Faith/Fidelity/Ferment

Max Warren, in his last book before he died in 1977, refers to Christian missionaries as “disturbers”—those who, like the leaven in our Lord’s parable of the Kingdom (Matt. 13:33), create ferment. Some of the most vigorous ferment in the 1980s, both inside and outside the church, unquestionably results from the widespread communication of a faith that liberates people’s spirits from bondage to sin, ignorance, disease, and tyranny.

Continuing our series on “Mission in the 1980s” we again present two viewpoints. The ideas of Walbert Bühlmann, a Swiss Franciscan-Capuchin, have become a major leaven in missiology since his publication in 1975 of The Coming of the Third Church. And Waldron Scott of the World Evangelical Fellowship clearly shows that missionary thinking among evangelical Protestants is by no means monolithic.

Two giants of missiology in an earlier generation, Gustav Warneck and Joseph Schmidlin, were born more than forty years apart. Each in his own way helped to determine the course of the modern missionary enterprise among Protestants and Roman Catholics respectively. Their legacies are here considered together, because much of Schmidlin’s thought developed in reaction to the writings of Warneck.

In his article on “Base Ecclesial Communities,” A. William Cook, Jr., offers a Protestant’s critique of the fastest-growing movement in Brazil’s Roman Catholic Church. The gospel has become a leaven within natural cell groups such as neighborhood associations, and the result is a new “hermeneutic of the people” and a “new understanding of mission.”

John Mbiti is widely recognized as one of Africa’s leading theologians. In discussing the biblical basis for present trends in African theology, Mbiti concludes that “as long as African theology keeps close to the Scriptures, it will remain relevant to the life of the church in Africa and it will have lasting links with the theology of the church universal.”

In “Toward a Process Theology of Mission,” David M. Stowe calls for a new theology “from below,” taking the predicament and experience of the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten as the starting point for theology and mission. This, he says, will also demand a renewed theology “from above”—a theology of mission that takes the reality of God as its organizing principle.

The Occasional Bulletin has pledged to keep its readers abreast of Christian thought in the Third World. In July 1979 we published the statement of the Asian Theological Conference of the Third World Theologians held in Sri Lanka earlier that year. We are pleased to include in this issue the statement from that group’s most recent meeting in São Paulo, Brazil.

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Mission in the 1980s: Two Viewpoints

I. Walbert Bühlmann

Mission in the 1980s will be determined by the increasing significance of the younger churches in the Third World, by the changing role of the older churches, and by new responsibilities for all the churches together.

The Priority of the Younger Churches

My thesis in The Coming of the Third Church (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977) is that Christianity's center of gravity has shifted in recent years. It has shifted from the West, where the Christian majority has lived for a very long time, to the southern hemisphere—Latin America, Africa, Asia—Oceania. This "Third Church," however, is not only the church of the Third World but also of the coming third millennium. In the first millennium the leadership was that of the First, or Eastern, Church, with Byzantium at the center, and the first eight councils all held in the East. The second millennium, from the Middle Ages down through all the missionary initiatives since the discovery of the New World, has been dominated by the Second, or Western, Church. I am convinced that in the future the Christian majority will be in the Third Church, and that the major inspiration to the worldwide church will originate in the southern hemisphere.

We in the Catholic Church had a clear indication of the beginning of this new era of the Third Church at the Episcopal Synod of 1974 in Rome. Whereas Vatican Council II and the first three synods were led predominantly by Western bishops and theologians, that fourth synod was obviously dominated by those from the South.

The major objective of the younger churches is to discover and express their own identity as local churches—not merely in the structural and geographical sense, but in terms of their inner reality. In theological terms, we are no longer obliged to plant (transplant) the church, but to incarnate it in the many cultures. This is made theologically clear in numerous documents. In the Catholic Church there are, for example, the documents of Vatican II and the apostolic exhortation Evangelii nuntiandi of 1975. Practically speaking, however, the process is still hindered by the central church authority, especially in the Catholic Church, or by lack of imagination or courage in the younger churches. We await a springlike cultural flowering in the churches of the southern hemisphere. Liturgy, theology, and church discipline must be contextual, and therefore pluriform. With every glance at a form of creation—orchids, butterflies, seashells, etc.—we discover a tremendous richness of forms and colors. Why should the church alone, composed as it is of creative people, remain uniform? We need a fresh breeze of the Spirit of creation, of incarnation, of Pentecost in Christ's church. Here and there we already see the first signs of this new springtime, bringing us some joy and hope for the coming third millennium.

And What of the Older Churches?

For a hundred years we have witnessed the efforts of the Western churches to build up new churches in accordance with the "three-self" principle: self-support, self-government, and self-propagation. That goal has been more or less achieved. The historic task of the mission agencies is to a large extent accomplished. From now on missionaries no longer need to build up the churches, but to collaborate with those already built up, in the manner and for as long as they are needed.

In this situation the role of missionaries has changed from that of dynamic church founders to collaborators; from people who take the initiatives and make the decisions to listeners, people of dialogue and, to a certain degree, of obedience and availability. By taking second place, the missionaries find themselves in a more natural situation, with an opportunity to discover more authentically their own evangelical identity as a people available for humble service. They conduct themselves as neither superiors nor inferiors, but as brothers and sisters. They do not impose themselves, but rather, offer themselves. They are no longer sent in compliance with a unilateral decision of the mother church, but invited by particular sister churches that need their services.

This new situation may give rise to both a psychological crisis in the missionary and a missionary crisis in the older churches. We are, in fact, in the midst of such a crisis. There has been a collapse of missionary vocations both in the Protestant churches, whose missions became "independent" longer ago, and in the Catholic Church as well. Will it be overcome? Should it be overcome? I consider this crisis to be a providential necessity. If we had as many missionary vocations as we did thirty years ago, the younger churches would throw up their hands and say, "Please stay away!" Even though many churches still need our collaboration, we must make it necessary for them to develop their own responsibility and capabilities. Hence this missionary crisis is a providential way of implementing the "moratorium," and I should add that it is a Western phenomenon. The church as a whole is more missionary than ever. Whereas in the past only one continent was involved in the missionary effort, that effort is now multiplied sixfold. That is to say, the churches in all six continents are now engaged in missionary activity.

As "foreign missions" gradually become self-sufficient, "home missions" become a newly discovered mission field. Half or more of the people in traditionally Christian lands are unrelated to churches. There are about 80 million such people in the United States alone (equal to roughly one-third the total population of black Africa). In Africa, however, for 80 million Africans, there are 5000 missionary priests and 10,000 sisters on the Catholic side alone. How many people in the United States are seriously concerned about the 80 million unchurched people in their own country? For some strange reason Western Christians will give large amounts of money for the missions in Africa and Asia,

Walbert Bühlmann, a native of Switzerland, has been general secretary for missionary animation at the Franciscan-Capuchin Secretariat in Rome since 1971. He taught missiology at Fribourg University from 1954 to 1970, and was a missionary in Tanzania from 1950 to 1953.
but are generally unconcerned about people in their own countries who are far from Christ. Thus missions can become an excuse for noninvolvement in Mission! We need a pastoral conversion and courage to go beyond the “Christian community” in order to bring the message of Christ to the no-longer-Christians as well as to the not-yet-Christians.

New Tasks for All the Churches

Some kind of moratorium (as that term was understood at the World Council of Churches’ Bangkok meeting in 1973) is necessary, and it is practically on the horizon insofar as the mission agencies and the younger churches are concerned. It is being accomplished either voluntarily, or by the crisis in missionary vocations, or by the expulsion of missionaries from a number of countries. In the future, however, we need a new sort of “moratorium” on two levels: among the many churches and among the many religions.

The first is a moratorium on the church divisions we have imported to mission lands. The scandal of such divisions is well known, although it has been much less pronounced in the last twenty years. In the next twenty years, either the initial speed of this improvement will be accelerated or we will be faced with new delusion. In the future, the Christian churches in the Third World must no longer work against each other, or even merely alongside each other, but with each other and in accordance with common plans and goals. The importance of ecumenism can hardly be exaggerated. We can truly say of it that “the end justifies the means.” All means that really lead to unity are good.

I would also propose a kind of moratorium on our “Christology-from-above” approach to the people of other faiths. Much has already been accomplished in this regard also during the last fifteen years. Numerous interreligious gatherings have taken place at all levels. Many representatives of the churches have begun to meet with those of the other religious communities for dialogue, mutual discovery, mutual enrichment, and the praise of God together. (A detailed discussion of this is found in Walbert Bühmann, All Have the Same God, London: St. Paul Publications, 1979). Following such prolonged lack of success in our missionary efforts among people of other faiths in Asia, it is certainly necessary to begin now with a “Christology from below,” with the historical Jesus, who appeared as a great prophet and who still fascinates people of all religions with his teachings and deeds.

We leave the rest with the Spirit, to determine how and when we shall openly manifest the deeper mysteries of our faith in Christ. In any case, the exchange of spiritual values among churches and other faiths is more important than gaining a few individual converts.

Together with all churches and religions, we must be committed to the integral salvation of humankind. People all aspire to the transcendent, eschatological salvation that both Christian churches and other religions have always stressed. But they also want immanent, here-and-now salvation. To deny them salvation in either dimension would be a betrayal.

Alms are not sufficient for the task of mission. We have already moved from missionary almsgiving to technical aid and a policy of development. We need to do still more. The gap between rich and poor nations continues to widen. We must protest that situation with all possible means. We need a spirituality of self-denial. After two decades of promoting development, Christians should now propose a decade of simpler living in the richest nations. This must be done for ecological reasons—because if we continue to exploit the resources of our planet we shall soon reach the point of catastrophe. It should be done for psychological reasons—because it is precisely in the rich countries that divorce, suicide, and frustration are most pronounced. And it should be done as an expression of solidarity with the people of the poorer nations.

I conclude with the thought that we are all bound together in a common world destiny. Up to this point we have divided history into three periods: antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the modern era. The fact is, however, that all three of those periods represent Western history only. Western hegemony is now at an end, and I suggest that we speak of the new period we have entered simply as the “world age.” It may be that the world age will be followed by a space age, when inhabitants of outer space will enter our history. In any event, both world and church today can be understood only on a worldwide scale, and so also our problems must be viewed and resolved in a global context.
The year 1980 promises to be an unusually stimulating one with respect to the global mission of the church. By the time this brief article appears, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches will have met (May 12–25, 1980) in Melbourne under the rubric, “Your Kingdom Come.” The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization convened a well-publicized consultation, June 16–27, 1980, on unreached peoples, at Pattaya, Thailand. And October will witness a World Consultation on Frontier Missions in Edinburgh.

The issues emerging from these three meetings are fairly easy to discern. Already in previous issues of the Occasional Bulletin a number of missiologists have illumined the horizon with their insights and analyses. I enter the discussion from a conservative evangelical perspective.

This is not the occasion for an exhaustive comparison of the three meetings. Yet I think it might be useful to highlight some of their respective features. This in turn will serve to focus crucial issues more sharply.

Edinburgh

Consider first the Edinburgh gathering. Its purpose is to recapture the pioneer mentality and commitment of the early missionary movement. The moving force behind the gathering, Ralph Winter, is perhaps the most vigorous exponent today of the strategic role of the decentralized, voluntary mission agency. Winter is convinced that contemporary churches have lost sight of the hundreds of millions of persons (whom he designates “hidden peoples”) beyond the effective reach of Christian congregations. Hence the title “Frontier Missions.”

Winter is equally persuaded that voluntary mission agencies, mobilizing and supervising thousands of cross-cultural missionaries, are still the key to reaching the unreached peoples of the world. Consequently the Edinburgh meeting will be attended primarily by missionaries and mission executives, both Third World and Western, and will have the support of numerous agencies associated formally or informally with the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

It is apparent therefore that the Edinburgh meeting hopes to reaffirm and perhaps reestablish the validity of the missionary enterprise as it has been understood, in Protestant circles at least, for the past two hundred years. True, Winter speaks of a “third era” of mission. But to some observers it appears that this new era is but a further development in a long-established movement, a new turn in a well-traveled path. And it is almost certain that modern students of comparative religion will see Winter’s “third era” as a retrograde movement. In any event the Edinburgh meeting clearly presages a continuing evangelical concern during the ‘80s.

Melbourne

The mood and agenda of Edinburgh contrasts sharply with the CWME meeting in Melbourne. Although I am writing before the event and may therefore be proved wrong, little has surfaced to date to indicate that either “hidden peoples” or “frontier missions” will be featured prominently at Melbourne.

Priority instead will be given to the quest for social justice and the fullest possible quality of life for all humankind—indeed for all creation. Mission will be described in neither geographical nor cultural terms. Instead the focus will be on class, and mission will be evaluated in terms of its contribution to the impoverished and oppressed. As Mortimer Arias expressed it in an earlier article, “In the 1980s our churches will rediscover the Liberating God and the Liberating Gospel for the poor—or else.”

Note Arias’s emphasis on “our churches.” He speaks from a cultural context wherein the church is still a decisive factor in the life and destiny of people. But his churchly perspective is not a parochial Latin American concern by any means. It is safe to say that this angle of vision will characterize most of the participants at Melbourne. Melbourne thus differs from Edinburgh not only as regards the essence and object of mission but also as regards the primary agency of mission.

Emilio Castro, director of the CWME, puts it this way: “Most of those who will gather in 1980 [at Melbourne] to discuss the mission problems of the Church [emphasis added] will not be thinking primarily of penetrating foreign lands but of crossing every frontier close or far away, starting from the daily life of every local congregation” (emphasis added).

Pattaya

There is a sense in which the consultation at Pattaya, a small town south of Bangkok, attempts to synthesize the best of both Edinburgh and Melbourne. In company with the former it will focus on unreached peoples. It will understand the Great Commission primarily in terms of proclamation, though its concern will be more for evangelism than missions per se.

In company with Melbourne, however, Pattaya will approach mission from the standpoint of the church as a whole, not just mission agencies. And it will listen attentively to those evangelical voices that insist on an intimate relationship between evangelism and social action. Contextualization will be a persistent note.

Despite this attempt at synthesis it is likely that Pattaya will in fact reflect the concerns of Edinburgh more than those of Melbourne. Pattaya’s theme, “How Shall They Hear?” does not in itself exclude engagement in the struggle for justice in solidarity with the poor. But the published program focuses primarily on the development of pragmatic evangelistic strategies rather than social analysis or theological debate.

Following the lead given by the Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, Pattaya sees the bulk of the 2.7 billion unreached people in terms of seventeen “people groups,” such as traditional religionists, Hindus, Marxists, city-dwellers, nominal Christians, etc. In preparation for Pattaya several hundred study groups in all parts of the world have been dealing with questions relevant to evangelizing each of these categories of people.

At Pattaya itself participants will spend most of ten days in mini-consultations, one for each of the people groups. Each mini-consultation will be guided by resource persons and consultants.

Waldron Scott

General Secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship since 1975, served with the Navigators as director for the Middle East and Africa (1960–66), for Asia and Australasia (1967–72), and as international field director (1973–74).
Implications for Mission

What issues have been raised by this brief and somewhat simplistic comparison of the three meetings? And which of these issues are likely to be of prime importance during the '80s?

1. The Issue of Who Is to Be Evangelized

Roman Catholics, mainstream Protestants and, to some extent, the Orthodox communities appear to be concerned primarily for the effective evangelization or reevangelization of what was once called Christendom. Those who meet at Edinburgh (who, incidentally, will represent at least two-thirds of the active Protestant professional missionary corps today) will be burdened for the "non-Christian world"—essentially the world of China, India, and Islam.

This concern for non-Christians will be shared also by a high percentage of those attending the Pattaya meeting (though not all, perhaps not even a majority). Ralph Winter repeatedly points out that the overwhelming bulk of mission personnel today is allocated to service in areas of the world in which churches are already established. A fair number of participants at Pattaya will be churchmen and churchwomen concerned more for their nominally Christian communities and, consequently, more for evangelism than for missions.

In an earlier article in the Occasional Bulletin ThomaStransky suggested the possibility that, under certain conditions, evangelicals might provide a significant measure of leadership for mission in the 1980s to Catholics and Protestants alike. If so, it is likely to be in this area: concern for the 2.7 billion beyond the frontiers of the church who have never yet heard the name of Christ. In contrast, it is unlikely that the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism will offer much guidance in this direction.

At the same time evangelicals cannot evade the issues put forward at Melbourne. Pattaya will focus on people groups. These are defined as sections of society, the members of which have a particular solidarity among themselves through certain fundamental convictions and characteristics of life they hold in common. It is obvious from this definition that "the poor" are a major people group. Yet Pattaya does not list "the poor" among its mini-consultations. Pattaya, like Edinburgh, sees the "hidden people" in terms of religion, ideology, and geography.

But Emilio Castro rightly insists that "God intends that the Gospel belong to the masses of poor people to whom it has not been announced. The fact that so many poor people in the world do not have any access to this knowledge of God's grace manifested in Jesus Christ is a challenge to our Christian conscience. To evangelize is to mediate to them the promises that belong to them."

2. The Issue of What William Carey Called "Means"

Who or what is to be the prime agent of evangelization? Edinburgh's stance is unambiguous: cross-cultural missionary agencies, as we have traditionally understood them, are the key. Both Pattaya and Melbourne, in contrast, seem to say, "the church." Yet Pattaya's understanding differs from Melbourne's in that numerous para-church agencies—some evangelistic, some oriented to social service—will be present along with denominational officers and mission executives. In fact, leaders of such para-church agencies as the Billy Graham Association and World Vision, to name only two, are likely to play very influential roles at Pattaya.

The point to be noted here is that both churchpeople and para-churchpeople, whether meeting at Pattaya or Melbourne, are agreed that the mission of the church is too important and too complex to be delegated to missionary societies. Winter and his colleagues reply that the history of the World Council of Churches during the 1960s and 1970s clearly testifies to the loss of missionary vision and nerve when missions and church are integrated.

On the other hand, even if Winter's point is acknowledged, the question remains whether or not cross-cultural missionary agencies, traditionally understood, are in fact the surest means for reaching the "hidden peoples" of China, India, the world of Islam, and nations governed by communist regimes. From personal conversations with Winter and with Leon Chin, coordinator of the convocation, I see little evidence that Edinburgh will come to grips with this crucial issue.

3. The Issue of Partnership

This issue has forced itself into the heart of missiology by virtue of the impact being made by the Third Church. All three consultations under consideration reflect this. Spokespersons from the churches of Asia, Africa, and Latin America will be as prominent at Pattaya as at Melbourne. And at Edinburgh special attention will be paid to the voices of missionary executives from Third World mission agencies.

Theo Williams, general secretary of the Indian Evangelical Mission operating out of Bangalore, is one of these Third World missionary executives. (He prefers the term "emerging missions" to "Third World missions." ) Williams believes that emerging missions can make unique contributions to mission in terms of stewardship, service, and suffering.

"Working out of poverty," he says, emerging missions will necessarily develop their own models of financial support during the 1980s. Being poor themselves, emerging missions can more readily identify with the poor and the oppressed.

Moreover, since they are bereft of political status and material glory, missionaries from the Third World can truly be the servants of all. "Most Western missions," Williams asserts, "are success-oriented and numbers-conscious. They are given over to a missiological triumphalism. Here again emerging missions can provide the needed corrective."

According to Williams, emerging missions can also bring to the global missionary movement a renewed emphasis on the Cross. Since Asian Christians are usually a minority group within their nation, they are used to persecution. As they move out in mission they anticipate suffering and hardship at levels with which Western missionaries may find difficulty coping.

Williams is also the executive secretary of the Missions Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship. In this capacity he sees the building of bridges between emerging missions and the established Western missions as one of the great tasks of the 1980s. Such bridges need to be built in the areas of missiological thinking, missionary training, and the sharing of resources.

It bothers Williams and some of his colleagues that emerging missions tend either to be indifferent to missiology or to borrow uncritically from Western missiology. Instead of assuming that their missiological insights are suited for universal acceptance, Williams believes that Western missiologists should encourage emerging missions to develop their own patterns. They should also be open to learn from Third World missions.

