Efforts to relate the Word of God to the contemporary world of humanity are as old as theology itself. But the persistent gulf between theory and praxis concerns Christian theologians in our day as never before, giving rise to a whole cluster of adjectival prefixes to the word theology: black, red, feminist, third-world, liberation, and so on.

Missiologists are characteristically in the vanguard of this concern for contextualization, because cross-cultural communication adds further dimensions of complexity to the task. Again, there is nothing new about the emphasis; it has been in the forefront of missionary thought from the first century onward. It was articulated at great length in all the conferences of the International Missionary Council from Jerusalem to Ghana, and it has been prominent ever since in meetings convened by the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and various evangelical mission associations. Yet the troublesome gap between intention and realization remains. Three articles in this issue of the Occasional Bulletin reflect several of the cultural dilemmas encountered along the road to effective Christian mission today.

Does Karl Rahner's controversial notion of the "anonymous Christian" undermine the missionary task of the Church? Robert J. Schreiter, C.PP.S., identifies the theological issues in Rahner's theory, isolates the major criticisms directed against it, and proposes an alternative approach. Schreiter's corrective demands greater cross-cultural sensitivity: "One has to grapple with the problems of translatability, contextualization, cultural universals and particulars, of literalism in the use of the Scriptures, of the differing horizons of meaning."

Focusing on Latin America as a case study, Mortimer Arias from Bolivia traces evangelization from the days of the conquistadores to the present crisis in both Roman Catholic and Protestant thought. Arias' plea is for "prophetic contextualization" and "costly evangelization against the status quo," something quite different from the forms of uncritical acculturation he sees as the result of some previous missionary efforts.

The vast majority of the world's Christian churches are culturally homogeneous, and there is no indication that the trend is reversing. But Donald McGavran's "homogeneous unit principle of church growth" is questioned by many people on the grounds that such churches share the blame for ethnically related social ills.

If Christ has broken down the walls of partition separating peoples, is it ethically responsible to encourage church growth along culturally homogeneous lines? That is the question squarely faced in the article by C. Peter Wagner.

Good News

In the year since the Overseas Ministries Study Center took over the publication of the Occasional Bulletin, circulation has more than doubled. We want to double it again within the next six months. To help make this happen we have started a direct-mail promotional effort to solicit new subscriptions. If you are already a subscriber and you receive one of our promotional letters, or if you receive more than one copy of our letter, it is due to the fact that we are using a number of other mailing lists on which your name may be included. Please pass the letter on to a colleague or friend with your recommendation to subscribe.
The Anonymous Christian and Christology

Robert J. Schreiter, C.PP.S.

When one takes up the theme of Christ, salvation, and non-Christian religions, and tries to sort through the complexity of issues involved, one comes up eventually against the debate surrounding Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christian." In the years since the idea was first put forward, it has generated a good deal of discussion and a large amount of literature. In that discussion, the anonymous Christian has drawn alternately praise and criticism.

On the one hand, the theory has been praised as a well-reasoned attempt to bring together imaginatively the doctrine of the universal salvific will of God with the contingencies of the missionary activities of the Church. In doing so, it accounts for those people of good will who, through no fault of their own, have not heard the Good News, yet still might enjoy a special relationship with God.

But on the other hand, the anonymous Christian has also had coals heaped upon his head. Among the major criticisms are that this theory does not take into account sufficiently the fact that Christianity is by definition an explicit confession of faith in Jesus Christ; that it owes more to Rahner's transcendental anthropology than to the biblical witness; that it does not provide adequately for the central Christian categories of justification and conversion; that it lacks specific christological and kerygmatic content; that it might undermine the missionary task of the Church; that it clouds seriously the meaning of Church; that it shows an insensitivity to the religious commitment of other peoples.

Yet for all these difficulties, the anonymous Christian has shown remarkable vitality. As recently as a few years ago, on the anniversary of Rahner's seventieth birthday, a special Festschrift was planned devoted entirely to his notion of the anonymous Christian. For here lies the overriding significance of the theory of the anonymous Christian, no matter what one's judgment upon it may be: Rahner has woven together into a single theological fabric a large number of disparate but related issues that surround the problematic of Christ, salvation, and non-Christian religions. As he himself has pointed out on a number of occasions, one is free to accept or reject his theory of the anonymous Christian, but the issues with which the theory deals will eventually have to be faced by the believer in one way or another.

I do not intend to recapitulate the many treatments of the anonymous Christian here in any detail. Nor do I intend to work directly with Rahner's theory internally, by criticizing this point or amending that one. It seems to me that such an approach has already been undertaken often enough, and that the major profit to be gained from doing so has in the main already been achieved. But at the same time, one cannot ignore Rahner's anonymous Christian; the problems with which the theory deals are indeed our problems and will remain with us.

I would like to propose a different kind of approach. To begin, I will try to locate the major clusters of theological themes and issues that Rahner's theory brings together. Whatever the future of the anonymous Christian, or any alternate theory, it might be helpful to try to at least list these issues and themes that impinge upon our discussion so as to know better what kinds of problems we will also need to take into account. Next, I hope to isolate the major criticisms directed against the theory of the anonymous Christian, since these are presumably also issues impinging upon the problematic of Christ, salvation, and non-Christian religions that Rahner's theory does not take up in a satisfactory fashion.

With that done, I would like to turn to a recasting of the concerns embodied in Rahner's theory. This will be done only in outline form, since space does not permit a full working out of such an extensive theory as would be needed. The alternate proposed here will, of course, be slightly skewed by the fact that it is dominated by some of the major criticisms of Rahner's theory. But perhaps what is lost in proportion might become a gain in perspective. Finally, I will explore briefly some of the implications of this alternate approach to the problematic of Christ, salvation, and non-Christian religions, investigating what sorts of new possibilities it might open up for us.

Themes and Issues

As was noted above, the persuasive power of Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian owes much to the fact that so many different and important themes of Christian belief, and so many issues facing the Church in the multiplicity of situations and cultures, are woven together into a single fabric. There are at least five major topic areas that bring together such theological themes and practical issues: the universal salvific will of God; creation and redemption theology; Christianity and the Church; Christ, Christology and soteriology, and culture. I would want to begin, then, by trying to indicate what seem to be the major themes and issues clustering around each of these topic areas.

1. The Universal Salvific Will of God

This topic area is central to the entire problematic of Christ, salvation, and non-Christian religions. For if Christians did not believe that God wills his salvation for all peoples, the questions we are addressing here would not arise.

First of all; belief in God's universal salvific will is central to the missionary activity. Without it, there would be no need to go out to engage in preaching and other activity.

Second, how we understand the realization of God's salvific will, will determine the style of our missionary activity. To what extent does it depend upon God's prior activity and to what extent upon the missionary's presence? Rahner's opting more for the former than for the latter has led to accusations that the theory of the anonymous Christian undermines missionary activity.

Third, the universal salvific will is a crucial Christological category. The universality of that will is connected intimately with our understanding of the Lordship of Christ over all human history. It is within the context of that will that Christians can assert and anticipate the full Lordship of Christ over the world.

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Occasional Bulletin
Fourth, there is the issue of what Rahner calls a “salvation optimism.” The Christian Church, in confessing the universal salvific will, has been alternately pessimistic about the range of realization of that will—in the belief in the massa damnata—and more optimistic about that realization outside an explicit Christian agency in discussing inculpable ignorance and, more recently, the role of good will in the life of the human race. At least within the Roman Catholic communion, Rahner senses a move toward a salvation optimism that accords more power to God’s salvific intent than to our weakness and inadequacy in the missionary task (1973:150f.).

2. Creation and Redemption Theology

This topic area, and the tensions within it, are as old as the theologies within the New Testament, and stretch back even further into the Hebrew Testament. The fundamental problematic seems to be this: How is one to interpret, and reinterpret, the world in view of the saving acts of God that his people have experienced and now confess? What is the relation between God’s first act of creation and his second act of redemption, and how does the second become coextensive with the first?

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the redemptive character of the moment of the incarnation is reviewed. And, in yet another way, it is involved in the question of whether the Apologists’ Logos theology represents a departure from the apostolic witness into a Hellenization of Christianity, or whether it is but a fuller realization of the significance of the redemptive suffering and death of Jesus. If one attaches great significance to the incarnation as the sanctification of all human nature (as would Rahner), one is open in a different way to the question of salvation in non-Christian religions than one would be if the emphasis is placed on the events of the suffering and death of Jesus as the sole instrument of our redemption.

And, finally, we come to the question of natural theology. Rahner’s theory of the anonymous Christian has been considered by many to be a natural theology based on reason rather than a theory growing out of the witness of the Apostolic Church. It is of course commonplace to note that a natural theology has to establish its own legitimacy in the minds of many Christians. Yet if one is to deal with the full implications of the doctrine of creation, one will be forced to construct at least a rudimentary natural theology. To fail to do so leads to an insistence on the total depravity of humankind as a consequence of the fall (and will come perilously close to denying the universal salvific will of God), and to a triumphalist notion of Church as the sole arbiter of human history. In many ways, the themes and topics outlined in this section on creation and redemption theology come together in an important way in the notion of a natural theology.

3. Christianity and the Church

It is the conjunction of the universal salvific will of God with the event of the Christian Church that seems to have raised most of those questions that have given us the debate about the anonymous Christian. There seem to be three interrelated themes involved here. The first is the relation of the Church to the Kingdom of God. Missiologists need not be apprised of this problem, of whether the Church is to be considered coextensive with the Kingdom of God, a proleptic realization of it, or its herald—nor need they be apprised of what each position means for missionary activity. The relation of the Church to the Kingdom of God, and the Church’s responsibility and task in the world in light of that relation, constitute a major consideration in the direction of its activity.

The second theme is closely allied to this question, and provides the crucial point of contact with the universal salvific will of God—namely, the explicit nature of the Christian confession. In other words, what constitutes membership in the community of grace? It is at this point that many critics have noted that to be an “anonymous” Christian must be a contradiction in terms. The New Testament seems to insist upon an explicit confession of faith (Rom. 10:10) and the need for preaching the Good News implies it (Rom. 10:14–15). Without an explicit Christianity, there would be no missionary enterprise. Yet when the explicit nature of the Church is confronted with the universal salvific will of God, one runs into a number of problems. What of those who have no opportunity to have the Good News preached to them? A variety of resolutions to this dilemma have been offered, and the anonymous Church is merely the most recent of them. The early medieval spoke of a votum ecclesiae or a votum baptismi, whereby people lived in such a way as to will full communion with God, even though they could not express this in an explicit Christian confession of faith (Rahner 1975). While this may solve the problem of the people of good life and of good will, it does not answer the question about the role of explicit Christian confession, and the content of such a confession.

The third theme is correlative to the first. What is the role of the Church, as the community of grace, within the entire salvific plan of God; or, conversely, if the Church is the salvific instrument of God’s plan, what constitutes the Church? In answering the latter, there has been a tendency to call the Church the full community of all those who have been justified in the sight of God, in whatever way. One is reminded in this instance of notions such as the ecclesia ab Abel, to indicate a sense of Church beginning prior to and extending beyond the immediate concrete reach of the event of Jesus Christ (Congar 1952). But one wonders whether “Church” then might lose all meaning. This becomes particularly clear—that a fairly clear sense of ecclesiology is important—when one confronts other religious systems.

4. Christ, Christology, and Soteriology

The themes and issues in this topic area recapitulate many of those referred to above, but bring them into a new and more central focus. When considered in this light, it becomes clear why theories like those of the anonymous Christian have exercised the influence they have; for the themes and issues brought together are focused not so much because of peculiar historical circumstances but by the fact that they lie at the heart of Christianity itself.

The first theme is a restatement of the questions of the impact of the universal salvific will of God upon human history. This restatement expresses the central paradox of Christology itself; namely, how can an historically contingent figure, Jesus of Nazareth, have universal, transtemporal, and transcultural significance? What is the relation of the incarnation to history? This refocuses the question of the salvation of those who have never heard the name of Jesus. This also touches on the question of specificity and universality found in discussions of the explicitness of Christian confession mentioned above. How one deals with the question of history, and what constitutes universal significance, will be of central interest in dealing with the question of salvation.

A second, related theme deals with the person of Jesus and the salvation wrought by God in him. To what extent is salvation connected with the person of Jesus? The Church affirmed from the beginning, particularly in the debates with the Gnostics, that Jesus is a person and not merely a principle. But the question of what constitutes personhood and the relation of personhood to history and to universal significance have continued to dog the Christian Church, even down to the modern period (witness the Hegelian Christologies of the nineteenth century and, more recently, the Christology of Paul Tillich). How is the personhood of Jesus preserved in those three most common manifestations of his presence among ensuing generations of Christians: the Word, the Eucharist, and the Spirit? The issue of the role of personhood and its relation to history and universality needs more exploration than can be given here. Because of Rahner’s natural theology approach, this has been a controverted area of his theory. Most recently, Rahner has undertaken to discuss the anonymous Christian in terms of the presence of the Spirit of Jesus that fills the whole world (1976b:308–312). But the problem continues, not only for Rahner, but for all Christian theologians.

A third theme is the meaning of justification and what brings it about. As Rahner has shown, the grace of justification is prior to conversion and the act of faith (1974a:171). To hold otherwise leads us into a Pelagian controversy. But if the grace of justification is present to the unbeliever prior to the preaching, what does this say about the person of Jesus, the role of preaching, and the task of the Church? What becomes the role of the missionary activity in light of this—explication of what is already present, or a bringing of the Good News for the first time? Rather than
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undermining the missionary activity of the Church, Rahner's theory of the anonymous Christian forces us to look closely at what is the meaning of the Lordship of Christ in the world and the relation of the missionary task to it.

A fourth, related theme is the question of the incarnation or the redemption as the principal moment of God's saving power for us in Jesus. Rahner's own theory, as well as much of patristic theology, seems to emphasize the role of the incarnation in God's saving plan over that of the suffering, death, and raising of Jesus. The point of the patristic writers is that in God's assuming our humanity in the incarnation, redemption is in fact already achieved. And it is out of this consideration, as was noted above, that the possibility of salvation is opened up to those who, through no fault of their own, have never heard the preaching of the Good News. But at the same time, we are being called back to speaking of salvation more in tune with the preaching of the primitive Church, emphasizing what God had done in Jesus. Can a similar theory be built upon the force of the resurrection as has been built upon the incarnation?4

Fifth, we need to look again at the meaning of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of God. Pneumatology has been an underdeveloped art in the Western Christian traditions, and theologians are beginning to investigate once again the meaning of the Spirit for understanding the person and work of Christ in the whole of human history.5 Rahner, too, has alluded to the possibilities here.

5. Culture

The problems of culture arose for Christianity when it left Palestine and encountered converts who did not share the Jewish heritage. In a postcolonialist world, Christians everywhere have become more acutely aware of the themes and issues involved in the consideration of the role of culture in Christianity.

The first theme to arise deals once again with Christianity's commitment to history and the incarnation. If Christians do indeed have these commitments, then one is immediately faced with the translation and contextualization of the Christian message. The indigenization of the Church, then, becomes not so much a luxury or a concession to underdevelopment as an imperative in fidelity to the Gospel. But we know that within the diversity of culture, problems continually arise. Our preaching and teaching in the contextualizing mode can end in a syncretic combination. And, on the other hand, our commitment to a literalism can destroy a people we try to save and so betray the Gospel itself. One can raise the question about whether Rahner's theory shows that sort of cross-cultural sensitivity in the articulation of his transcendental anthropology.

