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# Editorial

Witnessing to the Gospel in the market place is the organizing theme of this issue of ERT. We take witness to the wholistic concept for all of God's mission in the world. Lausanne II reminded us 'because of evangelism and social concern are inseparable in the mind of Jesus, they must be inseparable in our minds and ministry'. Witness is participating in the ministry of the Kingdom of God, declaring Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord of all life and society.

Archbishop Carey reminded us in his enthronement sermon that witness and martyr come from the same root. In the words of Paul 'Necessity is laid upon me; woe to me if I preach not the Gospel'. The 20th century has been an era of enormous church growth especially in the so called 'third world', but we must also not forget that there have been more martyrs in this century than in any other. Suffering, servanthood and death is the way the master went. We must always be ready to be martyr—witnesses.

It is common among evangelicals to think that evangelism is the church's primary function. It would be more biblical to recognize worship as central to the church's life. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever' begins the Shorter Catechism. True and authentic worship is itself a powerful witness to the Gospel especially in cultures where worship is a public event open to believer and critic alike. The symbols of water, bread and wine can be more powerful than spoken words.

However, witnessing must also be verbal and propositional—sharing God's good news to those who have not heard or understood it. Preaching, teaching and dialogue are central to all of biblical witness. The present decline of good preaching in the pulpit and in the market place is to be deeply regretted. The term 'evangelism' is best limited to verbal witness for to equate evangelism and mission inevitably blurs their necessary distinction. H. W. Gensichen maintained that everything the Church is and does has a missionary, *dimension* but not everything has a missionary *intention*. The Anglican Lambeth Conference (1988) launched a *Decade of Evangelism* calling for a shift to a dynamic missionary emphasis going beyond care and nurture to proclamation and service. Dialogue as discussed in this issue of ERT points to one area of interpersonal relationships in evangelism and in social service. We can expect sharp differences in understanding the methods employed in this decade of evangelism. As evangelism became more highly organised and publicised through modern technology, the tide of fear and resentment continues to rise among people of other faiths, Jews and Gentiles alike who are struggling for peace and harmony in the market place. Triumphalistic boasting and the manipulation of the media will discredit the Church's witness in the [p. 4](#) world. Love alone can overcome this fear—the love of God in Christ manifested in the message and life style of his disciples.

Central to witness is personal righteousness and social justice. With the decline of living faith in an age of secularism, agnosticism and hedonism, moral values disappear. Violence, poverty and oppression reign. People are enslaved. The church without a salvific message is powerless. The distinction between the Church and the world is lost. The prophetic role of the Church rebuking sin and evil is a priority of our times. But only a Church continually renewed in doctrine, spirituality and mission can become God's agent to transform society. Salt and light are precious commodities in any market place. The fearless witness of the late Bishop Alexander Muge of Kenya against political oppression points to the function of these symbols of life.

None of us can stand against the forces of evil alone; a fragmented Church cannot effectively witness to Christ's reconciling power. Unity in the body of Christ and the power

of the Spirit through prayer are essential to 'mission in Christ's way'. Without them there can be no sustained witness. [p. 5](#)

# Enthronement Sermon Canterbury, England Friday, April 19th 1991

George Carey

*Reprinted with permission of the Archbishop of Canterbury*

'Wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given his blood for the blood of Christ, there is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it.'

That sentence, from T. S. Eliot's play, is about the death of a former Archbishop of Canterbury, whose manner of dying made this place holy ground. My own enthronement, as successor to Thomas Becket, falls on the anniversary of an earlier martyr bishop, St Alphege, who in 1012 was beaten to death with the bones of an ox. Martyrdom is usually messy, often humiliating, never romantic, whatever we make of it later. So another Archbishop would tell us—William Laud—the only other Bishop of Bath and Wells to move to Canterbury, whose blood was shed on the scaffold. Such predecessors make me wonder—a little uneasily—about what may lie ahead, though it is not the particular circumstances of history which occupy my mind but the very nature of the calling to be Christian and a leader of Christians.

The clue lies in that word 'martyr'. It originates from a word meaning 'witness', a word which Christians use of anyone who tells their story of what God has done for them in Christ. It expresses what we are doing this afternoon, for Christianity is about proclaiming good news and expressing it in joyful worship and service.

Archbishops do not exist for their own sake. They too are witnesses—called to be preachers, pastors, teachers and evangelists. St Paul's words from our first reading are directed at me today—'Necessity is laid upon me; woe to me if I preach not the gospel'.

Necessity is laid upon me—or as another translation puts it; 'I am compelled ... woe to me if I preach not the gospel'. Knowing and loving and living within the grace of Christ, the church must so tell of its Lord and Master that others are brought to his allegiance. Like Paul I see this as central to the role of Christian leadership. The church is duty bound to call people to the Living God; and it is the Archbishop's duty and joy to lead that call.

Let none think that I say this in disregard of the doubt and secularism [p. 6](#) of much of our nation. I know there are many voices raised in disbelief that anyone can still think there is a God who loves, who hears our prayers and whose will is our good. They point to the blood stains of human history, not least in the Church, and ask, in anger, contempt or amusement, for evidence of this good and gracious God. They suspect that faith is simply a shelter for the weak in mind and spirit against the storms of life or nostalgia for a bygone age.

To such sceptics I ask: Is Mother Teresa weak? Is Desmond Tutu weak? Is Terry Waite weak?—he who with all other hostages suffers a living martyrdom and whose release remains a priority of my primacy. Are the Christians of Eastern Europe weak, especially

those who have been persecuted or exiled for their faith? In this Cathedral today are Christians from parts of the world whose courage and tenacity in the face of hatred and hostility compel our admiration. We must remind ourselves that there have been more Christian martyrs this century than any other of the previous nineteen. Ours is an age of martyrs. God has not left himself without witnesses. Nor does he now. Among the witnesses here today are my brother Archbishops and bishops of the Anglican Communion now gathered beside me at St. Augustine's Chair. Many of them bring to our Communion a faith that has matured in terrible adversity and triumphed over suffering.

Others come as representatives from different Christian bodies. It is a privilege to welcome you. Your presence is evidence of that slow but steady movement towards greater unity which has been one of the remarkable gifts of God to us in these times. And yet there remains a sadness at the heart of today's ceremony. As the 103rd Archbishop of Canterbury, I stand in a succession which directs us back to the one undivided Church of Christ, a long way away from the 360 member churches of the World Council of Churches. If necessity is laid upon us to preach that God reconciles, then we cannot rest content with our scandalous divisions. 'The love of Christ compels a burning desire for unity' Archbishop Benson declared years ago. Indeed it does, for that love requires of its messengers the love of Christ for each other.

And we must face that sober truth within the Church of England. Over the centuries we have faced many issues that deeply divided us. Each has tested our commitment to the God who reconciles. In our own time there are other challenges that will test us deeply—not only the ordination of women but also the challenge to live with and accept gratefully the diverse traditions that make up the breadth of Anglicanism. From St. Augustine's chair I ask that we set above our divisions the urgency of witnessing to our nation that there is a God who cares and loves all people. We shall only be able to do that if we stand together [p. 7](#) even when decisions are made that cause us terrible pain. Our witness to the God who unites divided humanity is always more important than our pain. That is true witnessing. This helps us to understand why true martyrs, who suffer in order to witness to the God who reconciles, are always a gift and a blessing. For there will be many for whom simply staying and serving within the Church may feel as costly as the service of those martyrs with whom I began.

This is our main challenge; to be the kind of Church that puts God first, the people we serve next and ourselves last. It will be woe to us if we preach religion instead of the gospel; woe to us if we seek to live off the inheritance of the past and fail to build on those foundations for the future; woe to us if we preach a message that looks only towards inner piety and does not relate our faith to the world around.

And that earthed gospel takes us directly into the market place of the world. No church can or should avoid political comment when freedom, dignity and worth are threatened. The cross of Jesus Christ firmly roots us in human concerns and needs—and places us alongside the oppressed, the dispossessed, the homeless, the poor and the starving millions of our planet. And at this time we particularly think of the plight of the Kurds.

And all this must be held together within a church in which worship and service go hand in hand! Yet we hear from time to time the cry that the church is irrelevant. But how can that be when the life and traditions of our church are woven into the fabric of English life and community in many unseen ways? We are there with thousands and thousands of children in church schools and youth organizations; we are there with the sick at home and in hospital; we are there amongst prisoners; we are there in universities, the forces, in industry and commerce; we are there in the struggles of farming communities and in needy inner city areas.

And all this is applicable to another group of people who are with us today; people of good will who are unable to accept all or most of the doctrines of the church and especially those who belong to other faith communities. You are also welcome today and by being here address an important question to those of us who follow Christ. You might put it to us in this form: 'We recognise that we live in a land that is Christian by heritage and predominant culture. But do we have a place with you?' Part of the answer lies in that shared texture of life I have just described. But deeper than that is the issue of integrity as persons and believers. I would want to put it this way: 'The faith that I have in Christ and his good news is so important that I am compelled—necessity is laid upon me—to share it with all people. But I trust I can listen to your p.8 story and respect your integrity even though having listened I may still want to offer to you, as to all, the claims of my Lord'. Through such listening, sensitive dialogue and mutual sharing I believe that our Church may express its faith, whilst always learning from the very breadth of the nation we serve more of its full meaning.

So today my new ministry begins. I enter into an office graced by many distinguished men—Robert Runcie, Donald Coggan and the hundred other faithful servants of Christ going back to the nervous Augustine who nearly fourteen hundred years ago landed on a wild Kentish shore. He came with the desire to make Christ known as the light of the world. I too enter into that mission with my hopes and vision; a vision for a Church, renewed and invigorated, growing in faith and increasing in number; a church united in its ambition to draw out a living faith in the young as well as in others and to involve lay people fully in its mission; a church eager to join other churches in maintaining and deepening the Christian heritage which is at the heart of our nation's traditions, culture and morality.

And we can be confident in our mission. In spite of what we sometimes hear, the Church of Jesus Christ will never die. But the local manifestation of it has no guarantee of success. We depend on the grace and power of God and our faithfulness to his call.

Such faithfulness will take many different forms. For the majority of us death by ox bones, the sword or scaffold will not be part of our pilgrimage. Our journey of faith will involve most probably sharing the love of God in many ordinary ways in our homes, communities and churches. And that way may be just as hard. It will require commitment if you and I are to fulfil our ministries. I hope that you will feel that as well as marking the beginning of my ministry as Archbishop, today might mark a fresh step in your journey too. Perhaps it might be a step of commitment to a more authentic profession as a Christian; a greater confidence in the claims of the one who calls us to follow; it may simply be a willingness to explore the claims of the Christian faith once more.

And commitment is the word. As someone who has an undisguised affection for football I love the words of Bill Shankly of Liverpool who on one occasion said to his players: 'Football is not a matter of life and death—it's far more important than that!' So is our Christian faith; far more important than life and even death, as our martyrs have witnessed. And woe to us if we fail to hand on to future generations the unsearchable riches of Christ which are the very heart beat of the church and its mission.

Alphege and other martyred Archbishops of Canterbury were p.9 burning and faithful witnesses in their day. Our time is now. Will you join me not only in sharing the pageantry of this day but also the mission and ministry of our Church? And may I invite you also to join me in a joyful witness to our world that God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and there is life, hope and peace in him. A hymn we shall sing later puts it in memorable words:

'Lord, for ourselves in living power remake us,  
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,  
Past put behind us for the future take us,

Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.'

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**Dr George Carey is the Archbishop of Canterbury, England. p. 10**

# Christ, the Word, the Light and the Message

Floyd T. Cunningham

*Reprinted with permission from the Asian Journal of Theology Volume 5, No. 1 1991*

*In reflecting on the World Mission from a Wesleyan perspective, the author explores theologically Christ as the living Word, the radiant Light and the Message incarnate in the messenger, who is universally active among all peoples and cultures. Christ is the One all have been searching for during many long centuries of religious quest. Yet all men and women by nature choose darkness rather than light. Mankind's only hope is in the grace of God in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. This prevenient grace is evidenced in the collective consciousness of each society and in the moral law found in all cultures. However, in his search for bridges between revelation through creation and in the Cross, the author is careful to avoid the errors of Pelagianism. For all seeking to witness in the cross-cultural plurality of the market place this article deserves careful consideration.*

Editor

The Wesleyan tradition stands to offer an evangelical theology of mission which takes into serious and sympathetic account the cultural predicaments of human beings. And, while vitally concerned with the 'telling' of the gospel well, historically it has been as equally committed to the 'living' of the gospel. What follows intends to be a Wesleyan-oriented theological reflection upon the first verses of the Gospel of John in response to perennial issues presented by the world mission. The emphasis is, as it must be, centred on Christ. Light and Life are in the Word which has now become flesh in Jesus Christ. The Word links the salvific work of Christ to God's creation and to the evidences of Him in the world. The light shines upon every man and woman in the world, yet it seems as if there are only dim flickerings of light in the midst of overwhelming darkness. So a John the Baptist is needed—a messenger proclaiming the Message. [p. 11](#)

## I. THE WORD AND THE WORLD

From God's creation which surrounds human beings, there is some evidence of the Word which made it all. Christian faith has largely considered the world itself as a means toward the knowledge of God and has affirmed that God is able to work through physical forms and symbols. Both the creation account of Genesis and the prologue of John affirm that God wants to make himself known in and through the world, not in spite of it. This is why Jesus, the Word of God, could have taken on human, physical form without taking on sin and evil. Christ himself was there in the beginning, creating order out of chaos; and because he was there he can be the Redeemer of all creation—he can be here. (This is why Christian faith can find such benefit in the sacraments: God's presence can be known through the material—through the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper).<sup>1</sup> Asian Christians understand this well, that God is seen in what he has created, and that though

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<sup>1</sup> Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), 52; Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Theological Study* (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, Zondervan, 1985), 95.



nature is not to be worshipped, it is to be treated with reverence.<sup>2</sup> Through the Word active in creation even those not privy to the stream of revelation flowing in the Hebrews' history of salvation are enabled by grace to perceive something of God. It is a knowledge limited by sin but grace is there sufficiently, so that at least men and women know that God exists and that he is powerful and are without excuse if they choose not to believe in him (see [Romans 1:20](#)).

### Christ responds to the religious quest

If, then, there is partial revelation in all creation because the Word has made it, as proclaimers of the gospel Christians must be sensitive to how the Word has already been at work. Even before Christians arrive with the full proclamation, the Word, the 'hidden Christ',<sup>3</sup> has already manifested himself to all people and cultures. Messengers of him fulfill [p. 12](#) the task, saying, 'Here he is, the one whom you have intuitively known. His name is Jesus of Nazareth and he has come to save you from sin'.<sup>4</sup> That name is proclaimed in order to enable individuals to have faith in him, to know the one who is the subject of their highest longings and deepest yearnings. He is Jesus, the hope not only of the Jews but of the Gentiles—the Indians, the Chinese, the Africans. He is the One *all* have been searching for during many long centuries of religious quest. This is the one so long waited for; here is the long-expected Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

The second and third century apologists appreciated the human search for truth, seeing Greek philosophy not only as human wisdom, but also as paving the way for the hearing of the gospel by Gentiles, similar to that way in which the law served as preparation for the Hebrews. Indeed the Logos was to them a key concept bridging religious philosophies. They would have said also that Hindu and other sacred writings, many antedating Christ, evidence some prevenient work of the Word and would have seen them as preparatory to Christ in a limited way. In these scriptures are signs of God's voice. Christians living in cultures affected deeply by sacred writings must treat the texts

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Chung-Choon Kim, 'Toward a Christian Theology of Man in Nature', in *The Human and the Holy: Asian Perspectives in Christian Theology*, eds. Emerito P. Nacpil and Douglas J. Elwood (Quezon City: New Day, 1978), 89–130.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase is used by Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 43, in describing the preliminary work of the Holy Spirit as a divine gift to all, attempting to lead all to Christ.

<sup>4</sup> See Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 45–46. See also John T. Seamands: 'God's Holy Spirit is working ... among people who have never heard the name of Jesus', thus 'preparing individuals and even ethnic groups for the coming of the Christian messenger'. *Tell It Well: Communicating the Gospel Across the Cultures* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981), 117.

<sup>5</sup> George A. Lindbeck remarks that this seems arrogant: to suppose that 'Christians know what non-believers experience and believe in the depths of their beings better than they know themselves'? (*The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984], 61). The messengers of the gospel have received their knowledge of its mysteries by the grace of revelation, which means, in Lindbeck's terms, by standing within the Christian cultural-linguistic tradition. Since it is by grace alone there must be humility. But there must also be boldness since there is implicit in the very nature of Christianity a faith in its ultimacy. That is, to be Christian is to believe in Christ's uniqueness and finality. The invitation to non-Christians, as Lindbeck rightly says, is to enter into the language stories and paradigms of the Christian community. What reason would there be either for the invitation or for its acceptance than that Christ and faith in him is perceived by both the inviter and the receptor as God's means of salvation in the World? (*Ibid.*, 129–132).

with dignity in order to understand both p. 13 how God already has been speaking and how to proclaim the gospel more effectively.<sup>7</sup>

However, the scriptures of other religions cannot be substituted for the Old Testament. Indeed all Gentiles had either written or oral stories of their gods. But now Gentiles have been incorporated into the long stream of tradition which makes them heir to God's revelation to the Hebrews.<sup>8</sup> Though scandalous in its particularity—unacceptably so to many Hindus—Christians affirm that Jesus Christ, born at a certain time in a certain place to a certain people, the Hebrews, is the Universal Saviour.<sup>9</sup> Christians can say in definitive ways how God revealed himself to the Hebrews because of the Revelation of God in Christ. God spoke, Christians affirm, in a final, ultimate way in Christ, and through him men and women look backward in history to his prophets and to his law. No one can say in ways just as certain or definite how God revealed himself among the Chinese, for instance. However, there may be some idea as to how God has spoken to other people comparing their cultural traits to the Word of his full revelation in Christ.

The particularity of Christ is not incidental to the gospel, but central to it. If Christ did not come at a moment in historical time as a human being there could be no hope of mortal men and women being redeemed in historical time. Christians affirm that he truly 'suffered under Pontius Pilate'. This fixes both the agony and the historicity of his coming, so that Christians may know that they may triumph with him as men and women in the time and place in which they live.

### **Prevenient grace in conscience and law**

The Word at work in the world is, in Wesleyan terms, an aspect of prevenient grace. If God's grace is not limited to the community of the Book, or to some hidden elect, but is given to all, how is it at work among those outside the manifest household of God? For Wesley, p. 14 even persons outside the flow of revelation possess both conscience and law, both of which are written by the 'finger of God' on their hearts. Though when Adam broke God's command, darkened understanding ensued, God as a divine gift 'in some measure reinscribed the law on the heart of this dark, sinful creature'. So 'the law of God is now made known to them that know not God'. Wesley asserts that God works among those who do not know him by name through the law and that there is a gracious restoration of the moral image of God lost in the Fall. The restoration of the 'law' meant to Wesley that God was revealing something of his own 'heart', that he had not shut off either compassion or knowledge of himself from the lost.<sup>10</sup> For Wesley the law functioned

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<sup>7</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 34–35. See also the suggestion of A. C. Bouquet that the Logos is evident in the sages of world religions; 'Revelation and the Divine Logos', in Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), 183–198. Cf. the more extreme implications of the hidden work of Christ in other religions in Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism: Towards an Ecumenical Christophany*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981), 48–61.

<sup>8</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 44–54.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, 45–48.

<sup>10</sup> John Wesley, 'The Original Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law', *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 7–10, 15. Also, Wesley, 'The Witness of Our Own Spirit', *Works*, vol. 1, ed. Albert C. Outler, 302. For comments on the partial restoration of the law to human conscience after the fall see John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, Zondervan, 1988), 97–98; 104–105; S. W. Ariarajah, 'Evangelism and Wesley's Catholicity of Grace,' in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 142–44; and, especially, Kenneth J. Collins, *Wesley's Platonic Conception of the Moral Law*, *Wesleyan*

through the Holy Spirit to convince the world of sin, to bring individuals toward Christ, and to keep believers alive in the life of God. That there was reason and order in the world, and that law preserved it, was evident to all—even to those apart from revelation. Preventive grace also enabled individuals to keep the law, so that everyone was accountable for the moral insight received. No one, not even non-Christians, have any excuse for sinning; but everyone has sinned.<sup>11</sup>

Social laws apart from the revealed commandments are both God's doing, this is to say, and the result of the collective conscience of society. Social laws do not in themselves perfectly replicate the mind of God, of course. They are used by God to provide the structures by which human beings come to know themselves as lawless or sinful ([Romans 7:7](#)). The socialization process within human beings is never completed and individuals continually feel imposed upon by the society in which they live. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann suggest that though an individual may abide by all the laws, there remains 'a struggle between a "higher" and a "lower" self'. The law seems alien to one's inward nature, and this tension between self and society persists throughout life. Societies, like persons, are not prone to perfectly fulfil God's intent. As Reinhold Niebuhr rightly assesses, greed outweighs altruism even more tragically in societies than within individuals.<sup>12</sup> Despite the merely relative moral character of social laws, despite the fact that the Word is only partly their creator, God uses social laws to constrain both chaos and sin, and to reveal the anomic character of human nature. So 'law' in itself is good. 'Society', in Wesleyan thought, it seems to me, emerges between the matrices of human sin and the Word of God in the world. The laws of societies may be righteous, partly righteous or unrighteous, depending on how the Word has been accepted or rejected over time.

When full revelation comes it brings the moral code as from above. The Ten Commandments and their fulfillment in the teachings of Christ, since these are revealed in the Word, serve as the standard to judge all social laws. To Christians who accept it, the Bible provides an objective base which prevents, hopefully, the anarchy of complete moral relativism. Individuals participate in the revelation by standing within a community, the church, which is devoted to demonstrating a kingdom ethic as well as to the Word which is beyond culture.<sup>13</sup>

The law would require complete complicity. The human will is bent toward sin. Without the Word spoken and without the community of Christ guiding and encouraging individuals there is little hope for salvation. Without faith in Christ the Holy Spirit's activity within human beings remains limited.

The Word is active even before becoming verbal or spoken, since it was from the beginning and always has been involved in the coming to be of all that exists. If God is at

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*Theological Journal* 21 (Spring-Fall 1986), 118–122. Perhaps from his experience with the Indians in America during his missionary days Wesley sensed that non-Christians know what is morally right while at the same time fail to do what is right. For that reason Wesley offered them the Book. But they rejected it and to the end of his life Wesley was burdened for their salvation. See Wesley to France Asbury, November 25, 1878, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley A.M.*, 8 vols., ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 8.24–25; *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 18, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 163–164; Martin Schmidt, *The Young Wesley: Missionary and Theologian of Missions* (London: Epworth, 1958), 33–34.

<sup>11</sup> *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1966), 183.

<sup>12</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), 9, 91, 262, 272.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 114–128.

work among people there is a point of [p. 16](#) contact between God and persons prior to their conversion.<sup>14</sup> Wesleyan thought, it seems to me, agrees with Karl Rahner that 'It would be wrong to regard the pagan as someone who has not yet been touched by God's grace and truth'.<sup>15</sup> Theologian H. Ray Dunning similarly suggests that:<sup>16</sup>

The Wesleyan approach is to recognize that whatever truth may be found in other religions is the result of the activity of prevenient grace in its revelatory function. The missionary can gratefully accept such truth and use it as a point of contact to demonstrate the fulfillment of those glimmers of truth by the fuller revelation in Christ.

Theologically, this view prevents deism, the idea that God is removed from what he has created or set in motion. The purpose of God's prevenient witness, then, is not only to preserve order but to enable response to his initiative. From the very beginning the aim of God has been both to more perfectly reveal himself and his nature, and to establish close, even personal relationship with human beings. Though Christians find meaning in the story of God's work of salvation among the Hebrews, his activity among other people must not be denied.

Perhaps there are ones who are enabled by the Word working through the creation to know God. If there is such knowledge it is because of grace flowing from Christ and it requires individuals so receiving this gift of God to contrast it with the society surrounding them. Likely, it will force them to act against the false religious forms of their culture and to live ethically beyond and apart from the [p. 17](#) community into which they are born.<sup>17</sup> Because of the Word alive in the consciousness of individuals, some might believe in an unknown, unnamed God ([Acts 17:23](#)). If faith arises through the Word spoken only in creation to the minds of individuals it is no less Christocentric, since the gospel readily affirms that the Word there in the beginning, and no other, became enfleshed in Jesus. Hence, if some are enabled to place their faith in God, beyond the god of their culture religion, it is because God through Christ has spoken, and draws them—even these—to himself. There is no other way but through Christ for men and women to be saved, but specific knowledge of the incarnate name of that Word waits for either the

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<sup>14</sup> See J. Kenneth Grider, 'Prevenient Grace and Evangelism', *Herald of Holiness* 75 (August 1, 1986), 14; Lycurgus W. Starkey, Jr., *The Work of the Holy Spirit* 133; George G. Hunter, *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 72. The Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia asserts that 'the church must be aware that Christ *precedes* us in evangelism. God has not left himself without a witness ... The grace of God is not confined to the Church'. In Mortimer Arias, 'That the World May Believe', in *Mission Trends No. 3*, eds. Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 95.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Rahner, 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions', in *Christianity and Other Religions*, eds. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Glasgow: Collins, 1980), 75. Rahner is very close in this essay to Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace, yet does not distinguish it sufficiently from saving grace. See also George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 57, in which there is criticism of Rahner's view that there may be 'anonymous Christians'.

<sup>16</sup> H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988), 166.