At the same time Williams recognizes that emerging missions have much to learn from established agencies, particularly in the
As the oldest son of a master craftsman in needlemaking and in keeping with tradition, the vocation of Gustav Junior was predetermined: he, too, would become a needlemaker. The odds were against him for anything else. His parents were extremely poor. The outlook on life in the home was narrow; opportunities for education were scanty. In addition, Gustav was a delicate boy, suffering from a serious lung illness. For a rapidly growing family. Inwardly, however, he possessed an insatiable yearning for knowledge and learning. By sheer self-determination and the reluctant consent of his parents he finally succeeded in entering the Gymnasium (a grammar school) of the Francke Foundation at Halle. Without financial support from his father, Gustav left home with one Taler (75¢) in his pocket. That was all his mother could spare for her oldest son.

As a clear goal, hard work, the influence of several teachers, eventually a scholarship, and a “sound conversion experience” were a combination of factors that helped Warneck to graduate from the Gymnasium with “shining honors” and to enter theological studies at Halle University (now Martin-Luther-Universität) in 1855. In 1858 he passed his theological examinations—again with honors. In the same year he accepted a position as private tutor in a noble family at Elberfeld. Here he was introduced to the spiritual atmosphere of Lutheran Pietism during the 1980s. It is doubtful that these particular matters are of great concern to the CWME. Are denominations affiliated with the World Council of Churches giving birth today to Third World missionary sodalities emerging from within Roman Catholicism these days? I do know that Third World missions constitute an important phenomenon within evangelical circles today. They are likely to assume even greater importance during the 1980s.

In highlighting only three features of these major international gatherings, I have necessarily neglected others that will be—or ought to be—of major importance in the decade ahead. Chief among these surely is the need for a fresh missiological approach to the phenomenon of religious pluralism.
Henriette Gerlach from his home village Naumburg. The Warnecks shared forty-six years of married life and became parents of nine children, of whom several died as infants. Here in Roitzsch, Warneck also met Reinhold Grundemann (1836–1924), his intimate colleague in later years. Their common interest was world mission and their friendship lasting and mutually enriching. Finally, in Roitzsch Warneck came to grips with reality. Ever since his conversion in Halle he had entertained the thought of becoming a missionary. But a renewed attack from his besetting illness convinced him that he would never be able to pursue a missionary career overseas. He settled the matter by becoming a missionary to missionaries. But his joy was great when his son Johannes and one daughter went to serve overseas.

In 1863 Warneck followed a call to pastor a church in Dommitzsch, near Torgau in the Leipzig district. He stayed seven years. These were hard years, but fruitful for both the pastor and the people. It should be noted that with his Pontius Pilate (1867), Warneck began his literary career in Dommitzsch.

Meanwhile, however, Warneck continued his studies and eventually received a Ph.D. degree from the University of Jena in 1871, and an honorary doctorate (D.D.) from the University of Halle in 1883.

The following three years with the Rheinisch Mission Society in Barmen (1871–74) were the most formative years in terms of his mission philosophy. He taught at the seminary where mission candidates received their training; he traveled widely in churches where people prayed and paid for the mission enterprise; he interacted frequently with such eminent theologians and ecclesiastical leaders as Theodor Christlieb (1833–89) of Bonn and Johann Christoph Blumhard (1805–80) of Bad Boll; and he worked closely with administrators like Friedrich Fabri (1824–91) of the Barmen Mission. Warneck commented in later years that his experience in Barmen had been God’s providential leading, exposing him to an area of service for which he had been searching all his life.

Barmen was not the last station of his pilgrimage. In 1874 he moved with his family to Rothenschirmbach (near Eisleben, Martin Luther’s birthplace). Here he pastored a 700-member church for twenty-two years. With this move began his time of greatest productivity for the cause of world mission. He received and counseled missionaries and mission leaders from all continents, wrote hundreds of articles and over twenty books on mission. The hitherto remote village suddenly became famous throughout the world because of its famous pastor. Rothenschirmbach turned into such a busy place that the post office expanded its services from one mail delivery weekly to two daily. In all of this his church lent full support to its pastor in his endeavors as a world missionary spokesman, statesman, and penman. He became the apostle to apostles, the father of Protestant missiology, and the missionary educator par excellence.

Warneck often sensed a vacuum in his own spiritual pilgrimage. When the American revivalist Robert Pearsall Smith conducted meetings in Brighton, England, Warneck went to hear him. With the exception of brief visits to Switzerland and one to Sweden, this was his only trip to a foreign country.

In his book Letters on the Meetings in Brighton (1876), Warneck reflects on his own experience of renewal and Heiligung, or sanctification. Although not uncritical—that would have been against his nature—Warneck speaks of having found “freedom” and “true joy in Christ” at these meetings. In his fourth letter (July 31, 1875) he wrote his friend:

Never in my whole life has the Majesty of the living God stood with such reality before my very eyes; never has this Majesty been so tangibly close; never did sin seem so exceedingly sinful as in the light of this holy Majesty; never has any object of shame appeared so despicably shameful as in these days.  

There was one more move for Warneck. In 1896 he occupied the first chair of mission studies in Germany, a position which he held for twelve years. Upon retirement in 1908 he remained active as a writer.

On December 26, 1910, the Halle newspaper headlines announced the passing of the greatest missiologist of the time. The pilgrim Gustav Warneck had reached the end of his terrestrial journey. He journeyed on to a celestial country while listening to the melody of the Christmas canticle:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.

Luke 2:29–32 RSV

The Preacher

It is expected, even in our day, that the pastor be a preacher. But not always is it taken for granted that the preacher be a pastor. Warneck was both, but first a pastor/preacher, then a preacher/pastor.

The Pastor/Preacher

While studying at the Francke schools in Halle, Warneck manifested unique pastoral qualities. He was a member of the Wingolf, a nineteenth-century German model of the present InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Students came to him for counsel, sought pastoral care, and requested prayer. He was always ready to help, even in times of sickness and poverty. But there were moments when he became very direct, almost to the point of being offensive. On one such occasion an older friend put his hand on Warneck and said, “Gustav, speak kindly with Jerusalem.”

One time Warneck was again suffering from a severe lung hemorrhage, which “brought him to the brink of death and left little hope for future usefulness.” But even then he encouraged those who came to see him and in turn was consoled by them. One day the Halle professor Friedrich August Gottreu Tholuck (1799–1877) came to his bedside, saying, “Warneck, you will not die, but will proclaim the name of the Lord.” That was prophetic.

The Preacher/Pastor

The pastor became a great preacher. Although there were times when he agonized over his text, he was always a man with a message for the hour. When things were hard going he followed the counsel of his teacher, Tholuck, who said, “When I prepare my sermons I throw myself on my knees and ask the Lord to unlock for me the door to the real life of the text.”

Warneck was a perfectionist both as pastor and as preacher. But he was as hard on himself as he was on young theologians and mission candidates. His son Johannes Warneck says that his father was frequent with criticism and infrequent with compliments. “I found father’s criticism of my first sermons harder to bear than that of the examination committee. After what I thought had been a fair presentation he would calmly respond, ‘That was nothing.’ Or he would say, ‘With such material you can’t entice a dog to come out of his niche.’” Conference speakers, particularly the younger ones, had to write out their speeches July, 1980

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and sermons and hand them to Warneck for scrutiny. Whoever passed without having to revise or rewrite his paper was given a modest compliment in the third person: “He’s a becomer.”

But Warneck practiced what he preached. He himself was an outstanding orator. His sermons were well organized, rich in content, tastefully illustrated, rhetorically excellent, and spiced with humor. He despised boredom in preaching. Although he admitted that boredom is no “sin unto death,” he maintained that “it is a sin that deadens.”6 Warneck’s preaching focused on the church and the kingdom of God. “A healthy and actively fruitful missionary life,” wrote Warneck on one occasion, “must be rooted in the local church.” Convinced that the pastor is the key person to promote that kind of mission spirit and recruitment in his own congregation, Warneck labored tirelessly on mission sermons and lessons for the preacher’s use. Such lessons, he contended, must be biblically sound, theologically stimulating, factually informative, scientifically accurate, homiletically useful, generally interesting, and experientially practical. His three-volume *Missionsstunden* (1881; 1886; 1899) is a prime example of his creative mind in these areas. The kingdom parables of Jesus play a central role in his preaching.

**The Pedagogue**

Warneck had a desire to become a “teacher to the Gentiles,” as his colleague Martin Kähler, his son Johannes, and others have pointed out. Although his physical weakness prevented him from becoming a teacher overseas, he did become a true pedagogue, molding thousands of lives. There are two dimensions to Warneck the pedagogue—one is philosophical, the other practical. Both are articulated in his major work, the *Evangelische Missionslehre, or Evangelical Theory of Mission* (1892–1905).

**The Philosophical Pedagogue**

Warneck’s desire to become a teacher to the Gentiles was based on the assumption that life itself can be molded by external influences. In fact, the Finnish missiologist Seppo A. Teinonen calls Warneck’s early theology a “theology of life.” This is true. The life-principle can be traced through all his writings. Life is created by God, therefore precious. Though humankind has fallen and has become alienated, it is not entirely dead. Traces of the divine image remain, making human beings both redeemable and redeem-worthy.

According to Warneck it is possible for the natural person to know God, but only in part. Such partial knowledge of God gained by natural processes lays the foundation for a deeper religious experience to become a Christian. The fullness of life, however, is attainable only by grace through the Word of God. This life, in turn, helps humans understand the very Word they hear or read. He cautions, however, not to misinterpret the meaning of being Christian. The true Christian, he insists, is “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), not merely an educated or a cultured manifestation of “natural man.”

Just as there are two sources to bring fullness to life, so there are parallel currents from which emerge the fullness of history. One current evolves from the “kingdom of nature” and is seen as Weltgeschichte, or “world history”; the other evolves from the “kingdom of grace” and can be seen as Reichsgeschichte, or “kingdom history.” As spiritual life is based on natural life, so is kingdom history based on world history. Thus he maintains that the developments in world history are in a sense prerequisite to kingdom history.

In his “Ethnological Foundations of Mission,” Warneck expresses some rather modern ideas. He states that the gospel in its very essence is “supraworldly”; it is simply not affected by social, cultural, and ethnic elements. Therefore, the gospel has the capacity not only to transform every type of natural community and the culture of a people, but also to adapt to any kind of situation that is not in direct violation to the core of the divine message.

**The Practical Pedagogue**

I have already pointed out that Warneck the pilgrim accepted a private teaching assignment for a wealthy family in Elberfeld. This was a prestigious position for the time. Educators recognized in him the “young gifted pedagog,” and soon a more challenging opportunity presented itself to demonstrate his reputation.

In 1861 Warneck was called to an orphanage in Elberfeld where a religious revival of a rather emotional type had gone beyond control. It was making newspaper headlines throughout Germany. The record has it that Warneck’s pedagogical efficiency soon normalized the unhealthy conditions among the young people of the orphanage. The seventy-five-page manuscript entitled, “An Experimental In-Depth Evaluation of the 1861 Emerging Children’s Revival in the Orphanage of Elberfeld” reveals Warneck’s insight on religion and human nature sporadically surfacing in German Pietism at that time.

The third area in which Warneck practiced his gift of teaching was at the Barmen Mission. Here he dealt with seminary students who prepared to become overseas missionaries. He was an excellent teacher and knew how to create interest, enthusiasm, and love for world mission. Unlike most other teachers who relied on the lecture method, Warneck guided his students in reading and research to become independent thinkers. It was here in Barmen that he saw the need for a comprehensive mission theory. His vision turned into ideas, and his ideas into the most complete system of mission theory ever produced.

Warneck also became the first professor of missiology on the continent. “Warneck’s life-work on behalf of the Christian world mission,” writes the Norwegian missiologist Olav Myklebust, “was essentially an act of education, and that in the true and comprehensive sense of that term.”7 Warneck’s goal was to make the study of mission an integral part of the university curriculum. His great phrase was that “mission as an academic discipline cannot remain a mere alien, but must attain the right and privilege of citizenship in the science of theology.”8 He realized his goal in his lifetime.

R. Zentgraf, a one-time student of Warneck, has called his teacher, “the pedagog of the church to world mission.” Whether he wrote, lectured, or preached, says Zentgraf, he was always teaching world mission.

His mission seminar was such an introduction to the world and spirit of the Holy Scriptures that we simply became absorbed by the thought that the entire New Testament was part and parcel of mission literature. Indeed, we became so fascinated by this idea that henceforth we had to read the New Testament as the book of mission. Every paragraph and every line breathes mission and contains the key to interpret world history from a divine perspective.9

**The Penman**

Once Warneck had been captivated by the spirit of world mission, as he saw and experienced it in Barmen, he devoted himself unreservedly to that calling. Never was there a time in which he questioned his *Sendung*, his apostleship, or sense of sentness in that respect. That is why he has been called the “missionary to missionaries”; “the man of the hour for the mission of his
time.” His colleague Kähler, in a special tribute to Warbeck, speaks of “Gustav Warnecks Sendung,” or sentness. In the very concept of sentness, Kähler points out, one recognizes an entirely new school founded by Warbeck. It was a “school without walls” through which thousands of sent ones, according to Kähler, became aware of their own sentness and were sent into all the world to carry out the Mandate of the Master to “make disciples of all nations.”

The most effective means Warbeck used to disseminate ideas and mission information was his penmanship. He wrote some thirty books, at least ten times that many articles on mission, and hundreds of missionary letters—and all of that with a quill pen.

The Scientific Mission Journal

In 1873 Warbeck attracted two of the most competent men—Grundemann, the cartographer-statistician, and Christlieb, the educator-theologian—and together with them founded the famous Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift (AMZ), whose chief editor he remained for thirty-seven years. In his dedicatory editorial, “Dic ur hic? Unser Programm” (Our Program), he fully recognized the various attempts made by others to bring the theory of mission to the level of an acceptable science. But he also pointed out the areas of failure. Thus he proposed and promised to provide for all levels a fundamental knowledge of mission history and discussions touching “geographical, linguistic, anthropological, ethnological, sociological, and religio-historical” dimensions as well as the theory of mission itself.

Those familiar with the Zeitschrift will be impressed not only with the wealth of accumulated knowledge contained in this “unique missionary encyclopedia,” but also with the scientific thoroughness with which it has been treated. Warbeck’s exegetical treatment of Matthew 28:16-20, which he called “Christ’s Magna Charta for the Church,” is no less than a classic commentary on that text.

The Study of Mission History

Warbeck contended that knowledge of world mission begins with acquaintance with world history. He produced a long essay entitled “An Abstract of a History of Protestant Missions,” published in the AMZ and in Herzogs Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche (1882). Warbeck does not treat mission history in isolation; every incident is treated in the context of world history, sociocultural history, and colonial history.

He constantly rewrote, revised, and expanded until his history became “a classic masterpiece and the historical foundation for all future missionary histories,” as Martin Schlunk puts it. “So surely had the master and the material grown together that after his death no single person was in a position to reedit his work; it took six of his ablest students to prepare the tenth edition.”10 It should be added that this history was translated into several foreign languages, including independent English editions in Europe and America.

The Field of Cultural Anthropology

Warbeck was in many respects ahead of his time. He took the cultural implications for the communication of the gospel remarkably seriously. This becomes even more striking when one thinks that cultural anthropology and ethnology as sciences were still in their infancy.

In 1879 Warbeck published a monumental work on the reciprocal implications of world mission and culture. Four years later Professor Thomas Smith of New College, Edinburgh, translated this work under the title Modern Missions and Culture: Their Mutual Relations. Smith had intended to write his own book on the same subject. But, he says in the introduction, while reading the original, “I formed the opinion that, in respect to variety of research, and in respect of clear statement, Dr. Warbeck’s book is superior to any that I could expect to write.”11

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**Announcing A Welcome to Gospel in Context Subscribers**

In its brief two-year existence, the quarterly journal Gospel in Context made a notable contribution to missiological literature. Published by Partnership in Mission in Abington, Pennsylvania, the journal fostered "a dialogue on contextualization" that was international, interdisciplinary, and interdenominational in scope and participation. Unfortunately, due to economic considerations, the journal ceased publication at the end of 1979. Given these circumstances, we are pleased to announce that Dr. Charles R. Taber, the editor of Gospel in Context, will become a contributing editor of the Occasional Bulletin, and the subscribers to Gospel in Context have been invited to transfer and continue their subscriptions with this journal. The Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research, with the collaboration of Dr. Taber, will incorporate and carry forward the concerns of Gospel in Context.

Considering the time in which Warbeck wrote, one is amazed at the insights he expressed regarding the complexities of the sociocultural value systems of peoples and what bearing they have on the proclamation of the gospel. He speaks of culture as being in itself “an entirely neutral concept,” which is to be interpreted from the perspective of the insider. Only then, contends Warbeck, can the missionary hope to understand the caste system in India and the polygamous marriages in African societies.

In principle, Warbeck agreed with the ideals of the Western missionary to abolish the caste distinctions and to prohibit plural marriages. But, he cautioned, a measure of toleration must be
exercised and the gospel must be trusted as a transforming power to bring about the desired changes in due time.

On the basis of careful study, he insisted that Christians from various castes should be allowed to form their own church within the given social structure, and that men in polygynous marriages, when they become Christian, be admitted to baptism and church membership. He contended that consistent teaching of the Word was the key to achieve the ideal forms of the Christian way of life in any culture.

It cannot be overlooked, however, that Warneck was a "child of his time." This also applies to his view of culture. Despite his farsightedness in some areas, he was nearsighted in others. He says, for example, that Western culture is far superior to the cultures of Asia and Africa, even superior to the advanced Hindu and Chinese cultures. Cultural anthropologists of our day reject such views. Perhaps that is why his book—though without question a pioneer effort in missionary anthropology—is rarely referred to by scholars in that field.

Theory of Missionary Science

Warneck's five-volume Evangelische Missionslehre was his magnum opus. In 1955 Myklebust spoke of it as the unsurpassed treatment of "the Protestant theory of missions," and in 1978 Johannes Verkuyl called it "a trail-blazing effort in systematic missiology."

This work more than any other has earned Warneck the title "Father of Protestant Missiology." During the last thirty years at least six major dissertations have been produced in which the Missionslehre received primary attention.

The five volumes are divided into three major parts, each dealing in great detail with the many dimensions of mission philosophy and principles. In part I Warneck attempts to build a broad foundation for his concept of mission from a dogmatic, ethical, biblical, ecclesiological, historical, and ethnological perspective. His thesis is that God has chosen to make himself known through Christianity as the full and final revelation of God for complete and universal salvation of humankind. This part contains valuable material and merits translation into English.

In part II Warneck discusses the various mission agencies. Because the church has failed, he maintains, the mission societies have been called into existence. He sees in this less the biblical model than the historical development. Thus he justifies the existence of the societies on the grounds of the church's failure.

The last part treats the mission fields of the world in all their complex geographic and religious diversities. "The Great Commission, says Warneck, rests upon the Christians to Christianize all non-Christians by making disciples of peoples, not only of individuals. His key concept is Volkchristianisierung, the Christianization of entire peoples.

Because of this theological conviction, Warneck failed to see the legitimacy of the Student Volunteer Movement's slogan, "The evangelization of the world in this generation." He believed that this was not realistic optimism, but a statement of arrogance and the expression of sheer superficiality and naïveté.

John R. Mott (1865-1955), the international student leader and missionary statesman, discussed this matter with Warneck on several occasions. Although they respected each other they never fully agreed. Warneck saw in his own concept of Christianization all that the evangelization theory contained and insisted that the task of mission goes far beyond mere proclamation of the gospel throughout the world in a rapid and superficial manner.

In a critical review he categorically stated: "I cannot agree with the tone of triumphalism in which this new missionary movement is being signalized." His reasons can be briefly summarized: (1) There is unbiblical eschatology. The evangelization of the world will not expedite the return of Christ, but it is his imminent return that motivates us to evangelize. (2) There is weak ecclesiology. The evangelization of the world in this generation is done by large groups of evangelists without giving due consideration to either a solid church base or to thorough preparation for the task. (3) There is inadequate understanding of the task. The evangelists confuse kerussein (proclamation) with matheieuein (making disciples). Disciplemaking, Warneck insisted, includes evangelization, baptism, church building, and continuing teaching. (4) The goals are based on mechanical mathematics. The apostolic missionary practice yielded not only quantitative, but also qualitative, fruit.