The question about Rahner's formulation brings us to the second issue in this topic area; namely, what can be said of the problem of perspective and the valuing of another's religious commitment? How does one, from within the circle of faith, help lay down rules for the dialogue with other people of good will on the question of their relation to God? In other words, it is not only a matter of allowing our meanings to be translated into their realities, but a translation in the other direction as well.

Third, the question arises about the object of Christian address when it speaks in another culture. Quite commonly, we try to bring what we consider human universals into play to aid communication and understanding. This is certainly the case with Rahner, who proposes his transcendental anthropology as the basis for an approach. But how does one set up cultural universals and what is their role and status within the concrete life of a culture?6 To follow Schillebeeckx here, is there a universal horizon of meaning that would permit such an approach (1974:506)? This is perhaps but another way of dealing with the theological theme of the relation of incarnation and culture. It is the question of to what part of human life the event of salvation addresses itself.

These, then, are some of the major issues impinging upon the area that Rahner addresses in his theory of the anonymous Christian. An examination of these areas, and a look at how Rahner has brought them together, explains partially the continuing persuasive power of his theory. As was seen, there are almost always two sides to each consideration; and, where possible, I have tried to indicate where Rahner would choose to stand.

There are, of course, other questions that can be raised about the anonymous Christian and the concerns the theory tries to focus. One such set of questions I will not take up here comes from those of whom the theory speaks, those not confessing Christ and the salvation he brings. One such question often put forward in this area is whether we Christians, in our own good will, would be willing to be called "anonymous Buddhists" (Kung 1974:90). A second question asks whether our concern for the anonymous Christian is but the dying gasp of a Western imperialism.

But I have restricted myself here to questions arising from within the circle of the Christian faith. Rahner does the same. I do this because it is we Christians, not the non-Christians, who are most troubled with the meaning of the anonymous Christian for our dialogue with persons of other religious traditions. While it is granted that we will most likely not clarify our own minds in isolation from this dialogue, there is much in our own house that needs to be set in order, even prior to our undertaking that dialogue on Christ, salvation, and non-Christian religions. Much of that setting the house in order will involve dealing with the themes and issues just outlined, of making some decisions about our position on the spectra set out for us, and then interrelating those positions in a responsible fashion. As Rahner himself points out, we may call the anonymous Christian by another name, but the problems will still have to be addressed (1974a:162; 1976a:281).

Correctives

In refining or even replacing the theory of the anonymous Christian, there are three correctives that will help us refocus our discussion in our continuing search for a basis upon which to discuss fruitfully Christ, salvation, and non-Christian religions. These correctives grow out of the considerations raised in the previous section about inadequacies within Rahner's theory.

The first corrective is that any theory dealing with the problem under consideration will have to be more Christologically explicit and more Christologically balanced. Rahner's theory strikes many as making any explicit Christological affirmation a superfluous act. There is a tendency both in Rahner and among some of his supporters to drop back into a minimalist affirmation along the lines of Hebrews 11:6. Moreover, our previous discussion has indicated that the questions of church and salvation will to a large extent turn upon our Christological affirmation. The God confessed needs to be confessed through Christ Jesus (Jüngel 1975).

The second corrective requires that our theory not only be more Christocentric, but also more faithfully rooted in biblical traditions. This criticism has been raised on many occasions. The response is not the respective marshalling of isolated biblical texts pro and contra the position. This has already been done (e.g., Kruse 1967) and it betrays the complexity of the biblical witness. One will have to drink more deeply and more carefully of the Scriptures to provide a genuinely biblical foundation.
The third corrective requires a greater cross-cultural sensitivity. The concern is not so much with our possibly being anonymous Buddhists or seeking out the “unknown Christ of Hinduism,” as dealing with some of the problems of culture outlined above. One has to grapple with the problems of translatability, contextualization, cultural universals and particulars; of literalism in the use of the Scriptures, of the differing horizons of meaning. In other words, we need to rethink our natural theology in light of a greater cross-cultural sensitivity.

Toward an Alternative Base: The Wisdom Tradition of the Bible

If one re-examines the theory of the anonymous Christian from the point of view of these three correctives, one prominent possibility presents itself that combines Christology, a strong biblical base, and cross-cultural sensitivity. This is the wisdom Christology found in the Greek-speaking Jewish communities in Palestine. If we are willing to listen to their struggles once again, perhaps they might point toward ways of dealing with the concerns we find brought together in the theory of the anonymous Christian.

The Christology of these communities offers a genuine possibility to us for a number of reasons. First of all, these communities in Palestine, and especially in Jerusalem, lived in a cross-cultural tension. Though pious Jews, they lived with one foot in the Hellenistic world as well. They embodied both the wisdom literature tradition of Palestinian Judaism and included within it the Hellenistic experience in Palestine and in Egypt. We may have a good deal to learn from what can be reconstructed of their coming to terms with confessing Jesus in this context. It should be noted, secondly, that the wisdom tradition within Judaism constituted a sort of natural theology (Collins 1977). It struggled with relating a local, tribal tradition that had been expanded by prophetic universalism to a concrete encounter with the larger Mediterranean world. Whereas one can speak in a universalist fashion rather readily within the circle of one’s own tradition, it is something else again to test such affirmations within the alemic of cross-cultural encounter. The Exile, the diaspora experience in Egypt, the Hellenist occupation of Palestine, and the encounter with Middle Platonism provided such an opportunity.

Third, it should be noted that the wisdom tradition of Greek-speaking Palestinian Judaism was not a later hermeneutic for the interpretation of primitive Christian data. Research has shown that Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem formed one of the earliest Christian communities, and that some of Jesus’ early followers may have been drawn from this group. There are indications that this same tradition influenced Jesus’ own understanding of the Law. And with the Synoptic Gospels there are traditions present of Jesus as the wise teacher and even as incarnate wisdom. Perhaps Jesus saw himself as the incarnation of the wisdom of God. These points will be taken up in more detail below. The Q materials and the early Christological hymns attest to the antiquity of these communities.

Fourth, research indicates that these wisdom traditions were highly influential in the formation of the earliest Christologies we find in the hymns and provided a first understanding of Jesus’ relation to God in prototrinitarian fashion (Hengel 1976). While the wisdom Christologies do not survive intact into a later period, their early important position cannot be overlooked. They cannot be considered as disappearing into the discredited theios aner legends or into Gnostic heresies. As we shall see, they remain central to confessing the Lordship of Christ.

Fifth, Martin Hengel has pointed out the key role played by the Greek-speaking Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem in the early missionary activity of the Church outside Palestine (Hengel 1971–72). If these people were indeed the prime movers for missionary activity throughout the non-Jewish world, then their experience and their Christology will be of considerable interest to anyone concerned about the missionary enterprise.

There may be a tendency upon the part of some to equate these wisdom Christologies of the early New Testament period with the Logos Christologies of the second and third centuries, and so see them as the beginning of the Hellenization of Christianity. This would be a premature and even anachronistic evaluation. As Hengel points out in his monumental Judaism and Hellenism (1974), the Greek-speaking Jew, embued with Hellenism, was on the scene in Palestine already for two centuries by the birth of Christ. And there are many indications that Jesus’ own experience, as a northerner, lay closer to that of this group and to that of the Pharisees than to the official temple cultus (Schillebeeckx 1974:188–210). The Greek-speaking Palestinian Jew did not capitulate rapidly to the Hellenistic world. Rather, he continued to grapple with these two parts of himself, the Semitic and the Hellenistic, and the result was more often a heightening of the Semitic profile in contradistinction to the Hellenistic offering. And so, while the Greek Apologists were to capitalize much later on the Logos of the Johannine writings and draw it closer to its Stoic counterpart, that Logos in John remained nonetheless a basically Semitic concept.

Keeping all this in mind, I would like to sketch out something of the wisdom tradition background of those early Christian communities, show something of the development of the wisdom Christologies, and then indicate how these might help serve as a corrective upon Rahner’s anonymous Christian theory and aid us in our discussion of salvation and non-Christian religions.

Along with other cultures in the Ancient Near East, Israel had a part in the generating and assembling of a wisdom literature. Maxims and proverbs describing the wise person, what constitutes wisdom, and the righteousness of the wise were collected. Alongside this, another factor came into play, particularly from the third century B.C.E. onward: the encounter with Hellenism. This contact is evident in the later parts of the Book of Proverbs, in Wisdom and in Sirach. While at one time it was thought that Hellenism was an extraneous influence on the edges of Palestinian Judaism, it now seems clear that the struggle with Hellenism occurred within Jewish circles in Jerusalem itself. During this period, the upper strata of Jewish society in Jerusalem could even conceivably be considered to be bicultural. The work of the scribes of that period, as evidenced in the work of Jesus Ben Sira, shows the struggle of preserving the ancient Jewish heritage in the midst of Hellenism, while at the same time grappling with the significance of being members of two cultures.

The Hebrew concept of wisdom was never amalgamated fully into Hellenism. Rather, it seems that the contact with Hellenism allowed for the expansion and elaboration of a number of ideas already present within the Hebrew wisdom tradition. This is particularly the case concerning wisdom as an hypostasis of God and the role of wisdom in creation.

Wisdom came to be seen as a pre-existent figure (Prov. 8:22–31; Job 28; Sir. 11:1–7, 24:3–7) who was present at the Publications Office, OMSC, P.O. Box 2057, Ventnor, NJ 08406.
creation (Prov. 8:27–30; Wis. 9:9) and mediated creation itself (Job 28:25–27; Sir. 1:8, 24:3–5; Wis. 7:12, 21; 8:5). Wisdom has been poured out over all creation (Sir. 1:8). Yahweh’s wisdom is in creation (Prov. 3:19; Job 38–39; Sir. 42:15–43:33). Yahweh sends wisdom to earth to dwell among the people as well (Sir. 24:8ff.). One cannot be wise of oneself (Prov. 3:10, 26:12), for wisdom is a gift of Yahweh (Prov. 2:6; Sir. 1:1). And true wisdom from Yahweh, since the prophetic period, had been understanding the deeds and judgments of Yahweh (Jer. 9, 11; Hos. 14, 10).

Wisdom for the Hebrew was not a matter of superior knowledge, but of knowing how to act; it was a moral wisdom by which one came to perceive the ways of Yahweh. The notion of wisdom was tied closely to that of the Law as the expression of the will of Yahweh (Sir. 1:11–20, 24:23–29; Wis. 6:18, 9:9, 17; Bar. 4:1–4). The fear of the Lord was indeed the beginning of wisdom, and one who followed the call to wisdom (Prov. 1:8) would come to have a share in that divine wisdom and would be considered just. It is to these that Yahweh gives his wisdom (Wis. 7:22–8:1).

The bicultural phenomenon in Jerusalem, represented in the later parts of the wisdom literature, opens up the way for a biblically rooted cross-cultural hermeneutic of the Jewish and Christian traditions. Missiologists have often looked to the Acts of the Apostles for cues on dealing with the cross-cultural presentation and implantation of the Gospel (e.g., von Allmen 1975); perhaps we can look even earlier to this period as well. And secondly, this tradition had its representatives in the early Christian Church in Jerusalem. According to Siegfried Schulz, it was these Greek-speaking Jewish-Christian communities who were responsible for much of the later Q material (1972). And they also had a large hand in the construction of the Gospel of Matthew.

These Greek-speaking Jewish communities were found not only in Jerusalem, but also in Galilee. Some of Jesus’ closest disciples may have been from these communities. Andrew and Philip have Greek names (cf. Mk. 3:18). Simon Peter, the brother of Andrew, later missionized in the Greek-speaking areas of the Mediterranean world. Jesus’ own attitude toward the Law shows sympathies with the Greek-speaking Jewish conception of the Law, with the emphasis on the two-fold law of the love of God and of neighbor as the heart of the Law (Schillebeeckx 1974:188–210). While I will not try to probe any further into the question of Jesus’ own relationship to these communities here, let this suffice to indicate there was contact, and that the images of Jesus as a wise teacher and as wisdom found in the Synoptic Gospels was probably somewhat continuous with the experience of the earthly Jesus.

For from the Q materials that have been woven into the Synoptic Gospels, images of Jesus as being wise and as wisdom recur throughout the texts. In the infancy narratives, Jesus is depicted as growing in wisdom and astounding the Temple teachers by his understanding (Lk. 2:40–52). His importance is acknowledged by the Magi from the East (Mt. 2:1–12). Many of the characteristics of wisdom from the wisdom literature return in the Gospel narratives. Felix Christ summarizes aptly the synoptics’ identification of Jesus with wisdom (1970:53):

As in the case of pre-existent wisdom of the wisdom tradition, Jesus Sophia sends prophets and emissaries, comes as the Son of Man, deals with all people (tax collectors and sinners), dwells in Jerusalem as the Shechinah, calls all to himself as the Law, is denied by this generation, is robbed of his message, hides himself from the wise and the prudent, chooses individual children, is justified by tax collectors and sinners, reveals himself to the little ones, calls the tired and weary, sends out prophets and apostles, announces judgment, withdraws and returns in judgment as the Son of Man.

To this one can add the recurring image of Jesus as the true teacher of the Law (expressed particularly in the claims that he was a false teacher, brought forward by his enemies). Jesus is presented as being wiser and greater than even Solomon (Mt. 12:38–42).

Beyond the synoptic material, we find in the most ancient Christian hymns an identification of Jesus with wisdom. In Philippians 2:6–11; John 1; Hebrews 1:3–4; Colossians 1:15–20, the model of the pre-existence of wisdom, wisdom’s coming to earth and wisdom’s exaltation is applied to Jesus. Paul speaks of Christ as the wisdom of God (I Cor. 1:24). This wisdom is not an earthly wisdom, as from the Greeks (I Cor. 1:17–2:7), but is a gift from God (Eph. 1:18, 17; Col. 1:9). The wisdom of Christ is the cross (I Cor. 1:18, 22; 2:2). Paul is probably responsible for the addition of the mention of the cross in Philippians 2:8, since this is what marks Christian wisdom.

Recent work on the early New Testament Christologies, particularly upon the title huios, has indicated that the early Church drew upon the models of the pre-existent character of wisdom and the Law, the sending of wisdom and the Law to earth, their rejection by the majority and their revelation to little ones, to first explicate the relation of Jesus to God. Thus the wisdom tradition of Judaism, and not Hellenism, was responsible for the impulses that led to the trinitarian formulation (Hengel 1976:71ff; Mussner 1975:103, 113; Schillebeeckx 1974: 455). It is principally in this form, and in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, that these early wisdom Christologies have come down to us. Their use in the Logos Christologies of Justin Martyr and the Apologists show much stronger Stoic influence, even though they did utilize the wisdom tradition via the Johannine literature (Grillmeier 1975:108–113). Thus the biblical wisdom tradition has exercised a strong influence on the Christian understanding of Jesus and of God.

**Wisdom Christology and the Anonymous Christian**

We have explored the wisdom tradition of the Bible to see if there were any possibilities within it to provide us with a biblically rooted approach that would take into account both the needs of a natural theology and a Christology.

The natural theology that emerges from the wisdom tradition exhibits a strong concern for the relationship between God, creation, and those who dwell within creation. Via its hypostasizations of God’s wisdom, word, and law, the tradition tries to deal with the interaction of transcendence and immanence, and at least obliquely with the question of transcendence and history.