<sup>17</sup> For a classic statement regarding the tensions between the individual and society, which yet indicates that such abnormality would be possible, see Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 251–278.

clear proclamation of the Word through messengers, of whom John the Baptist is the prototype, or for the final judgement.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than finding it easy to worship the Creator, men and women despair and worship the world instead, making images of mortal beings, birds, animals and reptiles ([Romans 1:23](#)). Though individuals aspire toward the divine, they freely prefer what their own hands have [p. 18](#) made. The religious forms of humankind evidence this religious pride that human efforts can reach the Creator, find knowledge of him, and thus secure salvation. The gospel says a loud 'NO' to this. Men and women are not saved by such works but only by faith in the God who is beyond any puny efforts to confine him. Human beings cannot grasp him; he grasps them and pulls them out of their own morass of ignorance and evil.<sup>19</sup>

## II. LIGHT AND LIFE

The light of Christ has shone and is shining today in some way to every person in every culture (see [John 1:9](#)), and the task of each Christian is to proclaim the Life so that there might be understanding, illumination, and perchance reception of the Life. Christians must find how the light has already been shining and explain more perfectly the way of salvation through Jesus Christ so that, through grace, faith may arise. Prevenient grace is working. There is a radiance from the Light sufficient to account for impulses in the religions and cultures of the world which seem to be in some accord with Revelation, for, as John V. Taylor says, 'God has nowhere left himself without a witness that always, to a greater or lesser degree, points to Christ'.<sup>20</sup> Wherever there is congruity it comes by grace and is designed by God to serve as preparation for the gospel.

From the pulsating life within human beings who desire what is good and the numinously holy, there is evidence of God shining in the world. Even though individuals, due to sin, are not able to attain their ideals, there are still visions, and aspirations which

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<sup>18</sup> Lycurgus Starkey remarks that 'that possibility of an extra-scriptural redemption is implicit' in some of Wesley's statements, though generally 'inconsistent' with his emphases on Christ's atoning work. *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, 43. Wesley said: 'Whenever I see a thousand men running into hell, be it in England, Ireland, or France, yea, in Europe, Asia, Africa or America. I will stop them if I can'. *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 26, ed. Frank Baker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 291; and in his 1738 sermon 'Salvation by Faith' Wesley slated clearly that saving faith must be explicitly in Christ. *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1 ed. Albert C. Outler, 120. However, Wesley also acknowledged that it was not needful for a person to have an understanding of justification by faith, or any other doctrine, in order to be saved: 'He that feareth God, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him'. *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 3 (Reprint, Kansas city: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), 308, or, to put it another way, one might possess the faith of a servant without either the assurances or the joys of sonship. Though Wesley applied this to himself prior to Aldersgate, and to other nominal Christians, might the concept have relevancy to those in other religions who have faith without knowledge of the Son? In one of his later sermons, 'On Faith', Wesley remarked that Moslems were to be more pitied than blamed for the 'narrowness' of their faith, and that those who have not had the privilege of the Word will be judged according to the light they have received. Wesley's definition of true faith is then stated broadly as 'a divine conviction of God and of the things of God'. Furthermore, he said, 'whosoever in every nation believes thus far, the Apostle [[Acts 10:35](#)] declares, is accepted by Him'. It is the faith of a servant rather than that of a son. *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3, ed. Albert C. Outler, 494, 497. See also Robert G. Tuttle, *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 315-316; A. Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart; John Wesley: Evangelist* (Reprint, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1978), 243-244.

<sup>19</sup> See Karl Barth, 'The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion', in Hick and Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions*, 32-51.

<sup>20</sup> John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, 181.

inspire religion. Amid an existentially evil world there is a desire for transcendence in the human soul.

### **All choose darkness rather than light**

Because of the prevenient work of the Light within human beings there is an inner sense of right and wrong. There is a general illumination, as Leon Morris puts it, ‘sufficient at least for them to be blameworthy when they have taken the wrong instead of the right way’.<sup>21</sup> The **p. 19** content of the ethical categories differs from culture to culture, but a sense of morality seems to be universal. Individuals intuit that there are changeless values in spite of the fact that the world is in flux. That there is in Wesleyan thought accountability along with this moral light implies both a capacity to know what is right and a power to do it. Neither this capacity nor this power is derived from natural ability. Human beings are far gone from the beings they were originally created to be and no longer possess freedom of will.<sup>22</sup> Now all are born with a predisposition to sin, and that continually. If there is any capacity either to *know* the good or to *do* the good it must be God’s grace.<sup>23</sup> Jesus himself comes, to use Augustine’s words, as Light ‘to infirm minds, wounded hearts, dim-eyed souls’.<sup>24</sup> The light of Jesus touches the blinded eyes of men and women even before they know who it is who is healing them. In every moral decision there is grace sufficient for human beings to choose the good, so that when men and women choose the bad and thereby succumb to their natural disposition, it is their own fault. One of the church fathers, Chrysostom, described this human accountability:<sup>25</sup>

If some, deliberately closing the eyes of their minds, do not wish to receive the beams of this Light, darkness is theirs. This is not because of the Light, but is a result of the wickedness of men who deliberately deprive themselves of the gift. Grace has been poured forth upon all: not refused to Jew, Greek, barbarian, Scythian, free, slave, male, female, old, young. It is sent to all alike, and calls all with equal honour. And they who do not wish to enjoy this gift ought rightly to attribute their blindness to themselves. When the way is open to all, and there is no hindering, if some lovers of evil **p. 20** remain outside, they are destroyed by nothing else than by their own wickedness alone.

Time and time again men and women choose darkness rather than light—to be children of darkness (see [Ephesians 5:8](#)). The tendency is universal.

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<sup>21</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 95.

<sup>22</sup> Regarding the loss of free agency, one Wesleyan creed states that through the fall of Adam, man ‘became depraved so that he cannot now turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God’. Article VII, *Manual*, Church of the Nazarene.

<sup>23</sup> See John Wesley, ‘The Circumcision of the Heart’, *Works*, vol. 1, ed. Albert C. Outler, 403; ‘The Witness of Our Own Spirit’, *ibid.*, 302; ‘Free Grace’, vol. 3, ed. Albert C. Outler, 553–554.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, ‘Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John,’ trans. James Innes, In *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1983) 15.

<sup>25</sup> John Chrysostom, ‘Homilies on the Gospel of St. John’, in *The Nicene and PostNicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 29. Martin Luther expressed the same sentiments. See *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 22, trans. Martin H. Bertran (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), 69. See also John Calvin: ‘that the light shines in the darkness is not at all meant as praise of corrupt nature, but rather to deprive ignorance of excuse.’ *Calvin’s Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John, 1–10*, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959). 12.

Pre-evangel, partially illuminating, prevenient grace is not saving grace, but Wesley saw it as being at one with the whole intent of God to bring men and women to repentance and spiritual life in Christ. To Wesley, prevenient grace goes before, reaching every person through the presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of physical birth: no one 'living is without some prevenient grace, and every degree of grace is a degree of life'.<sup>26</sup> God's grace abounds to all. Though hindered by myriad factors from revealing God fully, and from bringing men and women to salvation, the Holy Spirit is active until there is some decisive willedness against him.<sup>27</sup>

The missiological implications are clear. Not only are the children of Christians recipients of grace, but every child is, whether born into Hindu or Shamanist, or into irreligious environments. Perhaps certain individuals will live their entire lives without hearing of Christ, without knowing that a Holy Spirit is given, without knowing of the heavenly p. 21 Father. Even that does not defeat the grace of God. He works within the person, drawing gently to himself, wooing ever closer.

### **The Holy Spirit at work in culture**

The Holy Spirit is at work, it seems to me, through culture and directly to individuals, through their consciences. An individual's conscience is not the product of cultural values alone. If it were, there would be no chance for individuals to transcend social conventions and mores. At the same time, if the Holy Spirit is active preveniently on an individual basis, then the Holy Spirit must also be active collectively. The 'collective conscience' of a culture may reflect in some way how the Holy Spirit has been at work. This explains why none of the kingdoms of the world is wholly corrupt and evil. Wesley stated that 'some great truths, as the being and attributes of God, and the difference between moral good and evil, were known in some measure to the heathen world; the traces of them are to be found in all nations'.<sup>28</sup> God by his grace has spared humanity both total darkness and total wickedness. So even in China and India, God has not been absent, even during long centuries when the name of Christ was nowhere proclaimed. Some knowledge of God has

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<sup>26</sup> John Wesley to John Mason, November 21, 1776, in *Letters*, 6: 239–40.

<sup>27</sup> See Lycurgus W. Starkey, Jr., *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A study in Wesleyan Theology* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 41–45; Wesley, 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation', *Works*, vol. 3, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 203–207. Since prevenient grace is given to all as the result of Christ's deed on the cross, the resurrection, and the gift to humankind of the Holy Spirit, rationale is there for the baptism of either infants or adult converts. In no case is baptism in itself salvific for Wesley. Rather, it is an outward symbol corresponding to the depths of spiritual reality, an inward work of grace. If grace is universally operative in drawing individuals to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, then infant baptism is the church's proclamation of that work. Prevenient grace is salvific only until the person is able to make conscious decision to accept or reject the offer of eternal life through Christ. Becoming personally accountable is knowing the way of God but wilfully sinning nonetheless. If the individual accepts Christ, and neither infant baptism nor prevenient grace guarantees this, then individuals become assured of their divine childhood. Even if there is rejection, the Holy Spirit continues to woo and lure—for salvation is never coercive, only persuasive. Whether a child is baptized or not, prevenient grace is active and any child who dies before knowingly violating the intent of God will be saved whether born to Hindu or Christian parents. Infant baptism is profoundly filled with theocentric sensitivity to God's presence preveniently at work from the moment of birth. Child dedication, by comparison, is more human-centred, concentrating on the parents and the congregation's responsibility in the nurturing of the child. See Bernard G. Holland, *Baptism in Early Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1970), 11–12, citing R. E. Cushman and R. E. Davies; Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments*, 126–128.

<sup>28</sup> John Wesley, 'On Working Out Our Own Salvation', *Works*, vol. 3, ed. Albert C. Outler, 199.

shown through; some laws have been just and fair; some morality has prevailed; some order rather than chaos has been maintained.<sup>29</sup>

Yet due to sin goodwill does not come to humankind naturally. The theology of prevenient grace acknowledges the depth of human sin while attributing all the slightest motions toward God in the human soul to divine grace. With grace, with the Holy Spirit enabling their wills, individuals are capable of doing good. Prevenient grace provides the capacity for choice in ethical decisions. The race is wholly depraved and by nature deprived of God; but God graciously reveals himself, and gives of himself to all.<sup>30</sup>

The deeper, more perplexing question reemerges, as to whether p. 22 individuals may have faith in this unknown, yet to be revealed Christ, and be saved. Can they have faith in the God beyond their own, and their culture's gods? And can such faith save? I can conceive of a few persons being able to transcend their own cultural and religious boundaries to such faith. There could be some who would not succumb to, and who would repent of the universal tendency toward idolatry, to worship what their own hands had created, and rather worship the Creator beyond. If so, it would be because grace has penetrated somehow through the forms of nature, culture or religion and because there has been personal response to such grace, all of which flows from Christ. All have sinned, fallen short of the glory of God and have volitionally violated what they knew to be right, and if there is any revelation *or* salvation it is only because of the cross. Faith directed toward what is known is far better, far stronger, than directed toward what is unseen; but there can be such faith, I suppose, along with an inner sense of remorse for personal sins. Faith is much more apt to persevere to the end within a community of belief; but at least it is conceivable that such faith strengthened by grace could persist to the end. Ultimately, of course, it is God who knows. Meanwhile Christians are commissioned to speak of Christ to all.<sup>31</sup>

Cross-cultural ministers must not evangelize by opposing cultures, if the Holy Spirit already has been at work in them, but must find continuities between the revealed gospel and the structures of society. By listening to culture, by attentively understanding its form, and depths of meaning, they may discover just how the Holy Spirit has been working. More than two hundred years ago Nikolaus Zinzendorf expressed these sentiments:<sup>32</sup>

If we tell a savage of his Saviour, the Holy Spirit has surely been there ten years before; and if we get so far as to speak one intelligible word to men, we are witnesses of the Holy Spirit. We assure them of that which they had long ago, only they could not read it or

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<sup>29</sup> See Ajith Fernando, *The Christian's Attitude Toward World Religions* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1987), 120–123.

<sup>30</sup> John Wesley, 'The Circumcision of the Heart', *Works*, vol. 1, ed. Albert C. Outler, 403; George C. Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (Reprint, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 281–282; Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790–1935* (Reprint, Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1983), 150–151; Leon O. Hynson, *To Reform the Nation: Theological Foundations of Wesley's Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, Zondervan, 1984), 70.

<sup>31</sup> Richard S. Taylor seems to agree; see 'A Theology of Missions', in *Ministering to the Millions*, comp. Department of World Missions (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1971), 30–31. Related is the debate as to whether Cornelius was saved before receiving the Holy Spirit. See [Acts 10:35](#); Taylor, *Exploring Christian Holiness*, vol. 3: *The Theological Formulation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1985), 79–80, 118–124; J. Kenneth Grider, *Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980), 48–52.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in S. Baudert, 'Zinzendorf's Thought on Mission Related To His Views of the World', *The International Review of Missions* 21 (July 1932), 396.



express it; we emphasize it, we put the seal upon it. We simply assist the Holy Spirit in his work. p. 23

Where the religious thought of a people conforms to the revelation of God in the Bible there is no apt explanation except that the Light has been shining. Yet even where his name has been made known—in India likely from the first century, in China from the seventh, in Japan at least from the sixteenth—there has been rejection of the Light.

There is no doubt that the world is in darkness. The overwhelmingly unfair distribution of this world's goods evidences this. Men and women are greedy and lustful for both wealth and power, as if these could somehow assure personal peace of harmony. In spiritual pride human beings attempt to find their own salvation, and always fail. Gropping in a dark cave of life toward the slightest flickering of light, individuals may be sure that grace is trying to lead them out into the sun.

The bright star over the manger announced him, but the radiance of his life through centuries and around the world far surpasses that star. Christian witnesses may be guides toward God's grace, pointing to the Lamb of God who said even of himself that he was the Light of the world ([John 8:12](#)). And the Light is proclaimed by the Life.

### III. THE MESSAGE AND THE MESSENGER

Tragic it is sometimes that the Message is confused with the messenger or that the messenger is lifted up higher than the Message, as John the writer of the Gospel well knew. He likely pastored in Ephesus, a place where there was a strong cult of John the Baptist which competed with Christians.<sup>33</sup> John the Baptist had his adulators. So it was necessary to reemphasize that John the Baptist himself had said that he was unworthy even to untie the sandals of the one about whom he spoke; that he had said that he must decrease while Christ increases; that he called for repentance, whereas the Lamb of God would take away the sin of the world; and though he could baptize with water, the Son of God would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Wesleyanism has always tried to combine holiness of heart with that of life—pure intentions with righteous actions. True holiness is not a mere attention to the spiritual. It is a holistic concern which involves every dimension of the ministering Christian in order to serve the p. 24 gospel. This calls for self-emptiness so that there might be Christ actualization in and through one's life.

John the Baptist's humility is an example. Minister and missionaries must have the same spirit of honesty and humility, letting those among whom they minister know that they are unworthy servants of the one about whom they witness. Unfortunately this is not always the case and it is too easy to allow hearers to think of them too highly.<sup>34</sup>

There is already a proneness toward inferiority among many in the Two-Thirds World when it comes to Westerners. Missionaries arrive out of the sky in jets, drive up to shacks and bamboo churches in airconditioned cars and live lives which seem to most of the people among whom they work luxurious, lavish, and wasteful. How can they tell people of the cross? How can they tell national pastors that they must sacrifice even their very

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<sup>33</sup> See [Acts 19:1-7](#); compared to the long tradition of the writing of the gospel by John at Ephesus. However, there is debate among scholars on these points. Cf. Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 59-61; John A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John*, ed. J. F. Oakley (London: SCM, 1985), 45-47, 170-172.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in S. Baudert, 'Zinzendorf's Thought on Mission Related To His Views of the World', *The International Review of Missions* 21 (July 1932), 396.

lives for the sake of Christ? What has the missionary sacrificed? The Christianity of missions is one of wealth in comparison to people in the Two-Thirds World, which finds out now only too quickly that the missionaries have feet of clay. Any missions strategy which allows the messenger of the gospel to live like this must be unbiblical. Ministers are to be the servants of those among whom they labour and must not 'lord it over them' like Roman soldiers ([Mark 10:42-43](#)). It has never been God's way and in this age of rising world consciousness and education in the Two-Thirds World it is no way at all.

### **From passion to compassion**

Even before language expertise or evangelistic strategies, missionaries must possess the mind of Christ. That is, they must exhibit a 'crucified mind, emptied of self'.<sup>35</sup> Missionaries, says Ajith Fernando from Sri Lanka, must possess humility in the possession of their culture. There must also be teachability, patience and a cooperative mentality.<sup>36</sup> Great and good as communication skills are, these do not make missionaries what they ought to be. Within every missionary there must be what Albert C. Outler describes as taking place in Wesley's life, a 'conversion from passion to *compassion* as his dominant emotion, ... from a harsh zealot of God's judgement to a winsome **p. 25** witness to God's grace, from a censorious critic to an effective pastor, from arrogance to humility'.<sup>37</sup> In short, before they can 'tell it well', they must live it well. Even if missionaries can speak others' languages fluently, 'with the tongues of men and women and of angels,' if they lack love they are but noisy gongs and clanging symbols. Love demands that there be a plain and simple Christian lifestyle accompanying the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ ([I John 3:16-18](#)). Ken R. Gnanakan from India laments the 'preoccupation with the preaching of the gospel without an equally strong emphasis on the demonstration of this life-changing gospel'.<sup>38</sup> Can any missions strategy allow missionaries to live way beyond the means of the people to whom they are trying to witness? This is not the way of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

He came to minister among the poor, and in order to do so he came without his heavenly possessions and took up the cross. He left his splendour to walk dusty roads with the 'harassed and helpless', upon whom he was filled with compassion ([Matt. 9:36](#)). He did not come as an archangel, halfway condescending to men and women. He came as a man, to horizontally identify with humanity. So must missionaries bond themselves with those to whom they minister.<sup>40</sup> The Word became flesh and dwelt for a while among men and women. He forms the model and the pattern of ministry. The servant model of ministry which is being harkened to by pastoral theologians today must also be the model of the missionary. There must be an incarnational theology of mission wherein missionaries lose themselves for the sake of others as they take up the cross of Christ, who

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<sup>35</sup> Kosuke Koyama, *Waterbuffalo Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1974), 24.

<sup>36</sup> Ajith Fernando, 'Missionaries Still Needed—of a Special Kind', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 24 (January 1988) 19.

<sup>37</sup> *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> *Kingdom Concerns: A Biblical Exploration Towards a Theology of Mission* (Bangalore: Theological Book Trust, 1989), 161.

<sup>39</sup> The issue of missionary lifestyle is presented in Waldron Scott, *Bring Forth Justice: A Contemporary Perspective on Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 31-32, 160; Ronald J. Sider *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical study*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 197-198, but it is largely neglected in missiological literature.

<sup>40</sup> See also Jerald Johnson, *The International Experience* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1982), 19.

showed the way to the Father. Does anyone want to see the Father? Want to go to the place he is preparing? ([John 14:4-9](#)). It is not across the Jordan, not into the desert. The way he has shown is the way of the cross. In supreme paradox, all of the darkness of the world—death, sin and hell—is defeated by the cross, in the midst of darkness it lights the way. No one goes home except by way of the cross, there is no other way for any to go. The old missionary ideal of past generations, of going to a lost [p. 26](#) world no matter the cost materially and of being willing to suffer, is *not* out-dated. It is the way of Christ.<sup>41</sup> In a letter to a prospective missionary the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote:<sup>42</sup>

Do not always be trying to preach your doctrine, but give yourself in love. Your Western mind is too much obsessed with the idea of conquest and possession ... The object of Christian should be to be like Christ ... the real preaching is in being perfect, which is through meekness and love and self-dedication. If you are strong in your pride of race, pride of sect, and pride of personal superiority, then it is no use to try to do good to others ... On the spiritual plane you cannot *do* good until you *are* good. You cannot preach the Christianity of the Christian sect until you are like Christ.

Thus this Indian, by prevenient grace, issued a very Wesleyan call for sanctified missionaries! He continued: 'But one thing I ask of you: Will you be able to make yourself one of those whom you call "natives", not merely in habits but in love?' Perhaps too many Western missionaries are pampered and preened. The nationals hardly know how to deal with them anymore, daring not to invite them to places not antiseptically clean. Certain things Westerners think of as necessities for the over-whelming masses of world are luxuries. No wonder, then, God in these latter days seems to be choosing to work less through Westerners to evangelize the world, and rather to be turning toward those from the Two-Thirds World. From their own experience non-Western Christians have seen how missionaries should and should not act; they are more willing to do without and to live on less; they often are more on fire for the gospel; and perhaps they are living more nearly like Christ.<sup>43</sup> Only if Western missionaries are willing not only to tell it well but to live it well should they go at all.

John the Baptist both lived a lifestyle which he knew would facilitate his message, and made himself expendable, happy when his disciples left him to follow Christ. That was his purpose, to point to the Saviour. And when the Saviour came, his task was complete, just as was his joy. So also must missionaries be happy when they find 'their' followers already well down the path after Jesus. Their job, as John the Baptist's, is temporary, so that Jesus only is glorified. They are to lift up him, not themselves. They are not the Word, the Light or the Message. There [p. 27](#) are in this world false messengers and messages and people putting their hopes in such will eventually lose as that which is not ultimate inevitably passes away. Christians are to glorify the Message so that he in his time will glorify them. If there is any present self-gratification, they already have their reward.

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>41</sup> Regarding an incarnational theology of mission, see Paul R. Orjala, *God's Mission is My Mission* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1985), 45–62.

<sup>42</sup> In C. F. Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi's Ideas: Including Selections from His Writings* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1930), 354–355.

<sup>43</sup> R. Franklin Cook, *The International Dimension: Six Expressions of the Great Commission* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1984), 19–20.

There is unity among Christians through the Word, the Light and the Message. Just as the sun unites all human kind physically, as all are dependent on it, so the Son unites all Christians spiritually. The light goes out from the empty tomb almost two thousand years ago and extends now around the world., The leadership for the extension of the gospel rests not with a few but with all of those who have placed their faith in him. All are dependent upon him, and through him a new community is created. No longer are there Americans or Filipinos, white or brown; now all are Christians first of all. The highest loyalty and allegiance goes to Christ and in him the boundaries of state or race are forgotten. Yet I need brown brothers and sisters so that I might be authentically Christian. I need their perspective on the form of Christianity which I take up so that I may be sure that it is pure and not simply some cultural aberration. And they need me too so that they may avoid the same. Christian theology so built will be purer at the core than any particular cultural expression of it because it will be done through many eyes and hearts.

The community of the Word, of the Light and of the Message is the community of love, a love which shows respect for the dignity and integrity of others. There is no room for a dominating and superior spirit. Christians must relate with one another as brothers and sisters walking beside each other on the way the Word has revealed, the Light has shown and the Message has demonstrated, the way of Christ.

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# **Dialogue with Non-Christians in the New Testament**

**I. Howard Marshall**

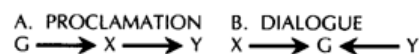
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*In this article Professor Marshall argues that dialogue as understood today is not found in the New Testament. He examines the use of the word in the Acts and concludes that the goal is to correct misunderstandings of the gospel and not to reformulate it. He looks at dialogue in the synoptics, in Paul's letters and in the Gospel of John in relation to the presentation of the gospel. He questions whether the church and the world ever conversed as equal partners in search of truth. On the other hand, the author discusses the role of dialogue in understanding and communicating the gospel in response to people's felt needs. Not all will agree with the author's definition of contemporary dialogue and may wish to ask how far cultural factors of religion, economics and politics have influenced our understanding of the gospel and whether or not dialogue between Christian scholars and with people of other faiths enables us to see more clearly the biblical message. The issue is more than one of communication, it goes to the heart of our hermeneutical methodology.*

Editor

The place of dialogue with non-Christians in relation to the evangelistic task of the church has received renewed attention recently in the pages of the *Evangelical Review of Theology*.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that some Christians regard dialogue as an important form of witness, and think that the church's evangelistic task should be carried on by means of dialogue as well as by proclamation.<sup>2</sup>

We may roughly contrast the two possible approaches as follows. In proclamation the evangelist (X) has a message (G—the gospel) which he communicates to his hearer (Y) as something which is to be accepted or rejected; the evangelist himself has received this unchanging message, and he communicates it virtually without [p. 29](#) change. In dialogue, however, the message is not something which the evangelist already possesses in normative form. Rather he must enter into discussion with his hearer, both participants contributing to the dialogue and thus together reaching an understanding of the gospel. The question which is posed by juxtaposing these two types of approach is whether the Christian message is something 'given' to the evangelist which is passed on unchanged to the potential convert, or whether the truth of the gospel is something that emerges in the course of dialogue. Obviously the issues are not as sharp as this in practice. Any evangelist must shape his proclamation to the situation and character of the hearer; it is no use speaking in German to somebody who only understands Tamil, and illustrations and concepts must be chosen which will be intelligible to the hearer. Similarly, even in a situation of dialogue the evangelist will have some understanding of the gospel, even if his understanding of it may undergo radical alteration in the course of dialogue. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to ask whether the *essential* content of the gospel is something 'given' to the evangelist or can undergo radical alteration in a common search for truth along with a non-Christian.



It is surely essential that in discussing this matter we have a clear understanding of what is meant by 'dialogue' in the New Testament and determine whether it was practised as a means of evangelism. We shall look first at the meaning of the Greek verbs which suggest the idea of dialogue, and this will involve us in a study of the church's evangelism as portrayed in Acts. From there we shall turn back to the synoptic Gospels to see whether the dialogue form can be found there, and then we shall move forward to see whether Paul's letters reflect the use of dialogue, and finally we shall consider the Gospel of John as a source for dialogue. The essay will close with some brief conclusions.

## 1. THE WORD-USAGE IN ACTS

The Greek verb which is roughly equivalent to the English verb 'to discuss' is *διαλεγομαι*, which occurs 13 times in the NT.<sup>3</sup> It can be used of a debate in which two or more people argue with one another, [p. 30](#) as in [Mk. 9:34](#) where we read of an argument among the disciples of Jesus, and in [Jude 9](#), where the archangel Michael and the devil dispute about the body of Moses. But the verb can also be used in contexts where the idea of mutual

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<sup>1</sup> P. Schrottenboer, 'Inter-Religious Dialogue', ERT 12:3, July 1988, 208–225. Reprinted from *Reformed Church Synod Missions Bulletin*, March 1986.