Various attempts have been made to reconcile Warneck's theory with that of the Student Volunteer Movement. But no unanimity has thus far been achieved.

Warneck's Missionslehre was not only the standard work for Protestants; Catholics borrowed from him and developed their own theory of mission. Joseph Schmidlin (1876-1944) became a pioneer in this respect when he wrote his Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss (1919), which was also published in translation as Roman Catholic Mission Theory (1931). In his foreword, Schmidlin acknowledges his indebtedness to Warneck, calling him "the founder and pioneer-master of mission theory."

The Prophet

The pilgrim Warneck was more than preacher, pedagogue, and penman. He was also a prophet in his day. He was invited to speak at the London Missionary Conference of 1888. Circumstances at home prevented him from going. He did, however, submit a paper on "Missionary Comity," which was read by a representative.

In this paper Warneck delineated in detail the things that separated and those that united missionaries and mission organizations. He pointed out that the factors uniting the mission forces were more than those that divide. He also suggested ways to increase the positive and decrease the negative elements in the interest of sound ecumenism. In fact, he outlined a plan for decennial general missionary conferences. These conferences, he suggested, should be supported by a central committee that would continue to give counsel to agencies and coordinate all Protestant mission activities overseas.

The ideas Warneck expressed in this paper—and in part III of his Missionslehre—were so progressive and prophetic for his day that the London delegates listened to the reading, put the paper in the files, and never looked at it again. But several decades later Warneck's vision was realized at the 1910 Edinburgh Mission Conference and with the formation of the International Missionary Council in 1921.

Conclusion

Warneck could also be described as a philosopher or thinker. But that in itself deserves an entire paper. So does his work as a promoter of mission. He was, indeed, a creative spirit, ever striving to improve on what he had inherited from the past in order to enrich the legacy for generations to come.

Some of the secondary literature, particularly that by Continental scholars, reflects a rather critical attitude toward his missiology. It is noted, however, that the majority of critics treat his work only in fragments. This means that the legacy of Gustav Warneck has never been fully dealt with and a biographical treatise of his life and work is long overdue.
Notes

1. Goethe’s Faust. Part I: Text and Notes, ed. R. M. S. Heffner, Helmut Rehder, and W. F. Twaddell (Boston: D. C. Health, 1954), lines 682–85. This and all subsequent translations from German sources are mine. H.K.


4. Ibid., p. 267.


6. Ibid., p. 75.

Selected Bibliography

A. Writings by Gustav Warneck

In my dissertation I list nearly 400 titles by Warneck. From these I select ten, placing them in chronological order.


Briefe über die Versammlung zu Brighton. Hamburg: Johannes Walther’s deutsch-evangelische Buchhandlung, 1876. A series of ten letters addressed to a friend between July 7 and October 12, 1875, in which Warneck describes and evaluates the Brighton holiness meetings.


B. Writings about Gustav Warneck


Schlunk, Martin. “Gustav Warnecks bleibende Bedeutung.” Neue Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift 11 (1934): 73–82. See also note 10, above.


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The Legacy of Joseph Schmidlin

Karl Müller, S.V.D.

When Professor Joseph Schmidlin celebrated the silver jubilee of his priesthood, his former student, Anton Freitag, S.V.D., wrote of him:

The merits of this German missiologist are not to be found only in the scientific field; rather, through his very deepening of the idea of mission by means of missiological studies, he has made an impact on the entire Catholic world mission. The immense progress at home in work for the missions and the missionary drive itself, now undertaken with far more vision and understanding, are due to a very large extent to Schmidlin's pioneer work.¹

Freitag wrote this appreciation while Schmidlin was still at the peak of his creativity, ten years before he began his tragic decline. The last ten years of his life were to be extremely bitter. Eventually he found himself incarcerated in a concentration camp. On the occasion of his brutal death, the Basel deanery newspaper wrote of him as follows:

A few days ago, the parish priest of Hagenthal asked me to meet him at the border at Schönenbuch. There he told me how his unfortunate brother, Prof. Dr. J. Schmidlin, had been tortured to death in Schirmbeck concentration camp and had died like a martyr. How often had this thoroughly good, pious and learned priest visited the parish at Allschwiler. A deeply emotional man, he could never keep silent in the face of injustice. Zeal for God drove him on and he had to pay dearly for it. His dead body was burnt by his torturers and his ashes used as fertilizer.²

1. Chronology

Joseph Schmidlin was born on May 29, 1876, in Klein-Landau in Sundgau, Alsace. His father was a teacher in an elementary school, educated in the French tradition, but German at heart. Joseph describes him as a "genuinely good man, if at times a bit rough and vehement." His mother was a more intelligent person and was deeply religious; "she lived in a supernatural world, and we were never pious enough for her liking."³ Of her five surviving children, three became priests. Schmidlin considers himself typical of the Alsace Sundgau people when he writes: "Whoever knows Sundgau and the sort of people who live there can use this knowledge to excuse many things which appear uncouth or temperamental in my character and even in my scientific and literary works: I have never been able to believe my Alsace and Sundgau origins, neither outwardly nor in my thoughts and feelings."⁴

Joseph was immensely talented and had an enormous capacity for work. When he finished his elementary schooling, he attended the minor seminary in Zillesheim for his high school studies. He graduated from St. Stephen's College, Strassburg, with the highest possible honors. Then he opted for theological studies. These he had to interrupt for some time because of pulmonary catarrh. The fruit of this break in his studies was a comprehensive history of Blotzheim and Sundgau (720 pages); a railway guide; a history of the pilgrimage center, Our Lady of the Oak; and a biography of the parish priest, Juif of Blotzheim. He was ordained priest at the age of twenty-three. In 1901 he became a doctor of philosophy, two years later, of theology, both degrees from the University of Freiburg in Breisgau. He was invited to Rome by Louis Pastor, whom he helped with his monumental History of the Popes. Over and above this work and the many articles he wrote, he published the following books during those years: Papst Pius X., sein Vorleben und seine Erhebung (1903), Ein Kampf um das Deutschtum im Klosterleben Italiens, Farfa und Subiaco im 16. Jahrhundert (1903), Die Geschichte der deutschen Nationalkirche Santa Maria dell' Anima (1906), Die geschichtsphilosophische und kirchenpolitische Weltanschauung Ottos von Freising (1906), Die Restaurationsfähigkeit der Breslauer Fürstbischöfe (1907), Die kirchlichen Zustände in Deutschland vor dem 30 jährigen Krieg nach den bischöflichen Diözesanberichten an den Heiligen Stuhl (1908–10). In 1906 he became the first private lecturer in the newly founded Catholic theological faculty in Strassburg.

The relationship between Professor Albert Ehrhard, the inflexible professor of ecclesiastical history in Strassburg, and the equally obdurate Schmidlin was from the very start stormy. Thus it was that Schmidlin applied for a transfer to Münster. He was accepted, not without qualms, by the theological faculty in Münster, since "he had shown himself in the course of his studies to be an exceptionally talented man." Dean Hüls sent him a fatherly warning:

After making conscientious enquiries we could not fail to recognize that the development of the Strassburg situation into what it actually became was due by and large to a certain imprudence in your own remarks and, even more, to the indiscreet way in which your friends backed your cause in public. You should, therefore, regard it as a sign of genuine goodwill if we express the wish that you do your very best to prevent your appointment as a lecturer here from being blazoned abroad in the press (especially in Strassburg), for should that happen, you could once more become the victim of the importunity of your own good friends.⁵

In Münster things went more smoothly and developed along normal lines. On April 27, 1907, he was appointed lecturer for church history of the Middle Ages and of modern times. In 1910 he took on the post of extraordinary lecturer for the history of dogma and for patrology. At the same time he was asked to teach scientific missionography, which in 1914 developed into a chair of missiology. From then on he devoted himself chiefly to missiology, although he continued to lecture in church history. One result of the latter activity was his four-volume history of the popes of modern times (1933–37).

His own publications in the field of missiology are legion: Besides his basic works—Einführung in die Missionswissenschaft (2nd ed., 1925), Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss (2nd ed., July, 1980
Schmidlin was nothing if not professional; his heart and soul lay in imparting his knowledge through teaching. One of his students in the early 1920s, Father John Thauren, S.V.D., speaks of his thorough preparation for his lectures in which he communicated a plethora of material; he traced the main themes and didn't clutter up his presentation with a superfluity of details. His love for his subject and still more for the church and its mission came through all the time. In his seminars he presupposed a lot and demanded a great deal. Even in private conversation he spoke almost entirely about mission, scarcely ever about himself. He seldom went out but, rather, seemed wedded to his desk-work. Thauren also recognized the tough streak in Schmidlin's character and called him "a fighter for the fight's sake." But he adds: "Yet every fight affected him deeply. Those who knew him well know how much he suffered within himself: 'my greatest cross is myself.'" He himself was aware of how much of what he had built up with great effort and success he himself destroyed in the heat of battle.\(^8\)

Schmidlin was not the kind of man to throw in his lot with the antidemocratic National Socialism. Because of his "opposition which brooked no bounds"\(^9\) he very soon ran up against reprimands and vexations; he even had to forfeit his passport. In a sharp letter to the minister of education on March 22, 1934, he broached the subject of an early retirement. It was immediately granted him. Since a return to his native Alsace had been officially forbidden because of his involvement in the Alsace Autonomy Process in 1928, he settled down in Neu-Breisach. Here he edited the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* and continued his scientific work. In 1937 he was obliged to resign from the journal. Eventually he was condemned to seven months' imprisonment in Freiburg in Breisgau because of speeches he had made against the government. He was then put under house arrest in Rottenminster Infirmary near Rottweil (Württemberg). As he did not observe this, he found himself again in prison, first in Offenburg and then in Struthof concentration camp near Schirmbeck (Breuschtal). But even here he couldn't hold his tongue. He was punished by being put into the "casemate," a small concrete dungeon in which it was impossible either to sit or to lie down—one could only stand. After some time here, he was beaten to death with rubber truncheons.\(^10\) According to the official prison report, he died on January 10, 1944, as a result of "a stroke." Professor John Beckmann, S.M.B. wrote in his obituary: "Although both his personality and his written work are marred here and there by imperfections and mistakes, they are more than compensated for the total dedication of his life to the great business of world mission and by the successes that were his in this field."\(^11\)

### 2. Schmidlin and the Chair of Missiology in Münster

Long before there was any move in Catholic circles to approach the work of world mission scientifically, Protestant scholars were already attempting to lift it "out of the twilight of sentimental piosity into the bright noon of science enlightened by faith."\(^12\) When Schmidlin in the winter semester 1909–10 commenced his lectures on the Catholic missions in the German protectorates, sixteen Protestant professors in twelve different German universities were giving one or more lectures on mission themes.\(^1\) They also had to their credit Gustav Warneck's three-volume standard work, *Evangelische Missionslehre* (Gotha, 1892–1903); nothing comparable existed in Catholic circles. Schmidlin's first series of lectures in the 1909–10 winter semester were attended by 120 registered students.

The preparation of his lectures gave Schmidlin an insight into the deficiencies on the Catholic side and into the importance of a Catholic missiology. Very soon he was exerting himself to have a chair of missiology set up in Münster. The lectureship in missionography given him in 1910 partly met his request. He did not limit himself to missionography in the narrow sense, but took in at once the whole field of missiology. He himself lectured to 157 students in the winter semester of 1910–11 on the introduction to missiology. These lectures appeared in book form in 1917: *Einführung in die Missionswissenschaft*. He also held seminars on the bibliography and sources of mission history. Moreover, he succeeded in getting Professor Meinertz to lecture one semester on mission texts in Scripture. It was in response to his proposal that a chair for comparative religion was set up in 1912 to complement the lectures on missiology. From 1913 on, Professor Ebers in the faculty of law lectured on church law as obtaining in the missions, while Schmidlin himself spoke on normative and practical mission theory. A chair of missiology was formally established in 1914.

His aim, as explained in a memo to the faculty in 1911, was the setting up of a missiological institute at university level, which would comprehend the whole range of related missiological subjects: missionography and mission history, mission theory and mission methodology, comparative religion, ethnology, and linguistics. But such a university institute never materialized.

Already in the fall of 1909, Schmidlin was approached about the publication of a missiological journal by Father Friedrich Schwager, S.V.D., who had pursued this idea for many years and now believed that in Schmidlin he had found a suitable editor. Even Schmidlin hesitated: "What put me off was, on the one hand, the size and the difficulty of the proposed task, and, on the other, its novelty, which would impose on me the necessity of leaving the areas of church history well known to me and venturing into an almost unknown terrain whose extent couldn't be perceived."\(^14\) But in the end he agreed to become editor in chief of the new journal, *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*. A team of colleagues was to help him in the work; for the first year this comprised seven university professors, Monsignor Baumgartner, and seven representatives of missionary congregations. Schmidlin's aim was a "harmonious wedding of mission and science, a synthesis on which the theorists and practitioners, the representatives of theology in the home countries and in the missions could easily agree."\(^15\) Father Schwager moved to Münster to give him a hand. Cardinal Fischer of Cologne contributed the foreword to the first issue. The journal became in time a mine of missiological research and information. Besides book reviews and bibliographical reports, many of its essays were of lasting interest. Schmidlin himself provided sixty-two pages of text in the first year: his two articles, "Die katholische Missionswissenschaft" (pp. 10–21), and "System und Zweige der Missionswissenschaft" (pp. 106–22), were already very basic. His choice of themes and writers shows his openness and breadth of vision, and also the great response his efforts found from the very start. In order to support these missiological undertakings financially, especially the publications, the *Internationale Institut für missionswissenschaftliche Forschungen* was founded on August 10, 1911, as an autonomous institute, situated first in Münster, and later transferred to Aachen. Schmidlin became the director...
of the scientific commission of this institute. But the planned internationalization never really came about. The institute supported the publication of the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* and the publication of the *Bibliotheca Missionum*. It was the publisher of the two series of *Missionswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen und Texte* (14 tracts appeared before World War II); and of *Missionswissenschaftliche Studien* (9 tracts in all; discontinued after World War II). The series *Missionstudienzwecken* was begun after World War II and likewise published by the institute. It is remarkable how quick the response of missionary congregations was and how many of their members decided to make a special study of missiology. Already on July 19, 1915, Father Anton Freitag, S.V.D., and Father Maurus Galm, O.S.B., obtained their doctorates in theology with dissertations on missiology. A year later, Father Laurence Kilger, O.S.B., did likewise. There were fourteen such doctorates awarded in Münster in Schmidlin's time and twenty-three in the first fifty years after the chair in missiology was established. All the recipients, with the exception of Jean Pierre Belche, who was a parish priest and national director of the pontifical mission works in Luxemburg, were members of religious congregations: five Divine Word missionaries, three Benedictines, three Capuchins, two Pallotines, two Oblates, two Sacred Heart missionaries, and one each from the Dominicans, Bethlehemites, Holy Spirit Fathers (Spiritans), Franciscans, and Mariahill missionaries.

Schmidlin is commonly regarded as the founder of a "school" of missiology—the Münster school. Is this really correct? Certainly he cannot be associated with the classic plantation theory of Pierre Charles, S.J. (Louvain). It seems to me, however, that one cannot identify Schmidlin with any school. Chronologically he was before them, and his ideas were of such general validity that they cannot be enclosed within the narrow confines of this or that school.

In his *Einführung in die Missionswissenschaft* (1917), Schmidlin deduces the mission of the church from the biblical text "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you," and so distinguishes a twofold task for the church: "1. to proclaim and spread the Christian faith and the Christian gospel and so, of necessity, propagate itself, and 2. to preserve and strengthen this faith and this church." He distinguishes between "mission in the subjective sense" (missionary activity), and "mission in the objective sense" (missionary works). The first he defines as "that ecclesiastical activity whose aim it is to plant and spread the Christian religion and church," and then to preserve it;" the second is "the totality of all ecclesiastical organizations which serve the spread of the faith." He feels that there is also some sense in regarding Catholics as the "object" of mission, "especially those, who outwardly count as church members, but who, because of lack of faith or sin, are dead or estranged members who stand in need of conversion anew." For practical and historical reasons, however, he defines mission as "the spreading of the faith among non-Christians." While Warneck accepts three stages in the aim of mission—developing the mature Christian, the independent community, and the organized church—Schmidlin considers the "confession of Christian teaching" (with simultaneous reception of baptism) and the "grafting into the church" to be two aspects of the one mission, a "twofold function found inseparable in the aim of Catholic mission." Later, in his *Missionslehre*, he distinguishes more clearly between the individual and social aims of mission, but he still holds firmly that "for the mission of the Catholic church the question doesn't arise in this absolute form, and the solution can only be individual conversion and the christianisation of a people. Mission must strive for both and unite both, if not at the same time then in successive development; on the one hand, it should seek to convert the individual, or rather individuals, and on the other, to join these individuals together in community, that through it the whole people may be renewed in Christ." Schmidlin was hardly fifty-eight years old when he fell foul of the National Socialist system, which was to crush him mercilessly. He himself describes the end of his academic career in simple but moving words:

The growth of the missiological faculty and seminar in Münster, which had given so much promise, was suddenly cut off, chiefly by my retirement in the summer semester 1934, at first at my own suggestion, but in the end by force. After I had begun a fifth series of lectures in that semester on ancient Christian and medieval mission history, I changed it into a seminar in which we treated the Indian missions of the past two years. Then, in the ensuing winter semester, I was forbidden by the rector to enter the university and a successor in the person of Prof. Lortz was appointed for the summer semester 1935.

### 3. Schmidlin and Home Support for the Missions

Schmidlin, at his deepest level always a priest, pursued not only missiological but also practical missionary objectives. Already in March 1909 he urged his students in Münster to found an academic missionary association. His appeal fell on receptive ears, and on June 10, 1910, the first constituent meeting of the Akademischer Missionsverein was held with 100 students of Münster university and 175 from the Borromäum (seminary) taking part. After the solemn opening Mass, 600 students joined the association. It turned out to be extraordinarily active, sending out invitations far and wide to the very best speakers.

Other colleges soon followed the example of Münster: the clerical seminary in Passau on February 26, 1911; Tübingen University (with 230 association members) on December 1, 1911; the seminary in Freising on February 6, 1912; St. Peter's Seminary in Baden on March 5, 1913; and soon afterward the house of studies for priests in Bonn, and many others. The Catholic Academic Association formed an Akademischer Missionsbund (missionary union) in 1920. From 1913 on, the academic missionary associations had their own paper, *Akademische Missionsblätter*.

On January 22, 1912, Schmidlin, in the course of a lecture for the clergy of the city of Münster, called for a rise in contributions to the missions and for a discussion on the need for the clergy in the homeland to organize themselves into a "mission conference." Once more his proposal was readily accepted, and on May 7, the Missionsvereinigung des Münsterschen Diözesanerlaus was inaugurated. There were 300 participants at the first meeting. The dioceses of Treves, Cologne, Paderborn, Strassburg, and others soon followed suit. All these diocesan units later merged in the Unio Cleri pro Missionibus founded in Italy in 1916 after the pattern begun in Münster.

Another of his great wishes was to found a missionary society of German diocesan priests. In 1937 he composed a memo on this theme and published it in the *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*. In 1913–14 he made many a journey to the Far East. His intentions in doing so were concrete and specific, "not just a grandiose program of setting up mission universities and printing presses, but also the recommending of an international association to gather financial support, and a mission training society to prepare the necessary personnel." Neither the missionary society of German diocesan priests nor the international association ever got off the ground. But they illustrate the breadth and vitality of Schmidlin's interest and imagination.
Schmidlin was also the organizer and animator of courses in missiology for the most diverse audiences: in 1916 there was a course for the clergy of Cologne, in 1917 for teachers in Munster, in 1919 for missionaries in Düsseldorf, in 1919–20 for missionaries home on leave in Münster, in 1925 for diocesan and religious priests in Steyl, in 1925 for academics in Siegburg, in 1926 and 1930 in St. Ottilien and Münster. He also played a decisive role in other congresses not organized by himself, for example, in 1924 at Mödling, Vienna, 1925 at Budapest, 1926 at Leirnitz, 1927 at Posen, 1928 at Würzburg, 1929 once more at Mödling, 1930 at Leibach, and 1932 at Freiburg, Switzerland.