An important difference of emphasis we find between the natural theology of the biblical wisdom tradition and the natural theology of Rahner’s transcendental anthropology is that the former develops itself in categories of action and moral behavior, whereas Rahner’s is developed primarily in categories of knowing. Rahner is, of course, involved in the problems of will and freedom as well, but his natural theology rests principally on an epistemology. Now this difference can have some far-reaching consequences. A natural theology based on the wisdom tradition will begin with categories of praxis as the way of coming into contact with God and his salvation. Wisdom, we have seen, is concerned with how we act, and how that action leads us to a grasp of the deeds and judgments of God. This difference of emphasis has a number of implications worth indicating here briefly.

First of all, when action reasserts itself alongside knowledge as a primary category, then we are already one step on the way to the Christian commitment to history. Yahweh reveals himself in his acts, and it is in our action that we come into contact with the God of history. We may have a lot to learn from those Latin American theologians such as Dussel and Gutierrez who have...
made action and history central categories in their theology. In emphasizing the centrality of action, we also move away from the problems of the thematization of knowledge of God as the sole basis for our relation with him. We move from a theology as noetics to a theology as praxis. It must be remembered, of course, that praxis has a theoretical moment, and that the theoreticization of experience grows in a dialectical relation to action. The thematization of knowledge of God can be interpreted only within its concrete context; it draws its power of meaning from within a praxis. When we begin our dialogue with non-Christian religions in this fashion, our point of entry shifts. One does not begin with a comparative doctrinal study to ascertain the presence or absence of a knowledge of the living God. Rather, one begins with a praxis, with a form of life in which God manifests himself.

Second, the point of contact will not be based upon mutually held universals. Universals are often constructed by finding common denominators. And the relative position of each of these universals in the respective cultures may be different. As Schillebeeckx has pointed out, we cannot create a positive horizon of shared meaning across cultural boundaries, but we can struggle together against those things that threaten our common humanity (1974:511). Again, using a praxis as a point of departure, how the wise person comport himself in the face of wickedness can serve as a mutual point of departure. From there a possibility can emerge for a careful articulation of common meaning. Moving away from the search for universals may move us away from trying to discern the nature of God toward contact with his saving activity.

Third, the wisdom natural theology of the Bible gives us a new entry to the problem of cultural diversity. A comparison of others’ “high cultural” elements (myths, rituals) with ours will no longer provide the sort of translation of the Scriptures into another culture for which we are looking. If the Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world (Wis. 1:7), one must examine the entire situation and not be hasty in reaching judgments about the relative symbolic statements being made by various aspects and relations of a culture. It is such hasty judgments that are responsible for many syncretistic combinations. Wisdom expresses itself in praxis, and one must study that praxis to find the presence of God within a culture; one will have to study that action in relation to other actions within the culture as well.

But as we have seen, crucial to the question of the anonymous Christian and the question of Christ, salvation, and non-Christian religions is the matter of Christology. And the wisdom tradition has a strong Christological strain within it. Jesus is presented as the incarnation of the wisdom of God. He is pre-existent wisdom, present from before all ages and in creation. He has come to earth and lived as one of us. He has been exalted above all creation and been given power and authority over all things. In him God’s secret plan of salvation has been revealed. On the one hand, he embodies the great wisdom tradition in his teaching, his being rejected by the hard of heart, his reaching out to the little ones and the weary. On the other, a new element is added, especially in Paul: the mystery of suffering as part of wisdom and God’s saving plan.

In Jesus, we see that it is not his teaching that is the primary instrument of God’s saving activity, but his suffering, his cross. The importance of praxis asserts itself once again. Our salvation, then, lies in this same solidarity with the suffering and the little ones. When we act in such a way, the gift of God’s wisdom will be given us, that wisdom which is life in Christ Jesus. When salvation is approached in this fashion, two important questions are addressed: the personhood of Christ and soteriology.

We noted above that the question of the personhood of Christ is essential to Christological doctrine. But the personhood has always been a problematic issue. While it preserves the Christian commitment to history and incarnation, it obscures the universality of Jesus and his Lordship at the same time. The fact that the early Christians turned to the hypostasizations of wisdom as a model for dealing with Jesus’ unique relationship to God may give us an indication on how to deal with this in our discussion of the anonymous Christian. Jesus is both the truly wise man and wisdom itself. The one is not subservient to the other; both are necessary to understand Jesus’ significance. Their interaction allows us to see that Jesus is not merely an extraordinary human figure nor is he an intellectual principle. Perhaps Rahner’s anonymous Christian grasps something of this dialectic. Jesus as wisdom itself is alive in his culture and life, and the personhood expresses itself in the praxis of his community. There is some parallel here to our own extensions of the personhood of Christ into our own histories: the Church as the Body of Christ, the Eucharist, the Word, the Spirit. Again, it will be thematized differently noetically, but in praxis the parallel might be striking.

In the question of soteriology, of the justification of the sinner and the confession of the name of Jesus Christ, wisdom is a gift from God that overcomes our foolishness, the Bible tells us. We cannot attain it of ourselves. If this is the same wisdom that is in all of creation, then others, too, may be open to its urgings as well. To come into the wisdom of God creates the just man. Perhaps the confessing of the name of Jesus Christ is done in that solidarity with the suffering, with those to whom true wisdom has been revealed. Perhaps our need for explicature has been aimed at a literalism that could bypass the saving reality of God in a concrete history.

Such an approach does not rule out the need for preaching. In a way, it allows the Word of God to assume its full power. When we speak to those who are not Christian, our preaching takes on a dual process: of speaking and of listening for the presence of the wisdom of God, of the nascent Lordship of Christ within that culture. In that listening aspect of our preaching, we not only bring the Word as judgment upon the situation, calling for decision, but in listening we allow the Word as judgment to come upon ourselves, to purify our understanding of the working of the Word in human history. God moves ahead of us, and we need to listen to what he says as we approach him. Only to speak and not to listen implies a triumphalist notion of the Christian mission—that we embody the full realization of the Kingdom of God.

This brings us to a final consideration; namely, the meaning of Church in a wisdom theology. As Rahner pointed out in The Shape of the Church to Come, a future Church will not define itself in orthodox formulae, since our sensitivity to history, culture, and hermeneutics makes this a more problematic bond. Rather, our bonds of unity in Christ will express themselves in action (1974b). Perhaps we have looked too much to definitions of ingroup/outgroup to give ourselves definition as Church. While confession of faith will always be important, it will ring hollow without concomitant action. Perhaps those not in explicit communion with us are still members of the Body of Christ in their suffering, in their struggle against the wise of this world.

One of the difficulties of accepting a wisdom theology basis for our dialogue with non-Christians is that we become less sure of ourselves. The praxis of biblical wisdom not only extends judgment to the non-Christians but will bring judgment upon us Christians as well. Where our words are not backed up by action, by commitment to the suffering and oppressed, by seeking wisdom where it might be found, we will stand under judgment as well. And our awareness of this will no doubt go far to correct absolutist pretensions our non-Christian brothers and sisters perceive in us. It will call us away from a biblical positivism and an ecclesiastical one too. It may even draw us deeper into that wisdom we preach and seek as the children of God.
"Gospel in Context" comes from "contextualization." And contextualization is the issue in contemporary mission/renewal strategy:

"Contextualization implies accommodation. But this accommodation must not be an easy accommodation . . . Contextualized theology must be a theology that challenges the very context by the power of the Gospel . . . The historical context is ruled by God. To it the Son came . . . to challenge it profoundly. Contextualization is, then, an outcome of reflection on the career of Jesus Christ."

—Kosuke Koyama,

"Contextualization . . . in its biblical dimensions calls on us to be continually transformed into fuller obedience to Christ in our culture. . . . In the end, contextualization is the cultural and sociological perspective of discipleship."

—Harvie M. Conn,
1977 NAE Convention

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—Peter Savage,
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Notes

1. Principal loci in Rahner’s collected essays include (1961; 1966a; 1966b; 1966c; 1969a; 1972; 1974a; 1976a; 1975) as well as pertinent best comprehensive statement of Rahner’s theory of the anonymous Christian (often cited by Rahner himself) is Riesenhuber (1966).

2. The collection was never published. One essay, that of Jüngel (1975), has appeared elsewhere.

3. For an exposition of inclusivist and exclusivist Christologies, see J. Peter Schineller (1976). On the uses and abuses of the concept of salvation history, see Müller-Fahrenholz (1974).

4. William A. Thompson (1976) calls for such a shift away from the partristic focus on the incarnation, the reformation focus on the theologia crucis, and the more recent Roman Catholic emphasis on merit, to a focus upon the resurrection.

5. Most recently, and somewhat inadequately, Kasper (1976).

6. Geertz (1973) raises this question most effectively.


8. Felix Christ (1970) feels that there is evidence that Jesus may have considered himself to be the sophia of God.

9. I am using “praxis” here to indicate the dialectic encompassing both action and reflection upon action, following the left-wing Hegelian use of the term. On this usage, see Lobkowicz (1967).

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How Ethical Is The Homogeneous Unit Principle?

C. Peter Wagner

The increasingly wide acceptance of the so-called “homogeneous-unit principle of Church Growth” among Christians in many parts of the world demands serious reflection. As worded by Donald McGavran, the classic statement of the principle is: “[People] like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers” (1970:198).

An Ethical Issue

This axiom could have turned out to be nothing more than a truism had it not been introduced into a world already torn by pieces by racism, social injustice, discrimination, and genocide. This fact has caused many good people, engaged in an effort to locate the sources of the ethnically related social ills, to place some of the blame on culturally homogeneous churches. McGavran’s principle has seemed to them to be an overt return to hard-line segregation or even apartheid. It has consequently become an important ethical issue.

There is no question that the vast majority of the world’s Christian churches are culturally homogeneous. If the exact data were available, I would not be surprised if they showed that something on the magnitude of 95 to 98 percent of the congregations in Christendom are made up basically of one kind of people. And there is to my knowledge no indication that the trend might be reversing, although in many cases the nature of the original homogeneous unit may be undergoing change. Nor is such a state of affairs anything new. It was as true of the churches in first-century Galilee, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Rome as it is in twentieth-century Jakarta, Madras, Bangui, or Buenos Aires.

It is also true that evangelistic efforts are more effective when converts are recruited for membership in churches of their own culture than evangelistic efforts that assume new converts should be incorporated into any Christian fellowship at all, whether or not there is a cultural match. Abundant missiological research confirms this fact. (Cf., for example, Mizuki on Japanese churches in Brazil [1976:73, 131]; Nordyke on Bolivian Aymaras [1972:141]; Klassen on Quinchuas in Ecuador [1975]; Liao on the Hakka of Taiwan [1972:60, 96]; Spruth on the Ena of New Guinea [1973:351–352]; Cunville on the Angamis of Nagaland [1975:101]; Subbana on high caste Hindus of India [1970:53–86]; Cornelius on caste churches of Madras [1971:136]; and Winter on Muslims in Pakistan [1975:224].)

Another interesting preliminary fact is that in the United States, where racism, discrimination, and forced segregation have constituted unusually acute social problems, a fairly dramatic change in the attitudes of Christian theologians and social ethicists has recently occurred. Largely as a result of the civil rights movements of the 1960s, many theologians, both black and white, who had roundly condemned “eleven o’clock Sunday morning as the most segregated hour in America” are taking a second look. Some are now celebrating the “new pluralism” and advocating cultural identity and integrity in Christian congregations as well as in other social institutions. Outmoded assimilationist or “melting pot” theories of understanding American society are rapidly giving place to less chauvinistic models.

Is Homogeneity Good?

None of the above preliminary observations, of course, addresses itself to specifically ethical issues. Homogeneous-unit churches may be common and the principle may work well for missionaries and evangelists. But is it good to have culturally homogeneous churches? Ought Christian churches to be planted and encouraged to grow among just one kind of people? Are homogeneous-unit churches “heathenish and heretical” (Moltmann 1973:91)? Is it true that “the more mixed the congregation is, especially in ‘class’ and ‘color,’ the greater its opportunity to demonstrate the power of Christ” (Stott 1967:71)? Is the homogeneous principle a capitulation to sub-Christian “culture Christianity” (Padilla 1975:125)? Do voluntarily segregated churches reflect “a deficiency in their understanding of the true nature and purpose of the church” (Pope 1957:122)?

Even among those who defend the homogeneous-unit principle, a further ethical issue arises. Suppose that planting homogeneous-unit churches is convincingly shown to be a good and necessary means for spreading the Gospel on new ground. Are they then simply a temporary expedient, a means toward an end? Or will they be expected to remain culturally homogeneous even after the members become mature Christians? Is homogeneity seen to be a kind of immature Christian behavior that might be tolerated while converts are yet “babes in Christ,” but that should disappear as quickly as possible when Christians attain their “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”?

The thesis I hope to develop in this essay is that culturally homogeneous congregations, when they are formed voluntarily and when they are open to all others who wish to become members, possess an intrinsic integrity as Christian communities. Rather than being denounced, they should be celebrated. Rather than being perceived as the causes of racism and discrimination, they should be seen as one of the most viable institutions for healing such ills. I intend to argue that homogeneous-unit churches are thoroughly Christian (other things being equal), and that much of the ethical opposition to them, in the final analysis, may turn out to be a subtle and thinly disguised manifestation of racism.

The Starting Point: Love

The ethical starting point for the development of this thesis is the Christian law of love. Few ethicists will question the supremacy of love as a Christian virtue, and the point does not need to be argued in depth. Suffice it to agree with Nygren who says that love is “the center of Christianity, the Christian fundamental motif par excellence” (1953:48). Biblical love is agape love. Unlike eros, it

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does not primarily focus on the self, but on the object. “Love seeketh not its own” (1 Cor. 13:5). Its starting point is the welfare of the beloved. Jesus’ new commandment was that “ye love one another as I have loved you” (Jn. 13:34). The love that Jesus modeled extended from within his band of disciples (Jn. 13:35) to enemies (Matt. 5:44) and to other ethnic groups (Lk. 10:29–37).

In what ways, then, does biblical love relate to the establishment and development of culturally homogeneous Christian churches?

1. Love Admires Creation

When the Creator looked out over his handiwork “he saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). God also had said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Adam, created in God’s own image, was made a social creature from the beginning. His personhood could not be completely fulfilled until it had become related to another person. Thus, from the very beginning we come to understand human beings as simultaneously having individual personalities and group identities. The pattern of God’s relationship to people, then, was established not in terms of independent isolates, but in terms of relational creatures in community. Human relationships are established within societies, and the behavior patterns operative within a given society are determined by its particular culture. It is necessary, therefore, for the purposes of the ethical understanding of the homogeneous principle to understand that human culture is creational, and to regard it as “good.” Culture is something to be accepted and admired as God’s handiwork just as much as the Swiss Alps, the human eye, and the Milky Way.

This is not to say that any particular manifestation of culture in time or space is perfect. Just as sin has tarnished all individual human beings, it has also tarnished all human groups. No culture is without its demonic forces that tend to erode human relationships, keep social units from glorifying God, and in many cases dehumanize some members of the group. Cultures, like people, need to be judged and improved and redeemed. But when they are, they do not cease being that particular culture, any more than a regenerated person ceases to be that person.

Not only culture, but cultural diversity should be seen as part of God’s decree of creation. As Novak says, “God is infinite, and, in order to mirror his infinity, all kinds and cultures of human beings are necessary” (1976:32). God chose not to create people from a precast die in which every person would come out exactly the same as every other. Human diversity in the physical, psychological, social, cultural, and linguistic dimensions is part of God’s design for the human condition.