<sup>2</sup> The problem was considered at the conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians in 1978, and the following paper is based upon a lecture given on that occasion.

<sup>3</sup> See G. Schrenk, TDNT II, 93–5.

discussion appears to be absent. Thus in [Heb. 12:5](#) the writer asks the readers, ‘Have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?’ and goes on to quote from Proverbs; the Revised Version translates the verb as ‘to reason with’. Here there is no question of dialogue or discussion, and this corresponds with the usage of the word in Jewish Greek, where, according to G. Schrenk, it ‘is used not merely for “conversation” or “negotiation” but quite frequently for “speech” in the sense of an “address”’.<sup>4</sup>

This range in meaning must be borne in mind when we come to the 10 occurrences of the word in Acts with reference to the missionary activity of Paul. It is used to describe his teaching in the synagogues ([Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8](#)), in the school of Tyrannus ([Acts 19:9](#)) and in Christian assemblies ([Acts 20:7, 9](#)). It also describes his disputes in the temple ([Acts 24:12](#)) and his conversation with Felix about justice, self-control and judgment to come ([Acts 24:25](#)). Arndt and Gingrich suggest that in [Acts 18:4](#) and other passages the word may simply mean to speak or preach,<sup>5</sup> and G. Schrenk makes the same point more forcibly: “There is here no reference to “disputation” but to the “delivering of religious lectures or sermons” ... What is at issue is the address which any qualified member of the synagogue might give.”<sup>6</sup> This interpretation is justified to the extent that there is certainly no mention of what Paul’s hearers may have said to him; all the stress falls on Paul’s activity as a speaker, and he discusses the gospel with them, rather than they with him. It would be helpful to know how far discussion and debate took place in the synagogues. So far as I can tell, the synagogue service included a sermon by any person present who was competent to deliver one, but there does not appear to have been religious discussion. Nevertheless, there are one or two places which indicate that the preaching of Paul led to vocal opposition during the actual synagogue service. This was the case in [Acts 13:45](#) and also in [Acts 18:6](#), and we might also cite the cases where Jesus’ activity in the synagogue led to protests and arguments on the spot, and sometimes to expressions of wonder and approval ([Mk. 1:27; Lk. 4:22; 13:14; Jn. 6:41, 52](#)). There could also be discussion outside the synagogue. The [p.31](#) picture which Luke gives of the Jews at Beroea who examined the Scriptures daily for themselves to see if what Paul said was correct ([Acts 17:11](#)) certainly suggests that discussion was taking place. Furthermore, the use of the verb *δυσζητηω* to describe how the Jews disputed with Stephen ([Acts 6:9](#)) and how Paul argued with the Hellenists ([Acts 9:29](#); cf. [Acts 17:18](#)) indicates that debate or dialogue certainly took place. Similarly, Apollos engaged in debate with the Jews and refuted them ([Acts 18:28](#)).<sup>7</sup>

There is, therefore, sufficient evidence to show that the preaching of the early Christians could lead to debate and discussion with the hearers. But it is clear that the emphasis falls upon the preaching of the gospel, a fact that would certainly be borne out by a detailed study of the vocabulary used to describe the evangelism of the early church. In short, the evidence of the vocabulary used in the NT to describe evangelistic activity can scarcely be said to give a large place to dialogue as a means of communicating the gospel; dialogue or debate arises rather as a result of the initial proclamation. There is certainly no indication whatever in the material from Acts that the evangelist needed to enter into dialogue with his hearers in order that he himself might gain a fuller and better

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>5</sup> BAGD s.v.

<sup>6</sup> TDNT II, 94f.

<sup>7</sup> Empty disputes, however, are not recommended in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim., [1:4; 6:4f.](#); 2 Tim. [2:23; Tit. 3:9](#)).

knowledge of the gospel. The objective is always to correct misunderstandings of the gospel, not to reformulate the gospel.

## 2. DIALOGUE AND PARABLES IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

When we move back from the study of Acts, to which we were guided by our linguistic investigations, and turn to the synoptic Gospels for evidence of the activity of Jesus, we find that the category of dialogue is a common one. Two types of unit demand our attention.

### A. The Apophthegmata or Pronouncement stories

The first of these is the *Apophthegmata*, sometimes and more helpfully known in English as 'pronouncement stories'.<sup>8</sup> R. Bultmann has subdivided these into the two categories of 'controversial and academic discussions' and 'biographical apophthegmata'. It is the former of these groups which interests us, and I shall continue to follow Bultmann in his classification of the material in this category and his p. 32 further subdivision into four groups. He distinguishes: 1. Controversies occasioned by a healing performed by Jesus. 2. Controversies occasioned by a healing performed by Jesus or the disciples. 3. Stories in which Jesus is questioned by the disciples or other people with friendly intent. 4. Stories in which Jesus is questioned by his opponents.<sup>9</sup>

According to Bultmann all these stories originated in the early church. In every case, therefore, they must be regarded as 'ideal' scenes, in the sense that they are constructions which express an idea pictorially in a concrete setting. While they may depict the kind of happenings that may have taken place in the ministry of Jesus, none of them certainly represents an actual individual, historical episode. Nevertheless, the stories developed relatively early in the history of the tradition, since the closest parallels to the types of discussion described are to be found in Palestinian Judaism.

The stories, then, are to be regarded as frameworks created to incorporate sayings ascribed to Jesus. Often they are concerned with the behaviour of the disciples rather than of Jesus himself, and this indicates their community origin. The labelling of the opponents of Jesus as Pharisees and Sadducees is stereotyped, and this again betrays a lack of historicity.

Even the sayings of Jesus incorporated in them are not necessarily authentic in the eyes of Bultmann. They often contain the sort of counterquestions or appeals to Scripture which are found in Judaism, and in particular the use of Scripture is typical of the early church.<sup>10</sup>

The merits of this discussion are that Bultmann has drawn attention to the existence of a dialogue form in a couple of dozen synoptic narratives. This form suggests that the early church retained the memory that Jesus' ministry was often carried on by means of controversial discussions, but above all, for Bultmann, the form testifies to the church's own controversies with the Jews over its beliefs and activity.

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<sup>8</sup> V. Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, London, 1933, 30.

<sup>9</sup> The passages in question are: 1. [Mk. 2:1-12](#); [3:1-16](#); [3:22-30](#) (also in Q); 2. [Mk. 2:15-17](#), [18-22](#), [23-28](#); [7:1-23](#); [11:27-33](#); [Lk. 7:36-50](#); 3. [Mk. 9:38-40](#); [10:17-31](#), [35-45](#); [11:20-25](#); [12:28-34](#); [13:1-5](#); [Mt. 11:2-19](#)/Lk. [7:18-35](#); [Lk. 9:51-56](#); [12:13f](#); [13:10-17](#); [14:1-6](#); [17:20f](#); 4. [Mk. 10:2-12](#); [12:13-17](#), [18-27](#).

<sup>10</sup> R. Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der Synoptischen Tradition*, Göttingen, 1958, 9-26, 39-56. See further M. Dibelius, *Die Forageschichte des Evangeliums*, Tübingen, 1971<sup>6</sup>, 34-66; M. Albertz, *Die Synoptischen Streitgespräche*, Berlin, 1921; A. J. Hultgren, *Jesus and his Adversaries*, Minneapolis, 1979.

Before we can build anything on this analysis, however, we need to [p. 33](#) ask whether it is soundly based, and it is not difficult to show that in many respects it must be pronounced to be totally unconvincing.

1. While Bultmann argues that the *Sitz im leben* of many of the controversies is the church's attempt to justify its own practices over against Jewish criticisms, J. Roloff has demonstrated that the main thrust in many of the stories is more accurately designated as christological; the stories are designed primarily to show why it was that Jesus was ultimately crucified.<sup>11</sup> Although, therefore, the stories still have their *Sitz im Leben* in the early church, the basic reason for narrating them lay in their testimony to what Jesus said and did on his way to the cross; in other words, the church showed a historical interest in Jesus. If this is the case, then the argument that the church created these scenes as a reflection of its own controversies about its way of life falls to the ground, even though the stories may have had a secondary value in helping to justify the church's conduct.

2. Bultmann's particular criticisms of the content of the stories are not cogent. It is not at all clear why the type of use of Scripture found in these stories should be denied to him. On the contrary, R. T. France's examination of the use of Scripture in the sayings ascribed to Jesus does much to support the general authenticity of the material as a coherent product of a single mind.<sup>12</sup> Nor is it strange if the types of answer favoured by Jesus should resemble those found in rabbinic discussions, unless it be denied that Jesus in any way resembled a rabbinic teacher.

3. The argument that the questions about the disciples' conduct betray their origin in the early church has been effectually countered by D. Daube's demonstration that a master was held responsible for the actions of his pupils and that consequently the Gospels can be regarded as showing how Jesus is called to answer for the habits which he had taught his disciples.<sup>13</sup>

4. There is at least some doubt whether the radical attitude towards the Jewish scribal interpretation of the law which is found in the controversy stories was typical of the early church. The disputes involving Paul strongly suggest that the Palestinian church was somewhat less radical than Jesus in its attitude to the law. [p. 34](#)

5. Bultmann's claim that the controversy stories contain 'ideal' scenes appears, so far as I can see, to be pure assertion without any real evidence to back it up. The fact that the stories were 'created' in the early church does not mean that they must be devoid of historical basis. On the contrary, the assumption that the early church had some historical basis for its stories about Jesus is much more credible. We may not be able to prove that each individual instance is historical, but in each case we may reasonably suggest that stories should be regarded as having a historical kernel unless positive answers to the contrary are produced. Bultmann's assumption that stories produced in the early church do not have a historical basis is in no sense a compelling argument.

The result of this examination of Bultmann's analysis is to suggest in broad terms that the controversy stories should be seen primarily as testimonies to dialogue situations in the ministry of Jesus, and that these dialogues are genuine and not artificial creations.

The value of Bultmann's classification of the dialogues in terms of the kind of occasion that led up to Jesus' reply is not especially helpful for our present purpose. What does emerge from the analysis is that, so far as Mark is concerned, discussions arising out of a

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<sup>11</sup> J. Roloff, *Das Kerygma und der irdische Jesus*, Göttingen, 1970. Roloff's investigation is concerned with the sabbath controversies, but its results can be extended more generally.

<sup>12</sup> R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament*, London, 1971 (reprinted, Grand Rapids, 1982).

<sup>13</sup> D. Daube, 'Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the Gospels', NTS 19, 1972-3, 1-15.



healing or other action performed by Jesus or his disciples occur predominantly in the first half of the Gospel, while discussions arising out of questions formulated by the disciples, interested enquirers or opponents of Jesus occur predominantly in the second half. This is historically plausible. In the early days it is more likely that the unusual actions of Jesus would lead to reaction in the form of enquiry about their significance. Only later do we find that questions are addressed to Jesus as an established teacher or with a view to acquiring evidence against him from his own mouth.

It is more useful to look at the kind of issues which arise in the dialogues. They can be roughly classified as: 1. Questions about Jesus' attitude to the law, especially the sabbath law, clean and unclean foods, fasting and divorce; 2. questions about Jesus' attitude to sinners, which again raised the issue of his attitude to the law; 3. a question about the chief commandment; 4. the question about entry to the kingdom, which again relates to the law; 5. questions about Jesus' authority to teach, to exorcise and heal and to forgive. These questions nearly all have some reference to the law and might, therefore, be regarded as dealing merely with ethical issues. But the concern is not merely ethical. It is about the law as the way of life appointed by God and with the authority of Jesus to pronounce concerning God's will. In a Jewish environment, therefore, the [p. 35](#) dialogue is very much concerned with the way of life associated with the gospel.

But this means that something precedes the dialogue. Its ultimate basis lies in the action and proclamation of Jesus which calls out for elucidation and finally for critical examination. The dialogues, therefore, are only to a limited extent concerned with the proclamation of the rule of God and the call to discipleship, although these figure prominently in at least two significant episodes. The basic question that keeps on recurring is: 'How do the teaching and activity of Jesus square with the existing Jewish understanding of the will of God for people?' We may legitimately draw the conclusion that the dialogues do not constitute a primary form of *presenting* the gospel. They serve to elucidate aspects of a message that has already been proclaimed in word and deed.

We may ask next about the effect of the dialogues. Do they constitute a 'dialectical' means of progress in understanding, so that the participants on both sides come to a new awareness? Clearly the people who question Jesus receive answers to their questions in the form of instruction, correction and challenge. Having been drawn into the possibility of a new awareness by some action or teaching on the part of Jesus, they now respond by seeking a fuller explanation, and they receive it. Whether they respond positively or negatively is another matter. As for Jesus, there is no indication whatever that he appears as the enquirer or that his understanding is deepened by the encounters. The whole point of the pronouncement story is that its theme is the definitive and authoritative statement or pronouncement made by Jesus himself. He never appears as the questioner, anxious to find out things that he himself does not know. When he asks questions, these are intended to make his opponents think, or to stir up his disciples to a deeper awareness. Jesus appears as the teacher who knows the answers.<sup>14</sup> There is no indication that the dialogues bring together two people in a common search for truth.

This general conclusion is confirmed by the actual form of the dialogues. As we have them, they are generally very simple in character. Only in two or three cases does the actual conversation go beyond a simple question and answer form. The questioners do not take up what Jesus says, except when he specifically asks them a [p. 36](#) question; at most there are expressions of approval or disapproval of what Jesus says.

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<sup>14</sup> This applies, of course, to the role of questions in the controversy stories. It is not denied that Jesus on occasion lacked information and asked for it, or that he grew in self-understanding. See J. R. Michaels, *Servant and Son: Jesus in Parable and Gospel*, Atlanta, 1981.

## B. The parables

The second type of unit which may be relevant to our enquiry is the parables. J. Dupont has argued that the parables of Jesus are intended to be understood as instruments of dialogue.<sup>15</sup> Their purpose is to answer the questions posed by people who listened to Jesus, and to propound fresh questions in their minds with the object of persuading them to make their response to Jesus. Hence many of the parables begin in question-form with the aim of involving the hearers in the topic discussed. They are to be regarded as means of persuasion rather than as weapons for conflict. The paradigm example of this understanding of the parables is to be seen in [Lk. 7:36–50](#) where the parables of the two debtors deals with a question in the mind of Simon the Pharisee and is meant to lead him to reflection and understanding about his own attitude to Jesus.

This is a helpful and useful approach to the parables, but again it must be stressed that there is no suggestion that the views of Jesus are to be changed in the course of the discussion. On the contrary, the aim is to convert the hearer. What is significant, however, is the use of a method which will lead the hearer to think in a new way and to be drawn into a discussion which can change his outlook. He is not so much confronted by an authoritative presentation of a set of facts or propositions which he must accept or reject; rather he is brought into a situation where he is led into seeing things from a new angle and is forced to ask his own questions and reformulate his own attitudes.

It might be argued that in neither of these cases, controversy stories and parables, is there 'dialogue' in the proper sense, in that there is no real interplay between the two sides, leading to deeper understanding on the part of both. But our concern is not with what 'dialogue' *ought* to be but with the actual phenomena in the Gospels, and it must be emphasised that the synoptic Gospels give us no basis for supposing that the task of evangelism consists in a dialogue in which Jesus and his partners embark on a common search for a truth which neither of them fully possesses. [p. 37](#)

## 3. PAUL AS AN EVANGELIST

From Jesus we turn to Paul. Here we at once come up against the difficulty created by the sources. Paul's letters are directed to Christian communities and are not evangelistic tracts. It is, therefore, a matter of some difficulty to reconstruct the probable contents of Paul's missionary message, and even more difficult to reconstruct the forms in which his message was presented. We can of course supplement the material in the letter with the evidence from Acts, but our earlier investigation of the vocabulary of dialogue showed that little concrete information was forthcoming from that area. So we are compelled to adopt a more indirect approach.

### A. Diatribe style

Although the writings of Paul are letters, they were no doubt meant to be read aloud in church, and we may presume that to some extent at least they were formulated for this purpose. In one or two places Paul adopts the style of the 'Diatribe', a type of philosophical address which was well-known in the Hellenistic world.<sup>16</sup> The diatribe was characterized by its use of artificial dialogue in which the speaker himself expressed objections to his

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<sup>15</sup> J. Dupont, *Pourquoi des paraboles? La méthode parabolique de Jesus*, Paris, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> R. Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe*, Göttingen, 1910. There has been some discussion as to whether Paul's style is really that of the diatribe. See S. K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Chico, 1981, for a careful evaluation of the position.

argument and questions which might be posed by imaginary interlocutors and then proceeded to answer them. We have a good example of the style in James, especially in chs. 2 and 3 where we may note the posing of questions by an imaginary interlocutor in [2:14](#) and [18](#).<sup>17</sup> Paul uses the style in Romans, where the use of questions and objections put into the mouth of imaginary opponents serves to provide him with hooks on to which to hang his own replies and so to move his argument forward.<sup>18</sup> Sanday and Headlam comment: 'No doubt this is a way of presenting the dialectical process in his own mind. But at the same time it is a way which would seem to have been suggested by actual experience of controversy with Jews and the narrower Jewish Christians. We are told expressly that the charge of saying "Let us do evil that good may come" was brought as a matter of fact against the Apostle (vet. 8). And vi. 1, 15 restate this charge in Pauline language. The Apostle as it were takes [p. 38](#) it up and gives it out again as if it came in the logic of his own thought.'<sup>19</sup> If this comment indicates that we cannot proceed directly from the artificial style of the diatribe to actual controversies in which Paul was engaged, at the very least we can say that use of this style probably indicates that he was conscious of real questions which arose in dialogue with other people, and that the actual questions which arose in such dialogue have contributed to the way in which he expounds his thought in his letters.

The use of imaginary questions by interlocutors is most prominent in Romans. It is not clear whether the limited use of questions in Galatians ([3:19, 21](#)) is anything more than a literary method for forwarding the argument. In both cases we have to do with objections to the Pauline gospel from the side of Jewish Christians or Jewish opponents of Paul. Certainly the questions could be regarded as points which caused Paul to deepen his understanding of the gospel. If Paul alleged that all could be saved through faith in Jesus Christ without observing the law of Moses, it was only natural to object: Why, then, did God give the law ([Gal. 3:19](#))! Is the law contrary to the promises of God about salvation by faith ([Gal. 3:21](#))? What is the point of being a Jew or submitting to circumcision if faith is all that matters ([Rom. 3:1](#))? And so on. But these are such obvious questions that it would be difficult to state categorically whether they first arose in the mind of Paul or in the minds of his opponents. While, therefore, it is very probable that Paul is dealing with real questions raised by Jews and Jewish Christians, it is not at all clear whether these questions actually led to any development in his thinking. But we must return to this point later.

## B. Questions from the churches

In [1 Corinthians 7:1](#) Paul begins the discussion of a fresh topic with the words: 'Now concerning the matters about which you wrote'. The same formula appears in an abbreviated form in the introductions to later topics in the letter ([1 Cor. 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12](#)), and it may also be present in 1 Thessalonians ([5:1](#); cf. [4:9, 13](#)). It appears that the structure of these letters is partly determined by a series of questions or topics which had been presented to Paul for his answers and opinions, so that here we have evidence of a genuine correspondence between Paul and the churches, with Paul replying to specific questions in the minds of his friends and conveyed to him either by letter (as in 1 Cor. [p. 39 7:1](#)) or by word of mouth. In both cases the questions are raised within the

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<sup>17</sup> M. Dibelius, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, Göttingen, 1957<sup>9</sup>, 36.

<sup>18</sup> See especially [Rom. 3:1, 3, 5, 27, 29, 31; 4:1, 9; 6:1, 15; 7:7; 9:14, 19](#).

<sup>19</sup> W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edinburgh, 1902<sup>5</sup>, 69f.

congregations, and therefore they afford no direct evidence for Paul's relations with non-Christians.

However, it is possible that indirectly some light may be shed on the way in which Paul's thinking could have developed in the context of dialogue. J. C. Hurd has drawn attention to the existence of an earlier letter of Paul to Corinth (cf. [1 Cor. 5:9-11](#)) and proceeded to reconstruct the stages of Paul's thinking on various problems dealt with in his correspondence. He traces Paul's opinions as expressed in his original preaching at Corinth, in his so-called 'previous' letter to the church, and in his canonical first letter to the church, and he attempts to show how Paul's thinking changed and developed between these three stages. On Hurd's view Paul's thinking was affected by the promulgation of the apostolic decree ([Acts 15](#)) and by the Corinthian letter sent in reply to his 'previous' letter.<sup>20</sup> If this hypothesis is sound, we would have some indication that Paul's views changed and developed in the context of controversy. However, Hurd's theory has failed to convince the most recent English-speaking commentators on 1 Corinthians; there is no clear evidence that Paul was affected by the apostolic decree, and the alleged changes of mind which he said to have undergone are improbable in the comparatively short period of time covered by the correspondence.<sup>21</sup>

In any case, the issues which Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians are concerned with matters of Christian belief and behaviour within the church. They cover such questions as sexual morality, attitudes to idolatrous feasts, the conduct of Christian meetings, the resurrection of the dead, and the collection for the poor in Jerusalem. There is little here that is directly associated with the proclamation of the gospel to non-Christians, except for the question of the resurrection of believers which Paul regarded as being a direct implication of the primitive affirmation of the kerygma about the resurrection of Jesus.

### C. Responses to opponents

In a brief summary of Paul's theology I once wrote that 'Paul's basic theology rested firmly on that of the primitive church; he frequently is indebted to it for theological and ethical material. Throughout his [p. 40](#) career he was beset by opponents who were envious of his success or anxious to upset his work. His theology is thus very much shaped by polemics, and it owed its individual development to the exigences of debate.'<sup>22</sup> When writing this statement I had very much in mind the way in which Paul's theology was hammered out in controversial writings dealing with the perversions of the primitive faith by Judaisers and by gnosticising Christians. This suggestion leads us to consider at a slightly deeper level whether we can see in Paul's theology the effects of controversy. Such effects might be of two kinds.

First, there is the suggestion, already hinted at, that Paul may have been led to develop particular themes in the light of objections made to his viewpoint. Thus it is arguable that Paul's stress on the close relation between the Spirit and justification arose out of the need to defend his doctrine of justification by faith against the charge of antinomianism. Similarly, his stress on the supremacy of Jesus Christ in Colossians could be a reiteration of a point which was called in question by gnosticising Christians. In such cases heresy acted as a catalyst to the development of Christian doctrine which in fact drew nothing from the heresy itself.

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<sup>20</sup> J. C. Hurd, Jr., *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, London, 1965.

<sup>21</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, 1968.6-8; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, London, 1971, 24, 58; G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids, 1987, 13.

<sup>22</sup> J. D. Douglas (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Grand Rapids, 1974, 757.

One interesting thesis along these lines has been developed by an evangelical scholar. J. W. Drane has noticed how Paul appears to be something of a libertine in Galatians, whereas he is something of a legalist in 1 Corinthians. He argues that these apparently contradictory stances taken up by Paul are dictated by the nature of the opposition which he was facing. In Galatians he was confronted by Judaising legalists, and therefore it was natural for him to stress the immediate guidance of the Spirit and to play down the importance of human traditions in the Christian faith. Then Drane argues that some of the Corinthian Christians proceeded to develop Paul's view well beyond their limits as a kind of reply to the apostolic decree of [Acts 15:20](#) which required that Christians should observe the Jewish law in whole or in part. On this view the 'Gnosticism' in Corinth was in part due to a one-sided development of Paul's own teachings. In 1 Corinthians we have Paul's reaction to this movement, and he reacts in terms of a legalistic approach, appealing to various traditions and rules which must be observed in the church. A middle ground between these two Pauline extremes is found in 2 Corinthians and Romans where Paul is 'anti-libertine without being legalistic'.<sup>23</sup> p. 41

It seems to me that Dr Drane has probably overplayed his hand.<sup>24</sup> I do not find that Paul has swung so violently in his opinions as this brief summary of the thesis might seem to imply. Nevertheless, in broad terms it is psychologically plausible that a person will emphasise now one aspect and now another of his theology in dealing with opponents from different angles. While I hope, for example, that my understanding of Christian baptism is reasonably consistent, there is more than a trace of original sin in me (not washed away by baptism), which makes me want to supply a paedo-baptist corrective to the views of advocates of believers' baptism when I am confronted by paedo-baptists. Certainly one may learn and develop in thinking through facing advocates of different positions, even if such growth is within a reasonably stable understanding of Christian doctrine. In broader terms we may claim that the development of doctrine has often been determined by apparently fortuitous circumstances.<sup>25</sup>

The preceding remarks have dealt with the possibility of development by way of reaction to opposition. There is also the possibility that contact with other opinions may lead a thinker to a creative assimilation of certain motifs from them, even although he may be fundamentally opposed to them. Something of this kind has been asserted with reference to Paul's contacts with gnosticising Christians. For example, it has been claimed that some of the theological terms which Paul uses may have been drawn from gnosticising use, or at least the fact that they were used by gnosticising thinkers may have brought them to Paul's attention and encouraged him to use them. Thus H. Schlier has commented on the use of the term 'head' in Colossians. 'Here we see both the ideas and terminology of the Gnostic myth'.<sup>26</sup> In the same way, Paul's use of the term 'body' in the captivity epistles is often thought to owe something to Gnosticism.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that such a passage as [Col. 1:15-20](#) is a Christian adaptation of an originally

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<sup>23</sup> J. W. Drane, *Paul, Libertine or Legalist?* London, 1975.

<sup>24</sup> See my review in EQ 48, 1976, 60-62.

<sup>25</sup> C. F. D. Moule, 'The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Christological Terms', JTS ns 10, 1959, 247-63; 'The Influence of Circumstances on the Use of Eschatological Terms', JTS ns 15, 1964, 1-15. Both essays are reprinted in the author's *Essays in New Testament Interpretation*, Cambridge, 1982, 165-183, 184-199.

<sup>26</sup> H. Schlier, TDNT III, 681; see 676-8, 680f.

<sup>27</sup> E. Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi*, Tübingen, 1933.

