianity'.⁵³ It regulated marriage arrangements to such a 'fatal extent', said Walker, that it was regarded by 'multitudes as almost a crime, not only to marry "out of caste" (as the world expresses it), but even to transgress the minute subdivisions of caste'.⁵⁴ It was, in fact, the 'marriage question'⁵⁵ that for many lay at the root of the whole issue of caste in p. 334 the Church. This was the case for Chinnial Eames, of the American Mudura Mission, who in an address given in Pasumelai, said, 'Once let there be free opportunity for intermarriage between those who originally came from different castes and the question will be practically solved. But,' he said, 'so long as the Christians determinelly [*sic*] and wilfully

⁴⁵ *Christian Patriot*, 24 July 1915.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ 'Pariah' was a term commonly used throughout the 19th Century to refer to those people considered outside the scope of the Hindu caste system. It is this same community that has also been spoken of as untouchable and outcaste. At the turn of the century the word Pariah was dropped in favour of 'Panchamas, or the fifth Section of Hindus' (*Christian Patriot*, 28 May 1896, p.4). It was Mahatma Gandhi, who, with political ends in view, designated the community 'Harijans' and it is this latter term by which the community is popularly known today.

⁴⁹ Burgess, *op. cit.*, p.300.

⁵⁰ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *op. cit.*, p.365.

⁵¹ Jones, *op. cit.*, p.60.

⁵² *Proceedings of the CMS for Africa and the East. 96th Year, 1894-1895* (London: Church Missionary House, 1895), p. 196.

⁵³ Jones, *loc. cit.*

⁵⁴ T. Walker, 'Spiritual Life in the Indian Church', *HF* 13 (December 1902): 454.

⁵⁵ Quoted in *Christian Patriot*, 16 August 1902, p.5.

confine the marriage of their children to those of the same caste there can be but little advancement'.⁵⁶ Chinnial Eames did not of course advocate intermarriage simply for its own sake, but how often it was true, he noted,

that even amongst the best educated of the Native community, even among Pastors themselves, an opportunity to marry a son or daughter into a different caste is refused, even when marriage seems most desirable in every other way, and a marriage is contracted with another party most undesirable save that they belong to the same caste. A beautiful, bright, well-educated young girl is given in marriage to a worthless, ignorant and even dissolute man simply because he is of the same caste, or a young man, well educated, and of much promise is handicapped all his life by being united to an ignorant and careless wife.⁵⁷

Another manifestation of caste was exhibited by the unwillingness of some congregations 'to accept as catechists or pastors those who hail from a lower social Hindu stratum than their august selves'.⁵⁸ However, perhaps the most grievous demonstration of caste in the Church was the refusal by some 'to partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with Christians who before their conversion to Christianity belonged to the pariah community'.⁵⁹ In 1877, Rev. Rajahgopal told of a whole village having been given careful training and instruction in the Christian faith and then who having been baptized 'declined to join in communion in order to escape the pollution of the one cup'.⁶⁰ In some situations two communion cups were used, Rajahgopal continued,

to preserve caste rules; and in some Churches where one is used, with the connivance of pastors, men of supposed high caste come in first, and then the lower castes. In other Churches, we are given to understand, the caste and non-caste communicants sit separately, a a beadle walks with a stick p. 335 keeping the latter to their places, and preventing any approach to the higher-caste men, which would be pollution.⁶¹

Two years later, in 1879, Burgess confessed that formerly two cups had been used in Communion, one for caste members and one for non-caste. He hoped, however, that the time had passed when 'this sin of dividing Christ in His most affecting ordinance'⁶² would be tolerated. His wish was not granted. Twenty years later Sharrock told of communicants still being allowed to 'approach the Lord's Table in the order of caste'.⁶³ Then in 1908, in a paper, 'The Relation of Missions to National Customs; Especially Caste', Rev. John Lazarus of the Danish Mission referred to 'caste-folk' taking the Sacrament first 'followed by the non-caste communicants' in order that the former might 'avoid pollution through saliva'.⁶⁴ There were even cases when force was resorted to, in order that certain factions

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Jones, *op. cit.*, p.59. See also Sharrock, *op. cit.*, p.303.

⁵⁹ Burgess, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁰ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *loc. cit.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Sharrock, 'Caste Suppression', *op. cit.*, p.303.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Lazarus, quoted in *Christian Patriot*, 5 December 1908, p.5.

could uphold their conviction of not desiring to receive Communion together with Pariah Christians.⁶⁵

MISSIONARIES' DENOUNCEMENTS

Most missionaries and denominations denounced caste and tried 'as far as possible to ignore it in their work'.⁶⁶ For the founder of the Caste Suppression Society that was not enough.⁶⁷ The *Christian Patriot* agreed, and chastised mission societies for their inconsistency. As an example, the paper told of missions that avowed 'principles of entire hostility to the spirit of caste' and yet who continue to open 'Caste Girls' Schools' which carefully shut out pupils of supposed lower caste, and then to add further injury to the situation endeavoured to staff them with ' "caste Christians" alone'.⁶⁸ The *Patriot* was much more disturbed and outspoken however over the substance of a paper by Rev. H. Y. Corey, apparently first presented to a Conference of Canadian Baptist missionaries and later published in the *Baptist P. 336 Missionary Review*. Corey's thesis was that if caste was afforded the same degree of tolerance the Apostles accorded to Judaism and customs such as slavery it would go a long way to put the Christian Church in sympathetic relation with the people it wished to influence and save. 'This,' said the *Christian Patriot*, 'is a startling attitude for a Christian missionary to take up in the twentieth century.'⁶⁹ To declare that caste is opposed to Christ's express teaching on one hand and yet to allow it to remain on the other because it might bring the 'Church into closer relations with the heathen, is to go against the lessons of history. The Church,' said the editor, 'has always witnessed for a higher standard than prevails on earth.'

Once the Church tolerates or is indifferent to caste, the Hindu can well turn around and ask us wherein lies our vaunted superiority. 'How are you,' the social reformer may reasonably ask the Christian, 'any better than we? We stand for abolition [of caste] ... you are for compromise.' We [*Christian Patriot*] would rather as Pandita Ramabai says, have one real convert than make any compromise; for that compromise will defeat its own end.⁷⁰

That was not the end of it. A week later, in an article, 'Should Caste be Tolerated in the Indian Church?', the newspaper continued its criticism.

We are told that toleration of caste would result in a larger number of conversions from the higher classes. This is exactly what the Roman Catholics preach and practice; ... These converts are so much like Hindus that the Hindus themselves regard the change of faith as purely nominal.

Corey's position was declared to be 'in fact an apology for caste', and as such, marked a 'new departure in the attitude of Protestant Missionaries towards caste in India. We hope,'

⁶⁵ Four members of the Pursawalkam (*sic*) Church, in a letter to Rev. I. M. N. Schwarz, president of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Church Council, Tranquebar. Madras, 6 April 1883, LELM Packet 20, UTC. See also M. V. Samuel, *loc. cit.*

⁶⁶ Hibbert-Ware, *loc. cit.* See also *Christian Patriot*, 5 December 1908.

⁶⁷ Sharrock, 'Caste Suppression,' *loc. cit.*

⁶⁸ *Christian Patriot* quoted in 'Exchanges and Reviews', *BMR* 13 (February 1907): 87.

⁶⁹ *Christian Patriot*, 13 June 1903, p.4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

said the *Patriot*, 'that it is confined only to Mr. Corey and that he stands by himself in advocating lit].'⁷¹ The *Christian Patriot* was adamant. It was thoroughly convinced that 'from the point of view of the interests of the Kingdom of Christ ... [any] toleration of caste would spell nothing but corruption and shipreck [*sic*] to the Indian Church'.⁷² Rev. C. H. Monahan, of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission, was in full accord with the *Christian Patriot*. Any attempt to promote Christianity on the basis of lowering standards in respect to caste would, he said, 'be ridiculous p. 337 if it were not so sad ... [and] must ever prove as futile as it has done in the past.' Monahan's appeal was for 'True Christianity ... or none at all. If we have so little faith in our divine Mission as to think that undiluted Christianity cannot succeed in India at least let us have undiluted heathenism with its frank disavowal of the spiritual equality of men. But,' he pleaded, 'don't let us flood the country with a spurious imitation of Christianity.'⁷³

Nevertheless, perhaps prompted by Corey, others attempted to wrestle with issues related to Church order and caste. One such person was Rev. L. P. Larsen. He was of the opinion that perhaps missionaries had sometimes extended their condemnations to include situations that were in fact amoral. 'I do not think,' he said, 'we have any right to use Christ's name to legislate about the forms of men's social life where there is no moral issue involved.'⁷⁴ Then, in a very thought—provoking paper presented in 1906 to the Bangalore Missionary Conference, Rev. H. F. W. Lester, in treating what he perceived to be a real problem, took the position that as baptism broke caste and that if the Church did not 'assume what the country believes to be our obligations towards the baptized men, we are disgraced and our convert considers himself to be deceived.' If, on the other hand, the Church did make provision for the material wellbeing of its converts, 'we establish a principle which is unworkable and produces more harm than good'.⁷⁵ Lester declared that if baptism cut a convert off from his community and livelihood and developed in him any measure of dependence upon the Mission or Church it was on those grounds 'irresponsible'. He therefore went on to speak of an 'unbaptized Christianity' which although a compromise, represented, for him, a wiser course of action. 'I would just as soon see a man,' he said, 'in the house of Rimmon as lounging about my verandah.'⁷⁶

Maynard pursued Lester's line of argument and suggested the problem of caste in the Church was not only a negative one of how to oppose it but that it also had 'an even more far-reaching positive aspect—the whole relation of the Church to a highly organized civilization'. He did agree that caste was 'one of the great evils of Hindu society' but felt a need to acknowledge it to be a 'very p. 338 marvellous and in many ways successful form of social organization' which had become deeply embedded into the very fabric of Hindu society and therefore could not be dismissed summarily as an 'evil'.⁷⁷ As far as Maynard understood the situation it was the perception of both non-Christians and converts alike that the organized Church was just 'another caste' which differed from his own in many,

⁷¹ *Christian Patriot*, 20 June 1903, p.4.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ C. H. Monahan, 'Symposium on Caste', *BMR* (June 1903): 224.

⁷⁴ L. P. Larsen, *Ibid.*, p.223.

⁷⁵ H. F. W. Lester, 'A Missionary Problem' (a paper read before the Bangalore Missionary Conference, August 1906), *HF* 17, 9 (September 1906): 41.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.344.