It must be added that the idea of having the theme of mission handled at the university level also caught on elsewhere. Thus in Munich missiological questions were treated by König in 1911 and by Aufhauser in 1912, in Bamberg by König in 1912, in Breslau by Seppelt in 1911, in Strassburg by Bastgen in 1912, in Hamburg by Schmidlin, Schwager, and Streit from 1911 to 1913, in Würzburg by Weber and Zahn in 1915. A lectureship in mission history and comparative religion (Professor Aufhauser) was set up in Munich in 1919. After World War I, the missiological movement passed on to other places too, especially to Rome, where the Urban College set up an institute and the Gregorian University established a chair for missiology. Professor Ohm, O.S.B., Schmidlin’s successor in missiology on the faculty at Münster, was not exaggerating when he said, “It is impossible to think of missiology and mission history without Schmidlin. For a long time he was mistrusted or even rejected in many missiological circles. But he won through all the same. Catholic missiology gained a secure place in the curriculum of universities and developed into an independent, well-defined, clear-eyed and true science. It has, thanks to Schmidlin’s exertions, reached a position that commands attention.”

Posterity has not really been fair to Schmidlin. His early forced retirement and, above all, his wild reactions to everything and everyone, be he pope or king or subject, were largely responsible for his being judged unfavorably. He said what he thought and was no respecter of persons. But, for all that, he deserves an honorable place in history. Not without reason has he been called the father of Catholic missiology. So much can be traced back to his inspiration and untiring zeal, so much is of permanent value. He maintained his own position clearly as distinct from the views of Protestant missiologists, notably Gustav Warneck. On the other hand, however, he is a great deal closer to them than is the “Louvain school.” This, in these ecumenical days, is something positive. In Vatican Council II some central ideas of the “Louvain school” doubtless made an impact. But the “Münster school” was also represented and made its presence felt. Both were good and necessary.

If in some places today the idea of mission has been relegated to the background, one could only wish for another Schmidlin, one who would perhaps be calmer and more balanced, but who would add his weight to the missionary cause with the same clear-sightedness, energy, and love that were peculiarly his. Schmidlin was indeed a pioneer, whose legacy has left its imprint on Catholic missiology.

Notes


2. Dr. K. Gschwind, parish priest, Allschwil, in Basel deanery newspaper, 1944, p. 503.


4. Ibid., pp. 168f.


6. Notes for a conference on Schmidlin. To round off the picture of Schmidlin it must be added that before he took his degree he worked zealously as assistant priest in Gebweiler. As a young private lecturer, he also worked as a priest in the Antoniusstift, and later as chaplain to Count Hatzfeld in Dyckburg. During World War I, he organized the rescue of missions in the East endangered by the Turks. He also took spiritual care of those in a prisoner-of-war camp and gathered its French theology students together there into a wartime seminary. He worked a good deal for the poor (see K. Müller, op. cit., pp. 23f).

7. E. Hegel, op. cit., p. 16.

8. According to information received from Dr. Clauss, archepiscopal archivist in Freiburg i.B. According to Th. Ohm he was starved to death and his corpse left lying in the prison for days: MR 32 (1947):10.


12. Ibid. 1 (1911):5.

13. Ibid., p. 7. In 1938 the journal was renamed Missions- und Religionswissenschaft (MR), and in 1950 it was changed to Zeitschrift für Missions und Religionswissenschaft (ZMR).

14. Einführung in die Missionswissenschaft, 1st ed. (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1917). pp. 46f. It is interesting that Ad gentes (AG)—Vatican II’s document on the missions—speaks in its first five chapters of the “mission of the church” in general, and only in chap. 6 defines the specific term “missionary activity.” Schmidlin had done likewise.

Base Ecclesial Communities: A Study of Reevangelization and Growth in the Brazilian Catholic Church

A. William Cook, Jr.

Possibly the most exciting item of missiological news to come out of Latin America these days cannot be found in the journals of most Protestant mission organizations. It has to do with the *communidades eclesiais de base* or Base Ecclesial Communities, the fastest-growing movement within the Roman Catholic Church. *Time* magazine (May 7, 1979, p. 88) called it the most influential Catholic movement in Latin America, where there may be as many as 150,000 *communidades*—80,000 of them in Brazil. A prominent sociologist, in a Smithsonian Institution symposium, states that these “grass-roots congregations” promise to change the face of Brazilian Catholicism into the nation’s first truly working-class association. He goes on to liken this phenomenon to eighteenth-century Wesleyanism (IDOC 1978:78-84).

What is the nature of this movement? What are its social and historical roots and its fundamental characteristics? And what is its significance for both Catholic and Protestant mission today? I have approached these issues with several concerns: (1) as a Christian who is deeply concerned about total human liberation; (2) as a Protestant who has been engaged in mission in Latin America for over a quarter century; (3) as an evangelical missiologist who is committed to holistic evangelization and church growth; and (4) as an inquisitive student of social and religious phenomena.

1. Definition

The Base Ecclesial Communities constitute a dynamic movement that defies easy definition. The 1968 Medellin Episcopal Conference of Latin America (CELAM II) called them “the first and fundamental ecclesiastical nucleus . . . the initial cell of the ecclesiastical structures and the focus of evangelization . . . the most important source of human advancement and development” (CELAM II:201). The 1979 Puebla Conference (CELAM III) called the *communidades* “an expression of the church’s preferential love for the poor . . . the focal point of evangelization, the motor of liberation.”

CELAM III defined “community” as “intimate personal relationship in the faith.” “Ecclesial” suggests the church-relatedness of these communities through the celebration of the Word and of the sacraments. But, above all, it is the church “putting into practice the Word of God” and making “present and active the church’s mission.” Finally, the *communidades* are “of the base” because they are germinal cells in the wider parish community.

What sets the Brazilian Base Ecclesial Communities apart from other superficially similar movements are their origins. They have not been imported from abroad. Nor are they communities that have been created by ecclesiastical fiat as part of some predetermined strategy for church renewal and reevangelization. They are grassroots communities, spontaneously in response to the Latin American reality, and of which the church was virtually forced to take cognizance.

The church gradually became aware of the existence of “natural communities (neighborhood associations, youth clubs, workers’ cells, etc.) . . . local and environmental, which correspond to the reality of a homogeneous group and whose size allows for personal fraternal contact amongst its members.” Having discovered these “homogeneous units,” the church determined to orient its pastoral efforts “toward the transformation of these communities into ‘a family of God.’” It tried to do this by making itself present among them “as leaven” by means of a small nucleus. The *communidade* “creates a community of faith, hope and charity which takes seriously and at the same time challenges the ‘homogeneous units’ which are at the base of society” (CELAM II: 201).

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Ibid. Schmidlin is thinking here of the house or group in which or from which mission proceeds, or again of a mission limited by place or specific personnel, such as the mission in Honduras or the Franciscan missions. AG stands by the geographical idea of mission. *Evangelii nuntiandi* (EN)—the apostolic exhortation of Paul VI on evangelization in the modern world, 1975—speaks of the missionary and of missionary activity, but steers clear of the word “mission” as a geographical determination.

Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss, 2nd ed. (Münster: Verlag Aschendorff, 1923), pp. 243f. For Schmidlin the word “conversion” means the profession of Christian teaching on the one hand, and baptism in the name of the Trinity, on the other (*Einführung*, p. 55).

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2. Sociohistorical Roots of the Base Communities

The transition from a traditional and semipagan institution that for almost 500 years had been allied with the rich and powerful to a church that is beginning to return to the poor did not happen as the result of a sudden change of heart. The social and political and religious determinants from the time of the discovery of Brazil by the Portuguese until the mid-nineteenth century were the royal patronage system, which controlled the church, and the fazenda, or system of large plantations with slaves and, after 1888, indentured labor.

Governmental changes from royal colony (1500) to independent empire (1822) and republic (1889) did not alter these facts. Fazendeiro and plantation chaplain, African slaves and mulatto and mestizo “free men” were all part of an overarching patron-dependent relationship to which the church, with only a few exceptions, gave its blessing. This relationship did not change when feudalism was supplanted by industrialism, setting in motion the vast peasant migrations to the cities and the rise of the festering faélas (Freyre 1964:30f., 390f.; 1968:26,95; De Kadt 1970:10–50).

The ecclesiastical fact of life during the first 489 years of Brazilian history was “regalism”—the control of the church by the crown: the direct result of the royal patronage granted the Iberian monarchs by the pope. When Rome regained control of the Brazilian church with the proclamation of the republic, it inherited a weakened and venal institution that had all but lost the allegiance of the masses. While the church basked in the reflected glory of the crown, it evidenced small awareness and concern over this fact. Forced to stand upon its own feet, the church discovered the virtual nonexistence of its own bases (De Kadt 1970:53f.; Bruneau 1974: 11–29). During this period several Protestant denominations began to appear on the Brazilian scene.

The indigenous population and the African peoples who were transferred wholesale into Brazilian slavery were superficially “Christianized.” They were allowed by their masters to practice their animistic rites in secret because this “facilitated the civilizing process and aided in the disciplining of the slaves” (Freyre 1964: 328). Afro-Brazilian Spiritism—and recent Pentecostal growth—can be explained in part as a reaction of the masses against the social, economic, cultural, and religious exploitation by the feudal fazenda and ecclesiastical systems.

During the first half of this century the church attempted to recoup its losses through an alliance of convenience with an anticlerical populist dictatorship. The political ferment and growing popular discontent during the presidencies that followed gradually forced the church into contact with the exploited masses, and numerous radical Catholic movements came into being. Two of the most important for our study were Catholic Action (AC) and the Movimento de Educação de Base (MEB).\(^1\) The MEB was born from the church’s increasing awareness of the plight of the peasants and out of its unease over Marxist successes. The basic techniques used by the MEB—Paulo Freire’s conscientização (consciousness raising) and nondirective group dynamics—have been refined in comunidade de base methodology (Bruneau 1974: 30–104; De Kadt 1970: 34–105; LADOC: vol. 2, April 1972, and vol 6, Sept.–Oct. 1975).

The violent reaction of the landholder-industrialist-military alliance to the threat of a radicalized Catholicism culminated in the military revolução of 1964, and in the eventual demise of the MEB as a prophetic movement. However, the prophetic voices and actions of the progressive priests and bishops who supported this movement led to an escalating confrontation between church and state. Events have placed the Brazilian hierarchy in the forefront of the struggle for reevangelization and human rights in Brazil and Latin America (Bruneau 1974: 127–65; De Kadt 1970: 177–211). Official Catholic documents and pronouncements after Vatican Council II gave the Brazilian progressives in the hierarchy the doctrinal underpinning for their actions. Gradually, for the sake of institutional solidarity, an increasing number of bishops have been forced to define their position vis-à-vis the revolução’s doctrine of national security. This doctrine subsumes, at whatever human cost, personal and collective civil rights to the security and economic well-being of the state (LADOC Keyhole Series, no. 8: 1–5; Pro Mundi Vida: Dossier 1977; IDOC: 14–29; 43–45).

The “Brazilian economic miracle” has, by the government’s own statistics (1978), resulted only in widening the gap between the rich and the poor. As they struggled to help the poor of Brazil to understand the meaning of the Catholic faith, the clergy were confronted with two aspects of the same Reality: (a) socioeconomic injustice and (b) Christopagan popular religiosity. This twin reality has shaped the church’s approach to base community praxis.

3. Fundamental Orientations of the Base Ecclesial Communities

The significance of the comunidades de base for Christian missiology can be found in the following four orientations, which set the comunidades apart from both traditional Catholicism and other Basic Christian Communities in Latin America.

a. A New Understanding of Reality

Reality with a capital R is the operative word in the Brazilian comunidades. The ingredients of this Reality are the context of poverty, injustice, and marginalization in which the majority of Brazilians find themselves. Comunidade members have begun to discover that this Reality is not a divine “given.” They are seeking to understand this Reality not so they can accommodate themselves to it, but in order to be able to change it as part of their Christian responsibility. Both Scripture and a critical socioeconomic analysis—which draws from several sources, including the writings of Brazilian theologians Leonardo Boff and Carlos Mesters—serve as tools for the unmasking of this Reality.\(^4\) Reality is also the nominality of the masses, which must be reevangelized with the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

b. A New Model of the Church

The comunidades eclesiais de base have arisen more or less spontaneously in response to Brazilian Reality. The interpretation of the ecclesial Reality of the comunidades will vary depending upon whether it is being seen from the vantage point of the hierarchy or from the perspective of the comunidade leaders. On the part of the latter, the church is the People of God, composed of all those who have been baptized. It has been called to be a servant community. But the church all too often has been unfaithful to this commission. According to Father José Marins, Latin American coordinator of the movement, the Base Ecclesial Communities are a faithful pilgrim remnant—what Dom Hêlder Câmara has called “Abrahamic minorities” (Câmara 1976:78)—within the larger nominal church and in the structures and institutions of society. This koinonia admits of no anonymous Christianity (despite the movement’s theological indebtedness at some points to Karl Rahner).

Sin and salvation, while affecting the individual person, are understood in the comunidades more in corporate and structural

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terms. Conversion is a process. The community of faith is constantly “being converted” to God in Christ through the church, to the Word and through the neighbor. These are the instruments that God uses to confront us with Reality.

The **comunidades** see their movement as a reordering from the bottom up of the millennial structures of the church. The church is no longer seen as a pyramid with the pope at the top, but as a circle in which every member, including the hierarchy and the humblest Christian, has a ministry which has been given to him or her by the Holy Spirit. In contrast, other Catholic observers tend to see the movement as one of several expressions of the one church, including the traditional territorial church, the Charismatic Renewal, the Neocatechumenate, marriage encounter, and others.

Reality is also liturgical, because it is in the Eucharist that the Christological and ecclesial center of the gospel becomes most evident to members of the **comunidades**. During the “celebration” every aspect of the austere liturgy focuses upon the significance of our Lord’s passion for the Reality which the **comunidade** members experience daily. It is a call to _martyria_, because more than fifty **comunidade** leaders have already been murdered or have disappeared in Latin America. Others have been harassed, imprisoned, and tortured.

c. A New Way of Doing Theology

The Base Community understanding of social and ecclesial Reality is the starting point for a new “hermeneutic of the people,” or a “theology of the base.” The point of departure of this theology is not a corpus of abstract dogma but the Reality of poverty, marginalization, injustice, and alienation which surrounds them. It is “the view from the base”—Scripture reread in community from the bottom up. Biblical themes, which have traditionally been interpreted from the optic of the rich and powerful, are now seen through the eyes of the poor and oppressed. Theology, then, becomes “a reflection upon praxis” by the oppressed leading to concrete actions toward their own liberation.

It is a contextualized theology, in the sense that the Base Communities are theologizing in their own context of poverty and oppression. Contextualization in this case does not mean functional accommodation to the dominant culture. This is a dysfunctional and prophetic contextualization, which challenges dehumanizing cultural norms. The “prophetic discontinuity” of this theology can be seen in the Bible study materials that have grown out of Base Community reflection (cf. Mesters 1973; Gorgulho 1975; Marins 1978).

d. A New Understanding of Mission

The **comunidades de base** reflection upon their own social and ecclesial Reality in the light of biblical Reality has led to a new understanding of the church’s mission. The proclamation of the gospel—in word and action—is both the _announcement_ of salvation and liberation in Jesus Christ and the _denouncement_ of everything that oppresses and alienates humanity (cf. Marins 1976b, 1977c, 1977e; Barreiro 1977). It is both reevangelization of the masses of nominal Christians and prophetic confrontation with the oppressive “powers.” In the words of a Brazilian bishop, “the **comunidades** are the theology of liberation put into practice” (Time, May 7, 1979, p. 88).

4. Questions and Observations from an Evangelical Protestant Perspective

It is a temptation for the evangelical Protestant to want to impose his or her own understanding of Reality (social, ecclesial, and biblical) upon the Catholic Base Ecclesial Communities. This is a temptation we must avoid if we truly believe in the incarnation of the gospel into different Realities. Neither can we evaluate the Base Communities according to our understanding of traditional Roman Catholic Reality. The **comunidades de base** cannot be fully appreciated or objectively critiqued from our own comfortable ivory towers. Incarnation into Base Community Reality will give us both the experience and the right to make critical observations. Nonetheless, I would suggest four questions that should be asked of the Base Communities by any student of the movement.

a. Is the **comunidades de base** understanding of Reality complete? Does it deal as adequately with personal sin as it does with institutional sin? Does it give as much weight to sin as transgression against God as it does to sin against neighbor? In what way does the “lostness” of humanity before God relate on one’s intra- and inter-personal alienation?

b. Do the base communities deal adequately with popular religiosity? Granting the need to rediscover and to preserve the liberating cultural and social values of “a religion of the people,” is there not also a need for prophetic denunciation (and exorcism) of the demonic elements in Spiritism and in popular religion?

c. What is the ultimate source of authority for the **comunidades de base**? Is it the church, socioeconomic Reality, or Scripture? In what way do these sources relate to the authority of the Trinity?

d. Does the Catholic **comunidades** concept of conversion-as-a-process exhaust the biblical understanding of conversion? Protestants can indeed be grateful for this counterbalancing of their own emphasis upon conversion-as-a-point-in-time-event. But at what point in the process does conversion-as-an-about-face—as _metanoia_, as turning “to God from idols . . . from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God”—take place?

5. Implications for Protestant Mission

The Catholic **comunidades de base** have profound implications for Protestant mission in Brazil and Spanish America. Virtually all Protestant churches now working in Brazil can trace their roots to Base Ecclesial Communities. The Scottish Covenanters had their outlawed conventicles and the Anabaptists had their persecuted communities. British congregationalism was a grassroots community movement, as were the Methodist “classes”—and the Moravian communities and Society of Friends groups, which work elsewhere in Latin America. The _colegia pietatis_ or _ecclesia in ecclesia_ of Francke and Spener have their descendants in some of the Lutheran movements in Brazil. Indigenous Pentecostalism, which accounts for more than two-thirds of Brazilian Protestantism, began as a base church movement.

Yet most Protestant churches today are afraid of the very base church movements that gave them birth. Some churches appear to be more concerned about attaining and maintaining a dubious respectability, even in the face of institutionalized injustice and violence, than in speaking out in defense of fundamental human freedoms. Religious “liberty”—“freedom to preach the Gospel”—takes precedence over other freedoms. Said Father José Marins, after he had been shown the large “cathedral” being built by a Pentecostal pastor, “We are coming from where you are going.” Latin American Protestants are being challenged to consider the possibility that the evangelization of Catholic Latin America may take place, at least in part, within the Catholic Church, and to search for ways in which Protestants can relate to this phenomenon.
6. Conclusion

Nevertheless, the comunidades de base present their greatest challenge to their own church. They challenge it, as we have seen, at the levels of sociology, ecclesiology, theology, and mission. How will a church, which is one of the wealthiest, most centralized, and traditional institutions on earth, respond to this challenge from a church of the poor?

The final document of Puebla, despite its ambivalence at several points, accepts this challenge to its "personal and institutional behavior." Quoting from Paul VI, CELAM III defined evangelization in terms of the totality of human needs: "Evangelization will not be complete until there takes place dialogue between the gospel and the personal and social lives of people in the concrete." Evangelization "must keep the whole man and all men before its eyes and must communicate to them suitably and adequately a particular vigorous message in our time on liberation ... always in the context of the global plan of salvation" (Evangelii nuntiandi 29, 38).

The foundational pillars of this evangelization, according to John Paul II, are "the truth about Jesus Christ ... about the church ... about man." If these foundations are taken seriously by the hierarchy and the comunidades de base leadership, the movement will continue to grow and to fulfill its promise as "a hope [and possibly the hope] of the church" (Evangelii nuntiandi 58).

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Notes

1. I am using the Portuguese spelling throughout; Spanish: comunidades eclesiales de base.
2. Quotations are from a rough translation of the final Puebla document done by some of the journalists who were present.

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The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology

John Mbiti

In the last ten years or so, it has become fashionable to talk about “African theology,” “Christian African theology,” “Christian African theology,” “Theologia Africana,” etc.; the market is now flooded with articles that try to define these terms. Some people are even afraid that any of these terms connotes a pollution or syncretism of theology (as they understand it in the western traditions of the church). Others question whether Africans are capable of producing anything that could be termed “theology.” Still others think that ready-made theology has to be imported to Africa and simply “indigenized there.” I have no wish to enter into a debate with any of these positions. I will use the term “African theology” in this paper, without apology or embarrassment, to mean theological reflection and expression by African Christians.