Gnostic text.<sup>28</sup> If these views are correct, then the suggestion is that certain words and concepts came p. 42 into Christianity from alien sources, and, to use a well-known comment by H. Chadwick, were 'disinfected' for Christian use.<sup>29</sup>

While the correctness of this thesis in detail must rest on careful exegetical consideration of the relevant texts, there need be no objection in principle to the possibility of this kind of development in Christian thought; at best it will have been marginal and has not substantially affected the central content of the faith. There are, of course, more far-reaching claims that Pauline theology (and also Johannine theology) can be shown to have a very broad base in the gnosticising outlook of certain early Christian groups,<sup>30</sup> but in my view such proposals are highly speculative and unconvincing, and we do not need to consider them here.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. DIALOGUE SITUATIONS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

We come, fourthly, to a consideration of the Gospel of John. Of all the documents which we are considering this one is the best source for dialogue. It is well known that it contains not only extensive monologues by Jesus but also lengthy scenes in which Jesus talks with several interlocutors. The story of the woman of Samaria, for example, is essentially a dialogue in which both participants engage in a comparatively lengthy conversation. Or one might cite [John 9](#) in which a whole variety of actors take part in conversations among themselves and with Jesus. Other scenes may begin as conversations, although they drift into monologues by Jesus, rather like the way in which Paul lets his conversation with Peter in [Gal. 2:11-14](#) slide over into a theological disquisition directed to the readers of the letter. So too Nicodemus quietly disappears from the scene in [Jn. 3](#) as Jesus continues to speak. It is, however, no exaggeration to say that the Gospel of John is characterised by dialogue, and that for the most part the dialogue is between Jesus and outsiders or opponents, rather than between Jesus and his disciples.

One may, therefore, examine the Johannine dialogues more or less as they stand, in order to learn from them how Jesus was envisaged as speaking to people. The story of the woman of Samaria has been seen as a paradigm for the Christian evangelist, exemplifying the way in p. 43 which a person may be brought to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>32</sup> But it is doubtful how far we can trace this exemplary motif, since much of the dialogue is of a kind that the church could not take over. Christians obviously could not speak in the same way as Jesus had spoken in his own person. They could, to be sure, adapt what he had said for use in their own conversations with non-believers.

To many scholars the Johannine dialogues have appeared to be somewhat unreal. It is argued that often the conversation proceeds by way of deliberate ambiguities on the part of Jesus and by inept misunderstandings on the part of the other participants. The dialogues, in other words, are literary rather than reports of the *ipsissima verba* of the participants. We may, therefore, be justified in regarding the scenes in John as dramatic

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<sup>28</sup> E. Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Theology*, London, 1964, 149-68.

<sup>29</sup> H. Chadwick, 'All things to all men', *NTS* 1, 1954-5, 272.

<sup>30</sup> R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, London, 1952, 1953; W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, Nashville, 1971.

<sup>31</sup> See R. M. Wilson, *Gnosis and the New Testament*, Oxford, 1968; E. M. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism*, London, 1973.

<sup>32</sup> W. Temple, *Readings in St John's Gospel*, London, 1945, 65-68.

rather than as precise reports of actual conversations. John presents the conversations in the manner of a dramatist who has a certain freedom in how he reports what took place. Just as the speeches in Acts may be Thucydidean, in the sense that Luke has 'kept as closely as possible to the general gist of what was really said', so too the Johannine dialogues may have the same quality. Indeed, this is what we would expect, since it is unlikely that the precise wording of what at the time appeared to be a casual conversation could be exactly remembered and recounted by any of the participants. We cannot, therefore, even on this level accept them as necessarily being protocol reports of what took place.

However, allowance for this dramatic element in the presentation does not mean that we cannot observe them to note the kind of issues which are raised and the answers which are given. It is immediately obvious that, as elsewhere in the NT, Jesus is the one who gives the answers or poses counter-questions to make his hearers think; there is no sense in which he is presented as learning from the dialogues or modifying his ideas in the light of what others say; the picture is entirely consistent with the synoptic one in this respect. The subjects of conversation are varied, but in general they are more christological than in the synoptic Gospels. The person of Jesus, his authority and functions as Saviour are of central importance. The first part of the Gospel is taken up with the claims of Jesus, and the problems discussed are those of Jews who are puzzled by him.

From a historical point of view there is much here that can belong to the historical ministry of Jesus. It is not difficult to compile a lengthy list of Johannine sayings which have parallels in the synoptic Gospels and which can be plausibly assigned to a life-setting in the ministry of Jesus. [p. 44](#) Nevertheless, two further factors justify us in cautiously broadening the scope of John's interest. On the one hand, there is the fact that in this Gospel, much more than in the others, Jesus speaks in the character of the risen Lord. There is a unique merging of the earthly and the risen Jesus. On the other hand, there is also a case that the situation of the disciples and the Jews often reflects the situation of the early church in a Jewish environment. The questions that arise are those faced by the early church.

An attempt to do justice to these factors has been made by J. L. Martyn who posits that John operates on two levels of reality, and that the dialogues can be seen as testifying to the historical events of the life of Jesus and as reflections of debates in which the early church had to engage with the Jews. John has, as it were, written a Gospel which attempts to deal with the problem: 'What would Jesus have said if he had been alive now in our particular situation?'<sup>33</sup> The important point that emerges for our purpose from the theory is that Martyn holds that the early church was in contact with Jews and discussions did take place between Christians and Jews; to be sure, such relationships could be broken as the synagogue excommunicated Christians and refused to have dealings with them, but the Gospel testifies to a period in which discussions did take place and the Christians attempted to defend and commend their faith. Such discussions may originally have taken place in a synagogue setting before Christians were excommunicated. Afterwards, they must have taken place in more private settings. But the point is that the evidence of John implies that one setting for evangelism was discussion and debate. We should not ignore the fact that the Gospel can also be cited as evidence for the presentation of the gospel by means of the sermon; it has been argued that features typical of Jewish synagogue sermons can be seen in some of the discourses in John.<sup>34</sup> But alongside such sermons there were also discussions.

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<sup>33</sup> J. L. Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, New York, 1968.

<sup>34</sup> P. Borgen, *Bread from Heaven*, Leiden, 1981.<sup>2</sup>

If this general hypothesis is correct, however much we may want to question some of the details, then it would seem that here in John we have some of the strongest NT evidence for the activity of dialogue in the early church. Thus the dialogue form which characterises John at a surface level reflects the situation of the church which was engaged in dialogue with the Jews, and the Gospel is both a reflection of such discussion and also, one may presume, a guide to Christians faced by the kind of questions that arose in such contexts. p. 45

Martyn suggests that one of the themes of such dialogue was the person of Jesus. He identifies a Jewish hope in the coming of a prophet like Moses who would be a messianic figure. Christians had to take a stance over against such Jewish expectations, and they did so by affirming that Jesus was the expected prophet. Yet this presentation was an inadequate one, and the church went on to affirm its belief in Jesus as the Son of man. If this is correct, it would show how the church responded to its environment by taking up the Jewish messianology and developing it positively. If, however, we prefer to believe that the ultimate basis of the teaching in John goes back to Jesus, then we can again say that Jesus responds to the views of his contemporaries and yet goes beyond their inadequate ideas about the Messiah. In both cases it remains true that there is a Christian response to ideas genuinely held in the environment of Jesus and the early church. Christian theology develops in response to these ideas, and yet it is not controlled by them; it makes use of them so far as they can serve its purpose, and especially because they can provide a point of contact with the people it addresses. But there is still no evidence that the thinking of the early church or of Jesus was significantly developed or changed by dialogue.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It emerges that the total amount of NT material that would contribute to a theology of dialogue is small in quantity, although there is more than might be realised at first sight. The lesson is surely that dialogue was not the primary means of presentation of the gospel in the early church. Certainly the church took notice of the ideas of its audiences and made use of them as starting points for its own proclamation of the gospel; one cannot communicate without using ideas that are comprehensible to one's audience. But we have found very little evidence indeed to suggest that the church's own thinking was significantly influenced by dialogue with non-Christians, or indeed that dialogue within the church played a significant part in the development of doctrine. The traditional picture of a church communicating and proclaiming the faith once-for-all delivered to the saints is a well-founded one. There is not the slightest suggestion that the church and the world conversed as equal partners in the search for truth. There is more room for the view that the early church progressed in its understanding of the way of God by discussion internally; we may think of the discussions recorded in [Acts 11; 15](#) and [Galatians 2](#) which were concerned with the place of Gentiles in the church. It has been p. 46 suggested that 1 John depicts a church which is not clear where the lines between orthodoxy and heresy are to be drawn, and which is engaged in dialogue to seek the answer, but this picture is not convincing to my mind.<sup>35</sup>

Positively, we may claim that the church did speak in terms that would be intelligible to its hearers and addressed them in their different situations. We have only to think, for example, of the way in which the presentation of the gospel in Acts to Gentiles differs in form from the presentation to Jews and proselytes who already believed in Yahweh. The

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<sup>35</sup> K. Weiss, 'Orthodoxie und Heterodoxie im I. Johannesbrief', *ZNW* 58, 1967, 247–255.



church has a duty to understand its hearers and their needs and to frame the presentation of its message accordingly.

It follows that our simple antithesis between proclamation and dialogue at the outset of this essay is over-simple. We must think rather of a model in which the unchanging essence of the gospel is proclaimed in forms adapted to the needs of its hearers.

C. PROCLAMATION THAT TAKES ACCOUNT OF THE SITUATION  
G → X - - → Y

(Here the broken arrow indicates that the 'shape' of the message is varied to make it intelligible and relevant to the hearer.)

Put otherwise, the problem of transmitting the message is a problem of *communication* or translation, in which the message must be put in such a way as to be intelligible and applicable to the receptor. It is not a problem of *discovery* in which the evangelist hopes that the 'receptor' will help him by means of dialogue to discover what the gospel is.

If we conclude that the New Testament knows nothing of a form of dialogue from which the evangelist may learn what the essential content of the gospel is, it still remains true that Christians must practise dialogue with non-Christians. On the one hand, only by means of dialogue can they come to an understanding of the situation of non-Christians and how the gospel answers their needs. On the other hand, as the examples in the Gospels show, Jesus responded to the questions raised by the people whom he met, and above all he sought to involve them in a personal encounter with the claims of God on their lives by bringing them in to a situation of dialogue in which they were invited to respond to his message.

Michael Green has written: [p. 47](#)

... in days like our own ... Christians tend to be rather shy about the uniqueness of their religion. 'Dialogue' replaces 'mission' in the vocabulary, and 'conversion' is an unacceptable concept. Recently Professor J. G. Davies has launched an assault on both the word and the idea of conversion. He criticizes the Church for attempting to extend its own numbers by proselytism and individual conversion. The true aim of Christians, he thinks, should be to enter into dialogue with the world, not subject it to monologue; to send men into the world with God's reconciling message in their lives, rather than to try by lip to exert an influence on the social and economic life of their generation. That is to say, Dr Davies is coming down firmly on one side of the old divide, social gospel or spiritual gospel. But the New Testament firmly rejects the dichotomy. The early preachers did not enter into dialogue with the world, except to understand it and to present their life-changing message in terms comprehensible to their contemporaries. They believed they had got good news for their friends, and they knew that good news was embodied in Jesus Christ. Him they proclaimed.<sup>36</sup>

I suggest that Michael Green's thesis is confirmed by our examination of the evidence.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> E. M. B. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, London, 1970, 147f.

<sup>37</sup> T. F. Torrance, 'Questioning in Christ', in *Theology in Reconstruction*, London, 1965, 117-127, has suggested that what Jesus did was to raise questions of fundamental importance in the minds of those who heard him and then to force them by his counterquestions to think even more deeply. 'In the last resort it is we who are questioned by the Truth, and it is only as we allow ourselves to be questioned by it that it stands forth before us for our recognition and acknowledgment.' This type of approach operates at a theological level and draws out the fuller significance of the fact that people ask questions of Jesus, and find that in the process they themselves come under questioning. It is not altogether a new approach, for it has often been recognised that in a sense the trial scenes in which Jesus appears as the one on trial are really occasions on which the judges themselves stand under judgment. But where Torrance goes further in theological

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# The Witnessing Church in Dialogue

Bruce J. Nicholls

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*As in the previous article this author rejects dialogue as a dialectical method for reaching the Truth. But as a way of life and a missiological method to understand people of other faiths, to communicate faithfully and relevantly the gospel and to sharpen one's own understanding of the message, dialogue is fundamental to fulfilling Christ's mission in the world. The author argues that in dialogue the witnessing church expands the frontiers of the Church's holistic mission.*

Editor

I am the pastor of a Hindi-speaking congregation of the Church of North India in the satellite town of Gurgaon, 35 kms from the centre of the capital city of New Delhi, a career missionary seconded by a mission agency to the Diocese of Delhi. I am appointed by the Bishop and I am accountable to him as is every other presbyter in the diocese. In our State of Haryana only 1 in 1000 of the population belongs to the Christian community and in some places only 1 in 10,000. Our local church of 70 families and the Roman Catholic Church of the same size are the only structured congregations in a town of perhaps 400,000 people. Thus the Christian community is a very small and insignificant community in the midst of a plurality of communities, some of whom are antagonistic to us. Our natural tendency is to retreat into our own ghetto, keeping to ourselves the limited benefits we possess and viewing with suspicion outsiders who want to join us. In such a context dialogue in the struggle for communal harmony and dialogue with other communities in our call to evangelism and church planting, are no academic issues for the Christian church. They are matters of life and death.<sup>1</sup> In the turbulent flow of our national life, the Church is either moving upstream in the struggle against principalities and powers or she is drifting downstream towards self-destruction. The question before the evangelical Christian is not whether our goals and methodologies are biblical, but

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discussion is when he claims that Jesus identifies himself with people in their questionings: on the cross he calls out, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' and thus voices on behalf of mankind the most insistent question of all; at the same time it is Jesus who gives the true and final answer to God; 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' This cry was answered, and this prayer was ratified by God when he raised Jesus from the dead.

On this view the dialogue is not one in which Jesus comes to deeper understanding, but rather one in which the world does so. And yet in a paradoxical fashion Jesus takes mankind's questions upon himself as part of the burden which he has to bear. But, Torrance insists, the questions which Jesus asks are the right questions, questions which are capable of fruitful answers, whereas our human questions are the wrong questions and need to be refined and purified through encounter with Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> See James P. Alter & Herbert Jai Singh, *The Church in Delhi*, (Nagpur, NCC, 1961) pp. 81–115.

whether they are biblical enough or big enough to encompass the whole of biblical revelation. Do we as p. 49 churches have a biblical wholeness in our understanding of the gospel and the function of the Church in the world?

In the hermeneutical process of working through these issues, it is legitimate to begin at any point in the process, provided that in the dialogue between text and context we maintain the dynamics of working from an authoritative text to a relative and changing context. Dialogue is a two-way process of listening and speaking and speaking and listening. In this consideration we have chosen to begin our discussion with the context.<sup>2</sup>

## I. DIALOGUE IN COMMUNITY

Communities are defined by the grouping of culturally identifiable people. They are integrated people's groups with a common worldview, common set of values and a common understanding of the functions of the institutions of society and they share common customs and behavioural patterns. The Christian community in North India is a small and fragmented community struggling for identity survival and yet called by God to witness to the plurality of communities who are ever attempting to absorb us. One of the most characteristic elements of Indian society over the past 5000 years is its capability to harmonise and absorb the ideologies, beliefs and life styles of any opposing community. The classic example is the reabsorption of Buddhism in the Hindu fold. To some degree the Muslim community has successfully resisted this eclecticism and to a lesser extent the Christians have done so. In the area where I work thousands of Christians reconverted to Hinduism after national Independence in 1947 through the evangelising efforts of reformed and militant Hindu communities and the subtle pressure of economic and educational benefits offered to those who declared themselves to be Hindu harijans and outcasts from which communities most of the Christian converts came.

We agree with Paul Tillich that 'religion is the substance of culture and culture is the form of religion.'<sup>3</sup> If we include ideologies which are generally substitutes for religion, then this dictum is abundantly evident across Asia. It is true of the mosaic of cultures and communities that make up the nation of India which until 40 years ago included the present Pakistan and Bangladesh. p. 50

### The local church and plurality of communities

The local church which I pastor is itself a plurality of sub-religious cultures. Some of the members have a high church Anglican heritage, others come from Presbyterian or Methodist or Baptist communities, each with their own approaches to worship, witness and service in the world. In our local church worship we use Hindi, Urdu and English and we sing the Psalms in Punjabi. Most other religious communities in our town conduct worship in one language only and are generally homogeneous in life style.

In the eyes of the other communities in our town, the Christians are not just disciples of Jesus for many non-Christians also claim to follow Jesus alongside other gods and gurus that they accept. They are people who have been baptised and who have thereby separated themselves from other communities. In the eyes of the other communities baptism is the mark of belonging to the Christian community. Baptism is more than receiving Christ as Saviour and Lord. This may be an enormously disruptive step. It marks

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<sup>2</sup> See Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, (Downers Grove, IVP 1979) pp. 48-52.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era*, (Chicago 1948) p. 57.

the transferring from one community to another. It has been stated that 7 out of 10 converts from Islam to Christianity in our sub-continent return to the faith of their fathers, embittered and disillusioned that the new community from which they hoped to receive so much support has not accepted them as full members nor been willing to share the benefits of their community with them.

In all Asian cultures the unit of the community is not so much the individual as the family and the kinship group. Decision-making is rarely a private affair. The community is all-important. Decision-making in marriage arrangements is primarily a negotiation between families. Love marriages are seen as threatening communal harmony. In this context it becomes painfully evident that hit-and-run evangelism by para-church groups with little accountability to the Church bears little lasting fruit and rarely leads to visible church growth. The ghetto mentality has to be broken from the inside.

Our local church in Gurgaon is thus one definable community living day by day in the midst of the majority and dominant Hindu communities and the minority communities of Sikhs and of Muslims, each with their own clearly definable worldviews, values, social institutions and customs. In addition to these religiously centred communities the families of our local church live in and mix with other types of communities. Some communities are work-orientated. Patterns of behaviour and relationship of those working in the factories surrounding our towns are very different from those of the people who [p. 51](#) serve in local schools and hospitals or in government offices. In our caste-controlled society few of our people own businesses or work in retail shops. None hold public offices in the municipality of our town. Economically, most of our Christians are lower middle class with their own homes, though a few are so poor that they are not able to afford an electric light connection.

Our town ranges from communities of rich families to slum dwellers and to a leper colony. Some families continue to live in a village lifestyle in a densely populated urban neighbourhood; others are urban born. However, none of the communities including the Christian community are static. Families are constantly moving up and down economically and socially as they move from one employment to another or to unemployment. A few are becoming very rich while perhaps half of the population are becoming noticeably poorer. Other factors facilitate rapid change, such as death in the family, natural disasters of floods and droughts and changes of ruling political parties in local and national politics. Our Christian community tend to vote conservatively in order to maintain the status quo.

The crisis of Christians in India, as elsewhere, is one of identity. Individuals, families and church communities are struggling with their identity as Christians in the midst of people of other faiths and with their identity as culturally Indian. While in all other communities religion and culture are harmonised Christians have little definable and distinct culture of their own. This is both a strength and a weakness. Our Christians are struggling with what it means to be unashamedly Christian and at the same time to be culturally Indian. 'Indianness' is an elusive concept. Many educated and observant Hindus continue to view Christianity as a foreign religion with foreign allegiances.

### **Dialogue in Community as a starting point**

Dialogue in community becomes our starting point for all other expressions of dialogue including evangelism. The theological consultation on Dialogue in Community held at Chiang Nai, Thailand, April 1977 brought together 85 Protestants, Orthodox and Roman Catholics theologians to reflect on some of the issues raised in situations such as I have

described.<sup>4</sup> The Statement adopted by the consultation<sup>5</sup> is p. 52 perhaps the most biblically conservative statement to come from this sub-unit. It gives valuable insights into the nature of dialogue between communities and a valuable critique of syncretism. The issue of the relation of God's universal action in creation to his redemptive action in Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit outside the church, the nature of God's self-disclosure to people of other faiths and biblical criteria for dialogue, were referred for further study. For evangelical Christians these issues are vital to our understanding of dialogue and cannot be postponed.

What then is the role of the Christian community in its day to day relationship with people of other communities? Christians have an unique opportunity to be peace makers in the midst of communal conflicts. Our failure to be so in Northern Ireland, the Middle East, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Nicaragua and elsewhere is one of the tragedies of our time. It is a denial of the gospel and a stumbling block to others coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Never has the need for peace makers been greater than it is today. In India communal riots are regular and predictable. Daily killings by terrorists in the Punjab show little sign of abating. For some engaged in dialogue peace is the negation of conflict, the inward withdrawal from involvement in the stress of daily life. But for us dialogue means reconciliation and working together in harmony for the good of all people. In the midst of the destruction of life and property that takes place in communal rioting Christians have an unique opportunity to be apostles of peace to all who suffer, through compassionate service and rebuking those who perpetrate injustice and oppression. In the carnage that followed the Hindu-Sikh riots in New Delhi following the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi in 1984, some local churches won the respect and confidence of the bereaved Sikh families by their sacrificial service. Dialogue must be a way of life for all men and women of good will. For the Christian partner, dialogue is taking up the cross daily and following Christ. This compelling dialogue of love and compassion must also characterise the Christian life style in times of natural disasters—floods, droughts and earthquakes. In the severe drought of 1987 Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi appealed to voluntary agencies to come forward and offer their help. Unfortunately, few churches responded.

### **Overcoming Misunderstandings**

Dialogue in community is also a commitment to overcome the misunderstandings that have built up between our religious communities. Some misunderstandings relate to past colonial rule when p. 53 churches received state protection and some missionaries were imperialistic and insensitive to these values and customs which Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims cherish. At the same time the Church must rise above its own indigenous character and welcome partnership with other Christian communities worldwide. The Church then becomes a powerful witness to a caste and class ridden society which reflects the spirit of apartheid.

Other misunderstandings are theological and hermeneutical. The difficulty for Muslims overcoming their prejudices and understanding the Christian view of Jesus as the Son of God is a case in point. So far most local churches have failed to take the initiative in inviting dialogue with the people of the temple, the gurujdwara or the mosque. The way forward may be structured meetings of local and national religious

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<sup>4</sup> At this consultation sponsored by the sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies of the World Council of Churches, the writer and a handful of other self-confessed evangelicals attended as full participants.

<sup>5</sup> *Faith in the Midst of Faiths, Reflections on Dialogue in Community*, ed. S. J. Samartha (Geneva, WCC 1977), pp. 134–149.

leaders after the pattern of the round table conference initiated by the missionary evangelist Stanley Jones a generation ago.<sup>6</sup> At the same time unstructured meetings in the round of daily work in the market place or at the level of the village *panchayat* (council) are to be encouraged. Christian involvement will be costly if progress in overcoming misunderstandings is to be achieved. Jesus urged his disciples to first be reconciled with those who held something against them and then come to offer their gifts ([Matthew 5:23f](#)). Participation in true dialogue begins for the Christian partner at the Cross.

Dialogue in community for communal harmony is a prerogative for every church. Those churches which limit their ministry to evangelism may reject this perspective on mission. Such churches may appear to experience rapid church growth but may equally quietly wither and die because they have no roots in the community and no identity with the sufferings and oppression of the people. They want the fruits of the cross without the demands of the incarnation. Their gospel does not include the Kingdom of God coming on earth. They love God without loving their neighbour.

### **A missionary dimension and a missionary intention**

A more biblical understanding of mission will include the search for good neighbourliness and communal harmony as well as evangelistic activity and the planting of new churches. These ministries though distinct, belong together, they belong to the gospel of the Kingdom of God. David Bosch in his discussion on the centrality of mission takes up H. W. Gensichen's distinction that everything the church is and [p. 54](#) does must have a missionary *dimension* but not everything has a missionary *intention*.<sup>7</sup> Since mission belongs to the very nature of the Church, all the church's ministries must have a missionary dimension. Worship and the ministry of the sacraments have a powerful evangelistic effect though this may not be their intention. Often Hindus will attend our church services because they want to see if the Christians are really in communion with the living God. Likewise, the church's ministry to be peace makers in the midst of communal terrorism has enormous evangelistic potential though this is not their primary intention. The missionary dimension of the church is the base for its missionary intention.

Much of the contemporary debate on the primacy of evangelism over social service misunderstands the relationship of the intention and dimension of the Church's mission. It reduces theology to ideology and the church as the community of the people of God to the individualism of salvation for life after death. True dialogue in community calls the Church neither to manipulate or deceive their partners in dialogue with a hidden agenda nor to hide the truth of the Gospel and its evangelistic intent for fear of giving offence. My own experience in such dialogues with representatives of other religious communities is that openness and integrity in declaring our missionary intention is the only acceptable basis for the mutual respect of each others values and human dignity.

If dialogue in community is a way of life, then central to the Christian's participation in dialogue is the ongoing renewal of the Church. Integrity, authenticity and accountability, three essentials of any meaningful dialogue, can only flow from a church living according to its nature and mission. The 16th century reformers spoke of the *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*—the reformed Church continually being reformed. Renewal is a call for continuous reforming of doctrine, worship and ethical behaviour according to the Scriptures and the purifying and empowering of the Church for mission

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<sup>6</sup> See E. Stanley Jones, *Christ at the Round Table*, (London, H&S, 1928).

<sup>7</sup> David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World*, (Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1980) pp. 198–201.

in the world by the Holy Spirit. Only a renewed Church can withstand the deceitful attacks of the devil and effectively relate dialogue to the totality of the Church's ministry.

Christ calls his Church to be both a model of the new messianic community and his agent to change the world. He calls his Church to be in the world but not of the world. He calls her to be both light and salt, witnessing to the Gospel and yet penetrating the whole of society p. 55 with divine goodness. Only a Church that is sanctified by the truth and protected from the evil one can be faithful in dialogue with other religious communities. True dialogue is the life style of the Church.