⁷⁷ Maynard, 'Relations', *op. cit.*, p.448 f.

and perhaps superior ways, but which was practically speaking 'a society of the same nature'.⁷⁸ The upshot was that Maynard played down the importance of membership in any particular church. His opinion was that caste was in fact 'fostered by our church organizations, whenever those organizations harden into fetters instead of being the expression of the Spirit of God'. The Church, he said, 'exists for men not men for the Church.' Maynard was quick to agree however that for many the existing Church was a help and that 'so far as it helps, it is Christian' but that so far as it made 'external demands and does not supply spiritual needs, it is infected with the caste spirit, and is a hindrance to the cause of Christ'.⁷⁹ In January, 1907, the *Christian Patriot* responded to Lester and Maynard, whose papers had earlier been published in the *Harvest Field*. In justice to them, and others who held similar views, the *Patriot* admonished that they had not realized where the logic of their views was driving them. 'If it is true that caste is evil, antagonistic with [*sic*] the truths of Christianity and a great curse to the Church as well as to the individual believer who obeys it, then let us by all means oppose it, fight it, and use every means to root it out of the Church and the individual.'⁸⁰ If, on the other hand (quoting Lester and Maynard), caste 'gives a "moral rule of life," if "it is a civilizing influence" and "not wholly evil", then let us in every possible way yield to it, encourage it, conserve it, nay, preach it for the sake of its "moral" and "civilizing influence"!' 'Many an honest missionary and missionary society,' continues the article, had 'too often blundered to the detriment of the Church and its healthy growth'. In conclusion the *Christian Patriot* issued a warning. 'Missionary brethren,' it said, 'take your bearings, and realize which way you are drifting. Under the false notion that you are fighting this monster [caste], make sure that you are not keeping him alive.'⁸¹ p. 339

In contrast to all of this Elizabeth Hibbert-Ware took a somewhat unique and novel approach: namely, that caste was 'not the impenetrable barrier to the advance of Christianity that it [had] sometimes been supposed to be, but the vulnerable spot in the armour of Hinduism'.⁸² She therefore pleaded for the development of a strategy that attempted to discover within the caste system a certain integral weakness that could be exploited to the advantage of the expansions of the Kingdom of Christ in India. 'Caste,' she went on, 'may be the very means by which the Christian forces may find an entrance into the heart of Hinduism and finally overcome it.'⁸³ Hibbert-Ware understood large movements of people into the Church as being due to the collective decision-making process of whole caste groups. Such action was likely to lead a whole caste in a village to embrace Christ. But, she observed,

The movement will not stop here. The same caste people in neighbouring villages will be interested in the change made in the lives, status, education and marriageability of the new Christians. Therefore, they will also inquire about the new teaching; and if the first

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.456.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.458–459.

⁸⁰ *Christian Patriot*, 5 January 1907, p.5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Hibbert-Ware, *op. cit.*, p.431.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.427.

village is influential, the others who are related to it by blood and marriage are also likely to be drawn the same way.⁸⁴

There was unquestionably a considerable amount of attraction in Hibbert-Ware's proposition. In spite of that, it does not seem to have been seriously pursued; the burden of evidence would rather indicate a widespread rejection of, if not animosity towards, caste in the Church both among missionaries and Indian Christians alike.

Rev. John Lazarus had several suggestions, but above all approved of those who 'nipped caste in the bud', as he was convinced that the 'remedy must be applied at the very outset when a congregation is being gathered'.⁸⁵ Some therefore recommended that only those converts who renounced caste be considered for baptism.⁸⁶ Rajahgopal agreed, contending that 'baptism is the time to settle with a man whether he is to be a true Christian or not, and it should be laid down as a principle that he cannot come into the Church with the dirty rag of caste upon him'.⁸⁷ The difficulty, as far as Sharrock was concerned, p. 340 lay in the fact that too often converts entered the Church with such mixed motives and with only a vague idea of what Christianity meant. And, he felt, without 'any real *metanoia* (repentance)—any real change of heart'. Sharrock therefore reiterated what Rajahgopal had said, maintaining that 'we ought to be more strict in admitting [converts] by Holy Baptism' on the one hand and in exercising 'more discipline over those baptised' on the other.⁸⁸ It was further suggested that those who retained caste not be admitted to the Lord's Supper.⁸⁹ Moreover, Burgess advocated that such persons be excluded from all offices in the Church.⁹⁰ This latter position was confirmed with a Resolution drafted at the Fourth Decennial India Missionary Conference in 1902.⁹¹

In addition, Jones contended that the time had come for Missions to 'cease entirely' from regarding caste as a condition in the appointment of workers to particular congregations. Apparently this had been quite a widely known practice. 'Every mission agent,' he said, 'should be regarded as available for every post for which his training and piety qualify him, apart from consideration of caste.'⁹² Lazarus also argued that applicants for employment in the ministries of the Church should not even be asked about their caste previous to conversion and that all consideration for appointment and promotion 'must be based purely on merit and character'.⁹³

CHURCHES' ACTIONS AGAINST CASTE DISCRIMINATIONS

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.428.

⁸⁵ Lazarus, *Christian Patriot*, 5 December 1908, p.5.

⁸⁶ Gullison, 'Symposium', *op. cit.*, p.219 f.

⁸⁷ Rajahgopal, *Missionary Conference 1879*, p.319 f.

⁸⁸ Sharrock, 'Problems', *op. cit.*, p.2.

⁸⁹ Rajahgopal, 'Conference', p.310.

⁹⁰ Burgess, *loc. cit.*

⁹¹ *Report of the Fourth Decennial Indian Missionary Conference December 11th–18th 1902*. (Madras, Christian Literature Society, 1903): 27.

⁹² Jones, *op. cit.*, p.63.

⁹³ Lazarus, *loc. cit.*

In 1894, Bishop Gell of Madras, in a pastoral circular, prohibited the adding of social or religious titles to the names of parties when publishing banns of marriage.⁹⁴ Lazarus went a step further and recommended that besides marriage banns 'the retention of caste-titles in Church registers and records ... and other announcements, in Mission reports and all other documents should be forbidden'.⁹⁵ Others obviously felt more stringent measures were required and [P. 341](#) suggested excommunication as a remedy, especially for those who, on the ground of caste, caused division in the Church.⁹⁶

It was apparent lack of brotherhood in the Church, or what Bishop Whitehead in 1905 referred to as the 'problem of unity', that would present the greatest challenge to the 'moral and spiritual progress of the Indian Church in the future'.⁹⁷ The danger, he warned, was not only that the Indian Church 'may perpetuate the divisions of Western Christendom, but that it may add to them a hundredfold by splitting up into an infinite number of Caste churches',⁹⁸ and in doing so 'substitute the spirit of caste for the spirit of brotherhood as the basis of the Christian society'.⁹⁹ Then, perhaps more in truth than presumption, Whitehead asserted, it was missionary influence that acted as a catalyst to hold the various caste groups in the church together; but that sooner or later the question would arise 'why different Castes should not have their own ecclesiastical organization'. He hoped 'that the very gravity of this danger' would compel the Indian Church to study seriously the subject 'of the unity of Christ's body as one of vital importance to its well being'.¹⁰⁰ The problem had already been understood by Jones to be one for the Indian Church to grapple with. But for him, more than its well-being was involved. Caste in the Church, he said, was a Goliath which threatened the community's integrity, if not its 'very existence as a Christian Church'.¹⁰¹

Later, in 1903, the *Christian Patriot* expressed the view that if a campaign against caste could only be 'guided and controlled by the spirit of Christ', and if people could be brought to see 'how repugnant and loathsome' caste was in relation to the mind of Christ, it was bound to be successful.¹⁰² After all, noted Monahan, it was a simple fact that there was no Church in which an outpouring of the Holy Spirit had not led to the breaking down of caste.¹⁰³ It was much more a personal issue, according to Rev. N. Gnanaprakasam, who, in an article published in 1918, noted that where one sees a really Christlike man, caste scruples are set aside in dealing with that man.¹⁰⁴ 'The one [p. 342](#) and only remedy', then, for the caste problem, as well as for all other moral and spiritual ills of human nature was 'for us to learn Christ as depicted in the Gospels and in the Epistles and be transformed

⁹⁴ CMS Proceedings, 96th Year, 1894–1895.

⁹⁵ Lazarus, *loc. cit.*

⁹⁶ Rajahgopal, 'Caste', *op. cit.*, p.370

⁹⁷ Henry Madras, 'Future', *op. cit.*, p.17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.17 f.

¹⁰¹ Jones, *op. cit.* p.64.

¹⁰² *Christian Patriot*, 28 November 1903, p.5.

¹⁰³ Gullison, *op. cit.*, p.220.

¹⁰⁴ N. Gnanaprakasam, 'Christianity and Caste', *HF* 38 (August 1918): 297.

into His glorious image, advancing from glory to glory'.¹⁰⁵ Two years later, Rev. G. E. Phillips confessed it was unfortunate that caste had not been eradicated from every part of the Christian Church but that it was 'a discredited, defeated, and continually waning force' wherever the Church was living and strong.¹⁰⁶

Without doubt considerable progress had been accomplished. Transformation among believers was taking place. For this reason the *Christian Patriot* strongly objected to certain persons 'rising up and shouting that the Christian community is rotten to the core'. It pointed to the

hundreds of Christian men and women in whom conversion has effected a radical change of life ... [and who] by their ceaseless energy and by deeds of love—in one word by the living of out and out Christianity [had] shown that they are indeed the salt of India, living Apostles known and read of all men.¹⁰⁷

Rev. John Lazarus was one Indian pastor who lived in the confidence that the day would eventually come when there would no longer be caste in the Indian Church. He expressed his views, in 1909, in a paper in which he contemplated the development of the Church over the ensuing fifty years. 'In the future Indian Church,' Lazarus claimed,

the caste of character will have taken the place of the caste of birth. There will be no such distinctions as Brahman and Pariah, or Chetty and Chuckler. Such redundant affixes as Pillai and Iyer, Naidu and Nadar, will give place to a plain Mr. This mixture of castes, resulting from unrestricted inter-marriages, will ... produce a new race of Indians as remarkable for strength of intellect as robustness of physique.¹⁰⁸

Two generations later, all true believers are still anxious to see the dream of Lazarus fully realized. By contrast, it also seems that Rev. John Jones' turn-of-the-century hypothesis also remains valid; namely, that 'if missions had their existence to begin over again ... they would meet the caste system with a different determination and with a greater p. 343 vigilance and more whole-souled antagonism'.¹⁰⁹ It remains, then, for us, members of the contemporary Christian community, with the perspective of even greater experience and the present unparalleled opportunities for the Kingdom of God in India, to do the same.

Dr. Graham Houghton is the principal of South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, Bangalore, India. p. 344

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁰⁶ G. E. Phillips, 'The Contribution of Christianity to the New India', *TETW* 18 (April 1920): 161.

¹⁰⁷ *Christian Patriot*, 28 November 1895, p.6.

¹⁰⁸ J. Lazarus, 'The Future Indian Church', *HF* 20 (October 1909): 372.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, *op. cit.*, p.62.

The Charismatic Movement in Ethiopia 1960–1980

Brian Fargher

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As a former missionary in Ethiopia, Fargher analyzes the Ethiopian situation during the stated period quite admirably. He clarifies how the charismatic invasion has drastically changed church life in all Ethiopia in the last two generations. He gives the origins as well as the present-day reactions to the movement. The tension in the generation gap is particularly valuable, since such an insight can be very useful in other contexts too. The section on contributions of the movement reveal valuable practical wisdom needed in any church-planting ministry in Two-Thirds World situations.