The Bible has been translated in part or in full into nearly six hundred African languages and has become the basis of African Christianity, even though the literacy rate ranges from about 7 percent to 85 percent of the population in African countries. It may seem to be a contradiction that while African Christianity is biblically grounded, many of the 185 million Christians on our continent today cannot read. The Bible is a closed book for those who cannot read it: they only hear it read or recited to them; nevertheless, through the translation and increasing use of the Scriptures the biblical world has been integrated with that of the traditional African world at all levels. The Bible is distributed extremely widely throughout what we may call “Christian Africa,” i.e., the southern two-thirds of the continent and Madagascar. Its potential and actual influence in shaping African theology and Christianity is tremendous.

There are three main areas of African theology today: written theology, oral theology, and symbolic theology. Written African theology is the privilege of a few Christians who have had considerable education and who generally articulate their theological reflection in articles and (so far few) books, mostly in English, French, German, or another European languages. Oral theology is produced in the fields, by the masses, through song, sermon, teaching, prayer, conversation, etc. It is theology in the open air, often unrehearsed, and little heard by small groups, and generally lost to libraries and seminaries. Symbolic theology is expressed through art, sculpture, drama, symbols, rituals, dance, colors, numbers, etc.

My paper will confine itself to written theology. Since about 1960, a considerable literature, mainly articles, has been built up. In preparation for this paper I was able to draw upon some three hundred such articles and books by African theologians, most of which were published in the last five years or so. Written African theology is at present very much on the increase. It would be extremely valuable to have a bibliography of this literature, so that scholars and students could find their way.

We shall now look at a number of areas in which the Bible is the basis of theological reflection for African Christians.

Biblical Theology, History, and Religion

We can discern some emerging trends from recent and contemplated publications. In 1968 Professor Kwesi Dickson, one of Africa’s leading biblical scholars, published the first of several volumes entitled The History and Religion of Israel, which, though intended primarily for school use, are based on sound scriptural scholarship. These writings arise from Dickson’s conviction that “it would be inexcusable to fail to give biblical teaching pride of place in this quest” for African theology.

Professor Harry Sawyer published in the same year his Creative Evangelism, which is also biblically grounded. Sawyer pleads for what he calls “sound doctrinal teaching” and liturgy in the “new encounter” of the Gospel with Africa. In its approach the book is very traditional and Anglican both in “doctrine” and “liturgy.” Sawyer has maintained his biblical emphasis, dealing with such themes as Paul’s missionary work, sacrifice and worship, sin and forgiveness, salvation and God.

Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs, edited by Dickson and P. Ellingworth, was first published in 1969. The title expresses the importance African theologians intended to attach to biblical scholarship when they met in Ibadan, Nigeria, in January 1966, where the papers for this book were read. However, the contents of the book have very little biblical material, except for one essay on eschatology.

My own New Testament Eschatology in an African Background appeared in 1971, focusing on the question of eschatology and relating New Testament insights with African concepts. On this same theme I have also published shorter articles. The late Dr. Byang Kato’s Theological Pitfalls in Africa appeared in 1975. It is replete with scriptural references and is intended to “guard against the destructive effect of heretical ideas,” as Dr. Billy Graham tells us in the Foreword (p. 5). Kato intended that “the primary purpose of this book is to sound an alarm and warn Christians on both sides of the argument concerning the dangers of universalism” (p. 16). He felt that “the stage is well set for universalism in Africa” (p. 11) and went on to list the “ten significant factors . . . encouraging and fostering these trends.” The author launched a most bitter attack on himself (pp. 56ff. et passim), Professor E. B. Idowu (pp. 96ff. et passim), and ecumenism (pp. 129ff.). At the end he proposed new points on how to safeguard what he called “biblical Christianity in Africa” (pp. 181ff.).

Dr. Kato’s passionate attack on fellow theologians and the ecumenical movement arose partly out of insufficient understanding on his part. I had the opportunity of discussing with him some of the issues, on December 9, 1975. At the end he apologized to me for having unjustifiably attacked me and promised to rewrite and change the relevant parts of his book. Ten days later,

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Announcing

The joint annual meeting of the Eastern Fellowship of Professors of Missions and the Eastern Section of the American Society of Missiology will be held November 7-8, 1980, at the Maryknoll Mission Institute in Maryknoll, New York.

to come out through the Daystar Press in Ibadan. Modupe Oduyoye (manager of Daystar Press) published When Kings Ruled and Prophets Spoke in Israel (1977), which deals with the biblical account "from the call of Samuel to the fall of Samaria." This is a valuable book for schools by one of Africa’s leading linguists. Other current books from the same press include: Essentials of Bible Knowledge by S. L. Fawole; The People of the Book by M. Oduyoye (dealing with the life and religion of the Jewish people before and after the Babylonian Exile); Old Testament History and Religion by Daniel Wambutda (dealing with the period from the establishment of the monarchy to the fall of the northern kingdom); Cry Justice: Conversations with Old Testament Prophets by Bishop F. O. Segun; and The Secret School of Jesus by J. A. Ajibola. (Other titles are cited below.) These publications give greater weight to the Old Testament than to the New, and their immediate readership is mostly school, college, and seminary students. African Christians have much interest in Old Testament accounts of Jewish cultural, religious, and political life, and these books are certainly very helpful in increasing our understanding of the Bible.

There are some important developments in the area of Christology, as summarized in a paper by Kofi Appiah-Kubi at the first consultation of African and Asian theologians, held at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, in June 1976. He incisively observed that the concepts of Christology of traditional African Christians are practical, dynamic, living, and based on real life experience. Their concepts of Christology, he says, revolve around genealogy and the rites of passage—birth, baptism, Eucharist, and death. Such titles as Mediator, Redeemer, Savior, Liberator, and Healer are pregnant with meaning for these indigenous African Christians.12

There are also short Christological studies by Gabriel Setiloane13 and myself.14 John Pobee has a forthcoming book on Christology. Since he is a New Testament scholar, we can expect a scriptural basis for this work.

Commentaries and Devotional Literature

Commentaries and devotional literature form another vast field, and we can touch on it only briefly to indicate some emerging trends. No doubt there are many publications circulating locally that are not widely known.

In 1966 (now) Bishop E. Mshana published Fidia ya Wengi: Marko no Injili Yake, a Swahili commentary on the Gospel of Mark.15 Other recent publications include Studies in Second Corinthians 1–6 by Osad Imasogie16 and The Epistle to the Ephesians by S. T. Ola Akande.17

There have been many Bible studies given at various gatherings of Christians, a few of which are summarized in published forms. For example, at the inauguration of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in Kampala in 1963, Bible studies were given on "Freedom and Unity in Christ."18 These addressed themselves to several themes, including freedom, unity, the Body and the Trinity, worship, ethics, politics, and social relationships. Professor Jacques Ngally published "Bible Studies from an African Perspective" in the AACC Bulletin of January–February 1975 where he presented what the AACC Theology Department prepared for the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi in November–December 1975. These all too brief studies covered "the revelation of the Son of God" as "Christ crucified" and Jesus’ mission to "liberate" and "unite." In another article, "Jesus Christ and Liberation in Africa: a Bible Study," Professor Ngally gave further meditations on Jesus and liberation from disease, hunger, wealth, tyrants, legalism, tribalism, and racism.20 I understand that Edward Fashole-Luke is attempting to produce an African commentary (or series of commentaries) on the Bible. At this moment I have no up-to-date information about this grand (but not new) idea.

In the devotional field we have Bolaji Idowu, Job: A Meditation on the Problem of Suffering;21 Zecharias Fomum, God’s Love and Forgiveness;22 and J. S. Mbiti, The Voice of Nine Bible Trees.23

The Bible and African Preaching

I have mentioned "oral theology" as a major concern in African theological process. The Bible is the basis of African preaching, as we can all testify from our own experiences. However, we have extremely little documentation on how and to what extent the Bible is used in preaching. There are a few indications, but these come only from overseas scholars and not from African theologians.

Dr. Harold Turner studied the uses of the Bible by the Church of the Lord (Aladura), the results of which he published in Profile through Preaching (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1965). This is a very revealing study, though out of one case we cannot formulate conclusions for the whole of Africa. Turner’s investigations showed “that both independent and older African churches ... all make greater use of James than of most other parts of the New Testament,” and the Aladura church “made use of the whole Bible in its preaching.” He also observed that “many portions of the Scriptures that we tend to pass over or ignore are taken seriously by African Christians.”24

Horst Bürkle has made important observations: that for the African preacher, “the persons and events of both Testaments are always near to the preacher and his congregation, as if they were part of their own time”; that “the attempt to reproduce biblical history through illustrations drawn from local, African scenes is a common practice”; and that “the African preacher confronts us with the relevance of the symbol.”25

Another expatriate investigator of African preaching, R. Albrecht, observed that among the Haya Christians (Tanzania), “sin” occupied 21 percent of the sermons. Other topics included God’s work of creation (10 percent), various attributes of God (10 percent), God’s love and grace (15 percent), and God’s presence through “new means” (18 percent).26
My own limited investigation of African sermons clearly indicates that the whole Bible is used and that links are frequently made between the biblical world and African heritage as well as contemporary life. The Christian hymns strongly reflect biblical knowledge and teaching; theological views are also expressed through song and dance.

But a great deal remains to be done by African scholars regarding the Bible in African preaching, hymnology, liturgics, and the arts.

The Bible and African Theology in General

There are many other areas of theological reflection in which the Bible is taken as the basis. We can mention a few examples. In the field of ethics, we have the article of Bishop Manas Buthelezi, "Theological Grounds for an Ethic of Hope," in which he examines the important element of hope in the Gospel, demonstrating that "the Christian ethic is essentially an ethic of hope." Others who have written on Christian ethics include B. Bujò and N. Tese, both relating African morality to the Christian faith. E. C. O. Ilogu has written on Christian ethics in the Nigerian context; Bishop J. Kibira on grace and law in the pastoral context; O. U. Kalu on ethical questions of development and on corruption in African countries.

The question of sin is also receiving attention, viewed partly from biblical and partly from African perspectives and background. We mention the articles of Harry Sawyerr on sin, Harriet Sibisi Ngubane on "purity," and S. Mbonyinkeye on sin in central Africa.

The theme of salvation has, through evangelism, been made almost synonymous with the Gospel. African theologians are beginning to examine this concept. The tendency is to look at both the scriptural basis for salvation and African concepts relating to it. Contributions have come from, among others, Professor Sawyerr, Dr. K. Enang, who relates salvation to community. O. Bimwenyi, who relates the discussion to the departed as well, and J. S. Mbiti, who discusses the meaning of "Our Savior" and "salvation" in African contexts.

The Christian approach to health and the practice of healing are beginning to receive serious attention from scholars, although for a long time healing has been fully integrated into the life of many Independent churches. Although it was overwhelmingly dominated by expatriates, the "Upumulo Consultation on the Healing Ministry of the Church" in September 1967 was a major recognition of African interest in the Christian dimension of health and healing. Kofi Appiah-Kubi has, more recently, begun to do serious research in this area and we await his findings. The theology of Christian healing lends itself readily to scriptural basis.

The theme of liberation has become very popular among African theologians, especially in Southern Africa and in the All Africa Conference of Churches. One must, however, point out that even though there is much biblical basis for this theme, African discussion of liberation has so far continued without or with only a few scriptural references. This neglect in Africa of the biblical backing of the theology of liberation is a very alarming omission that calls urgently for correction; otherwise that branch of African theology will lose its credibility.

Another growing discussion is on the relation between church and state in the African setting. The urgency of this debate has intensified in recent years, as the first generation of independent African political leadership began to give way to another and
sometimes feels threatened by other sources of power, of which the church is or could be one. There is a growing amount of literature, with contributions by Africans like Bishop Desmond Tutu on the question of church and nation, Bishop Eliehwaha Mshana on nationalism, Bishop Henry Okulu on church and politics, Bishop C. Mwoleka on his support for "Ujamaa" socialism in Tanzania, Zaire’s bishops wrestling with the church and authenticity, etc. Some of the discussion has sound biblical basis, but some makes no direct reference to biblical insights.

We have to recognize the value and use of the Bible in the formation and identity of many African Independent churches. Their founders have used the Bible as justification and inspiration; the beliefs of these churches are normally formulated on a biblical basis; they use the Bible for the legitimation of their existence and identity; and it is often the Bible that gives them the basis for establishing close ties with the African traditional world. Here, then, we see practical theology arising out of the use of the Scriptures in African Christianity and sustaining a continent-wide movement that has been labeled “renewal” and “African Reformation.”

There is a vast field of theology in relation to African religions. Literature by Africans is mushrooming on the relationship between Christian faith and the African religious heritage. This area deserves a separate full treatment. Trained African theologians—in theological seminaries and departments of religious studies—pastors in the villages, and the vast number of ordinary African Christians are all showing great interest in this topic in one way or another. A few feel that African religiosity is demonic and should not be allowed to enter the life of the Christians or the church. Some regard African religion as having prepared the ground for the ready and rapid acceptance of the Christian faith. Some wish to revive and retain African religion in place of any other religion. The majority are at the practical and pastoral levels where Christians live with the realities of both the Christian faith and their traditional religiosity. I have not yet seen a serious and exhaustive academic work done on this relationship between the Christian faith and African traditional religiosity. There are innumerable articles and reports and consultations; and there are books and articles by African scholars on African religion itself—many of which are valuable and relevant. But the theological examination of this interreligious relationship has yet to be done. It is to be hoped that the Scriptures will play their full role in that exposition. So far there is little use of the Bible in the debate.

Concluding Remarks

My topic is open-ended: there is no real conclusion to it since it addresses itself to an ongoing process of African theological work. That the Bible is playing a major role in African theology there is no doubt, as we have attempted to illustrate in this paper. It exerts greater impact on oral theology than is apparent in the extremely limited published material. Any viable theology must and should have a biblical basis, and African theology has begun to develop on this foundation. Edward Fashole-Luke is right in reminding us that “the Bible is the basis and primary source for the development of African Christian theologies.” Nothing can substitute for the Bible. However much African cultural-religious background may be close to the biblical world, we have to guard against references like “the hitherto unwritten ‘African Old Testament’” or sentiments that see a final revelation of God in the African religious heritage.

Equally serious is the tendency for some theological debates to be propagated without full or clear biblical grounding. We have already cited the case of the theology of liberation. To this we could add the “moratorium” debate; the plea made by Father Charles Nyamiti for the “adaptation” and “application” of (primarily western) theology to make it African theology or “the basis” for it; the “Ujamaa theology” based on “African socialism,” advocated by theological student C. Lyomo; so-called “relevant theology” being propagated in South Africa, which is primarily a ready-made European theology turned into a consumption commodity for Africans, and various discussions of the relationship between the Christian faith and African religious heritage. In these areas, biblical grounding has been either weak or lacking altogether.

Some of us are getting tired of seeing all sorts of articles and references under the big banner: AFRICAN THEOLOGY (or some similar wording). The substance of these articles often turns out to be advice on how African theology should be done, where it should be done, who should do it, what it should say, ad infinitum. Some of these self-made theological advisers, whether they be African or foreign, have little or nothing to produce beyond their generous advice; and others want to play the role of theological engineers who meticulously sabotage spontaneous theological output by African Christians.

Theology is not produced by advice alone, and those who have enough advice to give about it should first use their advice for themselves; let them produce theological works and let these works speak for themselves. I say this both to African and overseas Christians. We are tired of being advised. Let the Bible be our human adviser and the Holy Spirit our Divine Adviser. African theology is being produced, and it will continue to be produced, irrespective of what may be done to muffle it. We must move with the times and get on with the work of theologizing. After all, we have all the tools and sources necessary for the fulfillment of this task. Like the African proverb that says that “the eyes of the frog do not stop the giraffe from drinking water in the pond,” neither the critical, skeptical, nor advice-filled eyes of others should prevent creative theologians from engaging in theological output.

I discern remarkable signs in the development of African theology. In this development the Bible is playing a crucial role, even if not in every case. African Christianity has the Bible at its forefront, and the Bible is shaping much of its development both explicitly and implicitly. Oral theology, which is largely a prerequisite to written theology, is also strongly grounded on the Scriptures. As long as African theology keeps close to the Scriptures, it will remain relevant to the life of the church in Africa and it will have lasting links with the theology of the church universal. African theologians must give even more attention to the Bible than is sometimes the case. As long as we keep the Bible close to our minds and our hearts, our theology will be viable, relevant, and of lasting service to the church and glory to the Lord to whom be honor, dominion, and power unto the ages of ages. Amen.
Notes


2. The United Bible Societies reported that in 1975 they distributed a total of 14,371,000 Bibles, Testaments, and other portions of the Scriptures in Africa. This was slightly more than what they distributed in the whole of Europe (East and West), namely, 13,785,000. These figures do not include distribution through other agents. See Bulletin: United Bible Societies, World Annual Report 1975, nos. 102/103, First and Second Quarter 1976. An interesting but brief article, “How the Bible is Used in Africa,” by J. M. Mobogori, appears in African Challenge: Major Issues in African Christianity, ed. K. Y. Best (Nairobi: Transafrika Publishers, 1975), pp. 111–18.


41. For example, B. Moore, ed., Black Theology, articles on liberation in the AACC Bulletin: Lusaka 74; and AACC Bulletin 7, no. 6 (November–December 1974), Focus on Liberation; J. B. Chipenda,
Toward a Process Theology of Mission

David M. Stowe

T
here is a widely recognized need today for a new theology “from below,” as some Third World and liberation theologians are telling us. To do theology from below is to take the predicament and experience of those on the underside of history, the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten, as the central realities from which theology and mission must start.

I am convinced that along with a new theology “from below” we need a renewed theology “from above.” I do not mean “above” in a sociological sense, an upper-class theology alongside an under-class theology. Heaven forbid! Rather, I mean a theology from “above” in the traditional symbolism, of the “above” where God is. In other words, I propose a renewed theology of mission which takes the reality of God as its central organizing principle.

“Process theology” is primarily a way of affirming that the world and human experience are literally saturated with God, and a way of trying to understand how that is so and what it means. It is theology done “from above,” God-centered.

The great texts which process theology expounds are those which declare the universe and our life within it to be permeated with divine presence and action. They speak of a world alive with creativity and organically knit together in every part by virtue of the life of God within it. Consider Job 34:14–15, “If he should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.” Or Jeremiah 23:23–24, “Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth?” Or Psalm 139:

Whither shall I go from thy Spirit?  
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, thou art there!  
If I make my bed in Sheol, thou art there!  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,  
Even there thy hand shall lead me,  
and thy right hand shall hold me.

In the high Christologies of the New Testament, process theology finds the same divine relatedness to all existence. “I am the vine, you are the branches; he that abides in me, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). “In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. . . . He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16).

This biblical emphasis on the saturation of the world with God is linked by process theology with the understandings of the world in modern science and general secular experience. Process theology does explicitly what most other theologies do surreptitiously or unconsciously. It acknowledges the philosophical worldview within which it interprets Christian faith. That worldview has been framed by such philosophers of “process” as William James, John Dewey, Charles Hartshorne, and above all Alfred

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North Whitehead who did pioneering work in mathematics and logic at Cambridge and London and in philosophy at Harvard.

The contours of this process worldview may be suggested in three propositions about creativity, the nature of God, and the power of God.

1. The most fundamental character of the world is creativity. There is a constant emergence of new actualities in a cosmic evolutionary process. It is not a fixed eternal order nor an unchanging depth of being which is basic, but change and growth in an infinite series of intimately interrelated events, from sub-atomic particles to human experiences to stellar galaxies. As the title of Hartshorne’s significant book affirms, “Reality is social process.”

2. God is the reality by which this unending creative process receives its direction and by which the actualities achieve their value and their harmony. God is, in a fairly literal sense, the soul of the universe. As such, God not only provides direction for all things and proposes the values at which they aim, but his experience encompasses the whole. That evergrowing experience of God is the way in which all the values achieved in the perpetual appearing and perishing of the world’s actualities are conserved. “In him we live and move and have our being,” St. Paul said to the Athenians, and that is true not only now but eternally. Whitehead cites the familiar words of a hymn as a profound statement about reality: “Abide with me, fast falls the eventide”—where the fall of evening reflects the perpetual perishing of all things, and God is the abiding reality in whose ongoing life all find their home.