## II. DIALOGUE IN THE BIBLICAL AND THE ECUMENICAL CONTEXTS

### Dialogue in the Bible

John Stott reminds us that 'the living God of the biblical revelation himself enters into a dialogue with man. He not only speaks but also listens. He asks questions and waits for the answers.'<sup>8</sup> God respects the human dignity and freedom of the men and women he created in his own image, despite their wilful sinfulness and rejection of the law. 'Come now, let us reason together,' says the Lord ([Isaiah 1:18](#)). God's incredible patience with his people suggests the dialogue lies at the very heart of God. It is significant that in his preaching and teaching Jesus Christ gave central place to question and response, whether in dealing with individual enquirers like Nicodemus or the woman at the well, or with his critics, the lawyers and Pharisees, or in his use of the parabolic method. He always invited discussion. The one exception was his confrontation with demonic powers. He rebuked Satan and commanded the evil spirits to depart from those possessed by them; he never reasoned with Satan. Christ's encounter with seeker and critic is a model for the Christian dialogue with people of other faiths. The early Church followed the same patterns. Paul engaged in dialogue in the synagogues ([Acts 1 7:2, 17; 18:4, 19](#)), in the market place in Athens ([Acts 17:17](#)) and daily for two years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus ([Acts 19:9](#)). In each case *dialogomai* means to discuss or reason with a view to persuade. The proclamation of the gospel and conversion to Christ was always explicitly or implicitly the goal of Paul's dialogue with Jew or Gentile.

In classical and hellenistic Greek the noun *dialogos* was used for reaching the truth through the dialectical method developed by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Truth was the goal of the process and not the presupposition for dialogue. There is no exact equivalent to this method in the New Testament.

### The Changing Role of Dialogue in the Ecumenical Movement

Dialogue has been a concern of the ecumenical movement since the Jerusalem conference of the International Missionary Council (1928) p. 56 where the 'values' of non-Christian religions dominated discussion.<sup>9</sup> However up to the time of the New Delhi Assembly of the WCC (1961) the idea of dialogue was set within the framework of Christian communication. The New Delhi Assembly referred to 'dialogue as a form of evangelism which is often effective today.'<sup>10</sup> New Delhi was a turning point for WCC. On one hand it

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<sup>8</sup> John Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, (London, Falcon, 1975) p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> Carl F. Hallencreuts, *Dialogue and Community*, (Geneva, WCC, 1977) pp. 21-34.

<sup>10</sup> New Delhi Report (London, SCM, 1961) Section III, cited, by S. J. Samartha, 'Dialogue as a Continuing Christian Concern' in *Mission Trends* No. 1. eds. Gerald H. Anderson & Thomas F. Stransky (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1974) p. 248.

was the high water mark of 'biblical theology', while on the other, it marked the beginning of the process of the secularising of theology and of salvation as true humanization. In the context of witnessing to the cosmic Christ present in all of life, the contemporary idea of dialogue took shape. Interest shifted from dialogue in evangelism to dialogue in God's saving work in people of other faiths. The 'discontinuity' of Henrik Kraemer and Barthian era gave way to a new understanding of the continuity of spirituality common to all faiths. Christ is present in all search for truth. Karl Rahner popularized the idea that seeking non-Christians should be thought of as anonymous Christians, while Raymond Panikkar argued that Hinduism has a place in the universal saving providence of God. He states, 'The good and *bona fide* Hindu is saved by Christ and not by Hinduism, but it is through the sacraments of Hinduism, through the message of morality and good life, through the *Mysterion* that came down to him through Hinduism, that Christ saves the Hindu normally.'<sup>11</sup>

The new emphasis in dialogue became evident in the series of dialogues sponsored by the WCC—Kandy 1967, Zurich, 1970, Ajaltoun 1970, Broumana 1972. The era of direct dialogue with people of other Faiths had began. Following several consultations the meeting of Christians at Zurich (1970) prepared a Statement on new attitudes and relationships for inter-religious dialogue for the meeting of the Central Committee at Addis Ababa (1971). Interim guidelines for dialogue were proposed. At this important meeting a separate sub-unit on Dialogue was established by the WCC.

While brief reference to dialogue had been made in the documents of the Uppsala Assembly (1968), the first real development took place at the 'Salvation Today' meeting of the Commission on World Mission p.57 and Evangelism at Bangkok (1973) where the contribution of dialogue to the theme of the consultation was seriously considered.

This proved to be a curtain raiser for a major debate on dialogue at the Nairobi Assembly (1975) in the section 'Seeking Community: The Common Search of People of Various Faiths, Cultures and Ideologies.' Five members of other faiths were present as guests—a Jew, a Hindu, a Sikh, a Buddhist, a Muslim. The chairman, Metropolitan Gregorias (Paul Verghese) of India called for a common search for world community and not a debate on dialogue. The concern for the unity of mankind was given new priority. Dialogue as total openness was advocated by some delegates. Raymond Pannikar's statement in the preparatory document that the Christian 'goes unarmed and ready to be himself converted. He may lose his life; he may also be born again' was endorsed by Dr. Samartha at the press conference which followed the debate.<sup>12</sup>

As already stated, the theological consultation on Dialogue in Community held at Chiang Mai, Thailand, two years later was a generally more acceptable statement to evangelicals, even though little reference was made to evangelism and many key theological issues were not discussed. It appears that since Chiang Mai this more balanced emphasis has continued in ecumenical thinking. Evangelism is once again on the agenda. Evangelical criticism from outside the movement, the appointing of more theologically conservative staff to the WCC and the growing influence of the evangelical voice world wide are having their effect. The WCC Sixth Assembly in Vancouver (1983) stated, 'Dialogue is not a device for nor a denial of Christian witness. It is rather a mutual venture

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<sup>11</sup> Raymond Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, (London, Barton, Longman & Todd 1964) p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> See Bruce Nicholls, *Nairobi 1975: A Crisis of Faith for WCC* (Taipei, Asia Theological Association, 1976) pp. 20–24. The author was present as an observer.



to bear witness to each other and the world in relation to different perceptions of ultimate reality.<sup>13</sup>

However, the question must be raised as to whether dialogue as developed in ecumenical circles has a significant role for the future. If it means only elite scholars of different faiths, all skilled in the language of cross-cultural relationships, meeting together and producing reports, then its value is questionable. Dialogue must get beyond textbook religion to the actual religious life as experienced by ordinary believers, for it is here that communal prejudices are strong and inter-communal rioting takes place. Today the major religions are experiencing the p. 58 revival of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism. The hope of achieving peace through ecumenical dialogue is fading. In the context of mounting poverty, injustice and oppression, it is not surprising that concerned Christians are turning away from dialogue and embracing the political ideologies and practices of Liberation theologies. Political theology is overshadowing dialogical theology.

### **Dialogue in the context of evangelism**

Is there a better way to the more effective use of dialogue? We believe there is. A more faithfully biblical understanding of dialogue must be recovered. Dialogue must once more be set in the context of evangelism. The proclamation of a message of forgiveness and hope, of peace and justice undertaken in a spirit of authenticity, humility, integrity and sensitivity, to use John Stott's categories,<sup>14</sup> is essential to dialogue becoming an effective agent of change in an increasingly violent world.

David Hesselgrave's challenge to evangelicals to 'demonstrate a new kind of bravery' in entering into a true dialogical relationship with people of other faiths, is still largely unheeded.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden have called evangelicals to dialogical mission in the context of religious pluralism and social injustice.<sup>16</sup>

### **III. UNVEILING HIDDEN ASSUMPTIONS IN DIALOGUE**

Advocates of ecumenical dialogue rightly condemn hidden agendas in dialogue, and any attempt to manipulate for evangelistic ends those who have received help through social service. The Chiang Mai Statement warns, 'We soundly reject any idea of "dialogue in community" as a secret weapon in the armoury of our aggressive Christian militancy.'<sup>17</sup> This warning needs to be heeded by all Christians, protestants and catholics alike. True dialogue calls for transparent openness and integrity between partners in dialogue but without compromise or eclecticism. My observation is that non-Christian partners expect this kind of integrity from Christians. They may be offended and angry when they are told that they are already p. 59 saved by the hidden or anonymous cosmic Christ. The

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<sup>13</sup> *Gathered for Life*, Official Report, VI Assembly of WCC p. 40. cited by Paul Schrottenboer, 'Inter Religious Dialogue', in *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 12. No. 3, 1988 ed. Sunand Sumithra (Exeter, Paternoster Press) p. 211

<sup>14</sup> *op cit* pp. 71–73.

<sup>15</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan 1978) pp. 227–240.

<sup>16</sup> Vinay Samuel & Chris Sugden, 'Dialogue with other Religions—an Evangelical View' in *Sharing Jesus in the Two-Thirds World* (Bangalore, PIM, 1983) pp. 177–204.

<sup>17</sup> *Faith in the Midst of Faiths*, *op. cit.* p. 144.

resurgence of religious fundamentalism could be in part a reaction to the hidden agendas of Christians which are interpreted as signs of arrogance and imperialism.

In contemporary ecumenical dialogue, theological assumptions are often left undiscussed for fear of being devisive. Of these, we will limit our discussion to three areas that need open reflection—the nature of truth, the universalism of the people of God and the work of the Holy Spirit outside the Church.

### **Revelation: Relational or Propositional**

We begin by asking, 'Is religious truth always relative or is there a finality of truth that can be known and experienced?' This issue turns on whether revelation is always relational or whether it is also propositional. Dr. S. J. Samartha, the former director of the WCC unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, clearly states his position: 'Since truth in the biblical understanding is not propositional but relational ... dialogue becomes one of the means of the quest for truth.'<sup>18</sup> His successor, Dr. S. Wesley Ariarajah, holds a similar position. He states, 'Rightly understood, all theology is "storytelling". It is the framework within which one seeks to give expression to one's experience and faith ... The danger and temptation are to hold that one "story" is more valid than the others.'<sup>19</sup> The issue is a hermeneutical one. Evangelicals who affirm their confidence in the Bible as the authoritative and infallible Word of God hold to a gospel that is non-negotiable, because they believe in the finality of Christ in whom all Scripture finds its ultimate fulfilment. The relational and relative view of truth undergirds the existential interpretation of the Christian Faith which owes much of its inspiration to Martin Buber, Emil Brunner, Paul Tillich and Rudolph Bultmann. The dialectical process is basic to the methodology of ecumenical dialogue. For Hegel no idea had a fixed meaning or unchanging validity. In the dialectical principle of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, truth is never final. It is always relative, always becoming. The rational law of noncontradiction no longer applies. Truth is always inclusive. This creates an expectation in dialogue that opposing and mutually exclusive understandings of reality can ultimately be reconciled and harmonized. **p. 60** Hence the unity of mankind has become an attainable goal. To this assumption is added the process theology of Alfred North Whitehead and the evolutionary goals of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. It is then a short step to turn from spiritual and theological categories to those of sociology and politics. The genius of the Indian theologian M. M. Thomas lies in his capacity to utilise the marxist dialectical method to synthesise divergent lines of thought and action in terms of the process of secularization and to synthesise salvation as humanization. Since the Nairobi Assembly M. M. Thomas has forcefully advocated 'a Christ-centred syncretism.' Paul Knitter, the American Catholic theologian, has more recently developed the unitary principle as a new model of truth for dialogue.<sup>20</sup> He sees all religious traditions as talking about the same reality.

### **Incipient Universalism**

The universalism of the people of God has become an assumption of many engaged in dialogue. If special revelation is only a providential evidence of God's general and universal revelation and salvation history is the salvation of human history itself, then 'the people of God' become co-existent with humanity. In this context, the shift in

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<sup>18</sup> S. J. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue*, (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1981) p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, 'Towards a Theology of Dialogue', *The Ecumenical Review* (Vol 29, No. 1) p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll, Orbis, 1985).

emphasis from the unity of the Church to the unity of mankind becomes significant as the goal of dialogue. This leads to the view that the universal Christ is present in all religious dialogue and that Christianity is only one of many ways to God. As Ariarajah concludes, 'A theology of dialogue should take the human community as the locus of God's activity. There is nothing particular about the Christian community except that it has come to accept the event of Jesus Christ as a decisively significant event in the whole history of humankind.'<sup>21</sup> Undoubtedly universalism in salvation is the central assumption in much of ecumenical dialogue today. In a pluralistic world, it is assumed to be true but it is rarely 'unpacked' and openly discussed. Is it not a subtle form of manipulation?

This incipient universalism is frequently couched in terms of a common pilgrimage. The Chiang Mai statement called Christians to participate fully in the mission of God (*Missio Dei*). It states, "To this end we would humbly share with our fellow human beings in a compelling pilgrimage."<sup>22</sup> It then adds that as disciples of Christ we p. 61 come to know him more fully as we engage in his mission in the world and enter into dialogical relationships of service with other human communities. From my own experience, I have found this to be true. In dialogue, the issues of continuity and discontinuity, of judgement and hope, have been sharpened, enriching my own theological understanding and my commitment to Christ has been strengthened. As pilgrims we are exhorted to live godly lives ([1 Peter 2:11](#)).

However, to others at Chiang Mai 'a compelling pilgrimage' meant a common search with people of other faiths to find the truth and experience salvation. This view is unacceptable to us and a denial of the grounds of Christian assurance. For the Christian, peace with God is the beginning of the road, not its goal. Salvation is by grace through faith and is not the reward for any self-denying quest ([Ephesians 2:8-10](#)). A compelling pilgrimage is a compelling discipleship of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christology is the central issue in dialogue. Jesus' question, 'Who do you say that I am?' is the central question.

### **Salvation as a Universal Pentecost**

The question of the Holy Spirit outside the church is an increasingly compelling issue in our pluralistic world and one in which great communities of people are without a clear understanding of the gospel demands. This is no academic matter. I am the pastor of one of 16 CNI churches in the State of Haryana with its 16 million people and we are the strongest church in the State! The spiritual and eternal lostness of people outside of Christ, calls us to new faithfulness in discipleship.

While some theologians have advocated a cosmic or anonymous Christ present in every community, others have framed their response in terms of the universal work of the Holy Spirit outside the Church community. The Orthodox Metropolitan, George Khodr, in his well-remembered address at the Addis Ababa meeting of the WCC (1970) spoke of the economy of the Holy Spirit in a universal Pentecost. He suggested that 'non-Christian religions may be considered as places where his (the Holy Spirit's) inspiration is at work. All those visited by the Spirit are the people of God.'<sup>23</sup> Khodr added that the man of faith must wait patiently for the coming of the Lord and 'secretly be in communion with all men and economy of the Mystery within which we are moving slowly towards the final

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<sup>21</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 10f.

<sup>22</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>23</sup> George Khodr, 'Christianity in a Pluralistic World—the Economy of the Holy Spirit' in *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva, WCC 1971) p. 140.

consummation, when all things [p. 62](#) will be gathered up in Christ.' Once more universalism in salvation is the assumed premise of this position.

#### IV. THE HOLY SPIRIT ON THE FRONTIERS OF THE KINGDOM

The Holy Spirit is God's missionary to the world.<sup>24</sup> He is sent by the Father into the world as the Spirit of truth ([John 14:16](#)). He was in the world from the divine act of creation, 'Hovering over the waters' ([Genesis 1:2](#)). He energises nature and controls history ([Psalm 104:29f](#) & [Isaiah 34:16](#)). The Spirit of God in the Old Testament is God active in the whole of life and culture. He guided the children of Israel and used the rulers of the pagan nations as his servants. He prepared the people of Nineveh to turn from their evil ways at the preaching of Jonah. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon God-fearing Jews and proselytes who were worshipping in Jerusalem. God has not left himself without a witness in the changing seasons of nature ([Acts 14:17](#)). He prepared the Gentile Cornelius to respond to the Word preached to him ([Acts 10:44-48](#)) and he opened the hearts of some of the educated pagans of Athens through Paul's dialoguing with them ([Acts 17:16-34](#)).

God the Holy Spirit is always ahead of the Church's witness. He goes before and prepares the hearts of those who will respond to the Good News. He is in the frontiers of the Kingdom as the Spirit of Truth—penetrating the Kingdom of Satan, the father of lies and the ruler of this world. An awareness of and sensitivity to the prevenient grace of the Spirit is foundational to a biblical understanding of dialogue. It creates a spirit of expectancy, delivers us from aggressive behaviour born out of false insecurity or over-zealous self-generated responsibility. We know that salvation is of God and we can trust him to work. Dialogue is a way of life, an attitude of mind as well as a verbal defence and proclamation of the Gospel. The testimony of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives is more important than debate or verbal persuasion. The Spirit enables us to listen as well as speak and to discern what God is already doing in the lives of the partners in dialogue. The great poet and hymn writer of western India Narayan [p. 63](#) Vaman Tilak, a Brahmin convert, claims to have come to Christ 'over the bridge of Tukuram.' The Hindu saint of the sixteenth century, Tukuram, the worshipper of the god Vithoba, had a Spirit-filled hunger for God. In one of his poems, he cries out

'As on the bank the poor fish lies  
And gasps and writhes in pain,  
Or as a man with anxious eyes  
Seeks hidden gold in vain,—  
So is my heart distressed and cries  
To come to Thee again.'

Tilak shared this hunger but found satisfaction in Christ which began in a dialogue with a missionary on a train journey. Christ fulfils all spiritual search. Professor J. N. D. Anderson the noted Islamic scholar wrote, 'I have found that converts from Islam never regard the God whom they previously sought to worship as wholly false, but rather rejoice that they

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<sup>24</sup> Evangelicals took up the issue of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world with special reference to evangelization at a consultation at Oslo in May 1985 sponsored by the Theology Working Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. Dr. D. F. Wells was commissioned to author a book based on the material presented and the discussion of the consultation. See, David F. Wells, *God the Evangelist, How the Holy Spirit Works to Bring Men and Women to Faith* (Exeter, Paternoster Press 1987).

have now, in Jesus Christ, been brought to know and have fellowship with that God as he really is.’<sup>25</sup>

As the image-bearers of God, all human beings have an insatiable longing for God or spiritual reality. Agnostic secular humanism and atheism only mask this hunger. Marxism as an ideology is not match for the spiritual power of the world’s religions, be they Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism, as the history of Marxist Europe and Asia is now unfolding. Those religions that are able to offer a wholistic view of life are having the strongest appeal.

Every day millions of people in India repeat the prayer recorded in the Brihadarayaka Upanishad:

‘From the unreal lead me to the real  
From darkness lead me to light  
From death lead me to immortality.’

The renewal of the Hindu way of life, fuelled by national TV serials on traditional religious epics, is the most powerful force in Indian society today. That 10–15 million pilgrims could bathe in the Ganges during the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad on one day (6th February 1989) which was auspicious for the washing away of sins, is visible evidence of this fact. This spiritual search creates an atmosphere of openness that is conducive to genuine dialogue, but only when the Holy Spirit is in our midst. Therefore prayer is an essential component of living dialogues.

However, we must not lose sight of the reality of satanic presence in [p. 64](#) every dialogue, for all human beings are fallen beings and we are ever rebelling against God and rejecting his Law. Sin pervades the whole of life and taints and perverts all of culture. (Lausanne Covenant par. X) so that all people and all societies are idolatrous in all their acts, whether the symbols are visible and material, as in Baal worship or Hinduism or spiritual and relational as immorality and covetness ([Colossians 3:5](#)). The rebellious worshipper creates his god in his own image, and then seeks to manipulate deity through symbolic or magical rituals and *mantras*. Forsaken by God, the idolator becomes a slave of his own creation. Paul’s account of this process ([Romans 1:18–32](#)) is a salutary reminder that serious dialogue is an engagement with evil as well as good. Thus dialogue is warfare as well as reconciliation and peace. Judgement precedes hope, discontinuity is inseparable from continuity and we should not shrink from either. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement ([John 16:8](#)) as well as guiding into all truth ([John 16:13](#)) and the way of peace and discipleship ([John 20:21f](#)).

## CONCLUSION

In the light of the issues discussed in this chapter, a number of conclusions are suggested

a) Dialogue is only authentic when the Holy Spirit is present, convicting of sin and leading into all truth. We dare not go ahead of him; we must let God do his own work. As Christian partners, we are called to patience, to transparent honesty and openness and to a sensitivity to the work of the Spirit in others as well as ourselves. We go into dialogue resting in the confidence that God the Holy Spirit is in our midst.

b) The Christian in dialogue must be Christ-centred. He or she must know him in whom they have believed, and have the inner witness of the Spirit of their own salvation

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<sup>25</sup> Sir Norman Anderson (ed) *The World Religions* (London, IVP, 1975) p. 236.

in Christ. The Christian partner must with humility and grace confess that there is no other name by which salvation comes.<sup>26</sup> We acknowledge that the gospel itself is not negotiable, though others may help us to see our own misunderstandings of the gospel. A Christ-centred approach to dialogue will involve a costly identification in the sufferings, hurts and fears of others and obedience to the way of the cross in self-denial. The finality of Christ precludes a false universalism in salvation. p. 65

c) Dialogue is the life style of the community. If the Church is to maintain an effective openness and witness in dialogue, it needs to be constantly transformed in all its life, theological understanding, spirituality, ethical behaviour, unity and structures, and commitment to mission in the world. *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*. The structures of the Church must be constantly renewed to maintain the primacy of the Church's function. In the economy of God the Church is God's agent for change. She lives on the frontiers of the Kingdom in a hostile world.

d) Effective dialogue demands that the Church live on the frontiers of mission, meeting genuine needs whenever and however they may arise. This may mean meetings with leaders of other faiths, to overcome misunderstandings, joining with other communities in times of national crisis or disaster to reduce human suffering, being peace makers in times of violence, working together for the betterment of the wider community life. It will also mean rebuking corruption and oppression in every area of living, attacking the evils institutionalised in social structures. But it will also mean faithfulness in witnessing to salvation in Jesus Christ, recognising that 'if our Gospel is veiled it is veiled to those who are perishing'. ([2 Corinthians 4:3](#)). True dialogue belongs to the mission of the Church in the same way that God enters into dialogue with the world he created and in Christ redeems. Everything the Church is and does has a missionary dimension but everything does not have a missionary intention.

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## Kenya's Turbulent Bishop

A. N. S. Lane

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*In this moving account of an African bishop's stand against injustice, the author raises the issue of the Church's witness in the market place of politics. Are the political and spiritual fields incompatible or complementary? Whether the bishop loved mercy and walked humbly with his God as well as acting justly (to quote the prophet Micah) is a question not answered in this article. Justice without reconciliation and peace is always in danger of becoming another form of injustice.*

Editor

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<sup>26</sup> See W. A. Visser't Hooft's *No Other Name* (London, SCM Press, 1963) for a valuable discussion on the dangers of syncretism and the nature of Christian Universalism.

Bishop Alexander Muge of Eldoret was one of Kenya's most controversial bishops, well known for his outspoken statements against government corruption. On August 14th, 1990 he made a journey to Busia in the west of his diocese. As had happened before, he received a threat from the government. This time it was from the Minister of Labour, Peter Okondo, to the effect that if he went he would 'see fire and may not leave alive'. Muge took this threat seriously and a banner headline in the Kenyan *Standard* newspaper that day read: 'My life in danger says Bishop Muge'. Undeterred, Muge proceeded to Busia where he received a tumultuous welcome. On the return journey that afternoon he was killed in a road crash (17:8:90, 41).<sup>1</sup>

First reports of the crash referred to it as an accident. Archbishop Kuria, shortly after Muge's death, called it a tragic accident (17:8:90, 5). But as more evidence came to light the conviction grew that this was no accident. At Muge's memorial service in Nairobi the following Monday the talk was of murder. Muge's diocese made its own investigation and reached the following conclusions, having interviewed eyewitnesses. Muge was driving the first car of a four-car convoy. He caught up with a slow-moving lorry and trailer. Another lorry came round a corner at speed, grazed the rear of the trailer and smashed into Muge's car. The car was crushed and dragged for about 100 yards. Muge was found muttering 'It is done, it is done', before collapsing and dying (24:8:90, 5f.). Early reports had suggested that he was trying to overtake the trailer when the crash occurred. The evidence given at the trial of the lorry driver pointed in a different p. 67 direction, with Muge driving behind the trailer at a snail's pace (14:9:90, 4f., 12; 5:10:90, 35f.; 12:10:90, 19). The driver was convicted and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for causing Muge's death by dangerous driving (16:11:90, 16f.).

Why should Muge have been killed? He himself offered an explanation. The day before his death he referred to the murder earlier that year of the Kenyan Foreign Minister, Dr Robert Ouko. Muge quoted from a British newspaper which attributed Ouko's murder to cabinet colleagues who did not like his attempts to probe high-level corruption. Muge claimed that he too was under threat because of recent charges that he had made against certain cabinet ministers (17:8:90, 4). While it has yet to be proved that Muge was murdered, the evidence so far points strongly in that direction and many Kenyans see his death as murder.

The purpose of this article is to review and assess Muge's stand for social justice, which may well have been the cause of his death. Two major sources have been used. First, the Kenyan press, especially the *Weekly Review*, published in Nairobi, to which references will be found in the text. Secondly, Muge was a former student of mine and I was able to visit him in December 1989. During that visit I interviewed him on the present topic. All references to that interview in this article were seen and confirmed by Muge himself. In addition to these major sources, I am also indebted to a number of folk with whom I have discussed Muge, both in Kenya and in the U.K. In order to preserve confidentiality, these have not been named.

Muge's political stand needs to be seen in context. In Kenya there are three main church groupings. The Roman Catholic Church speaks occasionally on political issues, but generally remains silent. One bishop commented that 'Water and soil don't mix. Politics and religion don't mix' (3:5:85, 10). But when the bishops do speak, they usually speak collectively and so are harder to ignore (12:1:90, 81). The mainstream Protestant churches belong to the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK). Foremost among these churches is the (Anglican) Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK). In recent years

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<sup>1</sup> References in the text are to the Kenyan *Weekly Review*, published in Nairobi, giving the date of the issue and the page number(s).

three of the CPK bishops have spoken regularly against injustice—Alexander Muge, David Gitari (12:6:87, 4–7; 5:10:90, 8–10) and Henry Okullu<sup>2</sup> (26:9:86, 4–6; 4:5:90, 15–17). Manasses Kuria, the archbishop, has tended to be cautious in speaking on social and political issues, and p. 68 has been criticised for this on occasions. But during 1990 he became much more outspoken (6:7:90, 4, 7f.). Other clerics from the Methodist and Presbyterian churches have also spoken, most notably the presbyterian minister Timothy Njoya (17:10:86, 3–5). The third grouping is the Evangelical Fellowship of Kenya (EFK), to which the overwhelmingly evangelical CPK does not belong. The EFK tends to oppose church involvement in politics but seems happy to make political statements in favour of the government. The EFK has, however, on occasions made private representations to those in power.