Those who might be inclined to protest this on the basis of the story of the Tower of Babel would do well to take a closer look. Genesis 11:1–9 indicates that God was already in the process of causing the descendants of Noah to become scattered and separate. When they perceived what God was doing, the people of Babel decided to take matters into their own hands and attempt to halt the process. They wanted to build a tower and make themselves a name “lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4). God then took action. In confounding their languages he simply accelerated the process he had originally intended to carry out more gradually. The will of God, not the will of people, was vindicated, and they were “scattered abroad upon the face of the earth” (Gen. 11:9) as God intended them to be.

It is well to note also that the creational aspect of human diversity seems to be projected into the eschatological realm. Culture is never described in the Bible as a nuisance that should be done away with as soon as the Lordship of Christ is accepted or as soon as the Kingdom of God comes. The vision of the people of God at the very end of the Bible has them praising God from “all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues” (Rev. 7:9). Apparently cultural diversity will continue in heaven.

Christian love for the Creator admires the creation. Thus, it adopts and maintains a high view of human culture in all its diverse manifestations among the different groups of people of the world.

2. Love Protects Human Dignity

If culture is creational and if every human being is deeply involved in a particular cultural system, it follows that in some significant way that individual’s self-identity and culture are intertwined. Every personality is, to an extent, culturally determined. Culture is one of the components of human dignity. If this is so, and if humanity is a culturally related concept, then anything that would tend to deculturate might also tend to dehumanize.

Love accepts people as they are. Jesus did not make people into seraphim or angels in order to meet him halfway. He became a human being with all the limitations it involved. He modeled what we might call “incarnational love,” and we are told to “let incarnational love be reflected. Love will not allow this. Love is extremely sensitive to the
 dangers of mixing cultural assumptions with the Gospel message and thereby tending to dehumanize or deculturize those whom God desires to save.

The other side needs to be mentioned as well. Whenever the Gospel enters into a particular culture, some aspects of the culture will necessarily change. The same principle applies to cultures that applies to the salvation of individuals. When an individual is born again, he or she becomes a “new Creation” in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), but this happens in a way that at once protects the integrity of the personality. When I became a Christian, for example, I found the next day that some parts of my being had changed dramatically, but an honest inventory would show that more things were the same than had changed. My eyes were the same color; I received the same level of grades in my college courses; my father and mother were the same; I liked and disliked the same kinds of food; my friends still knew who I was—the list could be multiplied indefinitely. The degree to which the Gospel can be expected to change a culture must be seen in a similar light. Some of the culture will be changed, but more will remain intact.

Only a lack of love will insist that the price of God’s grace is to abandon culture. This is why I find it difficult to understand the statement that when people become Christians they should stop thinking in terms of their own culture and take the viewpoint that the culture of all Christians everywhere is the “culture of the Kingdom of God.” This type of statement is frequent among those who perceive themselves as “radical Christians.” It has never been clear to me, however, what such a culture should look like. When it is described it frequently resembles some kind of counter-culture that has been established in some historical situation or other and then, rather naively, that new counterculture has been claimed as having close affinity with the “culture of the Kingdom.” Those Anabaptists, for example, who have preserved sixteenth-century German or Dutch culture for three hundred years by forming sealed off, endogamous, homogeneous communities need to be careful of confusing their own cultural forms with the absolute ethical requirements of the Gospel. Developing any particular “Christian” life-style within the homogeneous unit itself causes few problems, but when this lifestyle becomes equated with “Kingdom ethics” and when other Christians are thereby judged for shaving their beards or going to church with women’s heads uncovered or serving in the armed forces or using automobiles instead of horse-drawn carriages for transportation or reading daily newspapers or watching television, the “Kingdom ethics” can be interpreted as a subtle form of cultural chauvinism. Love rejects cultural chauvinism and accepts people as they are.

3. Love Respects Peoplehood

Others have known it for some time, but we in America are just recently coming to realize that peoplehood is an important aspect of human dignity. Once the pre-1970 theories of the melting pot were replaced with what Greeley calls the “stew pot” model (1976:44), the way was opened as never before for American people to celebrate their peoplehood. The overwhelming public reaction to the recent television superproduction Roots dramatized the changed attitudes of American people, descendants of slaves and masters alike, toward the dignity of peoplehood, or, as Geertz would say, “primordial ties” (cf. Greeley 1974:12). More American whites now than ever before have an emotional understanding of what was involved in the slogan “black is beautiful.” Roots are important to people, even after four or five or six generations in a “new world.”

Love recognizes the beauty of peoplehood, and postulates that a loving Gospel will not require the cutting off of “roots.” A comfortable sense of “we” as over against “they” is important to a person’s psychological well-being. Group identity cannot be separated from human personality. When a Gospel is presented that explicitly or implicitly teaches that becoming a citizen of the Kingdom of God requires a denial of peoplehood, its authenticity must be called into question. It could hardly be the Gospel of a loving God, or perceived as such by the people who hear it.

Homogeneous congregations allow for the celebration of peoplehood. The careful preservation of the genealogical records of God’s Chosen People so prevalent in the narratives of the Old Testament reflects God’s own respect for “roots.” Jesus himself was kept aware of his roots by his parents. He was continually reminded that he was an Aramaic-speaking Jew from the hills of Galilee and that his tribe was the tribe of Judah. No ethical requirement of the Gospel of the Kingdom caused him to doubt, deny, or be ashamed of his peoplehood. The very fact that he chose at least eleven of his twelve closest associates from precisely the same homogeneous unit showed that he shared in the human need to relate to a “we” group.

Peoplehood is good, but exaggerated peoplehood can become demonic. Degenerated peoplehood becomes racism and discrimination. But the two must not be confused. Group identity always engenders, to one degree or another, ethnocentrism and prejudice. These are as much a part of the normal human personality as are the need for food and drink or the desire for sexual fulfillment. None of these qualities is evil in itself, but any one of them can become evil if used in the wrong way. Thus, the Christian ethical code speaks out against racism, discrimination, gull­tory, drunkenness, and adultery without simultaneously denying the underlying human needs with which they are associated. To condemn racism is proper. To extend the condemnation to peoplehood is an ethical error.

Love would not do that. Love respects peoplehood.

4. Love Throbs with a Passion for the Lost

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16). God sent his Son in order that people might be saved. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus’ task was to seek and save that which was lost (Lk. 19:10), and this is reflected in the Great Commission for his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19–20). Children of the Kingdom who desire to reflect God’s love to humankind have no option but to preach the Gospel in such a way that men and women will hear it, be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and become responsible members of God’s worshipping community.

Christian love will feel compelled to be sure that the Gospel preached is also heard. Studies of evangelistic preaching made with the tools of modern communications have proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Gospel can and has been preached without being heard. That is precisely “what’s gone wrong with the harvest” as Engel and Norton have argued (1975). Whatever Isaiah 55:11 may really turn out to mean, it is a fact of life that God’s word has returned void when disseminated carelessly. The good seed of the Word can be sown on the roadside where it not only fails to bear fruit for life eternal, but where it also serves as fodder for the birds that symbolize the “wicked one” himself (Matt. 13:19).

If response to the Gospel is recognized as equally important as the proclamation of the Gospel, if hearing is as high a value as preaching, then the evangelistic strength of homogeneous-unit churches becomes evident. The people who hear the Gospel are members of the group. They have roots. Not only do they ask themselves, “What will accepting this message mean to me?” but
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they also ask, “What will it mean to us?” They understand that accepting the Gospel implies both commitment to Jesus Christ and commitment to the Body of Christ. The tangible expression of the Body of Christ in most societies worldwide is the local church. Therefore, in a real sense the church constitutes part of the kerygma. If the community they are being asked to join looks like a viable option, unbelievers may be disposed to hear the Gospel. But if they look the community over and reject it for any reason at all, they most likely will become resistant to the Gospel.

Some people may have such a low sense of peoplehood that the cultural makeup of the church they are invited to join makes little difference. But worldwide, even contrary to some predictions made about the social-psychological effects of urbanization, industrialization, and technology, these kinds of free-floating, peopleless individuals are few and far between. Group identity is and will continue to be a powerful force in human affairs, and it will affect the way in which most people hear the Gospel. If becoming a Christian is perceived to mean that I will continue to be associated with my kind of people, I will be much more disposed to hear the message than otherwise.

Nothing in the homogeneous-unit principle suggests that heterogeneous churches are impossible. Precisely because love for Jesus Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit temper prejudice, prevent discrimination, and “break down the middle wall of partition” (Eph. 2:14), consecrated Christians can and sometimes do mix homogeneous units in local congregations. As they do so, they are often enriched through the contact with brothers and sisters of other cultures. But such a church seldom grows, and when it does it is frequently heavy on transfer growth and light on conversion growth. The reason it doesn’t grow by conversions is obvious. Such a community is manifestly unattractive to unbelievers who come from any of the several groups that might be mixed in the church.

In other words, if a congregation decides to mix Christians from more than one homogeneous unit in something more than a token fashion, it can be accomplished and there are some benefits. But two things must be kept in mind: (a) nothing in the Gospel of the Kingdom requires this to be done, and (b) the cost of doing it may be very high. The cost in this case is calculated on the basis of the reduced relevance that the Gospel has for the unbelieving community. If, on the other hand, the congregation decides to remain homogeneous, the evangelistic potential will increase accordingly. When the choice to mix a church is taken, it should be taken intelligently.

This is why love, which throbs with a passion for the lost, will advocate homogeneous-unit churches.

5. Love Constructs No Arbitrary Barriers to Salvation

Some may object to the above on the basis that it is overly pragmatic. They may claim that it so reduces the ethical content of the Gospel that the result is “cheap grace.” They may question whether people who respond to such a message are really saved, or if the churches that follow the homogeneous-unit lines are really Christian. They may score such evangelism and church growth as superficial. If so, it would be well to take a closer look at the question of just how much and what kind of ethical content should be included in the presentation of the Gospel to unbelievers.

There is no question at all that the Gospel, from the very beginning, makes ethical demands. Salvation is salvation from sin. The New Testament, from the preaching of John the Baptist to the letters to the churches in Revelation, demands repentance, or turning from sin. On the day of Pentecost the instructions given to the crowd were to “repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).

Recognizing the ethical dimension of the kerygma, however, does not answer the question of how much or what kind. Some Christians, particularly those whom H. R. Niebuhr would describe as the “Christ against culture” type (1951:45–82), have made a special case of insisting that the Gospel requires the person to make a substantial break with social and cultural ties. Niebuhr says that this view “uncompromisingly affirms the sole authority of Christ over the Christian and resolutely rejects culture’s claims to loyalty” (1951:45). Naturally “Christ against culture” types would see evil in the homogeneous-unit principle, which tends to affirm culture and peoplehood and dialect and roots rather than demanding a radical break from them.

The Christian didache is not to be separated from the kerygma, but neither are the two to be confused. Both contain ethical demands. Those who hear and act upon the didache are Christians who have been “born of the Spirit.” Those who hear and act upon the kerygma are unbelievers who have yet to experience the power of spiritual regeneration. God does not make the same ethical demands on both. It is one thing to enter the Kingdom of God through the new birth (Jn. 3:5), but quite another to enter into the lifetime process of working out all that is implied in serving the King once in the Kingdom. New life does not begin in adult forms. Adults grow from squirming, screaming, puking, diaper-wetting—and yet lovable—babies. Adult demands are not made on babies.

McGavran’s principle of the “two stages of Christianization,” namely “discipling” and “perfecting” (1955:13–16), recognizes the important distinction between the kerygma and the didache. McGavran, who is far from being a racist of any kind, nevertheless warns that “... because of the battle for brotherhood now raging, the temptation is enormous to add a... condition: to become a Christian you must cross a race or class barrier! The temptation must be resisted” (Hayward and McGavran 1974:223). Those who oppose this view, such as Yoder (1973:35–38), Padilla (1975:127–129) and Sider (1976:29), tend to introduce into the kerygma itself a series of radical ethical demands as part of the cost of unconditional discipleship.

In doing so, they may be guilty of raising artificial and non-biblical barriers to salvation. They may unwittingly be loading the Gospel with their own culturally biased interpretations of ethical forms and thus make the kerygma irrelevant to the ethical issues being faced by those who hear the Gospel. They may be using the keys of the Kingdom to lock the door rather than to open it.

What, then, should the ethical content of the kerygma be? One of the specific responsibilities of the Holy Spirit in the world is to “convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn. 16:8). This seems to say that the Holy Spirit has already been at work convicting people of sin even before the Gospel is preached. Thus the preacher should not seek to impose this ethical agenda upon the hearer, but rather first understand precisely what the hearer has been convicted of and feels guilty for. The ethical content of the kerygma should be determined by the hearer’s needs, not by the speaker’s preconceptions, stereotypes, or prejudices.

Apparently on the day of Pentecost the point of guilt was the murder of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:6), and repentance was demanded. Nothing was said about the need to share material goods with the poor, although that came later. Sharing with the poor was a prominent element in the demands of the kerygma to Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:8), but nothing was said to him about murdering Jesus Christ. Unequal distribution of wealth might not be the point of guilt among the animistic jungle tribe, but warfare and murder might.

The Council of Jerusalem once and for all put an end to...
loading the kerygma with culturally biased ethical demands. Undoubtedly the Judaizers were as convinced of the ethical integrity of their demand for circumcision and abstinence from pork as are radical advocates of a simple life-style or pacifism today. However, they did not prevail. It was declared that Gentiles could enter the Kingdom and still be Gentiles without feeling guilty for not being circumcised. There was no ethical demand for them to stop behaving like Gentiles or to renounce their culture, just as there was never a demand for the Jews to become anything but culturally authentic Jews who followed Jesus as Messiah. Likewise there is room in the Kingdom for culturally authentic Japanese, black Americans, Hutu tribesmen, German-Brazilians, red-necks, and Wall Street capitalists.

Love for the unsaved will be sensitive to overloading the Gospel with ethical demands that might reflect cultural chauvinism. It will accept people for what they are and trust the Holy Spirit to bring them to what they ought to be. It will construct no arbitrary barrier to salvation.

6. Love Seeks Theological Integrity

The contextualization of theology is an increasingly frequent subject of discussion in our day. It is now being recognized that much of what has been passing as "Christian" theology is, upon further analysis, only one particular form of culturally biased Western or North Atlantic theology. In the United States alone, efforts are being made to contextualize theology in the black culture, the American Indian culture, the Asian-American culture, the Hispanic culture, the Appalachian culture and the red-neck culture. Other demands for theological and ethical expression that reflect cultural authenticity will undoubtedly be heard. It is becoming clear that theological integrity is produced, not when some theological system is uncritically extracted from one culture and imposed upon another, but when the participants of each culture articulate their own understanding of the supracultural principles of the Word of God within their own frame of reference and in terms of their own world view.

It is not my purpose here to develop the subject of contextualization in any detail. I only raise the point because what is known as "ethno-theology" is so dependent on homogeneous-unit churches for authentic development. If Christian people are denied their natural right and inclination to form their primary fellowship groups with other Christians who share the same world view, contextualization of theology will not be possible. Theology must be a product of Christian community. Contextualized theologies will emerge from communities that have retained cultural identity and integrity. This kind of community is precisely what is meant by a homogeneous-unit church.

Some see contextualization as a threat to Christian unity. They argue that what Christianity needs is not an African theology or a Latin American theology or a water buffalo theology, but rather a biblical theology valid for all cultures. Many different theologies would tend to fragmentize Christianity and tear the seamless robe of Christ. Of course, such a viewpoint is exactly the opposite of the theme of ethnic theologians of liberation who argue that it is necessary for Christians of all groups to be granted the freedom in the Holy Spirit to apply the Bible to their own problems within their own frame of reference and without pressures from the outside to work on someone else's theological and ethical agenda.