3. The supreme power which God exerts within every part of the cosmic process is not a coercive omnipotence but the pervasive pressure of his intentions. “The power of God is the worship he inspires,” Whitehead wrote. “Worship” here is to be understood in the broadest possible sense as the response, sometimes conscious but more frequently unconscious, of persons and all other actualities to the lure of what Jonathan Edwards called the “excellency” of God.

Cosmic process is replete with freedom. God’s sovereignty lies in the way in which God has the first word about the possibilities available to each actuality and the last word with respect to its place in the ongoing life of the world. There is no “solution” to the problem of evil. Friction and discord and therefore waste and pain are inescapable characteristics of a world of real freedom and adventurous creativity. But there is an answer to evil in the constant possibility of a more perfect response by every creature to God’s call and purpose, and in the redemption which pain and tragedy may receive in the larger harmonies and more creative adventures which God is constantly making possible. The Bible speaks of such redemption of evil in texts like these: “With his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5); and “We preach Christ crucified . . . the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 1:23–24).

Charles Hartshorne summed up in a single weighty sentence his conviction that the key to understanding the universe is to envisage at the heart of it the real divine presence and action to which the Bible bears witness: “The ground for this book is the conviction that a magnificent intellectual content—for surpassing that of such systems of Thomism, Spinozism, German idealism, positivism (old and new)—is implicit in the religious faith briefly expressed in the three words, God is love.”

Now what does such a theology offer for our thinking about mission in the 1980s?

1. A theology of mission “from below” is required by this theology “from above.” God’s immanence with all the creation involves his massive presence with that great majority of humankind who make up the global under-class. With them, in Whitehead’s phrase, he is “the fellow-sufferer who understands.” His redemptive aims are particularly related both to their needs and their high potentials. Missionary action in partnership with this God will likewise have a central concern for these needs and potentials.

Such a missionary theology from above-and-below could not, however, be a narrowly partisan theology on behalf of any class, even the under-class. It rejoices in the Exodus but recognizes the pain and evil as well as the triumph of the Red Sea and the Conquest. God is actually partisan for all, for the centurion and the leper, the tax collector and the Pharisee, the harlot, the synagogue ruler and the little child, the Egyptian and the Jew and the Canaanite. Each has his or her special and important place in the cosmic process. Each has particular claims, for healing, rebuke, encouragement, correction, comfort and support. God is equally present with each, drawing all toward that final harmony for which the Kingdom of God is the New Testament’s symbol.

2. Since God has from the beginning been so involved in the life of every human being, one is bound to believe that there has been significant creativity and responsive seeking of God in all cultures. Process theology underlines the validity and the promise of our dialogical approach to persons of other faiths. Some remarkable similarities are discernible between aspects of process philosophy and Chinese Taoism and Neo-Confucianism, devotional (bhakti) Hinduism, and some types of Mahayana Buddhism. Christian mission should press hopefully ahead with dialogue, confident that as the meaning of these convergences is more fully understood the one truth about the one God and the one world history in which we all live will become more clear and more persuasive to all.

At the same time central convictions of Christian faith as process theology understands them will stand out in contrast with differing convictions. In an able article on “The Cross and the Crescent” Byron Haines underlines the traditional core belief of Islam: “In Muslim theology God is transcendent and all-powerful. Nothing can be compared or associated with God without committing the sin of idolatry.” But for biblical faith as understood by process theology God is not all-powerful but is involved in intense interaction with the creation. He is not simply or even primarily transcendent but is also pervasively and actively immanent. Here is opportunity for missionary dialogue, sensitive, searching, honest about differences and, one would hope, ultimately persuasive about the Christian “difference.”

3. Mission is a change-process. It aims to alter the conditions of human life and the quality of human existence for the better. Process theology affirms change as the fundamental character of reality. It perceives the world as made up of events linked in sequences which are related to all other sequences. Each such drop of reality grasps the causal influences which it inherits and synthesizes this diverse inheritance into a new reality. In turn it becomes immediately a part of the inheritance which new actual occasions will use in their new syntheses.

In other words, the world process is constituted by the interplay of inheritance, the achieved reality of the past, and of novelty, the reach of each occasion toward the future as it actualizes possibilities offered by God.

In this light, mission should aim at change which makes the most effective use of each present circumstance as material for building a better future. It will be evolutionary in the sense of respecting whatever achievements the past has provided. It will also be revolutionary in moving toward God’s ideal aim just as far and fast as the actuality of the present allows. A style of action is suggested which like the biblical prophets calls at once for the conservation of ancient values and for radical change toward God’s intended future. Thus it guards against a deadly conservatism and also against an illusory and possibly demonic utopianism. Because God does not literally have all-power, “omnipotence,” he does not work with a totally predetermined cosmic plan. No such plan
cesses of history, century after century, can be a very effective car-
as quite literally the body of Christ, an historic community consti-
tuted by the spirit of Jesus Christ who became a living presence
among his disciples by his resurrection. If reality is social process,
then only a social institution operating effectively within the pro-
cesses of history, century after century, can be a very effective car-
rier and instrument of spiritual realities. Hence the perpetuation
and extension and continual reform and strengthening of the
church is a central concern of mission.

6. In May 1980 Christians from all lands convened in a major
assembly of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism to
consider the theme, “Your Kingdom Come.” It focused on the
hope which Christians in mission hold and for which they work.
Process theology is both less hopeful and more hopeful than other
forms of Christian thought. It holds no hope for an apocalyptic
miracle by which suddenly at some point in time the entire cosmos
or at least the earth will be transformed into perfection. It does not
count upon a divine omnipotence to remedy all ills and fulfill all
human desires when God decides to do so. It provides no fresh
proof for a heaven symbolized by streets of gold and an endless
Hallelujah chorus of achieved triumph. But these forms of hope
are increasingly unavailable anyway.

On the other hand, process theology is immensely hopeful
about a world and the human life within it which are saturated
with the presence and action of a God of infinite creativity, a God
whose purposes are revealed in Jesus Christ. It finds an ultimate
assurance about each sparrow and human person in the conviction
that the whole cosmic process is being incorporated into the divine
life, forever and unfadingly. As Whitehead put it, God “saves the
world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. [His] is the
judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It
is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal
world is mere wreckage.”

What all this adds up to, this God-centered, almost God-intoxica
ted, spirit of process theology at its best, was illuminated for me
by some words of Roy Pearson, president of Andover Newton
Theological School. He was reflecting on a series of theological lec-
tures which he had been attending. “In these days when God is
clearly absent . . . ,” one lecturer had remarked. Roy Pearson com-
ments: “It was not that he did not talk about God, nor even that he
did not make frequent use of traditional theological language. . . .
But the world in which the lecturer was operating . . . was not the
substantive world of God’s creation in which God himself might
suddenly confront his human creatures as they walked in the gar-
den in the cool of the day. . . . There was no life-throbbing connec-
tion between God’s world and the world of the lecturers. The
theologians might as well have been atheists.”

Whether or not theologians might as well be atheists, mis-
ionaries cannot be. They must begin with the conviction that God
is clearly present—and go on to express that organizing conviction
and experience of their lives in the works of love and justice and
mercy and communication which make up the glorious process we
call mission.

Notes

Final Document
International Ecumenical Congress of Theology,
February 20–March 2, 1980, São Paulo, Brazil

Introduction

1. We, Christians from forty-two countries, meeting in the city of São Paulo from February 20 to March 2, 1980, held the Fourth International Ecumenical Congress of Theology, convened by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians.

At the same time we have shared our reflections with the Christian communities who have been meeting at the Theology Week each night at the Catholic University in São Paulo.

One hundred and eighty persons of various Christian churches, including laity, bishops, pastors, priests, religious, and theologians, participated in the Congress. We came from the popular Christian communities spread throughout Latin America and the Caribbean; we have also come from Africa and Asia and from the ethnic minorities of the United States; observers from Europe and North America were also present.*

The Congresses of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) in 1976, Accra (Ghana) in 1977, and Colombo (Sri Lanka) in 1979 preceded this fourth Congress.

2. The theme of our meeting was “Ecclesiology of the Popular Christian Communities.” Our reflection took as its starting point the rich experience of these basic ecclesial communities, sign of the renewal of the churches of the Third World, and was concentrated particularly on Latin America. In this experience we find ourselves profoundly linked to our churches and pastors, faithful to the appeal of the Word of God as well as to the involvement of the Christian communities in the life of our peoples.

3. Catholics and Protestants from various churches, we admit to a common search in the establishment of the Kingdom of justice and peace. In reflecting on the practice of the popular Christian communities, we shared days of community prayer, praising the Lord for all the signs of liberation and pleading on behalf of those who still suffer the destitution of captivity.

4. Challenged by the Word of God, which comes to us through the Bible and the history of our peoples, and as members of the community of Jesus Christ, we now give witness to the results of our work.

5. But first we want to express our deep gratitude to Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns for the fraternal hospitality with which he received us in his archdiocese.

We also appreciate the messages of support received from Rev. Philip Potter, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, from Cardinal J. Willebrands, president of the Sec-}

*The term "popular" has a connotation in English different from the Spanish. In Spanish, it refers to the church comprised of the working class, peasants, and the poor. The expression "popular Christian communities," as used in this document, carries the same meaning.

retariat for Christian Unity, and from Bishop Federico Pagura, president of the Latin American Council of Churches.

I. The Irruption of the Poor into History

A. Popular Liberation Movements

6. The situation of suffering, misery, and exploitation of the great majority of human beings, concentrated especially but not exclusively in the so-called Third World, is as undeniable as it is unjust.

7. Nevertheless, the most important historical process of our times has begun to be led by these very people, the truly “wretched of the earth.” Their oppression finds its roots in the colonial system of exploitation of which they were victims for centuries. Their struggle to defend their lives, to preserve their racial and cultural identity, denied by the foreign oppressor, is as widespread as this domination. But is is clear that their determination and their capacity for human liberation have today an outreach never before equaled, as we see in the recent case of Nicaragua.

8. In the context of the Third World, the emerging popular classes generate social movements; in their struggles is forged a more lucid consciousness of society as a whole as well as of themselves.

9. These popular social movements express much more than an economic grievance. They represent a phenomenon, new in our times: the massive irruption of the poor in every society. These are the exploited classes, the oppressed races, people who some would hope to keep anonymous or absent from human history, and who, with increasing determination, show their own faces, proclaim their word, and organize to win by their own efforts the power that will permit them to guarantee the satisfaction of their needs and the creation of authentic conditions of liberation.

10. In the case of Latin America, alongside the industrial workers’ movement, whose strength has traditionally been recognized, and the peasants’ union organization, which includes vast masses of the impoverished, new forms of workers’ organizations are arising, broader opposition groups within the unions, as well as popular social movements originating at the local level, e.g., neighborhood associations, mothers’ clubs, movements against the high cost of living, for better housing, for better health conditions, etc. From the deepest levels of our poor, the oppressed indigenous nations affirm their ancient identity and oppressed races fight to shake off their ethnic oppression within the popular movement as a whole. It is a complex and discontinuous process, with advances and setbacks; nevertheless, it shows an ever-ascending tendency that is a sign of hope.

11. To the degree that the popular movement develops, the fundamental question of formulating a broad historical project...

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is posed. Today such a historical project is based on the critique of capitalism and of imperialist domination. It includes a radical demand for democratization in the construction of a political system in which popular control over those who govern as well as popular power are effective realities.

B. Structures of Domination

12. This historical journey of the people of the Third World takes place within the framework of dependent capitalism. In that system the sectors that hold economic, political, and cultural power exercise their domination over society by means of an enormous number of structures, institutions, and mechanisms, which are multiplied at the national and international levels, and which vary according to each country and region: unequal ownership of the land, concentration of wealth and of technological scientific discoveries, the armament race with its production of weapons and destruction of life, transnationalization of the economy, etc. At the international level this is effected by means of monetary mechanisms, multinational corporations, political decision-making clubs for the rich nations (e.g., the Trilateral Commission), leading the nations of the Third World into an ever increasing foreign debt.

13. In the African, Asian, and Latin American societies, with specific characteristics in each region, the international structures in conjunction with the national structures of the capitalist system produce a process of development which is concentrated for the benefit of the few, with the consequent impoverishment of the masses, increase in the cost of living, inflation, unemployment, undernourishment, deterioration of the quality of life, super-exploitation of women and children, etc.

14. The dominant sectors exercise their power in society by means of the internalization of certain attitudes and behavior through formal education, the mass media, political parties, and even popular organizations. Thus, a certain type of society is being shaped with its materialistic and utilitarian values and lifestyles.

15. Furthermore, power is concentrated in authoritarian states which, from the top down, consider themselves as the protectors of society, penetrating even the private lives of the citizens. This procedure is justified in Latin America by models of restricted democracy, which are such only in form, or of national security.

The political institutions, at every level, restrict and try to control the participation of the popular groups and classes in making decisions and in effecting social change.

16. It is also important to stress the implacability of a whole series of mechanisms of a more subtle domination, often underestimated in the analyses, which produce forms of inequality and discrimination among blacks, indigenous peoples, and women. It has to be noted that the different mechanisms are not opposed, nor even juxtaposed, one to the other, but on the contrary, are articulated in one and the same comprehensive structure of domination. The black populations, the indigenous peoples, and the women of the popular classes have been for centuries, and are still today, doubly oppressed; more than in the past, however, they are struggling for their liberation. These mechanisms respond neither in a deterministic nor a linear manner to the interests of domination, but rather give rise to contradictions that the popular sectors can use to their own benefit on their journey.

17. In reality, these structures and mechanisms of domination follow different rhythms according to the different nations and regions, especially according to the varied capacity for response—in terms of organization, awareness, and struggle—of the popular social forces that are emerging. Thus, these forces are constantly occupying more space in the various institutions of society.

18. Furthermore, it is clear that this system of domination has been in a permanent state of crisis from the very beginning, even though this crisis has become increasingly more acute in the last few decades with the strengthening of the popular sectors.

C. Popular Movement and Basic Ecclesial Communities

19. Today in Latin America there is at the heart of the popular movement a growing number of Christians who explicitly express and celebrate their faith in Christ and their hope in the Kingdom of God. A popular, ecclesial stream is emerging that expresses itself in various forms of Christian life and community.

20. The irritation of the poor also is occurring within the established church, producing a religious and ecclesial transformation. The church is experiencing the judgment of God, which breaks into the liberating history of the poor and exploited. It is a moment of ecclesial grace and conversion, an inexhaustible source of a new and demanding spiritual experience. In the people's struggle, the church continues to rediscover its own identity and mission.

21. This Christian stream within the popular movement and the renewal of the church from the standpoint of its option for the poor constitute a unique and specific movement in the church. This movement takes shape in different types of basic ecclesial communities, where the people find a space for resistance, struggle, and hope in the face of domination. There the poor celebrate their faith in the liberating Christ and discover the political dimension of love.

22. The basic ecclesial communities, or popular Christian communities, form an integral part of the people's march, but do not constitute a movement or political power parallel to the popular organizations, nor do they seek to legitimate them. The Christian communities—through consciousness-raising, popular education, and the development of ethical and cultural values—exercise among the poor a liberating ministry that is an integral part of their specific mission of evangelization, prophecy, pastoral care, and ministering the sacraments.

23. The church redeems the people's symbols of hope, manipulated for centuries by the system of domination. The church celebrates the presence of the God of life in the people's struggles for a more just and human life. The church encounters the God of the poor by confronting the idols of oppression. The church receives the Kingdom as a free gift of the Father in the building of brotherhood and the solidarity of all the oppressed classes and races, humiliated by this anti-Kingdom of discrimination, violence, and death that is the dominant capitalist system.

24. The historical manifestation of the poor who appropriate the Gospel as a source of inspiration and hope in their struggle for freedom is deeply rooted in the biblical tradition. It can, moreover, be easily verified over the course of the history of the Christian churches.

25. In the Old Testament the entire history of a people in the process of liberation is told from the standpoint of their exodus from a situation of oppression and toward a space and time of freedom, abundance, and brotherhood. The same occurs in the New Testament, where the teaching of Jesus, in Matthew, starts with the beatitudes of the poor (Matt. 5:2-11) and ends with the definitive affirmation that Christ can be encountered only in concrete actions that redeem the poor from their condition of exploitation, oppression, hunger, that is, of being stripped of their human dignity as children of God (Matt. 25:31-40).

26. The whole of the biblical record reveals that the struggles of the poor for their liberation are signs of God's action in history, and as such are experienced as imperfect and provisional seeds of the definitive Kingdom. Christians are responsible for dis-
II. Challenge to the Ecclesial Conscience

27. This path of suffering, of a growing consciousness, and of the struggle of our people poses questions and challenges for us as Christians and as church. On the one hand, we must understand this journey in the light of God's revelation throughout history. On the other hand, our ways of living and understanding the faith are challenged by the vitality and creativity of the popular movements and the basic ecclesial communities. In a special way we need to bring up to date and deepen our ecclesiology, mainly along three lines: (a) the profound relationship between the Kingdom, human history, and the church; (b) evangelization and the basic ecclesial communities; and (c) the following of Jesus.

A. Kingdom, Human History, and Church

28. By our faith we know that the collective history that we live with our people, with its contradictions of domination and liberation, of segregation and fraternity, of life and death, has a sense of hope. Here we want "to give the reason for our hope" (1 Pet. 3:15).

29. The God we believe in is the God of life, of liberty, and of justice. God created "the world and all that is in it" for man and woman so that they might live, communicate life, and transform this world into a home for all their children. The sin of human beings, who take the earth unto themselves and murder their brother, does not destroy God's plan (Gen. 2-4). So God calls Abraham to be the father of a people (Gen. 12ff.) and Moses to free that people from oppression, to make a covenant with it, and to guide it to the promised land (Exod., Deut.).

30. Jesus proclaims the new presence of God's Kingdom to this same people. The Kingdom that Jesus points to with his messianic practice is the efficacious will of the Father who desires life for all his children (Luke 4, 7:18-23). The meaning of Jesus' existence is to give his life so that we all might have life, and abundantly. He did this in solidarity with the poor, becoming poor himself (2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:7) and in that poverty announced the Kingdom of liberation and life. The religious elite and political leaders that controlled Jesus' people rejected this Gospel: they "took from their midst" the Witness to the Father's love, and the poor "killed the Author of life." Thus the "sin of the world" reached its limit (Acts 2:23; 3:14-15; Rom. 1:18-3:2; John 1:5, 10-11; 3:17-19).

31. But God's love is greater than human sin. The Father carries his work forward, for the Jewish people and for all the peoples of the world, through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. In the risen Christ we have the definitive triumph over death and the first fruits of "the new heaven and the new earth," the city of God among humankind (Rev. 21:1-4).

32. The Kingdom does not have the same kind of tangible presence for us as it did for Jesus' companions (1 John 1), nor can we yet see the fullness of the Kingdom we hope for. Therefore the risen Lord pours out his Spirit on the community of his disciples, so that by its very life the church might be the visible body of Christ among human beings, revealing his liberating activity in history (Acts 2; 1 Cor. 11-12; Eph. 4).

33. The coming of the Kingdom as God's final design for his creation is experienced in the historical processes of human liberation. On the one hand the Kingdom has a utopian character, for it can never be completely achieved in history; on the other hand, it is foreshadowed and given concrete expression in historical liberations. The kingdom pervades human liberations; it manifests itself in them, but it is not identical with them. Historical liberations, by the very fact that they are historical, are limited, but are open to something greater. The Kingdom transcends them. Therefore it is the object of our hope and thus we can pray to the Father: 'Thy kingdom come.' Historical liberations incarnate the Kingdom to the degree that they humanize life and generate social relationships of greater fraternity, participation, and justice.

34. To help us understand the relationship between the Kingdom and historical liberations we might use the analogy of the mystery of the Incarnation. Just as in one and the same Jesus Christ the divine and the human presence each maintain their identities, without being absorbed or confused, so too is the eschatological reality of the Kingdom and historical liberations.