Editor

INTRODUCTION

The charismatic movement in Ethiopia was certainly ‘charismatic’, but at the same time this designation has misleading overtones. In the Ethiopian context it was much more a renewal movement; I will therefore use the terms ‘charismatic’ and ‘renewal’ interchangeable.¹ Many of the structures from within which the movement burst forth were not really very old, but they had become static; even though some were only a decade or two old. Initially the movement possessed a lot of rough edges, but as these were rubbed off a glow appeared. From the very outset this movement was not confined to what we generally call the Pentecostal denominations.

The renewal movement was not imported into Ethiopia from overseas. It sprang up from within the country and remained to become very much a part of Ethiopian Christianity; therein lies its historical importance. When the renewal movement began in Ethiopia there were three large denominations in the country and a number of smaller ones. The largest was the Orthodox Church followed by the Kalä Hiywät Church; the third largest was the Mäkanä Yäsus Church. p. 345 Along with the smaller denominations these three make up what must be known in the future as ‘the church in Ethiopia’. The renewal movement prepared Christians of all denominations to recognize what they had in common and what the real things were that divided Christians from ‘Christians’. Each denomination initially reacted to the movement in a different way; later each came to terms with it in its own way and profited by the movement in proportion to its openness and carefulness.

The movement began as a young people’s movement; this was one of its strengths, and at the same time a weakness that took some years to overcome. The twenty-year period selected for this study is an arbitrary setting of dates but it does provide an approximate starting point and also a definite point by which time the movement had achieved a considerable degree of maturity. By 1960 a quarter of a century had passed since the re-entry into Ethiopia of expatriate missionaries following the Italian Occupation. During

¹ The Ethiopian experience is quite different from that described by Henry Asige Ajega in ‘The Charismatic Movement in African Israel Church Nineveh (Kenya)’, *Strange Gifts?* ed. D. Martin and P. Mullen (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) pp.217–219. This Kenyan movement began in 1921 at Kaimosi in Western Kenya.

these twenty-five years the church of Ethiopia had developed numerically and organizationally. By this time patterns had developed which the renewal movement challenged. The challenge was constructive and positive. What would have happened to the church of Ethiopia during the first seven tough years of the Revolution (1974–1980) if the renewal movement had not already effected many beneficial changes by that time? The charismatic movement and the communist revolution transformed the church of Ethiopia into a unit quite different from what it had been in the 1945–1960 period.

THE PROVENANCE OF THE MOVEMENT

In 1960 the leadership of the Orthodox, non-Orthodox, and Catholic churches was almost entirely in the hands of older people.² Traditionally this was where the leadership belonged. In the political sphere the same was true. Throughout the country the younger generation was expected to wait until sickness and death cleared a way for it. Within many of the churches which continued to retain strong ties with external bodies there was an obvious trend to **P. 346** dependency. Many in these denominations who held administrative positions received high salaries which came from subsidy gifts. At least 85% of the membership of all denominations was made up of rural farmers and their families. These were devout Christians, but biblically illiterate, and academically worlds apart from the young people. It was these men who were the leaders in thousands of rural congregations. In both the rural areas and the urban centres the young people, that is the fifteen to thirty-five year old group, were generally excluded from having any part in the leadership.

The fact that each of the denominations claimed to base its theology and liturgy on the Bible might appear to be a uniting factor; in fact it was a matter which gave rise to endless confusion. The Orthodox church, in spite of the importance it placed on tradition and liturgy, attempted to base the faith of its membership upon the Bible. To an even greater degree this was true of the other churches, even of the Catholic church, especially in the rural areas. The Christians in these churches were biblicists but to one degree or another they faced two problems. Firstly, a stereotyped hermeneutic, rather than a Holy Spirit-inspired one, dominated the preaching and teaching in these churches. The sermon content was mostly ethical, often verging on the legalistic. Secondly, in place of the spontaneous sharing which characterized the renewal movement, the other churches had a fixed pattern of worship. In most churches doctrinal correctness rather than warmth, emotion and experience characterized the preaching.

Many of the Christian young people who moved to the urban areas to continue their education were the children of the leaders in the rural churches. Until these young people had reached grade eight they had studied close to home. They admired the devotion and tenacity of their fathers, many of whom had suffered for their faith. These adults had not had an opportunity to learn; but in spite of this they had struggled to teach themselves how to read and write Amharic, a second language to almost all of them. They desperately wanted their children to learn and so sent them off to school, often at great personal sacrifice. As their children continued their education they moved from the smaller towns to the urban areas. They became proficient in Amharic. They had been taught well at home and read their Bibles. They gathered together with other Christian young people to read

² Many of the essays in *Strange Gifts?* (e.g. Paul S. Fiddes, 'The Theology of the Charismatic Movement', pp.19–40, and Andrew Walker, 'The theology of the "Restoration" House Churches', pp.208–219) comment on the problem of authoritarian leadership in the movement. This was not a problem that particularly bothered the movement in Ethiopia.

their Bibles, to sing and to pray.³ As they did so they discovered for p. 347 themselves a new meaning in the Bible; they began to ask themselves why God wasn't at work in their midst, why their faith in the living God had become a ritual and formality.

The type of leadership patterns which existed in the churches, the emphasis upon the Bible and yet the stereotyped interpretation, and then the congregating of the Christian young people in the urban centres—these were some of the sociological factors that gave rise to the Ethiopian charismatic movement. In a sentence—almost without exception these young people found themselves excluded from the churches in which they had grown up. The father figures of the churches rejected them. It was perfectly natural that the traditional leadership should react in this way; leadership belonged to the fifty-plus generation (at that point in time!). The older generation felt threatened by the young people who knew so much more Amharic, and consequently so much more about the Bible, than they did. They wanted their children to learn but once they had acquired an education they did not know what to do with them. The younger generation had an honest desire to serve in the churches from which they found themselves excluded. A crisis of major proportions had developed.

The fact that they were excluded made the young people question critically what was going on in many of the congregations. They found ethical laxity, sterile worship and legalism. They began to be increasingly critical of the congregations within which they had grown up. The young people in many of the Orthodox churches discovered that biblical preaching and Bible study were not encouraged. In order to protect the liturgy which had been passed down from one generation to the next for many centuries, many priests felt that it was essential that nothing be questioned, nothing should change. In many of the other churches the elders had been almost as unbending as the conservative priesthood in the Orthodox church: traditions of form and interpretation had been established in all of them. In the congregational services conducted in the rural areas the same type of antiphonal singing took place Sunday after Sunday. In areas where the churches were expanding there was some enthusiasm among the new converts but the congregations as a whole had sunk into a stereotyped form of worship that had no dynamism. p. 348

SOME DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF THE MOVEMENT

No doubt there are many more characteristics than the five which I wish to mention. These five are the most outstanding; they are the ones that have made the greatest impact upon the church of Ethiopia. First is *the emphasis upon the literal meaning of the Bible*. Unfortunately this did not mean that all parties approached passages such as [1 Corinthians 14](#) with an open mind, ready to study it together and see what instruction it gave. It did however mean that there was a new willingness on the part of many to come under the word of God, to expect God to do the things that he had done in the past, and to make biblical preaching again the centre of the worship services. There was an insistence that today God must be at work among his people and in the world. There was a desire to know God and to experience his presence and power. There was a renewed emphasis upon the reality of conversion as a work of the Holy Spirit rather than just a human decision.

³ John P. Kildhal, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) p.65, observed that 'prior need for acceptance by groups and by God, were characteristic of the tongue-speakers we interviewed'. Later (pp.83-4) he commented: 'Their sense of community crossed ethnic, socio-economic, and educational lines. Their common overwhelming experience surmounted other barriers.'

The *congregational participation* which had all but dropped out of most services was reintroduced. Traditionally, communal meetings were structured for community participation. It was customary to share experiences, problems and achievements. As the renewal movement gained momentum discussion once again became a part of Christian worship, especially in the smaller groups. It was at this time, and as a result of the renewal movement, that the importance of small groups was recognized: not in place of, but alongside, the congregational services. In many groups the tendency developed of leaving all hermeneutical cruxes to the inspiration of the Spirit. At times there was such an unbalanced emphasis upon communal participation, upon the Holy Spirit as interpreter of the Bible, that the preacher would say: I do not need to say anything about this verse, or phrase, the Holy Spirit will show you what it means. Many congregations which had not experienced for a long time the joy of new believers being added to their fellowship, began to be rejuvenated as many people, especially young people, began to believe. Traditionally women had been excluded from many congregational activities; the renewal movement radically changed this situation.

Thirdly, there was a *new emphasis placed on prayer, purity and propagation*. This is not to imply that Christians had forgotten how to pray. But the renewal movement reminded people afresh to expect great things through prayer, to pray for miracles, to ask God for healing, to allow God to work out all the insoluble problems of life. Many Christians had lost sight of the exhortation to 'pray for one [p. 349](#) another'. Christians learned anew to share their cares and burdens with one another and to bear one another up in prayer. Many impurities had unobtrusively crept into the conduct of Christians: older people had become careless in handling funds; younger people had responded to legalism by become ingenuous: 'If I'm not apprehended then I didn't do it'. The Holy Spirit was recognized as the Christian's lawgiver, convicter, and restorer. Christians were exhorted to be bold and fearless in their witness for Christ. This marked a new beginning of urban evangelism in Ethiopia—a movement that expanded dramatically during the revolution years. The emphases upon prayer, purity and propagation stimulated and strengthened the growth of small group fellowships.

The majority of Christians did not experience too many problems in coming to terms with the first three characteristics: not so the fourth one. *Speaking in tongues* became a distinguishing feature, albeit a temporary one, of the renewal movement. Some, but not all, preached that this sign, and this sign alone, proved possession of the Holy Spirit.⁴ Others preached fire baptism: unless Christians had actually experienced the fire from heaven they were not part of the redeemed. The vast majority of Christians were unprepared to handle this new teaching. It was not easy for them to perceive the social and religious reasons which had given rise to it. Rejection by the majority was interpreted by the minority as a sure sign that they were indeed part of the select group who had to suffer persecution for their faith. Singing and praying often became unnecessarily loud. One-line choruses were sung over and over scores of times accompanied by loud clapping, shouts of 'Hallelujah, Amen' and ululating. A great deal of emphasis was placed on healing and prophecy. In the early years of the movement enthusiasts tried to ignore false claims of healing and unfulfilled prophecies. Many of the enthusiasts found it difficult to admit that they could possibly have been wrong, or made a mistake.

The fifth characteristic was probably the most offensive to the initially unsympathetic. Many within the renewal movement taught that *the baptism of the Spirit*, accompanied by tongue speaking, *imparted to the recipient a type of perfection*. This led to the teaching that

⁴ Phillip H. Wiebe, 'The Pentecostal Initial Evidence Doctrine', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (Dec. 1984) 4 pp.465-472 has re-examined this Pentecostal claim.

such an individual was always right: being full of the Spirit how could he or she make any mistakes? they argued. Humility was p. 350 dethroned by a proud, often haughty and offensive confidence. Advice from 'carnal' Christians, as non-enthusiasts were often designated, was never considered to be advice worth taking. Only those within the movement could counsel or exhort. Caution and discretion were dismissed as cowardice and fear. Culturally offensive things, such as adolescent boys and girls kissing in public, were condoned as biblical commands. All-night prayer meetings during which both sexes slept in the same room was another offence that both Christians and non-Christians found difficult to accept. It took time and experience to prove that not all who claimed to be led by the Spirit were actually so led. It took even longer for some to realize that even the most spiritual people can sometimes make mistakes.