Demonic forces, of course, can and do operate in the process of contextualization of theology. The arrogance of theologians who attempt to absolutize their relativities is not confined to North Atlantic minds. It would be just as wrong for Latin Americans, for example, who have succeeded in contextualizing theology to superimpose their system on middle-class America as it has been for the reverse. Love would not do this. Love would see the beauty of each theology in its context and the increased potential for glorifying God in a variety of ways.

This is why Christian love supports homogeneous units. Authentic theology develops within homogeneous-unit contexts, and authentic Christian churches develop within homogeneous-unit contexts. Love seeks theological integrity.

7. Love Builds Brotherhood among People

The application of the homogeneous-unit principle is a powerful antidote for cultural chauvinism, racism, and discrimination. A high respect for peoplehood is a prerequisite for social harmony in a pluralistic society. Conversely, disrespect for peoplehood contributes to social tensions and conflict.

The civil rights movement in America was the climax of social tensions that had been building for generations. Americans dedicated to the "melting pot" theory typically had a low respect for peoplehood. The assumption was that, given sufficient time, all deviations from the dominant British-American or Wasp norm would disappear and Americans would all be the same. This and other related assimilationist theories implies something else: that Americans were considered inferior to the extent that they had not been assimilated into the Wasp culture. Ethnicity was called a "disadvantage." Black English was "poor grammar." Immigrants were pitied as "backward." Japanese were put into concentration camps during World War II. To use the Spanish language in public was considered "un-American." Pressure was on the Indians to become "red white men." "Assimilate or perish" was the pervasive American social attitude, and it was all expressed as the fulfillment of the "American dream."

What is now designated as "assimilationist racism" exploded so fast during the civil rights movement of the 1960s that Christians had little time for calm reflection. Accelerated integration of churches became the ethical cry without a realization that the concept was resting on an assimilationist foundation. The Other Side magazine was founded as a journal to promote church integration, but renounced its position when the implications became clear (cf. Alexander 1974). The United Methodists abolished their Black Central Jurisdiction, but many Methodist blacks are now wondering whether it has helped or hindered their total witness within the church. The Church of God (Cleveland) integrated its black churches into the white denomination and has been losing blacks ever since. In an assimilationist or "melting-pot" world the suggestion of homogeneous-unit churches is extremely unpopular. The United Presbyterians took the most radical step when they virtually canonized the "melting pot" in the Confession of 1967, a doctrinal statement built on reconciliation as its starting point.

Such theologizing has since come under serious criticism by ethnic theologians busy with the task of contextualization. Japanese-American theologian Roy Sano says, "There can be no genuine reconciliation, peace, and understanding without liberation from political, economic, cultural, and religious oppression" (1975:263). Black-American theologian James Cone says, "This essential connection between liberation and reconciliation is virtually absent in the history of Christian thought" (1975:230). The idea that groups of people can be reconciled before each group has attained a healthy concept of its own dignity and cultural integrity is now seen by theologians of liberation as a manifestation of assimilationist racism.

Before, during, and after the civil rights movements, McGavran and his associates in the Church Growth movement had quietly been advocating the homogeneous-unit principle. Years
ago it was criticized as stimulating racism, but now, when seen in the light of America’s “new pluralism,” it is increasingly interpreted as a liberating concept. If homogeneous-unit churches contribute to better self-understanding among members of diverse groups in a pluralistic society and thus enable them to lay the foundations of liberation upon which the reconciliation of equals can be built without paternalism or coercion, for this reason alone they should not be seen only as temporary expedients for the initial phases of evangelization. They should also be seen as ongoing institutions that please God and contribute to the fulfillment of the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Because love builds brotherhood among people, love advocates homogeneous-unit churches.

All One in Christ

The Bible affirms that all Christians are one in Christ. There is no Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female (Gal. 3:28); Christ has broken down the wall of partition separating peoples (Eph. 2:14, 19); Jesus makes no distinction between circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Sythian, slave, and freeman (Col. 3:10–11). If homogeneous-unit churches violate this biblical principle, they cannot be supported by evangelical Christians. How, then, does the homogeneous-unit principle hold together the twin ethical values of respect for the group dignity and peoplehood and advocacy of Christian unity and brotherhood?

This important question could be answered from many different points of view. However, I would like to address it with my own hypothesis of homogeneity: The local congregation in a given community should be as integrated as are the families and other primary groups in the community, while intercongregational activities and relationships should be as integrated as are the secondary social groups in the community or society as a whole.

Within the framework of these two spheres of integration, the tensions between the twin biblical principles of unity and diversity can be resolved. We are all one in Christ—yes, in the intercongregational sphere. And tangible expressions of brotherhood and interdependence among Christians in this sphere need to be multiplied in our complex societies. If they were, they would become strong forces for healing many social illnesses. At the same time, Gentiles do not have to become Jews, females do not have to become males, nor do slaves have to become free in order to enter into and share the blessings of God’s Kingdom. Peoplehood, cultural integrity, and the church as a “place to feel at home” can be maintained—yes, in the intracongregational sphere. Such a model preserves the ties that constitute “my people” while breaking down the biblical barriers between “us” and “them.”

I do not wish to multiply examples of how this kind of a two-sphere model is being applied in real-life situations, but perhaps one outstanding case can be noted as an illustration. Temple Baptist Church (American Baptist) in the heart of Los Angeles found itself declining in a highly pluralistic inner-city situation several years ago. More recently, under the leadership of Pastor James Conklin, the situation has been reversed. Conklin, a graduate of the Fuller School of World Mission and a disciple of McGavran, decided to attempt to apply the homogeneous-unit principle. He designed what he now calls the “multicongregational model.” Within Temple Baptist Church are four homogeneous units: Anglos, Hispanic Americans, Korean Americans, and Chinese Americans. The ethnic groups are not "departments” or “missions” but just as much full members of the church as are the Anglos who were there first.

Each of the four congregations maintains its own cultural identity and integrity. It calls its own pastor, appoints its own lay leadership, worships with its own language, style, and music, and is a place where Anglos, Hispanics, Koreans, and Chinese can each “feel at home.” All four congregations contribute to the general finances of the church and participate in the leadership structure. Once a quarter all members of Temple Baptist join together on Sunday morning in a “Sounds of Heaven” celebration climaxed with the Lord’s Supper. On the intercongregational level the believers relate in a spirit of love and interdependence. Within the congregations they feel comfortable with their own people.

It goes almost without saying that the application of the homogeneous-unit principle cannot be coercive. Individual desires and initiative must always be respected. No one can be forced to join a church of one homogeneous unit if for some reason he prefers another one. No homogeneous-unit church can be fully Christian and close its doors to others. This is clearly racism and cannot be tolerated in the family of God. Christian love must balance the need for peoplehood and group identity with the need for a tangible exhibition of one of Jesus’ most radical principles: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples” (Jn. 13:35). The model most likely to accomplish this on a worldwide scale is the homogeneous-unit principle.

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Contextual Evangelization in Latin America: Between Accommodation and Confrontation

Mortimer Arias

I shall attempt to describe the Latin American evangelistic experience in terms of contextualization of the Gospel. A friend of mine, an engineer by trade, reminded me a few days ago that “contextualization” belongs to the technical jargon of theologians and seminaries. True, it probably originated in the hermeneutical distinction between text and context.

I have found a parable by the late D. T. Niles very helpful in understanding the concept of contextualization: the parable of the Seed and the Flowerpot. The Gospel, according to this great Methodist preacher from Sri Lanka, is like a seed, and you have to sow it. When you sow the seed of the Gospel in Palestine, a plant that can be called Palestinian Christianity grows. When you sow it in Rome, a plant of Roman Christianity grows. You sow the Gospel in Great Britain and you get British Christianity. The seed of the Gospel is later brought to America, and a plant grows of American Christianity. Now, said Dr. Niles, when the missionaries came to our lands they brought not only the seed of the Gospel, but their own plant of Christianity, flowerpot included! So, he concluded, what we have to do is to break the flowerpot, take out the seed of the Gospel, sow it in our own cultural soil, and let our own version of Christianity grow.

This has been called indigenization in missionary theory, and it is what contextualization is all about. The fact is as old as Christianity itself, because the Gospel doesn’t come in a vacuum. Already in the New Testament what we have is not a pure Gospel but a contextualized Gospel, Jewish or Hellenistic, and in distinguishable versions from Peter, Paul, or John. The New Testament record is both a witness to the Gospel and an appropropriation of the Gospel. Some Latin American theologians are saying today that what we have in the New Testament is a “first reading of the Gospel” and that we have to do our own reading today from our own context, in a dynamic interaction between text and context. Rafael Avila, a Catholic lay theologian from Colombia, has put it this way: “We have to look at Latin America with the eyes of the Bible and we have to look at the Bible with the eyes of Latin America.” In the same way, each generation has to appropriate and contextualize the Gospel received in the flowerpots from former generations.

When we recognize that the Gospel has to be contextualized, that evangelization has to be contextual, then our troubles begin. Contextualization may become mere accommodation, acculturation, domestication, or absorption of the Gospel as in syncretism or culture religion. The relationship between the Gospel and culture has to be dynamic and dialectic, just like the seed that grows, taking from the soil and selecting the nutritious elements that are congenial with the life of the plant, without losing its very nature. The Gospel, says Jesus, is also like leaven in the dough, like salt in the earth, like new wine. There is, then, an explosive, renewing, subversive, revolutionary power in it. This is why true contextualization also implies confrontation.

It is interesting to see how this principle is working in some of the most original theologizing being done in the Third World. Dr. Shoki Coe from Taiwan, the former director of the Theological Education Fund, is very clear on this point:

A careful distinction must be made between authentic and
false forms of contextualization. False contextualization yields to uncritical accommodation, a form of culture faith. Authentic contextualization is always prophetic, arising always out of a genuine encounter between God’s Word and his world, and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through the rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment.1

To use Shoki Coe’s words, we want to ask if Latin American contextualization of the Gospel has been prophetic contextualization, “a genuine encounter between God’s Word and his [Latin American] world, . . . challenging and changing the situation through the rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment.” And, in Kosuke Koyama’s words, we will ask ourselves whether Latin American evangelization has been “easy accommodation” or “prophetic accommodation.”2

Of course, this question has to be put to evangelization in the United States as well, or to evangelization in any other part of the world and in any given time. While I am trying to describe and interpret what has happened in Latin America, you can try to translate or to compare it with what has happened or is happening in your own country.

We shall look at our subject from a historical perspective and in a very preliminary and tentative way.

I. The Catholic Conquest: Civilizing Evangelization

The first evangelistic penetration in Latin America came with the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, which is considered “one of the most important events in the whole history of Christian expansion.”3 The missionaries—priests and friars of the Franciscan and Dominican orders—came on the wave of the explorers, the conquistadores, and the colonizers. Evangelization was the spiritual side of the conquest. The Spanish crown had been entrusted by the Pope with the responsibility of evangelizing the New World. (The same was true of the kingdom of Portugal in their part of the new lands.) The cross and the sword, Christ the King and the king of Spain, came together.4 The Indians were supposed to be evangelized by persuasion and, if necessary, by force.5 Slavery was prohibited by the Spanish crown, and the conversion and teaching of the Indians were entrusted to the colonizers by means of the “encomiendas,” land grants for those in charge of the Indians’ evangelization and education.6 Some of the missionaries, such as Father Antonio Montesinos and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas,7 protested against the abuses and were able to secure protective legislation for the Indians, but it was seldom observed. There were many missionaries who went to the Indians peacefully, and not a few who died as martyrs; but, in general, when the evangelizers appealed to the natives “to forsake their false gods” and to worship “the true God who is in heaven,” they had all the power and superiority of the conqueror behind them. “Obedience to the great king of Spain and submission to the King of heaven were demanded as one single act.”8 This was conquering evangelization. And it raises the obvious question: Can the conquerors authentically and efficaciously evangelize the conquered? (Can the rich evangelize the poor? Can the whites evangelize the blacks in a situation of racial domination? Can the Anglos evangelize the Hispanics in a situation of social and economic superiority? Can suburbia evangelize the inner city?)

But it was, as well, civilizing and colonizing evangelization. The religious orders brought with them new livestock and new seeds, new techniques in agriculture and crafts, European arts and literate skills. (In the Southwest of present United States, they were more successful in transplanting culture than in transplanting the Gospel.)9 The Jesuits made an outstanding civilizing work through the reducciones (Christian villages) where the natives received instruction in European mores and Catholic religion and developed new skills and industries. This civilizing task, however, implied a paternalistic attitude and in most cases the destruction of the original Indian cultures. “Spanish-ization” became synonymous with Christianization, and evangelization became colonization. (The same is true of a whole period in United States mission history, when Americanization was the content and intent of evangelization.)10

This conquering evangelization pretended to transplant the Spanish version of Christianity, the flowerpot included. The flowerpot involved not only Catholic dogmas, liturgy, and ethics, but also the Spanish hierarchy, the foreign priesthood, and even the Inquisition. The cultural genocide, however, would never be completely accomplished. The old Indian cultures—some of them widely developed—would prove to be resilient, and the old religion survived under the mantle of Christianity and with Christian names, such as the worship of the Mother Earth or the fertility deity in the imported worship of the Virgin Mary. This fact of cultural resistance and survival added to mass conversions and mass baptisms without Christian instruction, plus the shortage of clergy and the great distances to be traveled, would issue in a syncretistic type of Christianity, the worst kind of accommodation. In this way, we can say that conquering evangelization became conquered evangelization, another instance of the historical fact of the “conquered conquerors.”

After the first impact of the conquest, in the following four centuries, evangelization would be reduced to sacramentalization: baptism as the entrance door to the church and to society, attendance at the mass and religious feasts as the main Christian activity, marriage and burial ceremonies by the Church. “Christians of the three contacts”—baptism, marriage, and funeral—were legion. Catechetical instruction, when it existed, was memoristic and moralistic.11 But millions never had an option for a personal experience of Jesus Christ, and the Bible was both unknown and prohibited. Christ was known as the powerless, dying man on the crucifix, or the patronized baby in his mother’s arms.12 The Christ of the Gospels, the man between the manger and the cross, had not yet arrived in Latin America, except, perhaps, for a very small Christian elite. Latin America, after three centuries of evangelistic sacramentalization, remained a mission field.13 (This is equally true of the so-called “Christian countries,” or wherever Christianity is reduced to sacramentalization and discipleship is confined to church attendance or affiliation. And it is the reason I dare to say that this area is one of the most difficult mission fields in the world.)

As the Catholic bishops in Medellin recognized in 1968, “Latin American evangelization had remained incomplete,”14 and Latin America was ripe for a new attempt at evangelization, this time by the coming of the Protestant version of the Gospel.

II. The Protestant Transplant: Missionary Evangelization

The second evangelistic penetration in Latin America came in the wave of Protestant missionaries from the Anglo-Saxon countries in the second half of the nineteenth century,15 particularly Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian missionaries from the United States.16

The seed of the Gospel in its Protestant version was strongly biblical, Christocentric, ethical, and individualistic. This would become the novelty and the fertilizing value of the Protestant missions, in contrast to traditional Roman Catholicism which was biblically illiterate, centered on Mary and the saints, liturgical and superstitious, and strongly authoritarian.