35. The liberation and life offered by God surpass everything that we can achieve in history. But these are not offered outside history nor by bypassing history. It is all too clear, however, that there are other forces in the world, those of oppression and death. These are the forces of sin, personal and social, that reject the Kingdom and, in practice, deny God.

36. All people are called by the word of the Gospel to receive the Kingdom as a gift, to be converted from injustice and from idols to the living and true God, proclaimed by Jesus (Mark 1:15; John 16:3; 1 Thess. 1:9). The Kingdom is grace and must be received as such, but it is also a challenge to new life, to commitment, to liberation and solidarity with the oppressed in the building of a just society. Thus we say that the Kingdom is of God; it is grace and God's work. But at the same time it is a demand and a task for human beings.

37. The Kingdom is the horizon and meaning of the church. In the Third World context we must recall that the church does not exist for itself, but to serve human beings in the building of the Kingdom of God, revealing to them the power of the Kingdom present in history, witnessing to the presence of Christ the Liberator and to his Spirit in the events and in the signs of life in the peoples' march.

In fulfillment of its mission the church seeks to follow Jesus, taking its stand with him on behalf of the poor, "pitching its tent" among them (John 1:14). Thus it can live in an intense and meaningful way the new reality of the Kingdom. From this starting point it can be a credible witness and living sacrament of the Good News of the Kingdom for all human beings.

38. The Kingdom also judges the church. It incites it to conversion, denouncing its contradictions, its personal and structural sins. It makes it confess its historical mistakes, its complicity, and the betrayal of its evangelizing mission. And in this act of humble confession the church encounters the grace of the Lord that purifies it and encourages it on its pilgrimage.

B. Evangelization and the Basic Ecclesial Communities

39. A community is Christian because it evangelizes: this is its task, its reason for being, its life. Evangelizing is a diverse and complex activity. A Christian community is called to evangelize in all that it does, by word and by works.

40. To evangelize is to announce the true God, the God revealed in Christ, the God who makes a covenant with the oppressed and defends their cause, the God who liberates his people from injustice, from oppression, and from sin.

41. The liberation of the poor is a journey full of grief, marked by both the passion of Christ and by the signs of res-
The community dimension is joined with the evangelizing task, because the secrets of God's Kingdom have been revealed by vocation, continuously born of the people's faith, of "those not invited to the banquet" (Luke 14:15-24). In them a committed community has its privileged locus in a concrete experience: the basic ecclesial communities. In these communities is incarnated a church that is, to the abandoned masses, dispossessed of all their goods. There the life of the Risen One is present and actualized. The liberation of the poor is a vast history that embraces all of human history and gives it true meaning. The Gospel proclaims the history of total liberation as it is present in today's events. It shows how, here and now, among the poor masses of Latin America and all marginalized peoples, God is freeing his people.

Puebla spoke of "the evangelizing potential of the poor" (no. 1147). With this expression, Puebla wanted to recognize the rich and varied experience of many Christian communities. For it was this lived experience that allowed for the rediscovery of an evangelization carried out by the poor. The poor—a believing, oppressed people—announce and demonstrate the presence of God's Kingdom in their own journey, in their struggle: new life, the resurrection manifested in their communities, is living testimony that God is acting in them. Their love of their brothers and sisters, their love of their enemies, and their solidarity, show forth the active presence of the Father's love. The poor can evangelize because the secrets of God's Kingdom have been revealed to them (Matt. 11:25-27).

In Latin America evangelization carried out by the poor has its privileged locus in a concrete experience: the basic ecclesial communities. In these communities is incarnated a church that is, by vocation, continuously born of the people's faith, of "those not invited to the banquet" (Luke 14:15-24). In them a committed life of faith is subjected to evaluation. In them the hope of the poor is celebrated and bread is shared, the bread that so many lack and in which the life of the Risen One is present and acknowledged. They are privileged places in which the people read the Bible and in their own words and with their own expressions make their message their own. These communities allow for moments of fraternal encounter in which God is recognized as Father. The community dimension is joined with the evangelizing task, with the call to make disciples and to form an assembly of disciples, a church of the poor.

The purpose of evangelization is not the formation of small elite or privileged groups in the church. It is addressed to the flock without a shepherd, as Jesus says (Matt. 9:35), that is, to the abandoned masses, dispossessed of all their goods. Therefore, the Christian communities are renewed in the movement that leads them to seek out the most exploited of the poor. Evangelization of the masses is carried out within the perspective of the preferential option for the poor.

Evangelization is a concrete activity that is addressed to concrete people, here and now. Thus it undertakes the liberation of the poor through the liberation of their culture, their language, their race, and their sex. The popular Christian communities are the first fruits of the whole people at whose service they are. In them the poor people better discover their identity, their worth, their evangelizing mission within the history of the liberation of the poor. The universality of the gospel proclamation passes through this historical process and through this commitment of the Christian community.

C. Following Christ

The crowds who follow Jesus and are amazed at the good he does for all (Acts 10:38) are the first to hear the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus "gathers around him a few human beings chosen from various social and political strata of the day. Though confused and often unfaithful, they are moved by the love and the power that radiates from him. They are the ones who constituted the foundation of his church. Drawn by the Father, they start out on the path involving the following of Jesus" (Puebla, no. 192).

The power of the Spirit leads to conversion, to a radical change of life; thus an apostolic community is constituted, the seed and the model of the first ecclesial communities. In God's plan, if the rich and powerful of this world are to receive the Gospel, they must learn it from the people.

These first communities witnessed to Jesus Christ and taught the way to follow him: Jesus was poor and lived among the poor and proclaimed hope to them. This was a messianic hope, different from certain erroneous notions of his time, but a faithful fulfillment of the Father's promise. The Messiah announces God's Kingdom, that is, a God who is revealed as such because he reigns by doing justice to the poor and oppressed. To separate God from his Kingdom is to not know the God proclaimed by Jesus, a God who calls together brothers and sisters from among the poorest and most abandoned. Jesus proclaims that they are blessed and that the Kingdom belongs to them as a gratuitous and preferential gift of the Lord. This gift brings with it the demand of a commitment to justice.

The good news that announces to the poor the end of oppression, of deceit, of hypocrisy, and of the abuse of power, is also bad news for those who profit from this abuse and injustice. Thus the powerful persecute Jesus unto death. Jesus "chose to be the decisive victim of the world's injustice and evil" (Puebla, no. 194) and so practice what he had taught: that none have greater love than those who give their lives for others. By such great love we will be recognized as his disciples. Such are "the demands of the justice of God's Kingdom in a radical and obedient discipleship" (Letter to the Christian Churches and Ecumenical Organizations of Latin America, Oaxtepec, Mexico, September 24, 1978).

The first communities walked the liberating path of Jesus Christ, proclaiming him as the one Lord. They were martyred for rejecting the idolatrous worship of the powerful of this world. Today many popular Christian communities in the Third World walk the same path in following Jesus. They refuse to accept the mechanisms of domination that enrich the powerful sectors and countries with the poverty of the weak (cf. the Address of Pope John Paul II to the Episcopal Conference at Puebla). For the oppressed and exploited they claim justice and dignity, work and bread, education, shelter, and participation in the building of each people's history. In this liberating struggle these communities experience the Lord as alive and present. They feel the action of the Spirit who both calls them to trial in the desert and sends them to evangelize the poor and the oppressed with the courage of a new Pentecost.

In the following of Jesus the spiritual experience is never separated from the liberating struggle. In the heart of this process God is experienced as a Father to whom every effort and every struggle is offered. From him come bravery and courage, truth and justice. Filial trust assures that if the Father raised his Son to demonstrate the truth of his Word, he will also give life to those who, in the path of Jesus, give their lives for others.

Those who denounce destitution and oppression have, like Jesus, been persecuted. This denunciation unmasks the illusion of continuous, unlimited progress. Moreover it proclaims that the poor demand justice. These are uncomfortable truths that must not be silenced.

Jesus' journey, that of the basic ecclesial communities, is a journey of faith in a God whom we do not see and of a love of our brothers and sisters whom we do see. Those who
say they believe, but do not love, or who say that they love
but in practice do not, are not on Jesus’ path. Thus the martyrs
of justice, who give their lives for the freedom of their oppressed
brothers and sisters, are also martyrs of faith, for they learn
from the Gospel the commandment of fraternal love as a sign
of the Lord’s disciples.

III. Demands and Questions
A. Spirituality and Liberation

53. During our meeting we have dedicated a good deal of
time to the common celebration of our faith and our hope.
54. We believe that cultivating spirituality, or life according
to the Spirit of Jesus, is a fundamental demand placed on every
one of us and on the Christian communities. Many of us, many
of our communities, are living the search for Christian spirituality
in the new conditions of the church in the Third World.
Because of its crucial importance we think that the theme
of spirituality must be taken up again in future meetings, writings,
and events.
55. We must help our communities to appropriate the great
spiritual tradition of the church that today, as in every age, is
incarnated and expressed by taking up the present challenges
of history. Thus, we can speak of a “spirituality of liberation.”
We must revitalize, and even at times recover, Christian spiri­
tuality as the original experience that drives Christians and the
popular communities into an evangelizing political commitment
and theological reflection.
56. This implies continually overcoming dualisms alien to
biblical spirituality: faith and life, prayer and action, commitment
daily work, contemplation and struggle, creation and sal­
vation. Spirituality is not merely a distinct moment in the process
of the liberation of the poor. It is the mystique of the experience
of God within this process. It means the encounter with the
living God of Jesus Christ in collective history and in daily per­
sonal life. Prayer and commitment are not alternative practices;
they require and mutually reinforce one another. Prayer is not
an evasion but a fundamental way of following Jesus that makes
us ever ready for the encounter with the Father and for the
demands of our mission.
57. Spirituality also demands of us today that we enrich
ourselves with the great religious and cultural traditions of the
Third World. All this will teach us to introduce poetry, music,
symbols, festivity, fellowship, and above all the gratuitous di­
mension into the celebration of our faith.
58. The agents of evangelization are not to celebrate for the
people but rather with them. The people evangelize us by passing
on to us the mystique of their faith, their solidarity, and their
struggles.
59. The spirituality that we today seek to revitalize ought
to emphasize the love of God that calls us to follow Jesus and
is revealed in the poor. In the struggles, in the commitment,
in the martyrdom of the people, Jesus is followed not only to
the sacrifice of the cross, but also to his liberating resurrection.
60. In the spirituality that we want to recreate, the option
in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed becomes an ex­
perience of the God of Jesus Christ. All this demands a continual
coming out of self and a change of social and cultural position.
It commits us to live the political and economic consequences
of the commandment of love.
61. The Eucharist, or the Supper of the Lord, should hold
the central place in our communities, together with the sharing
of the Word of God. When they are celebrated among the poor
and oppressed they are both promise and demand of justice,
of the freedom and the fellowship for which the peoples of the
Third World are struggling.
62. For the Christian communities, Mary, the mother of Jesus,
is seen above all as the poor, free, and committed woman of the
Magnificat, as the faithful believer who accompanied her son
to the Pasch. For the Catholic communities, the saints of
their devotions become family in the Kingdom and companions
on the way.
63. Our popular Christian communities should grow in their
contemplative dimension. In their prayer, these communities of
the Third World must be grateful for nature and life, because
of the joy these produce in us. They should also be grateful
for the gift of communion with the God who supports all in
history. Besides living our prayer, our Christian communities must
educate for it. Open to life, they will include in their prayer
the cry of the people who demand justice and seek without
rest the face of their liberating God.
64. We believe, finally, in the liberating and evangelizing
efficacy of prayer—in ourselves and in the people. We believe
in its humanizing efficacy in the struggles. We believe that Chris­
tian contemplation gives sense to life and to history, even in
the failures, and leads us to accept the cross as the way of lib­
eration.

B. Persecution, Repression, and Martyrdom

65. The church that is reborn by the power of the Spirit
among the exploited and oppressed classes of our peoples keeps
alive the dangerous memory of the martyrs, who laid down their
lives as a sign of their great love (John 15:13). With a genuinely
Christian feeling this church thus recovers the tradition of the
most ancient Christian communities and touches the heart of
Christian faith: the recovery from the hands of an impious, unjust,
and idolatrous world of the maltreated memory of one who was
excluded from human society—Jesus of Nazareth.
66. Besides putting an end to his life, the murder of Jesus
(Acts 5:30) was intended to malign his reputation and deal a
mortal blow to his cause: “He has blasphemed” (Mark 14:64);
“if he were not a subversive we would not have brought him
to this tribunal” (John 18:30); if they do not put a guard on
his grave, “his disciples will come and steal the body and tell
the people that he rose from the dead” (Matt. 27:64).
67. The dominant powers of Jesus’ time were afraid that
the one they had murdered would be remembered. However,
the empty tomb and the power of the Spirit that freed the disciples
from a paralyzing fear. Timid people proclaimed vigorously that this man
“killed outside the city wall” (Heb. 13:12), this Jesus whom you crucified, was raised by God
and made Lord and Christ (Act 2:32,36).
68. The “way of life,” of “way,” that the disciples pro­
claimed, that common mind and heart, having all things in com­
mon and not allowing the exploitation of anyone, that “effectiveness” in the proclamation of the risen Christ, in a word,
that coming of the Kingdom that the early Christian communities
embodied (see Acts 4:32–35), was persecuted and repressed by
the same people who murdered the Lord. United in the common
life, in prayer and the breaking of the bread (Acts 2:42), those
who before were silent through terror joined the resistance, full
of the Spirit, and proclaimed that “we have to obey God rather
than men” (Acts 5:30).
69. Throughout the Third World today the popular classes
and oppressed ethnic minorities resist, organize, and struggle to
build lands of cooperative, humanizing justice, work, and life.
They are thus obeying God, who wills that people should live

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and dominate the earth as heirs, as children who feel that they are in a home of brothers and sisters. The church, which is reborn of this people, in spontaneous and organized struggles, shares this struggle and often encourages it with its unshakeable faith in the love of God that guarantees the ultimate meaningfulness of this struggle.

70. For this reason the church suffers the same repression that the dominating classes visit on the people. This repression, unleashed out of hatred for justice, hatred for human dignity, is what today we call persecution of the church. We have the right to celebrate as martyrs the tortured, the disappeared, the exiled, the imprisoned, and the murdered of this people. They are workers, peasants, indigenous peoples, and blacks, men and women and innocent children caught up in their parents’ political commitment. They are also catechists, ministers of the Word, leaders of Christian communities, priests and pastors, men and women in religious orders, bishops and martyrs, whom we have the right to celebrate as heroes sacrificed from among the poor.

71. When our church does not consent to live a life generously surrendered for the cause of God in the cause of today’s exploited and oppressed classes, when it allows itself to be paralyzed with fear and does not remember its martyrs in solidarity with the people, we have the right to ask if it has new eyes to recognize the crucified Lord in the disfigured faces of the impoverished people of the Third World (see Puebla, nos. 31–39).

72. We have the right to ask whether as a church we live out the prayer of agony that Jesus lived out, the prayer of submission to the Father and of resistance to the oppressor, the prayer that gave Jesus the strength to follow the way of the cross, from which God raised him up. We have to ask our church, if it recognizes the “greater love” in giving up one’s life for one’s friends.

73. Nevertheless, we give thanks to God because of the growing number of pastors and communities who proclaim the death of their martyrs and extend it with their own witness.

C. Unity of the Churches Starting from the Poor

74. The greatest division and disunity that the Third World suffers is the sin of injustice, through which “the many have little and the few have much” (Puebla, Message to the Peoples of Latin America). This injustice goes beyond and also divides all our churches and leads them to take diverse and contradictory positions.

75. We affirm with joy that through solidarity with the cause of the poor, through participation in their just struggles, in their sufferings, and in their persecution, the first great barrier that for so long has divided our different churches is being broken down. Many Christians are rediscovering the gift of unity as they encounter the one Christ in the poor of the Third World (Matt. 25). The promotion of total liberation, the common suffering, and the sharing of the hopes and joys of the poor have put in clear relief all that we Christians hold in common.

76. In this option for the poor and in the practice of justice, we have deepened the roots of our faith in the one Lord, the one church, the one God and Father. In the following of Jesus we confess Christ as the Son of God and the brother of all people. In the struggle for a just life for the poor we confess the one God, Father of all. In our ecclesial commitment we confess the church of Jesus Christ as his body in history and as sacrament of liberation.

77. In this faith and practice the various popular Christian communities, Catholic and Protestant, share the same historical and eschatological vision. That faith and practice lead us forward in unity at the levels of evangelization, liturgical celebration, doctrine, and theology. If it is true that the poor evangelize us, it is also true that they open the way toward our unity. They accelerate the fulfillment of the last testament of Jesus, that all may be one; that all, Catholic and Protestant, and even more, all men and women of all races and cultures, may come to form the people of the children of God.

D. Churches and Peoples of the Third World

78. In this Congress, with its profound encounters, we have noted a considerable lack of knowledge of one another and a lack of permanent, effective communion between our peoples and churches of Asia, Africa, America, the Caribbean, and the ethnic minorities of the U.S.A.

79. We cannot fail to recognize in each of the peoples and churches of the Third World their own identities and distinct contributions in the process of liberation: through the sufferings, struggles, and achievements of their respective histories and through the specific richness of their cultures. These are facets of the countenance of a poor, oppressed humanity that is open to contemplation and hope.

80. From today onward we commit ourselves—in order to be faithful to this hour of the Gospel and of the poor—to a greater intercommunication and mutual help, with greater effectiveness and ecumenical spirit, within the liberating process of the churches of the Third World.

81. All these processes have a global frame of reference. The poor of the Third World are making painful efforts to achieve unity in the common struggle against every kind of colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism. The churches must be committed to this effort.

E. Conversion and Structures of the Church

82. The church is not invited simply to reform itself, but is rather called to be converted from its personal and structural sins and conformity to the spirit of “this world” (see Rom. 12:2).

83. If the church is not converted in its structures, it loses credibility and prophetic power. A rich, dominating church cannot make an option for the world of the poor and oppressed (see Medellín, “Poverty of the Church”; Puebla, no. 1140).

84. The newness of the Spirit of the risen Christ demands a church constantly renewed in the service of the new world of the Kingdom. In order for the church to be able to liberate itself and to be a sacrament of liberation, we have to imitate in our church structures the new way of living together that Jesus inaugurated (see Phil. 2; Matt. 18:15–35; 20:25–28; 23:1–12).

85. In regard to its ministerial structures, this newness obliges the church to accept as a gift of the Spirit the new ministries that the communities need and are generating. In this new vision, the discrimination that women suffer in the churches cannot be justified biblically, theologically, or pastorally.

86. The liberty of the children of God that Jesus teaches with his word, life, and death clearly must also be exercised within the church itself. This means not passively accepting coercion in the church, and helping Christian people not to regard as rebelliousness what is intended as free gospel loyalty.

F. Specific Struggles and the Global Process of Liberation

87. The church of the Third World must commit itself to those struggles for liberation that take up the specific concerns of ethnic, racial, and sex groups, within the overall framework
of the struggle of the poor. Indigenous peoples, blacks, and women of the popular classes will always deserve special attention from our church and a growing concern on the part of our theology.

88. The church should contribute, from its faith and gospel love, to the end that these various struggles become a genuine joining of forces of oppressed people, without power takeovers that in turn become new modes of oppression. We ought to work together so that this grand alliance and this mutual respect become effective now in the global struggle.

89. As its proper mission, the church will proclaim and foster in this process those evangelical values that defend the life and liberty of the human person, that open space for communion with the Father and with our brothers and sisters, and that make an original contribution to forging the new person in the new society.

90. The church, like Jesus, will always be gratuitously present among the weakest and most marginalized, and will always be free and critical before the great and powerful of this world.

G. Clarifications

91. The participation of the entire people of God in the inner life of the Christian churches has been continuously growing. The form that this participation has taken in contemporary church structures has not been an object of our study. But we are happy to see the way our bishops and pastors have on their own initiative taken effective measures to insure that this participation, within the ecclesial community and under their pastoral direction, be ever broader and more effective.