Alexander Kipsang Muge was born in 1948. After a spell as an untrained primary school teacher, he served for six years in the paramilitary General Service Unit (police), where he became a corporal and was awarded a medal for bravery. Feeling the call to the ministry, he studied at the (Anglican) Maseno Bible College, after which he was ordained deacon (1975) and priest (1976). From 1976 to 1978 he pastored a church on the outskirts of Nairobi. While there he began to be known for the outspokenness which was to be the hallmark of his ministry. At that stage the object of his wrath was tribalism within both the CPK and the NCCK (17:8:90, 91). From 1978 to 1982 he studied for his BA at the London Bible College. On his return to Kenya he was appointed assistant to the provost of All Saints' cathedral, Nairobi, where he 'started spitting fire from the pulpit' (24:4:87, 12). He opposed government corruption and also attacked tribalism within the CPK and, in particular the dominance of the Kikuyus (1:7:88, 7). The following June he was elected the first bishop of the new diocese of Eldoret. Muge himself discerned a tribal dimension to his election. The diocese is predominantly Kalenjin and Muge was, like the president, a Kalenjin<sup>3</sup> (24:4:87, 12f.; 1:7:88, 7). As he was of the same tribe as many within the ruling clique, there were doubtless those who hoped that he would be at one with them. But this was not to be and he proved to be 'the thorn that still pricks' (22:7:88, 16).

## REASONS FOR SPEAKING OUT

Why did Muge feel obliged to speak against the government? In the interview he gave four reasons. P. 69

First, he was a Kalenjin, a member of the same tribe as the president and other leaders. As such he felt a particular responsibility to speak. Other members of the tribe, who do not belong to the ruling clique, had asked him to speak and to make it clear that they are not benefiting from the existing corruption. They were afraid that they would suffer when the inevitable backlash comes. The *Weekly Review* also noted the significance of Muge's tribal origin. 'As a Kalenjin railing against a Kalenjin-led secular administration, the late prelate's criticisms against the political system could not be branded as tribally-motivated. In that sense, his criticism of the political system was more credible than that of the majority of other critics' (7:9:90, 4).

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<sup>2</sup> Okulla has also written two books on the subject: *Church and Politics in East Africa* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1974 and many reprints); *Church and State in Nation Building and Human Development* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> While Muge and Moi were both Kalenjin, they came from different clans. Muge was a Nandi while Moi is a Tugen. There is some tension between the two groups and the conflict between Muge and Moi should be seen against this background.



Secondly, things are fundamentally different now from earlier times. Corruption existed under Kenyatta, but church leaders could approach him and he would take action. This happened in private and so there was no need for public confrontation, no tension. This was even true on one occasion when they approached him about the misdeeds of his wife. That is not to say that there was no corruption under Kenyatta, but rather that there were lines of communication between church and state, without public conflict. The situation is different under president Moi. He speaks against corruption and urges people to expose those who are guilty, but in practice takes no action. Corruption has become institutionalized and protected. The church is forced to speak in public as a last resort because other methods have failed. The result is public conflict, with church leaders being reviled by politicians, which was not previously true.<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, president Moi, unlike Kenyatta, claims to be a born-again Christian. In Kenya today around 75–80% of the population make some sort of Christian profession. Most of the government are churchgoers. This places a pastoral obligation on the church to speak, to call them to repent, forsake evil and come to the Lord. The church must oppose injustice in the same way as the OT prophets. The church's ministry includes a prophetic mission (29:3:85, 6; 19:9:86, 4; 22:9:89, 91).

Finally, one could once turn to senior leaders outside the government, such as civil servants. Today these figures are increasingly powerless. The concentration of power at the top will be considered [p. 70](#) further below. The church has had to step in to fill the vacuum that is left.

## POINTS AT ISSUE

There are a number of issues concerning which Muge spoke against the government. (These are drawn both from the interview and, where indicated, from the *Weekly Review*). First, at the most basic level, there are simple moral issues. As is well known, female school leavers are sometimes expected to offer sexual favours in exchange for a job (29:3:85, 61). There was an instance where a lady was entitled to air tickets for herself and her children to join her husband in the USA. The official concerned refused to hand over the tickets unless she would sleep with him. She refused and eventually the diocese had to come to her rescue and buy the tickets.

Secondly, there is straightforward corruption. Those in positions of leadership use them to enrich themselves at the expense of the people. President Moi is reputed to be the second wealthiest African leader, surpassed only by the infamous Mobutu of Zaire. The majority of Kenyans are landless while cabinet ministers own huge farms. In the Eldoret area the white settlers used to have farms of two to three thousand acres. The new 'black settlers' have amassed farms of ten thousand acres and more. Ordinary folk are worse off than under the colonial regime. In one instance some landless folk got together to buy a plot of land. They asked a local politician to help them with this. He told them to leave it in his hands. What he actually did was purchase the land for himself, using government money. The would-be purchasers found themselves being evicted by the police. The local district commissioner was powerless to act.

Thirdly, there was one particularly notorious instance of corruption. The district commissioner for West Pokot happened to be the president's nephew. He also ran a transport firm. In 1989 he gained the contract to transport 6000 bags of maize, each

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<sup>4</sup> Not all would agree with Muge's claim that corruption under Moi is worse than during the later years of Kenyatta's rule. There are also stories of Kenyatta's rejection of church criticism and expulsion of troublesome foreign clergy.

containing 91 kilos for famine relief in the Sudan. He had the bags taken to his home where inmates from the local prison were made to extract 35 kilos from each bag. Thus 336,000 kilos reached the hungry, 210,000 kilos went to the wealthy district commissioner (15:9:89, 81). This incident was investigated by the special branch, who forwarded a report on it, but no action was ever taken.

Fourthly, there was another incident concerning West Pokot. Muge claimed that there was famine in parts of the district, but the p. 71 government denied it. Muge stated which villages were affected and produced a video as evidence. This charge led to a particularly vigorous government response, doubtless because it conflicted with the official claim that Kenya is self-sufficient in food and that there is enough to feed the whole country. The president publicly condemned Muge for the first time over this issue (24:6:88, 9–10). The issue was complicated by the fact that this is a remote region where the people have yet to adapt to the modern world. The *Weekly Review* went on a fact-finding mission to the region. They concluded that there was a food shortage but found no evidence that people had died of hunger. But on the other hand they stated that many were dying of malnutrition (1:7:77, 4–612). Muge also claimed that the district commissioner had been distributing government food relief selectively, on political grounds (15:9:89, 91).

Fifthly, a major point of conflict between church and state was the issue of ‘queuing’. This is a method introduced in 1986 for the selection of parliamentary candidates. As Kenya is a one-party state, only those nominated by the party, the Kenya African National Union (Kanu), may stand for parliament. ‘Queuing’ means that candidates are selected not by a secret ballot but by electors ‘queuing’ or lining up behind the candidate of their choice, or his representative. The president defended this system maintaining that because it is less open to fraud than a secret ballot and, curiously, that votes cannot be bought if the voting takes place in public. Only paid-up party members (less than a fifth of the population) can take part. Again, it would be hard for church leaders, for example, to vote by publicly giving support to one candidate. There are also problems for many voters in government employ whose jobs might be at risk if they voted publicly for the ‘wrong’ person. Furthermore, if a candidate receives 70% or more of the vote, he is automatically elected as the MP, without any further ballot (29:8:86, 3–6). Another, less publicized, feature of this system is that appeals against the results of elections go to the president, not to the courts (29:4:88, 13). This furthers the concentration of power at the top and encourages the situation where MPs are answerable to the president rather than the people. One MP told his constituents that they could not remove him if the president wanted him. As Muge put it, ‘there is an outcry in Kenya today that the present parliament is full of people who are the friends of party officials and not the choice of the electorate’ (22:7:88, 16).

The church spoke out against this new method of election. At the time when Kanu adopted the queuing method, the five-yearly NCKK pastors’ conference was under way. This adopted a resolution p. 72 opposing queuing<sup>5</sup> (29:4:88, 12). Muge described the resolution as ‘wonderful’ and archbishop Kuria, the head of the CPK, described the queuing system as ‘un-Christian, undemocratic and embarrassing’ (29:8:86, 3–5). The Roman Catholic bishops eventually came out with their own statement expressing their reservations concerning queuing (29:11:86, 81). The Evangelical Fellowship of Kenya, on the other hand, issued a statement supporting queuing (5:12:86, 9f.).

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<sup>5</sup> The church protested against queuing partly on the grounds that it would be improper for the clergy to vote publicly. The president announced that clergy and some others would be allowed to vote by proxy instead (19:9:86, 4). This did not happen (8:12:89, 9f.) and the secretary-general of Kanu stated that ‘there is no special way of voting without queuing. You either stay away or join the queue’ (29:4:88, 13).

In 1988 the queuing debate entered a new phase. It was proposed that this method also be used for general elections, in place of the secret ballot. This again led to a storm of protest by bishops Muge and Okullu, together with a Catholic bishop. All three claimed that there was vote-rigging under the queuing method (29:4:88, 11–14). This time the party backed down and no change was made. But there was another spin off from the queuing debate. An NCKK-sponsored magazine called *Beyond* had been critical of the queuing method. The March 1988 issue was devoted to a critique of the previous month's Kanu nominations, claiming widespread abuse. It alleged that some of those declared to have won had not in fact done so. The government responded by banning the magazine. This meant that it had to cease publication and also that the mere possession of back copies could result in imprisonment (18:3:88, 18f.). The editor of the magazine was briefly imprisoned.

Finally, the queuing controversy erupted again in 1989. The NCKK sponsored a large conference on the mission and calling of the church in Kenya today. One of the speakers was the former president of Zimbabwe, Canaan Banana. The conference adopted a resolution critical of the queuing method and urging the government 'to come up with an electoral system which is fair and just'. The government vehemently rejected this suggestion. Muge was not at the conference but expressed his support for the resolution and his opposition to the queuing system, calling it undemocratic and unpopular (8:12:89, 8–10; 15:12:89, 6f.).

Behind queuing lies a more fundamental issue—the concentration of power at the top. Kenya's independence constitution contained a number of checks and balances. These have been steadily eroded in recent years, with increasing power going to the president and the party. The auditor-general has the task of checking the government's p. 73 accounts. In the words of the *Weekly Review*, 'over the years, the reports of the auditor-general have unearthed a large number of questionable expenditures'. Clearly he has a key role in the exposure of corruption. In 1986 his security of tenure was removed, meaning that the president can sack him at will. This seriously undermines his ability to act independently, which was presumably the aim of the exercise (21:11:86, 7f.). At the same time the attorney-general also lost his security of tenure. Again, this security had been designed to 'enable the holder of the office to exercise his often sensitive duties with a relatively free hand, and without the fear of pressure from higher authority'. The aim in removing security of tenure was presumably to prevent such independence (21:11:86, 4–7). These changes provoked protests from many quarters: from the Law Society of Kenya, from the NCKK and even from the Roman Catholic bishops (28:11:86, 3–8). These were ignored. When the changes came before parliament, they were explained by the attorney-general who then announced that he expected no opposition to the bill from MPs (28:11:86, 4f.). In 1988 this process was taken further. High court and court of appeal judges also lost their security of tenure, as did some other officials (5:8:88, 3–6).

More is at stake here than the independence of a few officials. When the 1986 constitutional changes were introduced the president made the ominous pronouncement that the party is supreme over both parliament and the courts (21:11:86, 91). These were no empty words, as can be seen by the way in which the 1988 changes went through parliament. Here were serious constitutional changes, yet the bill was introduced to parliament at 3 pm and had received its third reading by 6 pm, without even token opposition (5:8:88, 3–6). The total lack of serious debate or scrutiny of such a major bill chillingly revealed the truth of the president's earlier words. So shocking was this that the *Weekly Review* devoted much of its next issue to considering the independence of parliament and could come up with no greater comfort than the fact that the situation was no different elsewhere in black Africa (12:8:88, 4–15).

Earlier that year, when the question of extending the queuing method to general elections had arisen, a government minister made some revealing statements. The secret ballot would be scrapped 'whether people like it or not'. There would be no need for a referendum because 'Kanu knows the wishes of the people'. Parliament would support the proposed change because any MPs failing to do so could have their party membership withdrawn (29:4:88, 7f.). These remarks led to protest from Muge, Okullu and a [p. 74](#) Catholic bishop (29:4:88, 11–14). In fact the change was not introduced, but the attitude of the minister to the people and to parliament remains on the record. A more recent incident illustrates the same point. An MP was assailed by his local Kanu branch for 'asking irrelevant questions in parliament' (12:1:90, 81). If even MPs cannot speak freely in parliament, how can Kanu know the wishes of the people?

Underlying all of these issues is the question of the one-party state. Kenya began at independence (1963) as a multi-party state, but became a *de facto* one-party state the following year. Another opposition party emerged in 1966 but was banned in 1969. Finally, in 1982 Kenya became a *de jure* one-party state (12:1:90, 8f.). This is a sensitive issue for church leaders. Archbishop Kuria, who had spoken against queuing, expressed his support for the one-party system (17:10:86, 3f.). Others, such as bishop Okullu have opposed it<sup>6</sup> (26:9:86, 4f.). Muge spoke repeatedly 'against the pressures of totalitarianism in the name of one-party systems and against the detention of political opponents without trial; (19:9:86, 4 *et al.*). Even the cautious Catholic bishops claimed that 'the party is assuming a totalitarian role. It claims to speak for the people and yet does not allow the people to give their views' (12:11:86, 8). The similarities between the Kenyan and former East European systems have not been lost on observers. Muge warned Kenya's leaders to heed the lessons of Eastern Europe, where the masses were rising against unpopular governments (8:12:89, 10).

The events in Eastern Europe served to keep attention focussed on the issue of the one-party state. 1990 began with a forthright New Year sermon on the subject from the controversial presbyterian minister Timothy Njoya. He claimed that the one-party system had been imported into Africa from Eastern Europe. He criticised attempts to justify the system by giving it local names, adding that 'all forms of social evils appear to stop being evil when baptised African' (12:1:90, 3–6). Later in the year a number of disaffected politicians began to agitate for the introduction of a multi-party system and the government responded by detaining two of them. The church did not keep quiet. Okullu sparked off a new controversy in April by speaking out in favour of a multi-party system (4:5:90, 6–9). The baton was surprisingly taken up by Archbishop Kuria, reversing his earlier [p. 75](#) position (18:5:90, 9f.; 6:7:90, 7f.). Even more surprisingly, Muge spoke in favour of the one-party system. But he continued to call for further checks and balances within the one-party system, to make it more democratic (25:5:90, 6). Thus his defence of the system should not be seen as a reversal of his earlier opposition to matters such as queuing. But his advocacy of the one-party system does appear to have been a new stance. It has been suggested that he took this attitude because he came to see the advocacy of a multi-party system as a Kikuyu plot—which might have been reinforced by seeing the (Kikuyu) archbishop support it.

Muge's defence of the one-party system came at a time when he 'seemed to have lost much of his fire', as it has been put. He had been silent on national issues for some months and 'many observers felt that the usually fiery prelate had changed sides and become a supporter of the political system' (17:8:90, 11). There were rumours to the effect that he

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<sup>6</sup> Okullu has also opposed the one-party system in his books: *Church and Politics in East Africa* 73–75; *Church and State in Nation Building and Human Development* 72–88.

had been 'bought off' by the president. There is evidence that he received gifts from the president, which it would have been hard to refuse—but also that the president was annoyed at Muge's failure to step into line.

Any doubts about Muge's position were dispelled shortly before his death when, in the words of the *Weekly Review*, he reverted to type (10:8:90, 101). The context was a Review Committee set up by Kanu to tour the country and receive, from whomever wished to appear before it, recommendations for reform (27:7:90, 3–8; 3:8:90, 4–10; 10:8:90, 4–10). The original agenda included the queuing system, the 70% rule and expulsions from the party. Some sought to broaden the agenda to include the one-party system and the question of limiting the tenure of the presidency to two five-year terms. Muge appeared before the committee on August 3rd in a manner that indicated that he was 'once again on the warpath'. He claimed that the president was surrounded by a clique of cabinet ministers who were misleading him and indulging in activities which were driving a wedge between Moi and the people. He cited the examples of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Milton Obote of Uganda, both of whom fell, he claimed, as a result of alienation from the people. He went on to cite specific instances of corruption (10:8:90, 5f., 10–12). It was these charges that led to the threats against his life a few days later.

### **MUGE'S SOURCES**

What were Muge's sources for his serious allegations concerning corruption? In the interview he named three. First, the diocesan office **P. 76** includes a department of justice and peace, with an officer in charge and another part-time worker. This department investigates such issues. It was hoped to employ a full-time solicitor before long. Secondly, ordinary people volunteer information when they find that normal channels are ineffective. The episode of the theft of the maize was reported by the prisoners concerned to church members working in the prison. It was also reported by an official who knew of it and whom I was able to meet personally. Information is given confidentially by people who could lose their jobs if they spoke openly. Finally, a number of Christians in West Pokot had the courage to sign a paper outlining the misdeeds of the district commissioner and urging the government to act. The only action that was taken was against the man who had drafted the document, who was a clinical officer. His clinic was closed down and his licence to practice was revoked, thus preventing him from pursuing his profession in Kenya.

One further source should be mentioned, which is perhaps so obvious that it is in danger of being ignored. The diocese is composed of a network of parishes and these are served by clergy, who are in regular contact with the people. This structure provides among other things an efficient process whereby the bishop can be kept informed of grassroots grievances.

### **THE CONSEQUENCES OF SPEAKING OUT**

Until recently the main consequence for Muge and the other outspoken bishops was little more than insults and threats from politicians. Doubtless Muge was flattered to be called 'Kenya's enemy number one' (17:4:87, 13). Calls for him and other clergy to be detained and/or defrocked were commonplace (e.g. 22:7:88, 16). The NCKK and the CPK were branded as colonial relics subject to foreign masters (15:12:89, 6f). One of the more curious calls was for Muge and the others to come out into the open and form an opposition party. As the *Weekly Review* dryly observed, 'the question of forming another

party could only have been rhetorical, given the fact that Kanu is now the sole political party allowed in Kenya by law' (15:12:89, 7)!

Occasionally the harassment was more than verbal. In 1988 the police prevented worshippers from gathering for a church service and dragged Muge and two clergy from the church. This was later denied, but had been witnessed by visitors from West Germany (22:7:88, 17). The editorial of the *Weekly Review* made some unflattering comments about Muge ('imbued more with a bloated sense of his own importance than with the Holy Spirit') but was outspoken against this p.77 'height of stupidity' which 'amounts to gross interference in freedom of worship, and is a development with the most dire consequences for the sanctity of our constitution' (22:7:88, 1). Another time, while Muge and Gitari were monitoring the conduct of (queuing) elections their cars were stoned (13:10:89, 61). Gitari's house was also attacked one night by a gang of thugs. He himself escaped only by hiding in the roof (13:10:89, 51). More recently, Okullu was confronted and harassed by a group of about forty Kanu 'youthwingers' outside a church (27:7:90, 10).

Finally there was what at the time appeared to be a comical incident involving West Pokot once again. A local politician, Christopher Lomada, demanded that West Pokot should become a diocese independent of Eldoret. He also suggested that the people of the district were upset about Muge and that he should stay away for his own safety. There was a dramatic turn of events when the president's office also advised Muge against visiting West Pokot. He replied that nothing would stop him from performing his pastoral duties in the district. With the support of all his family, he declared that his personal security was secondary compared to the primary task of taking the gospel to the outermost parts of his diocese. If it was God's will for him to die, 'that is welcome, for death to a Christian is a gateway to heaven' (15:9:89, 7f.). (Interestingly, he made a very similar statement on the eve of his death (17:8:90, 6).) The government threats backfired in that they succeeded only in turning Muge into a martyr without (on that occasion) the inconvenience of martyrdom. Shortly afterwards he visited the district in what the press dubbed a 'triumphant entry', complete with police escort. There was no indication of local hostility. Muge visited Lomada's shop and bought some refreshments from his wife (22:9:89, 8f.).

## ASSESSMENT

How should one assess the stand that Muge took?<sup>7</sup> The *Weekly Review* summed him up well by calling him 'always fearless and sometimes reckless' (1:7:88, 71). An example of the latter was his charge that the human rights situation in Kenya was worse than in South Africa (17:4:87, 13, 24:4:87, 3). Not only was this charge untrue but it is particularly offensive in a black African country. In an p. 78 interview shortly after Muge admitted that 'the violation of human rights in Kenya cannot be compared to the situation in South Africa' but rightly protested against the hypocrisy of protesting against South Africa while ignoring the evils of one's own country (24:4:87, 4).

Another criticism that has been made is that Muge was guilty of conducting vendettas against individual politicians (such as the former local MP Stanley Arap Metro (17:4:87, 13 *et al.*)) and that he sometimes sank to mud slinging (24:4:87, 11). Related to this, some felt that he could be very emotional and therefore sometimes spoke rashly. He could turn

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<sup>7</sup> This assessment has been stimulated by conversation with a number of folk in Kenya, including the leaders of several denominations. I have not named them as these were private conversations.

molehills into mountains when he got involved. Again, even his supporters admitted that on occasions he could be erratic.

Some would question whether the points on which Muge made a stand are all particularly *christian*. In opposing the supremacy of the party and the removal of checks and balances was Muge standing for christian truth or was he merely expressing his personal preference for liberal western rather than traditional African values? This is a charge that must be taken seriously, especially by a western observer. In Muge's favour it should be noted that the point at issue is not the system as abstract political theory, but this system as actually used to protect corruption and injustice. Again, the issue of fair elections is not just theoretical. In Uganda hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost in the process of removing unpopular regimes by force. The ballot box is rather more economical in terms of both lives and financial damage.

It should also be noted that Muge was not himself totally committed to western liberal values. He repeatedly insisted that freedom of worship is a God-given right and not a favour bestowed by the government, a distinction that did not win him friends in the government (31:8:84, 9, et al.). But more recently he was the one church leader who urged the banning of a small and allegedly anti-christian religious sect. The group was in fact deregistered which means that it can no longer legally meet (2:2:90, 15f.). Again, his support for the one-party system, reaffirmed in his submission to the Kanu Review Committee, was not the stance of a western liberal. It has been said that his concept of leadership was similar to president Moi's in that he demanded total allegiance from his subordinates. Some of those who served under him felt that on occasions he could be arrogant.

Muge was also criticised for going to the press or to the BBC rather than making his points privately to those in power. This came out most clearly over the issue of the alleged famine in West Pokot. The [p. 79](#) president rebuked Muge for going to the press rather than to the district commissioner. He claimed that Muge had written him a private letter, which had appeared in the press before he had received it. This was extremely rude, he said (24:6:88, 10). Others also charged Muge with acting disrespectfully towards his elders, be they the president or the archbishop. This is a more serious accusation in Africa than it would be in the west. Again, Muge was accused of pushing himself forward and seeking his own glory by the manner in which he sought publicity. The question of motivation must be taken seriously, but there may be another reason why Muge was criticized for his use of the media. One is tempted to suspect that some people's irritation was at least in part prompted by Muge's success in gaining publicity through the Kenyan press and the BBC—which is doubtless why he continued to turn to the media. Muge also claimed that private representations to those in power were ineffective. This may well have been true, but one can question his claim that the situation is so much worse than under Kenyatta. Stories are rife of corruption both under and *by* Kenyatta and also of the suppression of criticism. Perhaps what has changed the most is not so much the government as the church's willingness to stand up and be counted.

*Should* the church be taking such a political stand? The issue is well summarized by the *Weekly Review*. Kenyan politicians 'have always been critical of clergymen who comment too freely on national political issues, accusing them of misuing the pulpit and asking them to resign their church ministry and join politics instead'. They see politics as their domain and feel that the clergy should confine themselves to spiritual matters. While most politicians see the political and spiritual fields as incompatible, many clergy reject this compartmentalization and see their role as complementary to, rather than conflicting with, that of politicians. Church leaders stress that the church cannot be blind to social evils (29:13:85, 6; 26:9:86, 51).

In conversation with folk in Kenya I found a widespread appreciation of the fact that Muge and others made the stand that they did. This appreciation was shared by many who may not always have agreed with the point being made or the manner in which it was made, but were glad that someone was making a stand. One comment from a Kenyan clergyman was significant: the bishops are able to say things which would put other people in detention. The same point is made by the *Weekly Review* (12:1:90, 8). Apart from the church, the major opposition to the recent constitutional changes came from the Law Society of Kenya. This body was less able to sustain its criticism, lacking the moral authority and the broad base of support possessed p. 80 by the church. Furthermore, the government dare not try to suppress the church because it stands not just for political justice and freedom but also, unlike the Law Society, for divine truth which it is beyond the power (or will) of the government to suppress. The church in Kenya finds itself in a situation analogous in some ways to that of the Protestant church in East Germany at the start of the 1989 revolution. The church is the one permitted focus of opposition and as such has a moral responsibility to accept this role, however reluctant she might be. Muge noted that the role of the church in speaking out 'when God-given rights and liberties are violated' is especially important in African one-party states where the church must 'give a voice to the voiceless' (29:8:86, 5). The NCKK has been seen as being providentially called to become a forum for alternative political viewpoints in the absence of a second political party (5:12:86, 7). If it failed to rise to this challenge it would be bad for the nation and bad for the church.