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tromission" of Protestantism in what was considered Roman Catholic territory. Everything would be used to stop this "foreign invasion": law and repression, social and political pressure, physical violence against persons and places or worship, even murder. Not a few of the sowers of the seed, the witnesses of the new faith, would die like grains of wheat to bring forth fruit. Gradually, and painfully, the Protestant missionary evangelization was getting a foothold in this missionary field in an officially Christian land. At the beginning of this century there were barely 50,000 Protestants, mostly artisans and immigrants, less than one per thousand inhabitants. The first method used by Protestants to sow the seed of the Gospel was the distribution of the Bible. The pioneers in this apparently stony field were colporteurs of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and later on agents of the American Bible Society. The forerunner was James Thomson, a Scottish preacher who distributed the Bible and started Lancasterian schools, using the Bible as the textbook, with the support of the heroes of independence of the new nations. Almost every Latin American nation has stories of people converted by the reading of the Bible and giving birth to new congregations. The second method was preaching — first by missionaries, and soon by national and lay preachers, who put the fluency and beauty of the Spanish language and the fervor of their personal conversion to Christ at the service of communicating the good news. Very often this preaching was polemic and anti-Roman Catholic, using all the biblical ammunition against that religious-social system. A third approach to evangelization was through educational institutions, used to educate the Protestant children in freedom, to reach the elite of the country and to motivate and train prospective Christian workers. Distribution of tracts and circulation of Christian literature was also a favorite instrument of evangelization until the coming of the radio, which become the principal medium of verbal proclamation for the Protestant groups.

Of course the Protestant seed came with its flowerpot — denominational doctrines and church structures, liturgy and hymnology, ethics and style of life, architecture, and even clerical composition! But there were also the cultural components of the flowerpot — the world view, the ethos and the ideology of the prospering and expanding capitalistic Anglo-Saxon countries, the image of democracy, progress, education, freedom, and material development. And it was this flowerpot, and not the seed itself, that the liberal politicians, the members of the Masonic lodges, and the young Latin American elite were looking at. In the nineteenth century, the old Spanish colonialism was being replaced by the commercial and diplomatic neocolonialism of Great Britain, and later on of the United States of America. Protestantism arrived in Latin America when our countries were engaged in the "age of modernization." Latin American intellectuals looked at the Anglo-Saxon world as their model and to Protestantism as a timely ally.

José Miguez Bonino, the Argentinian Methodist theologian, puts it this way:

It hardly comes as a surprise that the men engaged in this struggle felt attracted by what they thought were the social, economic and political consequences of the religion of the Anglo-Saxon countries: Protestantism. They were not so attracted to it as a personal religion — very few became Protestants themselves. Rather they saw in it, in the first place, an ally in the struggle against clerical domination. On the other hand, Protestantism (they referred mostly to Puritanism) had helped to shape the virtues needed for the modern world: freedom of judgment, reliability, a pioneering and enterprising spirit, moral seriousness. It was the religion of activity, culture and life as opposed to ritualism, idle speculation, and the next world. Under the auspices of these men, conditions were created for the introduction of Protestant missions in Latin America.

Democracy, freedom, moral uprightness, science, and culture: these are the goals that the new religion is supposed to serve. As one follows the evangelical congresses and the accounts of missionaries, it becomes clear that Protestantism accepted this function.

In summary, for the Methodist theologian from Argentina, as Catholicism "played the role of legitimizing and sacralizing the social and economic structure implanted in America" of the "conquest and colonization in the sixteenth century," Protestantism "played a minor but significant role in the liberal-modernistic project" of the "neocolonialism in the nineteenth." The intention was evangelization, but, consciously or unconsciously, Protestantism fulfilled an ideological function. In one sense, it was confrontation, prophetic accommodation, in relation to the old social order, but it became accommodation, simple accommodation, in relation to the neocolonial modernistic society in the making. Though many of us would celebrate with gratitude the coming of the Protestant version of Christianity, which made possible for us a personal and transforming confrontation with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we have to accept the ambiguity of the Protestant presence in our historical situation.

In the twentieth century new missions were coming in, and a flood of missionaries from the United States entered after the Second World War. Protestantism began to grow steadily, particularly after 1930. While at the time of the Panama Congress of Protestant Missions in 1916 the Protestant community was 500,000, by 1936 it had jumped to 2,400,000. And while the population has been growing by 3 percent annually, the evangelical membership has been growing by 10 percent, doubling every 10 years. In 1973, the Protestant community was estimated at over 20,000,000, between 7 and 8 percent of the total population. When we break these figures down we discover a few interesting facts. First, 65 percent of the Protestants in Latin America are in Brazil, where there is also the largest Catholic Church in the world. Second, the main-line Protestant churches, which are the oldest, represent 25 percent of the total evangelical community in all of Latin America. Third, the conservative evangelical and faith missions, with a huge deployment of missionary force (over 10,000 missionaries as compared with 750 from the main-line Protestant bodies), reach a modest 3 percent of the total Protestant membership in Latin America. Fourth, the Pentecostals, who work without foreign missionaries and without financial support from outside, constitute two-thirds of the Protestant community in Latin America.

III. The Pentecostal Sprout: Indigenous Evangelization

The Pentecostal movement in Latin America was one of the "multiple centers of the worldwide explosion of Pentecostalism" at the turn of the century, but it has become "the only authentic South American form of Protestantism," according to the French sociologist Christian Lalivé d'Epinaÿ. There are some Pentecostal missions (Assemblies of God and others) from the United States and Sweden, but the bulk of the movement belongs to those indigenous forms of Pentecostalism having no connection with or dependence on outside churches or mission boards. Chileno Pentecostalism, for instance, was a sprout of Pentecostal experience inside the Methodist Church under the leadership of missionary pastor Willis C. Hoover. After the condemnation by the Methodist Annual Conference in 1910, the movement expanded to a membership of over half a million in its several branches. The
Methodist Church in Chile has since retained membership numbering only 1 percent of the Pentecostal total. In Brazil, a Swedish missionary founded the Assemblies of God in 1910, and in the same year an Italian member of a Presbyterian church in Chicago started the Christian Congregation of Brazil. The Assemblies of God planted churches in every state in Brazil, through the work of consecrated laymen, becoming the largest evangelical church in Latin America with a membership of 1,500,000. The Congregation of Brazil had half a million members in 1967. Manoel de Mello started with a congregation in São Paulo twenty years ago, and today his Brazil for Christ church has more members than all the historical Protestant churches together.27

This fast growth and the particularities of the movement have intrigued sociologists, missiologists, church executives, and experts from Catholic, Protestant, and secular circles. How is this phenomenon to be explained? Some give a spiritual reason: Some one find a special spiritual reason: the free action of the Holy Spirit. Some find anthropological roots: people's hunger for God. Others offer a sociological explanation: the Pentecostal movement, in replacing the "hacienda" social pattern, responds to the need for belonging, support, and authority for those coming from the rural areas to the insecurity and anonymity of the big cities. Others find the answer in an appropriate pastoral methodology: lay participation, common people communicating the Good News to common people in their own situation and on their own terms; the practical training and selection of pastors through a long on-the-job process; and sound principles of self-support, self-government, and self-propagation. There are also psychological explanations: the freedom of expression in worship and the charismatic type of authority of leaders and pastors. Finally, the cultural dimension: the use of popular music and instruments, the indigenization of worship. Probably each one of these explanations has relevance, but one thing is clear: here we have an evangelistic movement thoroughly contextualized.

The question is whether is this is prophetic contextualization or mere accommodation. In one sense, at the individual level, there is undoubtedly a dimension of confrontation. Individuals are called to make a break with their former style of life, to "leave the world" and "follow the Lord," to become sober and honest, to put themselves and their families in order, and to "serve the Lord," preaching and witnessing in the streets. There is a definite sense of liberation from fear, loneliness, guilt, sickness. There is, as well, a social integration at the level of the congregation. But a lack of prophetic understanding of the Gospel is apparent. The Pentecostal vision of the world is dualistic and pessimistic. Its ethics are very conventional and individualistic. There is a lack of concern for society at large, though there is concern for "the household of faith." Lalive d'Epinay, after two years of study of the Pentecostal movement in Chile, says that the Pentecostals live in a state of "social strike," a withdrawal from the world. Certainly the great challenge for the future of Pentecostalism is to find a prophetic contextualization of the Gospel.

IV. The Seasonal Vintage of Revival: Professional Evangelization

Organized revival was not a spontaneous product in Latin America as it was on the North American frontier. To be sure, it has been tried for a long time in the Latin American churches that have retained the annual or semiannual "evangelistic campaign." But it has died a natural death in many churches, and in others it is merely another instrument in the permanent task of witnessing and communicating the Gospel.

Latin America has proved to be a fertile or at least open field, however, for para-church groups from the United States such as the Billy Graham organization to experiment with interdenominational evangelistic campaigns. Crusades have been held by Billy Graham himself in Buenos Aires and São Paulo, and by some of his associates in other Latin American cities, following the same pattern of businesslike multimedia organization with interdenominational participation. Several "mini Billy Grahams" have appeared in Latin America in the last twenty years. Another type of mass evangelization, very successful in terms of mass movements, has been the campaigns of the faith healers.

The 1978 annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology will be held in conjunction with the meeting of the International Association for Mission Studies at Maryknoll Seminary in Maryknoll, New York, August 21-26, 1978. The theme of the meeting will be "Credibility and Spirituality in Mission." Details about the program have been published in *IAMS Newsletter, No. 11*. Attendance will be limited to 200 participants. For further information, write to: Dr. Frans J. Verstraelen, General Secretary of the IAMS; Department of Missiology, I.I.M.E., Boerhaavelaan 43, Leiden, Netherlands.

By far the most comprehensive and best-organized effort at professional evangelization has been Evangelism-in-Depth (EID), originated in Latin America by the creative work of Kenneth Strachan of the Latin America Mission.28 Its aim is to mobilize the whole people of God—all Christians, all churches, all methods—for evangelization during a whole year of concerted effort and pooling of resources. ("Key 73" was a mild adaptation in the United States of this type of "saturation evangelism.").30 It has been more effective in small countries where the evangelical community is in a minority situation, e.g., Nicaragua, Guatemala, Venezuela, Bolivia. It has not been tried in the big countries like Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. The great values in this coordination of resources and methodologies are the mobilizing of the churches in an intentional effort for a sustained period of time, on-the-job training of laity and clergy in methods, development of national leadership, cooperation among evangelical churches, and improved public image of the evangelical community. Thousands of prayer cells, visits, tract distributions, participants in parades, and professions of faith are reported, but the results in terms of effective church growth have not been conclusive.

Professional evangelization of this type stirs the congregations a bit, produces a brief public impact, and probably attracts a few people from the margins of the church. But, as Professor Rudolf Obermuller has said, the task is not "revival," because "revival" presupposes a certain knowledge of the Church and the Bible, and this is precisely what the masses do not have in Latin America.

What can we say of professional evangelization in terms of our inquiry? Is it prophetic contextualization? Hardly. In spite of all the modernization in terms of the media, the theology is as old-fashioned as it can be—almost a carbon copy of the minis-
more inclusive in their approach and more sensitive to human needs in a given context, incorporating Good Will Caravans, for instance, as they did in Bolivia. But they have to work with and through the churches as they are, so they have to compromise on a "lowest common denominator," and this is always the fundamentalist, conservative understanding of the Gospel and evangelization.

Efforts of the movement to obtain public sympathy and support from the government made it very unlikely that the evangelistic message would become specific about the situation in a given country. Actually, most of the Presidential Breakfasts at the conclusion of the EID programs have hosted presidents who held their people in oppression and repression. The evangelizers wouldn't dare "to mention the rope in the house of the hanged," as we say in Spanish. And the reports usually celebrate the mere fact that the president came, said a few pious words, and commended the EID program. In this way they show awareness of one context—the power of government—but not of the other context of suffering, oppression, injustices, discrimination, exploitation of the poor. They are thus alienated from the vast majority of the population to whom we are supposed to bring the Good News. The organized revival is like a rake, gathering what is on the surface and piling it up as "the seasonal vintage of revival."

V. Time of Pruning: Crisis in Traditional Evangelization

In one way or another, through sowing and planting, by raking and seasonal harvesting, by transplant or indigenous sprouting, the plant of Christianity has been unevenly growing in Latin America. But now the time of pruning has come. This is much more than metaphor in our lands—it is a painful and dramatic process in the daily life and struggle of the Christian Church. In the area of evangelization this means a crisis in the traditional approach and methodology. It is happening simultaneously in the Roman Catholic Church, in the Protestant community and, to a certain degree, in the family of Pentecostal churches.

The Second Vatican Council and the Medellin Conference of Bishops in 1968 marked the turning point for the Roman Catholic Church. It was clear to the Latin American fathers that they had been engaged for a long time in a "pastoral" of conservation and sacramentalization rather than a "pastoral" of evangelization. They were aware that Catholic people were being baptized but going "through life without being truly converted to the Gospel, without a personal encounter with and commitment to Jesus the Savior." They saw that it was time for a radical revision and a new evangelization for the masses and the elite. The task was one of evangelizing the baptized, calling the Christian people "to a fuller experience of the Gospel and to re-conversion or, better, to a permanent conversion." The Dominican Jordan Bishop put it this way:

The first task of the dynamic nucleus—priests, religious and lay people—in a Latin American parish today, would be the evangelization of the practicing Catholics in the parish. . . . Evangelization is not a matter of statistics; above all, it is a matter of Christian authenticity. Religious syncretism is rejected as a false incarnation, but there is a clear call to the Church to incarnate itself in the life of the people in Latin America, assuming their hopes, sufferings and struggles. This incarnation would be much more than cultural contextualization; it would be an option for the poor and oppressed, as evidenced by the mushrooming of documents, movements, declarations, confrontations, and deadly struggles triggered by the Medellin Conference. The Church had discovered the neighbor, the poor on the other side of the road, and had rediscovered the gospel of human liberation in the Bible. Evangelization could never be the same. It had to be humanizing, conscientizing, and liberating. A similar process has been taking place among Latin American Protestants since the early sixties. The Central Conference of the Methodist Church in Latin America in 1960 called the churches to "an incarnation in the sufferings and hopes of the society in which they live." The Latin American Evangelical Conference in 1961 called the churches and Christians to overcome the traditional spiritualistic individualism and to assume their responsibilities in the dramatic situation of the Latin American continent, marked by population explosion, malnutrition, infant mortality, illiteracy, poverty, exploitation, rising expectations, and shaken by the galvanizing effect of the Cuban Revolution. "The problem is not one of growth," said Thomas J. Ligget, a missionary of the Disciples of Christ, after reporting the amazing growth of the evangelical churches. "The problem is what are we going to do? Have we a word to say? Are we prepared for the necessary changes in the church and society? Our danger is not to be few, but not to be creative." Gonzalo Castillo-Cárdenas, a Presbyterian from Colombia, told the World Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Mexico, 1963, that the demand made of the Church is a kenosis and incarnation in the new Latin American situation. "The fundamental task of Latin American Protestantism is one of conversion to the world" said Dr. José Míguez Bonino to the Student Christian Movement Congress in Cordoba, 1964, "a growing incarnation in Latin America." The social context had become increasingly the agenda of the Church when the Methodists met in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in 1966 for a Consultation on "Evangelization and Revolution in Latin America."