REACTIONS

By about 1970 there were enthusiasts for renewal within all denominations. They made no secret of their identity: their enthusiasm and exuberance embarrassed and annoyed the unsympathetic. The reactions to, and ramifications of, the five characteristics noted above helped shape the renewal movement. The young people of every denomination, almost without exception, were enthusiastic. There was a very real sense in which this movement in Ethiopia was spearheaded by the Christian youth. They saw it as a return to a biblical lifestyle—which it was. It was also a movement with clear sociological ramifications. The movement enabled the youth to gain an authority and identity which the older generation had denied them. They became leaders in a cause that their parents, the church leaders, could not understand.⁵ Spiritually the young people found what the Bible promised them—an experience of God's presence and blessing. As they became bold and aggressive in their praying and preaching they saw results. Their prayers were answered: people were saved.

The puzzled majority in all denominations and missions deepened its defensive trenches and prepared to fight what would be a losing battle. Initially the older generation was determined that everything in the church should go on as before: singing, preaching, participation, p. 351 administration, conduct of meetings, giving, and evangelism were all treated as sacrosanct and not subject to any type of change. The fact that the movement passed through a disruptive stage made the leadership of the churches even more defensive. It took years before sufficient concessions had been made on both sides to enable the two groups to work together harmoniously. The energetic, enthusiastic and Bible-verse-quoting youth bamboozled many of the older people in the church. Most expatriate missionaries reacted in one of two ways. Some said, 'We have no place for such a thing in our liturgical tradition'; and others, 'Such enthusiasm belongs only to the immature stage of the church'. The result of both reactions was the same:—'we cannot afford to come to terms with this movement, so we'll separate ourselves from it by excluding the enthusiasts'.

Exclusion, or excommunication, was a futile reaction, for it encouraged the forming of new fellowships, something the churches did not want to encourage. This only further widened the gap between the generations. The youth began to meet in homes. These

⁵ William J. Samarian, *Tongues of Men and Angels. The Religious Language of Pentecostalism* (New York/London: Macmillan, 1972) p.235 notes the importance of fulfillment and accomplishment: 'People talk in tongues, because it is part of a movement that offers them the fulfillment of aspirations that their previous religious experience created in them. They too want to believe in God passionately, to know the delight of communion with him, and to see him at work in life.'

meetings were the beginning of what would be known during the first decade of the revolution as the 'Homechurch Movement'.⁶ These home meetings were led by the young people and attracted young people. In most urban areas the young people who flocked to these fellowships did not discontinue their attendance at church even though they felt unhappy with the services. Until about 1970 the home gatherings experienced a minimum of problems. From 1960–1975 the renewal movement shifted out of the churches, into the homes, and then back into the churches again. The experience of being expelled from the churches did result in the formation of one new denomination, the Full Gospel Believers' Church.⁷ The leaders of this church initially had no intention of forming a new denomination. It began as a fellowship of like-minded Christians. As it evangelized it became a denomination. The small group fellowships, which began because the churches were p. 352 unwilling to allow the enthusiasts to take part in the regular services, were then adopted by many of the churches as a viable method of stimulating church life.

Exclusion did not bother the enthusiasts of renewal any more than did the various attacks which were launched against it, often, sadly enough, by other Christians. Throughout the twenty-year period under review, few if any enthusiasts for renewal were able to remain within the Orthodox church.⁸ Repeatedly they were attacked as 'Protestant' and expelled from the church property. The vocal and public repudiation of the renewal movement by some leaders of the Orthodox church created a problem that dogged the movement for many years. It was natural enough that observers would connect the renewal movement with historical Pentecostalism, although in Ethiopia there were far more enthusiasts outside the Pentecostal denominations than within. In spite of this all the enthusiasts were branded by the government as 'Penty'.⁹ This, as well as the social changes of the early 1970s, further widened the generation gap. Fathers attacked their children as 'Penty'; the youth replied by attacking the older generation as 'blind leaders of the blind'; they attacked them for being cowards and traitors (so the youth said) because they refused to identify themselves with the issues which the young people considered to be crucial; they attacked them for their pride of office, for loving authority above ministry; they attacked them for being, dependent upon overseas funds for their salaries.

As a whole the young people were enthusiastic about the renewal movement and supported it in spite of the outspoken disapproval of their fathers. Scores, and then hundreds, and eventually thousands of small group meetings sprang up all over the country regardless of attacks from both the government and the churches. Some of the renewal groups began to send out their own evangelists who went out 'in faith', living only

⁶ Cf. 'The Theology of the "Restoration" House Churches' by Andrew Walker, *Strange Gifts?* pp.208–219. In Ethiopia the Homechurch Movement was only tangentially related to the charismatic movement and was thus quite different in nature and function from the sectarian movement described by Walker.

⁷ This denomination had/has no organic connections with denominations in the west using the same name. In fact, initially, the F.G.B.C. was quite xenophobic. A group calling itself the 'Apostolic Church' practised baptism in the name of Jesus only, and was therefore called the 'Jesus Only People' (cf. Andrew Walker, 'The Orthodox Church and the Charismatic Movement', *Strange Tongues?* p. 169), but this movement was apparently imported into Ethiopia from North America, and was not a by—product of the renewal movement.

⁸ There are persistent rumours of groups of 'secret enthusiasts' within the Orthodox church: it is difficult to understand how these people could be both 'secret' and at the same time 'enthusiasts'.

⁹ 'Penty' being short for 'Pentecostal', i.e. trouble-maker, rebel, traitor. Over a period of years the enthusiasts managed to shake off this epithet proving by their conduct that they were loyal and faithful citizens. For a year or two this name was pasted onto all enthusiasts.

on the gifts of those who supported the movement. The small group meetings were often rowdy causing the neighbours to complain to the police about the noise. Parents expressed concern about the involvement of girls and boys in these p. 353 meetings. Many enthusiasts were persecuted and imprisoned, some for many years. Instead of making any attempt to avoid such confrontation they often welcomed it. There were many occasions when confrontation appeared to be unnecessary but such decisions were inevitably left to the individual conscience; once the decision had been made it was wholeheartedly supported by the group. Among the young the excitement and enthusiasm was contagious. By the early 1970s a deep rift existed; there was a generation gap and both sides were full of bitterness.

HARMONY ACHIEVED

The conflict between the two groups reached its nadir in the mid-1970s. It happened in this way: the government needed the support of all citizens in order to fight the secessionist wars which had broken out in the east and north. The nation as a whole was commanded to wave its left fist in the air and scream imprecations against all the enemies of the Motherland. The presence of a few unwise 'prophets', who preached that these invasions were God's judgment on a nation forgetting God, only exacerbated tensions. Many of the young people refused, in spite of imprisonment and physical violence, to curse their enemies. The vast majority of the older generation did not agree that this was an issue on which they should draw fine lines. The young people were supported by those within the movement but condemned as 'traitors' by those outside, sometimes even by their Christian parents. Many pastors and elders travelled from one part of the country to the other trying to bind up the wounds but they were too deep to heal quickly. The young people felt that they had been betrayed.

Gradually some of the older generation began to see things from a different perspective. During the 1960s there had been a lot of froth and bubble in the renewal movement.¹⁰ There had been insincere preachers who had stolen funds and many harsh words had been spoken on both sides, in spite of this the older generation could not deny that the largest percentage of these young people were brave, dedicated and vitally alive Christians. This new evidence of faith had been expressed in words that were put to Ethiopian tunes, tunes that p. 354 became so popular that secular musicians sometimes copied them. Those who had been spectators of the renewal movement slowly began to admit that the biblical preaching of many of the young people had both content and value to it; the Bible, they discovered, was not just a book of 'do's and don'ts'. Little by little the older generation began to acknowledge its shortcomings and mistakes. This did not happen suddenly or in any one particularly place. It was a gradual softening which took place over a number of years. Slowly, thanks to tireless peacemakers, both sides of the conflict began to see that it was possible for them to make minor concessions and to minister to one another.

For years neither side had been willing to share: for both of them it had been an 'either/or' situation. The youth were determined to stage a *coup d'état*, and the older people were equally determined to maintain the status quo, come what may. Gradually the young people were convinced that they could minister without having to administer.

¹⁰ Felicitas D. Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues. A Cross-Cultural Study of Glossolalia* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1972) explores the whole subject of behaviour and dissociation from a sympathetic anthropologist's point of view. The point is made that dissociation, almost of necessity, carries with it some unusual behaviour.

They were persuaded that many changes could be brought about in an orderly way. However, as the young people began to move towards a rapprochement with the church leadership they often forced them to make hasty and unwise decisions which they later regretted. In the mid-1970s the mood of the country was revolutionary: the young people thought they knew what changes were needed in the churches, and they wanted to see them implemented immediately. Thus it was that during the early 1970s in every denomination some type of youth movement was formed; this gave them their own organization within the church. Youth delegates were appointed to numerous church boards and committees. Slowly, but surely, the young people began to share in the Sunday services.

Perhaps the most difficult thing for both the enthusiasts of the renewal movement and the others to learn, as they moved back together again in the life of the church, was Spirit-controlled spontaneity.¹¹ Years of bitterness and endless recriminations had left many deep wounds; as a result many Christians refused to become members of any one denomination. Both sides were suspicious of the other. There was the constant feeling on the one side that there was too much freedom, and on the other that there was not enough. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s those within the charismatic p.355 movement had often suffered unjustifiably and unnecessarily because of the exhibitionism of some who claimed to be enthusiasts. This made them ready to agree to the imposition of controls on what could and could not be done. They realized that noise and disorder in meetings were not always, or even often, signs of the Holy Spirit's presence. A consensus of opinion was gradually reached on how much repetitive singing and handclapping should take place during worship services. Fora for talking to one another, and thereby curbing criticism, were set up.

The most significant peacemaker was music.¹² The revival movement introduced the piano accordion and guitar into many of the church services in Ethiopia. Within the country both instruments were already associated with dancebands and, in most rural churches and many urban ones, the leadership had banned such musical instruments. Three types of singing had been common in the churches: translated hymns set to western tunes, traditional antiphonal singing, and chanting by priests and deacons. All three lacked the one thing which the renewal movement stressed: the expression of relevant spirituality. The movement introduced three things into almost all of the churches and thereby gained itself a place within, rather than outside, these churches. Hundreds and thousands of new hymns were written. The author's name was never attached to the hymn, and once accepted it became public property. New instruments were introduced into worship services, thus facilitating further change. Within the brief space of about five years (approximately 1973–1978) almost every congregation in the country had at least one gowned young people's choir.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE MOVEMENT

The movement began almost unnoticed in the early 1960s. Within twenty years it had changed the shape of Christianity in most parts of Ethiopia. By the 1980s it had become institutionalized and could hardly any longer be called a separate movement. But the

¹¹ The ideal is 'churches in which enthusiasm and regular order coexist in harmonious interaction'. James D. G. Dunn, 'Models of Christian Community', *Strange Gifts?* p. 12.