## POSTSCRIPT

This article has inevitably, like the churchmen's protests, focussed on the negative features of Kenyan society. But this is only one side of the picture, as was acknowledged by the NCKK (28:11:86, 71), by the Catholic bishops (28:11:86, 8) and by Muge. Kenya should be compared not with Western Europe but with black Africa. Here Kenya stands out for its stability and prosperity. Its stability can be seen from the number of pan-african ecclesiastical, governmental and business institutions that have their headquarters in Nairobi. Kenya's free market approach has produced a relatively strong economy and the poor are better off than those in most other black African states,<sup>8</sup> Kenya's human rights record is not perfect, but is good compared with its neighbours. There is detention without trial, but at the end of 1989 there were no more detainees<sup>9</sup> and there was an amnesty for political exiles (5:1:90, 18). This changed during 1990 with the detention of advocates of a multi-party system. Press freedom is not unlimited, as is seen by the banning of *Beyond* magazine and other incidents. But it is significant that almost every allegation mentioned in this article can be documented from the *Weekly Review*, which feels free to report the comments of others, however cautious it may be in its own comments. P. 81 But on the other hand, a presbyterian clergyman was sentenced to six years' imprisonment in March 1990 for sedition. His crime was to have written offensively about the president and the government *in his personal diary* (4:5:90, 32-34). It should also be noted that this article was initially accepted for publication by another journal, but one of the editors feared that his organisation would be forced to leave Kenya if it

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<sup>8</sup> For a more negative assessment of Kenya's economy, cf. E. Mukonoweshuro, 'Authoritarian reaction to economic crises in Kenya', *Race and Class* 31:4, April-June 1990, 39-59.

<sup>9</sup> An article in the *Economist* (13:1:90, 49), which made many of the same points that Muge was making, claimed that there were still political prisoners in Kenya.



appeared. Whether or not that was a real danger, it is *perceived* to be a danger by folk in Kenya and their actions are limited accordingly.

The negative criticisms of Muge and others must be seen against the background of the positive features of Kenya, as he freely acknowledged. He did however warn that the situation was getting worse and that stability and prosperity could not be taken for granted. There was the danger that increasing corruption and injustice would give rise to an explosion which could destroy all that has been built. Hard though now it is to believe, it used to be Uganda that was called the pearl of Africa, a title now often awarded to Kenya. The example of Uganda shows the danger that could face Kenya. Muge's words, spoken in the interview at the end of 1989, have proved to be prophetic given the unrest of 1990 with its attendant dangers.

Muge died shortly after appearing before the Kanu Review Committee. This committee reported to a special delegates' conference of Kanu at the beginning of December 1990.<sup>10</sup> The report recommended the abolition of queuing, of the 70% rule and of the use of expulsion as a method of party discipline, the three matters that the committee had been set up to consider. At the conference the delegates' speeches were predominantly against making any such changes, but president Moi surprised everyone by speaking at the end strongly in favour of them, in the interests of national unity. His wishes prevailed and the conference voted to accept the report in full. (7:12:90, 4–21)

Prior to the conference the president had also asked parliament to restore the security of tenure of the auditor-general, the attorney-general and the judges (7:12:90, 5, 7). Thus almost all of the constitutional changes opposed by Muge have been or are being reversed. At this stage it is hard to estimate the full significance of these events. Many politicians will see them as the end of a process, while others will hope that they are just the beginning of a more far-reaching process. Only time will tell. Either way, the constitutional changes are relatively easy to make, the elimination of corruption, Muge's other complaint, will be much harder.

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## Educational Responses to Modern Pluralism

Brian V. Hill

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*This important article demands careful reflection. It is adapted from the author's keynote address delivered at an annual conference of the Australian Teachers Christian Fellowship. The author argues the case for recognising modern pluralism in society as a day of*

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<sup>10</sup> The full text of the report is found in *Weekly Review* 7:12:90, 37–60.

*opportunity for Christian educationalists, while not ignoring its dangers. He sees pluralism as a state of mind as well as a social reality. He argues his case on the basis of our Lord's dictum 'to be in the world but not of it' and examines four options being pursued by Christians today. Two he finds totally unacceptable, a third is compatible with Scripture but his preference is clearly with the fourth—that of modifying structures from within. He believes that only a gospel which is transcultural will withstand the shocks of pluralism. Education is more than schooling.*

Editor

To coin a phrase: 'some mothers do have em', i.e. those children who always seem to be 'in another world'. Their hold on life in this world appears, at best, to be spasmodic. Given instructions about what bus to catch, what to do when the oven chimer rings in the kitchen, what to buy at the food shop, they listen pleasantly and with apparent attention but remember not a thing. The bus they board will bear them to a place not of their devising, the kitchen will burn down, and they will buy pet-food for the Sunday roast. Their time-sense diverges from that of ordinary mortals, especially if they happen to be holding either a tea-towel or a telephone. Their thoughts move in different realms, and in the midst of family conversations they will suddenly and with great animation make statements that are totally out of context, very much in the style of characters in a Chekhov play. Many parents hold the belief, reasonable in the circumstances, that if the life-support systems of the home were to be taken away, such children would be [p. 83](#) quite unable to fend for themselves and would infallibly expire, without even being aware of their own demise.

## LIVING IN ANOTHER WORLD

It must be said however, that from the point of view of God, the heavenly parent of us all, many of *us* are living in another world, at a time when we ought to be about our business—or *his* business—in this one. But the reasons for *our* behaviour may not be as innocent as the reasons which account for our children's behaviour. Beginning with a desire to grasp spiritual realities more fully, we find the reinforcing effect of fellowship and devotional practice so enjoyable, as compared with the tedium of daily duty and the pressures of the work-place, that we turn inward. Superspirituality becomes a 'cop-out,' especially if we feel threatened by what is customarily described as the 'real' world.

Sadly, this is true at a more general level as well. Most Western Christians today are so dismayed by the present world-order that they are displaying withdrawal symptoms. They are shell-shocked by the speed with which the pluralistic society has come upon them, and defensive reactions predominate.

This is understandable. For many centuries, Western civilisation operated under the unified value-canopy of Christendom, which was culturally potent even into the middle of the present century. Many readers born before the Second World War can probably still remember what it was like to live in a society where the Christian ethic was generally endorsed and expectations of life-style were relatively uniform.

By contrast, today's Western societies are profoundly pluralistic. Older Christians have been slow to come to terms with this fact, and their reactions, especially in education, have tended to be defensive, and even escapist; rearguard actions in the face of *offensives* mounted by radical minorities. This is far removed from the spirit of Charles Wesley's indomitable call 'to serve the *present* age, my calling to fulfil.' The present article will advance the thesis that pluralism, far from being an unpalatable option, is a social given which can be turned to advantage by Christian educators and evangelists. I will be

working not just for more positive feelings towards our task, but a more clear-sighted acknowledgement of present-day social realities.

The argument will proceed in five stages. Firstly, we will study the fact of pluralism, leading on, secondly, to a biblical critique of the range of possible responses to this fact. We will then study the implications of this analysis for educational policy at two levels: p. 84 curriculum theory and institutional provision. Fifthly and finally, some specific and concrete directions for Christian activism in education will be proposed, in order that we may the more effectively fulfil our calling in the present age.

## THE FACT OF PLURALISM

There is a pluralism in definitions of pluralism. At one level, the term is applied to societies in which no one world-view or unified value-stance exercises a monopoly over the minds of its citizens: hence personal convictions and life-styles differ, while a middle ground of civic and economic cooperation is maintained by pragmatic negotiation at the level of procedural values. But this definition implies that societies in which governments are striving to enforce a unitary worldview—notably under some Islamic and Marxist regimes—escape the net cast by the definition.

But pluralism is more than a social state of affairs. It is an individual state of mind, whereby one is sensitive to the problematic status of all systems of belief and value, given the plurality of options now presented to human consciousness in the global village. To be aware of pluralism in this sense is not necessarily to become a relativist; one may continue to affirm that one world-view in particular is the true one, but such an affirmation will be understood to depend on acceptance of arguments for that belief which fall short of indisputable proof. It is no longer possible to assume that every right thinking person will be in agreement with oneself. The pluralised mind accepts the fact that a burden of proof rests on every believer. In this sense, even under the most totalitarian regimes of today, the mind of the average citizen is well on the way to being pluralised. This invites *four* further comments on the fact of pluralism.

First, it is *ubiquitous*, that is, it is a world-wide phenomenon which affects all aspects of our thought and practice. Only by disposing of our radios, television sets, newspapers and all books published since about 1840, and by developing a self-sufficient form of life which dispenses with all externally manufactured consumables and machines, might we block out its effects. And even then, we would be subject to laws about such things as property ownership and social discrimination which have been affected by the fact of pluralism. We are not talking about an optional form of life, but a social given in today's world.

Secondly, it is *irreversible*. Pluralism is not a temporary condition preceding a new intellectual monopoly. Short of imposing thought p. 85 control by methods of Orwellian magnitude which even China's Cultural Revolution failed to achieve, pluralism is with us to stay. From a Christian point of view, it is not only immature but unscriptural to hope for a return to any kind of Christian monopoly of thought such as existed in European Christendom, albeit adulterated even then by other pagan values. Biblically speaking, the wheat and the tares will grow together until the end of our aeon.<sup>1</sup> Sociologically speaking, human consciousness has turned a corner and the act involved in adopting a faith to live by is now more generally understood to be the existential wager which Pascal long ago perceived it to be.

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<sup>1</sup> [Matthew 13:24–30](#).

Thirdly, pluralism is *morally ambiguous*. Acknowledging that pluralism is a fact does not commit us to liking it. Our first definition—referring to pluralism as the state of a society—pre-supposes nothing about the desirability, nor even the viability of such a state. It is a *present* fact. Its future is another question which it is not the place of a definition to predetermine. Nevertheless it has been suggested that, simply as a matter of fact, pluralism in the second sense—of a state of consciousness—is irreversible. Its viability is not at issue, therefore, but its desirability is. Should we regard it as a good or bad thing? The truth is that it is a morally ambiguous fact; that is, it is both.

On the one hand, it threatens social unity by opening the door to communal rivalry and fragmentation; and it jeopardises *mental* integration by suggesting that all beliefs and values are culturally relative. On the other hand, it creates a bias towards negotiation and tolerance between groups, in preference to monopoly by the faith community with the most political power; and intellectually it fosters the habit of giving a reason for the faith that is in one.<sup>2</sup> Calling pluralism a fact does not mean that there is nothing we can do about it. There are, as we shall see in a moment, several options. But we do not have the option of pretending that pluralism as such can be ignored or banished.

Fourthly, pluralism is *politically unstable*. Even though the human consciousness is pluralised, that is no guarantee that people will accept the logical implication that therefore no-one has a moral right to impose a particular world-view on other persons by means of political coercion. Human ingenuity finds many ways to oppress one's fellows, and ideological monopoly has often been used as a convenient excuse for economic and other forms of exploitation.

Several factors have led to the pluralistic state of mind. These include cross-cultural migration, industrial revolution, and the access of the p. 86 masses to global communications. Not the least important of such factors, however, has been the development of civil liberties which have made it possible for different belief systems to co-exist in modernised societies. This development has been largely the product of Christianised civilisation. Freedoms of speech and assembly, equality in law, the right to own property and so on, have been fruits of a biblical view of persons and the dissenting tradition in the history of Christendom. They are not necessarily guaranteed by other world-views.

Yet it is neither realistic nor proper to expect that such values, essential to the operation of a pluralistic society, will be legitimated in that society by agreement with the Christian world-view. Hence they must be defended on more pragmatic and generally acknowledged grounds, as, to a large extent, they can be. Thus, for example, the Constitution of India borrows directly from the human rights tradition of Christianised Europe to describe its principles of secular democracy, with the result that its political rationale is, in some important respects, more just than the Hindu and Muslim world-views dominant in that country. Would that the Afrikaner approach to justice issues was as biblical as the preamble to India's secular constitution!

In a pluralistic society, individual rights and liberties are always vulnerable and call for continuous negotiation. Many Christians today are discovering that they cannot assume that the Christianised pre-war consensus still holds. It follows that they must vigilantly and continuously re-negotiate community acceptance of such values as equality, justice and compassion, appealing not to divine fiat but to secular democratic theory. All too often however, Christians either react negatively by scolding their neighbours for departing from biblical teaching (without any genuine expectation that this will win people back to the faith—it is just a petulant way of lashing out) or they quit the field and

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<sup>2</sup> [1 Peter 3:15](#).

wash their hands of responsibility for the health of society. Except that they cannot quit the field for there are no desert islands left. And God *does* hold them responsible for the health of society.<sup>3</sup>

## INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO PLURALISM

Let us then attempt to categorise the possible responses Christians may make to pluralism. A framework is provided by the great and familiar prayer of Jesus for his disciples in [John 17](#). On the face of it, the prayer [p. 87](#) multiplies paradoxes. Jesus thanks the Father for giving him the disciples *out* of the world (v. [6](#)) but later says he is not asking for them to be taken out of the world (v. [15](#)). He describes them as still *in* the world (v. [11](#)), and says that he is in fact sending them into the world (v. [18](#)). Yet he also prays for them to be 'in us' (v. [21](#)), that is, domiciled in the Godhead.

The paradoxes are resolved by the Lord's statement that the disciples are not *of* the world' (vv. [14](#), [16](#)), given that the apostle's use of the word 'world' is in reference to the cultural reality developed by the human race independent of allegiance to God. Those who become friends of God cease to be captives of this reality, not by being bodily removed from it, but by staying 'in, but not of' it. When Jesus sends them back into the world, their steps are to echo his. They are to identify with their fellows, in order to mediate effectively to them the higher reality of identification with Christ.

How are we to operationalise this concept, in terms of Christian responses to pluralism? The reaction of some Christians is to *deny* the pluralism which now characterises the present world order; to pretend it is not a fact, but a temporary aberration or else the final apostasy. Either way we need not take it seriously. Some will work to win back political power for the Christian constituency, so that pluralism can be outlawed by decree. Others will ignore a world order they believe to be collapsing, and focus on a narrowly individualistic form of personal evangelism, coupled with superspiritual preparations for the Rapture back in the church fellowship. The key to both strategies is a refusal to face the reality that pluralism is a fact of the present world order. In responding to Christ's command to go into this world, they elect, as Jonah did, to flee to a different and simpler reality. For all practical purposes, they are out of this world.

Secondly, there are some other Christians to whom the fact of pluralism has become so obvious and central that they have elected to *embrace* it as the cornerstone of a revision of Christian belief. The first step is to see in religious pluralism proof that all world-views are after all but fumbling attempts to express the inexpressible. There are many paths up the mountain; many ways to please God, or the Buddha within each of us. The embarrassingly particularist prayer of [John 17](#) is to be softened by focusing out of context on one verse, the twenty first, where Jesus prays 'That all of them may be one.' This is the universalist terminal point to which we are led by the axioms of liberal Christianity. The erstwhile Christian is now back in, *and of*, the world, a captive to the humanism which denies the historical intervention of God in Christ. [p. 88](#)

Neither of these responses is in harmony with Christ's prayer. In the first case, there has been an acceptance of Christ at the expense of acceptance of the reality in which we are to fulfil his mission. In the second case, there has been acceptance of the reality of pluralism at the expense of acceptance of Christ and his mission. The prayer requires

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<sup>3</sup> To the voices of such Old Testament prophets as Elijah, Isaiah, Amos and Micah may be added Paul's in [Romans 13](#), [James 1:27](#) and Jesus's call to be savouring salt in society ([Matt. 23:13-16](#)), to work for social justice ([Matt. 23:23](#)), and to liberate the needy ([Matt. 25:31-46](#)).

recognition of the two realities in their proper contexts: the reality of this present age *and* the reality of Christ's ultimate lordship. We are to be in, but not of the world.

## **VIABLE RESPONSES TO HUMANISM**

We may now identify a range of Christian responses which attempt to represent this dialectical perspective. Over-simplifying, they group into responses which set out to *compete* with alternative social options and structures, and those which attempt to *modify* those options and structures from within. Both strategies recognise the realities of valuepluralism and the secular democratic process. Both would consider that they were trying to savour society by presenting a persuasive, rather than a coercive Christian presence. The first strategy, however, emphasises the creation of distinctively Christian agencies and structures, whereas the second emphasises participation, as far as conscience permits, in the agencies and structures of the general community. These distinctions are conceptual, but not necessarily exclusive in operation. The individual Christian may be operating on both levels at once in his or her total life-style.

The competitor stance seeks to avoid compromise with the world's disregard of God by maintaining agencies parallel to those of the secular society, but operating within a distinctively biblical rationale. Such agencies may range from the Christian home to the Christian hospital, welfare agency, school, business, social club and political party. Typically, Catholic and Reformed minority groups have favoured this strategy. It achieves clarity of purpose but at the cost of some social division and possible loss of identification and communication with the world.

The modifier stance seeks to overcome these problems by seeding Christians in the agencies of the secular state, where they may interact more authentically with non-believers, and commend their otherworldly perspective by the fruits it bears in this world. Typically, Christians in countries which still have state churches—Catholic or Lutheran, in the main—have favoured this stance, though their justifications tend to look back to the Constantinian settlement rather than the present fact of pluralism. More in tune with modern realities [p. 89](#) are those non-conformist traditions which, because of their own history, are already predisposed to embrace the safeguards to individual liberty which pluralism offers. The modifier strategy, but at the cost, potentially, of compromising its goals and having its influence negated by weight of numbers.

It is not possible to judge between these two stances purely on the basis of biblical imperatives. They represent two kinds of social theory compatible with Scripture though not with each other. It is probably desirable that we preserve a dialectical tension between them by honouring Christian activism of both kinds, rather than by insisting that only one can be right. For either can go bad. The competitor stance can be pressed so hard that it results in our opting out of the mainstream of community life to the point where it becomes that denial of pluralism which I described earlier. The modifier stance can become so conforming to the systems of this world that its servanthood to Caesar extinguishes the higher claims of the Lord God, and it lapses into that uncritical embrace of pluralism which was also described earlier.

## **CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES**

The four kinds of response I have analysed above translate fairly easily into contemporary educational strategies. Those for example who strive to keep the state education system Christian and to exclude the study of other value stances (as does the Queensland Fundamentalist lobby) are attempting to deny the fact of Pluralism. An example of the

converse is those British and Australian theorists who argue that religious studies in state schools should accord no more than equal time to Christianity alongside other religious traditions. They are embracing pluralism too completely. The other two groups of strategies are exemplified by policies of Christian school development on the one hand as against policies of involvement in state education on the other.

If the author's own preference, at the level of theory, runs in the direction of the latter, it is, no doubt, influenced partly by a nonconformist and financially straitened upbringing. But it is also influenced by the conviction that most current moves to multiply Christian school alternatives are defensive and tend to reflect a desire to repudiate pluralism rather than to work through it redemptively. This becomes apparent not only in their policy of institutional segregation, but also in their principles of curriculum selection. I am also convinced that Christians are relinquishing too easily their spheres of influence in state structures, almost as if out of pique because they are not automatically listened to as they were in the past. Yet, numerically, they are a far more substantial interest group than any of the radical minorities who are attempting to swing the curriculum towards value stances unacceptable to Christians.

As I have argued on previous occasions,<sup>4</sup> this is not a time to cry 'foul' and to quit the field. Non-Christian trends do not add up to a unified and well-orchestrated secular humanist conspiracy. The opposition is even more pluralised than the Christian church! We should be looking for allies, not pre-judging as enemies those non-Christians with whom we could reasonably expect to find much common ground at the levels of community concern and education policy.

In short, there are good grounds for regarding pluralism, with all its risks and ambiguities, as presenting us with a day of opportunity. Avenues are open for dialogue with people of other persuasions in ways which monopolistic societies of the past discouraged. In the pluralistic society, there are not only people who believe in other gods, but people who have seized the opportunity to believe in nothing, only to find that there is an emptiness at the core of their existence and attempts at enjoyment. Our goodwill and positive services, as we interact with them on the secular middle ground of the pluralistic society, can return a hundred-fold harvest, in terms not only of personal evangelism but of improvement in the general health of society. But what does all this imply for curriculum selection and institutional provision in the world education?

## CURRICULUM SELECTION

In the broadest terms, what curriculum components are needed to equip our children to fulfil their calling in the present age? Let us try to breathe life into a debate which has become platitudinous (though not for that reason, less important) by considering a special case. In November 1984, it was the author's privilege to be invited to speak in Manila on the education of the children of missionaries.

The question to be addressed was: What is an appropriate curriculum for such children, suspended, as it were, between the culture of which their parents were native, and the culture indigenous to the location of missionary service? p. 91

It seemed that four elements were important, given that for most the parental culture (PC) was western and the indigenous culture (IC) was of the Two-Thirds World. First, missionary children *did* need to achieve an adequate adjustment to the PC. This was their

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. Brian V. Hill, 'Going Into All the World ... of Education,' *Journal of Christian Education*. Papers 77, July 1983, pp. 1-2 and 'Free, Compulsory and Secular: A Slogan Revisited,' *op. cit.*, Papers 78, Nov. 1983, pp. 70-71.

racial background, and they might well fail to obtain citizenship or workpermits in the country of service when they grew up, supposing that they did want to stay on.

Nevertheless, for the time being at least, they were residents of this country, growing up in the IC. It would be psychologically stunting to act as if this culture did not exist or was not worthy of serious study, in areas such as language, literature, history and religion.<sup>5</sup> Thus far, we get a picture of a curriculum with two discrete strands of study, possibly subjecting one strand—the IC—to many unfavourable comparisons because of ethnocentric bias. Therefore it was needful to adopt a more consciously multicultural approach, whereby the validity of differences in ethnicity and cultural tradition would be more generously acknowledged.

It could be objected that this concession would not be necessary for children who would ultimately be reentering the parental culture. Such a reply however, would not only be regrettably ethnocentric but also unrealistic, given that western cultures like the U.S.A., Britain and Australia are themselves currently in the throes of accommodating to multiculturalism (MC) within their respective borders. This is precisely one of the concomitants of that fact of pluralism which we have been analysing.

But it is possible for MC to be interpreted in a very descriptive, socially adjustive way, without reflection on the comparative worth of the traditions studied. This is often seen as the safest course to pursue in state schools because of its supposed neutrality. But even if it were possible to achieve complete impartiality in the descriptive study of cultural differences, the result would not be neutral but an encouragement to relativism and conformity to the status quo.

There is, therefore, an additional need for what we shall call transcultural studies (TC). By these are meant studies which develop in students a critical awareness of culture as such and a capacity to choose consciously what values and beliefs they themselves will embrace. One component of such studies would be the study of Christian apologetics. This implies not just a knowledge of what p.92 Christians believe—or, more particularly, what Christians in one's own sect or denomination believe, passed on as unchallengeable truth—but how these truth claims stand up to challenge from other faiths, and how the biblical gospel stands over against all cultures including the Christianised sub-culture to which one belongs.

There is a risk in such a TC approach that the child may not conform to the particular model of Christian living exemplified by the parents, but the important thing is not to follow man but to follow God.<sup>6</sup> Only a gospel which is TC in this sense will be proof against the shocks of pluralism.

This, then is our special case-study, oriented to the survival needs—both psychological and spiritual—of the missionary child. Has it anything to suggest concerning children reared entirely in the parents' homeland? It assuredly has, for by analogy, every child of Christian parents is an expatriate. The parents' sub-culture is Christian, a minority group living within a larger indigenous culture where pluralistic value-diversity prevails. The two strands are already implicit.

Furthermore, as has already been said, that larger culture is now multicultural, and an adequate education requires that one be able to understand, tolerate, and appreciate

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<sup>5</sup> Even on these criteria alone, certain patterns of western enclave boarding school sponsored by some missionary societies fall seriously short, to the detriment of their students' development.

<sup>6</sup> There is a poignant demonstration of this tension in Jim Wallis's discussion of his protracted struggle towards independent personal faith, freed from the inadequate theology of the Great American Dream to which his early upbringing had conditioned him. See Jim Wallis, *The New Radical*, Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1983.



difference without automatically branding it as evil or inferior. So MC is a necessary component. But further than this, the child needs to acquire a critical awareness of cultural mechanisms—even of its own Christian sub-cultural conditioning—in order to attain a robust personal faith capable of withstanding the pressures of a pluralised consciousness. Therefore TC studies are just as necessary in this case as in that of the missionary child.

Since TC studies are the keystone of the curriculum model we are propounding, more needs to be said about their Christian content.<sup>7</sup> Factual understanding of the biblical story of God’s dealings with Israel and the young church is a necessary underpinning. Exposure to the teachings of Christ and the prophets will itself pull away many cultural blinkers and provoke questions about current beliefs and practices. Discussion and problem-solving will be methods at least as important in this as didactic teaching.

It then becomes appropriate to make the student aware of other faiths, religious and secularist, in order to develop an appreciation of [p. 93](#) the way humans have responded to their situation, some pursuing the religious quest with admirable singleness of heart, though not Christians. Beyond the evidence of pluralism however, lies the application of Christian apologetic—the genuine attempt to enter into the thought forms of those who oppose us in order to defend the reality claims of Christianity in relevant terms.

For many centuries we have enjoyed teaching the Christian worldview as fact, and ridiculing those who questioned it. We must now raise up young people who recognise its status as faith, and who have a confident capacity to demonstrate its reasonableness and adequacy to friends who believe differently.

The odd thing in all this is that we get more clues about how to reach this goal from the New Testament than from any subsequent era, ranging from the mediaeval synthesis to the present day. For society in the time of Christ was truly pluralist. There was no favoured treatment for the gospel. Christ and Paul dialogued with people wherever they were in their thinking. And it was Peter who saw value in always being ready to give reasons for our faith.

Ultimately then, the curriculum for life we offer our children must provide genuine initiation into four dimensions of awareness: the subculture of the home and the Christian fellowship; the dominant cultural patterns of our society; more generally, the multicultural riches of that society; and, standing over against all three, transcultural studies, including the gospel of Christ as both proclamation and apologia. The next question is: what organised learning environments are required to enable our children to benefit from such a curriculum?

## **EDUCATION IS MORE THAN SCHOOLING**

It is important to begin this section by emphasising that education is more than schooling. All our educational objectives may not be achievable in the specialised, professionalised environment of school. Indeed, as the author has said elsewhere, voluntary learning environments such as youth groups should be viewed not just as a supplementary to schooling but as complementary. The voluntary sector, because of its untidy diversity and informality is vastly underrated by governments and educational theorists. Hence the point needs to be made that the curriculum components which we have been describing, though relevant to planning school curriculum, have implications beyond education by schooling.

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<sup>7</sup> And more is said about their other than Christian content in ‘Part 2. A suggested Rationale’.