In the seventies, the "new evangelical generation," particularly the leadership that had been working in the Intervarsity Movement in Latin America, was catching up and trying to respond to the challenge of prophetic contextualization. Typical of this new approach is the following statement of Orlando E. Costas, the first Latin American missiologist from the Protestant ranks:

Just as the gospel arises from within a concrete historical situation, so its communication takes place in a particular context. To evangelize one needs to understand the world of those who are to be evangelized. . . .

This is precisely the tragedy of evangelism in the Latin American world. On the one hand, the gospel has not been proclaimed in its fullness. The gospel has been separated from the kingdom, redemption from creation, salvation from history. The work of evangelism has been limited, accordingly, to the sphere of the privatistic, I-Thou relationship. Congruent with the latter is the fact that the proclamation of the gospel has not been adequately validated by efficacious historical signs. The church in Latin America has not shown the marks of the cross of unconditional engagement in the struggles and agonies of the suffering, oppressed majorities. To be able to fulfill its evangelistic task today, the Latin American Church needs, in consequence, not only to recover the fullness of the gospel, but, especially, to authenticate its truth and power in the life of unconditional obedience.

If we, as Latin Americans, are to undertake seriously and efficaciously the evangelistic challenge which our world poses today, we have to start evangelizing the church, i.e., calling her to experience a new conversion to the Christ who stands alongside of the oppressed and exploited.

This is the kind of message that the so-called "conservative evangelical" young leaders carried to the International Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne, one that would make its impact on the whole congress and radically affect the content of the Lausanne Covenant. For José Míguez this process of pruning, of repentance and conversion, must take the shape of very concrete, risky, and painful options for the Protestant community. Prophetic contex-
tualization obliges Protestants to reverse the accompanying role of the "modernization project" of a former generation. Says the Dean of Studies of the Superior Institute of Evangelical Theological Studies of Buenos Aires:

Protestantism can overcome its crisis of identity and mission only if it can recapture the "subversive" role it once played, but doing so from within the radically different situation in which we find ourselves today. That means it would work to overcome the very historical movement in which it previously participated. To do this it must intensify, interpret, and articulate anew the basic evangelical concepts of newness, repentance, transformation, new life, and the new man. This reinterpretation must be based on the whole dimension of biblical witness, be articulated in relation to existing conditions in our countries, and emphasize the necessity of internal and external liberation.47

Even Pentecostalism shows signs of being deeply affected by the human situation in Latin America. Juan Carlos Ortiz from Argentina, the representative of one of the charismatic renewal streams, bluntly says that there is not a "spiritual Gospel" and a "social Gospel," but just one Gospel, which includes the spiritual, the social, and the material. Ortiz is meanwhile experimenting with a community of sharing in his own growing church in Buenos Aires.48 Manoel de Mello, the founder and leader of Brasil "social Gospel," but just one Gospel, which includes the spiritual, with a community of sharing in his own growing church in Sao Paulo, has joined the World and proclaims a Gospel that includes the denunciation of injustices. He has undertaken a multifaceted ministry for the "whole person" in his huge church in Sao Paulo, has joined the World Council of Churches, and attests to his conviction with a good record of arrests.49 The limitation of this contextualization is that it is not prophetic enough. As Orlando E. Costas says:

The individualism of the Pentecostal service shows up even where the emphasis is as communitarian as in the renewed (charismatic) worship service. Here there is a strong consciousness of the neighbor. It is evident in a preoccupation with the individual needs of the members of the community of faith, and of the visitors and near neighbors. But a concern for the structural problems of society is conspicuously absent . . .

Though it is true that the Pentecostal service reflects a strong autochthonous Protestantism, it is also true that it reflects an egocentric church . . . a church sociologically and theologically naive, unaware of the fact that society is much more than the sum of individuals. . . . In this way it becomes one of the main agents of the status quo in a continent where change is not a luxury but an unavoidable necessity.50

Protestantism in Latin America, in trying to be faithful to the Gospel and to the Latin American person, in its evangelistic witness, oscillates between accommodation and confrontation.

VI. Prophetic Contextualization: Costly Evangelization

I want to conclude with a brief note on a new phenomenon in Latin American Christianity: the emergence of what could be called prophetic contextualization. As has been said, "The future Church historians will be puzzled in studying this period of the Church in Latin America, because, suddenly, Christians began to act out of character."51 For centuries the Church has been the supporter of the status quo. But when Nelson Rockefeller visited Latin America and made his report to President Nixon, he pointed to the Church as one of the main forces for change in the continent.52 Strange as it may sound, the title of a recent release from the Latin American Press is quite true to the facts: "Right-wing dictators fear Christianity more than Marxism."53 These Christians, however, are not using Capital or the Communist Manifesto. They are using their Bible, and releasing its liberating message. Not all Christians, but a growing and decisive minority, including laywomen and laymen, young people, pastors, priests, friars, nuns, and quite a few bishops, are trying to respond prophetically to "the cry of my people"54 as Yahweh asked Moses to respond.

In one sense we are seeing the greening of the Church in Latin America. Springtime has come and a revitalizing breeze is blowing. The Roman Catholic Church has jumped over four centuries, assuming finally the Reformation of the sixteenth century and embracing the impetus of the revolution of the twentieth century. Protestants are finally overcoming their reductionistic individualism and spiritualism, and they are gradually liberating themselves from their inherited cultural hang-ups. Pentecostalists are experimenting with a growing awareness of human needs and

The next meeting of the International Association for Mission Studies will be held at Maryknoll Seminary in Maryknoll, New York, August 21-26, 1978.

The announcement of the Gospel implies the denunciation of everything that is not in agreement with the Gospel. No evangelism is authentically evangelical if it is not at the same time prophetic. The Church cannot make compromise with any force that oppresses or dehumanizes man. It cannot name Jesus Christ if it does not name also the idols and the demons that must be cast out from the inner life of man and from the structures of society (Luke 3:1–20; 6:20–23; Matt. 23).60

These declarations were anticipations of what was going to happen and a description of what has been happening in the seventies in Latin America. Most of the Latin American countries are under military regimes that have adopted a line of economic development, stability at all costs, coinciding with an anticommunist, antisocialist, fascistic type of ideology. They are using all their repressive power to kill any dissension, any protest, any force that oppresses or dehumanizes man. The churches in this situation have become the “voice of the voiceless,” but they are paying a price for it.61 Pastors and professors who have been engaged in refugee programs have been arrested and have disappeared. Others have been imprisoned for months on the basis of rumors and anonymous accusations. Hundreds—including priests and nuns—have been expelled or exiled. Fifteen bishops of the Catholic Church were arrested, imprisoned for twenty-four hours, and expelled from Ecuador. Monsignor Dom Helder Camara is not allowed to speak by radio, television, or the press in his country, Brazil, but there is freedom to attack him. He and other bishops who have been denouncing the injustices, tortures, and violence, and speaking for the peasants and the workers, have been accused of being communists. Dom Helder’s secretary, Father Pereira Neto, was brutally assassinated and the episcopal building was machine-gunned. A para-military group in Argentina repulsed a terrorist attack against a general of the army by murdering three priests and two seminarians who were moderates and had nothing to do with the terrorists’ action. A priest who went to the police to accompany two women and their children presenting a complaint about their lands being invaded by the big corporations in Matto Grosso, Brazil, was killed by those police. When a guerrilla group in El Salvador executed the Minister of Foreign Affairs held in hostage, a rightist group, The White Warriors Union, assassinated Jesuit priest Alfonso Navarro Oviedo on May 12, 1977. Two months before, unidentified persons ambushed and killed Father Rutilio Grande and two campesinos who were with him. Between February and May, fifteen foreign priests, seven of them Jesuits, were expelled from El Salvador. The latest news is that the White Warriors Union, a lera-military rightist organization, has threatened to kill all the Jesuits who do not leave the country within thirty days. Father César Jerez, Jesuit Provincial, said: “We are going to continue to be faithful to our mission until we fulfill our duty or are liquidated.”62

These are just a few examples of what is becoming a sort of pattern in Latin America. This new generation of Christians is discovering again that when faithfulness to the Gospel and to people is at stake, there is no easy prophethood. They are learning that Christian evangelization is not cheap, verbal proclamation of evangelical propaganda. The Gospel is free, but it is not cheap. Grace is free, but not cheap. Both discipleship and evangelization are costly.

But we have no right to complain. Jesus told us so. He warned us, “Beware when all men speak well of you” (Lk. 6:26). “Blessed are you when you are persecuted . . . because in this way they persecuted the prophets before you” (Matt. 5:10–12). Prophetic contextualization is always risky and costly; but it is faithful and fruitful.

In truth, in very truth I tell you, a grain of wheat remains a solitary grain unless it falls into the ground and dies; but if it dies, it bears a rich harvest. (John 12:24)

If this is so, the best still is to come.

Notes


6. Ibid., pp. 14ff.

7. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Apologética Historia de las Indias, Madrid, 1909, and Del Unico Modo de Atraer a todos los Pueblos a la Verdadera Religion, Mexico, 1942.


12. Mackay, op. cit.

13. This was disputed before but not after Medellin. See n. 14. Enrique Dussel, Sintesis para una Historia de la Iglesia en America Latina, Barcelona, 1967, pp. 159ff.


15. There were immigrant churches from Germany, Great Britain, Holland, etc. They were there not to evangelize but to preserve their faith in a Catholic land. Cf. González, op. cit., ch. 9.

16. José Miguéz Bonino, “The Political Attitude of Protestants in
17. There are Protestant martyrs in almost every Latin American country. In Bolivia there are 17, the last 8 (including a Canadian Baptist missionary, a national pastor, and six Indian believers) were killed in 1949. In Colombia, during “The Violence” of 1948–1958, there were 1,869 recorded cases of violence against Protestant persons on religious grounds (649 arrested, 38 tortured, 22 put to forced labor, 493 injured, 126 murdered, 423 families forced to flee because of persecution). James Goff, Protestant Persecution in Colombia, 1948–1958, Cuernavaca, Mexico: CIDOC, 1965.


19. See Gonzalez, op. cit., pp. 333ff. There are two classic biographies of colporteurs in Spanish: Claudio Celada, Francisco Penzotti, un Apóstol Contemporáneo; Andrés Milne, Del Cabo de Hornos a Quito con la Biblia, Buenos Aires: La Aurora.

20. In 1964 there were 23 Protestant broadcasting stations in Latin America, 18 in Spanish, 1 in English, and 4 in Portuguese, besides thousands of programs from commercial stations in every country (DIA, Monthly Summary, May—June 1964).


22. Ibid., pp. 10–12, emphasis added.

23. Ibid., pp. 4, 7, 12.


34. CELAM, op. cit., Documents I, Conclusions II.


38. The Church and Society movement gained momentum in the sixties and was one of the catalytic agents in sensitizing the social conscience among Protestants. For a review and evaluation of the movement see Orlando E. Costas, Theology of the Crossroads in Contemporary Latin America, ch. 9. The ISAL (Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina) consultation at El Tabo, Chile, in 1965, was the turning point. See the report and interpretation of that event in América Hoy, Montevideo: ISAL, 1966. A critical analysis of ISAL is “Iglesia y Sociedad en América Latina” by C. René Padilla in the volume he edited, Fe Cristiana y Latinoamérica Hoy, Buenos Aires: Ediciones Certeza, 1974, pp. 121–153. Other documents of this process: América Latina: Movilización Popular y Fe Cristiana, Montevideo: ISAL, 1971, and the collection of the magazine Cristianismo y Sociedad, Montevideo and Buenos Aires: Tierra Nueva.


47. José Miguez Bonino, “The Political Attitude of Protestants in Latin America,” tr. by James and Margaret Goff, from Noticiero de Fe, July 1972, p. 2, emphasis added.

48. Juan Carlos Ortiz, “Iglesia y Sociedad” in C. René Padilla, Fe Cristiana y Latinoamérica Hoy, pp. 185ff. See also J.C. Ortiz, 73.

January, 1978 27
Book Reviews

American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective.


This is a collection of eleven papers presented at the fourth annual meeting of the American Society of Missiology, together with brief responses to some of them. Symposia are often uneven; this one, prepared from author-edited and author-prepared camera-ready typescript, is more so than most. The papers do focus on the theme of American missions, but they vary greatly in approach, quality, and length. Without overall editing of the final typescripts, certain errors were not eliminated and repetitions could not be avoided. There is no index.

Yet this may well be one of the most important books in the field of religion to arise out of the bicentennial celebration. It gives the reader a broad cross section of current historical and theological thinking about North American missions, Protestant and Catholic. Each of the longer papers makes an impressive contribution; just to list them gives some impression of the range of materials in the book: “A History of Foreign Mission Theory in America” by Charles W. Forman, “Mission and Modernization: A Preliminary Critical Analysis of Contemporary Understandings of Mission from a ‘Radical Evangelical’ Perspective” by Stephen C. Knapp, “The Churches and the Indians: Consequences of 350 Years of Missions” by R. Pierce Beaver, and “The Role of American Protestantism in World Mission” by W. Richey Hogg. Shorter papers deal with the missionary situation in the Revolutionary era (Charles L. Chaney), with the cultural factors in the American Protestant missionary enterprise (Henry Warner Bowden), two with American Roman Catholic Missions (Tim Ryan, Simon E. Smith, S.J.), with conciliar Protestant concepts of mission (J. Walter Cason), with black Christianity (Emmanuel L. McCall), and with cultural adaptation in American church action (the presidential address by Louis J. Luzbetak, S.V.D.).

A number of overall impressions emerge from the volume. The extent and importance, as well as the limitations, of Indian and home missions are emphasized in a number of ways. Without the building of the home base, the great sweep of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century foreign missions would not have been possible. The long-range shifts from paternalism and imperialism to partnership and mutuality in much mission thought and action are glimpsed from various angles, as are the trends from the repudiation of other religions to the appreciation of and dialogue with them. There is awareness of the long entanglement of missions with ethnocentrism and racism; the note of repentance is sounded in a number of papers, along with hints of how mission in the future can be freer of such flaws. The presidential address traces a growth from “ethnocentrism” through “incipient adaptation” to “incarnational adaptation.” The recent upsurge of conservative evangelical missions is noted.

In the notes and bibliographies of the papers there is a wealth of information on the historical and contemporary literature of mission. To put such a wealth of material before the reader at relatively low cost would seem to justify the production of this book from camera-ready copy; while it does not have the polish of a carefully printed work, it is a landmark in the development of missiology in America.

—Robert T. Handy

Robert T. Handy is Professor of Church History and Academic Dean at Union Theological Seminary, New York.
The Church and the Third World Revolution.


Théologie politique has had a considerable vogue in recent years, especially in the theology of mission. The distinction of Father Bigo's book lies partly in its freedom from ideological cant, but mainly in the fresh and perceptive way in which he relates classical Christian theology to the massive and complex problems of social justice.

Bigo defines the Third World revolution in historical terms. The first revolution was libertarian-humanitarian—the declaration of the rights of man and all that—as against the restraints of the feudal order. Among other things, its proclamation of economic liberty produced (or at least did not inhibit) the growth of the free enterprise system.

The second revolution undertook to do battle against capitalism—demanding a higher standard of living and a wider sharing of power for the formerly disadvantaged. These two demands led to a more unified organization of society and a progressively socialized system, even in capitalist countries.

The third revolution has developed in the last decade. It lacks the cohesion of the first two and is primarily a revolt against "repression" and against the "system" as represented by the technostructure, the political complex, the entrenched bureaucracy, the family, and the hierarchy of the Church. This revolt has so many faces that it is, in effect, a faceless revolution. That does not mean that it has no potency. But it makes no pretense of founding a new society. Its vision is radically pessimistic.