¹² Douglas Davies, 'The Charismatic Ethic and the Spirit of Post-Industrialism' (*Strange Gifts?* pp.137–150, esp. p.140). He too points out that it is the group experience, the sense of community, even in the tongue-speaking, that is most important. Music, more than any other single thing, achieved that sense of oneness.

contributions it has made will last as long as their value is recognized by Ethiopian Christians. Space permits only the brief mention of five contributions, although no doubt there are many more. **P. 356**

First there was the *enthusiasm*. Even those churches which had been established for only a few decades had become traditional and static. The denominations which refused to come to terms within the movement still remain that way; they have a religion but no enthusiasm. Elsewhere, congregational services are now viewed by many as the opportunity to minister to one another as well as the time to worship God. In spite of difficulties there is a renewed realization of the primacy of evangelism. In many places a legalistic ethic has been replaced by an emphasis upon purity of attitude and intention.

The second contribution, *music*, has already been briefly mentioned. Hundreds of Christians who had never thought of expressing their faith through songs were encouraged to do just this. Hundreds of their songs have now become part of Ethiopian church life and worship. The authors remain anonymous but their words express the Christians' faith. The minstrel [*zāmare*] was a familiar figure in traditional Ethiopia; often he played the role of the modern gossip columnist—rebuking, telling secrets, quashing rumours. The renewal movement brought a powerful new figure into Ethiopian church history: the soloist. Many of these men and women were able to make whole congregations dissolve into tears or shout out 'halleluiahs' and 'amens'. Thousands upon thousands of their cassettes (from which they receive not a cent in royalties) have found their way into the remotest parts of Ethiopia—indeed, into every army camp and prison in the country. The introduction of chorus singing has enabled the whole congregation to share in music in a way which was previously impossible. Many denominations, or individual congregations within the denomination, which previously knew little about congregational singing have introduced chorus singing into their worship. It would be safe to say that today any young person between the ages of five and thirty-five who wants to sing can find a place in one choir or another in his or her local congregation.

The renewal movement has made *participation* a meaningful word for Ethiopian Christians. The traditional model was that the functionaries (priests, deacons, elders, pastors) went about their activities while the rest of the congregation simply sat, or stood, and listened. Before the renewal movement began there was a limited amount of after-service sharing in many smaller rural congregations. This was usually confined to sharing prayer requests and praise items. In many denominations this has now changed. Music, more than any other single factor, has encouraged the participation of the whole congregation in much of the service. People do not need to be literate in order to sing choruses; it would appear that it is easier to be enthusiastic **p. 357** while singing choruses than throughout hymns with four or five verses. The administration of the congregation now often involves a number of committees in which many young people are involved. The young people often have a representative on the Elders' Board and are given some opportunities to preach. The renewal movement had succeeded in focusing Christians' attention on mass participation in worship.

The fourth contribution is a forceful reminder that, exegete 1 Corinthians however you will, *the gifts of the Holy Spirit* are present in the Ethiopian church today. On the potentially divisive issue of speaking in tongues no consensus of opinion has been reached. But Christians have agreed to respect one another's viewpoints and refrain from causing offence. The same is true in the case of prophecy.¹³ Those who uttered prophecies

¹³ Rex Davis, 'Living Liturgically: the Charismatic Contribution' *Strange Gifts?* pp.107–122) writes on p.114: 'The recovery of prophecy in worship is surely the greatest of pentecostal contributions in this century ...'

were never considered to be prophets! They simply spoke and then disappeared back into the crowd. Forbearance rather than arguments prevented this from causing hurt feelings. Much the same can be said for exorcism, suffering, exhorting, to name but a few of the gifts. Most Christians in Ethiopia are now thoroughly convinced that they need the gifts of the Spirit in order to live Spirit-filled lives and to exercise a fruitful ministry. This viewpoint has also contributed to a greater participation of the congregations in the worship services. It has also enabled gifted young people to be accepted more readily by the older generation.

The renewal movement has convinced Christians that not every enthusiast is genuine no matter how often he may have spoken in tongues or how many demons she may claim to have exorcised. Too often they have seen people go astray who had seemed to start well.¹⁴ They have learned that a difference must be made between confidence and pride. The young people in particular learned that there is no true freedom in their own fellowships without some mutually agreed guidelines. Congregations and congregational leaders discovered that p.358 it was possible to retain most of the enthusiasts within the church by making an effort to include and to define, that is, by permitting the enthusiast to minister within the congregation as long as he or she observed the guidelines.¹⁵ It took years to learn the lesson that the Holy Spirit may, and will, bring about many changes, but that these changes can always be in the context of order and decency; most congregations and individuals did eventually agree that this was a lesson worth learning.

CONCLUSIONS

The charismatic movement came to Ethiopia at a time when two distinct age groups within the Christian population were experiencing serious social problems. Christians generally did not recognize the existence of these tensions. The renewal movement has solved those problems for the Christians. Many of the young people who were the leaders of the renewal movement back in the early 1960s are now in their mid-fifties. Many are now leaders in their congregations. Where are *their* children? Within the structures of the church we can initiate change and respond to it. To do either requires effort; change will always be disturbing. The easier way is to do nothing, to accept the status quo, to discourage change. Through the difficult and disturbing years of 1960–1980 God taught the church in Ethiopia many things through the renewal movement. These lessons need to be written boldly and clearly into the pages of Ethiopian church history. They are lessons from which many other churches around the world could derive considerable benefit.

Mr. Brian Fargher, a former missionary to Ethiopia, is currently engaged in Church ministries in Canada. p. 359

Although prophecy was present in the Ethiopian renewal movement it was not considered to be one of the most important gifts.

¹⁴ In his essay 'All Creatures Great and Small: towards a Pneumatology of Life' (*Strange Gifts?* pp.41–53), in which he advocates panpneumatism (overtones of Hegel?), W. J. Hollenweger has a section entitled 'Non-White Indigenous Pneumatologies' (pp.46ff). He suggests that some 'non-white indigenous people' may have acquired a better understanding than the western world of panpneumatism. Preachers within the charismatic movement in Ethiopia did not display any tendencies towards panpneumatism.

¹⁵ 'The Charismatic Joy of Liturgical Dance Movement' by Nell Challingsworth, (*Strange Gifts?* pp. 123–126). The liturgical dance that is here described appears to have had no place in the Ethiopian renewal movement.

Personal Purity

Sam Vassell

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This article was a paper presented at a CETA meeting in March 1987 at Jamaica Theological Seminary, Jamaica. In all the business of programmes, meetings, consultations and other activities, the man of God may be left virtually without the resources of personal purity nowadays. Evangelicals need to stress this aspect of discipleship in our time. Vassell analyzes biblical characters in both the Old and New Testaments who exemplify this virtue of purity: Isaiah, Joseph, the Psalmist, Paul, Peter, John. He convincingly shows how moral rectitude, a sense of God's holy presence and true worship are its essential elements. He concludes that both the categories of the Kingdom of God and parousia in the New Testament are fundamentally concerned with purity.

Editor

The subject of personal purity may be approached from many angles. In this study, I have decided against an approach using word studies and the like, because I believe most if not all of us share a consensus as to the semantic content of the term. I have also chosen not to approach it from the standpoint of systematic theology, because of the fact of our differing systems. These systems place us squarely into such varying camps that we often cannot talk to each other using terms on which we all agree.

I have sought to take an approach that is more concerned with biblical theology. It is, therefore, an approach that seeks to identify a unifying motif throughout Scripture relative to the concept of personal purity. It assumes that there is a progressive clarification of the concept alongside the progressive revelation within Scripture. While the paper does not attempt to exhaust the subject, it seeks to identify some fundamental conclusions that may be reached using such an approach.

The motif that this paper identifies is that a personal appreciation of the living God inevitable ushers one into a life of purity in keeping with, and as a consequence of, that appreciation of him.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE PATRIARCHS

Joseph is a shining example of personal purity among the Patriarchs in [P. 360](#) the Old Testament. He may rightly serve as a paradigm of the biblical concept of personal purity. The episode in his life that best demonstrates this is found in [Genesis 39:1–20](#).

A Relationship with the Living God. The text establishes the crucial factor of relationship with God in this story by the words 'The Lord was with Joseph' in [Gen. 39:2](#). These words appear again in verses [21](#) and [23](#) of this chapter, as the conditioning and constant factor in face of the changing situations of Joseph's life. They have vital significance in the book of Genesis, in relationship to the covenant relationship that God had established with Abraham and his descendants. So, in [Genesis 26:3](#), as God reaffirms his covenant commitment to Isaac, Abraham's son, God says, 'I will be with you ... and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.' The assurance of God's presence is thus associated inextricably with his covenant commitment. So in the words 'The Lord was with Joseph'. The covenant relationship between God and Joseph comes into sharp focus (cf. also [Acts 7:9](#)—and note how Stephen emphasizes this fact in his speech before the Sanhedrin).

Personal purity a function of the relationship with the living God. Joseph's story develops in a way that demonstrates God's favour upon him. He is physically attractive and financially astute. He therefore rises to leadership and prominence in his master Potiphar's household. The narrative peaks, however, with a testing challenge to his commitment to personal moral rectitude. In the presence of ample opportunity and in the absence of any restraining group or written legal code, he is persistently enticed into a sexual relationship with his master's wife. The personal purity of Joseph shines out in response to this challenge. He consistently and decisively refuses to cooperate. He states clearly his fundamental reason for consistently refusing in the famous words: 'How could I do such a wicked thing *and sin against God?*' With these words Joseph establishes that such an activity would scandalize the God that had graciously and faithfully committed himself in covenant to him, his ancestors and his descendants. The personal purity exemplified in Joseph's upright moral choice is shown to be a direct function of his consciousness of the living God in terms of a sacrosanct relationship. For him, the violating of this relationship was unthinkable.

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PROPHET ISAIAH

A revelation of the living God. The Prophet Isaiah remembers a critical **P.361** point in time when he 'saw the Lord' (v.1). Unveiled before him was the absolute authority of the living God, his dazzling glory and his overwhelming holiness. (vv.2-4). It was an awesome revelation to Isaiah. In the light of this revelation of God, Isaiah sees himself as one who stands condemned because he, a self-confessed 'man of unclean lips', has seen 'the King'. From an Old Testament perspective, no man expects to live, having seen God (cf. [Gen. 32:30](#); [Ex. 33:20](#)). The prophet realizes that, having seen 'the King', he is now completely at God's mercy.