This point emerged in a particularly poignant way when the author was studying the education of the children of missionaries. A choice [p. 94](#) that many missionary parents feel obliged to make is to send their children away to boarding schools: either those run by expatriates in the country of service or those available in the country of origin. Such practices arouse a number of misgivings about the way many schools of this kind see their function. Some operate as tightly knit western enclaves, minimising student contact with the local culture and confining religious studies to authoritative Christian teaching. The completeness of their control over the learning environment of the students is something many Christian day schools envy. But should they?

Studies pioneered by Goffman in the 'sixties gave rise to a term widely used today in sociological circles.<sup>8</sup> It is the term 'total institution.' It refers to those kinds of organisation which accommodate clients in whole-day, highly regulated environments where the individual's areas of choice, responsibility, free activity and outside contact are minimised. Examples are psychiatric hospitals, children's and old people's homes, prisons, and boarding schools. Even day schools reflect many of these features. The interesting thing is that, regardless of the particular reason for which the institution may have been set up, its effects on the inmates tend to be similar. Characteristic psychological problems can develop, including the stunting of the powers of inmates to make choices, take responsibility, and experience natural relationships.

The moral of this story for boarding schools is the need to extend their students' areas of freedom and voluntary relationships as much as possible, especially by interacting with the adjacent community. The hot-house effect is in any case anti-educational, for it prevents students from learning, under guidance, what the pluralistic society is really like.

These reservations about the boarding school option prompted a new look at other learning environments which might possibly be available to the missionary child. There has been a growth in the development of correspondence courses, for example, and some enthusiasm for the home school movement. The home, again, *is* underrated as a learning environment and, in terms of our curriculum model, has much to contribute directly to learning about the parental culture and the transcultural gospel of Christ. We should feel uneasiness, however, about the tendency to extend the *schooling* model to the home. Placing the quasi-professional role of schoolteacher on parents can reduce their credibility as parents and friends who love their children regardless of their academic levels. [p. 95](#)

Given the importance of home nurture and community life it seemed valuable to question the frequency with which the boarding school solution was preferred. Sometimes it is the missionary parent's only real option, in which case our hints about reform in the boarding school model itself are relevant. Often, however, a preparedness to suffer the academic imperfections of local indigenous schooling can in any case lead to a more all round fulfilment of our curriculum objectives. Thus the indigenous culture is taken more seriously. Parents can guide and monitor the multicultural sensitivity of the child, and they and the local church can lay foundations for a transcultural awareness of Christianity and other faiths. Deficiencies in the more academic aspects of education in the parental culture can be made up by correspondence courses, intensive schools in local vacation time, correspondence coaching by the home church and support group in the country of parental origin, and so on. Keener transcultural consciousness can be developed by, for example, itinerant teaching teams moving through missionary regions and simultaneously helping older youth and adult church members in this regard.

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<sup>8</sup> Erving Goffman, *Asylums*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961.

Again our specialised case-study has helped to illuminate the general issue, in this case that of how to provide for the education of our children. Hopefully it has reduced our western tendency to treat the school as the universal solvent. It is as necessary for ordinary parents as it is for expatriates to regain their confidence in the educational role of the home, to exercise their responsibility to be involved as the community in school policies and to encourage and direct their children towards worthy voluntary groups and activities. The task of the local church has also been highlighted in respect of providing studies which not only tell the gospel story but develop the capacity of members to present a credible Christian apologetic to their neighbours.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

But such comments carry us to into the final phase of this analysis, which is to derive some concrete and specific Christian responses in education to the fact of pluralism in our time. It will be sufficient to list them.

1. We must foster greater mutual respect and continuing dialogue between Christians working in the public and private sectors of education, thus reducing the tendency of members of the body of Christ to question each other's spirituality and veer to extreme positions. p. 96
2. We must enhance the status of parents within the educational processes affecting their children, while at the same time avoiding over-formalisation of their teaching role.
3. We must work politically to reduce the power of centralised departments and teachers' unions to override the wishes of communities of parents with regard to the treatment of students and the representation of value-stances in the school curriculum.
4. We must encourage Christians to become involved in the schools, private or public, which their children attend, and to work for greater recognition by schools and governments of the complementary contributions of voluntary organisations and community services to the education of children.
5. We must foster trends which make school curricula more truly and fairly multicultural in emphasis, while at the same time welcoming attempts to help students become more critically aware of the processes by which they themselves are being acculturated.
6. We must support moves to acquaint students with the religious traditions influential in their environment, and to encourage them to ask appropriate questions about their values and truth claims.
7. We must encourage more attention in the teaching programmes of churches to raising the consciousness of our people with respect to the fact and challenge of pluralism and the mechanisms of religious and cultural conditioning, and to developing the ability to offer rational and relevant defence of the faith.
8. We must draw more on missionaries and other Christians with expatriate experience to enhance the transcultural awareness of church members, while conversely seeking to be of more help to them in their efforts to obtain a balanced education for their children.
9. The Australian Teachers' Christian Fellowship and other similar national organisations should sponsor curriculum projects to provide resources for the raising of transcultural awareness and the development of apologetic skills in both older school students and adult church members.

The reader will no doubt see ways of refining and extending this agenda, but our aim in providing it has been not to exhaust the possibilities but to illustrate them. The prospect of tackling such tasks is surely exciting, because the needs they represent bring us at one and the same time closer to the milieu of the New Testament and closer to our non-Christian neighbours in the present age. We have been retreating for too long. Trumpeter, sound the advance!

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# The Use of Comics for Evangelism Among Female Factory Workers

Elena Chen

*Reprinted with permission from Case Studies in Christian Communication in an Asian Context ed. by Ross W. James (Abridged)*

*Ross W. James writes, 'In 1986–87 the Communication and Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship co-sponsored a Master of Theology in Communications degree programme under the auspices of the Asian Theological Seminary, Manila, Philippines. The primary aim of the programme was to provide communications training for Christian leaders and theological educators, so they, in turn, could offer training and communications courses in their various institutions. Seventeen students from six Asian countries undertook the programme which consisted of coursework and a major field project.*

*A secondary aim of the programme was to develop and provide resources to promote the study of communications in theological seminaries and Bible schools in Asia. The resources would also assist curriculum planners of programmes similar to the THM or academic administrators planning communication courses to be integrated into existing seminary programmes at various academic levels. Hence this book which provides a Reader of case studies of communication theory and practice in an Asian context. The case studies were prepared by graduate students to meet the requirements of the major field project.'*

*Of the six case studies I am including excerpts from one, the use of comics in evangelism as a contribution to the witness of the Gospel in the market place of the lower working class. Female factory workers are a neglected 'peoples group' that need special focus. The author of this case study, Elena Chen states, 'Today the comic is the most influential mass medium among the semi-literate Filipinos'. This is sufficient justification for including this study in this issue of ERT.*

Editor

## INTRODUCTION

Every generation has the responsibility to reach its own for Christ. Among the neglected members of our society are innumerable factory p. 98 workers who have as much right to hear the Gospel as anyone else, having been created by God. Since most factory workers

have had very little education, Christian literature in full textual form can never truly be appreciated nor read and understood extensively by most of them.

It is now commonplace for the electronic media, as well as the print media to be used extensively in evangelism. There is, however, among the less privileged masses a rather popular medium, that, to all appearances has not been fully availed of. This is the 'comic' medium, the illustrated literature conveyed through a series of pictures.

To be more specific, this study was designed with ten objectives:

1. To determine the comic reading habits of the female factory workers;
2. To determine the female factory workers' level of knowledge about the Christian Gospel;
3. To determine the female factory workers' attitude toward God;
4. To determine the female factory workers' attitude toward using comics as a medium of evangelism;
5. To determine the areas of the interest and needs in the lives of female factory workers;
6. To create a comic on evangelism for the purpose of testing its effectivity;
7. To determine the artwork's attractiveness to the intended audience;
8. To determine the level of message comprehension and retention through the use of the comic;
9. To determine the message relevance and believability of the comic;
10. To determine if some knowledge change occurs after reading the comic.

Unless the different assumptions held by a people are understood by the communicator, he is unlikely to bring about significant change. It is necessary to be aware of the influences that have contributed to the making of the people to whom a message is to be communicated. It is useful, then, to briefly outline the Filipino worldview prior to developing a communication strategy for Filipino factory workers.

## **FILIPINO WORLDVIEW**

The Filipino in the past 25 years has emerged as the sum total of social strains and cultural elements that are cosmopolitan in nature. He is both Oriental and Occidental (Panopio et al., 1978). **P. 99**

The oriental nature of the Filipino is the core of his moral and social conscience and cultural identity centered on interpersonal and social relationships that revolve around 'blood ties', marriage and ritual kinship. The Spanish influenced the Filipino's religious, political, economic and educational life, his language, dress and diet. The Americans introduced the democratic system of government, popularized education and infused new ideals pertaining to the family, economy, government, education, religion, recreation and health and welfare. The years of Japanese occupation impressed upon the Filipino a rugged materialistic outlook. Although caught in a complicated web of conflicting values and engaged in a 'strain for consistency' among different value orientations, Filipinos have displayed remarkable adaptability resulting in a 'many-sided' cultural heritage.

The Filipino is a unique blend of an Asian and Western ethic. Thus his placement on the philosophical orientation continuum between an Asian pessimism about the future which results in immediate gratification and a Western optimism about the future which places faith in the future and is willing to withhold immediate gratification for the hope of increased future benefits should be considered (Hennig, 1983). The fatalistic view of the Filipinos concerning the future directs some to bank on luck (*suwerte*) to make life physically less difficult. This Asian ethic clashes dramatically with the Western ethic

which has been superimposed to a greater or lesser degree on the Filipino. The Filipino who leans toward the Western ethic is optimistic about life and is willing to defer immediate gratification to plan for a better life in the future.

Filipino worldview is supernaturalistic, based on myth, tradition, and mystical phenomena full of spirits, magic, and superstition (Andres, 1981 ). The Filipino views the world as one over which he has little or no control; success or failure is largely dependent upon the supernatural beings or spirits. This fatalistic outlook contributes to the Filipino's lack of foresight, his contentment with the past, his indolence and lack of initiative, self reliance, or pioneering spirit. In other words, the Filipino is less autonomous, more dependent, more oriented to authoritarian ways rather than to innovation or entrepreneurship (Rosario-Braid, 1983).

Given that, a bridge to reach Filipinos is necessary to meet this need: introducing Christ as someone who can meet their every need, who can be faithful in times of crises, a reliable source in major and minor decision making.

The total adoption of Christianity by Filipinos reflects the great and untiring deeds of the Spanish friars. To many Filipinos, Christianity is p.100 already part of life and is deeply embedded in the inner recesses of their hearts. Thus, the Philippines has since been the only Christian nation in the Far East (Celis, 1974). Much of Christianity as practised by the Filipino is diluted with folk religion. More of rituals and traditions rather than practical application. Nevertheless, the Filipino is religious (Lynch & Makil, 1968). He is more open to things which concern the religious aspect. This only shows that the Filipino is not hostile to the preaching of the Gospel. He is an open field ready for sowing.

## COMICS IN THE PHILIPPINES

This study is focused on the medium of comics for disseminating the Gospel among female factory workers. While comics seem properly to belong to the print medium, they may however be regarded as a special medium in themselves. Comics are audio-visual in print, (Ong, 1976) a film on paper, a movie which is not a succession of fleeting images but pictures and words one can read in a time sequence, examine and ponder again and again (Feuter, 1982).

However, a medium is only a means. Communication can only be effective when the medium matches the message and the audience, as well as the method of using the medium. To use the comic medium effectively requires a thorough study in the light of its relationship with the message, the audience and the usage as well.

### The Message in Comics

The comics of the Philippines contain a variety of themes. There are the melodrama which are mostly love stories, triangles, and all their possible permutations; the fantasy stories with fantastic characters such as super heroes (usually the flying variety), super animals (from flying and talking horses to flying and talking birds), mythic characters, both heroes and villains (usually the variety with snakes on their head or shoulders), super things (from a flying car to a moving skeletal hand), human beings endowed with super or divine or demonic powers, interesting and mysterious freaks (from a flying elephant boy to a beautiful woman with two demonic creatures on her breast), and other fantasies that are limited only by the writer's and illustrator's imagination; adventure and action stories, set in the jungle or the hardcourt or the boxing ring. Besides all these novels, there are *katatawanan* (humour) pages, sex comics, the opinion moulding comics (utilized to disseminate information on health, farming, government policies and projects, etc.), documentary and biographical p.101 comics (which illustrate historical events or lives

of well known historical figures), and religious comics (dealing with religious topics) (Del Mundo, 1986).

It has been objected that comics are associated with topics that are not taken seriously and therefore may not be suitable for catechetics. Ong (1976: 35) reacted to the objection by stating, 'This is like saying guitars should not be used for religious music'. He felt that the wide range of topics for which comics are used today should answer this objection. Feuter (1982) declares that the problem of combining factual and fantasy to recapture the specificity of the biblical writings in comics can be solved when Christians are delivered from their obsession with biblical knowledge. Therefore, Christians cannot turn their backs on comics if they want to reach their generation with the Gospel.

In the Philippines, the Communication Foundation of Asia produced a religious comic called 'Gospel Komiks'. The comics use biblical themes and apply them into Filipino's daily life situations. This type of comic has been widely circulated among Catholic institutions, schools and other organizations as a means of teaching catechetics. Aside from the 'Gospel Komiks', CFA also published a three volume 'Illustrated Bible' (Bible stories taken from the Old and New Testaments). The 'Illustrated Bible' was written in Tagalog and has been translated into Cebuano, one of the major dialects of the Philippines. Other Christian organizations and publishers such as the Alliance Publishers, OMF Literature Inc., OMNICOM, and CGM have produced comics intended for evangelism, but so far, CFA is the only organization which has been deeply involved in regular production of religious comics.

Commercial comics that merely entertain, without any effort to teach anything, are easier and cheaper to produce because entertaining stories can be woven out of pure fantasy without offering any positive values or providing them a systematic way. On the other hand, educational comics which ideally should be just as entertaining, require much more time, effort and expertise to prepare. Not only good story-telling and good artwork are needed here, behind the story and the artwork must go research into the audience.

### **The Audience for Comics**

According to Reves' (1986) survey there are fifty comic magazines published in the Philippines, with a combined circulation of more than two million copies. It is estimated that there are 16 million regular readers of the comics from Aparri to Jolo (the northernmost tip of the [p. 102](#) country to the southernmost point), if one counts those who borrow or lend their copies for a fee. When one considers that the total population of the Philippines is 44 million, the number of comics readers represents a diffusion rate of 1 to 4. Although most of the readers are not affluent, they spend an average of two million pesos a week—or more than 100 million pesos a year—on this popular medium.

While most of the comic readers and buyers are obviously children, teenagers and adults also read comics. A household survey of Greater Manila in 1973 showed that 46% of the respondents 14 years old and above had read one or more local comics within a week of the survey. Among the regular comic readers, the highest percentage belonged to the 20–29 age group, most of which had reached high school and belonged to the lower class homes. The survey also showed that female comic readers exceeded male readers by 7%.

Another study (Institute of Philippine Culture, 1980) on reading habits of Filipinos found that comics were one of the most popular print media together with newspapers which tended to be used between 1 to 15 times a month. Exposure to comics was higher among younger persons and to a lesser extent, among never-married respondents, persons with higher education, and respondents who lived in houses judged to be in good state of repair.

The study also found that the more affluent persons tend to devote slightly more time to reading of books and comics than do the less affluent. But reading assorted kinds of comic books does not differ substantially by socioeconomic status. However, the higher the level of education, the lower the preference for comics, as the best reading materials for entertainment.

How do readers receive evangelistic messages presented through the comics medium? The Gospel Ad Ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ can testify to its effectiveness, through Gospel Ads, published in various secular magazines, comics, and newspapers (Gospel Ad Ministry, 1986).

In January–November 1985, 7,350 people responded to the ads. The messages which appear to be well received, dealt with adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, greed for wealth and power, loneliness, depression, love, hate, gambling, drug-addiction, horoscopes, fortune telling and many other areas of life which are contrary to what the Bible teaches.

In the Philippines, just as in other countries with pronounced language differences between regions or ethnic groups, comics form one medium of communication that can boast of reaching every p.103 population group. The comics literature over half a century has reflected the changing position, tastes, and worldview of the Filipino masses. Today, the comic is unquestionably the most influential mass medium among the semi-literate Filipinos (Marcelo, 1980).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

This pilot study was intended to find out the receptivity towards comics used as a medium of evangelization among female factory workers. The study was divided into three main parts: *Part I* to determine the respondents' comic reading habits, level of knowledge about the Christian Gospel, their attitude toward God, attitude toward using comics as a tool of evangelism, and their main interests and felt needs in life; *Part II* the conceptualizing and creating of a comic book meant for evangelism; *Part III* the testing of the created comic book to determine its effectiveness in carrying out evangelistic messages.

The sampling method employed was the area cluster sample, which confines interviewing to reduce costs but still has an acceptable representative sample (Engel, 1977). Five garment-manufacturing companies were located in Quezon City. Three out of five companies belonged to the small-scale home industry category which employ a maximum of six workers, while the bigger companies employ around 20–30 workers. Respondents were chosen either on a voluntary basis from bigger companies or by special request from the smaller companies.

A total of 30 respondents were employed for survey 1, and 2–6 representatives per company. The same respondents were employed in both surveys in order to gauge accuracy of responses and at the same time to detect changes in their knowledge of the Gospel content.

All data was gathered through personal interviews, for the reason that the presence of the researcher permits greater ability to probe and clarify answers. All interviews were administered by the researcher herself, using two sets of questionnaires as a guide—one set for the first survey and another set for the second survey.

The respondents were females, working in garment manufacturing companies as sewers (20), shaders, cutters and packers (8) and in supervisory positions (2).

All data gathered from survey 1 regarding the respondents' background characteristics provided a basic framework for the creation of the comic book intended for evangelism. The procedure started with the conceptualization of the basic story and



transforming it into a script with captions and dialogue. Then the illustrator visualized p. 104 the script and put suitable illustrations into frames divided accordingly in every page of the comic book. After the artwork was completed, the comic book was reproduced and distributed to all 30 respondents before the second interview took place. This enabled the respondents to read the comic book. Then the comic was tested for effectiveness in carrying evangelistic messages.

In the presentation of findings that follows, a summary of the respondent's profile is provided, their comic reading habits, attitudes toward Biblical themes in comics, attitudes toward God, level of knowledge about Christian theological themes, and areas of interest and felt needs in life. The data was analyzed to help assess whether comics could be used as a communications medium to factory workers and to identify areas that could be used in the comic book story.

### **Profile of Respondents**

*Age:* most respondents (40%) were in the age bracket of 26–34 and 33% were in the 19–25 group; 16% were under 18 years and 10% were over 35 years of age. *Civil status:* 18 (60%) of the 30 respondents were single, 11 (34%) married, and 1 divorced.

*Education:* 22 reached elementary and high school level and of the seven who attended college only two were able to finish.

*Religion:* only one respondent was Protestant, the others were Roman Catholic. Their responses regarding self-perceived religiosity indicated differences in perception. Only four regarded themselves as 'very religious', 23 as 'a little religious' and three as 'not religious'. Most of the respondents perceived religiosity as activities done in fulfilment of their religious obligations to a certain faith. For example, church attendance, prayer, Bible reading, obeying God's commandments. Only two people related their religiosity to personal faith in Christ.

The sample can then be described as urban, literate, working class, with a basic religious knowledge.

### **Comic Reading Habits/Practices**

Sixteen (53%) read comics less than once a week and the others read comics only once a week. This was not because they lack interest in comics but mainly because of the lack of time, money and comic materials. Most preferred Tagalog language comics and eight liked English language comics, with one preferring Ilocano. Some cited a p. 105 preference for both English and Tagalog. When given a choice of different types of comics, most respondents selected educational comics followed by fantasy, humour, romance, horror, and, finally, drama. By selecting educational comics first, these respondents indicated they wanted to learn from their reading.

### **Interest in Comics with Bible Themes**

Most respondents were either interested (43%) or fairly interested (46%) in comics with Bible themes. A number of respondents (43%) said that, during the past six months, they had read such comics, but could not recall the titles, apart from the more commonly known such as 'St John', 'Gospel Comics' and 'Kasaysayan ni Hesus'. Religious comics were rated as interesting, informative and believable. Respondents agreed that comics could be used as a medium to explain biblical truth. They said that complicated matters in the Bible can be made more understandable with interesting illustrations.

### **Bible Readership, Frequency and Reasons for not Reading it**

Most respondents (76%) indicated they read the Bible but of these only two read it every day and the others said they read it less than once a week. Four of the seven who did not read the Bible said they had no Bible and others said they did not have time to read it. Of the respondents who read the Bible nearly all said it was inspired by God, but one said it was a product of man's imagination. This finding shows that respondents were not antagonistic to the Scripture but viewed it positively. Those not reading it also had positive attitudes toward the Bible but were not reading it because of other reasons.

### **Theological Concepts**

All respondents believed in the existence of heaven but five did not believe in the existence of hell. Three believed God would not send anyone to hell and one did not know who could go to heaven. Only one person said that people needed to accept Christ as Saviour in order to gain entrance to heaven—the others believing good works and few sins will allow people into heaven. Sixty-six percent of respondents said hell would be punishment for those who commit major sins such as adultery and murder. Most (83%) believed that sin is some action which goes against the laws of man, such as disobeying traffic rules, stealing or murder etc. These laws dealt more with the [p. 106](#) relationship between man and man, rather than between man and God. Most believed everyone sinned, but three thought it was possible for some people to never commit any sin. Half of the respondents described Jesus as the Son of God, six described him as the Saviour of men's sins, two did not know who He was and most (83%) knew that Jesus had something to do with heaven or hell. All respondents believed there is a God, with 86% saying He is of central importance to their life, and 93% believing He is most powerful of all. A few did not know how powerful God was, or who would go to hell. Overall, these responses reveal the limited awareness of the real concept of sin and salvation.

### **Areas of Interest and Felt Needs**

The need to know the real meaning of life and to have fulfilment in one's job were the two most strongly felt needs among the respondents, followed by knowing the right way to live, true love, and release from loneliness. The least felt area of need was the meaning of death, followed by the realization of who self is. The results from this question served as the guide in the process of creating the comic. Because the needs were identified by the respondents, they would be more likely to read meaning into the comic and find a solution relevant to their needs. Most said they would pray to God if they had a problem but nine said they would talk to a friend about it. These reactions revealed the importance of God in their lives, because they turn to Him for help.

### **Reactions to the Comic**

The respondents had a positive response to the comic, with high ratings for an easy level of understanding, believability, interest, information, and entertainment.

The respondents were asked to cite parts of the comic book which they found confusing. Twenty-five (83%) said they understood everything; one could not understand the phrase on page 10 which said 'sin separated man from God'. Another could not understand [Titus 3:5](#) on page 11. Three other respondents found [Isaiah 64:6](#) on page 11 confusing because they see no wrong in doing good works. These have possibly learnt to do good works in order to gain salvation which is contradictory to what the Bible teaches.

Twenty-five (83%) respondents found no phrases or words in the comic book that is offensive to the readers and not appropriately used. [p. 107](#) But five respondents said that words such as *buwisit* (jinx), *tanga* (stupid), and *walang silbi* (good for nothing), should not

be used in a comic book intended to teach religion. The intention in using these words was to portray the emotion of a character in a certain situation, however it was felt the words should be discouraged so that the young will not learn to use them.

### **Message Relevance**

Thirteen people (43%) said the message of the comic was speaking to themselves, because they saw some character traits in Delia as being similar to their own. Another 16 (53%) felt it was for someone else because they identified similar incidents which have happened to someone they knew, or which they have seen or heard on radio or television drama. One was not sure who the comic was referring to. All respondents agreed that they learnt something from the comic: teachings about God (40%), lessons on real life situations (36%), how to accept Christ as Saviour (10%), forgiveness for each other (10%), do not forsake one's family (3%). They stated they would readily buy such a comic if the price was reasonable, because they learned from it.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The field study found among female factory workers that

1. they have been well exposed to the comic medium;
2. they show great interest in religious comics;
3. their knowledge regarding the Gospel is very limited;
4. their attitude toward God is positive and open;
5. they want more changes in their lives.

The possibility of using comics as a medium of evangelism was also drawn from the reactions of the respondents to the comic book 'Muling Pagkikita' (Till We Meet Again). The main content of the story in this comic book is a typical life situation tie-up with the theme that salvation is in Jesus Christ alone. Areas such as sin, good works, Jesus Christ, salvation, and forgiveness were discussed in the comic to help respondents understand the Gospel. Reactions from the second survey indicated that:

Media can either be a vehicle for redemption or condemnation. Moreover, God's communicational activities have provided man with principles to be guided by and even a model to pattern after. His main intent in communicating with man is that He wants to be understood and responded to. [p. 108](#)

1. respondents understood the message of the comic quite well and could recall certain parts which most impressed them;
2. respondents found messages of the comic believable and relevant to life;
3. realistic artwork is better understood than abstract drawings; and
4. some knowledge change occurred after the respondents read the comic in that their minds became enlightened and their belief or perception of God became more defined. They found that God is important but they did not know enough of Him.

This field project could be another contribution to the concrete implementation of evangelism. It will be helpful to pastors in their evangelism work among the economically limited sector of our society, most significantly those who have limited literacy. It will also challenge workers in evangelism to deliver God's word in concrete terms, using pictorial representations so that people who cannot be reached by abstract language can still be evangelized through simple pictures. Recommendations from this study include:

1. Further study on the use of comics for evangelism among sectors of the Philippine society with limited literacy such as male factory workers, labourers, helpers, vendors, etc.
2. A study on the use of comic production and marketing strategy of Christian comics for mass circulation in the secular market.
3. Research on Filipino perception of pictorial representations.
4. Ongoing training of artists, writers and research for a Christian ministry in comic production for the purpose of evangelizing people with limited literacy.
5. Compiling an instructional manual on comic production techniques for personal reference of people interested in this ministry.

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**Elena Chen, a Chinese born and bred in Manila, regularly leads home Bible Studies among factory workers. p. 110**

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*(Subject to change)*  
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