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The continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America are convulsed in the confluence of these three revolutions. They are fighting on three fronts at the same time: against the remnants of a feudal heritage, against capitalism, and against "the system." But the battle is confused, the issues are ill defined and often contradictory, and the outcome is uncertain.

The answers to the Third World revolution will demand wisdom that science alone cannot provide. Father Bigo, therefore, devotes detailed attention to an exposition of the social and political dimensions of the Christian faith. This includes biblical exegesis and an informed discussion of its implications for social thought and action. He proceeds to a critique of the Marxist, socialist and democratic alternatives, in which the distinctiveness of the Christian mission is affirmed over against all ideological systems. People may turn to ideologies for a revelation of their destinies, but these have no answer to the great questions about life, which move in a space circumscribed by death.

The Church must not be an accomplice of the forces of death. Its mission is to testify against all profane powers that lay claim to adoration and to point to the light that is in the world but not of the world.

A brief review cannot convey the quality and importance of this learned and prophetic book, which makes a valuable contribution to missiological thought.

—Charles W. Ranson


From antiquity the Chinese attempt to be a moral people in a moral society without reference to any outside deity has been both a fascination and a bafflement to Western Christians. In the China of Mao Tse-tung Thought this attempt continues and challenges the church ecumenical to a new understanding of itself and the mandate of its Lord to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to all nations. If the Christian faith has nothing to contribute to the new China, does it have any contribution elsewhere?

In this small volume, Fr. Michael Chu gathers for us six essays by Catholic scholars continuing the theological discussion of the ecumenical gatherings on China held at Bastad, Sweden, and Louvain, Belgium, in 1974.

Julia Ching begins by giving us the parameters within which theological exploration on China is to take place: information from the People's Republic of China is scanty, inadequate, and ambiguous. We do not know whether we are looking at the real or a mythical China. Though at best an exercise based on limited facts, we must nevertheless try for theological understanding. She warns against repeating the arrogance and triumphalism of past missionary eras and pleads for theological openness that does not attempt to squeeze all human experience of worth into Christian molds and categories.

What follows in the rest of the book are representations in a spectrum from a traditional ecclesiocentric What-China-lacks-Christianity-can-provide-perspective (Grasso, Sullivan) to an attempt to see what it is that is really new in the new China that challenges Christian faith. After pondering over all the good things that are apparently paving the way for China's salvation, Fr. Francis A. Sullivan asks, "Where is the Church as Sacrament in all this?" He concludes by saying that the Church is present in bringing about the new through the intercessory prayers of the saints in Taiwan and the Chinese diaspora.

Because of the fact that we have virtually no meaningful relationship with the citizens of the People's Republic, all theologizing about China unfortunately is done in a monologic attempt "to understand the Christian experience by reacting from a Chris-
tian standpoint to the ideology of Mac Tse-tung” (Faricy). Much of this agony over the challenge of China is done under the assumption that what is said of China, by official sources, is true.

Fr. Gerald O’Collins offers an imaginative understanding of Christian suffering that is more comprehensive. In the Chinese context Christian suffering is not limited to the individual Calvaries of missionary martyrs of the past, but is seen by O’Collins as suffering writ large that includes the mass death of thousands upon thousands of innocent victims in a world wrought with injustices and violent conflict.

Writing from the perspective of a historian of religions, Paul Rule sees Mao Thought as a substitute religion having all the flavor and tone of “transcendence.” He fears that being such it will be even more, not less, impervious to Christian faith. Therefore, he warns that any attempt in the future to relate Christian faith to China will have to understand the religion of Mao Tsetung. This volume is another addition to that understanding.

—Franklin J. Woo

The Historical Study of African Religion.


Africa’s traditional religious systems have been considered passive cosmologies, timeless systems that were abruptly challenged by the dynamism of Christianity and Islam. Gaarded by this assertion in Dr. G. Parrinder’s Religion in Africa, Professor B. A. Ogut challenged scholars to recognise that religious history would in all likelihood have experienced the dynamics of precolonial life that have already been diagnosed in African economic and political history. In the long run, after a good deal more research, the religious history of Africa should then complement an integrated historiography spanning the dichotomies of specialized political, economic, and religious writings.

In June of 1970 Isaria Kimambo, Professor of History at the University of Dar es Salaam, and Terence Ranger picked up Ogut’s challenge in their conference on the historical study of African religious systems. Although Ranger had moved to UCLA (he is now at Manchester, England), his earlier years in Tanzania had helped to place the department of history at Dar es Salaam in the vanguard of African research, a position enhanced by this seminal conference.

The papers have been edited to focus on East and Central Africa, and have been arranged in six sections: Methods for the Reconstruction of Early Religious History, Cults of Kingship, The Interaction of Religious and Political Innovation, the Historical Study of Rites of Transition and of Spirit Possession Cults, The Nineteenth-Century Crisis and Religious Systems in East and Central Africa, and Interactions Between African Religion and Christianity in the Twentieth Century. While the authors saw their efforts as “initial rather than definitive attempts” to address the Ogut challenge, this modest hope has produced some meticulous and challeng-
Fifteen Outstanding Books of 1977 for Mission Studies

The Editors of the Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research have selected the following books for special recognition of their outstanding contribution to mission studies in 1977. A few of the books have 1976 copyright dates, but did not actually appear until 1977. We have limited our selection to books in English since it would be impossible to consider fairly the books in many other languages that are not readily available to us. We commend the authors, editors, and publishers represented here for their continuing commitment to advance the cause of the Christian world mission with scholarly literature.

Braaten, Carl E.

Beaver, R. Pierce, ed.
American Missions in Bicentennial Perspective.
South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library.

Bühmann, Walbert.
The Coming of the Third Church. An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church.
Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Coggins, Wade T. and E. L. Frizen, Jr., eds.
Evangelical Missions Tomorrow.
South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library.

Dayton, Edward R., ed.
Monrovia, Calif.: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center.

Elwood, Douglas J., ed.
What Asian Christians Are Thinking: A Theological Source Book.
Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo and Richard Shaull.
Liberation and Change.
Atlanta: John Knox Press.

Hallencreutz, Carl F.

Lacy, Creighton.
South Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library.

Neal, Marie Augusta.
A Socio-Theology of Letting Go. The Role of a First World Church Facing Third World Peoples.
New York: Paulist Press.

Neill, Stephen.
Salvation Tomorrow. The Originality of Jesus Christ and the World's Religions.
Nashville: Abingdon.

Sider, Ronald J.
New York: Paulist Press; and Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press.

Song, Choan-Seng.
Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

Thomas, M. M.
Some Theological Dialogues.

Torres, Sergio and Virginia Fabella, eds.
The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History.
Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.

1977 marks the bicentennial of American mission work. The editors have selected the following books for their outstanding contribution to mission studies in 1977. A few of the books have 1976 copyright dates, but did not actually appear until 1977. We have limited our selection to books in English since it would be impossible to consider fairly the books in many other languages that are not readily available to us. We commend the authors, editors, and publishers represented here for their continuing commitment to advance the cause of the Christian world mission with scholarly literature.
Search for Salvation—Studies in the History and Theology of Cargo Cults.


Although Melanesian cargo cults share many features with new religious movements generally, they also reflect the unique characteristics of their historical, religious, and cultural environment. The term “cargo” refers to the expectation that an imminent radical change will introduce an improved social, economic, and cosmic order. The advent of the new age will be introduced by the arrival of “cargo” which may include food, clothing, economic development, money, release from oppression, technological advance, and peace.

The history of these Melanesian movements falls into three periods: 1860–1914, 1915–1941, and 1942 to the present. These movements have arisen both where Western Christian influence has been felt and where it has not. Hundreds of these cults have emerged over the past century and there is no sign of abatement.

Many of these movements have appeared for a time and then died, but some have persisted over long periods. One of the earliest, Mansren, through the power of its myth has provided the dynamic for new movements over the course of one hundred years.

After summarizing the history of these movements in Melanesia, Strelan turns to the problem of interpretation. Following Guiart and Worsley, Strelan gives ten characteristics of cargo cults: the myth of the return of the dead, a revival or modification of paganism, Christian elements, belief in the cargo myth, belief that the Melanesians will become white men and vice versa, belief in the coming of a messiah, attempts to restore native economic and political control, violence or threat of violence against whites, unification of traditionally separate and hostile groups, and a phoenix-like tendency to revive after apparent failure and death. Scholars have interpreted this phenomenon using five different categories: sociopolitical, Christian-ethical, cultural-historical, national-economic, and eclectic. No one category or theoretical construct has proven adequate.

Notwithstanding the riches of scholarly studies of these movements, there is one lamentable gap. Christian theologians have almost totally neglected the field. Recently two studies have appeared that point the way. Steinbauer’s doctoral thesis in German, Melanesische Cargo-Kulte (1971), is an important beginning. Oosterwal’s essay Modern Messianic Movements as a Theological and Missionary Challenge (1973) surveys these movements worldwide but draws heavily on his own field experience in Melanesia.

Strelan’s study, based on a solid exegetical foundation plus missionary experience in Papua New Guinea since 1962, lifts out important theological themes in cargo cult self-understanding and evaluates these in terms of biblical theology. The central role, for example, the ancestor(s) plays in bringing in the golden age must be compared with Jesus Christ, the Messiah, as the bringer of new life. Melanesian eschatology operates in terms of a “return to origins” dynamic while Christian eschatology moves toward the new creation. The cargo cult’s central preoccupation is with salvation that is immediate (as compared to a postponed or future) and that offers an alternative to the present way of life.

This study is a model of clarity, richly suggestive of themes that need to be pursued, and makes an urgent plea for the Christian church to respect and respond to these movements with understanding.

—Wilbert R. Shenk

Wilbert R. Shenk is secretary for Overseas Missions, Mennonite Board of Missions, Elkhart, Ind. He was a missionary in Indonesia, 1955–1959.

Response

To the Editors:

On page 23 of your January 1977 issue there is a review by Alfred C. Krass of the book edited by C. René Padilla, The New Face of Evangelicalism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant. As one of the initiators of the project that resulted in the publication of this volume following the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974, I would like to clarify a couple of points.

The book was not edited at the request of any publisher and no strictures were imposed by anyone. Padilla and I had the initial idea and drew up a list of possible contributors. There was complete editorial freedom except that we wanted broad geographical representation, definite evangelical commitment, and clear identification with the Lausanne Covenant. Some who were invited to contribute refused because they did not agree with the Covenant. We were encouraged, however, by the enthusiasm of most of those who were invited to write. After we drafted the initial plan while still at Lausanne, René Padilla carried the editorial responsibility. He also secured a publisher, which was no easy task for an indigenous Latin American project with no endorsement from any missionary or evangelistic establishment. Another important detail: the contributing author identified as “A. N. Observer” is a Christian leader of wide experience in several missionary situations where the church has suffered persecution, and is not an observer of the church in Eastern Europe as Krass implies.

I am very pleased to know of the new provisions for the expanded publication of your valuable journal, and I wish you God’s guidance in this venture that will enrich our missiological literature.

Samuel Escobar
Cordoba, Argentina
Much has come to light on the independent church movement in Africa, especially during the last decade and a half. Bengt Sundkler's *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (1948) is the pioneer study. Field work and honest, subjective analysis is the only way of giving an unbiased understanding of this vast "self-movement of the church" in Africa. The appeal of some of these churches can be so intense that it is not strange that the author became a member of the African Apostolic Church of John Maranke (AACJM), the church she went to study as an outsider. Here the author's sensitivity gives one a vivid picture of the AACJM. She has managed to retain scientific objectivity which accounts for her honest and clear analysis.

The book consists of three parts divided into eight chapters, with one appendix containing songs, sermons, and excerpts from the church and a further appendix containing documents and accounts of apostolic social organization. The glossary and index are very helpful, followed by an extensive bibliography. The photos and maps are also effective.

The AACJM, the strongest independent church in Rhodesia, receives "the highest percentage (59%) of its members from Mission Churches" (cf. M.L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches*, The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1974, p. 18). Jules-Rosette describes the inner life of this "self-moving" church, especially outside the borders of Rhodesia, which is based on a truly Afro-Christian religious outlook.

Conversion is the subject of Part One. The first chapter deals with her own position as "the observing participant." She admits "generalizations" (p. 48) at the beginning. Instruction of potential members and the duties assigned to the various offices in the hierarchical structure are considered. Chapter 2 concentrates on the rituals from an observer's point of view, and here one learns about her own baptism and initiation into the group. In Part Two, Chapter 3, she extensively describes the weekly Sabbath ceremony or *kerek* (Afrikaans kerk-English church), which is a ceremony of praise, of confession, and cure. As in most independent churches, the Holy Spirit is central, giving the service a Pentecostal character. This is black Pentecostalism in spite of the emphasis on the Sabbath (Saturday) and Passover as two basic symbols.

In Chapter 4, "Songs and Spirit" receive attention. Great is the role of singing in Africa, with its natural and ingenious song composers, vital for the presence of the Holy Spirit. Singing establishes the mood, releases tension and invokes the supernatural forces. Chapter 5 makes reference to methods used, such as private discussion of doctrine (palaver), and deals with instructing each person in his specialized activities. Symbols such as baptism, Sabbath (Saturday), Passover, Keti or gate of entry (enquiry before the service), etc., are insignia of a life separated from the world.

In Part 3, Chapter 6, on "The Liv-
**Mission in a New World.**


Written by an associate editor of *The Lutherian*, this brief survey of main themes in world mission today should be useful for lay people and pastors in all denominations seeking an introduction to the subject.

An initial chapter stresses the development of a global village. As Trexler points out, in spite of all the talk about First, Second, Third, and even Fourth Worlds, it is really just one world. Developing commonalities continue to move us away from the old radical differences among societies. For this very reason missions today seem less "exotic" and thus less interesting to many. To overcome such apathy is one of the reasons he wrote the book, utilizing a wealth of concrete examples and a number of effective photographs.

Mutuality and interdependence in mission is obviously imperative in such a world. "Missionary moratorium" is discussed briefly, with reasons for its proposal and the sensible conclusion that it was intended to foster "an enlightened sense of interdependence."

Ecumenical sharing is stressed in a third chapter, where refreshingly candid note is taken of nontheological barriers to unity. Consider this quotation from Bishop Sundar Clarke of Madras: "If you ask me when Lutherans will join the Church of South India, I would answer, when American dollars stop coming to India."

A chapter on missionary personnel emphasizes the growing role of lay people, mostly in terms of service within established mission programs. The dramatic decrease in the number of missionaries supported by "mainline churches" is properly linked with tremendous inflation in mission costs over the last fifteen years, coupled with static or actually declining income for mission agencies. The implicit shift from world to homeland mission is not analyzed nor explained, nor is the vast increase in the personnel of independent mission agencies.

A chapter on church growth rightly indicates that the experience of declining churches in the North Atlantic world too easily hides the realities of dynamic and expanding Christianity elsewhere.

Very few errors were noticed by this reviewer. Many more than eight countries were represented at the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches, and Ndabaningi Sithole, the Rhodesian nationalist leader, is not Methodist but United Church of Christ.

At time's the cascade of illustrations is a bit overwhelming and one wonders just what they are proving. But as a lively primer on contemporary world mission, this book should be widely read and heeded.

—David M. Stowe

David M. Stowe, Executive Vice President of the United Church Board for World Ministries, New York City, was a missionary in China 1947-1950, in Lebanon 1962-1963, and formerly Associate General Secretary for overseas ministries of the National Council of Churches.
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