Personal purity resulting from revelation of the living God. The revelation of God not only evokes what may be called 'Judgement day' honesty in the Prophet, shown in the admitting of his own 'uncleanness' before God, but also compels him to abandon any mitigating isolationist posture of individual self righteousness ('and I live among a people of unclean lips'). He sees himself in the same way as all those around him. He recognizes and identifies himself with the common problem of his fellowmen which merits doom in the presence of a holy God. Thankfully, his woeful, impassioned cry does not go unnoticed. And so upon his humble and honest confession of his plight, instead of merited and expected condemnation, a gracious purging takes place which 'takes away his guilt' and makes atonement for his sin. He is now, *and only now*, able to speak God's words to his fellow men. Isaiah's explicit defencelessness before the holy God, and his implicit dependence upon him (being at his mercy), are theologically important precursors of the prophet's experience of personal purification and subsequent commissioning.

For the prophet, personal purification is not merely an end, but it is brought into the service of public proclamation of God's will. Indeed personal purging-is absolutely necessary if he is going to be God's prophet.

One notes with interest that the sin of which he is purged is that of having 'unclean lips'. The focus on 'lips' here indicates that the phenomenon of social relationships is implied. All social relationships are in fact mediated through oral communication, 'the lips'. It is reasonable to argue that since the Prophet's subsequently 'purged' lips speak the word of God, which in this context is a word of justice, truth and impartiality (cf. [Is. 6:9-15](#)), that the common sin which he shared with his fellow men ('unclean lips') points to conditions of injustice, falsehood and compromise which were systemic within and characteristic of contemporary society? If this is the case, then the personal purging here

which he experienced in the presence of the living God [p. 362](#) not only delivers him from this damnable situation of corporate uncleanness, but also enables him to speak God's truth to it, and also necessarily against it.

THE EXPRESSION OF THE PSALMIST

A reflection upon God. The Psalms highlight the religious reflection of ancient Israel upon God in the sacred context of worship. They are uniquely the repository of the nation's theology, and this is a theology that is decidedly *theocentric*. Of the many Psalms that could be cited in order to highlight this issue of personal purity, [Psalm 24](#) commends itself and in the words of verses [3–6](#) brings the issue into sharp focus.

Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord?
Who may stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to an idol
or swear by what is false.
He will receive blessing from the Lord
and vindication from God his Saviour.
Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

([Ps. 24:3–6](#) (NIV))

From verses [3](#) and [5](#) we deduce that the quintessence of blessing, in the mind of the Psalmist, is to be enabled to stand in the presence of the living God completely vindicated by him. Verses [4](#) and [6](#) describe the character and the conduct of the one who participates in this blessedness. That one has 'clean hands' and 'a pure heart', 'does not lift up his soul to an idol', or 'swear by what is false'. And 'such are the generation of those who seek him', who seek the 'face' of the 'God of Jacob'.

On reflection, personal purity seen both as gift and demand. The Psalmist seems to integrate all the elements of personal purity already alluded to in this paper. For him ritual purification is not enough to guarantee the blessing of the right of entry into God's presence and to stand there vindicated. 'The exclusive stress is laid on the moral purity of the worshipper' (Weiser). In his moral choice and actions, 'clean hands'; in his moral attitude and integrity, 'pure heart'; in his fidelity to the living God of covenant, he 'does not lift up his soul to an idol'; and in his social justice and integrity, nor does he 'swear by what is false'. Note, however, that it is those who specifically seek a right relationship with the God of Jacob, the God who redeems twisted characters, who receive the blessed privilege of entry in to the holy [p. 363](#) presence. The really deep desire to be in God's presence is then *both the motivation for* actions and attitudes indicative of personal purity and *the means whereby* a gracious saving God purifies one, and thus enables one to be ready to come in. 'Clean hands', 'pure heart', and the rest—moral rectitude in relationship¹ to God and man—are then indicative of the personal purity which for the Psalmist is both responsibility and privilege, demand and gift. At the moment of desire for true worship, the openhearted worshipper both receives a gracious gift and also meets the holy demand in the presence of the living God—the God of Jacob.

¹ The Hebrew idiom 'his face' used in this context connotes the idea of favourable relationship. (cf. [Ps. 27:7–9](#)).

THE EVIDENCE OF PARTICIPATION IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Rule of God. The New Testament presents the coming of God's Kingdom as central to its message. It has been argued convincingly that the failure to grasp the nature and centrality of this eschatological concept will lead to a serious misunderstanding of the whole New Testament (cf. Schweitzer, Dodd, Cullman, Ladd).

Matthew's Gospel is particularly concerned with the concept of the eschatological Kingdom. It is often referred to in Matthew as the 'Kingdom of *Heaven*'.² This 'Gospel' is the 'Gospel of the Kingdom'. Jesus is presented as the Messianic King in the Kingdom of God. Matthew, therefore, presents the principles of the Kingdom. It describes the participants in this Kingdom and in its record of various parables and narratives of Jesus, it clarifies the nature of the Kingdom.

My understanding of the teaching regarding the Kingdom of God in the New Testament, and especially in Matthew's Gospel, may be concisely summarized in the following way. In the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah, the Kingdom of God has broken decisively into history ([Mt. 12:28](#)). There are eschatological blessings associated with this inbreaking of the Kingdom, the foremost of which is the real possibility, here and now, of becoming a participant in this Kingdom of God. However, notwithstanding the present inbreaking, there is coming a fuller and final consummation of the Kingdom of God which is as yet future, and for which the New Testament urges constant anticipation and preparedness in the certain hope of its coming. So the [p. 364](#) Kingdom of God is 'already' present in some measure, but 'not yet' consummated in its fullness. It is 'already' but 'not yet' (Cullmann).

In keeping with my understanding of the doctrine of the Kingdom of God, I regard [Matthew 5:3-10](#) as a description of the characteristics of the blessed participants in the Kingdom of God. Verses [3](#) and [10](#) are all-inclusive and provide the clues to this conclusion: the poor in spirit and the ones who are persecuted because of righteousness are the ones to whom the Kingdom belongs. The other six 'Beatitudes' ([4-9](#)) are 'Kingdom characteristics' which are shared by all those blessed ones who are truly participants in the Kingdom of God. These people enjoy here and now the favour of God. They *are* the blessed. They stand blessed in an 'already' sense and look forward to more blessedness in a 'not yet' sense. So they all display in the 'now' the characteristics of blessedness: they sensitively mourn, they are meek, they hunger and thirst for righteousness. They also experience in the 'now' a measure of the associated eschatological blessings: they are 'already' experiencing comfort, they have begun to be filled with righteousness, and so on. However, they also look forward to a future fuller experience of these eschatological blessings which will certainly be revealed when the 'not yet' comes.

Personal purity as an evidence of the Rule of God. Within this hermeneutical framework, [Mt. 5:8](#) ('Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God') takes on tremendous significance for our discussion. Personal purity is identified as a characteristic of those who now stand blessed, being participants in God's Kingdom: the pure in heart are *now* the objects of God's favour. Their purity of heart, however, relates to the fact that they have 'already', in some sense, begun to 'see God', the vision of whom is both the motivation and the means to purity as we have already discussed above. (Cf. also Paul in [2 Cor. 3:18](#) and John in [1 John 1:5-7](#)). The term 'pure *in heart*' conveys the idea of a condition that is intensely personal. Stott points out that this blessed characteristic is best described as a disposition of absolute openness to God's scrutiny and correction (which he describes as

² The author's sensitivity of his Jewish audience's concern for circumlocution of the divine name is no doubt the reason behind this phenomenon.

a 'Christian counter culture'). In this situation, there is complete submission to the rule of the living God. This, however, has a social dimension as it also frees one to be transparent before one's fellow men. There is consequently an absence of hidden agendas and ulterior motives. The façades of play-acting become ridiculous to such an individual, for *deceptive double dealing* and *secret moral corruption* have no place under the holy scrutiny of the living God to which he has submitted himself. If there is absolute openness and honesty [p. 365](#) before God, whom the pure in heart begins to 'see' in his transcendental holiness, what does he need to hide from his fellow men, with whom he shares common human mortality and fallibility?

THE EXPECTATION OF THE 'PAROUSIA'

Personal purity, vital sign of Christian hope. Having discussed the issue of personal purity as it relates to the rule of God emphasized in the Gospels, the final consideration of this paper will be the relationship between the expected return of our 'Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (the 'blessed hope' of every Christian), and the matter of personal purity. This will be examined in reference to the final phase of revelation, the 'Apostles' doctrine'.

Paul. For the apostle Paul, the triad of faith, hope and love constitutes the essential, basic and sufficient elements of genuine Christianity (cf. [Col. 1:3-5](#), [1 Cor. 13:13](#); [1 Th. 1:3-10](#)). For Paul, these three qualities in combination give irrefutable evidence of the redemptive work of God in the lives of persons. Paul knows no genuine Christianity where these elements are absent. *All* true Christians love, *all* must have faith in Christ and *all* look in great expectation for his return.

In 1 Timothy, Paul gives personal advice to Timothy to whom he has assigned the demanding task of 'guarding the Gospel' (as John Stott's book title puts it) in Ephesus. In [1 Tim. 4:12](#) he assures Timothy that the 'only way to silence criticism' (Barclay's translation), is simply to be an exemplary Christian, 'an example for the believers'. Timothy must be a model, both in his speech and in his conduct, if he wants to be taken seriously. Paul elaborates the idea of exemplary Christian conduct in terms of three essential elements, '*love, faith and purity*'. Here, the Pauline triad of essential Christian virtues seems at first glance to be disrupted. One would expect 'hope' to complement faith and love, in the triad; instead we see 'purity'. I believe, however, that there is a vital link between 'hope' and 'purity' in Paul's mind, and that the Pauline triad is not therefore violated. For Paul, *Christian purity* is simply and necessarily the corollary to *Christian hope*. The life of purity is the consistent reflection in this world of the life that hopes for the world to come. This emerges clearly if we allow Paul in [Titus 2:11-14](#) to interpret Paul in [1 Tim. 4:12](#).

Paul writes to Titus in Crete a similar letter to that which he writes to Timothy in Ephesus. In the letter to Titus he makes unequivocally explicit the link between purity and hope. [p. 366](#)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. ([Titus 2:11-14](#), NIV).

In the above passage, Paul explains concisely that the life of personal purity results from the disciplining³ of God's saving grace. He further shows that this life is lived in light of the dynamic expectation of the 'blessed hope', the content of which is the 'glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ'. He concludes by asserting that it is Jesus Christ that gave himself in order to redeem us from all wickedness, and to produce a people designated as 'his very own' and characterized by moral purity, and an eagerness to do good.

William Barclay in commenting on [Titus 2:11-14](#) says this:

Jesus Christ makes us able to live with the *prudence* which allows no passion or desire more than its proper place; with the *justice* which enables us to give both to God and to men that which is their due; with the *reverence* which makes us live in the awareness that this world is nothing other than the temple of God.

He continues:

The dynamic of this new life is the expectation of the coming of Jesus Christ ... The Christian is the man who is always prepared for the coming of the King of Kings ... Jesus can purify us until we are fit to be the special people of God.

In the light of this passage in Titus, we understand Paul's advice to Timothy in [1 Tim. 4:12](#) as being an encouragement to demonstrate purity of life which, for Paul, is the corollary of Christian hope.

The apostolic witness of John and Peter corroborates the idea seen in Paul that Christian hope is inevitably reflected in Christian purity.