92. The Christian churches, as institutions, should not limit themselves to a particular part of society to the detriment of the universality of Jesus’ message. In the carpenter of Nazareth, God made his option for the poor and oppressed. To be poor is the vocation of the entire church. But the ecclesial community is open to all—to the rich young man and to Zaccheus—challenging them to respond to the gospel demand to share the poor’s aspirations for freedom (Luke 19:1-10).

93. In our societies in the Third World there is a serious division that negates evangelical fraternity by the existence of different social classes. Still, conversion to the Gospel of Jesus cannot be limited to becoming aware of the need to be at the side of the oppressed. This is doubtlessly a demand made by the Lord, who sends the rich away empty and fills the hungry with good things. Christian conversion implies, above all, an openness to the Word of Jesus, accepted in faith, lived out in a liberating hope, and made concrete in the love that transforms humankind and the world.

94. We should praise the Lord for Christians’ participation in the building of just and fraternal societies. Liberation, its sociopolitical implications, and the analytical categories that define it are not limited to social theories. Before the social sciences spoke of liberation, the people of God had already achieved it in the Egypt of the Pharaohs. Liberation is at the center of the biblical message. Within the perspective of our paschal expectations, liberation is not reducible to one or another political model; rather it transcends all history. And it attains its fullness in the manifestation of the Kingdom assured by the liberating practice of Jesus and the merciful goodness of the Father.

95. We close our Congress and end this document strengthened by the promise of Jesus to his followers: “Do not be afraid; I have overcome the world. I am with you always” (John 16:33; Matt. 28:20).

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Book Reviews

Karl Barth’s Theology of Mission.


Waldron Scott has given a most propitious start to the series Outreach and Identity: Evangelical Theological Monographs with his study of Barth’s theology of mission. This all too brief treatment of Barth by a leader of the evangelical movement is of utmost importance. It signals what can prove to be a fruitful dialogue of neo-evangelical theology with Barth. In his first two chapters, Scott sets forward clearly and fairly the major outlines of Barth’s theology of mission. Scott focuses not simply on the major discussion of the church’s mission in Barth’s fourth volume of the Church Dogmatics, The Doctrine of Reconciliation, but also places it more broadly in the total outreach of Barth’s thought. In a third chapter, Scott makes a discerning evaluation of Barth’s contribution.

In his theology of mission Barth shows himself to be a true heir to classical Calvinism. He rejects any notion of granting ultimate importance to the human act of faith. Barth rejects any traces of the Arminianism so characteristic of theologies of mission abroad in the church today. The task of the missionary is not “to save” anyone, simply because no missionary has that capacity. The full work of salvation has already been completed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. So for Barth the task of mission can consist only in announcing this completed work of salvation to those who have not heard it.

The advantages in Barth’s theology of mission are clearly great. It preserves the missionary and the mission-sending agency from the arrogance of believing that they are the
instruments of salvation. Ultimately, there is only one means of grace, the Holy Spirit. It also allows the so-called "religions of the nations" to be taken seriously, yet at no time to be construed as presenting a point of contact or compromise with the gospel. Barth’s theology lays down the foundation for mission work that is not dependent on Western civilization or colonial aspirations. Missions are to serve and not dominate those to whom they go. All of this is commendable. However, as Scott very well points out, severe problems remain. Not only is there the problem posed by Barth’s strange view of the illegitimacy of missions to Jews, there is also the implicit if not explicit universalism of his position. By his focus on the ultimate issue of God’s grace, Barth has blurred the proximate issues of how the decision of faith is made and what its importance in the plan of salvation is. A fully adequate mission theology must deal with these problems.

By means of a Christocentric doctrine of election, Barth has laid down a necessary challenge to the Arminianism of most evangelical theology. He does this on the basis of a full-orbed study of Scripture and of the unfolding confessional life of the church. So his position must be taken seriously by evangelicals. Barth can be a partner in the ongoing dialogue toward a more adequate mission theology. Waldron Scott has done yeoman service in making this conversation with Barth a part of evangelical mission thinking.

—Donald G. Dawe

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**Why the Church?**

*Edited by Walter Burghardt, S.J., and William G. Thompson, S.J.*


Six faculty members of the Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago, all but one of whom belong to that society, have written five well-articulated essays on theories of the place of the church in human salvation. Serious readers of any Christian persuasion should find the collection useful. Most of the authors are at home with a wide range of Protestant theological writing, although, as might be expected, Karl Rahner, S.J., is the thinker to whom the three contributors interested in systematic questions are most indebted. Paradoxically, an essay of Roger D. Haight, S.J., entitled “Mission: The Symbol for Understanding the Church Today” reveals the greatest breadth of view of the three, while citing only Tillych and Gustafson outside the Catholic camp.

In matters of positive theology where the reviewer is most familiar, the articles on two New Testament ecclesiology and those of two fathers of the church are thoroughly satisfying. Eugene A. La Verdiere of the Society of the Blessed Sacrament writes on the first Gospel and Acts, William G. Thompson, S.J., on the first Gospel, in “New Testament Communities in Transition: A Study of Matthew and Luke.” Thompson develops the theme of the Gentile mission in Matthew in which a beleaguered minority, Jewish in orientation, is threatened with internal division (cf. 24:40-41; 45:49; 25:2-4, 16-18) but looks on itself as “the least of these my brethren” sent to

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preach the gospel to all the Gentiles before the end of the age (cf. 24:14; 28:16–20). La Verdiere finds the church’s internal social life in Luke–Acts “clearly related to the presence of Christ.”

The presentation of J. Patout Burns, S.J., on “The Economy of Salvation: Two Patristic Traditions” explores the economies of salvation of SS. Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, drawing on multiplied extracts from their writings. Neither church father espoused the universally available salvation that marks the modern period. “Augustine assigns the Church a type of constitutive role which is foreign to the Greek tradition” (p. 68), while “Gregory does not assign the Church a constitutive role in either the establishment or the operation of the universal economy of purification and growth [of the soul]” (p. 64).

The Haight essay defines as the crisis of our times the meaning of history and says that the church in mission to the world has spiritual resources to meet that crisis. It does not have a mission. It is defined by mission. Granting the church’s functional nature, Robert T. Sears, S.J., holds, in “Trinitarian Love as Ground of the Church,” that Haight omits identifying the ontic basis of the community. The title indicates that Sears thinks it to be God’s successive self-givings in the Son and Holy Spirit. He relies on a paradigm of the stages of spiritual-social development in the individual “into transformation by Trinitarian love” to illustrate the four stages of religious community he finds in the Bible.

Appearing first is the essay to be read, by all means, last: the taxonomy of Christologies and ecclesiologies found in “Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views” by J. Peter Schineller, S.J. It is successful in a way that the two other systematic pieces are not, a model of theological synthesis.

—Gerard S. Sloyan

Religion in America: 1950 to the Present.


In 1700 approximately 4 percent of the American colonial population belonged to churches; by the time of the American Revolution, this figure stood at between 5 and 10 percent. Steadily throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the percentage of church members increased until it peaked at

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Mission Trends No. 4: Liberation Theologies in North America and Europe, edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, C.S.P.


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just over 60 percent during the late 1960s. During the past decade, however, many so-called "mainline" Protestant denominations, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, have suffered substantial declines in church membership. Interestingly, and this is one of the findings of this valuable book, religious participation and religious interest do not seem to have subsided but have been transformed in this same period. In short, what we are witnessing in contemporary American society is a realignment of the churches' relationship to the culture and a changing religious climate.

The focus of this book, despite its title, is not so much on "religion" but on its institutional expression, especially the Protestant denominations, and the problem is primarily one of church membership. The authors attempt to make somewhat broader application of their findings, but the concern is largely Protestant in character. Jackson W. Carroll, a sociologist at the Hartford Seminary Foundation, provides some clear exposition of the reasons for the surge and then decline of church membership in the period since 1950—the postwar baby boom which brought children to church schools and their parents into membership, the expansion of the suburbs and suburban churches, the move away from church development and toward a variety of social programs, internal conflict in congregations and denominations, etc. He also effectively disposes of some popular theories about church-membership decline—pruning of the rolls, increased per-capita assessments, etc. What emerges from Carroll's analysis and the increasing literature in this field is a helpful lesson for those engaged in formulating mission policies. There is no single cause of either church growth or decline, no matter what one's own theological or ecclesiastical political agenda may be.

Marty's contribution to the volume contains a rehearsal of the historical sketch of the prominent Protestant denominations, but in an insightful chapter of "Interpreting American Pluralism," he provides some constructive perspectives for people baffled by what seems to be happening to the churches today. Using thirteen color-coded and shaded maps of religious affiliation in America, broken down according to county, Marty emphasizes the role of regionalism and mobility in American church life. The more mobile a segment of society becomes, the more disruptive this is for church life. Likewise, the more religiously homogeneous an area of the country, the more all churches seem to prosper. Marty stresses that Americans do not confront the perplexing pluralism of American religious life without resources. Region and mobility are important factors in their affiliation with the churches.

Douglas W. Johnson of the Institute for Church Development is the author of the concluding section to the book, and he gives some practical suggestions for denominations in the 1980s, ranging from the issues of church growth to energy management. George Gallup, Jr.'s afterword speculates on the possibility of a religious revival in the 1980s, and the eminent pollster describes the widespread religiosity that seems to exist alongside the malaise of Protestant churches.

This book is obviously not a unified whole but a variety of different attempts to write contemporary history and make recommendations for the churches. The answers are not all here, and one senses that the dimensions of the crisis are not fully explored. Nevertheless, this book should be studied carefully—from the parish to the denominational offices—and pondered.

—John M. Mulder

John M. Mulder is Assistant Professor of Church History at Princeton Theological Seminary, and Assistant Editor of Theology Today.
The phenomenon of journal keeping is not new within the missionary enterprise. Beyond the ultimate resource for reference or history, journal keeping can be an asset for persons in circumstances so different from the place and time of their origins. Read carefully and selectively, Keeping Your Personal Journal could provide some positive motivation for the missioner to engage in the sacred task of writing one’s own book of revelation.

For the newcomer to journal writing, a few words of warning are in order. The paradox of anonymous, noncorrectable private writing is proclaimed on page 2. The principle of this anonymity is systematically violated in Part 1. The first three chapters detail the history, process, and rationale of journal keeping with didactic clarity. Chapter 4 sets the stage for journal editing, journal sharing and, ultimately, journal prostitution.

Part 2 appears to be journal-oriented. In reality a collection of unidentified workshop techniques are represented as operations flowing from the journal experience. The bits and pieces from Doctors Assagioli, Howe, Progoff, and Simon, which this reviewer recognized, plus items which other readers will identify from their experiences, amount to a giant casse-
role called "Exploring Soul Country." Taken separately, pages 101 to the end of the book have value if used with those professionally competent to handle such self-disclosure within the group situation. Innocently linked to the journal-keeping descriptions of Part 1, the unsuspecting reader might be lured into revelations of self neither intended nor desired. The critical missing factor is the basic respect for privacy. To invite openness, then structure triads of sharing, violates the sacred place and sacred time of the basic journal experience.

—Joan Chatfield, M.M.

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Joan Chatfield, M.M., Director of the Institute for Religion and Social Change in Honolulu, was formerly director of the Maryknoll Mission Institute in Maryknoll, New York.
at Princeton, and field work in India gave birth to this book about the ritual purification ceremony of suddhi.

The author discusses this ritual of the Árya Samāj movement in broad outline as well as in detail. Some of the literature concerning this ritual is translated and analyzed, including a “Model Rite” for the return of a convert to Hinduism.

After an introduction the author describes the emergence of the Árya Samāj movement. He states that “much of the strength of the Árya Samaj lies in the fact that members were both able to say 'Back to the Vedas,' the definitive battle-cry of a slogan raised by their founder, in other words, to claim all the ascriptions of a religious revival movement with its call for purification and revitalization, and at the same time to learn and to use the methods of the West in organization, fundraising, prolific use of books, pamphlets and newspapers for propagandizing, establishment and maintenance of educational and other institutions” (p. 16).

According to the sacred books the word suddhi is used principally to refer to cleansing or purification after impurities brought about by birth and death. This idea of purification is also used for reversion or readmission of those who were for a time beguiled away from their socio-religious background. Suddhi seems to have provided a defense of the integrity of Hindu cultural value. At the same time it is also a superb attempt to raise the ritual, social, and cultural status of the “Untouchables.” A concluding chapter says that in its essence suddhi is a ritual act to what is perhaps the most central and enduring of religious motifs in Hinduism: the cleansing of pollution. This purification ritual is meant to remove the mana, or sacred power, of foreign religions and to revitalize the body of Hinduism for the future.

—Dirk Bakker

As a missionary of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Dirk Bakker taught at the United Theological School in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Presently he is Director of the Hendrik Kraemer Institute in Oegsgeest, Leiden, the center for the training of workers in overseas ministries of the Protestant Churches in Holland.

The Christian and Other Religion. The Measure of Christ.


The noted Anglican Islamics scholar and specialist in Christian dialogue with Muslims looks at Christian faith and mission in an age of religious pluralism. The book is erudite, beautiful, evocative, and challenging, but hardly for the novice reader. Cragg takes one on a pilgrimage through the inner sanctuary of his own convictions, treading a marvelous labyrinth of Scripture, literature, religious belief and practice, at every turn demonstrating sensitivities to value, meaning, and feeling in other faiths. There is far more than can be easily assimilated. The author’s poetic, almost meditative style occasionally produces a feeling of elusiveness rather than clearly graspable meaning. Undoubtedly he wants to negate simplis-
tic conclusions and to encourage the reader to probe the depth and complexity of the subject matter.

The argument moves from a statement about interdependent religious experience and a plea for "right courtesies" and reciprocal awareness to an exploration of differences between monotheistic faiths and Asian monisms. Cragg introduces his own *Confessio fidei* and follows it with an extended meditation on the Holy Spirit and the Christian meaning of salvation against the background of interreligious encounter. This is punctuated by a significant missiological excursus in which the author shares his deepest reservations about the approaches of C. F. Andrews, Barth and Kraemer, Hocking, Toynbee, Hick, and "anonymous Christianity," concluding that a theology of pluralism and of mission in a pluralistic age is still in the making.

Where does Cragg come out on this issue? His undoubted purpose is to affirm fidelity to the Christic vision of life, centering in the incarnation and the cross of Christ, while rejecting nothing that is good, beautiful, and true outside Christ. Repeatedly he suggests that intellectual formulations and creedal statements alone are not the ultimate way that Christians relate to other religionists. The final test lies with some kind of orthopraxy that expresses genuineness and integrity through persons and Christian community. His paradigms for ultimate faithfulness, interestingly, are persons who witnessed by their *doing* and not by their orthodoxy: Albert Schweitzer and Dag Hammarskjold. What then is Christian mission? "It is so to live that the symbol of Christ is always available to be the clue for the yearnings of mankind." "The calling of the Christian community is to be there with the Gospel as that sphere of association where the mystery is luminous." The final question then is not that of knowing or speaking but of willing and being, that is, of mature discipleship and commitment.

—James A. Scherer

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If other mission agencies have similar services, the Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research would be pleased to publish information about them.

The Deep Sea Canoe. The Story of Third World Missionaries in the South Pacific.


Dr. Tippett’s primary concern is to focus on some of the basic elements of a biblical theology of mission, with the hope that it could be an example to younger generations of South Pacific islanders to formulate and discover for themselves a biblical theology of mission worked out historically in their own context. The style and content of the book are geared to meeting this purpose. Consequently the book describes and discusses a biblical framework of mission theology which, when examples from the South Pacific are removed, can provide the outline for study of the planting and growth of the church anywhere in the Third World. What is considered to be the primary purpose, that of describing the often overlooked yet tremendously important role of the South Pacific islander in the expansion of Christianity in the Pacific, inevitably appears as secondary and is dealt with only through the illustrations and examples cited at random to illustrate the discussions on the basic themes of mission.

The eleven chapters follow this dual pattern of approach. First there is a discussion of the basic elements in a biblical theology of mission and the biblical basis for such elements. Then, the last four chapters deal with special themes by which we can detect the process of growth in a newly planted church.

Throughout the study, illustrations from the South Sea islands, especially Fiji and Tonga, are utilized. Dr. Tippett here draws from his vast knowledge of the history of the church in Fiji and Tonga. In a language easy to understand, he describes the exploits of the South Sea islanders in opening up their own and other islands for the gospel. The examples illustrate very well the missionary principles under discussion.

The worth of this book lies in its character as a biblical-theological meditation of the author on the missionary themes, providing an outline basis for the development of a South Sea island missionary theology. True, it gives glories accounts of the worth of islanders, but these are only records of unconnected events in history, and the very language in which they are described is cause to question their historicity. However, the author repeatedly points out that this is not intended to be a documented history. This book is important because it has laid the basis toward a mission theology and issues a challenge for South Sea islanders to justify not only biblically, but taking into account the total island situations as contributing to the expansion of Christianity, their place in the total preparation by God of whole peoples for the reception of his gospel.

—Elia T. Ta’ase

Theologies in Conflict. The Challenge of Juan Luis Segundo.


Alfred Hennelly offers his book on Segundo’s theology with the candid remark, “My interest is frankly to effect a change in theology.” Owing to several years’ work in the Third World, participation in the “Theology in the Americas” dialogue, and personal interaction with Latin American theologians, Hennelly is deeply concerned to promote authentic encounter between North Atlantic and Latin American theologies. In an approving and thought-provoking preface, Segundo himself expresses the expectation that Hennelly’s book “will not join the ranks of . . . consumer theology,” but will instead effect the change Hennelly seeks.

Hennelly’s treatment of Segundo’s work is structured by his perception that the latter is an “open theology,” in which commitments to growth and development “take precedence over a systematically organized body of theological contents.” This insight is crucial. Segundo himself has described his theology as an opening of “pathways” in the service of God and his kingdom (cf. The Liberation of Theology, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976).

Elia T. Ta’ase is Assistant General Secretary of the Council for World Mission (Congregational and Reformed Churches), London.
Hennelly accompanies Segundo along the pathways his theology has taken since the early sixties. In successive chapters, the reader sees Segundo developing his views on what it means to be a Christian, the mission of the church, Christian morality and sacraments, theological method, faith and ideology, spirituality, and the use of Marxism. In each chapter Hennelly provides accurate and readable expostitions of Segundo's thought as well as interesting reflections on the possible meanings of the latter within North American contexts. It is Hennelly's reflective sections that leave me least satisfied. Hennelly clearly states his intention to establish a "first moment" (that of careful listening) and to begin a "second moment" (that of contextualized experimentation) in the dialogue with Segundo's theology. He is correct to emphasize the need of North Americans to listen rather than prematurely to close their ears. But attentive and open listening must involve questioning. Here Hennelly provides his readers little assistance. Particularly in the vital methodological concerns of the hermeneutic circle, deutero-learning, and deideologizing, Hennelly refrains from raising the kinds of critical questions concerning Segundo's thought that would enable his readers truly to grapple with the latter. This is a good book, worthy of the attention of anyone seeking a deeper grasp of the theological ferment in Latin America. Whether or not it will also fulfill the expectations of its author and of Segundo himself remains to be seen. Although critical reflection is left solely to the reader, the challenge of Segundo is forcefully communicated.

—Stan Slade


Much has been said lately about the changing character of theology. Here is the first attempt to construct a Christian theology of change as such. But the unsuspecting book-buyer who now resides in North Dakota where he is willing to subject himself to a radical rethinking of the Christian concept of God's character in the biblical sense is sure to be disappointed. If, however, "changeless" is a holdover, says Lee, from Platonic and Aristotelian thought. Although Dr. Lee strenuously opposes all traditional expressions of theology as absolutist, his own belief in the inclusiveness of God appears to commit him to an absolute determinism that embraces evil as well as good. "In an ultimate sense what is good is also evil and what is evil is also good" (p. 60). "God must be both good and evil," he asserts (p. 57). The social and ethical implications of this conclusion are not discussed. In fact, nowhere is primordial Change related to social change. Perhaps a final chapter is needed on the implications of the theology of change for Christian social ethics. This apparent weakness should not detract from an otherwise exciting adventure in seeking to reinterpret the Christian doctrine of God in an Asian perspective.

—Douglas J. Elwood

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Douglas J. Elwood, Professor of Theology, Silliman University, Dumaguete City, Philippines, has spent eighteen years in Asia under the United Presbyterian Church and the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia.
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