John. In [John 3:1-3](#), the text speaks for itself, without the need for extensive comment. It says:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God. And this is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Dear friends, now are we children [p. 367](#) of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The concepts of hope and purity are obviously explicitly linked here. This passage however sheds more light on the *nature* of personal purity by showing that the standard of personal purity is to be 'just as that one': Jesus Christ, for whom we wait. It is Christlike purity. He further shows that the hope of the Christian is indeed to realize just that—Christlikeness at the time of the unhindered vision of Christ, when we shall see Christ 'as he is'.

Peter In [2 Peter 3](#), Peter speaks about the 'day of the Lord'. For him, it is the day when God comes in final judgement and brings complete redemption. In vv. [13](#) and [14](#) he says, 'But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth; the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him'.

The consensus of the apostolic witness is that, without doubt, personal purity is a function of genuine expectant hope for the return of the Lord.

³ The Greek word translated 'teach' in the NIV text implies more than mere instruction; it has the force of 'training' or 'disciplining' (Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich).

CONCLUSION

From this study, we have seen that throughout the Scripture there is the vital concept that an individual's deep appreciation of the living God is a life—conditioning phenomenon. The occupation with the living God necessarily works out itself in history in terms of personal purity.

In the Patriarch *Joseph*, the consciousness of a relationship with the God of covenant informed his moral choices. It demanded moral rectitude, with no compromise. In the prophet *Isaiah*, his encounter in vivid revelation of the God of absolute power, glory and holiness draws out honest confession of defencelessness in his presence. This is the necessary precursor to God's gracious purging. In [Psalm 24](#), reflection upon the awesome requirements necessary to approach the living God in true worship, leads the Psalmist to see beyond ritual purity to the many-faceted issue of moral purity, which takes in both relationship with God and man. He theologizes that it is both the holy demand of God, and the gracious gift of God.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we have seen that one definitive quality of those that have personally accepted into their lives the rule of God which the Gospel of the Kingdom announces, is the distinguishing [p. 368](#) characteristic of purity of heart. These people begin to 'see God'. They are transparent before him and before men. There is no place for deception and hypocrisy. There is also the anticipation of fuller purity in the anticipation of a fuller vision of God.

Finally, in the apostolic teachings of the New Testament, we found that there was complete consensus between Paul, John and Peter in articulating the concept that personal purity is the proper Christian disposition lived in the light of a knife—edged expectancy of the return of our Great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. Those who anticipate the consummation of the future, in the fulfilling purposes of the living God, live pure lives in hope and expectancy.

Bearing in mind our discussion of [Titus 2:11-14](#) above, may we hear afresh the concluding challenge of the apostle Paul in reference to personal purity:

These then are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you.

May we also resolve to be models, by God's grace, of that which we teach, rebuke and encourage. I am convinced that if we teach personal purity and also live pure lives, we will serve the Church in our time and our region in a way that glorifies the living God.

Sam Vassell is teaching at the Jamaica Theological Seminary, Jamaica. [p. 369](#)

Mission and Renewal in Latin-American Catholicism

Samuel Escobar

*Reprinted with permission from Missiology—an International Review,
Vol. XV No. 2, April, 1987*

Like most of the Two-Thirds World nations, perhaps more than them, Latin America is in turmoil in several dimensions—political and economic as well as ecclesiological. The recent emergence of Basic Ecclesial Communities and the Protestant missionary efforts of recent years call for an analysis of their sources, in order that their effects for posterity might be better assessed. Escobar gives a detailed history of the birth of Latin American Catholic missionary enterprise (an analysis which has had to be reduced due to lack of space) in the three areas of self-critical redefinition of the meaning of being Christian, a fresh understanding of the Christian message in which the Bible plays a vital role, and a change of pastoral methodologies more relevant to the situations of the continent. These are the new and daring contributions of the author, both because of his own Latin American background and because of his expertise in the area.

Editor

Latin America is a region of the world where Christianity arrived in 1492 and was well established a few decades later. The fact that someone would consider it 'missionary territory' was the subject of much debate at the beginning of this century. Usually it was Protestant missionary statesmen from England and North America who described the spiritual condition of Latin America in sombre tones. The appeal to send Protestant missionaries was accompanied by a description of social, moral, and spiritual conditions that were a call to action. Robert Speer wrote in 1913:

The first test of religious conditions is to be found in the facts of social life. No land can be conceded to have a satisfactory religion where the moral conditions are as they have been shown to be in South America. If it can be proved that the conditions of any European or North American land are as they are in South America, then it will be proved also that that land needs a religious reformation. (1913:145)

For Speer the situation was not a matter of concern only to Protestants, but also to Catholics in North America. John A. Mackay, who was to [p. 370](#) become one of the great ecumenical leaders of our century, explained his missionary work in Catholic lands, at the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council (1928). His words reflect the controversy that had been taking place in European missionary circles since the famous gathering of Edinburgh 1910:

Sometimes those who are interested in Christian service in South America are apt to be regarded as religious buccaneers devoting their lives to ecclesiastical piracy, but that is far from being the case. The great majority of men to whom we go will have nothing to do with religion. They took up this attitude because religion and morality had been divorced throughout the whole history of religious life in South America. (1928:121)

What would appear as a description tainted by Protestant bias at the beginning of the century was later on repeated by Catholic theologians and missiologists, sometimes with equally dramatic and sombre tones. During the Inter-American Catholic Action Week held in Chimbote, Peru, in 1953, after a careful and detailed study of the situation country by country, delegates concluded that in Latin America 'the vast majority of Catholics are *solo de nombre*: that is, nominal Catholics ... though baptized and believing in the Catholic faith, those nominal Catholics do not practice their religion or allow it to influence their daily lives in any appreciable degree' (Coleman 1958:20).

In the four decades between the year of 1913, when Speer wrote, and the year 1953, when the Chimbote gathering reached this kind of critical conclusion, there was a period

of intense Protestant missionary activity, and a steady growth of Latin-American Protestant communities. Like other missiologists, Speer was of the opinion that the Protestant presence was going to be an incentive for Catholic renewal. 'The Roman Catholic Church in South America needs the Protestant missionary movement,' he wrote, and in a way that some would consider too triumphalistic today, he added:

The presence of Protestant missions alone will lead the Church into a self cleansing and introduce the forces, or support whatever inner forces there may already be, which may correct and vivify it. (1913:237)

Twenty years later Mackay expressed the same opinion and even quoted a French Catholic *abbé* in Mexico who had expressed in reference to Latin America:

The best thing that could happen in the spiritual life of the Continent would be an increasingly strong Protestant movement; that would oblige the p. 371 Church to put her house in order, and get ready to fulfill her mission. (1933:264)

It seems to me that during the most recent four decades the situation that Speer and Mackay described has started to change radically. A new vitality is fermenting in Latin-American Catholicism, and some of the renewal movements within are now reaching many parts of the world, beyond Catholic circles. The most recently published history of Christianity in Latin America is an excellent interpretative volume by German historian Hans Jurgen Prien. He records both Catholic and Protestant developments, and throws light especially on what has happened in the most recent decades during a period of intense social and political change. Prien describes this period in his last chapter under the title 'Crisis of the Missionary Identity of the Church'.¹ Crisis is not viewed in a negative pessimistic fashion, but rather as an 'agonic' time (to use a famous metaphor from Unamuno), a time of struggle that is an indication of life. Liberation theologies, Base Ecclesial Communities, a lively Christological exploration and conscientization are all movements and ideas that increasingly find acceptance around the world. They are perceived by many as the contribution of a revitalized Catholicism to the church universal.

A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE BEING OF THE CHURCH

One of the effects of the Protestant presence in the Latin-American countries was to question the quality of the Christianity represented by the Roman Catholic Church. Some of the more radical Protestant missionaries denied that the kind of institution that had fostered the conditions of life in Latin America could be considered as a Christian church. Others pointed to the need for deep and serious reforms. Though this produced at first a negative reaction among Catholics, it is evident that in the fifties we see the rise of a new attitude, with a clear disposition to become self-critical. Maryknoll missionaries publicized in English the results of the Congress of Catholic Action in Chimbote, Peru, 1957, that we have already mentioned. This was a clear effort at self-analysis that did not spare words that sound as an echo of what Protestants had been saying for decades (Coleman 1958). p. 372

Application of social analysis and a more progressive theology reflected the real dimensions of the crisis. Under the direction of Francois Houtart, several sociological tools

¹ Prien's massive book is available only in Spanish and German. This author is a historian and a missionary, and unlike others, such as Dussel, has provided an account of both Catholic and Protestant history, as they interrelate in the last two centuries.

were applied to understand the facts, country by country.² Part of this was also an effort to analyze in depth the real dimensions of the Protestant advance and its methodology.³ By contrast, it was evident that in the observation of why Protestantism grew, some of the most evident defects of the Catholic life and ministry became visible.

Ireneo Rosier, a Carmelite from Belgium who had studied the crisis of Catholicism in Europe along the lines of dechristianization, conducted a study in Chile that had a chapter on Protestantism. The description of Protestant advance was really a way of analyzing Catholic failures. Some things that were essential and fundamental were called into question:

What attracts people in Protestantism is the person of Christ and his doctrine ... the beauty of the Christian life in small communities, the greater depth in one's life and the concern for saving one's soul explain the influence of Protestantism among the people ... Protestantism has opened the direct way to Christ, while in Catholicism it is as if the authentic face of Christ would be veiled by civilization and the complications of so many centuries. (1959:103)

This process of self-criticism acquired more sophistication in the pastoral analysis of Juan Luis Segundo and Gustavo Gutiérrez.⁴ Again, basic things are called into question, not out of a spirit of iconoclastic criticism but out of pastoral and missionary concern. The pastoral and missionary intention of these theologians has been forgotten and obscured by the persistent reference to what in their theology seems to be a call for political and social action on the part of the church. But some of the things that they have been saying have to do with the basic [p.373](#) question of what is the meaning of being a Christian today in Latin America, and consequently, what is the mission of the church in those lands, and how is she going to accomplish that mission. Before the publication of his best-known book about the new theologies, Gutiérrez had written a short but serious booklet about the pastoral situation in the continent (1970). The spirit of that booklet is well summarized in a paragraph of another publication from 1969:

The Latin American Church is in crisis ... The scope and seriousness of the situation is of enormous proportions. Long gone is the era when the Church could handle questions and problems by appealing to her doctrines and distinctions. Today it is the Church herself that is being called into question. She is being called into question by many Christians who experience in their daily lives the terrible distance that separates the Church from her roots in the gospel and her lack of harmony with the real world of Latin America. She is also being called into question by many people who are far away from her—many more than our traditional pastoral outlook is willing to admit—who see her as an obstructive force in the effort to construct a more just society. (Maryknoll Documentation Series 1970:xiii)

² Between 1958 and 1961, under the leadership of Francois Houtart, Director of the Centre for Socio-Religious Research of Brussels, the social and ecclesiastical situation of Latin America was studied. Research teams were formed in fifteen countries, and more than twenty volumes were published in Spain. Though the teams were formed mainly by European and Latin American priests and social scientists, an enthusiastic sponsor was an American mission leader, Monsignor Luigui Ligutti, and the research was financed by North American funds of the Homeland Foundation.

³ Spanish Jesuit Prudencio Damboriena, consultant for the Vatican, published a two-volume study of Protestantism in Latin America (1962). Well researched and planned, the book is very critical of Protestant missionary work.

⁴ Segundo has written extensively about pastoral work. His most revealing volume on this issue appeared in 1972 and only six years later in English. (1978)

We are aware, of course, that there were clear differences in the outlook and theological perspective from which earlier Protestant thinkers wrote and the writings of Ireneo Rosier and Gustavo Gutiérrez. The missionary proposal that could be derived from each of these three visions would be different. But all of them point toward a new understanding of the mission of the church, that some way or other has touched the very being of the Catholic Church in Latin America. On the other hand, theologians like Miguez Bonino in ecumenical Protestantism and Rene Padilla in evangelical Protestantism have been exploring the way in which, at this end of the twentieth century, the basic question of the meaning of being a Christian has become a burning issue for the Protestant churches in Latin America.⁵

A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE MESSAGE OF THE CHURCH

The proclamation of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and the challenge to follow him in obedience to his call, were central in the message of Protestant missionaries to Latin America. This Christocentric nature of their gospel was interpreted in relation to the cultural **P. 374** and spiritual reality of the continent, in a classic book that could be an example of what we say: John A. Mackay's *The Other Spanish Christ*. For this famous theologian and missionary, 'a common need presses upon the Spanish and Anglo-Saxon worlds: to "know" Christ, to "know" Him for life and thought, to know Him in God and God in Him' (1933:xii). And as Rosier remarked about the popular Protestantism he studied in Chile, it 'has opened a direct way to Christ.'

A stream of Christocentric thrust has become evident in the Catholicism of the past two decades. It is possible to detect it in manifestations as varied as the Christologies of John Sobrino or Leonatrio Boff,⁶ the evangelistic methods of the Catholic charismatics,⁷ or the popular poetry paraphrasing Scripture.⁸ What is especially significant for an evangelical observer is the new role that Scripture has in these pastoral and theological efforts. When Protestantism started to spread through Latin America, the Bible was central in its missionary action, and was practically an unknown book in the continent (Prien 1985:711-716).

An eloquent example of the kind of impact this had on Catholic leaders is the anecdote provided by Father Jorge Mejia, one of the most eminent Roman Catholic Bible scholars of the continent. He tells us how when he was a child of ten he found a Bible in his family library, and how he gave himself to its reading 'secretly, of course'. Then he proceeds:

But I was soon found out and severely reprimanded, if I remember well for two reasons: first, because I had exposed myself to the occasion of reading certain crude stories, improper for children; secondly, because the Bible I had found was a Protestant version. This, I think, was very typical of Catholic mentality among Latin American educated classes thirty or even twenty years ago, before the Bible renewal got under way. On one hand there was a certain diffidence about the Bible. It should not be read freely, lest some

⁵ Padilla became well-known because of his paper at the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism in 1974 (1985), and some of the work of Miguez Bonino in this area is evident in his introduction to *Liberation theologies*. (1975)

⁶ Especially Sobrino has now become a classic writer on the subject. (1978)

⁷ For instance, the writings of Jose H. Prado Flores in Mexico. (1980)

⁸ The gospel story was adapted in Argentina to the metrics of the most famous national poem, and Jesus was presented as a *gaucho*. A famous Mexican novelist, Vicente Lenero, has written a novel that is a paraphrase of Luke's Gospel, set in contemporary Mexico.

innocent reader come upon shocking language or descriptions. On the other hand, most available editions in Spanish were of Protestant origin. (Considine 1966:205)

This anecdote is representative of the fact that it was the Protestant initiative, and the observation of how Protestantism was able to put the p. 375 Bible in the hands of the people, that partly brought the biblical renewal within Catholicism in Latin America. This renewal, of course, had also sources in Europe, in movements that found adequate expression in the Vatican II Council. By 1967, explaining the effect of conciliar decrees in relation to Scripture, Walter Abbot, S. J., outlined how the Bible was going to be the chief source of theology and how the training of priests from then onward 'should be built around a Bible-centred theology rather than polemically oriented thology.' This did not mean an abandonment of Catholic tradition, but more precisely:

What has been swept away is the polemical focus developed during four centuries of controversy with Protestantism. A primary focus on the positive teaching of the Scripture means revision of seminary textbooks, catechisms and all other religious literature. Not all parts of the vast Roman Catholic Church move at the same speed, but the process has begun that should result in the restoration of the proper role of the Bible. (Abbot 1966:103)

By comparison with what existed before, we could say that Bible renewal in Latin-American Catholicism moved with speed. Mejia attributes a breakthrough to the presence of a German priest and Bible scholar that came to Argentina in 1938. Monsignor John Straubinger. He also points out the important role played by priests that during the post-war period went to study in France and received the influence of the French Bible-centred pastoral renewal. Love for the Bible was also characteristic in many of the missionary priests that came from Europe. This flourishing of biblical studies, and especially the entrance of biblical categories into missionary work and reflection, have been facts that can only cause joy among Protestants. Evangelical theologian Emilion Núñez spoke clearly about it in the first Congress of Evangelism in Bogota, 1969 (Núñez 1970). It was, he said, the most promising aspect of the Catholic 'aggiornamento'.

The Catholic rediscovery of the Bible has opened for Protestants a set of key questions in relation the hermeneutics and contextualization.⁹ in a field very dear to their tradition, they find themselves now before an unexpected interlocutor which is posing especially the dramatic question of the relevance of God's written Word to the contemporary needs of a changing society. At the same time, there is substance in the allegation that the new wave of North American p. 376 missionaries coming from evangelical Protestantism seems to be weak in the area of biblical training and conviction.¹⁰ However, there is also the promising fact that for the future of missionary action there is now new room for dialogue and common action.

A NEW MISSIONARY METHOD: PASTORAL RENEWAL

In the process of self-analysis in face of the growth of Protestantism, Rosier pointed out the way in which Christian life was experienced in the small communities as a decisive aspect of its attraction for the masses. He also made extensive use of the pastoral

⁹ Latin-American evangelical theologians, like Emilio Núñez and Rene Padilla, have forcefully presented the hermeneutical agenda in world evangelical gatherings.

¹⁰ Since 1970 the Latin American Theological Fraternity has posed the seriousness of this question in Evangelical missionary circles (Padilla 1985).

observations of the Jesuit Ignacio Vergara, who had made a study of Protestantism in Chile in 1956. Vergara was especially intrigued by the strong sense of personal missionary responsibility that the Pentecostal groups were able to instil in their adepts.

Another very important system of their methodology is the spread of small groups all over the country. These local groups have many advantages: they increase the responsibility of the followers, they facilitate constant religious practice, and instruction is adapted to the various categories of persons and small groups. Having the meetings very close to the homes of people, they are held at an hour in which the working man can attend. The personal contact between leaders and followers is easier when the area which is reached is small. The leader is one of themselves that lives their own problems, knows all of them personally and belongs to the same social class ... All this helps to the development of a brotherly community. In it the followers and the new who arrive find a familiar atmosphere, a sincere welcome, help in difficult moments and mutual union. (Rosier 1959: 107)

Point by point this description coincides with recent descriptions of the Base Ecclesial Communities, a pastoral innovation that has been hailed as 'Latin America's most important recent contribution to the Roman Catholic Church's pastoral practice worldwide.'¹¹ In the second chapter of his book *Ecclesiogenesis*, Leonardo Buff reminds us that in 1956 in the Brazilian northeast, Dom Angelo Rossi initiated a movement of popular catechists that was to become very influential in the pastoral strategy that the Brazilian bishops developed in the early sixties. According to Buff the spark that moved Dom Angelo was the p. 377 complaint of an old woman who remarked that in Natal while the three Protestant churches were lighted and filled with people, the Catholic church was closed and in darkness, because the people could not find a priest. Other writers confirm Boff's anecdote:

The bishops concerned over a chronic lack of priests, the inroads of Evangelical Protestants and the growth of left movements, joined with pastoral agents to design an Emergency Plan in 1962. Included was a section urging bishops to 'identify natural communities and work on the basis of their life situation,' and give lay Christians in these communities 'a more decisive role.' (Kirby-Molineaux 1985:1)

We are confronted here not only with a question of methodology, but also with a deeper question for Catholic ecclesiology, namely the structure of the church and her ability to be really missionary. The criticism of the massive nonpersonal church becomes eventually a criticism of the clericalism involved in a pastoral effort where there is no room for the action of laypeople. As some of the most perceptive critics of missionary presence pointed out, the danger for the church in Latin America was to depend too much on foreign missionary help, to the point that she would avoid dealing with the structural problem behind the chronic lack of clergy (Prien 1985:1040-1045).

Here we are at the central difference between the structure of the type of Protestantism that has developed more, and the Catholic structure. For this writer, both the missionary experience and the strength of the biblical argument are on the side of Buff, when he points to the difference between a church that is born out of the people and one that is imposed from above. The matters of control and authority are clearly linked here to the concept of the ministry.

The voluntarism and missionary zeal of Pentecostals and other independent evangelical groups are frequently criticized, but they have been a catalyst for renewal and

¹¹ A recent Roman Catholic-Protestant presentation of Base Ecclesial Communities has been published by *Transformation*, Vol.3, No.3, July-September 1986.

a driving force in the appearance of thousands of new congregations spread all over the continent. They constitute in the contemporary Latin American setting a vivid expression of what Luther meant by the priesthood of all believers. The great question it poses to the more developed and institutionalized forms of Protestantism is that of the loss of their initial vigour, either because of an adolescent clericalism or because of the loss of missionary concern.

If we turn back to the quote from Speer in 1913, at the beginning of this article, we have to ask again if it is true that the acid tests for a satisfactory religion are the facts of social life and the moral conditions of a nation. Is it possible to apply here the saying of the Lord: 'By their [p. 378](#) fruit you will recognize them' ([Mt. 7:16](#))? Four decades of missionary action, both Catholic and Protestant, in Latin America, can be put to the test. There is much to be learned.

CONCLUSION

Foreign missionary work in Latin America during the postwar period has had a renewing effect on the spiritual life of the continent. Some elements of the Protestant missionary experience have had an effect on Catholic mission both as a challenge and as a kind of model. Catholic renewal has taken those elements further into a creative movement from which Protestant missions could learn a lot. Contemporary Protestant theologians from Latin America, both evangelical and ecumenical, are also embarked in a fresh understanding of their traditions and their biblical basis in order to respond to the challenges of this moment of history. After 500 years since the arrival of Columbus and of Christian missions, Latin America continues to be a missionary challenge and an enigma. Let us hope that, benefiting from lessons of the past four decades, Latin-American Christians will also become a missionary force for the twenty-first century.

Dr. Samuel Escobar teaches missiology in the Hispanic ministries Department of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA. [p. 379](#)

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Bong Rin Ro & Marlin Nelson (eds.)
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